**After UCS: Workplace Occupation in Britain in the 1970s**

**Abstract**

This paper traces the development of this form of industrial action through the 1970s, the emergence of an alternative economic voice, ultimately almost silenced in the 1980s with the dominance of neo-liberalism, leaving a sedimental alternative which periodically reappears. We first need to consider the context for this occupation movement and the social, political and economic developments of the post-war period which facilitated this form of resistance. Then we consider the nature of ‘occupation’, the forms it takes, and what differentiates it from strikes and other manifestations of organized conflict arising from the employment of labour power under capitalism, before examining the pattern of occupation after UCS.

**Introduction**

On 30th July 1971, outside the gates of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, Jimmy Reid, the convener of the joint shop stewards committee, announced to a mass meeting of workers as well as observing journalists, that:

The world is witnessing the first of a new tactic on behalf of workers. We’re not going to strike. We’re not even having a sit-in strike. We’re taking over the yards because we refuse to accept that faceless men, or any group of men in Whitehall or anyone else, can take decisions that devastate our livelihoods with impunity.... The shop stewards representing the workers are in control of this yard. Nobody and nothing will come in and nothing will goout without our permission.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Within a year, and before there was any idea that UCS work-in would save any jobs, there were to be around a hundred other occupations in some ways claiming its inspiration. In the following decade we can find reports of over two hundred and sixty instances, with perhaps a further seventy by 2018.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The occupation, the ‘sit-in’ or ‘work-in’, of a workplace proved the most dramatic form of industrial action during a very turbulent decade following UCS. Often associated with resistance to closure,[[3]](#footnote-3) and, in its heyday, with the establishment of workers’ co-operatives, this only relates to a minority of occupations. It is, however, a challenge to property relations, central to the posing of an alternative economic strategy, and, at the same time, prefigurative of a society based around workers’ self-management.

This paper traces the development of this form of industrial action through the 1970s, the emergence of an alternative economic voice, ultimately almost silenced in the 1980s with the dominance of neo-liberalism, leaving a sedimental alternative which periodically reappears. We first need to consider the context for this occupation movement and the social, political and economic developments of the post-war period which facilitated this form of resistance. Then we consider the nature of ‘occupation’, the forms it takes, and what differentiates it from strikes and other manifestations of organized conflict arising from the employment of labour power under capitalism, before examining the pattern of occupation after UCS.

**The break-up of the post-war consensus?**

Post-war economic growth and Keynesian policy of full employment facilitated union growth and a mobilisation of shop floor challenge to management with a growth of shop steward representation. Not only were shop stewards seemingly associated with rising militancy, the ‘English disease’ of unofficial strikes, but also with increasing political dissent: with a growing left, around the Communist Party, dissent within Wilson’s Labour Party, and a growth of other parties and organizations of the left. Communist Party members, for instance, dominated the shop steward committee at UCS. As well as a challenge to managerial prerogative this posed a militant opposition to the established leadership of the unions.

By the 1960s there were problematic signs in the UK economy; while growth was continuing, it was not as strong as competitor economies. As part of their modernisation recipe, ‘the white heat of technological revolution’, the 1964 Labour Government promoted corporate mergers. Government established, through its Industrial Reorganisation Corporation (IRC), companies they hoped could compete internationally. Included in this policy was Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, formed from five separate yards. There was growing criticism of the 1964-70 Wilson Government’s policies, some of which gelled around the May Day Manifesto and a new left in Britain, and more importantly coming from a new generation of left leaders in some of the trade unions. Within this was concern about the the nationalised industries. One concern of elements within this ‘new left’ was that nationalisation had maintained the management heirarchy, and paid ne heed to traditional socialist demands for workers’ control.[[4]](#footnote-4) One element of this critique was developed through the Institute for Workers’ Control which, picking up on the expansion of shop floor organization, argued that in extending its power, trade union organization was an encroachment of workers’ control against managerial prerogative.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In 1968, the occupation of factories became an important part of the events in France as militancy migrated from the students, engaged in University sit-ins, to industrial workers. In a repeat of events of 1936, when an occupation movement erupted,[[6]](#footnote-6) workers across France took over their factories.[[7]](#footnote-7) While recognising the development of international movement demanding grass roots control, Michael Barrett Brown considered that, in the UK, ‘it is unlikely that in the near future workers' control can mean "taking over" docks or pits or factories.’[[8]](#footnote-8) The pamphlet got its title from a 1969 television play, written by Jim Allen and directed by Ken Loach, *The Big Flame*, portraying a fictional takeover by its workers of the Liverpool docks. Some major worker action against closures and rising unemployment was much anticipated, although it was recognised that a traditional strike, a ‘withdrawal of labour’, would be counterproductive.

In 1969 shop stewards at GEC/AEI/EE, a company formed out of mergers facilitated by the IRC, proposed an occupation to resist redundancies, a plan initially accepted at a mass meeting. Without immediate occupation of the factories the employer was able to mobilise opposition, including recruiting support from some of the stewards. Doubts developed on the implication of a takeover, for safety and insurance while in occupation, and, perhaps most importantly, what impact resistance might have for unemployment benefits and for any redundancy package. Eventually the plan was voted down by a later mass meeting.[[9]](#footnote-9) The shop stewards had asked advice from the IWC, and its failure prompted considerable debate.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**The Nature of Occupation**

The events at GEC/AEI indicate the uncertainty concerning occupation although this was not an unknown tactic even in the UK. Stay-down strikes had occurred in the mines in the 1930s,[[11]](#footnote-11) as well as in USA during Roosevelt’s New Deal,[[12]](#footnote-12) and in France in 1936-7 during the Popular Front government.[[13]](#footnote-13) Other record exist of occupation in Britain, for example in the motor and the cycle industries,[[14]](#footnote-14) as well as the garment industry.[[15]](#footnote-15) While, at the time, the tactic was most associated with student occupation, it is clear that Jimmy Reid was aware of the use of sit-ins in distancing their action from them. Short ‘sit-down strikes’ or ‘downers’ were used, especially by mass production workers.[[16]](#footnote-16) In January 1971, before the UCS work-in, there was report of workers in Staffordshire staging a sit-in, across several shifts, in a dispute about earlier strike breaking,[[17]](#footnote-17) and at Hawker Sidderley in Manchester over redundancies.[[18]](#footnote-18)

By taking over the workplace, rather than leaving it, the occupation is fundamentally different from a strike. At least tacitly this becomes a challenge to property rights, instead of a withdrawal of the sale of labour power. Even more than in strikes, the occupation needs organization. In a work-in, the workers exercise their control, and organization, of the means of production which could be argued to be more radical than a sit-in. However, the adoption of sit-in or work-in was a practical decision rather than an ideological one. While some argue that occupation is ‘a tactic of class struggle - not an experience in workers' control,’[[19]](#footnote-19) it could be considered as prefigurative of workers’ self-management, not only taking over but also using worker collective expertise in running the enterprise. However, occupations vary greatly across a spectrum from short small-scale protests to the takeover of a whole establishment with the continuation of production, and perhaps organization of the supply- chain and distribution, by the workforce.

Occupations, certainly when they are very short, are often reported as strikes. Many unofficial and spontaneous strikes, at least before industrial action was constrained by legislation of the 1980s, began with some form of occupation. Such actions, ‘sit-down strikes’ or ‘downers’, were largely short and transitional. They could often be quickly resolved through negotiation, suppressed through management threat, or, at least before the introduction of ballots, be the prelude to a walk out. But they could lead to a longer occupation, perhaps organizing a shift pattern for 24-hour cover.

