

THE NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' MOVEMENT: THE MANAGEMENT OF INDUSTRIAL DISCONTENT IN TIMES OF MASS AND LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT, 1926-1936

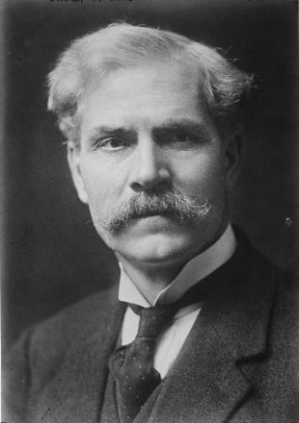
AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE, THE TRADE UNIONS, AND THE NUWM INSIDE THE BRITISH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS' SYSTEM

PHD THESIS

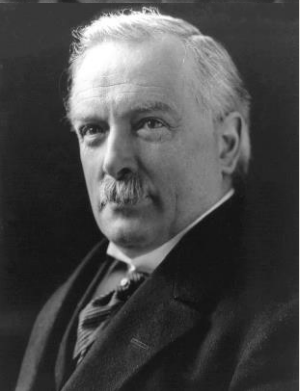
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THE CONTEXT: INTER-WAR BRITAIN

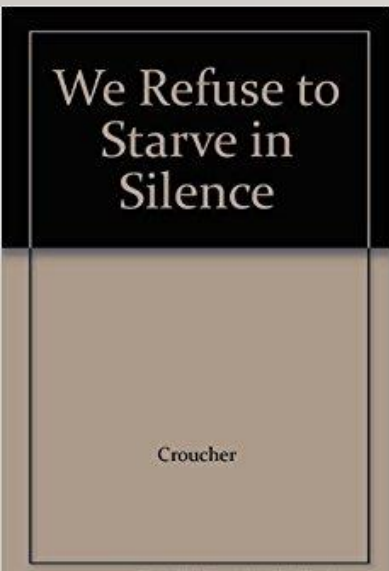


- The history of the disappointment of hopes of a happier society at home, of the nations of the earth living in peace and unity, an era of speculation of false hopes of easy prosperity, dreaming to go back to the times of the *Belle époque* (1871-1914)
- Mistrust on politicians managing economic affairs. Return to the Gold Standard. Taxation. London losing power position as a financial centre
- Economic crisis. Large-scale structural unemployment based on the primary industries (textile, steel, shipbuilding and coalmining), rising up to 23% in national terms –over 30 in some areas, after industrial boom
- Amalgamated Engineering Union (almost exclusively skilled men's union): never less than 8% of its members out of work between 1922 and 1935. Boilermakers' Society: 60% of its members, unemployed, in the depths of the world depression
- Industrial unrest: General Strikes, 1919/1926
- Influence and fear of the Russian Revolution (1917)

THE NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' MOVEMENT



- Founded in 1921. National and district machinery to coordinate and lead the struggles of the unemployed
- *Membership: 10,000 – 100,000 members*
- “Work or full maintenance for the unemployed” Against the “not genuinely seeking clause”, the “means tests” and “workers’ transference”
- Demanded both Conservative and Labour governments to use public expenditure to guarantee the unemployed to live with dignity
- National Legal Department: information and representation service for individuals applying for unemployment insurance. More effective than trade unions in processing cases. Over one-third of the total number of cases brought to the Umpire.
- Led by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain
- Challenged trade unions’ monopoly over workers’ affairs. From 1926 onwards, isolated from the British labour movement, and threatened by the hostility from the State and the traditional trade unions



