

“Run with the fox and hunt with the hounds”: managerial trade unionism and the British Association of Colliery Management, 1947-1994

Abstract

This article examines the evolution of managerial trade-unionism in the British coal industry, specifically focusing on the development of the British Association of Colliery Management (BACM) from 1947 until 1994. It explores the organization’s identity from its formation as a conservative staff association to its emergence as a distinct trade union, focusing on key issues: industrial action and strike cover; affiliation to the Trades Union Congress (TUC); colliery closures; and the privatization of the coal industry. It examines BACM’s relationship with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS), the National Coal Board (NCB) and subsequently the British Coal Corporation (BCC). This is explored within the wider context of the growth of managerial trade unions in post-war Britain and managerial identity in nationalized industries.

Keywords: Managerial unionism; white-collar trade unions; public ownership; coal industry

The British Association of Colliery Management was a very British institution in that it seemed to have the freedom both to run with the fox and hunt with the hounds ... Although it never really joined in the dispute [1984-5 miners’ strike] when it came, it took some getting used to a situation in which people who clearly laid full claim to being representatives of “management” could, and did, through their union, criticize that management.¹

Former NCB chairman Ian MacGregor’s vituperative attack on BACM reflected the breakdown between the two parties and their distinct

outlooks on the future of the industry in the 1980s. It was also indicative of the BACM leadership's distinct organizational and occupational locations; BACM was in many ways forged and sustained by nationalization. Many of its members were proud and protective of the industry and its nationalized track record, as well as being occupationally and geographically socialized within coal mining.²

This article examines the formation, development and politics of BACM against the changing historical context of the nationalized coal industry. First, it extends our understanding of the role and identity of managers within the coal industry, specifically under nationalization, who, like colliery deputies and overmen, have been neglected in the historiography.³ Second, it explores the world of managerial trade-unionism, building on an older literature that gradually disappeared from view as the phenomena it was studying declined.⁴ In so doing it questions a number of characterisations both general and specific made about managerial and white-collar trade unions. Alongside historical work by Melling on the Association of Supervisory Staffs, Executive and Technicians (ASSET), the article interrogates earlier claims by George Sayers Bain, that white-collar workers were not motivated by social location or occupational characteristics.⁵

BACM is located within to Blackburn's concept of 'unionateness'. A measure of BACM's character as a trade union can be gleaned from using Blackburn's scale of 'unionateness'. Blackburn identified seven indicators of 'unionateness'. The first three 'variable' indicators depend on a union being primarily concerned with representing its members in collective bargaining and protecting their rights (rather than acting as a professional regulatory body or a welfare organization); the union being separate of employers so that it can represent its membership independently; and lastly its willingness to use industrial action to achieve its ends. The remaining points on Blackburn's scale involve the union being registered as a trade union; declaring itself to be a union; affiliated to the TUC; and finally, affiliated to the Labour Party.⁶ The analysis also builds on Perchard and Zweiniger-Bargielowska work on managers in the

Scottish and south Wales coalfields. It is informed by BACM records (now housed at the University of Nottingham, previously held at the BACM offices in Doncaster), the National Mining Museum of Scotland, and Tyne and Wear Archives.⁷ Use of these collections was complemented by a number of interviews, the published recollections of key actors, and the diary of the NCB South Wales Area director, Phillip Weekes (held at the National Library of Wales).

The wider relevance of a study of BACM is underlined both by the scale and importance of Britain's nationalized coal industry (and other socialized corporations), which invested heavily in a managerial revolution. In the 1950s, the NCB was the largest single employer in Europe, with an output almost matching that of the entire European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).⁸ Established in 1947 to represent the industry's managerial personnel, BACM represented a new experiment in the sphere of UK industrial relations. Nationalization and the professionalization of management that accompanied it were crucial in the formation and shaping of the organization.⁹ Managers have remained largely a spectre at the feast in much of the literature of the coal industry. At best, they have been talked about as a homogenous grouping, at worst, characterized as shady villains of the piece, variously as the 'same crew in different jerseys' or in terms of the 'macho management' of the 1980s.¹⁰ In various cases, it was a well-deserved reputation, but as this article makes clear, managers within the industry were a complex body affected by a variety of factors. One of the few early studies of managerial unionism in the industry described them as follows:

Colliery officials strongly identified themselves with their employers. Their individualistic, pro-employer orientation stemmed from the scattered nature of the coal industry, the small size and heterogeneous nature of the managerial unit at collieries, promotion possibilities which broke down group solidarity and the resistance of the coal-owners to trade unionism among their staffs, resistance which often took the form of establishing company unions.¹¹

As Perchard has illustrated, even prior to nationalization, this is a characterization that requires qualification. Many managerial employees prior to public ownership were indeed isolated (poorly paid and educated, and with low labour market mobility and lacking in social capital), but they were increasingly vocal in their criticisms of their conditions and the way the industry was being run by private companies.¹² The paucity of investment in managers' education was a factor raised well into nationalization.¹³ And yet, as one of the official historians of the industry in the twentieth century Barry Supple has pointed out, the decision to nationalize the industry, resulted, at least in part, from the, 'tension between colliery managers who wished to plough resources into development and directors who were reluctant to find more money or give up available profits.'¹⁴ Fishman argued that it was, "'progressive" managers' support for radical change which ensured nationalization was well received by public opinion.'¹⁵

The importance of BACM extends beyond the confines of the coal industry. The organization represented the 'new' and 'modern' technocrats that swelled the ranks of the British middle class between 1931 and 1951. BACM's members were the 'professional functionaries' in the 'responsible society', in which the Labour government placed so much faith and sought to accommodate. They were an example of what Savage *et al* referred to as 'managerial workers, dependent upon organization asset' who have remained, 'one of the great mysteries of British history'.¹⁶ If nationalization can be interpreted as a crowning peak for 'the rise of the professional society' – rather than the 'commanding heights' of a socialist vision – then it was also fundamental to the granting of an independent voice to the technocratic expert; by 1980, 25% of British managers were union members, of these 60% were in the public sector.¹⁷

New beginnings: the formation of BACM and managerial employees in the NCB

Formed in August 1947 – from the merger of the 7,000 strong British Association of Colliery Officials and Staff (BACOS) and the colliery under-managers association – BACM may have been a ‘new departure’ for the coal industry, but it was by no means the pre-eminent ‘experiment’ that its president claimed for it.¹⁸ The Electrical Power Engineers’ Association (EPEA) represented managerial and professional employees in the power-generation industry from 1913, and ASSET, representing managers, higher technicians and professionals in the engineering industry was granted negotiating rights by the Engineering Employers’ Federation (EEF) in 1944.¹⁹ The emergence of managerial trade-unionism, as part of the broader growth in white-collar unionism, was heavily dependent on employer recognition and union density. As such, it is not surprising that density amongst managerial employees was highest in the nationalized industries, where a separate voice for managers was enshrined in the formal machinery of arbitration.²⁰

The transformation of management within the coal industry was influenced by a number of factors, but underlying them a sense that, ‘moral imperatives’, rather than ‘simple market advantage’ be placed, ‘at the centre of discussion of what are traditionally thought to be “economic issues”’.²¹ Unlike the empty rhetoric of the Mining Association of Great Britain (the body representing Britain’s coal owners prior to nationalization), which had promised ‘to raise the profession of mining engineers to a level at least equal to that of any other scientific and technical profession’, the NCB transformed managers’ status.²² And managers saw an immediate improvement in their salary, conditions, and opportunities for professional development. Moreover, they acquired an independent voice within the industry, distinct from other professional associations, such as the Institution of Mining Engineers (IME) and the Association of Mining Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (AMEME). This initiative owed much to the commitment and support of Labour ministers.²³ The NCB’s treatment of managerial employees, which contrasted sharply with the private coal companies, helps to explain the increasing, if qualified, support among many mine management professionals for nationalization.