In ‘workplace occupation’ we are considering action where at least some of the occupiers are, or were, employees of the establishment being occupied. [[20]](#footnote-20) It excludes sit-ins which might occur as a short protest at an establishment, such as a welfare benefit office or a government department, not the place of work of the participants. In some occupations only part of the workplace might be taken over, restricted to an area, like the canteen,[[21]](#footnote-21) or to a section or department. In some occupations, management were evicted by the workforce but in others they may be able to carry out their duties uninterrupted or only inconvenienced by the workers’ action.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The Pattern

Official figures are a measure of ‘stoppages of work due to industrial conflict’, so include strikes and lockouts but not all occupations. There is also no official definition of what constitutes an occupation, sit-in or work-in. Other researchers have also attempted to measure ‘days lost’ through occupation,[[23]](#footnote-23) but since occupation might be quite the opposite of a withdrawal then such a figure is not necessarily helpful. Likewise, any figure for the number of workers involved does not account for involvement in the action. Often only a small proportion of a workforce were active in an occupation, a number likely also to decline over time, especially in a protracted dispute, [[24]](#footnote-24) this also discounts any equivalent of ‘days lost through industrial action’ for occupations.

Table One: Reported Incidents of Occupation in Britain, 1971 to 1981[[25]](#footnote-25)

Table One indicates the number of occupations identified from newspaper reports in the decade following the UCS work-in. We can see that 264 occupations could be identified in reports between 1971 and 1981. However, one important feature of Table One is that it indicates that resistance to closure only accounts for 88 occupations, a third of the overall total.[[26]](#footnote-26) The particularly large number of occupations concerning pay and conditions in 1972 and 1973 relate to the engineering industry national dispute. Only in the year 1975, with a favourable political context, were there more occupations concerning closure. Overall, we can see a pattern, with numbers hitting a peak in 1975 and then going into decline, with a minor revival in the early 1980s after the election of the Thatcher government. We might ask a further question, not of the emergence of the occupation but why there was not more resistance in the 1980s with the closure of many plants in traditional industries with highly unionised workers?

Figure 1: Occupations lasting > 12 weeks, 1971-1982

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Figure One shows the 29 occupations which lasted for more than 12 weeks and includes many of the best-known incidents. Bunching occurs around 1972, in occupations concerning the national engineering disputes and its repercussions and early action against closure. We can also note that many occurred before the outcome of UCS itself was clear. Further bunching occurred in the mid-1970s attached to closure and links to workers’ co-operatives. There is a clear decline in the latter 1970s, also noted by Sherry, who argues that: “the numbers steadily dwindled until they were few and far between, proof of how much the movement had retreated under Labour.”[[27]](#footnote-27) While there was a clear move in the mid-period of the Labour government, other causal factors might have contributed to this decline: redundancy pay, management strategy in closures, as well as a shift in resistance not noted by Sherry. Some shorter occupations about closure were sustained in this period, as were some concerning pay and conditions. In the latter 1970s a new focus for occupation developed around hospital closures, some of which, such as at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, proved protracted.

While there is only a very small increase in the numbers of occupations as we entered the 1980s, and particularly the early years of the Thatcher government, there are a number that were more protracted, as outlined in the contributions throughout this collection. Given the extent of the decline of traditional industries, as well as the more general government attack on organized labour, we might expect more resistance. But the number of occupations tails off in the mid-1980s, paralleling a significant decline in the number of strikes, although we must also consider particular constraints placed on occupation.

**The Rise**

The UCS work-in was different to the occupations that followed, although many found inspiration from it and some consulted with them about how to organize their own action.[[28]](#footnote-28) The shop stewards’ committee at UCS took over the employment of those made redundant rather than taking over the yards and organizing shipbuilding production. The receiver remained in charge of the management of UCS, holding dual power with the work-in committee made up of stewards and white collar union representatives.[[29]](#footnote-29) The main power held by the UCS workers was over the movement of the ships, of considerable value, still in the yards and under construction.

In October, facing large scale redundancies, shop stewards at BSA motorcycle plant in Birmingham initially planned an ‘Upper Clyde Shipbuilders type work-in’,[[30]](#footnote-30) and sought advice from UCS stewards. A work-in was opposed by union officials, arguing ‘the difficulties of maintaining a work-in at a factory completely dependent on a steady flow of components from outside. They pointed out that the UCS yards had large stocks of heavy steel plate and other materials on the premises when their demonstration began.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

The first workers to actually take action inspired by UCS were at the Plessey torpedo plant in Alexandria, also on the Clyde. After having been open only one year, the closure was announced and workforce, mostly women, were gradually made redundant. The final 200 decided to resist, occupying the plant for five months before the site was sold to a developer with the promise of about 70 jobs on offer in a new industrial estate.[[32]](#footnote-32) At British Steel River Don works an occupation was successful in reversing a rundown of staff with possible closure. While there might not have been the continuation of production, some occupations, such as at J. Engl in Bridgend, found their power in stopping the removal of stocks and machinery from the factory.[[33]](#footnote-33)

A debate opened in the early phase of the occupation movement as to the best course for continuation of the enterprise faced with closure. Briant Colour Printing in East London maintained their presses to supply material to the labour movement during the disputes of the ‘glorious summer’ of 1972,[[34]](#footnote-34) sought a new owner and rejected establishing a worker co-operative. Only fourteen weeks after finding a new owner, who took on half the workforce promising jobs for the rest as work increased, the plant was again closed. This time they could not respond with an occupation; receiving redundancy notices through the post, workers arrived at the plant to find it already closed and guarded by security.[[35]](#footnote-35)

At Fisher Bendix on Merseyside, workers stormed a meeting of the company board and evicted them from the factory after they recommended closure. Their month-long occupation ended with the intervention of Harold Wilson, leader of the Labour opposition and the local MP, who arranged a takeover by the International Property Development (IPD). The workers, building on this experience, were to occupy the plant again two years later when it was closed by its new owners.[[36]](#footnote-36)

A workers’ co-operative had been drifted into by another group of workers in an early occupation. When Sexton Son and Everard decided to rationalise their shoemaking business by closing a small plant in Fakenham the women workers, abandoned by their union, decided to support themselves by manufacturing leather bags from the scrap materials available and sell them on local markets. Seeking assistance from Scott Bader Co, an established co-operative, they continued themselves as a co-operative at a nearby factory.[[37]](#footnote-37)

During a long pay dispute at Doncaster Monkbridge in Leeds, electricians staged a short sit-in after refusing to take instruction from a manager who had ‘scabbed’ in a supervisor strike over pay. This quickly became a lock-out after they failed to sustain what appeared a very partial occupation.[[38]](#footnote-38) With the publicity of the UCS work-in, these possibly common ‘downers’ or short sit-down strikes, were gaining publicity alongside longer occupations.

The occupation was, however, quickly to move into the mainstream of industrial relations in the engineering industry. In 1971 the negotiations on a ‘long term agreement’ between the Confederation of Engineering Unions (Confed), the bargaining body for the unions in the engineering industry, and the Engineering Employers Association (EEA) broke down. An agreement would have determined basic pay for the three grades of workers in the industry – skilled, unskilled, and women - for the next three years, but also the length of the working week and holiday entitlement. The unions were pushing for extended holidays, a shorter working week, and ‘moves towards’ equal pay for women. When the negotiations broke down in January 1972, with the EEF’s refusing to increase their offer of an increase of £1 per week, and no improvements in the other demands. With deadlock nationally, the Confed decided to move to negotiate at local level on the agreement. A meeting of about 700 shop stewards in Manchester decided to submit the national claim at each plant in their region. If the claim was not met by 27th March, they proposed a ban on overtime, an embargo on piecework, and a work-to-rule. Some of the delegates proposed that if the employers escalated the action by threat of lock-out then they would retaliate with occupations.[[39]](#footnote-39) Within the next few months occupations occurred in over thirty plants in the North West region. These spreading to about twenty more plants nationally. In each case the national claim, often compounded by local grievances, led to the threat of lockouts with prompt retaliation of an occupation.

