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**Tim Strangleman**  
**Railway and Grade:**

**The Historical Construction of Contemporary**

**Identities**

**PhD. Thesis**

**University of Durham**

**1998**

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**Thesis Abstract**

This thesis attempts to understand the role and meaning of occupational identity in the contemporary British railway industry. It examines the way in which culture change initiatives and programmes have explicitly targeted an older 'railroad culture'. The study explores the way such a culture was portrayed by successive Conservative Governments and management as being a major obstacle to change, and a historic reason why the industry has under performed. The notion of the past failure of the industry, and a cultural analysis predicated on such assumptions, is challenged. Employing a historical and comparative research strategy, it is argued here that grade and industry culture is an emergent autonomous property of the workforce itself and as such attempts to change it are misguided, and at times positively harmful to the organisation. The research uses a variety of material collected from London Underground and former British Rail companies, including documentary sources, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation techniques.



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12 MAY 1998

## **List of Abbreviations**

APT - Advanced Passenger Train

ASLEF - Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen

ASRS - Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants

BA - British Airways

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

BPR - Business Process Reengineering

BR - British Rail/Railways

BRB - British Railways Board

BTC - British Transport Commission

DOM - Duty Operations Manager

EFL - Exterior Financing Limit

ER - Eastern Region

EWS - English Welsh and Scottish (Railways)

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GER - Great Eastern Railway

GLC - Greater London Council

GNR - Great Northern Railway

GNER - Great North Eastern Railway

GRWU - General Railway Workers' Union

GWR - Great Western Railway

HRM - Human Resource Management

HST - High Speed Train

IBS - Intermediate Block Signal

ICEC - Intercity East Coast

IIP - Investors In People

JIT - Just In Time

LDC - Local Departmental Committee

LMR - London Midland Region (BR)

LMS - London Midland Scottish (Railway)

LNER - London North Eastern Railway  
LNWR - London North Western Railway  
LPTB - London Passenger Transport Board  
LT - London Transport  
LUL - London Underground Limited  
MIC - Mutual Improvement Class  
MMC - Monopolies and Mergers Commission  
MR - Midland Railway  
NER - North Eastern Railway  
NUR - National Union of Railwaymen  
O for Q - Organisation for Quality  
PSO - Public Service Obligation  
RCA - Railway Clerk's Association  
RCH - Railway Clearing House  
RE - Railway Executive  
RES - Rail Express Systems  
RfD - Railfreight Distribution  
RMT - Rail Maritime and Transport Union  
ROSCO - Rolling Stock Operating Company  
RRNE - Regional Railways North East  
SR - Southern Railway  
SWT - South West Trains  
TCL - Train Crew Leader  
TCS - Train Crew Supervisor  
TOC - Train Operating Company  
TOU - Train Operating Unit  
TQM - Total Quality Management  
TSSA - Transport Salaried Staff Association  
UPSS - United Pointsmen's and Signalmen's Society  
WR - Western Region

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## Introduction

The British railway worker has long exercised a fascination over popular and academic imaginations. In the Victorian era they form the respectable uniformed working class of mid-century stability, in striking contrast to the anarchy of the navy culture witnessed in the industry's construction phase. Some of their number form part of an aristocracy of labour, while others were instrumental in the creation of the Labour Party through their trade union structure. This group are also key actors in the 'strange death of liberal England' with their industrial action in the middle of the Edwardian high summer. This militancy is repeated during the inter-war period with the railway workers crucial role in the Triple Alliance, alongside the miners and other transport workers. Railway work has, at other times also conjured up heroic images - be it wind-swept footplatemen on the speeding locomotive on its 'race to the north', or later, as the stalwart figures who kept the country moving during the aerial bombardment associated with W.W.II. In the post-war world the footplatemen enjoyed their Indian summer of popular acclaim, with a public eager for tales of the footplate from an 'Engineman Extraordinary' (Semmens 1966) or a 'Legendary Railwayman' (Hooker 1994).

In another register these same workers are seen differently, viewed as the victims of corporate oppression, or later, as outdated operatives of a once great industry now suffering terminal decline. Indeed it could be argued that the very length of this fall, possible dating from the 1920s, has contributed to the continued return to this group as a symbol of occupational declivity.

Given such a history this thesis attempts to understand how railway work has been experienced by those employed in the industry, particularly over the last two decades. I have chosen to look in depth at this period because of the much heralded shift from what is characterised as a traditional public service ethos to a commercially driven focus, a process accelerated by the privatisation programme instituted in the early 1990s. I wanted to understand the depth to which employees had identified with their work and what such attachment produced. Given an understanding of this traditional occupational identification, the question is raised as to how it has fared in the face of great organisational upheaval and change. In particular what has been the effect on the workforce of the managerially inspired shift from collectivism to an increasingly individualised employment strategy?

To this end this thesis examines the experience of two groups of employees within the contemporary railway industry - signal workers and train drivers. These two grades have been selected because they represent 'pure' railway occupations in that they undertake work specific to this industry. Both grades have also been in existence virtually since the beginning of the railways, and are likely to remain a core part of the industry for the foreseeable future. I have attempted to situate the discussion of the railway workforce within the wider debate about work, employment and corporate culture. Part three of the thesis in particular engages with the separate but related debates about identification with work and the ability of management to enact corporate culture change. The railway industry would seem a singularly good terrain on which to explore such issues because of its assumed historic level of

workplace identification and because of the high profile way in which its work culture has been attacked.

At this point I must examine my own background with regard to the thesis. Before my higher education career I worked for over five years for London Underground (LUL). My first job was as a box boy working in various signal boxes on the Metropolitan and Central Lines. When I reached my eighteenth year I was given the option of becoming a train guard, a station foreman or a signaller. I choose the latter course and for the next three and a half years spent an immensely enjoyable time signalling trains in various parts of the system. From the first I was aware of the divisions between grades within LUL. There existed a complex pecking order between the various lines and occupational groups which, at times, had the appearance of a Byzantine caste system. There can have been few better training ground for a budding sociologist than to negotiate these identities and historic rivalries. I also became aware of the complex character of the employment relationship, in particular that between shopfloor supervisors and those they managed. Within the period of my employment things began to change dramatically. I had joined London Transport (LT) in its Golden Jubilee year of 1983. At this time it still bore the heavy imprint of its pre-war foundation in terms of its design, style and a labour policies. When I had entered the service it was assumed that this was a job for life, I was asked once by a Station Manager if I was a 'stayer'. By the time I left in 1988 there could be no such confidence for those that followed. Throughout my higher education career I stayed in contact with a number of former colleagues who kept me informed as to the unfolding drama that was LUL. What particularly

interested (and at times shocked) me was their description of the 'Company Plan', a proposal to change the culture of the organisation (see chapters five and six).

When I had the chance to study for a doctorate in 1993 the subject of corporate culture change in the railway industry was one that naturally suggested itself. I decided to combine a study of the privatisation process of the then British Rail (BR) with material from LUL. At first I planned to split my time and interest equally between both organisations but this proved both difficult and expensive. I have therefore used the material gathered from LUL predominantly in the last two chapters. I have not sought to give such a detailed picture of the Underground because of a combination of lack of time, suitable material and space. While I recognise that this does unbalance the thesis I believe that the evidence from LUL does allow interesting comparison to be made within the industry.

## **Methodology**

In carrying out this study I have employed a triangulation of research methods and strategies. I have done this both in terms of the groups studied - workers, management and trade unions - and within these groups by combining primary and secondary sources along with oral histories generated as part of my fieldwork. In terms of primary sources I have used a range of material from Parliamentary Select Committee reports from the Nineteenth Century, historical and contemporary company documents and staff newspapers. These are used throughout the thesis to add depth to an understanding of the issues surrounding corporate and occupational identities.

In terms of secondary material the thesis draws on general historical, sociological, economic and political sources in combination with those concerned directly with the industry. The scholar researching this particular industry is singularly lucky in the extent and range of publications at their disposal, even if one recognises the dubious character of some of these (see the critical remarks of Howell 1991, 130; Kellett 1969b; Robbins 1967, chs. 1 and 2; Wilson 1996, 3). Of greatest use here has been the extensive and growing range of railway worker autobiography. While one must always treat such material with care I believe that this is a fascinating resource which has not been exploited to any great extent. Such accounts would seem to offer a detailed description of working life as well as the labour process at the point of production. The best of these publications gives a picture of the socialising and maturing process within the workplace. The interesting point for the scholar is to compare such autobiographies between regions, grades, companies. Thus one can, for example, contrast working in a locomotive department at the same point in time but with two actors at the beginning and end of their respective careers. I would argue that the strength that these accounts have is the access they give us to the emotional realm that is perhaps more difficult to probe in a conventional interview, even under the best circumstances.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a range of current and retired workers from former BR organisations and LUL. In addition I interviewed supervisors and management from Loadhaul and Railtrack organisations (see below). The interviews with staff were carried out in their own homes, although I did interview one signaller while he was working his box in the Hartlepool area. I

usually preferred to interview people alone although several tapes were recorded with two retired workers present. This seemed to work surprisingly well as one would act as a stimulus, or prompt, to the other when gaps developed in the narrative. I was lucky to make contact with a group of retired workers who regularly meet in Newcastle. Through this group I gained eleven interviews with retired footplate workers and signalmen. In addition contacts were made through this group to current workers who had worked with the retired staff earlier in their careers. I recognise that the retired workers may be a self-selecting group in that they predominantly worked in railway service for the whole of their adult working life. I acknowledge that those actors who chose to leave the industry are not represented in this account although they figure significantly in autobiographies used (see Gasson 1981; Spooner 1986; Stewart 1982; Vaughan 1984). I believe that my 'insider' status was an important factor both in being initially accepted by older and younger workers, but also in the access it allowed to an understanding of the technical descriptions of work that the interviewees gave.

In terms of current workers I interviewed seven drivers from Loadhaul/English Welsh and Scottish (EWS) companies. Some of these meetings were in the form of a long period in a pub in Newcastle at the insistence of the interviewees. While this was far from ideal, it did render some fascinating material as well as being illustrative of the concern felt by railway staff about speaking to outsiders. BR and its successors are very strict on unofficial contact between staff and academics and media generally. In part I was forced into unofficial contacts because of the closing of official channels. This closure was due to a combination of factors including the privatisation

itself as well as industrial action that involved the signalling and footplate grades during 1994 and 1995 respectively, illustrating Beynon's (1988) point about the political nature of research into industrial organisations. To this end all of the workers quoted here who are currently working in the industry are given pseudonyms. I have at times been forced to exclude background material because it would possibly identify staff too closely.

The practice of combining interview material from both retired and current workers in the cases of BR in the North East and LUL has been extremely fruitful. This has highlighted the mechanics of generational socialisation and reproduction. The oldest workers interviewed began their working lives in the mid-1930s. At times, they worked alongside other workers who had begun their own careers decades before. Similarly, those current younger workers in their thirties had worked alongside the older group, thus there are interesting comparisons to be made about this relationship. Although I interviewed a range of workers from those in their mid-twenties to those in the seventies I now recognise, and regret, that I did not more actively seek those even younger. The kind of evidence that they might have provided would have made an interesting comparison with more established workers' views discussed in chapter six.

Fieldwork was carried out predominantly in the Loadhaul Freight organisation (see chapters five and six). This company, based in Doncaster, allowed me extensive access to various layers and departments within the organisation. I was therefore able to interview actors from the HRM, Industrial Relations and Training departments as well as supervisors. In addition to semi-structured interviews with these actors I also

engaged in non-participant observation on several occasions. This involved days spent shadowing a Train Crew Leader (TCL), a driver, as well as attending a company Safety Brief. At no time did I reveal my 'insider' status to any of the managers or supervisors I met for fear of having my access curtailed.

I attempted to gain official access to Intercity East Coast (ICEC) and Railtrack organisations but was refused in both cases because of the pressures of the privatisation process. I nonetheless continued to collect material from both companies as well as conducting interviews with five members of staff and a manager from Railtrack as well as a single worker from ICEC. In terms of LUL I decided, because of my background, not to officially approach the organisation. I obtained interviews with seven LUL signal workers as well as a female train driver and a middle manager. In addition I had several informal discussions with other members of staff. I regret that gender and race do not really figure in this thesis. While I appreciate the importance of these areas I felt I could not tackle them adequately here. In part the issue of race has not significantly been an issue historically in the North East because of the region's status of being one of the least racially mixed areas in the country. While race is far more of an issue in London I felt that I wished to concentrate on the theme of culture change. In terms of gender I have interviewed two women (one from the LUL footplate and signalling grades respectively). While this a small number compared to the sample as a whole it is a proportionality far greater than the ratio in the wider occupation. Again I felt that there were issues that could not be adequately addressed within such a small group. I was also hampered by the very visibility of female interviewees. Because of their very small number they



are very easily identifiable, if even the smallest amount of contextualising material is employed.

### **Outline of the Thesis**

Part one of the thesis is an historical overview of the industry from its inception in the 1820s through until nationalisation in 1948. Chapter one considers the structure of the industry and its development during the period, in particular there are detailed discussions of the role of the state, market relations and management. Chapter two examines the question of labour within the period. It opens with exploration of some of the emergent themes from classical sociology concerning occupation and identification with work. I then proceed to examine the way the railway workforce was recruited, trained and subsequently developed their own distinct corporate and grade specific identities.

Part two covers the years between nationalisation and 1979. As with part one this section is divided thematically. Thus chapter three contains an overview of the structure of the industry, in particular the assumptions shaping state ownership. Secondly, the chapter studies the way railway management were embedded within the social structure of the industry, and how latterly this was challenged by the many reforms carried out in the period. Chapter four deals with the experience of working for a state owned railway. It employs interview and autobiographical material in order to understand how the related programmes of modernisation and closure were dealt with by the workers themselves. The chapter also places this evidence within the contemporary sociological discussion about identification with work.

Part three considers the railway industry from 1979 until 1997. Chapter five examines the structure of management within the industry and considers the changes to organisational form that were instigated in the early 1980s. In particular, space is devoted to the analysis of corporate culture and the various ways in which this has been challenged. The final part of this chapter explores the way in which BR and its successors have attempted to distance themselves from the supposed failure of state ownership in order to justify wholesale change to the labour process. It is suggested that they have achieved this by a manipulation of corporate image, identity and history itself. It is argued here that a way to understand this is by using the concept of the 'greening' of 'brownfield' sites. By this I take to mean the attempt to reformulate the employment relationship within an existing organisation. Chapter six examines the impact such strategies have had on the workforce. It is suggested that corporate culture change cannot be successful in the medium and long term if culture is understood as a social process, rather than as a static phenomenon.