Managerial identity was also shaped by the NCB's organizational culture. When nationalizing the coal industry, the Labour government drew on a number of models. Foremost among these was the example advanced by Morrison in his 1933 plans for socialized transport. His *Socialisation and Transport* envisaged a public corporation, which 'must be no mere capitalist business'. This, Morrison proposed, would be staffed by a board and officers, 'in the splendid tradition of public service, loyalty and incorruptibility in the British Civil Service', who 'must regard themselves as the high custodians of the public interest'.²⁴ It was imperative that the aim of these 'socialized industries' be to 'promote the maximum of public well-being and status, dignity, knowledge and freedom of the workers by hand and brain employed in the undertaking'. Those managing these corporations should be selected 'primarily on suitable grounds of competence', 'must graduate from within that industry', and embrace public service.²⁵ 'Socialism', as a Labour Party pamphlet for the 1945 general election declared, meant, 'carrying the managerial revolution to its logical conclusion'. This was to be facilitated, in Labour's technocratic vision, by a 'progressive and professional' modern management. As both McKibbin and Savage observe, it was this technocratic vision that sold 'socialism' to the middle class, although the class location of mine management professionals remained both complex and contestable.²⁶

Ministers and the NCB sought to build an *esprit de corps* within the organization, through an integrated technical and management education. The NCB's most senior managers were initially enrolled at the Administrative Staff College (ASC) at Henley. This educated senior civil servants, as well as managers from other nationalized industries and various other patrician British companies (such as Cadbury, the British Aluminium Company, and Imperial Chemical Industries), with the institution's standards set down by the newly founded British Institute of Management. The midwives of the ASC intended it as, 'a meeting place of the two main categories of administrators – the officers of the private and of the public services', in which they should learn that, 'they must work

together' and 'acquire, so far as may be, the characteristic virtues of the other, and know its own characteristic defects'. All of this knowledge was to be 'directed to the fuller service of the public interest'. As one United States observer of the college in the 1950s noted: 'A special virtue of Henley is its recognition that government and business leaders must be trained in common problems of policy and administration if they are to understand each other and take independent but consistent action designed to further the common interest of the nation'.²⁷ All colliery managers were educated through the NCB's own staff college, established in the late 1950s, charged with 'developing and unifying management in the industry'.²⁸ Education was delivered both in-house by the NCB and in university mining departments. The move towards greater professionalization was also prompted from within the ranks of management, notably by the former chief inspector of mines, NCB board member, and prominent mining engineer, Sir Andrew Bryan, who was to become the BACM's first interim president.²⁹ Whether this inculcated, as Jonathan and Ruth Winterton detected, a 'managerial unitary philosophy' within the NCB over time is debatable given experiences leavened by location, occupation, and personal outlook.³⁰

The internal politics of BACM reflected the legacy of the role and status of managers in the private industry, as well as the new opportunities and tensions arising from nationalization. The divisions within BACM were reflected in contests over managerial functions and status, and affiliation to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Changing energy policy and the growing programme of colliery closures also witnessed a shift in the politics of BACM, including fostering alliances across the mining unions. These issues highlighted the contested locations occupied by managers and the 'moral choices' made by them. The changing culture of BACM illustrates the transition from 'staff association' to a recognisable managerial 'closed union'.³¹ These shifts within BACM were to be reflected in the background, politics and style of the union's officers.

Leadership and the politics of BACM

The shifting politics of BACM was no more in evidence than in the contrast between the first (permanent) national president of the union from 1947 to 1956, Major Stanley Walton-Brown, and the general secretary from 1947 to 1959, Major Robin W. Anderson, and the leadership of Jim Bullock (national president, 1956-1969) and latterly George Tyler (general secretary, 1959-1973). Walton-Brown and Anderson were doubtless uppermost in Bullock's mind when he observed in a presidential address in 1961 that colliery managers and mining engineers were 'largely Conservative in outlook', and 'resented nationalization at its outset'.³² In contrast, Bullock and Tyler's tenure marked a watershed in the union's development, coinciding with the growing crisis in the industry as successive governments looked to other energy sources, the colliery-closure programme escalated, and national strikes in the 1970s and 1980s. In this climate, Bullock and Tyler were crucial in laying the foundations for their successors – Charles Alexander, Norman Schofield, Doug Bulmer, and Alan Wilson – who continued their legacy, steering BACM as an independent managerial union through challenging times.

Walton-Brown and Anderson represented a certain type of owner-manager who had vested financial interests in the private coal companies and had occupied senior positions within the industry. Walton-Brown spent most of his working life in Northumberland – apart from attending a minor English public school and military service during the First World War – where his father had also been a senior mining engineer. At the time of nationalization, he was managing-director of the Seghill Colliery Company. Outside the industry, Walton-Brown filled the roles of a district and county councilor, and magistrate, as well as being president of his local Conservative Association.³³ Walton-Brown and Anderson were neither 'natural' trade unionists nor enthusiasts for nationalization, approaching their relationship awkwardly with a mixture of private deference and public belligerence. Yet, for all the indignation, in the closed environment of their first meeting with the NCB, BACM had pledged to be a 'very necessary help to the Board', and 'no longer a nuisance'.³⁴

Walton-Brown's loyalties, and view of nationalization, were made abundantly clear in his public pronouncements. In a speech to the BACM annual conference in 1953, he declared: 'In a monopolistic industry, the ideas of a National Coal Board and their managers as employees no longer coincide to the same extent as was the case under the former regime'.³⁵ Although some managers undoubtedly shared Walton-Brown's views, others tentatively embraced nationalization.³⁶ The dominance of former owner-managers, such as Walton-Brown, and the entrenched sense of hierarchy among others had a profound effect on the executive bodies within BACM. Tensions increased between the 'mining groups' (colliery managers, mining engineers and senior production officials) and allied mining professionals (mining electrical and mechanical engineers, safety officers, and mines surveyors) over the dominance of the national executive (NE) and the national joint council (NJC). As late as 1975, three out of the nine vocational groups that made up BACM, representing half of the union's membership numbers, were not represented on the twelve person NJC. In contrast, the 'mining groups', representing 18% of the membership, held 39% of the seats on the NE and 42% on the NJC.³⁷ These tensions between the 'mining groups' and other branches of the mine management professions would come to a head in BACM in the 1970s. This was reflected at branch level too; 'mining groups' dominated the Scottish, the Durham, and Northern branches until the 1970s.³⁸ This inculcated the initial conservatism of BACM's outlook at the national level. However, the reorganization of managerial functions and the growing confidence among other groups within BACM was to challenge this hegemony. It was also to heighten internal tensions.

Much of BACM's business in the early years was taken up with opposing the replacement of perquisites traditionally offered to managers with a more transparent salary structure and allowances. While the elimination of perquisites did see an initial loss in earnings in the early 1950s, managerial grades experienced a dramatic improvement in pay, conditions, prospects and representation compared to private ownership. BACM's relationship with the NCB was initially not aided by attempts in Durham, Yorkshire and Scotland to recruit NACODS and NUM members.