The spread of the occupations has been attributed to the militancy of shop stewards in furthering the campaign.[[40]](#footnote-40) While many of the occupations involved shop stewards with a reputation for militancy and left political allegiances, the pattern was dictated by the employers of the South Lancashire and North Wales Engineering Employers Association (EEA) who essentially chose how to deal with individual plants.[[41]](#footnote-41) In establishments where there was a reputation for militancy they threatened lock-out to escalate the dispute, provoking an occupation and blaming militant stewards. At other plants, where they thought it might be accepted, they offered a pay-only deal, in some cases above that claimed by the union, but without any improvement in hours or holidays. The EEA were attempting to alienate militant shop stewards while rewarding those they felt co-operative, and thus dividing the union side in the dispute. Evidence for this view can be found in the re-emergence of occupations after the national agreement, where further disputes and occupations were to occur over the victimisation of some of the participants specifically targeted at some of the longest occupations of the year before. At Ruston Paxman in Newton le Willows there was a six-week occupation and another for thirteen weeks at L. Gardners in Eccles, a plant which had not been occupied in 1972 but would be important later, both over the victimisation of shop stewards. At Bason-Pasco an occupation was evicted by bailiffs after one week, becoming a strike, over eleven redundancies also considered victimisation of militants by other workers.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**The Heyday**

As well as its inspiration to workers in conflict, the UCS work-in also influenced the Heath government in fundamental policy change. Coming to power in 1970 with a liberal market agenda, they instituted policies to reverse the interventionism of the previous government. Their Industry Act 1971 scrapped the machinery used to facilitate mergers, which had been used to create UCS and NVT as well as other conglomerates. Instead of protectionism through state intervention the market would allow firms to fail; ‘lame duck’ companies would be allowed to go to the wall. However, with the situation at UCS, precipitated by this withdrawal of government support alongside the collapse of Rolls Royce, flagship for British industrial excellence, the Heath government set about a U-turn in policy.

Heath introduced wage policy to tackle inflation, increasingly argued to be caused by militant trade unions. The policy involved an initial pay freeze (Phase one), followed by Phase 2, which allowed increases of £1 plus 4%, and finally, after a year, Phase 3, which allowed 7% plus threshold payments if inflation continued to rise. While workers and unions generally acquiesced with the early phases, opposition mounted as inflation continued to rise well beyond pay. When workers at Maclaren Controls, an ITT subsidiary, had their claim below the Phase 3 limit rejected by management they took strike action. But when, after 4 weeks, they saw machinery being removed and suspected plans for closing the plant, they occupied. After thirteen weeks the company finally agreed the wage claim in full, although conditional on redundancy of up to half the workforce which were still to be negotiated.[[43]](#footnote-43) By the end of Phase Three the policy also prompted an occupation at Plessey in Beeston near Nottingham after management attempted to put a limit on the threshold payments, increasingly being triggered by inflation.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Another significant aspect of the U-turn by the Heath government was in industrial policy. Just a year after its 1971 Act the government introduced the Industry Bill 1972 allowing for the provision of public funds for industries when "it is likely to provide, maintain, or safeguard employment in any assisted area" (Clause 7). It also provided £550 million, over five and a half years, when assistance was "in the national interest" and "likely to benefit the economy" (Clause 8).

The significant change was not lost on the Labour opposition whose Industry spokesman, Tony Benn, in giving opposition support to the Bill, pointed out that Labour would, ‘make use of the powers of the Bill, when we inherit power again, more radically than the … (Heath Government) … will use them.’[[45]](#footnote-45) Opposition from both the neo‑liberals in the Conservative party, and from the CBI, rested on the belief that the legislation could be used as a means to extend nationalisation under executive powers. To ameliorate this, a major amendment was introduced to Clause 8 of the Bill which limited the Ministers’ independent action to aid of £5 million to any individual enterprise. Anything exceeding this would require a vote in the Commons.

The British motorcycle industry had been leading world manufacturers of motorcycles, but from the 1960s had been in rapid decline because of competition from Japan. The remaining three British companies were involved in a series of mergers in an attempt to survive.[[46]](#footnote-46) In 1971 BSA, based in Small Heath, Birmingham, merged with the Meriden based Triumph. In July 1971, with some reservation from the unions, workers agreed to forgo their annual productivity bonus and accepted greater mobility of labour.[[47]](#footnote-47) In October, with a threat of 3,000 redundancies and receivership, the plan for a work‑in was abandoned. In the end the company was rescued by Barclays Bank, extending overdraft facilities of £10 million, which allowed continued production at Small Heath.[[48]](#footnote-48) But in 1973 BSA‑Triumph were again facing collapse, their shares having been suspended on the stock exchange. The other remaining firm, a merged Norton and Villiers, was also in the process of rationalisation, having recently announced the closure of a plant in Andover whose workforce resisted with an occupation,[[49]](#footnote-49) with only its plant at Wolverhampton remaining. In November the Wolverhampton workforce also staged an occupation in support of a wage claim, in defiance of government pay policy.[[50]](#footnote-50)

For a decade companies in the industry had been heralding "miracle" recoveries based on rationalisation of plant and concentration on specific models, but by 1974, a last desperate merger created a merged Norton Villiers Triumph (NVT). Part of a Government rescue plan, agreed in March 1973, NVT, now one company, was to close the Meriden plant and build up production at Small Heath. It would receive £4.8 million under the terms of the Industry Bill 1972. On 14th September NVT, announced to trade union representatives at the Meriden plant that work would be transferred to either the Small Heath or Wolverhampton plants. Meriden was to be closed in February 1974 making the 1,750 workers redundant. Simultaneously the plan was announced at the other two plants.[[51]](#footnote-51) The Meriden workforce immediately imposed an embargo on the movement of plant and motorcycles. When, in October, the detailed plans for the closure of the plant were finally announced the workforce evicted senior management and continued producing motorcycles until parts ran out and insurance cover was withdrawn. The work‑in became a sit‑in which was to last for over a year.

The idea of setting up a workers' co‑operative was first suggested by Leslie Huckfield MP and Bill Lapworth of the TGWU. A solution had already been adopted pragmatically by workers in two previous occupations, at Fakenham as well as at Leadgate Engineering in Durham. The Meriden co-operative was originally to be financed by about one million pounds in redundancy pay from the workforce with a national subscription to provide the rest, all agreed to ‘readily,’ by NVT who saw this as a means of disposing of land, buildings and surplus plant. [[52]](#footnote-52) NVT were also interested in an end to the occupation, or ‘the blockade’ as they referred to it, which was obstructing the movement of completed motorcycles, spares, drawings and machine tools. After four weeks the negotiations broke down with NVT opposed to a plant which would compete with Small Heath. In November redundancy notices were issued. Initially the company informed the Department of Industry that they intended to apply for a court order for the recovery of their assets held by the Meriden workforce. The Minister, by then Christopher Chaterway, counselled against this course of action, and instead a compromise solution was drawn up.[[53]](#footnote-53) Work would resume at Meriden, to continue until July 1974 to essentially continue the run down. But an option on purchase was also given to the Meriden workforce to be exercised before April. At this stage the Government assistance was to be directed into NVT to rationalise motorcycle production around the Small Heath and Wolverhampton plants. Meriden workers’ opposition was delaying NVT's implementation of the agreed plan, and Small Heath workers were on short time working. Some of the antagonism between the two workforces also stemmed from Meriden's lack of support for Small Heath in 1971 when BSA imposed redundancies and the workforce had proposed a work‑in.