# **Chapter I**

## **Organisation and Management of the Railway Industry**

### **1825-1947**

#### **Introduction**

This initial chapter will provide a background to the study as a whole by exploring the structure that emerged from the foundation of the railway industry in the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century until the mid Twentieth Century. The chapter will be divided into three sections; an overview of the industry until the eve of nationalisation in 1948; a section devoted to the role of the state in regulating the railways within the period; and finally an outline of the organisation and management of the industry until 1948. In each of these discussions evidence will be drawn from the industry as a whole, but will focus especially on material based on the North East of England. This approach has been adopted for several reasons. Firstly, the North East, as will be shown, is important in the story of the developments of the industry generally (1). Secondly, much secondary material has been written about the railway companies in the region (2). Finally, such a focus will facilitate a deeper, richer understanding of the primary material which forms the basis of subsequent chapters.

#### **The Historical Background to the Industry**

This section will be divided up into three historical periods; from the beginnings of the industry in the 1820s until the period where it began to mature in the 1870s; the era of its maturing and zenith, 1870 to 1918; and finally the aftermath of the two World Wars and the Grouping of 1923.

## **1820s-1870 Genesis**

The claimants for the title of the first railway are the Stockton and Darlington company of 1825 and the Liverpool and Manchester built five years later. The debate centres on the combination in the latter of monopoly train operation allied to ownership of the right of way. In the case of the Stockton and Darlington the company owned the right of way, but allowed other companies to provide services in addition to their own. Access was granted in return for the payment of a toll, in much the same way canals and turnpike roads had done before (Bagwell 1974, esp. chs. 1 and 2; Milne and Laing 1956).

The success of these pioneers in the industry led quickly to the building of other lines in various parts of the UK (3). In the era under review there were three booms, or manias, in construction in the years 1837-40, 1845-7 and finally 1862-5 (Dyos and Aldcroft 1974, 132; Pollins 1971, 35). These were periods of intense interest and speculation in proposed railways, many of which later failed to get built. From their origin railway companies needed large amounts of capital to finance the building and equipping of their particular line. This capital was usually obtained by floating limited liability companies on stock markets. Some have argued that the railways did much to popularise this form of company structure, although such views must be tempered by the fact that railway company failure during the period also did much damage to its image (Gourvish 1988; see also Bailey 1995). Many of the early companies were built with money raised locally from small investors, £100 being the minimum sum usually expected. This local form of investment was to remain important in some companies into the Twentieth Century. Irving, for example, has

studied the profile of share ownership in the North Eastern Railway (NER) and believes that on the eve of the Grouping of 1923 perhaps as much as 47% of the company's capital was held within the region (Irving 1976, 155-157).

Although the railway manias or booms introduced cycles into the industry much of the actual investment took place after the boom had subsided. This meant that construction could occur counter cyclically. Much historical ink has been spilt over the extent to which the railways acted as a stimulus on the economy, particularly with regard to their construction (Hawke 1970, esp. ch. 8). Gourvish (1988) has argued that important though they were, railways played a supportive rather than leading role in British industrialisation.

There has also been great debate over the cost of constructing the lines in Britain comparative to those elsewhere. This expense is seen to be derived from the high cost of land, labour and the Parliamentary procedure required in order to build the line (see Bagwell 1974, ch. 4; Pollins 1971, chs. 1 and 2). In addition to such cost was the price paid by the British railway companies for being the first in the field. Other countries building later could learn the lessons of railway construction and operation from the British experience, in many cases directly employing British engineering consultants and labour (Brooke 1983; Coleman 1986). In this sense the railway industry suffers similar disadvantages to those found in other parts of British industry for its vanguard status (see Crouzet 1982; Hobsbawm 1969; Mathias 1969; Nichols 1986). British railways paid for this in terms of expensive contrary lines that were built, and in the technology deployed on them. In this latter case the rapid development of the steam locomotive made capital investment prematurely

redundant. This in turn fostered an environment where there developed a multiplicity of short run niche market designs, heavily reliant on skilled craft labour, rather than benefiting from the economies of scale associated with long production runs employing less skilled workers (4).

In terms of the network itself the basic framework was in place by 1870, with most of the mainlines linking major towns and cities built. By this date there were approximately 30,000 track miles laid forming 15,500 route miles. Most of this system had been built in the aftermath of the booms in investment and planning (Gourvish 1988, 70; see also Bagwell 1974, ch. 4; Hawke 1970; Pollins 1971, pt. 1).

### **1870-1918 Maturation and Zenith**

Although by 1870 much of the network was in place, this did not mean that construction or expansion ceased. Indeed the carriage of freight was not to reach its peak until 1913, while passenger traffic continued to rise until just after the Great War. In terms of mileage this period also witnessed the expansion to over 20,000 route miles by 1913 (Cain 1988, 92). Equally there was also a significant growth in the total fully paid up capital invested by the British railway companies, rising from £502.6 million at the beginning of the period to £1,256.2 million by 1912. However, as Cain points out, the importance of the industry in terms of its proportion of the nation's capital stock had fallen from approximately one-seventh in 1870 to one-tenth before the Great War (*ibid.*, 95).

There is, however, much debate in economic history circles as to the meaning that should be attached to these figures. The central issue is how far this additional capitalisation represented a wise investment (Bagwell 1974, 99-102; Hawke 1970, ch.

8; Pollins 1971, ch. 2). Some commentators have seen such investment as the explanation for the falling rates of profits in the period and as laying the foundation for problems during the Twentieth Century. Chief among these critics was Ashworth who highlighted the folly in the expansion of capital spending in this era:

Much of the high capitalisation of British railways derives not so much from reckless waste in promoting and establishing the railways before 1850, which is popularly supposed to be the fount of most of their subsequent financial ills, but from the enlargement of traffic capacity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Ashworth, quoted in Pollins 1971, 114).

This enlargement of traffic capacity took the form of new lines, extensions to existing ones, and the provision of new or improved levels of service to customers. There were without doubt some unlikely additions to the network after 1870. Chief amongst these, and oft cited in such discussions, were the Midland Railway's Settle and Carlisle route of 1876, and the London extension of the Great Central in the 1890s. Both of these railways had the effect of increasing capacity when traffic levels did not justify such a move and further weakened profit levels of existing competing lines.

The physical expansion of the system into these marginal areas can be explained in several ways. Some of the new lines built were the result of decisions taken by capricious individuals within the companies who were more intent on empire building than increasing profit levels. An alternative, and increasingly accepted interpretation of marginal expansion after 1870 is that it was the result of competitive pressure (Cain 1988; Irving 1976, 1978). Such investment was justified as

either keeping existing customers happy or preventing other companies constructing lines in their established area, which would have the effect of siphoning off traffic, and therefore profit. As Irving's detailed study of the NER shows, not only was such action a threat but it could easily turn into reality. In this Company's case, merchant dissatisfaction with service at the port of Hull led to the promotion and construction of the Hull and Barnsley Railway after an initial meeting held in Hull in 1879 (Irving 1976, 1978; see also Allen 1974, ch. 21; Brooke 1972).

Elsewhere in the NER's territory competition was held at bay by co-operation or strategic expansion. As Irving points out, throughout the period the Company, with a virtual monopoly on traffic in the area, could not profit maximise in line with the expectations of classical economics precisely because it feared competition in the form of entry into the market of other companies. Irving has also argued that the NER was not simply a discrete company which aimed to make profits hauling traffic within the area, but rather the board of the company reflected the other industrial interests in the region (Irving 1976). In this light, discussion of the rationality the companies displayed in the expansion into seemingly marginal areas and services during the period must be situated within a wider debate about the interplay and interpenetration of capitals. In the case of the NER its very customers were also represented on the board (Kirby 1984). While the local nature of capital is important in understanding the development of any industry the character of that in the North East is particularly interesting (see Benwell 1978; Beynon and Austrin 1994) (5).

Irving has questioned some of the assumptions about investment during the period. He notes that it was not the investment itself that was unwise but rather the



way in which it was subsequently used and managed. In particular he highlights the increasing impact of legislation on British railway companies' ability to effectively manage labour and capital costs. The result can be seen in the price stickiness of labour cost and increasing expectation of the public and traders as to service levels (ibid., 18). A combination of these factors had a detrimental effect on the operating ratio of British railway companies in this period, although after 1900 things were to improve (ibid., 1976, 1978; see also Milne and Laing 1956).

The structure of the industry was to remain fairly static in this period, a number of large regional groups in uneasy alliance with countless smaller companies. In 1874 the four largest groupings owned 39% of track mileage and earned 47% of gross receipts. The ten biggest companies accounted for 70% of the mileage and 75% of gross receipts. In the next forty years, as Cain points out, there was little movement in these figures although he does acknowledge that the larger companies may well have exercised greater pressure over the smaller ones than bare statistics would indicate (Cain 1988, 103-104).

Thus the patterns of ownership and the degree of concentration in the industry remained fundamentally unaltered at the end of the period. It was only during the Great War that this structure was questioned, with efficiency and productivity gains undeniably made under state regulation and control. Change in some form after the war was therefore made inevitable (Crompton 1995, 116).

### **1918-1948 Concentration to Nationalisation**

The inevitability of reform derived from a number of areas. Firstly, the war had brought about structural changes that were judged as being more efficient and

productive, and it was therefore recognised that to simply return to the pre-war situation would be to lose these advances (Crompton 1995, 116). There had also been government imposed wage and hour regulation on parts of the industry's workforce that the many smaller companies would have found difficult to adjust to with a return to the status-quo-ante. Added to this was the increasing threat of competition, which had its roots in the construction of private and municipal tramways in the late Nineteenth Century, and began to be an issue before the Great War. The immediate aftermath of the war witnessed increasing competition from lorry, bus and coach services, and gradually the private car (Bagwell 1974, ch.8; Irving 1976, 174-5; Pollins 1971, ch. 9).

In the discussion about the industry's future that followed the Great War the preferred government option for concentration of the industry was grouping rather than outright nationalisation, although the latter option was considered (Allen 1971, 12; Bagwell 1974, ch. 9; Crompton 1995; Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994, ch. 8). The chosen formula for reform was not surprising given the overall lack of state involvement in running industry generally. In 1923 the industry was moulded into four large regional companies: The London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), The Great Western Railway (GWR), The Southern Railway (SR) and The London North Eastern Railway (LNER). Although regionally based the companies were not entirely monopoly undertakings. The competitor companies' lines penetrated each others areas to a varying extent and there were also running and pooling agreements between each of the groups.

These four groups were themselves formed from 120 railway companies extant before amalgamation, the LNER was itself made up of a number of large companies in addition to minor lines (Allen 1971, ch. 2; Bonavia 1985b; Smith 1988). The groups also took control of the non-railway interest of their antecedent companies, such as hotel and shipping concerns. The Big Four, as they became known, were still owned privately, with shares held in the pre-grouping companies being converted into those of one of the new undertakings. In the case of the LNER, total paid-up share capital on 1st January 1923 was £348,355,275 (Allen 1971, 42).

Although the government had recognised the need to restructure the industry in 1923 it still did not attempt to tackle some of the historic obligations placed upon the railways with regard to the carriage of certain traffics or the strict regulation of price (Milne and Laing 1956, 28-33). Thus the industry was neither a true monopoly, nor was it competing on a level playing field with its new and growing rivals in other forms of transport. The problem for the railway industry was that it had to cope with this new source of competition and restructure itself to achieve the expected economies of scale against the background of massive recession. The LNER was perhaps the most badly affected of all the groups because of its historic reliance on serving the areas of heavy industry in the North East. Recessions in the coal, shipbuilding, iron and steel industries took a serious toll on traffic levels (McCord 1979, ch. 5; North 1975, 7). The industry as a whole saw a decline in its traffic in both freight and passenger journeys. In 1923 total freight figures were 343.3 million tons compared to the 1932 figure of 249.6 million tons. Although figures improved during the 1930s they remained under the 300 million ton mark, and indeed were

falling before W.W.II. In passenger terms the recession saw total passenger journeys down from over 2,186 million in 1920 to a low of 1,231 million in 1935 (Pollins 1971, 156-7).

There is much criticism of the railway companies in this period for failing to invest in labour saving equipment and plant, but as Crompton points out they were finding it increasingly difficult to raise capital at this time. During the 1930s the railways expanded the amount spent on capital by using debt rather than share issue and, he notes, it was therefore not surprising that they were loath to invest more than was actually necessary in the short term (Crompton 1995, 134-5). Crompton believes that the industry at this time was over-capitalised and that this situation had its historical roots in the valuations of 1914. Although some assets had been written down at the time of the Grouping, it had been inadequate. Both Crompton and contemporary economic opinion saw the answer in increased investment after such a write-down, but the companies were reluctant to undertake such action. This was partly, Crompton has suggested, because of the directors' fear of losing face which might have had implications for the future organisation of the industry had the interwar governments interpreted such action as an admission of failure. There was some debate during the interwar period as to whether the industry should be fully nationalised (see Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994). The directors of the companies argued that the recession was a temporary problem which the rest of industry also faced and therefore 'The collapse in earning power was not accepted as permanent' (Crompton 1995, 136).

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 the railways found themselves again under government control with their shareholders paid a fixed sum in return for the use of their assets. Unlike the first war, the industry suffered greatly during W.W.II. This was due both to damage from aerial bombardment and the lack of maintenance. Although the companies reverted to their pre-war organisation in 1945 it was clear that reorganisation was again inevitable. Opposition to nationalisation by the boards of the Big Four has been interpreted by some academics as being more motivated by a wish to see greater compensation than a genuine hostility to state control (see Crompton 1995; Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994). In 1948 the whole industry was nationalised, becoming British Railways (BR), itself part of a wider British Transport Commission (BTC), responsible for all inland transport (Bonavia 1971; Gourvish 1986, ch. 1; Pollins 1971, ch. 20).

## **The Role of the State**

State involvement in the industry fell into three categories; the legislation for building and opening the system; the concern over the structure of the industry; and finally the imposition of regulation on the industry regarding aspects of operation, safety and pricing regimes. In practice, legislative intervention is not so amenable to so clear a separation as this division would suggest.

The context in which the state acted is of central importance to the narrative. The period under consideration witnesses the move from the dominance of laissez-faire interpretation to the complete nationalisation of the industry in 1948. Why was there such a change? And what was the reasoning behind the move from the one set of organising ideas to the other? The railway industry emerged in a world when the

ideas of the political economists were manifest in government legislation. Indeed the major part of the construction phase of the industry coincided with the zenith and then eclipse of almost unquestioned acceptance of the free market ideal (Coats 1971; Crouzet 1982, 105; Taylor 1972).

Although there were those who were critical of some aspect of these approaches, in the main parliamentary opinion firmly favour non-interference. This is not to say that there was little or no intervention, proposed or enacted. On the contrary the railways were one of the most, if not the most, regulated industries in the country by 1914. Dyos and Aldcroft have noted that there were Parliamentary Select Committees investigating some aspect of the industry's affairs every year between 1835-40 and then afterwards in 1843/4/6/9-1853-1863/4-1872- 1881/2, 1891 and 1893 (Dyos and Aldcroft 1974, 163). This apparent contradiction, between a laissez-faire policy and manifest intervention, can be explained by the need on the part of the state to ensure against abuse of monopoly power by the railway companies either individually or collectively (Bagwell 1974, ch. 7; Milne and Laing 1956, ch.5; Taylor 1972).