BACM received a rebuke from the chairman Lord Hyndley for 'poaching ... of a flagrant kind'.³⁹ The bitterness these disagreements with the NCB inured was evident from Walton-Brown's speech to the second annual conference in 1948: 'there has never been a time when the management and staff were so disgruntled [...] so ready to talk of industrial action'.⁴⁰ Walton-Brown's rancor, and capacity for fanciful exaggeration, was still evident as he wrote his parting message as BACM President in 1955:

It is a far cry back to the days of 1947 when this Association commenced its task of putting the relationships between the Board and the Union on a firm and proper basis. At that time we were faced with an atmosphere created by the first Board whose conception of the Management Staff dated not merely back to feudal times but even further, perhaps even to the days of Rome, Egypt and Babylon when slaves might be seen but certainly not heard.⁴¹

Prosecutions of managers under the Coal Mines Act 1911 continued to be a bone of contention. While the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 introduced further clarification, acknowledging both the role of higher levels of management and the diffusion of management functions, colliery managers and under-managers bore the brunt of the responsibility. The shortcomings and inequities of this became ever more evident with the productivity drives from the late-1950s onwards.⁴²

In the vanguard of the mood for change were Bullock and Tyler. In their backgrounds, managerial style and political outlook, Bullock and Tyler could scarcely have been more different than Walton-Brown and Anderson. Bullock was born into a household of miners. After leaving school at thirteen, he worked as a miner, junior official, and under-manager, before becoming a colliery manager. He remained a Labour Party supporter, an advocate of nationalization and a committed trade-unionist.⁴³ Tyler also came from a mining family, left school at fourteen to become an apprentice fitter, and subsequently worked for six years underground. He went on to study mining, when he discovered an interest in trade-unionism and social sciences, which he studied at the Universities

of Nottingham and Oxford. During the 1930s and 1940s, Tyler worked with the South Wales Miners' Federation organizing holiday camps for unemployed miners. From 1947 he held numerous posts around the country for BACM.⁴⁴ Their backgrounds were important in recommending them to many managers. As one former Scottish BACM official recalled: 'Jim Bullock was the best leader that BACM have ever had, and, yes, there was a change in the attitude of the management union [...] He came up, as you'll know, from the pit. He was a pit family. Brother, father, uncle, Tom Copley, and all were miners. He was from a mining village and he was a hands-on man.'⁴⁵

Bullock and Tyler forged a distinct and independent agenda for BACM; one that they argued was in keeping with their role as trade-unionists. They highlighted the double-standards implicit in the government's granting of increases in salaries for board members while urging wage restraint from the mining unions.⁴⁶ Breaking with Walton-Brown and Anderson they became vocal in their criticisms of the failure of successive governments to alleviate the distress of the contraction of the industry, to develop a robust national fuel policy, and worked nationally with the NUM and NACODS to lobby against closures in the 1960s.⁴⁷ This strategy found favour with Bullock and Tyler's leadership coinciding with a 39% growth in BACM membership from around 12,000 in 1956 to a peak of 16,700 in 1964. By the 1970s, BACM claimed union density of 95% among NCB managerial grades.⁴⁸ While the declining fortunes of some coalfields and the specialization of management functions (and growth in allied management professions) in part explain the shifting politics of the union, it is no small measure of Bullock and Tyler's effectiveness that they managed to elicit the following response from the chairman of the Durham branch in April 1963 (which was among the new leadership's most vocal critics): 'a great tribute should be paid to Mr. Bullock ... despite the number of closures ... not one single Member had actually been sacked from his post because of redundancy'.⁴⁹

Enduring malaise between the NCB and BACM was due to the perceived lack of consultation over production targets, colliery reviews and closures.

Increasingly, the sense of alienation became visible both among individual managers and collectively through BACM. This growing sense among operational managers that they were subject to direction by national edict was allowed to fester. Discontent grew over the subjugation of local managers to unrealistic, nationally devised productivity targets, victimization, forced early retirement, and redundancies. After the NCB chairman Lord Robens lectured BACM members on the need for consultation at their 1963 annual conference, locally and nationally anger started to mount over the Board's own failure to consult managers.⁵⁰ BACM was becoming more stridently independent and particularly critical of government by the 1960s over issues as energy policy and colliery closures. This criticism also extended to the government's restriction of compensation of pneumoconiosis sufferers with BACM declaring in March 1973:

Pneumoconiosis is an insidious and often a devastating disease. Only those who know or visit the homes of men suffering from it can appreciate the full extent of the disability, pain and suffering ... It would seem only just and fair that these blameless victims of the Industry should be adequately compensated. The Government's decision to set up a Royal Commission to report upon the problems of compensating persons who have been injured is to be welcomed. But pneumoconiosis victims should not have to wait for the recommendations of such a Commission; they are more akin to the thalidomide tragedies, and should be considered and treated in the same way.⁵¹

If BACM's preoccupation had initially been 'the protection of members' occupational interests' their tactics shifted markedly under Bullock and Tyler.⁵² This was primarily shaped by pragmatism and the experience of operating both within the wider post-war arena of industrial relations, and specifically the NCB conciliation and arbitration mechanisms. Bullock and Tyler both utilized and recognized the limitations of 'discursive confrontation'. They distinguished between the success of (and benefits to be accrued by) managerial unions that extended their sphere of influence

through fora like the TUC, and those who foundered in professional isolation.⁵³ This change reflected the determination of key figures at national and branch levels to transform the outlook of the union. Changing UK energy policy and the industrial politics of coal brought Bullock and Tyler's successors into ever more vocal condemnation of UK government policy and finally by the 1980s into open conflict with Ian MacGregor and the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. BACM's claims to trade-unionism were to be markedly tested by debates over such issues as strike cover and TUC affiliation.

To cover or not to cover: BACM and industrial action

No single issue illustrated the complexities and contested locations of managerial trade unionists as their position over industrial action. BACM remained fundamentally opposed to the use of the strike weapon. However, from the first annual meeting in 1947, BACM agreed that in the event of industrial action, 'members ought not to do the work of other bodies on strike, except in matters involving the safety of the pit'.⁵⁴ This was subject to an unsuccessful challenge at the 1952 conference when the South Western branch attempted to have the rules amended to 'do everything in their power in the interests of safety [and] keep everything going'.⁵⁵ This policy was brought sharply into focus during the 1972 strike. Prompted by requests from branches for clarification of the position during the dispute the union remained steadfast in its position: 'Members ought not to do the work of strikers except in matters involving the *safety of the pit in its strict and proper sense* [authors' emphasis].'⁵⁶

BACM remained opposed in principle to industrial action but sympathized with the NUM and was vocal in laying the fault at the door of the former NCB chairman, Alf Robens, for what it perceived to be a direct result of the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement in 1966.⁵⁷ BACM and the NUM national executive committees had agreed on safety cover in the event of official industrial action two years previously.⁵⁸ How this was enforced at a local level led, however, to claims and counter-claims of illegal working and intimidation by pickets, contrary to agreements, concluding with an exchange between NUM general secretary

Lawrence Daly and Tyler, subsequently reported in BACM's *National News Letter*. Daly wrote to BACM on the back of reports that members had been flouting the rules over strike cover and producing coal. Tyler responded rebutting these claims and questioning the behavior of pickets in relation to the intimidation of BACM and National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) members covered by the agreement with the NUM NEC. Tyler couched BACM's position around the long-term survival of pits, although he was forced to admit that finance staff had been breaking the agreement:

Do you really expect our members to allow a pit to be ruined and made unfit for work when the strike is over? I know that some of your members have publicly declared that they would prefer that to happen, rather than to compromise on pay claims... Whatever our members are doing at pits, they are not producing coal. Any activity they are undertaking is equally in the interests of your members as ours because it would be a very hollow victory indeed if, as a result of the strike, some pits (and it could be many) are never able to open again.⁵⁹