In January 1974, with the oil crisis and the threat of a miners’ strike, the Government introduced the three-day week. While there might have been agreement to use some of NVT's resources to fund the compromise scheme at Meriden, the changed circumstances ended this. Negotiations on assistance to both Meriden and to NVT went into abeyance. On the 4th March the Labour Party took office with policies of establishing a National Enterprise Board and extending industrial democracy. The architect of the industrial policy was to be Tony Benn, who had moved towards supporting the extension of industrial democracy largely under the influence and experience of UCS. When Benn arrived at the Department of Industry the Meriden co-operative plan was already on his desk. With the expiry date of this latest agreement also approaching, the company were again threatening to seek a writ for possession.

Benn now encouraged the Meriden workforce to formalise plans for a workers' co-operative and to submit an application for assistance under the 1972 Industry Act that was separate from that for NVT. The consequences of what had previously been an attempt to rationalise the motorcycle industry around two factories, and resistance to this solution from the third, was then turned into an attempt at a rescue for all three plants, meeting scepticism from the workforce and resulted in further divisions between plants.

Benn facilitated rapid assistance to the Meriden workforce, setting up a separate entity so that they could qualify for £4.96 million aid under the Industry Bill, awarded separately from the assistance that NVT had received. This not only allowed the establishment of the Meriden co‑operative but also NVT to get the release of the machine tools and plans. It also gave NVT a ready buyer for their factory and excess plant, and a sub‑contractor to produce the motorcycles.

When Benn spoke at the NVT plant at Small Heath, to announce support for Meriden, he was surprised by the opposition this plan received. The workforce had previously been told by management that there was no alternative to the two-plant solution. While Meriden was being saved in a welter of publicity, and support from the unions and labour movement, they felt that their own jobs were now at risk. The rest of the NVT workforce, and particularly those at Small Heath, had continually opposed the aid to Meriden on whom they placed blame for impending closure. The co‑operative was picketed by members of both these workforces.[[54]](#footnote-54) Now the Wolverhampton workforce set up an action committee to plan an occupation, their spokesman argued that: “It seems ridiculous to us that Meriden should continue while our lads face short time and possible redundancy."[[55]](#footnote-55) In early September the Wolverhampton plant was closed and the workforce carried out their threat of occupation. During the first days of their sit‑in they went ahead with plans for a "revolutionary" new motorcycle on which they pinned their hopes. While this was constructed in record speed, it was, like past attempts at "miracle" recovery heralded by the company itself, produced from existing components.[[56]](#footnote-56) In October the Small Heath plant was closed without any resistance.

The Meriden and NVT experience had a profound effect on Benn's perspective. It seemed that, through the discovery of the worker co‑operative, reminiscent of the roots of Labour radicalism, he had discovered the democratic key to extending "socialisation" of the economy.[[57]](#footnote-57) The workers' co‑operative, which the Meriden workers had proposed, seemed the answer. When he was also approached by workers occupying against the closure of IPD in Kirkby, formed after the occupation of Fisher Bendix with the assistance of Harold Wilson, it was Benn who suggested, to initially sceptical shop stewards, that they should put forward similar plans for a co‑operative so that they would qualify for assistance under the Industry Bill that he had inherited from the Conservative Government.[[58]](#footnote-58)

On 11th July IPD went into receivership and an occupation began as the receiver refused to employ the entire workforce. Benn was keen on supporting the workers' venture and that, given the role Wilson had played in the IPD takeover, little opposition would come from the rest of the Cabinet. By 2nd September the receiver announced that, because of the insistence of the workforce that all of them should be kept in employment, he could not find a buyer for the factory. Benn responded with temporary assistance until substantial plans for a co‑operative were submitted; eventually submitting a plan involving a grant of just under £4 million under section 7 of the 1972 Industry Act.

The third of the "Benn co‑operatives" was established by the workforce of Beaverbrook newspapers after closure in Glasgow. Within hours of the announcement of the closure on the 18th March 1974, with only twelve days’ notice, the Federated Chapels established a smaller Action Committee.[[59]](#footnote-59) Initially the Action Committee attempted to interest other prospective proprietors in purchasing the plant, although this was under‑capitalised and contained obsolete presses. With three days still left before the papers were due to close, Beaverbrook announced that the workforce could have first option. This concession, while recognising the favourable publicity it might generate, was based more on their inability to dispose of the obsolete plant than goodwill to the workforce. For a time, some of the workers staged a sit‑in, after which the doors of the building remained locked for a year.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The plan for a co‑operative became increasingly the focus of the campaign and the Department of Trade and Industry agreed to commission a feasibility study of the project. When a report argued that the paper could not be a viable concern, the Action Committee released it, with their own criticisms, as the basis of their application to the Industry Department for aid of £1.7 million. The co‑operative, to qualify for the Government's loan of £1.75 million (half the amount required), had to raise half a million in equity or unsecured loans and a further £775,000 in secured loans beyond £475,000 which had already been committed.[[61]](#footnote-61) The raising of these funds took almost another year and involved them with Robert Maxwell, ex-Labour MP and aspiring newspaper tycoon.[[62]](#footnote-62)

In January 1975, at the height of controversy regarding the assistance Benn was giving to workers opposing closure, Litton Industries announced the closure of its Imperial Typewriter plants in the UK, in Leicester and in Hull. The weekend after the announcement, trade union officers and local MPs, along with Tony Topham, a trade union tutor at Hull University and a founder of the Institute for Workers’ Control, produced a report challenging the company rationale and mobilising a campaign against closure.[[63]](#footnote-63) In contrast the Leicester workforce was divided following a bitter strike in which there were accusations of racism against some of the workforce, who attacked the predominantly Asian strikers, and against the local union.[[64]](#footnote-64) Hull workers directed their campaign at Benn; prior to the closure he told the workforce to ‘stick together’ which they took to mean occupy the plant. The company sent letters telling them not to turn up for work on 21st February, the day of the closure. Some still congregated at the gate that morning and climbed the perimeter fence and opened the gate. Joined by other workers, they started an occupation that was to last for six months.

While they pushed for the establishment of a workers’ co-operative, and some plans were formulated, the strategy for saving the plant in Hull became increasingly desperate. There was little future for any scheme around typewriters, an antiquated technology, and other potential products proved unviable. There wasn’t ownership of the site, leased from Hull Dock Company, and any trademarks and intellectual property were still held by Litton Industries. While a placard outside the occupied factory announced that ‘Tony is with us’, Benn himself was becoming increasingly isolated from any decisions. In a letter to Tony Topham, Benn informed the union that ‘the whole official machine is 100% against you.’[[65]](#footnote-65) Ultimately there was nothing of value held by the occupation.

Political life was also becoming dominated by the referendum on Common Market (or EEC, European Economic Community, predecessor of the EU) membership, with Benn as a key speaker opposing membership. When the vote went substantially for Britain to remain in the Common Market, Wilson reshuffled his Cabinet, moving Benn from Industry to Energy, replacing him with Eric Varley.