The first area of state intervention can be seen in the planning and building of the railways. Individual companies required legislation for both the building of a line and to achieve limited liability status. Once the issue of other companies using the line (the model assumed in the cases of canal and toll road operation) was abandoned, Parliament responded by ensuring individual companies could not fully exploit their de facto monopoly. This was achieved by the inclusion of certain clauses in the individual Company's Act, and by ensuring the construction of competing schemes

was not blocked.

As witnessed above this led to the duplication of many routes and services, which in numerous cases made the long term prospects of railway companies collectively less secure. This is perhaps one of the greatest legacies of the era of laissez-faire economic policy which has persistently haunted the industry to this day (see below). As was mentioned above, the NER, in spite of its own regional monopoly, was intensely aware of the issue of competition and invested in very marginal capital projects because of it (Irving 1976). What needs to be stressed here is the sunk nature of capital in the industry. Once investment had taken place there was little alternative use for it and closure was therefore an unattractive option. Although the barriers to entry were high exit costs were higher still.

The concern to regulate against monopoly formation did not of course terminate with the building of the line but continued with its operation. One of the ways of achieving regulation against monopoly was to prevent the formation of large groups. From the earliest period in the industry's history there had been some level of concentration, for example both the NER of 1854 and the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) of 1846 were the product of the amalgamation of several smaller companies (Allen 1974, ch. 13; Gourvish 1972, ch. 4). And indeed this process had subsequently continued to a varying extent (Dyos and Aldcroft 1974, 163-174).

What successive government and public opinion objected to was the creation of much larger groups formed by the merger of already substantial individual companies. Were this to occur, it was feared that competitive pressure would be removed, prices would rise and service levels would decline. Thus in the 1870s and

again after the turn of the century merger plans or grouping proposals were unsuccessful. This was due to either outright opposition by Parliament or public opinion stirred by traders' fears of higher prices. This led to state regulation to ensure that the cost of mergers, in terms of cuts in charges that would be imposed on the new company, defeated the logic of the proposal in the first place (Cain 1972). As Cain notes the power of traders:

The traders were well organised in Chambers of Commerce and well represented in Parliament, where they clashed with the powerful "railway interest" (Cain 1988, 107).

The effect of such organisation was to make progress towards the realisation of economies of scale by the natural move to horizontal integration in the industry difficult, if not impossible. Further, the ability of the companies to set their own level of price was increasingly reduced. The industry's members were forced to rely on pooling agreements, both overt and covert, and other forms of co-operation (Cain 1972, 1988; Bagwell 1968).

As Cain has shown, the Board of Trade was keen to promote some form of co-operation between companies where obvious efficiencies could be made. Their preferred process of change was for companies wishing to undertake forms of amalgamation to present a bill to Parliament, which could be suitably amended by the Board of Trade. This was to be achieved by the insertion of clauses that would guarantee the interests of traders and employees in addition to those of the companies and their shareholders. However these proposals satisfied no party to the dispute, and by the beginning of the Great War opinion was inflamed on all fronts. As Cain notes:



Thus, in 1913 the railway industry appeared in a sorry state with the companies retreating into secret agreements, their shareholders dissatisfied, their men mutinous, the traders seemingly ineradicably hostile, and the Board of Trade's careful schemes apparently in ruins (Cain 1972, 637).

The Great War was to change the situation enormously. The Government took control of the industry paying the companies compensation based upon pre-war levels of net profit (*ibid.*, 638). As noted above the efficiencies arrived at during the war demonstrated the need for some kind of revision in the organisation of the industry. What made this issue all the more pressing in the immediate post-war situation was the rise in inflation that had turned pre-war profits into post-war losses (Cain 1972, 638).

The Grouping scheme the Government proposed was the most palatable option for all concerned, and as commentators have noted it was unlikely that full scale nationalisation would have been imposed given opposition from within the companies and Parliament itself (Crompton 1995; Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994). The agreed formula attempted to balance the need of the industry to realise operating efficiencies and yet preserve a vestige of competition. Thus prices would not be allowed to increase, but profitability would be ensured, it was assumed, by the reduced costs in operating a more integrated concern (Cain 1972, 638-9).

The option of nationalisation had long been an issue within Whitehall, and the possibility of state involvement in the ownership of the industry had been enshrined in Gladstone's Railway Act as early as 1844. A clause in this legislation allowed for the nationalisation of all lines built after that year (Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994,

20-21). When nationalisation did occur in 1948 the overriding stimulus was the wish for efficiency and sound finance, rather than either of the traditional explanations of the move, as part of a socialist programme or as inevitable progression (see Millward and Singleton 1995; Saville 1993; Tomlinson 1982; see also ch. 3 below).

The third area of state involvement in the industry is witnessed in the passing of legislation restricting the companies' freedom over various aspect of their business. This type of intervention was partly connected with concern over potential abuse of market power by the railway companies. This concern manifested itself in two areas of legislation; regulation of railway rates, prices and services, and secondly in the safe operation of the industry, in particular the hours and pay of railway servants and the safety equipment deployed (Bagwell 1974, ch. 7).

From the beginning of the industry there had been state involvement in the decisions as to the services that companies had to provide. They had an obligation to carry at reasonable rates whatever goods were offered to them (Milne and Laing 1956). Perhaps the most important Acts of legislation passed in terms of provision of service were those of 1888 and 1894 (Irving 1976, 37). Both of these represented a serious restriction on the companies' ability to charge prices in line with fluctuations in cost. The result of this was that the railway companies increasingly became loath to reduce charges because increasing them again at a later date was difficult. The companies had to prove the rise was justified on the grounds of increased cost. Such a case was almost impossible to make on individual flows of traffic as high percentages of these cost were shared with other flows. Thus rigidity was introduced into a system that was already inflexible (Dyos and Aldcroft 1974, 174-186).

The second area of state regulation was concerned with operating procedure. Here again Parliament was increasingly involved in the specification of issues such as safety devices, hours and conditions of service of railway workers (Bagwell 1974, 188-198; Irving 1976, 1978). The Act of 1893 permanently locked the industry into a higher cost base because of the lower levels of productivity that flowed from the restriction placed on the number of hours that could be worked. As will be seen below the companies argued, in their opposition to the legislation, that this sort of flexibility was vital to the economic operation of the industry as a whole. The industry was further restricted from 1907 with the Conciliation Scheme set up to mediate between railway labour and the companies (Alcock 1922, ch. 20; Bagwell 1963, ch. 11; Raynes 1921, ch. 13). During the Great War the Government also extended the commitments of the companies by regulating wages and hours still further (Cain 1972).

In terms of the introduction of safety equipment Parliamentary intervention had been a steadily growing influence. Attempts to get railway companies to introduce new methods and equipment had originally been permissive in nature. It was hoped that the companies would be shamed by public opinion into retrospective adoption. New lines could be made to include such practices before they were allowed to carry traffic. Again the adoption of this kind of equipment was expensive and reduced profitability, if anything pushing up the operating expenses. As Irving has shown the adoption of safer working practice added to company costs in terms of greater investment in fixed capital, block bell signalling, new signal boxes etc., and in the labour used to operate them. He notes that the number of signal workers

employed per route mile on the NER between 1875 and 1912 increased by approximately one-half. While some of this growth can be explained by the impact of the regulations of hours in the wake of the 1893 Act, it was also affected by increased investment in signalling at a given level of technology (Irving 1976, 102-3).

## **Management and Organisation of the Industry**

The first two sections of this chapter have outlined some of the main structural features that the railway industry displayed. We now examine how these obstacles were negotiated and managed by the individual companies. This section will analyse the size and complexity of the industry; the various external pressures on management- governmental, customer and public; industrial relations; the competition from other companies; and finally the quality of the management itself.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing railway management was the relative size of the undertakings from the first. By implication railway companies were not small firms and could not benefit from entrepreneurial forms of management in their start up period. Instead individual organisations very quickly adopted a highly developed division of labour for their management, supervisory and shopfloor staff (see Kingsford 1970; McKenna 1976, 1980; below ch. 2). As such the railways can be seen as ideal typically modern organisations with their combination of separate functions in addition to bureaucratic control and administration (Brown 1977; Savage forthcoming).

As seen above, companies within the sector were among the first to take full advantage of limited liability status. Even modest lines would require considerable investment in land, fixed equipment and labour before any return could be realised.

In 1851 the LNWR, which had been formed in 1846 by the amalgamation of three smaller companies, constituted the largest joint stock company of its day. It was capitalised to the value of over £29 million. It could boast 800 miles of track and in the years 1846-7 had 23% of the UK market share for passenger receipts and 25% of those for goods. To put these statistics into perspective the Dowlais iron works in Wales, often cited as an example of modern large scale industry in the Nineteenth Century, had an estimated capital of just £1 million (Gourvish 1972, 108-9). Likewise, by 1870 the NER had fully paid-up share capital of over £40 million (Irving 1976, 139).

Given this size what form did railway management structure take? In the case of the LNWR its board appointed a General Manager on formation of the new company. The man appointed was Captain Mark Huish who had held various posts in railway management since 1837. He had started his career in the industry with the Glasgow Paisley and Greenoch Railway working there until 1841, when he joined the Grand Junction Railway which was to form part of the LNWR. Huish is interesting because he represents a transitional stage in the management of the industry, joining it as he did almost at its inception and making a major contribution to its evolution into a recognisable modern form (Gourvish 1972).

One of the key issues in the evolution of such a structure was the development of the respective roles of the management and directors. In the case of the LNWR this issue was ultimately to be Huish's downfall when he was effectively sacked in 1858. To a certain extent, Gourvish argues, the role of manager was defined by the incumbent himself. There was little distinction made between operating and

commercial areas of management. The relationship between the management and board level was problematic in part because of the different pressures they were under. In the case of the LNWR Huish was expected to run as much traffic as the company could handle in order to keep the value of shares high, and yet at the same time such action was costly in terms of operational revenue. Gourvish shows that the problem was partly that the directors in this case occupied their position on the board because of their local standing rather than their commercial acumen (*ibid.*, ch. 4).

The structure of railway management evolved over time with an increased fragmentation in the division of labour of both management and supervisors due to the increasing size of the undertakings. At the board level sub-division of responsibilities was achieved by the development of a committee system which had its antecedents in the structure of the banks, canals and turnpike roads (*ibid.*, 60; see also Milne and Laing 1956, chs. 1 and 2). Huish developed the role of General Manager in his company as a link between the diverse elements of the corporation and the board itself. He was instrumental in creating a structure below him that divided responsibility on both functional and regional levels. Thus there were four distinct levels of management beneath board and General Manager level as early as the 1840s. Each of these was horizontally divided along regional lines with each level reporting hierarchically to the next (Gourvish 1972, 112). This gave the office an immense amount of power as effectively the General Manager was in the position where summaries of the business flowed to him before he in turn presented them on to the board by way of a regular flow of reports.

The relationship between the boards and their General Managers was obviously not uniform between companies, or over time. Some companies at particular times, such as the LNWR, allowed their General Manager a great deal of autonomy, while others remained firmly in control of the day to day decision making process. This involvement in the minutiae of management has been regularly used as a criticism of railway management into the contemporary period. The argument is made that too much time was spent dealing with individual problems rather than with more strategic issues (Bate, 1990; Gourvish 1986; Joy 1973). Perhaps an extreme view, from the 1920s, of the quality of the relationship between the board and managerial level is witnessed in comments attributed to Sir Eric Geddes in responding to the news that William Whitelaw was to be the first Chairman of the LNER:

He represents the bygone feudal system of railway management, when the railway directors regarded the General Manager much as they would their bailiff or gamekeeper (Allen 1971, 48)

The make-up of railway company boards could be varied. In the case of the LNER membership was drawn from:

“The Establishment”; the Law; the City; Finance and Banking; Trade and Industry, and heavy industry in particular; Mining; and Shipping (ibid., 47).

As mentioned above the NER also had a mixture of representatives on its board. In 1898 for example the company had as its Chairman Joseph Pease who had interests in banking, coal, locomotive engineering and iron (Kirby 1984). His deputy, Lowthian Bell was also involved regional commerce. In addition every other member

of the board, save for three there for their railway experience alone, was in one way or another connected with farming, shipbuilding, coal ownership, iron making or other industrial manufacture (Irving 1976, 130-132). Irving has argued that such was the interpenetration of industrial and commercial interests in the NER that the danger of the company using its monopoly position to levy high charges against its customers was never a real possibility, precisely because of this broad ownership with a desire for low rates.

To return to the structures of power in the railway companies it is again important to recognise the variety of practice. Some companies preferred centralised decision making while others devolved power to a regional or departmental level. Any strategy of control mixes relative advantages. In some cases these could and did prove to be fatal. In the example of the NER amalgamation of several competitor companies in the 1860s produced a recipe for confusion in operating practice. Three centres of power were created at York, Darlington and Newcastle/Gateshead. As Simmons has noted this structure was kept in place not out of managerial efficiency but rather as a sop to the sensibilities of the former railway management (Simmons 1994, ch. 9). This structure was seen as a contributory factor in a series of accidents in the new company's territory in 1870. For example, one of the incidents was blamed on the fact that there were three rule books operating on one railway, the following of any particular one depending on where a train happened to be on the combined system!

Another problem with devolving responsibility in the case of the departmental system was the creation of power centres, which developed an identity of their own.



The NER had in 1902 separated commercial and operating sections in the company, but the level of predicted efficiency had not been achieved because of the continued existence of the powerful Engineering and Locomotive departments. There was a good deal of resistance from within these two organisations to being submerged into one simplified structure reporting to the head of the Operating department. Wedgwood recognised that such a departmental system was ‘Heaven made for irritation and annoyance’ and that its very continuance contributed to rigidity in the organisation which prevented the training of all round railwaymen (Irving 1976, 256).

The ability of departmental systems in the company to resist reform was so great to prevent it occurring. Indeed such was the power of such practice in a number of companies that its legacy is still felt to this day. Many of the ‘reforms’ of the period since 1979 are specifically tackling the supposed dominance of the ‘production led’ railway over a ‘service led’ one (Bate 1990, 1995; Gourvish 1986; see ch. 5 below).

An example of the autonomy of the different departments and their lack of communication can be seen in the memoirs of Hewison who worked as a Shed Master for the LNER in the 1920s. He discusses how the design department of the new company, headed by Nigel Gresley, produced locomotives which in practice presented operational difficulties. He notes what this resulted in on the ground:

The entire arrangement was excellent from Gresley’s point of view; he designed and built the engines which he then passed to the Running Superintendents on the principle that “it was up to them to make the engines work”. It was unwise to attribute locomotive failure to errors in design and a

DLS (District Running Superintendent) or LRS (Locomotive Running Superintendent) who attempted to do so was likely to learn of Gresley's extreme displeasure; all failures resulted from the drivers' mishandling or lack of shed maintenance (Hewison 1981, 19).