Charles Alexander, Bullock's successor as BACM national president made a moral appeal to members justifying safety cover on the basis of ensuring survival of the industry in the same edition of the *National News Letter* (in March 1972), while expressing indignation over the tactics employed by pickets:

However much one might sympathise with the aims of the mineworkers, I object strongly to the methods which they are currently employing to enforce their demands. The belligerent attitude adopted by pickets is not universal against our members, but where obstructive practices have been introduced they have been very frightening... In no sense can we be accused of strike-breaking. Not one ounce of coal has been produced by the efforts of B.A.C.M. since the strike started, yet our people have to suffer abuse and worse every day they go to work. We have not the suicidal impulses of those who would destroy their means of sustenance and the support of their families. We want this

industry to survive because first and foremost we want to work in it and live from it ... We will fight against joining the vast army of the unemployed, and we will fight against any reduction of our living standards ... That is why we go to work, why we want to preserve this Industry, and why we face the daily insults and threats. That is why we are management.⁶⁰

Alexander concluded with what he saw as the responsibility of management in a nationalized industry drawing on the spectre of earlier periods of disruption:

Because we are management we are conscious that a large part of the national asset is being severely damaged and we accept our responsibility by our attempts to minimize that damage. Two major wars were fought against external forces to preserve our Country and its industries; we will use the same determination to preserve the system against internal disruption.⁶¹

Alexander's reaction is notable both in capturing the conflict between being a manager and a trade-unionist and in voicing generational difference and conflict on the picket line. Alexander, who had served in the Second World War, used language similar to a number of other managers of his generation who took issue with what they saw as the unruliness of young miners on the picket lines.⁶² What proved even more contentious for BACM was the ambiguity over unofficial action, with rules left purposefully vague on the subject. This allowed BACM members to be called upon to undertake duties beyond those necessary for safety in the event of unofficial action, as long as consultation took place between the NCB and BACM, and conditions over competency and job demarcation were met. During a pit deputies' strike in the East Midlands Division in 1956, BACM members were instructed to 'help the board as far as possible', but that 'no manager or undermanager should act as a deputy'.

Divisions over BACM's position on industrial action were also evident during a consultation over policy in 1964. While most branches accepted the status quo, the Scottish, Northumberland and Durham, and North Western branches urged a stronger statement. In particular, they

expressed concern that 'members should not be strike-breakers'. The then Scottish branch secretary (and subsequently BACM national president), Charles Alexander, insisted that, 'members should refuse to undertake work other than their normal duties'.⁶³ In 1966, BACM rules were flouted when engineers were directed to carry out emergency tasks, which they were not qualified to undertake, and without prior consultation. It was the opacity of BACM's position on this that led to a motion being raised at the annual conference in 1975 to introduce clarity into the rules to ensure that members could not be directed to maintain production in the event of a strike, which was over-ruled by a sizeable majority.⁶⁴

The NEC had issued a policy declaration in July 1964 providing further clarification on the position, in particular stating that any task undertaken should not contravene safety regulations and not be carried out by unqualified officials. Nevertheless, it 'recommended' that administrative staff at area and divisional levels should 'help the Board, taking into account the conditions', while directing members to 'refuse to undertake work other than their normal duties unless consultation has taken place'.⁶⁵ Differences over the position of members came to the fore again during unofficial action at Lynemouth colliery in Northumberland in 1968. The NCB approached BACM with a request for members to cover. The branch had agreed, on the understanding that it was voluntary, that members not be asked to cover NUM and Colliery Officials and Staff Association jobs, and that this would be limited to one weekend. All except one of the colliery engineers agreed the request. However, at a subsequent meeting 'where the Union's policy had come under fire', some deputy engineers who were sympathetic to the NUM claim entered into a fierce debate with the branch secretary. He responded to their request for clarification, with an unambiguous statement: 'management officials who accepted management privileges had to accept management responsibilities'.⁶⁶ In essence, these incidents captured the compromised position BACM found itself in during unofficial action, and more broadly (as with other mining unions) the tensions between national and sub-national regional branches and individual members. The 1975 attempt to change the regulations once again suggests that those proposing the motion felt morally

compelled to challenge a ruling which could be used to direct them to continue production. As the clash between the BACM Scottish officials and Albert Wheeler during the 1984-5 miners' strike over safety cover illustrated, BACM policy in the event of industrial action continued to be a divisive issue.⁶⁷

BACM's position on strike cover illustrated characteristic tensions for managerial and white-collar unions. This was reflected in Alexander and Tyler's comments in the aftermath of the 1972 strike. Policy on strike cover also exposed the trapeze-like balancing act by the union to maintain some semblance of unity. The moral arguments deployed by the national leadership in the early 1970s mirrored those they advanced against premature closures and ill-conceived UK government energy policy. Ultimately divisions among management over future visions for the industry would be brought sharply into focus after 1979, particularly after the ascension of Ian MacGregor as NCB chairman in 1983.

BACM and TUC membership

The legacy of Bullock and Tyler's leadership was also evident in BACM's joining the TUC. Bullock was unequivocal in his support for affiliation, declaring in the *National News Letter* in March 1964: 'My mind has always been clear that any union that wanted to be a union in spirit as well as in name should join the TUC'.⁶⁸ The same month in a memorandum to the NEC, BACM's research officer, G E C Paton, sought to allay the fears of sections of the members by stressing the politically independent nature of the TUC, as well as the benefits to be accrued from membership. This was a tactical move designed to counteract the substantial opposition they knew they would face, rather than one that reflected both men's personal political outlook. It also reflected BACM leadership's concerns not to affect their independent bargaining position with Conservative administrations.⁶⁹ While BACM did ultimately join the TUC, fulfilling a key characteristic of Blackburn's 'unionateness', the debates over affiliation illustrate the tensions in managerial trade-unionism.

Despite support for the proposals from the Scottish, East Midlands and London branches, Bullock and Tyler faced substantial and robust opposition within BACM. In a letter to their branch members in 1964, the Durham and Northumberland branch (ironically for an older coalfield given that lobbying within the TUC could have provided BACM with an additional forum in which to campaign against the closure programme being ratcheted up) urged their members to vote against affiliation, on the grounds that:

[I]t is not, at least at the present time, an organisation to which B.A.C.M. should belong. The B.A.C.M. is an Association which caters for Management Grades and there are other Unions which are not affiliated to the T.U.C., which, whilst not perhaps being as wholly management in outlook as we are, nevertheless, also cater for senior officials.⁷⁰

This revealed the contested position of BACM's managers'; something that Paton had attempted to address, adapting the statement of the general secretary of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants to their members: 'In the event of the Society's affiliation to the T.U.C., this would not in the slightest way affect the position of a member of the Executive Class occupying a managerial position, who would continue to adopt a wholly impartial attitude to public issues'.⁷¹ The Durham and Northumberland branch's circular, and a subsequent sharp rebuke from Tyler, highlighted the regional differences within the organization. The subsequent vote in September 1964 was characterized by a low response (37%), with 37% voting in favour. The following year, Bullock and Tyler sought to address concerns expressed by sections of the membership, re-emphasizing the union's outlook and the changing politics of the TUC:

The T.U.C. itself is concentrating increasingly upon economic and social questions and the growing influence of affiliated black-coated unions will help to ensure that in time purely political questions are left to political parties. In the event of affiliation the Society will react to questions as it does now according to how these affect our relationship with the Government and employer.⁷²