FOCUS



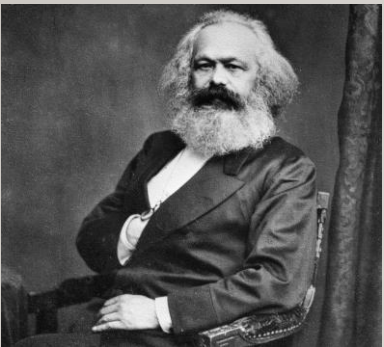
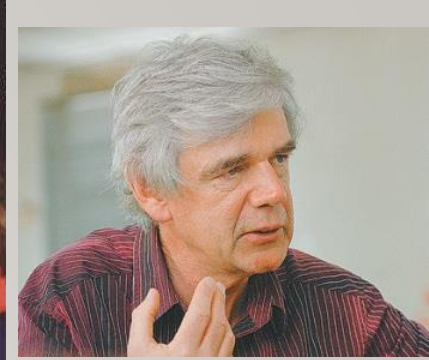
- Gap in the analysis of the role played by the NUWM inside the British industrial relations' system regarding its relationship with two key entities within that system: the state and the trade unions
- How the British state managed discontent through its relationship with the NUWM between 1926 and 1936 given the exceptional type of unemployment and the unemployed movement's demands? / What explains the trade unions' attitude towards the NUWM after the 1926 General Strike and its variations within the following decade? / Which was the role played by the trade unions within the study period in helping the state –deliberately or not– in its duty of maintaining social order?

KEY TO UNDERSTAND DISCONTENT

- Skilled engineers removed from their jobs and substituted by non-skilled workers who operated the new machines in operation; they just needed to move the lever. “Dilution”
 - Mechanization of production: a phenomenon of capitalism in the inter-war period
- Unemployed without insurance forced to look for jobs that were not out there
- Left behind not just by the industry, but by the state and the trade unions
 - Trade unions used to deal with affairs of those employed and fearing to lose their position achieved in British advanced capitalism
 - The state used to deal with employers and trade unions, and trying to maintain stability
 - Industry in transformation – less skilled workers needed



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



- Facts do not speak for themselves. All understanding takes place within a conceptual framework. There can be no theory-neutral interpretation of events. Knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain point of view. Observation is theory dependent
- Marxist theories on the state and industrial relations
 - Common interpretation of Marxism: sterile debates among fanatics and extremists about abstract principles
 - If political science is to rise above the level of investigative journalism, then it is necessary to grapple with some difficult issues surrounding theories of the state; all studies of politics are rooted in a theory of the state. A theory of the state is also a theory of society and of the distribution of power in that society
 - Deriving the state from Marx's account of the circuit of capital allows a conceptualisation of governing, and the limits of state action, which is absent in most orthodox political science. Within the problem of principal actor designator, the state stands out as an option offering the possibility of a conceptualisation rather than a description of actors/events



Core of State apparatus: distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted functions is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will

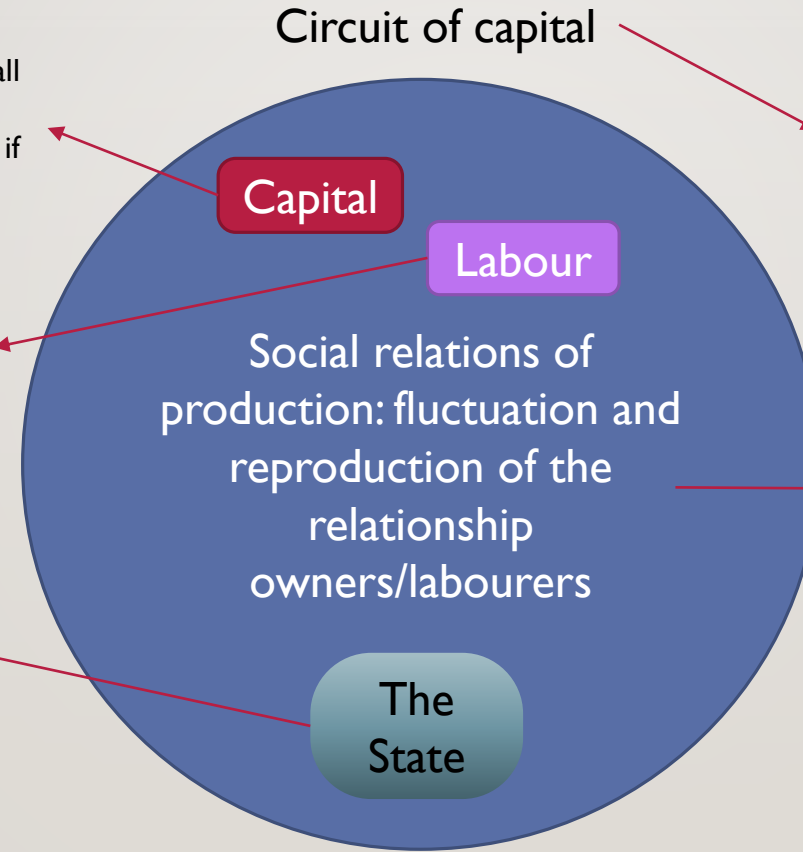
National and local government, administration, military and police, the judiciary and assemblies