With the amalgamation of 1923 the LNER adopted a divisional system of management which Allen sees as the least centralised of all the Big Four. Each of the three parts had a Divisional General Manager, the Scottish Division's known as a General Manager, with a Chief General Manager in London along with other all-line appointments responsible for group functions. While there was a devolving of spending power to the divisions, larger sums of money had to be referred to board level. The North Eastern division of the LNER covered the area of the former NER and the Hull and Barnsley companies. Thus despite grouping, the region enjoyed a continuity of organisation which was to continue into the nationalisation era with the creation of the North Eastern region, which finally was merged into the Eastern region in the late 1960s.

In terms of co-operation between companies the greatest step forward was the establishment in 1842 of the Railway Clearing House (RCH) (Bagwell 1968). This was an organisation which sought to smooth the problems associated with traffic crossing between two or more companies. In the earliest period of the industry's history, dominated by a series of local or regional lines with little or no connection with a system, such co-operation was not an issue. By the 1840s the outline of a national network had been already laid or was on the drawing board.

The RCH was formed by some of the largest contemporary companies in the country, for whom the carriage of through freight was increasingly an issue. The success of this organisation led to the adoption of standard practice for the allocation of cost between member firms based on mileage. Standard categorisation of types of freight was also a feature of this system. Even after such simplification of procedure there were problems of efficiency given the extreme complexity in the possible combinations of starting and terminal points multiplied by the categorisation of types of freight. In 1847 for example the RCH published a 'simple' classification of goods based on five separated headings under which were nearly four hundred individual items. Given such complexity there is little wonder that when deciding price levels, railway management relied heavily on rule of thumb, with reference to estimations as to 'what the traffic will bear' (Bagwell 1968, 74)

The day-to-day organisation of the RCH was carried out from London with other employees based at strategic points around the country. The organisation was paid for by a levy of the member companies who contributed to it on the basis of size but were allocated the same decision-making rights as other members. The RCH also went on to act as a policy making forum for member companies, examining issues such as operating procedure and the type of safety equipment that should be collectively adopted. However the ability to jointly adopt safer and more efficient working practices was at times hampered by the unrepresentative power wielded by the smaller companies. Thus while large, more progressive, companies wanted to see reform enacted the organisation tended to be tied to the lowest common denominator. Thus those companies too small to have the ability to invest in new equipment

effectively blocked adoption by the larger ones, another illustration of the problematic nature of the industry's structure (Bagwell 1968).

In their relationship with government bodies, Parliament and the public, the railway companies deployed a number of strategies over the period under consideration. As we have seen, the Nineteenth Century saw the creeping regulation of the railways. In order to protect their interest from government interference, as they saw it in their business, the companies set up in 1854 a Railway Companies Association (RCA) (Alderman 1973). Such bodies as this tended to appear at time of particular problems for the industry as a whole and were not in continuous existence.

In Parliament there developed a railway interest formed of MPs and Lords who were directors of various railway companies. This pressure group again tended to be mobilised when there was a perceived threat to the interests of the industry as a whole. Examples of such a threat can be seen in the fight against the compulsory adoption of safety equipment or the conditions of service of their employees (see Alderman 1973; Bagwell 1963, chs. 4-7; 1974). They could also use this interest group on the numerous select committees or Royal Commissions that were constituted on various topics. Thus the railway interest in Parliament could be deployed at times but did not represent a homogeneous whole. Party affiliation over time moved towards the Conservative Party along with other representatives of business (see Bentley 1984, ch. 5).

In earlier examples the railway companies' arguments, allied with the dominant political discourses, had been successful in fighting greater compulsory regulation. Captain William O'Brien of the NER had argued in front of a Select

Committee on Safety against the compulsory introduction of safety devices, believing them experimental. Others argued that their adoption would actually increase the possibility of accidents by reducing the responsibility on the servants of the company and thus their concentration (Simmons 1994, 128).

In the Select Committee of 1891 (6), which examined the question of railway servants' hours, Joseph Pease, Director and later to be Chairman of the NER, took a lead in examining witnesses. Many of those who gave evidence had actually been provided by the Company. Pease used the process as a way of showing the kinds of pressures that the industry in general, and his company in particular, were under. These pressures, it was argued, would be intolerable if further aggravated by legislation curbing excessive hours was introduced. Pease used his questions to an Inspector of Railways to elicit acceptance of the premise that the content of long hours at work were not necessarily hard or taxing:

Where a man is kept at a junction, say four hours on his engine, because the mail is delayed by fog, although he is on duty he is not upon that harassing duty which is wearing to life? (Q126)

Again when questioning one of his fellow directors, Henry Tennant, Pease attempted to show that although signal workers may have worked long shifts they were not constantly engaged in physical effort:

Would you kindly give the committee the hours of duty which the men would actually employed in sending and accepting signals, moving signal and points levers and so on? - In the first case Tollerton, the actual time occupied in working 12 hours duty was 1 hour, 43 minutes, 50 seconds (Q7954).

This example from the NER system was part of a document, submitted by Tennant on behalf of the company, which detailed the comparison between the number of hours of duty and the content of the same. In some senses the use of such figures represents an early time and motion study, seen by some as a symbol of modern management.

The theme recurring through these examples and other evidence from different grades was that the NER, and by implication other companies, had to rely on long hours worked by their staff in order to cope with fluctuations in traffic levels. Tennant, Pease and other representative of the railway companies claimed that this flexibility was necessary if the industry were to remain profitable. The figures from quiet boxes on rural lines were used to demonstrate just how marginal they were as a source of traffic. The implication was that the railways were providing a public service, if not actually at a loss then only made possible by a certain level of flexibility on the part of their workforce.

Evidence presented to the Committee highlighted the fact that the NER was attempting to cater to this public desire for service. Here Tennant discusses the impact of cutting such services:

It would be possible if the companies paid less attention to the wishes of their customers to do something in the way of a diminution of the hours, but then I think they would hardly be justified in interfering with the commerce of the country. ...For instance, on the Nidd Valley Branch the men are on duty one way or another for 14 hours. If the last train each way were taken off they could be reduced from 14 hours to 11, but included in the 14 hours the man has 5 hours standing doing nothing (Q7941).

The railway companies claimed that the removal of this flexibility by restricting hours of work, as eventually happened with the passing of the 1893 Act, would make this sort of marginal traffic totally uneconomic. It is interesting to note the way in which companies promoted themselves, and were certainly perceived by their customers, as providing a public service (Revill 1991).

But flexibility was also needed for the NER's core traffic of minerals to the East Coast docks. It was argued by the Company's representatives at the hearings that the hours of footplatemen and guards as well as allied workers were required to be lengthy at times because of the great variation in traffic density. Tennant gave an illustration of the nature of the swings in volumes:

...but as regards iron ore just the same applies to Sunderland: There is a quantity imported there, but comes in various quantities, from nothing per week to 6,000 tons per week (Q7895).

Tennant went on to give details of even larger variations in the coal traffic shipped from Tyne Dock of between a low of 5,700 tons to a daily high of 24,686 tons. Such cyclical movement meant that the NER could not operate a fixed timetable, which could allow for more regular working hours for their staff. Rather they relied on the running of trains at very short notice which were not booked in the working timetable. Indeed Tennant claimed that at times 90% of his company's freight trains were not booked workings (Q376). The argument over flexibility of labour arose because the company was attempting to avoid taking on temporary labour to cope with such fluctuation. The implication being that longer hours at times of peak demand were balanced by reduced hours during quieter periods.

Thus the NER, and the industry as a whole, found themselves in the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century having to cope with increased regulation of their business which restricted their ability to deal with the problems they already had. Simultaneously there was an increasing public expectation of the standard of service that the industry should provide. The combination of higher wage costs with such an expectation and ever greater restriction on the industry's ability to discriminate in pricing saw the erosion of profitability. This was due to the rise in the operating ratio, that is the proportion of working expenditure to gross revenue, which was generally on the increase over the period (Cain 1972; Irving 1976, 1978). As we have seen this situation was compounded by the addition of marginal traffic which was attracted onto the railways in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century.

Given these pressures on cost how did management in the industry respond? And how effective were the strategies they chose at coping with them? One tactic adopted was to continue to compete with other companies for traffic. As seen above the competitive era of railway development was largely over by the final decade of the Nineteenth Century, although there were important extensions to the network after this. These additions themselves became part of the structural problem that impacted on all of the industry, namely excess capacity. Again, as seen above, competition after 1870 was to a large extent based on service rather than price. Such duplication added to the industries' structural problems by ratchetting up the level at which all companies had to compete. Thus public and traders alike came to expect levels of service that were expensive to maintain and difficult to cut (Cain 1972, 1988).



This became a live issue when the prospect of amalgamation or merger came to the fore. The companies themselves were desperate to rationalise services and this was one of the main benefits seen in greater co-operation and pooling agreements. However, as Cain has noted, the traders' lobby was convinced that any amalgamation should not herald a reduced level of service. Such was the power of this movement that these arguments won the day and thus almost entirely defeated the object of the proposals in the first place (ibid.).

One of the largest areas that managers had influence over was that of labour. This was especially important in an industry with such large volumes of fixed capital, and hence fixed cost. Railway companies could therefore take advantage of labour flexibility in several ways. Firstly, we have seen the way companies in general, and the NER in particular, deployed their workforce especially prior to the 1893 Act. Flexibility was achieved by responding to demand by recourse to various strategies - overtime, generally longer hours on quiet, low traffic, sections, and by the practice of stepping up lower grades of labour to cover for more senior ones. The advantages for the companies was that this system preserved a large core workforce which possessed important skills and knowledge, but also kept wages low by restricting the absolute number of those employed (7). Such a strategy was attractive to the railway companies, as there was a ready supply of labour willing to work in the industry. Thus unskilled labour could be recruited to fill positions at the bottom of grade hierarchies, and members of this group could be more easily dispensed with if a downturn in the economic cycle occurred. Irving notes that the NER had an average of four hundred applicants for each position of signaller in the period 1884-1888.

Further examples from this company can be seen in the confidence with which Tennant addressed the problem of staff unhappiness with working conditions on the NER to the House of Commons Select Committee of 1891. Various examples were given of the length of service which the Company's servants had worked and this was seen as function of the popularity of the employment (see Q8000 onward).

However these policies were problematic over the medium to long term because of the lack of incentive the companies had to invest in capital equipment, which could cut such heavy reliance on labour. This has been seen by other commentators as a weakness in other parts of the British economy (Nichols 1986; Payne 1990; Robbins 1990; Roberts 1993; Samuel 1977). Thus the pressures from legislation in the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century added to the industries' wage bill while further depressing productivity levels. This situation was made more serious because of the issue of price stickiness for labour that Irving emphasises in his study. As the NER attempted to cut wages during the late 1870s they were faced with labour militancy which increased if the company was successful in its aim. Thus wage cuts and lay offs in 1879 led to increasing recruitment by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) (Gupta 1960, 1966; Irving 1976, 54). In general wage rates were not to fall in line with other prices over the period.

What then was the quality of the management itself? To what extent did the management of railways represent something new and was there development over time? Of course to generalise about such a wide range of possible practices is almost impossible, rather certain examples of style and content can be examined. Initially where did the industry recruit its managers from? At the beginning of the industry's

history former military personnel were a popular source of management and supervisory staff. This was primarily because of this groups' perceived ability to deal with large numbers of men effectively, combined with an ability to 'keep the books' (Gourvish 1972, 27). Both of the companies examined in detail above relied on this source of recruitment. In the case of the LNWR Mark Huish had been a Captain in the East India Company while the NER employed the services of William O'Brien, also a Captain, but in the army (Gourvish 1972, ch. 2; Simmons 1994, 124). Gourvish believes that the ranks of Captain and Lieutenants were the most popular with railway companies, and that recruits from the Navy were especially numerous. The drawback for the companies was that such personnel displayed a tendency to stress disciplinary matters over those of organisational efficiency or productivity (ibid.).

In some ways the following of the military practice was inevitable given the comparative size of the railways with their deployment of high proportions of fixed capital to labour. The military model can be seen reflected in the system of management, supervision and grades employed in the industry, with strict chain of command organised on hierarchical lines. Indeed this organisational form was so enduring that it has continued to the late Twentieth Century, and has only really been significantly eroded with the fragmentation of the industry in the last decade. Bate, for example, discusses the way the language of the military mixed with that of the railway so that senior managers became officers who would socialise in messes, divided by rank (Bate 1990; see also Bonavia 1981, 1985a; Gourvish 1986).

Once the railways were over this transitional stage they quickly developed their own internal labour markets for management as well as supervisors. Thus both Huish and O'Brien were succeeded in their respective posts by internal candidates. The advantages of reliance on a strong internal labour market for a railway company was that insiders could base their judgements in office on experience, both individual and part of a collective process (8). Gourvish notes the benefits and relative novelty of such a situation in the mid Victorian era:

In stressing the advantages of recruiting trained railwaymen where possible, the companies demanded that candidates for higher posts in the executive should possess a working knowledge of railway business, a qualification which would have hardly been possible a decade earlier (Gourvish 1972, 107-8)

Thus a long tradition of learning by doing was born which in many ways was how the pioneering managers had coped with the problems they faced. The strength of the system based on such practice could also be seen as a disadvantage as, at times it developed an inward looking, parochial management style which failed to interact with the best contemporary management practice. Gourvish (1986) refers to a 'rail road culture' among the industry's management (see also Fiennes 1973). Again this criticism has certainly been mobilised regularly in the period since the nationalisation of the railway industry, and in some circles has been seen as axiomatic (see ch. 3 and 5).

In the case of the NER the danger of inbreeding was recognised and was one of the stimuli in the development of the Traffic Apprenticeship scheme in 1897 by

Gibb, the General Manager, with the appointment of Ralph L. Wedgwood, a Cambridge Classics graduate (Irving 1976, 215). Traffic Apprentices were subsequently drawn from the universities, public schools or from the Company's own staff. The scheme was designed to allow the employee to move around the system experiencing the work of various grades of labour, as well as that at supervisory and management levels. A sense of the scheme can be gleaned from several railway managers who were recruited in to it during the early stages of their careers. Humphrey Household joined the scheme on the LNER from the ranks of the company's own clerks (Household 1985). Gerard Fiennes, who was recruited by the LNER scheme, gives a snapshot of the range of experiences he had during his time on the scheme from learning how to build the brick arches in the fire box of a locomotive to the putting of drunks on trains. He is also useful in gauging how 'scientific' the scheme was, noting the lack of contact with head office:

We spoke to an officer perhaps ten times a year. We were taught our trade by the men who plied those trades (Fiennes 1973, 1).