Eric Varley was far less sympathetic than Benn, and continually advised all the occupations he inherited to leave the plants so that the receivers could carry out their job. Imperial Typewriters workers abandoned their increasingly desperate occupation, finally abandoning the site in August. Members of the workforce at NVT Wolverhampton remained in occupation for ten months with less and less hope of a saviour. At the end an agreement was reached with NVT for the completion of work in the plant. NVT had themselves submitted the highest bid to the liquidator, of £200,000, for the 10,000 engines and 1,100 motorcycles held at Wolverhampton.

The dispensing of public funds for the establishment of worker co‑operatives did not make Benn popular with much of the media and the right, turning him into a vision of left extremism supporting illegal acts against capital. The plans for both Meriden and the *Scottish Daily News* were announced to Parliament in July along with announcement of similar action likely in the case of IPD. This prompted two editorials, on consecutive days, in the *Daily Telegraph*,that are informative.[[66]](#footnote-66) Unlike in other industrial disputes, the blame could not be put on the workforce themselves. When their aspiration is to save their own jobs then their action could even be laudable and the experience of a workers co‑operative might even give them lessons in the problems faced by capitalist management. The Telegraph had reservations about rewards being given to a workforce who had engaged in militant action, but this was mainly seen as the fault of the Government, and particularly Benn, in providing aid from his Department. This becomes clearer on the *Telegraph*’s editorial of the 27th July 1974:

Apart from the fact that such schemes seem in a general way an abuse of taxpayers' money, there are two grave, particular objections to them. One is that they must act as an encouragement to workers to think that unauthorised occupation of premises ... is a sure ticket for Mr Benn's cornucopia. … his ability to do those things without going to Parliament is derived from the last Conservative Governments' Industry Act.[[67]](#footnote-67)

This was clear condemnation of the action of the Heath Government in providing the means by which such Government intervention could be carried out. This was to blame Heath for the failings of the previous Government, for the U‑turn in policy which brought the Industry Bill. This opposition was developing an alternative strategy around these "neo‑liberal" beliefs, condemning all state intervention as restrictive of individual freedom, whatever its initial motive for its introduction.[[68]](#footnote-68)

**New Directions**

Many of the occupations can be seen to be rooted in mergers and corporate rationalisation often supported by government intervention. This certainly covers UCS itself, NVT, as well as GEC-EE, but also other companies such as Plessey which experienced multiple occupation on different sites. In March, workers at three Merseyside plants and at Beeston in Nottingham staged occupations concerned about potential redundancies and possible closures.[[69]](#footnote-69) Management challenged their ‘lock-out’ by arguing that this action would have detrimental impact on any redundancy payments. Some workers reoccupied,[[70]](#footnote-70) and there was even talk of a proposal for a workers’ co-operative plan being submitted to the Department of Industry.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Two alternatives were being presented: state intervention or the market. As interventionism was increasingly argued to be failing then Thatcher, as disciple of Frederik Hayek, could argue that ‘there is no alternative’ to the market and neo-liberal policies. But another alternative was beginning to emerge from workers out of resistance to the closures, redundancies and rationalisation.

The workers’ co-operatives emerged as one alternative solution to save jobs, although the three Benn co-operatives had profound problems. Underfunded and already facing closure, these enterprises were in some desperation and had little chance of success. In some of the occupations there had been attempts at the development of new products although, as with the new model of motorcycle developed at NVT, or typewriter at Imperial Typewriters, these had adopted the traditional UK methods of recycling existing parts and components. A more substantial approach emerged from the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee from their campaign against rationalisation. It was also precipitated by a meeting between Benn and the Combine Committee, while he was still in the Department of Industry. At the meeting Benn suggested that the shop stewards draw up their own corporate plan for Lucas Aerospace, to challenge that of the company, which was rationalising around armaments production, involving increased redundancy.[[72]](#footnote-72)

 Lucas had long had a monopoly position as supplier of many components for the British motor industry and during the 1960s made inroads into the European market. This was particularly true of CAV, the diesel components of Lucas. CAV announced a £13.5 million expansion programme in 1970, which they claimed would increase production by fifty per cent and create 1,100 new jobs.[[73]](#footnote-73) But within a year this programme was reversed. Instead redundancies were imposed, particularly at their plant in Fazakerley on Merseyside.[[74]](#footnote-74) This plant shared a site with a Lucas industrial equipment plant. The occupation of CAV resulted in the laying‑off of the Lucas workforce.

Developments in the Aerospace Division were like those in Diesels although greater co‑ordination emerged amongst the workforce. The Aerospace division, like Rolls Royce, was also involved in the RB211 engine development for Lockhead. It was already planning redundancies, but the cancellation of the project allowed them to accelerate these and bring down the workforce by nineteen per cent within six months, although production was maintained through increased productivity.[[75]](#footnote-75)

While the redundancies at Lucas Aerospace affected all the factories, one had been earmarked for total closure ‑ the plant at Willesden which had been the company headquarters. At the time a Combine Committee of Aerospace worker was being established but it was, as yet, incapable of any consolidated action. Resistance was left to the Willesden workforce to organize alone. After a six-month struggle, including possibly an occupation, management were able to remove the machinery and shifted production to a smaller plant nearby.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee was first mobilised around a strike and occupation, at Burnley, part of the national engineering dispute in 1972.[[77]](#footnote-77) When the national claim was submitted management offered a 50p a week increase. After one week of sanctions, management turned off the power and the workers occupied. Within a few weeks the occupation was transformed into a strike, continuing the dispute for a further five weeks, sustained by financial support through the Combine Committee for a hardship fund. Eventually they received an increase of £1.50p. The Combine Committee considered the Barnsley dispute a vindication of their existence and were, through the following years, increasingly able to mobilise action over corporate strategy. Action that attempted to avoid pitting plants against each other in such rationalisations, which had plagued Lucas as well as NVT and other groups of workers. But, while they could be reasonably effective in this, they also began to question some of the implications of continued employment in the context of the Aerospace Industry integrated within armament production. The Combine countered the redundancies by surveying plants to assess capacity and products, to see what worthwhile work they could carry out. The answer to this was to gradually take shape within the Combine over the following years, the ‘alternative plan’ being launched in 1976. In following through the rationale of resistance, it was clear, as the Combine's spokesperson put it: ‘There is no point occupying a factory if the products it makes are not in demand.’[[78]](#footnote-78) But this was not to be an appeal for a resurgence in the market, for greater state spending on armaments to avoid the proposed 13,500 redundancies at 13 Lucas plants were still facing. Instead of arms they assessed their own skills as producers and the capacity of Lucas Aerospace for 'socially useful' alternatives. As well as challenging the very basis of the very de-skilling of labour through the dynamics of capitalist enterprise,[[79]](#footnote-79) their plan proposed a range of products being run down by Lucas, such as kidney dialysis machines, but also others, revolutionary for the 1970s, which could be developed such as new sources of renewable energy, and hybrid powered vehicles, as well as a road-rail vehicle which they developed and which toured Britain. Opposed, not just by the company and the government but also by their own unions as an ‘unofficial body’ the combines plans remained within an alternative undercurrent.[[80]](#footnote-80)

After the EEC referendum, and the cabinet reshuffle, Labour government policy shifted as the economy moved into crisis. In 1976 the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healy, approached the IMF for a loan which was awarded on the condition that public expenditure was cut.[[81]](#footnote-81) At the Labour conference in Blackpool that summer James Callaghan, who had replaced Wilson, famously announced the end of Keynesian economic policy, that “the cosy world” of full employment was over.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Health service workers began to resist the impact of cuts in public expenditure. By 1978 this was to grow into resistance to pay restraint. Already, in 1976, there was resistance to individual cuts blamed on Government policy. These cuts compounded problems already encountered in the NHS’s own rationalisation program which saw the stock of small local and specialist hospitals, inherited with the establishment of the NHS, being replaced with centralised provision in Regional General Hospitals.