Bullock and Tyler also highlighted what they saw as the benefits of membership, namely access to the network of corporatist bodies, such as the National Economic Development Council giving BACM more of a voice in discussions over the industry's future. In addition, since the Bridlington Agreement of 1939, TUC membership also offered a measure of protection against forced mergers. Nevertheless, they continued to face considerable opposition. One critic writing in the *The National News Letter* in 1966, accused Bullock and Tyler of being 'out of touch with the BACM membership', arguing that TUC affiliation would embroil them in debates about Rhodesia and Vietnam.⁷³

By the time Bullock and Tyler stepped down in 1969 and 1973 respectively, BACM was still deeply divided over TUC affiliation; a vote in 1970 returned a 58% majority against. By 1975, the majority of the NEC supported TUC membership. A number of explanations for this change of heart have been posited. First, the UK's entry into Europe and the platform that the TUC provided for representing the industry's long-term interest. Second, concerns over energy policy and the future of the industry. Third, the Conservative government was urging BACM and the First Division Association (representing the senior civil service) to join to 'strengthen the representatives of the TUC' (to counteract the block votes of the manual unions and the left). In 1976 a majority of BACM members voted in favour of BACM's affiliation (joining in 1977).⁷⁴

BACM's affiliation to the TUC severely weakened attempts, supported by a number of Conservative MPs, to create a separate forum to bring together managerial unions. This parallel attempt aimed to forge a Managerial and Professional Group (MPG) bringing together the Association of Managerial and Professional Staffs (AMPS) and the UK Association of Professional Engineers (UKAPE), along with fourteen other unions and associations (including the British Medical Association) in 1977. The MPG was further weakened when SIMA, UKAPE and AMPS subsequently joined the TUC. Within the TUC, managers' unions campaigned for a specific section. In the 1980s, BACM, along with the Engineers' and Managers' Association

and the British Air Line Pilots' Association, set up a council within the TUC for unions not affiliated to the Labour Party. The intention of this was not simply to promote interests of professional and managerial staff within TUC, but also to share information, lobby government, and encourage other unions to merge with them. In part, as Bamber notes of BACM (and other managerial unions), this was a response to rising costs and falling membership, increasing unemployment, and the anti-union politics of the Conservative government.⁷⁵ It also built on discussions already taking place within BACM, and their collaboration with the NUM and NACODS over colliery closures.⁷⁶

The TUC became an important forum for BACM to lobby government over energy policy. This was visible in attempts to lobby against financial targets within the Coal Industry Act of 1985 (requiring the NCB to break even) – which BACM pointed out to the TUC was 'likely to cause further capacity closures and redundancies' – and the Central Electricity Generating Board's industrial energy prices, which sought to further lower already unrealistic coal prices, as well as over review procedures for colliery closures.⁷⁷ Some pressures could not be resisted with a contracting industry and membership. With membership having fallen to 5,640 by 1993 (many of them retirees), BACM created the Technical, Energy and Administrative Management (TEAM) section to create BACM-TEAM (representing managers and engineers in the energy sector).⁷⁸

In attempts to foster alliances to lobby for coal and protect the remaining jobs in the industry, BACM-TEAM found itself by the twenty-first century attempting to foster national reconciliation between the NUM and the UDM. In contrast, concerns over factionalism prompted BACM to block Scottish branch attempts to affiliate to the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) and the Scottish Council (Development and Industry); key avenues for lobbying within policy-making circles in Scotland. Though other white-collar unions affiliated to the STUC (including the FDA), BACM never did. This was fraught with wider tensions over the rise of nationalist parties and campaigns for greater decentralization of power in Scotland and Wales, and public debates and dissatisfaction over the so-called,

'democratic deficit' (embracing both the labour movement and business interests) by the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁹

As with contests over cover for strike policy, debates over TUC affiliation reflected battles over struggles within the union – chiefly between the 'mining group' and allied professions – as much as the issue at hand. By the 1970s, the pre-eminence enjoyed by the colliery managers and mining engineers (though still controlling the NEC and NJC) was being challenged. The diffusion of managerial functions also created further tensions. Capturing the changes within the union, Moore recounted the 'coup' that saw the 'mining group' ousted from their position of dominance within the Scottish branch, after which the colliery managers and mining engineers walked out *en masse* in protest: 'Managers always thought [...] that they should be in charge and that other disciplines were subservient. If you like, they were lesser beings [...], "This is our union, you have only pinned yourselves on. Therefore we should be in charge".⁸⁰

Bullock and Tyler's campaign, carried on by their successors, for TUC affiliation took over a decade to achieve. It exposed the deep-seated tensions within BACM between branches and the national leadership, posing the fundamental quandary for managerial unions over their claims to be a trade union or a professional association. Ultimately as Bullock and Tyler presciently observed it was crucial both given the changing context of UK energy policy and industrial politics. It would become an important forum for BACM in the hard decades that followed.

Building alliances: energy policy and pit closures

One factor able to unite BACM and other mining unions was criticism of the absence of a well-conceived, long-term energy policy. Under Sir James Bowman and subsequently Lord Robens, the industry was decimated, with 515 collieries closed and 411,200 jobs lost between 1958 and 1971 alone.⁸¹ Notwithstanding their association with the colliery-closure programme, both Robens and Bowman sought to alleviate the effects. In addition, Robens clashed publicly with Harold Wilson when the

latter, convinced of the dawn of the nuclear age and with cheap oil supplies, wanted to speed up the contraction of the industry. Robens defied ministers by winning a major deal for coal from the Canadian multinational Alcan for its Lynemouth smelter over the government contracts designed to subsidize the construction of the new generation Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors (AGR) and alleviate Britain's balance of payment problems by reducing imports of aluminum. This move was symbolic, pitting coal (representing old Labour) against Wilson's vision of the technocratic revolution. It won Robens few friends among his erstwhile Labour colleagues, but admiration amongst coal industry managers and BACM in contrast to his ebullient management style (and the NPLA), which won him few.⁸² Against this backdrop, both Bullock and Tyler were highly critical of the government's failure to develop a robust national fuel policy.

The effects of the closure programme required a concerted campaign on the part of mining unions. The indignation felt in areas of the coalfields was captured in a speech by Michael McGahey, the future NUM Scottish Area president and national vice-president, in Ayrshire in 1966: 'What we are experiencing is not the normal process of life of closing down exhausted pits but the deliberate, premeditated murder of an industry'. Much the same language was used by BACM's Jim Bullock in a 1969 documentary, visiting the Yorkshire mining village of Fryston where lived and worked: 'Closing a pit doesn't just mean closing a pit, it means destroying a whole community...What touches us in mining families is that this destroys something that I don't think will ever be built up again.'⁸³

As one of the 'exporting divisions', BACM's Scottish branch, as well as its counterparts in NACODS and the NUM, lobbied Bowman against proposals to transfer coal production for Irish markets from Ayrshire to the East Midlands. By the early 1960s, BACM nationally were collaborating with the other mining unions in lobbying against closures.⁸⁴

This was in no small measure affected by the recognition that BACM's own members were leaving the industry as a result of the contraction of jobs. Managers were personally affected by the closures as individuals and as

part of occupational communities. By 1958-9, of the seventy managerial staff they expected to be affected by the closure of thirty collieries in Scotland, the Scottish divisional board was only able to give guarantees of posts for twenty-seven. A similar picture emerged in the Cumberland and Northumberland coalfields. Over the same period, most of the mine management staff affected by seven closures in both coalfields were not placed, demoted or given short-term contracts mothballing the collieries they had worked in. The case of the 39-year old manager of Blackhill Colliery in Cumberland is indicative. After declaring that 'we do not foresee alternative employment for this man in the immediate future', the divisional board appointed him to salvage work. He finally found a demoted post as an under-manager at Woodhorn Colliery, only for this to be closed in 1961. He was offered a post as an undermanager only after vigorous lobbying by BACM's local branch. In another case in Cumberland, one of the divisional board's staff managers visited an assistant colliery agent recuperating from an operation in hospital and informed him that he was to be retired within three months. By September 1959, the Durham divisional board informed BACM that sixteen members under retirement age, some as young as fifty-five, were to be made redundant.