Thus for all that the original scheme had represented a shift from a purely internal labour market there remained a strong sense in which the importance of learning by doing was necessary in order to make 'good' managers. This is not to say that the railway companies completely relied on such empiricism. The industry developed a strong tradition of self improvement and education. Household describes some of the classes open to him as a lowly railway clerk in the 1920s:

The basic educational facilities for clerical staff had been created by the North Eastern in the early years of the century with classes covering the rules and

regulations governing block signalling and the safe working of trains, and in passenger and goods station working and accountancy, instruction in all three given by railwaymen. In addition, there were advanced courses in railway operating, economics, law and geography, given by professors and lecturers from Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon -Tyne, and Leeds University. These could be attended in York, Leeds, Hull and Newcastle (Household 1985, 45).

The NER under the leadership of Gibb was willing to learn from the best practice of railways in other countries. In 1900 Gibb took a number of his officers to the USA to examine the working practices of the Pennsylvania and Burlington Railroads (Bell 1951, 12). In thirty-one days the party covered 4,000 miles and were much impressed by what they saw. When the trip was over Gibb set about further reform for the company including the collection of traffic statistics and the use of larger wagons which could realise greater economies of scale (Irving 1976, 223).

To a great extent the NER was a pioneer in these and other respects. Other contemporary British companies rejecting criticism based on comparative practice on the grounds of British singularity. The lack of accurate figures of passenger and ton per mile statistics has often been pointed to by critics of the industry. Industry management relied on the formula of 'what the traffic will bear' for their pricing policy coupled with the wish to attract the highest loading as possible. It was assumed that, with the very high fixed costs the railways worked under, the cost of providing capacity for extra traffic was marginal.

Again, the NER under Gibb was something of a pioneer in attempting to maximise traffic but to work this traffic in as efficient manner as possible. The key

management tool here was train loadings, and Gibb managed to increase load per train by ensuring that as many freight services as possible ran to capacity, thus maximising the efficiency of train crew, train paths and wagons. The company seems to have met with considerable success, and was able to monitor this because of its collection of statistics (*ibid.*, 242). The NER's success was not matched by the great majority of companies in the period, and most witnessed only modest improvement in the profitability of their freight trains. Accurate information on pricing, and therefore cost, was to remain a problem for railway management throughout the period of the grouping and on into the nationalisation era (Gourvish 1990; Joy 1973; Pollins 1971).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the creation and maturing of the railway industry. It examined the basic construction and expansion of the first system of its kind in the world, with few if any models to follow. Such development has to be placed in the context of a political environment where the free market as an ideal state of affairs was seen to be almost unchallengeable. The industry's construction stage coincided therefore with a celebration of private enterprise and the paralleled wish to guard against monopoly.

What this produced was a network of competing lines which made profits in the periods of high demand and yet experienced problems of over capacity in times of slump, or as the effect of competition began to bite. This tended to hit the profit levels of all the companies due to the large sums of such capital. The solution to this problem lay in the merging or amalgamation of smaller companies to produce larger undertakings able to more fully exploit economies of scale, which in such an industry

were considerable. Although early on the industry did witness such moves and a handful of larger groups were formed, the process was far from complete. There remained over 120 separate companies, which were grouped into the Big Four in 1923. By this time the industry was past its peak and the reconstruction, so necessary, was hampered by its implementation in a period of general retrenchment and recession.

Government policy towards the industry was to ensure against the abuse of monopoly. This effectively meant that moves toward greater co-operation and consolidation were always problematic. Though government policy was not averse to realising economies of scale it was keen to prevent a decline in service coupled with rising prices. Various governments, under strong pressure from a diverse range of interest groups, also intervened in areas of safety equipment and procedure, hours of work and pricing of freight. These increasingly prevented the industry from responding to change and realising greater levels of efficiency. Operating ratios increased faster than revenue and thus the return on capital was cut.

From the beginnings of the industry the scale and size of the new companies had presented problems for management. Again there was little existing practice upon which to base policy. Thus the management and organisational strategies were to grow up on a mixture of military models coupled with an empirical tackling of problems as they arose. Railway companies very quickly developed internal labour markets at both grade and management levels. This has been criticised, especially in the last two decades as producing an inward looking, inbred form of management with a steady but unimaginative approach to the problems the industry has faced.



Though undoubtedly some of these criticisms are fair we must place the actions of management in their historical and structural context. There were some innovative managers and boards of directors, but these actors were embedded in a context which was neither a free market nor a regulated monopoly. One of the major ways management could cope with such a structure was through the control over their labour force, the major variable cost in the industry. It is the creation and development of the workforce in the industry that the next chapter will consider.

## Notes to Chapter 1

1. The North East is important for any discussion of the railway industry because it saw the first railway company created in the area with the construction of the Stockton and Darlington railway of 1825. There is also a pre history of the movement of coal from collieries in the area by rail. Also George and Robert Stephenson, the former known as the 'father of the railways', were closely associated with the initial stages of the industry's development.
2. In particular Irving's study of the economic history of the NER is an outstanding and influential piece of research. Irving, R. J. (1976) *The North Eastern Railway Company 1870-1914: an economic history*, Leicester, Leicester University Press. For a more popular, though still detailed account of the railway history in the region see Allen's books on the NER and LNER. Allen, C. J. (1974) *The North Eastern Railway*, London, Ian Allan. Allen, C. J. (1971) *The London and North Eastern Railway*, London, Ian Allan.
3. Pollins tells us that the financial success of the Liverpool and Manchester and the Stockton and Darlington companies in the 1830s was a powerful incentive to further investment. Pollins, H. (1971) *Britain's Railways: an industrial history*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 27.
4. For a discussion of the problems associated with the lack of concentration and short production runs in the locomotive construction industry see Bailey, M. (1996) 'The origins of locomotive workshop practice: Robert Stephenson and Co. at Newcastle-upon Tyne', un-published paper to 'Forging a past: Railway workshops in historical perspective' conference, Institute of Railway Studies, York. For details of

legacy of such a structure see Drummond, D. (1995) *Crewe: Railway Town, Company and People 1840-1914*, Aldershot, Scolar Press; Lawrenson, D. (1996) 'Fordism and post-fordism: a misleading taxonomy assessed with evidence from the other vehicle industry', *LSE Sociology Department Working Papers*, 5.

5. For a discussion of the historical specificity of the economy in the North East and the way this is reflected in various industries see Benwell. (1978) *The Making of a Ruling Class*, Newcastle, Benwell Community Project; Beynon, H. and Austrin, T. (1994) *Masters and Servants; Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation*, London, Rivers Oram; Irving, R. J. (1976) op. cit.; Roberts, I. P. (1993) *Craft, Class and Control: The Sociology of a Shipbuilding Community*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

6. Select Committee on Railway Servants (Hours of Labour) 1891, vol XVI, pp. 1-91.

7. Tennant spoke eloquently of the disadvantages for labour in the imposition of a fixed ten hour day for railway labour: 'Supposing we kept a staff of men large enough to do the largest amount of traffic on the basis of ten hours, it follows, as a consequence, that for many weeks they would hardly get more than half time. The arrangement which prevails is to keep a firm and adequate staff, so that by working overtime when necessary the business can be carried on, and that the men should not suffer; and this is one of the points which we have impressed upon the officers of the company; the men do not wish such arrangements as will bring them in less than a week's pay, whether it is a busy season or a slack season;...If we did not do that, we should perhaps have to resort to the system of casuals, which is about as objectionable

plan as could possibly be adopted, namely; that a number of drivers, firemen and guards should be hanging about our gates ready to take a train when there happens to be an excessive number of trains', Tennant to Select Committee op. cit. Q7885. In reality it would have been very difficult to operate such a scheme given the tacit skills necessary for railway employment in the grades mentioned (see below ch. 2).

8. For useful insights in to early railway management and supervision see Ross, H. R. (1904) *British Railways: Their Organisation and Management*, London, Edward Arnold, esp. chs. 3 and 4; Adams C. F. (1969) *Railroads: Their Origin and Problems*, New York, Harper and Row. For early autobiographical accounts of such employment see Neele, G. P. (1974) *Railway Reminiscences; Notes on a Railway Superintendent's Life*, East Ardsley, EP Publishing; Simmons, E. J. (1974) *Memoirs of a Station Master*, Bath, Adam and Dart; Tatlow, J. (1920) *Fifty Years of Railway Life in England, Scotland and Ireland*, London, The Railway Gazette.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Grade and Occupation 1825-1948**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the role and meaning of occupation and grade structures in the railway industry in the period 1825 to 1948. As such it situates the creation, production and reproduction of the workforce as a whole within, and in relation to, those structures examined in the previous chapter. It will be argued that these developments were not simply the human properties of structural forces and outcomes but that rather the grades, and in combination, the workforce as a whole, were active in the process of creating the structure they came to be embedded in.

The chapter opens with an exploration of the way classical sociology has dealt with the division of labour and occupational groupings. This is done in order that we may place the later discussion of industrial identities within a theoretical framework derived from the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. It is argued that there exists an underlying creative tension within this body of literature that views the creation of industrial identity as ambiguous in terms of form and meaning. Put simply, this tension is the way in which occupational identities in 'modern' societies are viewed both as potentially enabling and disabling at different moments of the employment relationship.

The second part of the chapter will examine the structure of recruitment, promotion and socialisation of two particular grades of railway employees: signal workers and the footplatemen. Evidence drawn from a series of interviews

undertaken over the last four years will be combined with oral histories, biographies and autobiographies of railway workers to facilitate a richer understanding of the social processes involved in the production of such identity over time. Detailed focus will be placed on the role of generational relationships in the creation of such identity. Although the oldest of these interviewees began their working life in the late 1930s their socialisation displays similarities with that found in earlier autobiographies.

The next section places the grade structure within the context of the creation of the initial railway workforce, and will note the influence of models from other organisations in terms of the detailed division of labour, supervision and recruitment strategies. The section further explores the solidifying of these identities along with their organisations, and asks how far such identities were subject to challenge and manipulation by factors such as economic crisis and the rise of trade unionism. The issue of union formation will be examined in detail, not because of its importance as an organisation in its own right, but rather for its centrality in influencing the different grade identities. In particular the tension between the all grades unionism of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) of 1871 and the craft unionism of the Associate Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) of 1880 is explored.

It will be argued that an examination of the discourse used and promoted by both of these groups facilitates an understanding of the greater strategic power of the footplatemen compared to that of other grades. What is attempted here is an apprehension of the differences in occupational identity, and the power that flows from such articulations. This, it is argued, can only be understood by appreciating the

combination of a multiplicity of events and causes over time, and the response to these both by individual actors and groups. This chapter suggests that it was the footplate workers who became a dominant and powerful group because of historical contingency, technological development, as well as their relative importance in the division of labour combined with a greater ability over time to articulate its own identity. This is not to say that identity is solely derived from discourse, but rather it is the ability of particular groups to draw from historical locations the resources they require in order to make a claim to a particular identity, and with it specific material advantage. Such an understanding will be placed in a theoretical framework derived from several sources, in particular Giddens' (1984) notion of structuration.

In such a way this chapter aims to locate the creation and reproduction of a workforce within its material and historical context. As such it seeks to serve as a discrete historical essay as well as forming the basis of later explorations of grade and industrial identity in subsequent chapters.

## **Occupational Identity**

It could be argued that the division of labour is central to an understanding of much of the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. In the writing of each of these theorists there is an emerging concern with the transition from traditional to modern societies and the social implications of such a process. All three saw the move as being ambiguous in terms of the effect on the individual, at least in the short and medium terms.

Division of labour for Marx was an important sign of the development of productive forces in any country:

The relations of different nations among themselves depend upon the extent to which each has developed its productive forces, the division of labour and internal intercourse. This statement is generally recognised. But not only the relation of one nation to others, but also the whole internal structure of the nation itself depends on the stage of development reached by its production and its internal and external intercourse. How far the productive forces of a nation are developed is shown most manifestly by the degree to which the division of labour has been carried. Each new productive force, in so far as it is not merely a quantitative extension of productive forces already known, (for instance the bringing into cultivation of fresh land), brings about a further development of the division of labour (Marx and Engels 1938, 8).

This greater division of labour in the capitalist epoch led to a concern for the individual and collective workers' skill level, the degradation of which was seen as inherent to the capitalist labour process. Marx argued that the logic of capital was such that capitalists would be forced into cutting wages, lengthening hours, increasing the intensification of work or a combination of all three, in order to realise greater levels of profit. This was because surplus value could only be secured from variable capital and not fixed (Marx 1954; see also Kolakowski 1981, esp. chs. 12 and 13).

Creativity, and hence humanity, was squeezed out of the worker de-skilling them on an individual and wider level. This resulted in the worker experiencing various levels of alienation, from the work product, the process of work, from other workers and from themselves. Modern capitalist production would break down individualism and uniqueness at both the level of the isolated worker and the



collective mass. Labour would increasingly become interchangeable as skill was no longer a prerequisite of an increasing number of occupations.

But at the same time there is another aspect to Marx's discussion of such trends. For Marx humans were distinguished from animals as soon as they began to produce their own means of subsistence, and this led to ever greater production of their own material life. Here Marx works through the logic of what this means for both the individual and collective worker:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definitive form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production (Marx and Engels 1938, 7) (*italics original*).

Thus Marx seems to be suggesting that individuality is produced at the very moment that it is being degraded, that each distinct shift occurring within a mode of production will open up countless unique sites of human creativity and singularity. This notion, it could be argued, is reflected at a lower level of abstraction in Bensman and Lilienfeld's statement on the relationship between craft and consciousness:

There is no doubt in our minds that such occupations as medicine, architecture, teaching law, steamfitting, cobbling, taxicab driving, and ragpicking produce unique and peculiar combinations of attitudes appropriate to the craft as well as to the societal and social position, ideological and material interests, and commitment to the society at large. Every occupation, every skill at every substantive level produces such attitudes (Bensman and Lilienfeld 1975, 187).

Marx, however, made the distinction between the division of labour at the level of society and that occurring in the factory. While the skill level residing in the collective worker may well have been higher in the latter case it was a distorting phenomenon:

While simple co-operation leaves the mode of working by the individual for the most part unchanged, manufacture thoroughly revolutionises it, and seizes labour-power by its very roots. It converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts...(Marx 1954, 340).

And Marx goes on to note that 'Intelligence in production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others' (ibid., 341). Put simply the type of division of labour witnessed in modern manufacture tended to simplify work, resulting in a specialisation in a very narrow sense. This process led to the separation of knowledge about the labour process from the workers themselves (Marx 1954, esp. pt. 4; also see Braverman 1974; Brown 1992, ch. 5; Rattansi 1982, esp. pt. 4; Thompson 1983). There would seem to be therefore a tension within Marx's work on the division of

labour. On the one hand social experience shapes identity and therefore the greater division of labour could be interpreted as a creative process. Whilst on the other hand increased specialisation had a tendency to constrict the individual worker's ability to fully realise their creative potential (1).