In November 1976 staff began a work-in resisting the closure of Elisabeth Garrett Anderson (EGA) Hospital, in Euston Road London. This hospital, founded by the first female doctor qualified in the UK, provided a wide range of medical and surgical facilities for women with an exclusively female staff. This occupation started a movement of sit-ins and work-ins which was to spread to at least 9 other hospitals by 1981 and to possibly 23 more in the next decade.[[83]](#footnote-83)

While those in manufacturing were declining, both in number and in duration, two of the hospital occupations (at EGA and at Hounslow) lasted over a year. But, in the case of the latter, it was continued by local supporters after the hospital was closed. One important feature which differentiated these hospital occupations from those in manufacturing was that while pressing for a maintenance or improvement in health provision, they were not directly confronting redundancies, since most staff were redeployed elsewhere in the area. Comparison between the EGA and the UCS work‑ins can be sustained on several points. Firstly, and principally because most participants in both were in continual employment throughout the action, they could be maintained for relatively protracted periods. At hospital work‑ins, redundancy was not involved, and staff had to be employed while there were patients to look after. In these work‑ins, also, the actual 'right of management' was not in question either. To this extent, therefore, it might be argued that these were forms of industrial action falling short of other occupations. But, while not challenging the 'right' they were challenging the nature of management action and, in the work-ins, medical and other staff organized the running of the hospital and care of patients.

The EGA work‑in developed balance of power between a workforce intent on resisting closure and the hospital administration, the Area Health Authority (AHA) and the DHSS, intent on closing it. As a pamphlet produced by hospital workers engaged in the work‑ins explained:

Work‑ins (in hospitals) have not aimed to take away the responsibility that the AHA and the DHSS have in law for patient and staff in a hospital, or for the provision of health service facilities. Opposing attempts by authorities to close a hospital has meant however that some control has been taken away from the authorities and into the hands of the staff.[[84]](#footnote-84)

 The work‑in was increasingly operating as a focus of a broader campaign against health service cuts, and the general depersonalisation of health care.[[85]](#footnote-85) With early support from the women’s movement the campaign also mobilised trade unionists and local political activists, who maintained a picket of the hospital while staff continued to care for the patients within.

In May 1979 Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. The previous year, with the last deadline for the closure of the EGA, Conservative support had been canvassed. The Conservative Women’s Conference passed a resolution supporting keeping the hospital open. Thatcher had voiced support for the campaign in a letter to an ex‑patient of the hospital's, she stated that she was: "a ***staunch supporter*** of the Elisabeth Anderson Hospital... We must keep the hospital open somehow."[[86]](#footnote-86) On 23rd May it was announced that, instead of closure, the planned to provide £2million to 'upgrade' the hospital into a forty bed gynaecological unit.[[87]](#footnote-87) This was not greeted with total relief from the work‑in, who complained that this meant the hospital's general provision shifting to a narrow specialism. Splitting the staff and supporters this was enough, however, to end the more than two-year work-in.[[88]](#footnote-88)

The EGA work‑in was the catalyst and model for other campaigns against hospital closures and health service cuts. The policy of centralisation of resources meant the demise of 'community' or ‘cottage hospital’ provision. In March 1977 the local AHA announced that it was to close the community hospital in Hounslow, moving the patients and provision to the West Middlesex Hospital two miles away. The staff decided to stage a work‑in, like that at EGA. The support of outside bodies, in particular the local Trades Council and unions, was consolidated in a Defence Committee. Its initial role was purely to support for the workforce in the hospital who were staging the work‑in. This continued after the proposed closure date of the end of August but, in contrast to the EGA, this did not prompt a long postponement by the AHA. In what became known as 'the raid',[[89]](#footnote-89) the remaining twenty-one patients were removed from the hospital without any warning.[[90]](#footnote-90) While staff were relocated to other hospitals the occupation continued for more than another year. The members of the Defence Committee, who previously had supported the hospital staff staging the work‑in, continued in occupation until November 1978 turning the hospital premises into a meeting place for local unions, community, and political groups. After thirteen months, and having suffered a recent fire, the occupation members decided to leave after the AHA had given a commitment to build a new community hospital 'when funds allow'.[[91]](#footnote-91)

 At Bethnal Green, another community hospital under threat of closure, it was broader based pressure which supported a work‑in. While the members of the work‑in had canvassed the support of all the local G.P.'s to continue referrals,[[92]](#footnote-92) on the day that the casualty department was due to close they were greeted with the 'spontaneous gesture'[[93]](#footnote-93) of between two and three hundred local people turning up for 'treatment', effectively occupying the department.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Several work‑ins were not directly about closure but were directed at a more general run down of facilities. These were particularly prevalent in long stay hospitals where a close relationship can grow up between staff and patients. At Brookwood Mental Hospital in Woking the staff had complained of a long-term decline. While the staffing establishment was just over eight hundred there were only 420 actually in post.[[95]](#footnote-95) When, in breach of an agreement for consultations before prices are raised, the Hospital Management Committee increased charges for the staff nursery from 75p to one pound and five pence,[[96]](#footnote-96) the staff set up a 'workers' council', with representatives from each of the unions, and staged a work‑in.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Part of the grievance at Brookwood Hospital stemmed from the blurred distinction between ‘work’ and ‘home’. This also contributed to another arena for developing occupations, in ferries and the merchant fleet. In September 1979 and in 1981, crew of the SS Blenheim occupied when the company, the Fred Olsen Line, attempted to replace them with a cheaper overseas crew.[[98]](#footnote-98) A year later those on the Cunard Countess held the ship in Barbados to stop a transfer to a lower paid, West Indian and Chinese, crew under a flag of convenience.[[99]](#footnote-99) In 1981, P&O crew took over ferries, and threatened wider action, against the ending of the Liverpool to Belfast ferry. The action was finally halted when the routes was taken over by Belfast Ferries.[[100]](#footnote-100)

**The significance of occupations in the 1970s**

The occupation emerged in the general economic and political turmoil of the 1970s. Mostly remembered when workers took over to challenge to closures, represented principally by the a-typical work-in at UCS, these only represented a minority of instances of occupations in the decade. A rational response to closure, when a ‘withdrawal of labour’ in a traditional strike would be counterproductive, the occupation was also used extensively by workers in escalating conflicts, often to challenge threatened lock-out. In the Manchester engineering dispute such an escalation represented the employers attempt to tame shop steward organisation. But perhaps most important in the long-term was the use of occupation against the rationalisation of plant following the wave of take-overs and mergers. The resultant rationalisation and redundancies led to workers themselves formulating their own plans.

While seemingly a response to defend workers interests against management, this defence necessitates the articulation of an alternative. Early in the use of occupation against closure workers had to decide their chosen outcome; to seek an alternative employer or to establish a worker run enterprise. While only the outcome of a few cases, the occupation movement also became associated with the establishment of workers’ co-operatives. Already the chosen solution at Sexton & Everard, although rejected at Briant Colour Printing, it was promoted by Tony Benn as Secretary of State for Industry; Benn, who had shifted to support for ‘workers’ control’ following the experience of UCS. But it was not only the nature of ownership that workers found the need to reflect on. Often there was some attempt at research and development although often based on already obsolete products, NVTs initial attempt at a new model of motorcycle or, Imperial workers prototype portable typewriter. The Lucas Aerospace shop stewards took this dimension further, in their plan for socially useful products drawing from their own skills linked to social need.