Main aspect: the central government; speaks on the state's behalf/It is to the government that men are required to give obedience.

Few people own the means of production. Dominate key sectors of industry, finance and commerce. Relatively small number of giant firms, often interlinked.
Enormous political significance: present their interests as if they were of the whole society or nation.
No single, unambiguous logic capital

Operate the machinery in industry, pressuring for higher salaries, shorter working days, and in general for a better quality of life

A transitory form of the capital relation to guarantee exchange
Regulative agency to intervene in class struggle, but also an essential, integral, and dependent part of it.
Institutionally separated from the core of capitalist production. Remains external to the accumulation of capital; not neutral



Circuit of capital

Capital

Labour

Social relations of production: fluctuation and reproduction of the relationship owners/labourers

The State

Valorisation of capital/extraction of surplus value
Separation of the labourer from the means of production and subsistence

Based on inequality
Resistance and attacks
Reformulations/contradictions
Tendency towards crisis of the capital relation

Class struggle

Capital - Labour

Capitalists - Capitalists

Industrial relations: the study of processes of control over work relations

Trade Unionism (core of industrial relations): the manifestation of industrial conflict; the institutionalised form through which workers can exercise control over employment conditions and the work situation.



Representative organisation of workers. Traditionally separated by craft
Overcome the individual workers' weakness by collective bargain to influence the actions and decisions of employers, legislators and other state and non-state entities