For Max Weber too, issues of occupation and the division of labour are important ones, and this concern is witnessed as methodological, theoretical and substantive interests in his work (2). Weber attempted to analyse different types of economic division of labour:

Every type of social action in a group which is orientated to economic considerations and every associative relationship of economic significance involves to some degree a particular mode of division and organisation of human services in the interest of production. A mere glance at the facts of economic action reveals that different persons perform different types of work and that these are combined in the service of common ends, with each other and with the non-human means of production, in the most varied ways (Weber 1964, 218-219).

Weber further examined the development of occupational types and identities. He sought an understanding of how such identities arose within both the work group and the individual, and attempted to allocate the creation of such identities between structures and agency:

The present survey is trying to establish, on the one hand, what effect self-contained industry has on the individual personality, the career and the extra-occupational style of the workers, what physical and mental qualities it

develops in them, and how these are expressed in the total behaviour of the workers; and on the other hand, to what extent industry on its side, in its capacity for development and in the direction of its development, is governed by given qualities arising out of the ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, the tradition, and the circumstances of the workers (Weber quoted in Eldridge 1970, 104).

Weber goes on to stress that to separate the influence of each on the other is for analytical purposes, and that in reality any investigation into such groups must examine the quality of their simultaneous interaction.

As with Marx the discussion of deeper division of labour and occupational formation has contradictory elements. In Weber's writing this is manifest in both the calling into being of occupational groups which have an ethic of vocation which acts as a source of meaning, and on the other hand the analysis of occupational specialisation itself as part of a process of rationalisation (3). This ethic of vocation, in modernity, is seen as a de-personalised process whereby activity in economic and political fields can no longer be guided by reference to 'ideals such as *caritas* or brotherliness' (Brubaker 1984, 28). Brubaker suggests that Weber instead saw the concept of *Berufsethik*, or ascetic ethic of vocation, as being suited to modernity:

Today... The *homo politicus*, as well as the *homo oeconomicus*, performs his duty best when he acts without regard to the person in question... without hatred and without love, without personal predilection and therefore without grace, but sheerly in accordance with the impersonal duty imposed by his calling [*sachliche Berufspflicht*] (E&S, p. 600) (Quoted in Brubaker 1984, 28).

Thus we have the idea of the lack of substantive meaning within a form of identity from which actors derive perhaps their main source of meaning. Everett Hughes has noted ‘...a man’s work is one of the more important parts of his social identity, of his self’ (Hughes 1975, 209). And yet once again Weber turns his attention to the way in which workers experience occupational groups and professions as a source of stability. Weber urges the researcher of occupational groups to understand the social structure of a given set of actors by assessing the extent to which they experience stability (Weber 1964, 251). Thus he would seem to think that occupational groups are more than simply concerned with the impersonal administration of their particular segment of the market. Indeed Weber recognises the ability of such groups to appropriate particular parts of the labour process. One aspect of this discussion shows that Weber saw the possibility of such action as an impediment to technical efficiency:

Every form of appropriation of jobs by workers in profit-making enterprises, like the converse case of appropriation of the services of workers by owners, involves limitations on the free recruitment of the labour force. This means that workers cannot be selected solely on grounds of their technical efficiency, and to this extent there is a limitation on the formal rationalisation of economic activity (*ibid.*, 236).

Thus Weber presents us with a series of problems and contradictions. The division of labour brings about differentiation, and yet the ethics that actors refer to are de-personalised and formal in nature. Weber, while noting this trend and perhaps lamenting its implications, considers the continual existence of groups of workers

who deploy autonomous, substantive rationality in order to appropriate space within the division of labour and enact occupational closure. Thus the division of labour in modernity both enables and constrains individual and collective identity.

Perhaps the most important figure of classical sociological theory in terms of a discussion of division of labour and the formation and role of occupational groups is Emile Durkheim. These themes recur frequently in his work. Durkheim's concern was with the problem of what would be the form and content of social solidarity in modernity. His interest was in the quality of solidarity that this latter form would enjoy. Whilst this new type of society was potentially liberating for the individual self it was also rent with danger, as a lack of moral regulation on this newly constituted self would result in anomic social forms. Durkheim's project therefore was to construct a philosophy that could appreciate the tensions inextricably linked with modernity. The ever greater division of labour that was predicated on such a change in society represented both the potential source of social stability and its alienation, in that a modern society would enjoy an organic, and natural relationship between actors. This organic solidarity would arise naturally and spontaneously. Jobs within such a society could be allocated not on the basis of tradition but on merit, talent and choice. As Eldridge has noted the problems associated with a forced division of labour:

The division of labour only produces the solidarity it is capable of when each individual does the task to which he is fitted. If there is a mismatch between the aptitudes of individuals and their actual activities then "only an imperfect and troubled solidarity is possible" (Eldridge 1973, 78).

Eldridge goes on to quote from Durkheim's *Division of Labour* on the essentially spontaneous nature of such solidarity:

In short, labour is divided spontaneously only if society is constituted in such a way that social inequalities exactly express natural inequalities. But, for that, it is necessary and sufficient that the latter be neither enhanced nor lowered by some external cause (Durkheim 1964, 377: Quoted in Eldridge 1973, 78).

It is here that we must guard against what Eldridge has described as vulgar readings of Durkheim's work (see for example Braverman 1974; MacDonald 1995). Instead we should recognise the sophistication of his analysis by seeing Durkheim's view of perfect organic solidarity as an ideal type, or model against which to gauge empirical evidence. As Eldridge goes on to note 'Durkheim recognises that a society characterised by perfect spontaneity does not exist in any complete sense,...'(ibid.). And that further regulation is the *basis* for true organic solidarity.

What form was such regulation to take in Durkheim's organic solidarity? Rather than the coercive regulation of a forced nature, or its absence almost entirely in an anomic character, Durkheim understood moral regulation as the desirable form in a just society (Eldridge 1973, 79). But from where was such moral regulation to emerge? Here we see why Durkheim should be interested in occupational and professional groups. He saw their role as acting as a repository of, and stimulus to moral regulation. Such groups acted as the crucial link between the state and the individual or their family:

In this respect, then, professional ethics find their right place between the family morals already mentioned and civic morals, that we shall speak of later (Durkheim 1992, 5).

Moral regulation at the level of the state would be too remote and at the former would be too localised. In the preface to the second edition of *Division of Labour* Durkheim stresses the importance of such groups:

For, if it be indispensable, it is not because of the economic services it can render, but because of the moral influences it can have. What we especially see in the occupational group is a moral power capable of containing individual egos, of maintaining a spirited sentiment of common solidarity in the consciousness of all the workers, of preventing the law of the strongest from being brutally applied to industrial and commercial relations (Durkheim 1964, 10).

Thus Durkheim was interested in the moral role that such groups could exercise on their individual membership. And this was not about occupational closure, indeed he is critical of previous manifestations of such groups for precisely the way emphasis is placed on utilitarian motive. Durkheim is not arguing for a return to craft guilds, but rather is trying to tease out what was moral about them and, in the same part of the *Division of Labour*, he discusses how in the example of Roman corporations this took on a religious quality (ibid., 10-11).

In *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* Durkheim spells out the role and necessity of moral regulation at this mezzo level. Having stressed the commonality of duties and morals at the level of the state he goes on to formulate why those morals of



other groups beneath them are differentiated:

No man exists who is not a citizen of a state. But there are rules of one kind where the diversity is far more marked; they are those which taken together constitute professional ethics. As professors, we have duties which are not those of merchants. Those of the industrialist are quite different from those of the soldier, those of the soldier from those of the priest....We might say in this connection that there are as many forms of morals as there are different callings, and since, in theory, each individual carries on only one calling, the result is that these different forms of morals apply to entirely different groups of individuals (Durkheim 1992, 4-5).

There are echoes of Bensman and Lilienfeld's (1975) conceptualisation of occupational view of the world deriving from the place in the division of labour cited above. Durkheim's understanding of the role of professional and occupational groups, as with much of his sociology was essentially pluralistic and liberal (see Cladis 1992). He recognised that the nature of the ethics these groups possessed was likely not only to be different from others but would very probably be both contradictory and in opposition to the ethics of other groups:

These differences may even go so far as to present a clear contrast. Of these morals, not only is one kind distinct from the other, but between some kinds there is real opposition. The scientist has the duty of developing his critical sense, of submitting his judgement to no authority other than reason; he must school himself to have an open mind. The priest or the soldier, in some respects, have a wholly different duty (Durkheim 1992, 5).

This pluralism and liberality is also found in his conception of how occupational and professional ethics and morals would be produced and reproduced over time. Again Durkheim seeks to distance his concept of a collective ethic from that of a norm imposed from above. Rather he saw it as an essentially emergent property *from* and *of* the group. Externally imposed rules would not be adhered to in the way an autonomously derived one would:

Thus, the discipline laid down by the individual and imposed by him in military fashion on other individuals who in point of fact are not concerned in wanting them, is confused by us with a collective discipline to which members of a group are committed. Such a discipline can only be maintained if it rests on a state of public opinion and has its roots in morals; it is these morals that count (Durkheim 1992, 28).

Durkheim recognises that rules of any kind can be interpreted as doing damage to individuality and that they display an external quality to them that is seen as being imposed or even tyrannical. Behind these laws lay a different set of values:

But beneath the letter lies the spirit that animates it: there are the ties of all kinds binding the individual to the group he is part of and to all that concerns that group; there are all these social sentiments, all these collective aspirations, these traditions we hold to and respect, giving sense and life to the rule and lighting up the way in which it is applied by individuals (Ibid., 28-29)

Rather than collective discipline being seen as a 'tyrannous militarisation' Durkheim argued for it to be understood, in its truest form at least, as a collective manifestation of the individual's own self regard. This is not to say that Durkheim did not

recognise that the individual would not at times see these rules as exterior to them. This was inevitable, as given growing numbers in a particular group, such moral rules would appear to transcend the individual. The moral discipline that Durkheim saw as essential performed the role of curbing the ego of the individual precisely by stressing the individual's role as part of the collective. In this sense Durkheim could almost be seen to be making an argument for Burkeian conservatism with its stress on the ignorance of the present generation juxtaposed to the sagacious quality of collective generations (4). But this conservatism is tempered by his understanding of the way in which morals are derived from the group as a whole:

A system of morals is always the affair of a group and can operate only if this group protects them by its authority. It is made up of rules which govern individuals, which compel them to act in such and such a way, and which impose limits to their inclinations and forbids them to go beyond. Now there is only one moral power - moral, and hence common to all - which stands above the individual and which can legitimately make laws for him, and that is collective power (Durkheim 1992, 6-7).

Thus Durkheim saw occupational groups as having an essentially moral quality about them. The individual would derive comfort and meaning from them and a sense of their place within a wider context, above that of the family but below that of the state. But any sense in which this morality was seen to be imposed on the individual and unnatural to them was countered by the notion that the ethic was itself derived from the occupational group as a whole.

The classical sociological theorists' discussion of work identity thus offers a fruitful starting point for the analysis of occupational identity. In Marx, Weber and Durkheim's work it is possible to identify contradictory elements. In Marx we discover the creation of difference and yet the simultaneous destruction of heterogeneity. Further, the uneven development of capital brings in to existence a privileged group of workers who actually derive meaning from their employment. In the writing of Weber we find similar problems. In particular there is the overwhelming process of rationalisation which strips individuality from the workforce but at the same time witnesses the creation of distinct occupational groups as part of that very process. Finally in Durkheim's discussion of the division of labour we gain a more positive reading of the possibilities inherent in modernity. For Durkheim occupational and professional formations offer a potential solution to the danger of anomic social forms. Durkheim viewed these groups as offering meaning and moral guidance which was above the immediate family but nearer than the remote state.

What I now wish to do, given these theoretical insights in the transition to modernity, is to chart the way occupational groups were created and developed within the British railway industry. These grades were new industrial workers, with few role models to follow. They were the products of modernity but as we shall see developed distinct and lasting identities which at times were resistant to capital, and that acted as a resource for action. These groups could be seen as lively and creative autonomous social forms that did develop their own moral codes and identities and were not simply the manifestations of managerial control strategies. It is argued that the grade

system in the industry created numerous unique sites of resistance in dialectic relationship to the management.

## **The Creation of a Workforce**

It was Frank McKenna who noted that before 1824 railway workers as a profession or occupational group did not exist. By 1847 there were 47,000 of them and this figure had increased by 65,000 to 112,000 in 1860, and stood at 275,000 in 1873 (McKenna 1976, 26). This total itself represents less than half of the workforce at its peak in the next century (5). As we saw in the previous chapter on the structure and organisation of the industry its expansion was dramatic and near-continuous over the course of the century. Similarly the demand for workers in such a labour intensive industry was immense. To try and generalise about the way the companies recruited, trained and employed their staff, especially in the early years of the industry, is of course difficult. It is complicated by lack of detailed accounts and the fact that the origin and destination of workers could vary enormously. The type of labour undertaken, where the worker was recruited, geographical position and the size of the undertaking, for example, are all complicating factors.

From its origin however there was a highly developed and complex division of labour in the industry, workers being organised fairly quickly into separate grades which themselves were organised into departmental structures. The need for such a high division of labour was predicated on the early size and nature of the industry. The demands of operating a railway ensured that personnel were required at specific locations at particular times. Furthermore such personnel developed skills and knowledges that were singular to occupation and place, the long term retention of

these attributes was necessary for a railway company success, a problem faced by railway management elsewhere in the world (Gratton 1990; Stein 1978). Pre-eminent among these early grades were the footplatemen, the driver and fireman.

From this point grade structures quickly developed so that by 1870 there were nearly a hundred separate grades (Kingsford 1970, xiii). Such a structure was also to develop because of the military influences on organisational structure and behaviour that were noted in chapter one (6). The adoption of this military model was to create a highly differentiated workforce within and between grades. As Kingsford notes, such a division of labour mapped onto the organisational structure created a highly developed social hierarchy based on the individual's position in the collective. It was also important in terms of age, with the criteria for promotion quickly coupled to seniority, with the worker who was the most senior applicant in the grade or company being allocated to any internal vacancies. Such a system was buttressed by the department structure which offered little possibility of cross transfer once a worker had stepped onto a particular occupational ladder, although it was not totally unknown (7). Some commentators have argued that the use of seniority as a promotional criteria was itself a control strategy. Gratton (1990) in his discussion of North American railroad practice suggests that seniority was an effective way of retaining skilled workers by cutting labour turnover. Savage (forthcoming) argues that the construction of the notion of career by railway companies was an alternative to direct control mechanisms. Subjective identification with one's own career effectively becomes a self-disciplining mechanism (see also Grey 1994).

We now turn to a discussion of the two grades that form the basis for this study, those of footplate and signalling. These two are important because they represent forms of labour that, while developing over time, are fundamentally engaged in the same work in the contemporary industry as they were in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, albeit (most of the time) at a very different level of technology.