Central to the workplace occupations in the 1970s was then their significance in workers themselves attempting to shape the direction and outcome of the political turbulence as the UK slipped further into economic crisis. While the outcome of this turmoil was the increased dominance of neo-liberalism, Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that there was no alternative was a challenge to the alternative forming in the labour movement, the recent history of resistance to closures and management perogative giving rise to a reemergence of interest in workers’ co-operatives and the formation of alternative plans, rather than some statement of objective fact. This alternative, which remains a sediment within an alternative hegemony, includes the idea of socially useful work within an economy in which production is owned collectively and managed by those working in it.

1. John Foster and Charles Woolfson, *The Politics of the UCS. Work-In: Class Alliances and the Right to Work* (London, 1986), p 199-200; the quote can also be found in other accounts of UCS [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See below, from newspaper search 1971 to 1981 and an online search of newspaper databases covering 1981 to 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gregor Gall, ‘Contemporary Workplace Occupations in Britain: Motivations, Stimuli, Dynamics and Outcomes,’ *Employee Relations* 33, no. 6 (2011)., ‘Occupations, Not Occupy!’ *Capital & Class* 42, no. 3 (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Ken Coates and Tony Topham, eds., *Workers' Control: A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control*, Modern Society (London, 1970), Section III. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a statement of this position see Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The New Unionism: The Case for Workers' Control* (Harmondsworth, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin, *June '36: Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France*, trans. Peter Marsden, Peter Fysh, and C. Bourry (London, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Andrée Hoyles, *Imagination in Power: The Occupation of Factories in France in 1968* (Nottingham, 1973); also, Jacques Pesquet, *Soviets at Saclay?* (London, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates, *The 'Big Flame' and What Is the IWC?* (Nottingham, nd.) <http://www.socialistrenewal.net/sites/socialistrenewal.net/files/IWC14.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. IWC, *GEC-EE Workers' Takeover*, IWC Pamphlet Series 17 (Nottingham, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. IWC, ‘Memorandum for Action Committee, GEC/EE, Regarding the Occupation,’ *DTO Hull History Centre, papers of Tony (Anthony John) Topham (1929-1984)*, no. DTO/6/84 (1969).; Solidarity, ‘GEC Liverpool: The Occupation That Failed,’ *Solidarity: for workers' control* 1969 1. <https://angryworkersworld.wordpress.com/2018/02/07/solidarity-west-london-newspaper-1969-1970/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A fictionalised version is Montagu Slater, *Stay Down Miner* (London, 1936), further stay-downs occurred in the 1940 through to the 1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936 - 1937* (Ann Arbor, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Danos and Gibelin, *June '36*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT, ‘Cycle Workers in Sit-Down Strike*’ The Times*, Saturday February 4, 1961; Ken Weller, ‘Sit-In at BMC,’ *Solidarity: for workers' power* 2, no. 2 (1962). <http://libcom.org/files/solidarity-202.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Mark Fore, *Strategy for Industrial Struggle* (Bromley, Kent: Solidarity Pamphlet No 37) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. David Widgery, notes an unreported one-hour sit-in at Ford Dagenham in December 1968, *The Left in Britain: 1956-68* (Harmondsworth, 1976). Chronology p. 476. He also notes a sit-in by workers at Injection Moulders in August 1968 evicted by police. (474) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Our Correspondent, ‘Sit-In Strike at 'Kangaroo Court' Factory, *‘The Times*, Friday January 29, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Labour Research* March 1971, Diary, 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Dave Sherry *Occupy! a Short History of Workers' Occupations* (London, 2010). P. 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. It does include some hospital occupations started by employees but continued by supporters, see below. But I have excluded student occupations despite these perhaps including some members of staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Also noted in Gregor Gall, ‘Resisting Recession and Redundancy: Contemporary Worker Occupation in Britain,’ *Working USA* 13 (2010), p. 112 who notes short occupations by postal workers of works canteens. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. An early study of occupations excluded UCS because if was considered exceptional in that management and the receiver continued working. Metra, *An Analysis of Sit-Ins* (London, 1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A.J. Mills, ‘Worker Occupations, 1971-1975: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Development and Spread of Sit-Ins, Work-Ins, and Worker Co-Operatives in Britain’ (PhD, Durham, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For the figures presented in the next section I include, where the duration is known, occupations which lasted for more than one day, or perhaps longer than a change of shift. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This table draws from a search of a newspapers and journals, (including *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Socialist Worker, Labour Research*) carried out at various occasions between 1975 and 1984. This replicates others, such as Mills 1982, and Metra Consulting who have carried out similar research on occupations during part of the period here considered. Since then some searches have been carried out on media not available then, which has not significantly changed the general pattern here. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is also observed by Mills in his study of the period 1971-75, and ‘the slightly surprising result that in fact the majority of occupations originated with pay disputes rather than redundancy/closure.’ Mills, 1982 p. 186 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Dave Sherry *Occupy!*  127 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. An early study of occupations by Metra 1972, p.2, excluded UCS because ‘although UCS has provided both inspiration and guidance to some other sit-ins it should not be included because in many ways it was exceptional. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For the UCS work-in, see: Foster and Woolfson, *The Politics of the UCS. Work-In*; Jack McGill, *Crisis on the Clyde* (London, 1972).; Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, *The UCS Work-In* (London, 1972).; Charles Woolfson, ‘Working Class Culture: The Work-In at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders’ (PhD, Glasgow, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The *Times* 11 Oct 1971 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The *Times* 29 Oct 1971 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Labour Research* Nov 1971, March 1972; *Socialist Worker* 5 Feb 1972; *The Times* 29 Jan 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Labour Research* Dec 1971; *Socialist Worker* 13 Nov 1971 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Labour Research* (Jan 73); Coates *op.cit*; *Socialist Worker* (24 Nov 73); Inside Story, ‘How Red Was Briants Colour?’ *Inside Story*, no. 10 (1973); also, Alan Tuckman and Herman Knudsen, ‘The Success and Failings of UK Work-Ins and Sit-Ins in the 1970s: Briant Colour Printing and Imperial Typewriters,’ *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 37 (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tom Clarke, *Sit-In at Fisher-Bendix*, I.W.C. pamphlet. no. 42. (Nottingham, 1974).; Solidarity, *Under New Management? the Fisher Bendix Occupation* Solidarity Pamphlet No 39 (London, 1972); Malcolm Marks, ‘The Battle at Fisher Bendix,’ *International Socialism*, no. 73 (1974). <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1974/no073/marks.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Judy Wajcman, *Women in Control: Dilemmas of a Workers' Co-operative* (Milton Keynes, 1983); [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Socialist Worker* 30 Oct 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Graham Chadwick, ‘The Manchester Engineering Sit-Ins 1972,’ in *Trade Union Register*, ed. Ken Coates, Tony Topham, and Michael Barratt Brown (London, 1973).; Alan Tuckman, ‘Industrial Action and Hegemony’; Glyn Carver, ‘Manchester: Victory Or Defeat?,’ *Socialist Worker* 1972.; J.G.W., ‘The Manchester Sit-Ins,’ *Solidarity* , no. 7 (1972).; Roger Rosewell, ‘The AUEW: The 1972 Wages Struggle and the Left,’ *International Socialism*, no. 57 (1973). <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1973/no057/rosewell.htm>; R. W. Shakespeare, Ronald Kershaw, and Clifford Webb, ‘Sit-Ins: The Unions' New Tactic After the Switch to Plant Bargaining,’ *The Times*, Monday June 12, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Darlington and Lyddon, *Glorious Summer;* Sherry, *Occupy!