The rancour between BACM and the NCB grew when it was apparent that the latter were not honouring the 1953 agreement to maintain the salary level of those demoted or transferred because of closures. The refusal by the then Conservative Minister of Power, Lord Mills, to change superannuation arrangements to make allowances for early retirement further inflamed matters, with the Durham and Northumberland branches declaring: 'when men have worked a lifetime in an industry so arduous and demanding as mining, they have a right to expect some restful leisure in their eventide'.⁸⁵ In some cases, closures forged a united front between the local colliery management and the NUM, such as at Woodend colliery in Lanarkshire (which fought the threat of closure for three years before succumbing in 1965).⁸⁶

BACM was sharply critical of government policy, including the Fuel Policy White Paper of 1967. By 1970 BACM was calling for the development of a national board that would co-ordinate energy resources and power

supplies. Alexander told delegates at the union's annual conference that 'if there is to be some measure of stability in the power game in this country a strong over-riding body must control its destiny'.⁸⁷ Tyler spoke of the bleak future for coal without planning. He wanted, 'as management to be able to say honestly that we can guarantee a future to young men coming into the industry'.⁸⁸ In the brief respite afforded by a renewed interest in coal, Alexander declared in the summer of 1971: 'As far as we in this Industry are concerned, this means there should be no more closures, with the normal exceptions of the few which will shut because of exhaustion of reserves, or unexpected problems like insurmountable geological differences'.⁸⁹

Deploying arguments over security of supply (against the backdrop of delays in the UK's much-feted new nuclear AGR stations and the oil shock of 1971), in June 1972, the president restated that BACM was 'opposed to closure' on any other grounds than exhaustion of reserves or insurmountable financial difficulties, arguing that coal's 'value to the Nation must not be assessed in the context of short term and markets, but on the wider aspect of a future realisable asset'.⁹⁰ Alexander further admonished those in the press who took cheap shots at it and reminding them of what it had achieved. As he remarked in March 1972: 'It would be fair to say that the recovery of the nation depended upon the strength of the Mining Industry ... Notwithstanding some failures, it had achieved this "in adversity"... against the forces of nature, against the equally perverse forces of government ... and against a public which is notoriously fickle in its attentions and is always prepared to drop an established and loyal service in favour of a modern gimmick [undoubtedly a side-swipe at the UK's nuclear energy programme]'.⁹¹

As the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, and NUM policy, symbolized rank-and-file discontent, then the changed context in the NCB's relationship with government also played a part. Where Robens had stood on a stronger footing given his political alliances and public persona, Ezra was an industry figure without the political influence of his predecessor under pressure from a confrontational government.⁹² Notwithstanding residual bitterness over conduct during the 1972 dispute, BACM once

again cooperated with the NUM, as well as NACODS, in writing to the NCB demanding greater involvement, scrutiny and transparency in the review procedures process over colliery closures.⁹³ This followed Alexander's commitment at the 1972 BACM conference, as he restated the next year:

I stated that it ought to be part of the policy of any British Government to conserve any supplies of indigenous fuel over which it had absolute control. I also stated that it should sustain any industry which was actively engaged in the extraction and production of these sources of basic power in view of the situation which was developing in the world energy markets... I emphasized that our energies should be directed towards influencing the political body, in conjunction with the Board and any of the other Unions in the Industry...⁹⁴

During the NUM overtime ban in 1974, in agreement with the NUM NEC and in accord with its own policy, BACM undertook extra duties to guard against flooding and fires in pits, in order to protect the industry. While BACM remained critical of the dispute, this was directed equally forcefully at the government as the NUM. Commenting in January 1974, former general secretary Tyler warned the government to pay attention to miners' concerns remarking: 'we are close enough to the pit head to know that the miners are not kidding'.⁹⁵ A year later, the new president Norman Schofield urged the government to maintain, 'the right atmosphere in the pits'.⁹⁶ The assault on the industry and mining communities – as well as the threat of managerial employees jobs – had the effect of coalescing opinion amongst sections of the mine management professions, drawing the distinctions between 'insider' and 'outsider'. The depth of feeling among managers expressed during the 1984-5 belied two decades of tensions. This was an attack not just on the industry (and significantly the organizational culture of the NCB) and coalfield communities, but also on their personal identity as individuals who had built their careers in coal.

Culture clash: BACM, MacGregor, and the road to privatization

The appointment of MacGregor to the position of NCB chairman in March 1983 marked a major watershed in the future of British coal. Even before his appointment, BACM had voiced their concerns about the Thatcher administration's management of the industry.⁹⁷ Two months after MacGregor was appointed, in May 1983, BACM's president, Norman Schofield, voiced his fears. Looking at his track record at BSC, Schofield stressed that MacGregor been put in post to, 'run the industry down'.⁹⁸ He added that: 'Should it become obvious that his objective is to butcher the coal industry, then the membership of this association will not be with him.'⁹⁹ In October, BACM signed a tripartite agreement with the NUM and NACODS to offer, 'all possible mutual support and assistance to prevent further rundown'.¹⁰⁰

The animosity between BACM and MacGregor was to reach its peak with the strike of 1984-5. This is little commented upon, and indeed understood, in the literature of the dispute. By August 1984, the NCB's industrial relations director, Ned Smith, later recalled MacGregor's tactics and utterances were 'bringing to a head a growing sense of fear and discontent, not to say disbelief, in the ranks of ... BACM'.¹⁰¹ In a meeting with Jimmy Cowan, the NCB's deputy chairman, shortly afterwards, BACM declared that 'they had lost confidence in the Board, in particular the confidence of the Office of the Chief Executive'.¹⁰² By autumn, BACM was in open conflict with MacGregor over the handling of the dispute. It confirmed that in the event of a breakdown of the talks between NACODS and the NCB, and a strike by junior officials, they would refuse to allow their members to cover miners working in defiance of the NUM.¹⁰³ The same month Phillip Weekes, the NCB's South Wales Area director, recorded in his diary: 'The man has to go, and go soon.'¹⁰⁴ In November, BACM declared MacGregor's management of the industry a 'disaster', observing to the press: 'that is not the way to run this industry, which is complex and has certain traditions that have to be known and understood'.¹⁰⁵ The same month, the NCB's public relations director, Geoffrey Kirk took early retirement, observing of MacGregor: 'he is unaccustomed to having people questioning his decisions and pointing out consequences'.¹⁰⁶ BACM held a 'torrid meeting with Cowan & MacGregor',

with Weekes noting after in his diary, 'I am convinced that this pair of idiots is so inept that it wouldn't be impossible to imagine a Third Front being opened', referring to the possibility of BACM joining the NUM on strike, alongside the threat of NACODS action.¹⁰⁷ The following month Smith publicly criticized MacGregor's 'balance sheet mentality' to pit closures. In the wake of his departure, *The Times* reported: 'Colleagues of Mr Smith argue privately that his resignation is just the tip of an iceberg of discontent at Hobart House, the board's head office in Victoria'.¹⁰⁸ Smith's departure was followed in February 1985 by Paul Glover, the NCB's director of staff, and Ralph Rawlinson, the technical director, leaving the national board with no experienced senior officials.¹⁰⁹