### **The Footplate Grade**

As shown above in the case of the footplatemens there was a recognisable grade from the very beginning of the industry, with two men on the footplate of the first locomotives. One of these was engaged in driving and stopping the machine as well as looking out for obstructions. The second, the fireman, was charged with ensuring that there was sufficient steam in the boiler to produce the power necessary for movement. The work was highly autonomous in the majority of cases and was well rewarded over most of the period under review (Farrington 1984, 32-124; Joby 1984; McKenna 1980). Kingsford notes that a driver on the London Brighton and South Coast Railway in 1871 would earn on average 39s per week. This was in most cases double other grades' average earnings and more than a Station Master (Kingsford 1970, 102).

From the start the relationship between these two workers was asymmetrical with the driver being in charge of the fireman. Some have likened the relationship to that between father and son, a master and apprentice, with Stein going as far as likening it to husband and wife! (Stein 1978) (8). It is possible to witness the different aspects of this relationship in the different stages of their respective careers. The

father/ son quality is witnessed in McKenna's account of the footplate crews lodging where the driver would at times tell the younger man when to go to bed:

Whatever double homers got up to in Wellingborough the ancient role and status of the Midland Railway engine-men was maintained. Drivers and firemen sat at different tables. The driver could and did order his stoker to bed. These bigots would proudly inform young firemen that in earlier times promotion for fireman was dependent upon drivers' reports, regular attendance at work, the condition of the engine and the smartness and punctuality of the fireman (McKenna 1980, 203).

Stein has produced a fascinating cross-cultural comparison with her study of the French footplate grades:

Thus the driver exercised considerable responsibility both on the road and in the depot. He was totally in charge of the locomotive and his relation to his fireman resembled that of master to apprentice, with all that that implied. As in the metal workshops and print shops, informal work customs assigned tasks to the apprentice; he often brought wine to the driver, carried his lunch basket on board, and was generally expected to behave deferentially if the driver so desired. This relationship was termed a "household" (*menage*) for it would last until the fireman was promoted to driver and received his own locomotive. It was also a patriarchal household in which the driver, like the husband, was accustomed to command and the fireman, like the wife, had to obey whether or not he found the relationship satisfactory (Stein, 1978, 407-8).



The other side to this relationship was altogether more positive with the driver transmitting knowledge and skill both directly and indirectly. The quality of the relationship was in part a reciprocally moral one, with the younger man having to demonstrate that he was keen to do the job and learn from the older man. Walter Mulligan of Heaton shed in Newcastle describes the kind of driver he first worked with as a new fireman in the 1940s:

When I first started though you had the 'old school tie' type of driver "Two paces behind me son" and what they said was law...They wouldn't even lift the lamp off the train...some of them they were there to drive the train and that was all they did (Walter Mulligan, interview 1995).

But gradually as the fireman settled into the job and proved he was capable of doing it the relationship would change:

After they got used to you, you were treat as an equal more or less you know, they still wouldn't lift the hand lamp off but they would talk to you...Two men there [at Heaton Shed] who had waxy moustaches, and when you looked at them they were so fierce, you weren't frightened of them but you were in awe of them you know. And what they said was law, but when you got firing for them regular and they knew you could do the job they had no bother with you, they were as good as gold - they were still the driver don't get me wrong - what they didn't know about the job was nobody's business (ibid.).

Such was the power of the shed culture that a fireman soon acquired a reputation, good or bad, and this was important for it could directly affect the career of the individual. Such was the strategic power of the driver in the labour process that they

could and did refuse to work with some firemen. The same interviewee describes his first experience of firing on the mainline:

The first chance I got on the mainline I was night shift, I was eighteen and the foreman said "I want you for a job, you're going to go driving for this particular bloke" and I've never been very big and he [the driver] was a big man and he said "I am not taking him, he couldn't fire up the bank to Consett"...he was told he had to take me. So we went round Blaydon to Consett...with a load of iron that had come off the boats at Newcastle...When we got up to Consett...he says "I'll take you back with me, you're all right" so after that we were all right. Once you passed with one driver you were all right (Ibid.) (9).

Later on in the fireman's career reputation would be important if the driver was to allow the younger man to take the controls for an unofficial drive (10). Training was largely empirical with the fireman observing his driver at work, or being shown good practice by the senior man pointing out particular techniques or the peculiarities of the road they found themselves on. For the keen fireman there was much to learn and a good driver would be inculcating knowledge all the time. Part of the reason why this learning process took the form it did was because of the multiple layers of complexity in which the simple function of raising steam, could and did take place. These variable conditions include the way the engine was being driven, with an enormous difference between the most efficient or inefficient combination of practices. Variety was also introduced by the quality of the coal burnt, the state of the road or the engine (11).

Thus a fireman's job could vary greatly from day to day with few trips being exact replicas of previous ones. Part of the training was to learn the road they were travelling on and the controls of the engine. Here again the driver would, if he were willing, act as a mine of knowledge, drawing the younger man's attention not only to the everyday, but also to the extraordinary that might only crop up once in a working life. Sometimes incidents that had happened to others in the shed would be used as illustration, thus building up a reserve content of knowledge and skill. Joe Brown, originally of West Auckland shed, and Tom Storey of Pelaw shed discuss the nature of their training:

(JB) The drivers trained you or you trained yourself, there was no training [official], you just learnt off the driver and he would tell you, they were very good like, some of the old drivers. (TS) You know brilliant and they knew everything, you used to go to work one day and they would be asking you all the questions, steam actions and all this kind of thing (Joe Brown and Tom Storey, interview 1995).

When the fireman was near 'his time' attendance at the Mutual Improvement Class (MIC) was expected before being passed for firing or driving duties. These were classes held and run by the grade themselves in order to get the younger members through the examination by the footplate inspector. The MICs included both theoretical and practical elements. Often halls would be used that were owned by the railway companies. Here the men would be given lectures and practical demonstrations of the various aspects of their craft, including the handling of sectionalised parts of steam locomotives that had been donated or 'acquired' from the

local shed. The classes were taken by interested drivers, or sometimes inspectors. Attendance at these MICs was entirely voluntary, and unpaid, both for the teachers and the taught (12). Tom Storey described the sacrifices he and his family had to make in order that he might attend:

I travelled twelve miles to the MIC... In fact on a Sunday morning I used to go to Consett MIC and it was in your own time, I used to get the first bus, maybe 8 o'clock in the morning and it used to be 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock before you were coming home....I think I went five year or something like that (Tom Storey, interview 1995).

Underlying this sacrifice was the material reality that if the worker didn't attend, his chance of passing the formal examination would be reduced:

You knew you had to, it was as simple as that. I'll tell you what, any boy that didn't get theirselves involved used to have to work harder at it when the time came, there were any amount of them that didn't pass just through not going to the classes...when you were passing to be a fireman, passing to be a driver things like that you had to do it because you couldn't look at books and do it (ibid.).

The entry point in the footplate line of promotion was that of engine cleaner rather than straight into the fireman's grade. Here a young man would spend a period of time cleaning and oiling engines after they had performed a spell in traffic. The work of this grade acted as a useful introduction for many into the complexities of steam locomotion. Arthur Turner, who eventually became a driver describes his early experience of such shed work for the LMS in Bath:

When engines had been stopped for boiler washing-out, general repairs or just because they hadn't been used for a while, the firebox would have to be cleaned from the inside. This meant the bar boy had to get in through the fire-hole feet first and with head downwards, then with special tools clean the firebox of all rubbish that could not readily be done from outside. All fire-bars would have to be examined and changed, if necessary. This task was one of the least pleasant as it was a very dirty, hot and unthankful job...All this was hard work for a young lad, but it was taken as part of the job, and a good basic training for future days (Turner 1996, 9-10).

Walter Mulligan spoke of the division of labour among the cleaners, and the exacting standards expected of them even during wartime:

They would give you an engine to clean so many of you, say six of you to clean it, two on the top that's on the boiler, one on one side one on the other. One on either side of the works the wheels and the side rods and that, and then two underneath to do the underneath. Well this Billy King [the foreman cleaner] who was supposed to be as blind as a bat, had great big cloths, had great big cloths in them days, and he put his hand underneath the side rods along the back of the wheels, and he would come back and if there was any dirt on it he would say "Come on then better get cleaning again." So the engines were really clean in them days [1940] and they used to come in in some states (Walter Mulligan, interview 1995).

The exact division of labour within the cleaning gang was itself usually based on seniority, with the newest entrant getting the worst job graduating to the point

where they were senior enough to be 'passed' and then become fully fledged firemen (13). Frank McKenna eloquently describes his first experience of cleaning the underside of a locomotive on Carlisle's Kingmoor shed in 1946:

Sweating with fear as well as activity I climbed up into the belly of the engine across brake hangers, stretchers and slide bars. I sat across a brake stretcher, the filth oozing through my overalls and trousers, trapped in space. For more than an hour I perched there in the darkness broken only by the spluttering of the flare lamp, almost overpowered by the sense of isolation and danger. The dankness of the cotton waste, the sickly smell of the cleaning oil and the menacing black underbelly of the boiler petrified me...I had now discovered the daily ritual of the junior cleaner on the shift (McKenna 1980, 118).

Once the cleaner had graduated to fireman he would then have to wait until he was passed as a driver and the whole process of earning the title of fully-fledged driver began. Again the industry developed a system of allocation of jobs by seniority with the best turns (usually attracting high mileage payments) being allocated into the upper links of a particular shed (14). Thus the promotional system that developed within the majority of British railway companies acted as an important social and technical introduction to railway work. The lack of formal company training led to the growth of a widespread self-help movement that further buttressed an autonomous workplace identity. In this respect there are similarities with the situation in other countries (see for example Gratton 1990; Morgan 1994; Stein 1978).

## **The Signalling Grade**

The signalling grade had a slightly different genealogy, simply not existing in the initial phase of the industry. Signalling, as such, was undertaken by railway policemen who, as part of their duties, attempted to prevent collisions by ensuring a particular length of time had elapsed before allowing the following train into a section (Whitbread 1961, esp. ch. 4; see also Blythe 1951; Rolt 1966, ch. 1). This had obvious disadvantages, not the least of which was there was no guarantee that the preceding train had not stopped for whatever reason in the next section. At first this grade signalled trains with coloured flags or lamps but these were eventually replaced with fixed apparatus which could be manipulated to show the state of the section ahead. Eventually the controlling levers for these devices, along with those operating the points at a particular location, were concentrated in a signal box or cabin. Each cabin controlled a particular part of the line dependent on the nature of traffic and layout. There were technical and physical constraints on the size of these areas as points could only be thrown relatively closely to the controlling box. Later mechanical and technical advance witnessed the transcendence of such problems (see Blythe 1951, Rolt 1966). These boxes could vary in traffic levels from extremely busy inner-city locations to some of the rural kind alluded to in the previous chapter (15).

In contrast to the footplate grades the signal workers were relatively geographically isolated, indeed they became something of an icon in Victorian popular imagination as the archetypal solitary worker alongside lighthouse keepers (see Dickens 1967). Although not working in large groups there was, after the

introduction of the telephone, a great deal of communication between boxes, both official and otherwise (see for example Vaughan 1984; Warland 1992). Boxes would usually be operated by one worker for the shift, which could vary in length from eight hours for busy boxes to ten and twelve hours in quiet area, where (as was witnessed in the last chapter) traffic levels could be extremely light. Henry Tennant of the NER gave the 1891 Select Committee on Railway Servants Hours of Labour a detailed illustration of the working arrangements in his company:

Altogether we have 976; of these 88 are eight hour cabins, and at 124 cabins the hours of duty which men receive a full weeks wages vary from 60 to 66, Sunday duty being paid extra. The number of eight hour cabins has gradually increased during the last few years; I do not really know exactly how fast, but we have added to them from time to time, and the rest are about 12 hour cabins (Q7952).

Tennant was tacitly admitting that the majority of the NER's signal cabins were worked on a regular basis by signalmen and women employed on twelve hour shifts. The Select Committee had heard much evidence from the supporters of reform as to the abuse of the system by the railway companies. The issue was not that the shifts in themselves were too long, it was rather what happened when there was no relief for someone who had carried out a normal turn of duty. There was also the related issue of internal coverage of days off or Sundays. Few Victorian or Edwardian railway companies employed relief signalmen, thus a worker's absence on one shift would have to be covered by the other resident signallers. In twelve hours boxes, therefore, this meant that working shifts of twenty-four hours or more occurred on a regular



basis. In such a box this was rostered every second week to give the other resident a Sunday off. Accidents that had occurred, in combination with public perception that long hours increased the risk of an incident occurring, intensified the pressure on both government and the railway companies to take action over the number of hours worked (see Howell 1991; Rolt 1966; Simmons 1994).

The signalling grade did not attract the level of wages the footplatemen enjoyed. Kingsford gives an illustration of the difference in the range of pay between the two grades. In the early 1840s, for example, signalmen on average attracted 22s 11d between a range of 21s to 25s. By the early 1870 however this average figure had fallen to 21s 2d between a range that started at 18s and still ended at 25s (Kingsford 1970, 91).

In part this difference in pay rates reflected the fact that the training period for signal workers was much shorter when compared with that of the footplate. Typically the prospective employee would be given some theoretical rules and regulation training after which they would be allocated a box where a vacancy existed. The training in the box would consist of spending a week on each of the shifts. This would ensure that the trainee had experienced the full range of traffics and situations that arose with a particular timetable. If the trainee was lucky the trainer would also pass on other knowledge about the box and its area that would not come up during the period of training, and indeed might never arise in the working life of most workers in the grade. Interestingly this kind of advice and information was not limited to the area, but workers would also draw on examples of incidents on other systems and companies to illustrate a point, again this built up tacit knowledge in the new worker.

Sometimes this only led to confusion in the trainee's mind. Andy Polston tells of his training period, from a much later period, with an experienced signaller who had worked in the box when it had been a great deal busier:

...and he'd be sitting there telling us how you pull points, how you pull the signals, but Alan, being there when it was really busy, and of course at the finish I was seeing trains, I was imagining things that weren't there. "You have a man [train] towards Glebe colliery and you have a man running around the main line and you have a train standing at the side" and I realised more than anything it was all imagining trains, traffic wasn't there, it wasn't as busy as what it used to be, we used to get it in fits and starts (Andy Polston, interview 1995).

Ron Bradshaw describes in his autobiography the aftermath of his first mistake in the signal box in front of a qualified signaller. Bradshaw, having cleared the road for an express train, had not noticed that the signal had failed to clear. The driver of the train had been given misleading information and had to brake dramatically in order to stop:

In all my years I have never seen a fully laden train of eight coaches and a Stanier 'Black Five' come to a stop in so short a distance. Only drivers who have experienced a red light thrown in their faces at that speed with a fully-loaded passenger train behind them can know that sickly and hollow feeling in the pit of their stomach. Within split seconds the regulator was swept down, the brake applied at full, the reverse wheel frantically wound back and the sanders were blown...Joe [the qualified signaller], rather than chastise me

after the visible shaking-up, was feeling sympathy but repeated the importance of observing a constant vigilance and the importance of signal arm response and track circuit indicators. He quoted the Castlecary (Scotland) accident of 18 months ago when 35 people were killed. During the ensuing enquiry a signalman was held partially to blame for incorrect observation of the indicator of a distant signal. This little episode had a sobering effect on my possible over self-confidence and was to remain a constant reminder when working busy boxes later, a truly graphic illustration of 'more haste, less speed'! (Bradshaw 1993, 29-30).