*  [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Manchester Engineering Employers' Association, ‘Engineering Dispute - the Facts,’ *Manchester Evening News*, Wednesday May 3, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Socialist Worker* 12 & 19 May 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Socialist Worker* 23 March 1973: *Worker's Control Bulletin* 23 March 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Socialist Worker* 22 June 1974 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 837, 22 May 1972, 1027-36 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Barbara M. D. Smith, *The History of the British Motorcycle Industry 1945-1975* (Birmingham, 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *The* *Times* 22, 23 July 1971 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *The* *Times* 11, 22, 23, 28, 29 Oct, 2 Nov 1971; *Socialist Worker* 6 Nov 1971 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *Labour Research* June 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Socialist Worker* 10, 17 Nov 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. N.V.T. Ltd *Meriden: Historical Summary 1972-1974*, (1974) was circulated to Members of Parliament and formed the basis for Jock Bruce-Gardyne, *Meriden: Odyssey of a Lame Duck. A Study of Government Intervention in the Motor-Cycle Industry ... The Way the Money Goes* (London, 1978); Ken Fleet ‘Triumph Meriden’ in *The New Worker Co-operatives* (ed.) K. Coates, Nottingham 1976 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. N.V.T. 1974*.,* 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. N.V.T. 1974*,* 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Guardian* 17 July 1975 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *The* *Times* 17 July 1975 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Tribune* 12 Sept. 1975 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See, e.g. Tony Benn ‘Labour's Industrial Programme’ in *Arguments for Socialism* ed. Chris Mullin (Harmondsworth, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ron McKay and Brian Barr *The Story of the Scottish Daily News* Edinburgh, 1976; Tony Eccles *Under New Management: The Story of Britain’s Largest Worker Co Operative Its Successes and Failures*, London, 1981 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. A. Mackie (1976) ‘The Scottish Daily News’ in Coates (ed.), 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. While Mackie infers that the sit-in continued throughout the dispute, he says that, before the co- operative could take possession ‘entry into the building was negotiated’ (128). The Action Committee appeared to occupy a wooden hut by the gate from which they could stop the removal of plant, and where meetings took place: *Labour Research* (Sept 1974) claims that the premises were occupied until the Government announced its loan in July [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Mackie ‘The Scottish Daily News’, 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For this relationship see, Alister Blyth and Fred Sillitto, ‘Scottish Daily News: Workers Are Still in Control,’ *The Sunday Times*, 28 September 28, 1975.; Allister Mackie, ‘Letter: Mr Maxwell and the SDN,’ *The Sunday Times*, 5 October 1975 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. TGWU. *Threatened Closure of Imperial Typewriters, Hull: The case for government aid to maintain production, and/or to establish a Co-operative to assume ownership and management of the plant: a Preliminary Statement*, DTO Hull History Centre, papers of Tony (Anthony John) Topham (1929-1984) 20th January 1975; later published as IWC, *Why Imperial Typewriters Must Not Close: A Preliminary Social Audit By the Union Action Committee* (Nottingham: Institute for Workers' Control, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Mala Dhondy ‘The Strike at Imperial Typewriters’ *Race Today* July 1974; racialism within the union is later condemned in a report on the dispute carried out by TGWU (Region 5: Midlands) *Report into the Circumstances and Causes of a Dispute which occurred at the Imperial Typewriter Co. Ltd Leicester.* (Birmingham: 1974) [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Benn, Tony. *Letter to Tony Topham*, *DTO Hull History Centre, papers of Tony (Anthony John) Topham (1929-1984)* 17th March 1975, 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Telegraph* 26 & 27 July 1974 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. 27 July 1974 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Of course, rooted in the classic statement by Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London, 1944). See also Samual Brittan (April 1975) *Participation Without Politics: An Analysis of the Nature and the Role of Markets* Hobart Paper Special 62, Institute of Economic Affairs, p. 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *The* *Times* 3, 11 & 15 March 1977; *Guardian* 10 March 1977 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Guardian* 26 May 1977 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Labour* *Research* May 1977 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. A shortened version of the plan was published as *Lucas: An Alternative Plan*, IWC pamphlet No. 54 (Nottingham: 1978); also Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliot *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making?* (London, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *C.I.S. Where is Lucas Going? Anti-Report No. 12 (nd.),* 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. C.I.S. *Lucas* 26; *The Times* 4 Oct 1972 claims that 150 redundancies were imposed [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. CIS *Lucas* 42; Lucas Aerospace Twenty Fourth Annual Survey of Factories, Financial Year to 31 July 1971 in Wainwright and Elliot *Lucas Plan* 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Wainwright and Elliot *Lucas Plan* 52, it is only described on this page, as ‘resistance’, although later as ‘the Willesden occupation’ (p.75). No report of an occupation could be traced in the newspapers consulted although Mike Cooley, then TASS convener at the plant, has later talked of an occupation when tracing the origins of the Lucas plan see his ‘The Social Implications and Possibilities of Technological Change: The Relationship Between Design and Production’, *Production of* *the Built Environment, Proceedings of the First Bartlett Summer School* 1979, 1, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Wainwright and Elliot *Lucas Plan* 64-9; *The* *Times* 14 Aug 72, 22 Aug 72 and 9 Sept 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Mike Cooley cited in *Guardian*, 23 Jan. 1976 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See, Mike Cooley, *Architect or Bee? the Human/technology Relationship* (Slough, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee, *Diary of Betrayal: A Detailed Account of the Combine's Efforts to Get the Alternative Plan Implemented* (London, 1982).; Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards' Committee, *Democracy Versus the Circumlocution Office* IWC Pamphlet No. 65 (Nottingham, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. 1976 Labour *Party Annual Conference Report* [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. cohse-union, *Hospital Occupations in Britain* ; available from <http://cohse-union.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/hayes-cottage-hospital-occupation-25th.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Keeping Hospitals Open, *Work-ins at E.G.A., Hounslow and Plaistow Hospitals, Hounslow Hospital Occupation Committee*, EGA Joint Shop Stewards Committee, Plaistow Maternity Action Committee, Save St. Nicholas Hospital Campaign (ND), 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Some aspects of the work-in and campaign strategy are discussed in *Keeping Hospitals Open, op.cit*., which is essentially a guide to running hospital work ins produced by the EGA and workers at two other hospitals, Hounslow and Plaistow (see below) who have engaged in them. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. cited in the *Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1979, emphasised in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1979 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. On the division at the end of EGA, Candy Udwin, Lynne Harne, and Sue O'Sullivan, ‘Fightback: Its Good for Your Health,’ *Spare Rib* 1981, 103 52-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *Fightback*, Feb. 1978; *Keeping Hospitals Open,* 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *The* *Times*, 7, 8, 11, 13 Oct. 1977 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *The* *Times*, 29 Nov. 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Fightback*, (no.2) May/June 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *Guardian*, 3, 5 July 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *Fightback*, (no.4) Winter 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. *Fightback*, (no.3), July/August 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. *Socialist Worker*, 3 June 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *Guardian*, 23, 24 May 1978 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. ######  *Socialist Worker* 22 Sept 1979; Guardian 17 Oct 81

 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. *Guardian* 22-24 October and 3 & 4 November 1980 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. *Guardian* 8, 11 November 1981; 23 April 1982 [↑](#footnote-ref-100)