As MacGregor's recollections suggest, the animosity between him and BACM was mutual. The gulf between the chairman, and those in the industry's management, was further widened by decisions reached secretly with the government's political advisers, without consulting his colleagues. Unlike in the steel industry where he had grown accustomed to the qualified support of managers and their union the Steel Industry Managers' Association (SIMA), BACM and MacGregor developed a mutual and visceral dislike of each other.¹¹⁰ Unlike his predecessors Ezra and Siddall, MacGregor was also an 'outsider'. In contrast to MacGregor's close proximity to the Thatcher government, Ezra had deeply resented the interference of the Heath government in the NCB's negotiations with the NUM in the early 1970s.¹¹¹

In Scotland, where one of a number of bullish area directors, Albert Wheeler, had been installed, managers were divided over the 1984-5 strike.¹¹² In the years immediately preceding the conflict, Wheeler sought to dismantle the existing colliery-level negotiations and disrupt existing relationships between operational management and the NUM. This included replacing 'local' managers with those brought in from outside, with a brief to sever agreements and enforce the new managerial prerogatives. At a meeting of mining engineers in Edinburgh in 1982, he excoriated them for taking the path of least resistance. Even before the strike, with the introduction of an NUM overtime ban in response to wage

claims and closures in November 1983, Wheeler (in contrast to his counterparts in England and Wales) refused to permit BACM members to support surface cover (management supervisory cover) to allow NACODS members to undertake weekend safety and maintenance work. Events reached a climax with Wheeler when BACM officials in Scotland requested that their members be allowed to fulfill basic maintenance tasks (to prevent flooding and falls). In an act many viewed as tantamount to criminal negligence of 'community resources' – leading directly to the flooding of the Bogside complex and one of Scotland's largest pits, Polkemmet – Wheeler refused the request and threatened any BACM member undertaking such tasks with demotion. In Scotland, this narrative about 'insider' managers pitted against the 'outsider' Wheeler has been a common theme among both NUM activists and some managers; One retired Scottish BACM official interviewed appropriated MacGregor and Margaret Thatcher's characterization of the NUM leadership as the 'enemy within', to refer to Wheeler as the enemy 'within our ranks'.¹¹³

Though pursuing a cautious line after the strike – recognizing its lack of power and the poor relations with MacGregor and the government – BACM made its views on closures and government policy clear, with general secretary Alan Wilson declaring in September 1985:

There will also need to be an acceptance that social factors must be taken into consideration. Clearly these are lessons of the past five years. Why then the doubts? My fears stem principally from the external forces which I am sure from past experience can have such an impact upon the industry. I refer to political philosophy and voices are already being raised in certain quarters suggesting more decentralisation and the privatisation of parts, if not all, of the coal industry.¹¹⁴

Wilson continued with a further rumination on the aftermath of the 1984-5 strike, lamenting the focus exclusively on the bill: 'This staggering financial cost takes no account of the human cost – the legacy of bitterness, estranged families, broken homes, the lingering acrimony and the deep divisions within the NUM'.¹¹⁵

After the 1984-5 strike, with the dissolution of the NCB and formation of the British Coal Corporation in 1987, BACM, in alliance with other mining unions, focused its efforts on resisting, and then mitigating the effects of, the breakup of the nationalized industry and further closures. In this, it was afforded some support by the conclusions of the House of Commons Energy Select Committee's Fifth Report, which pointed out the gross disparities in funding being awarded to the nuclear industry over coal in crucial areas such as research and development (Department of Energy support for the former was 65% of R&D budgets compared to 2% to the latter) and conclusions that the market could not be relied upon for energy security.

As BACM stated emphatically to news emerging of the further contraction of the industry in September 1991: 'The Association has made it clear that whoever is thinking of such a strategy should not expect the management staff of the industry to co-operate in their own suicide'.¹¹⁶ As well as lobbying the government on the future of the industry, BACM placed a motion before the TUC in 1991, including a pledge that the Congress support, 'maintenance of a substantial British deep-mining coal industry', and pledge to, 'have no confidence in any government that turns its back on coal'.¹¹⁷ Ultimately the Union's officers recognized the unrelenting political direction – unsurprisingly given the preceding privatizations of British Gas, Britoil, BP, the regional electricity companies, and finally, in March 1991, the key power generators PowerGen and National Power – with BACM's 'National News' commenting on the back of an Adam Smith Institute conference on privatization attended by accountants, economists, corporate finance and lawyers: 'My, how the vultures are circling'.¹¹⁸

In response to the government's selection of Rothschild & Co. to prepare a report on the future of the industry, and the leaking of the document's dismal outlook to selective news outlets in September, BACM president Doug Bulmer left little space for misinterpretation: 'These reports were commissioned by the Government as it wishes to privatise the industry'.¹¹⁹ Bulmer pointed out that the net effect was to sow doubt about the future of the industry: 'Whether we privatise or not will be

decided by the result of the General Election which will probably be held next Spring. The issue of privatization has been overshadowed by the emergence of doubts over our continued existence...¹²⁰ He also took a sideswipe at the Conservatives' long-time intellectual apostles of privatization, the Institute of Economic Affairs economist, Stephen Littlechild, over the timing of electricity contracts and for privatization.¹²¹ By December 1992, Bulmer concluded:

At this stage we can only deduce that the Government's underlying policy objective for coal has for a long time been to break the power of the NUM and to demonstrate the failure of public ownership. With its newly established reverse Midas touch [a direct attack on Conservative management of the wider economy over the recession of 1991-2] this objective has failed on both accounts... From a national interest point of view, the policies pursued for a long time have been negative regarding the coal industry. The scale of inequality of treatment is such that the Government should be required to demonstrate clearly why it took the decisions that it did. Long term strategic considerations seem to have been of no account. How did we get into this mess?¹²²

What Bulmer, BACM and the other mining unions were witnessing (in a, by then, well-practiced way) was the systematic discrediting of the industry, using public relations firms, and the dismantling of public-owned power generation and supply. Meanwhile, the mood in the coalfields, among managers (as with miners and deputies) was grim; the BACM branch secretary covering Scotland, the north-east of England and Yorkshire, reported despondently of the decision of British Coal to suspend the colliery-review procedures in September 1992: 'At any other time, or in different circumstances, it would be pleasing to report this fact but I suspect that this is just the calm before the storm – or even before a hurricane.'¹²³ Bill Marshall ('Big Willie', as he was known amongst his colleagues), a deputy manager and between 1988 and 1991 a BACM Scottish branch committee member representing deputy, remembers of the time, that going into work was like going into a 'penitentiary'.¹²⁴

BACM and the other mining unions organized lobbies, demonstrations and gained widespread support in their criticisms of the 1992 colliery-closure programme. While acknowledging the 'gratifying' 'wave of public, media and political support' (although noting that it was too belated) and its effect in giving the industry a brief stay, BACM noted the inexorable moves by government to contract and privatize the industry: 'it is perfectly clear that all this simply going through the motions in order to satisfy legislative and political requirements'.¹²⁵ BACM had become strident defenders of nationalization and indeed vocal critics of Conservative administrations plans for the industry after 1979. This is hardly surprising given the background from which many managers were born; most hailed from mining families and communities, and had started off working as miners. Nationalization had afforded them tremendous individual opportunities and a collective voice. BACM continued to represent managers through the final phase of colliery closures and in 2014 voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the Prospect trade union.