Vertical boundaries, ruled in oligarchic lines

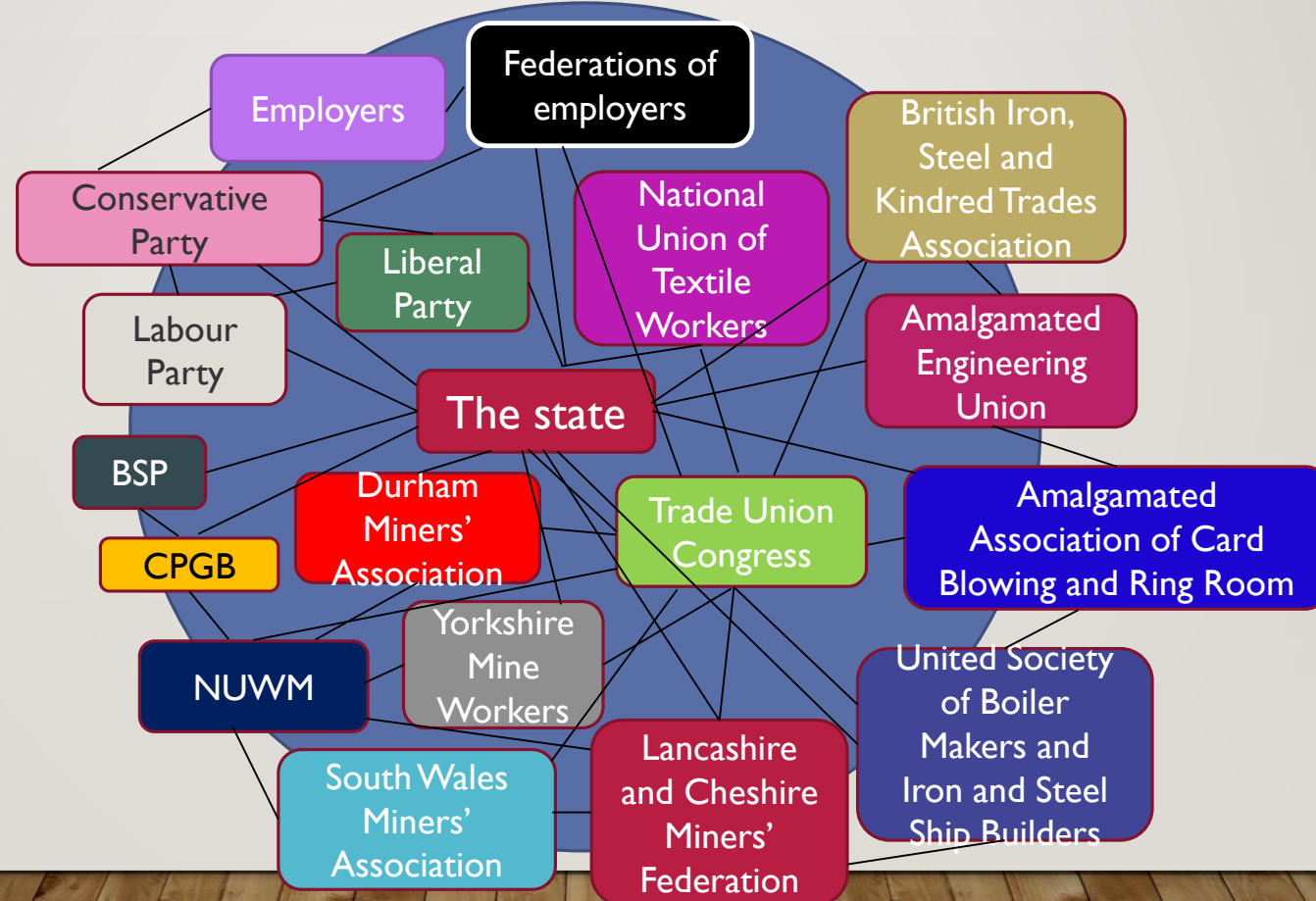
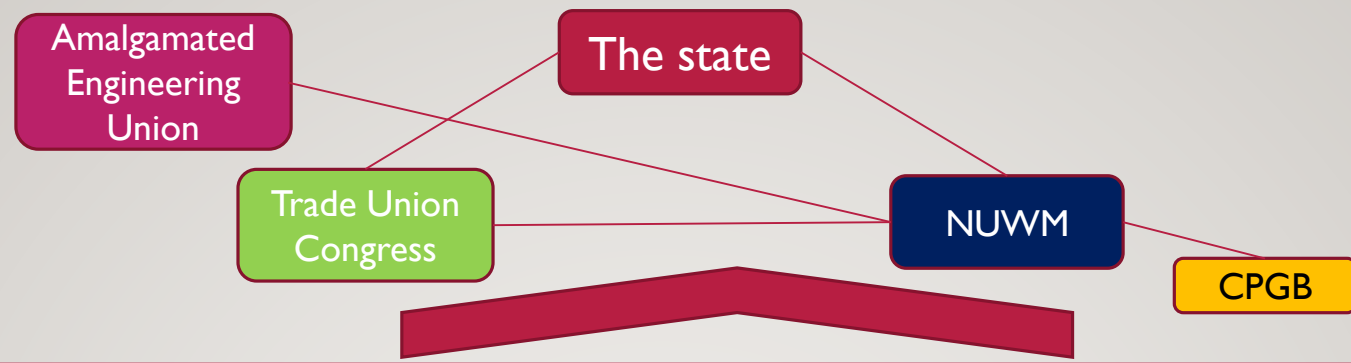
Moderate and conservative policies; aware of behaving responsibly/fulfil the requirements of the orderly formal system of industrial relations