Conclusion: Reluctant Trade-Unionists

BACM's actions, as well as those of individual managers demonstrate a more complicated position and range of opinions amongst managers in the nationalized British coal industry than has been portrayed in much of the literature. In their 1971 study, *Managers and their Wives*, Jan and Ray Pahl observed that managers were little understood. However, contrary to assumptions the Pahls noted:

We have certainly detected a degree of ambivalence and uncertainty towards the basic materialistic values which are often assumed to be dominant by politicians and spokesmen for British industry. That so many of the middle-class couples we studied showed such ambiguity towards the basic values of a competitive society has far-reaching implications.¹²⁶

BACM's position from the 1970s onwards was characteristic of that uncertainty. While the state may have acted as a midwife to managerial unionism, conversely frustration over centralized control and the

contraction of the industry from the late 1950s onwards increased recruitment to BACM and saw the Union adopt a more stridently independent position and seek alliances with other unions. BACM was transformed from a conservative staff association and reluctant partner in nationalization, as epitomized by the first President and General-Secretary, Walton-Brown and Anderson, to an independent managerial trade union, as represented by Bullock and Tyler. From the 1970s, and especially the 1980s and 1990s, BACM's leadership had to contend with positioning themselves during the national strikes of the 1970s and 1984-5, and ultimately an assault on the long-term future of the industry and nationalization. This was especially visible with the open confrontations with Ian MacGregor. This period also saw considerable tension within BACM's ranks between mining engineers and other mining groups, which Alexander, in particular, was forced to confront.

In most respects, BACM complied with Blackburn's model of 'unionateness'. Part of the challenge for Bullock, Tyler and their successors – as demonstrated over issues such as strike cover, TUC affiliation – was in managing different sectional interests and regional/national branches, experiencing contraction and growth, against the shifting political economy of energy in the UK. Ultimately, what would bring some unity to the mining unions was the survival of their industry in a hostile policy environment. That commitment to the industry, and recognition of the reliance of coalfield communities on it for survival, calls into question the suggestions made by McCormick that managers unquestionably remained wedded to their employers and Bain's that managerial employees were unaffected by social location or occupational identity. BACM's actions reflected the profoundly contested position that managers occupied in the changing context of the nationalized British coal industry when the collective resources and the very fabric of mining communities were under threat. The divisions witnessed among managers themselves reflected the ruptures in the moral economy of the coalfields.¹²⁷

Notes

¹ I. MacGregor, *The Enemies Within: The Story of the Miners' Strike, 1984-5* (William Collins & Co. Ltd: 1986), p.151.

² A. Perchard and J. Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and Management of the Nationalized Coal Industry in Scotland', *Contemporary British History*, 25:3, (2011), pp.387-405.

³ I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Colliery Managers and Nationalization: The experience in South Wales', *Business History*, 34:4, (1992), pp.59 – 78; A. Perchard, *The Mine Management Professions in the Twentieth-Century Scottish Coal Mining Industry* (The Edwin Mellen Press: 2007)

⁴ B. J. McCormick, 'Managerial Unionism in the coal industry', *British Journal of Sociology*, XI: 4, (1960), pp.356-69; G. S. Bain, 'The Growth of White-Collar Unionism in Britain', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, IV:1-3, (1966), pp.304-355; H. Hartmann, 'Managerial Employees – New Participants in Industrial Relations', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, XII:2, (1974), pp.57-65; A. J. Arthurs, 'Managerial Unionism in the Coal, Steel and Electricity Supply Industries' (MA, University of Warwick: 1975); H. Gospel, 'European Managerial Unions: An Early Assessment', *Industrial Relations*, 17: 3, (1978), pp.360-371; W. R. Garside and H. F. Gospel, 'Employers and Managers: Their Organizational Structure and Changing Industrial Relations', in C. J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914* (Harvester Press, Brighton: 1982), pp.99-115; 'Arthurs, 'Managerial Trade Unionism', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 25: ISSUE NEEDED, (1983), pp.140-152; G. Bamber, *Militant Managers? Managerial Unionism and Industrial Relations* (Gower Publishing, Aldershot: 1986); E. Snape and G. Bamber, 'Managerial and Professional Employees: Conceptualising Union Strategies and Structures', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27:1, (1989), pp.93-110; C. Wrigley, 'From ASSET to ASTMS: An Example of White-Collar Union Growth in the 1960s', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 7, (1999), pp.57-74; J. Melling, 'Managing the White-Collar Union: Salaried Staff, Trade Union Leadership, and the Politics of Organized Labour in Postwar Britain, c.1950-1968', *International Review of Social History*, 48, (2003), pp.245-271; *Idem*, 'Leading the White-Collar Union: Clive Jenkins, the Management of Trade-Union Officers, and the Politics of the British Labour Movement', *Int. Rev. Soc. Hist.*, 49, (2004), pp.71-102.

⁵ G. S. Bain, *The Growth of White-Collar Unionism* (The Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1970), pp.180-1; J. Melling, 'Managing the White-Collar Union', *Int. Rev. Soc. Hist.*; *Idem*, 'Leading the White-Collar Union', *Int. Rev. Soc. Hist.*

⁶ R. M. Blackburn, *Union character and social class: a study of white-collar unionism* (Batsford, 1967), p.18.

⁷ Perchard, *Mine Management Professions*; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Colliery Managers', *Bus. Hist.*.

⁸ L. Hannah, 'The economic consequences of the state ownership of industry, 1945 – 1990', in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700. Volume 3: 1939 – 1992* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1994), p.168; M. Chick, *Electricity and Energy Policy in Britain, France and the United States since 1945* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham: 2007), p.42.

⁹ Snape and Bamber, 'Managerial and Professional Employees', *Brit. Jour. of IR*.

¹⁰ The same point is made by Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Industrial Relationships and Nationalization in the South Wales Coalmining Industry', (PhD, University of Cambridge: 1990), p.341. For example: R. Page Arnot, *A history of the Scottish miners* (Allen and Unwin: 1955), pp.278-291; L. Cooney and A. Maxwell, *No More Bings in Benarty: An Account of the Rise and Fall of Mining in the Benarty Area of Fife, and its Influence on the People who Lived There* (Benarty Mining Heritage Group, 1992); H. Francis and D. Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff: 1998), pp.436-7; For exceptions, see: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Colliery Managers and Nationalization'; Perchard, *The Mine Management Professions*; A. Perchard and J. Phillips, 'Transgressing the Moral Economy', *Contemp. Brit. Hist.*, pp.387-405.

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¹⁰¹ J. and R. Winterton, *Coal, Crisis and Conflict: the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike in Yorkshire* (Manchester University Press: 1989), p.216; N. Smith, *The 1984 Miners’ Strike: the actual account* (Whitstable, 1997).

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- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
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- ¹¹⁸ A neoliberal think-tank, the Adam Smith Institute was influential in informing the Conservative policy on privatization of nationalized industries. Ibid, p.5; D. Parker, *The Official History of Privatisation, Volume I: The Formative Years, 1970-1987* (Routledge: 2016); *The Official History of Privatisation, Volume II: Popular Capitalism, 1987 – 1997* (Routledge: 2016).
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¹²¹ A former professor of economics at Aston and Birmingham universities, and a member of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, Stephen Littlejohn was the chief architect behind the Conservative government's deregulation of UK energy markets. He subsequently became UK energy regulator between 1989-1998. BACM, *National News Letter*, (March 1992), p.2.

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¹²⁴ Bill Marshall, Interview with Andrew Perchard, Kirkcaldy, Fife, 21 April 2004; BACM, *National News Letter*, (September 1991), p.25.

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