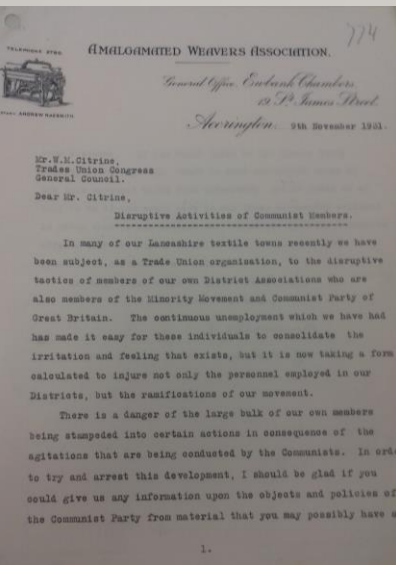
Myth of achievement

Co-option by employers or the State

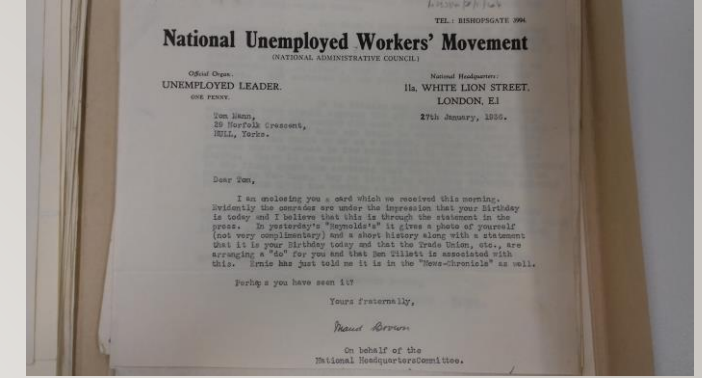
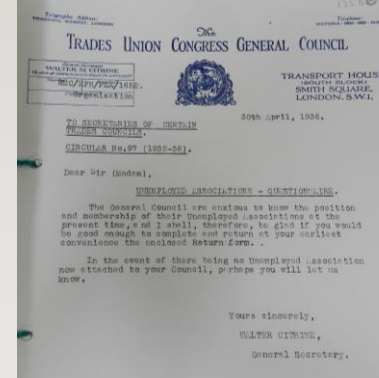
As a response: development of movements such as the Shop Stewards' and the NUWM

This thesis

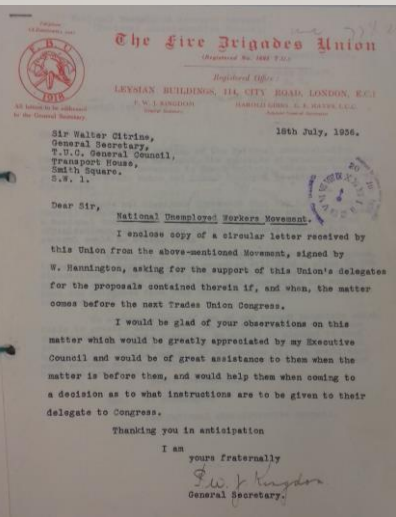




METHODOLOGY



- Methodology: Archival/documentary analysis
 - National Archives, Modern Record Centre, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Marx Memorial Library, Archives of the University of Hull, The South Wales Miners' Library
 - First sources (produced at/immediately after the event and intended for internal circulation)
 - Second sources (produced for publication)
 - Files produced by the main institutions of the state relating industrial unrest (Home Office, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Labour and Prime Minister's Office); Minutes of the Trade Union Congress' General Council and of trade unions' leadership; Records of the NUWM



CURRENT RELEVANCE

- How to make pressure to achieve a right
 - i.e. social security
- Arrival of unexpected movements to the political scenario
- Political stability and governability in times of economic crisis and social unrest
 - i.e. Mexico
- Management of industrial discontent
 - i.e. US and Canadian Trade Unions making pressure to break NAFTA with Mexico due to the low salaries in Mexico – no way to compete with them!