Bradshaw at this point was not a fully qualified signalman, rather he was a booking lad, sometimes known as a box boy. These were youths who were employed at busy locations to help the signalman with the booking of trains as they passed through the section. In addition they carried out numerous other duties in the cabin such as answering the phones, cleaning and, perhaps most important of all, making the tea. This was a very direct way of being socialised into both a work and occupational identity. Here Bradshaw describes what it meant for him:

At fifteen and a half years of age, I was quickly to learn the meaning of maturity and manhood, for here I was a lone teenager thrown into a world of adult working men, without a single person of my own age group for companionship or consolation (Bradshaw 1993, 25).

The same writer also describes the process of this socialisation. Here the author discusses being taught the role of booking lad:

By the eighth day that hitherto impenetrable barrier had been conquered and Ted Cox's face broke down into a satisfied smile. With a pat on the back he announced "You'll make it lad. Now we'll show you how to write. Your script is appalling..." Up to then, I had secretly feared him; now I felt a conversion to almost hero worship (Bradshaw 1993, 21) (16).

For many prospective signalmen this was the means by which they found their way into the grade. Most of the signalmen interviewed here entered the grade through a spell in this position and this is very common in the autobiographies of such workers (17). In some ways the promotion system in the signalling grade acted as an apprenticeship scheme. Although the individual worker's initial training could be relatively short in comparison to a craft apprenticeship or the much longer training for the footplate grade, the signaller would usually start in a quiet, small, and therefore low paying box. Promotion would be on the basis of seniority and aptitude, with the senior applicant for the vacancy in a more attractive box having first refusal. The situation was made more complex by the unwillingness of some members of the grade to move from their preferred box, usually because they lived locally and didn't want to disturb their family. Thus younger workers, if they were willing to be geographically mobile could seek quicker promotion. One common way of gaining promotion was to become a relief signalman. The relief was a grade which covered absentees, vacancies and later annual leave and rest days. The numbers of relief staff grew in the wake of nationalisation in 1948 with improved conditions of service introduced at this time. Here Stan Fairless, a signalman who worked in the North East after WW2, describes his own motivation for taking such a position:

After that of course I would have been at busier boxes, but the snag was promotion and seniority, but how I got around that was I became a relief signalman in 1954 to give me access to other signal boxes which I couldn't get under promotion. I'd become a relief signal you see, and consequently I learnt boxes on various lines, I learnt boxes on the main line, electrified area, I learned boxes on the west line to Carlisle and it was very interesting, all the boxes were different, and then again more experience, things happening, and all together I spent twenty-six years on relief, that was based on various areas (Stan Fairless, interview 1995).

Therefore like the footplate grades the signal workers developed highly autonomous work cultures within an externally ordered working environment. Like the drivers signal workers enjoyed little if any direct control by management over their work. Having examined the creation and nature of the two grades that form the basis of this study we now turn to examine their relationship with other sets of workers and management.

## **Developing Identities**

In the first chapter the nature of the railway company as an organisation was analysed, and this chapter now examines the impact of this company identity on that of its workforce. The Victorian railway company was a combination of paternalism and militarism, exercising control over its workforce by a mixture of reward and sanction (see Edwards and Whitston 1994; Kingsford 1970; McKenna 1976, 1980; Revill 1989, 1991; Savage forthcoming). Management were faced with the problem of controlling its new workforce and yet had to allow for a considerable latitude in the

nature of supervision because of the wide geographical spread of employees. This was coupled with the need for trust given the high levels of capital equipment used by workers on a daily basis. In terms of positive reward the most direct material advantage of such employment was the relatively high pay, especially for those in more senior grades like the footplatemen. Perhaps of even greater importance for almost all grades was the permanence of railway employment. This was a crucial factor in developing this kind of work as a respectable type in the Victorian labour market. Indeed in the case of the footplatemen it is the combination of high wages, and the regularity of them, that led Hobsbawm to include them in his collection of trades that form a Victorian and Edwardian labour aristocracy (Hobsbawm 1986, 286) (18).

While initial wages might have been only slightly higher than those paid to agricultural labourers the railway companies offered prospects of promotion that perhaps few other contemporary organisations could match. This was especially true of the early period of railway development, where a company might recruit staff for extension or expansion by recourse to its internal labour market (19). This kind of promotion and the progression through the grades tended to slow down as the industry matured, and this may have been one of the stimuli to greater labour unrest at the turn of the century (Irving 1976, ch. 3). The impact of such compression will be explored more fully later in this and subsequent chapters as it has important implications for occupation identity, conceived as both an intersubjective and subjective state (see below chs. 4 and 6).

Other positive aspects of railway organisations' treatment of their staff is witnessed in their use of welfare and provision of company housing. In terms of housing the record of individual companies is mixed. Some, for instance, built company towns to house their workers: the LNWR at Crewe or the GWR at Swindon are perhaps the best examples of such practice. These were usually provided to attract the new workforce for company workshops, not for the operating grades that form the basis of this study (see Drummond 1995; Joby 1984, ch. 4) (20). For other grades railway company provision was less generous with accommodation provided for specific grades only where there was particular need (Kingsford 1970, ch. 7).

In terms of welfare many companies operated schemes of some description, but perhaps the most direct and important aspect of such paternalism was the continuation of employment for those workers who could no longer do their original job, either through infirmities of age or accident. Railway companies were able to do this in part because they were such large organisations. Being both vertically and horizontally integrated they could find a position for such a servant somewhere in the complex division of labour. McKenna quotes a flattering account of this responsibility:

As long as a driver can move about...the company feels bound to keep him on the pay list...(Quoted in McKenna 1976, 32) (21).

McKenna goes on to note the way such practices worked in his own grade:

In my own time (1946-1960) the men who swabbed the messroom tables, swept the engine sheds or acted as lavatory attendants, were workers who had once been well up in the hierarchy of the wages grades. Ill health forced them

to accept the most menial tasks in the industry, the only alternative being resignation (McKenna 1976, 32).

The same author goes on to stress the importance of such policies for earlier railway workers:

Loss of status must have been as abrupt and painful for the nineteenth-century railwaymen; but they were cushioned from the absolute disaster which could pitch a man from the pinnacle of the working class respectability to the abyss of despair, and even break up his family and home - the loss of a job (ibid.).

In addition to direct paternalism in connection with employment, railway companies often engaged in other forms. This is best illustrated by the building of churches and schools or the laying out of parks in railway towns. Interestingly though, Revill has argued that the limited liability status companies' enjoyed restricted the organisation's ability to perform such a function, with shareholders of the Midland Railway thwarting attempts to use company funds to build churches at Derby (Revill, 1989, 1994).

But there was another, darker side to railway discipline combining the threat of withholding the positive aspects of such employment with the imposition of negative sanction. The organisation had the ultimate threat of dismissal and this was certainly used (Edwards and Whitston 1994; Kingsford 1970, chs. 2 and 3). The importance of the loss of a job in the Victorian labour market has already been stressed, but what must also be highlighted is the level of dependency that was engendered in this particular workforce. To a great extent the skills and knowledges required of railway workers were, and to a degree still are, occupationally and grade



specific. Indeed it could be argued that some grades were even tied to a particular company or area. Thus in Revill's phrase railway workers were 'trained for life' (Revill 1991). Even if individual workers did possess transferable skills the chances of them being hired by another company were remote, managers having tacit agreement not to engage in such a practice (Kingsford 1970; Revill 1991). However, as Pollins points out, this policy was highly contingent on the wider labour market and on the particular demand for skilled labour over time (Pollins 1971, 77-78). In addition to sacking their workers railway companies could also invoke threats of blocked promotion and use of a system of fines. Discipline was also buttressed by the inclusion of other grades in a disciplinary regime. The companies made active use of the divisions existing in the workforce based upon company, region, shed or depot, station, religion and most obviously grade identities. Kingsford explores this idea in his study of Victorian railwaymen:

'Divide and rule' was a routine method as well as one used with special force during disputes. The practice of using one grade as a check on the other was general. Orders issued in the fifties [1850s] provided that guards were to report on the irregularities of signalmen; signalmen were to report engine drivers (Kingsford 1970, 77).

The same author goes on to describe how evidence from other grades was often used in cases of dismissal by companies. He also quotes from a Select Committee of 1858 where a witness from the LNWR is being questioned as to the relationship between grades:

Lord Alfred Paget: In fact there is no love lost between the engine drivers and the signalmen?

J. Beattie [Locomotive Superintendent, LNWR]: I think it would be a pity that there should be any; it would not be so good (Kingsford 1970, 77) (22).

Thus companies could use the contours of difference within the workforce to enact disciplinary action or perhaps to ensure the workforce internalised the need for discipline in a Foucauldian sense, this gaze of the different grades being akin to the panoptican device employed by Foucault and Foucauldians via Bentham (23).

However, such a bleak reading of the relationship amongst grades, and between workers and management must be tempered with evidence contradicting it. Later qualitative literature, and my own fieldwork indicates that the other side of such relationships was the co-operation between workers based on an understanding that mistakes could be and were made by all grades. What seems to have developed was a morality that led to minor, and some not so minor, mistakes and transgressions being covered up. For example the incident described above by Bradshaw was later covered up, he also here describes the 'squaring up' of a runaway train:

...but on more than one occasion, the pressure of 800 tons against an 80-ton locomotive would prove too much on a wet rail and a cursing Wakefield or Edge Hill driver would bring his sliding train to a standstill 100 yards ahead of the offending home signal. Block signalling allows for these eventualities and no harm, apart from a possible delay, will transpire. The normal friendly liaison between locoman and signalman usually 'square up' the episode (Bradshaw 1993, 116).

Such cover ups could also involve supervisory and management levels. Adrian Vaughan, a signaller on the Western Region (WR) of BR, tells of the way a District Inspector was prepared to collude in such a cover up over a delay to a prestige train. The inspector said according to Vaughan:

‘...you tell me what happened here yesterday, the truth, I’ll tell your lies for you’ (Vaughan 1984, 251).

Again illustrations of such relationships could be cited in many autobiographies and interviews (24). What was engendered in railway workers was a mutual trust and respect built up over time, a kind of banking of good will if you squared up on behalf of another worker, hoping that you would never have to make a withdrawal. Thus there was a moral tie between grades and at times between the grades and management. In the latter case this grew up as a result of the manager having seen, and perhaps done the job at first hand as part of their training (see for example Ferneyhough 1983, 1986; Fiennes 1973). This would usually have included them benefiting from fiddles or other forms of unofficial work practice. Equally the individual manager or supervisor may have actually done the job before being promoted.

From the point of view of management to not engage this sort of arrangement, or at least turn a blind eye, was to store up problems for themselves later. They too were deeply implicated in a system that required the deployment of non-standard methods outside the letter of the rule book on a daily basis. There built up over time, therefore, an embedded autonomous set of practices and relationships that linked members of a grade with others and between such grades and supervisory or

management levels. What is not being argued here is that mistakes were always covered up, or wrong-doing condoned, but rather that workplace relations were imbued with a moral significance that resided above the individual worker. This could be understood as an attempt on the part of the collective worker and management to mitigate at least some of the harshness of an impersonal set of bureaucratically drawn up and imposed rules by essentially humanising them, giving the benefit of the doubt where possible.

Thus it could be argued that this represented the interpenetration of substantive, affective and formal rationalities (see Munch 1987). The values of the grade or grades, the relationships between workers and with management had an essentially human quality. Such a relationship witnesses the mediating of affective and substantive rationalities as group identity is curbed by collective human qualities. Thus the *impersonal* cash nexus between capital and labour is mediated at the point of production by the *personal* qualities of individual and groups of actors. On the formal level such processes represented the recognition that the rule book, if pushed to the limit of its logic, would prove to be a disaster in terms of the future of the firm. Thus substantive rationality, mediated through affective forms, proved itself more rational than formal rationality (25).

Thus we have a mixed picture of the Victorian railway company's policy towards labour. It was a good employer in terms of the wages it paid (or potentially offered) some of its workforce. It offered the chance of promotion and advancement with the opportunity of a job for life. This was coupled with a mixture of other fringe benefits such as cheap travel, a uniform for most grades, a respectable job, chance of

a bonus, company pension and possibly housing. In return, railway companies expected complete loyalty and offered long hours in some very poor and dangerous conditions. McKenna has likened this relationship to Hobbes' Leviathan:

On joining the railway and signing his Rule Book, the Victorian railwayman established a covenant with his employer. Within this covenant was security. Outside it - in the conditions of Victorian life - was chaos...The company promised him a job for life, if he did not offend against its rules, and a position which was likely to improve, through the system of promotion, in stark contrast to other occupations where many men were old at forty. In Hobbesian terms, railwaymen surrendered their freedom in return for security. Thomas Hobbes' contention that self-preservation is the dominant impulse in men is quite clearly demonstrated in the way that thousands of Victorian working men were ready and eager to accept these terms, and to commit themselves to a company for life (McKenna 1976, 32).

But as we have seen within the embrace of the organisation, a kind of total institution, there was space for individual action, creativity and autonomy. For every rule that was drawn up there would be ten situations that were outside the remit of the rule book. For every new division of labour new skills would be derived and a new occupational group formed, with, over time, its own customs, practices, norms and language. Frank McKenna has also developed the concept of the railwaymen's Bailiwick, by this he means an area or province of interest to an individual or collective:

The area covered by a railway company was inhabited and worked by sections of staff as easily identified as settled tribes. These tribes were distinguished by work patterns, by acute grade consciousness, by uniforms, by the tools they used, by the use of local or regional colloquialisms, and by their fierce identification with the territory they inhabited (McKenna 1976, 66).

He develops the concept of defensible space as part of this discussion. So we have the central importance of such identities being built up over the medium and long term, formed both by the action of the company and the individual and collective agency of railway workers. We now go on to focus on the resistance that such identities allowed.

## **Leviathan Challenged**

The greatest challenge to the unrestricted power of the railway companies was the development of trade unionism. There had been numerous attempts to establish a trade union presence before the first permanent example in 1871, with the foundation of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS). Before this date railway unionism had been marked by sectionalism and instability (Bagwell 1963, ch. 1; Gupta 1960, 1966). Most active in this type of unionism were the footplate grades (Bagwell 1963; McKillop 1950; Raynes 1921). The ASRS was, however, from the beginning an all grades union, which meant it would recruit its membership from almost any grade of labour in the industry. There were some important exceptions to this rule. Firstly, the union would not accept workshop staff. Secondly, railway clerks were excluded and finally, the all grades headline was undermined by the fact that some grades could not afford to join or remain members permanently.

The history of trade union formation in the industry is a useful counter-case to the Webb's thesis concerning the development of trade unionism more generally (Webb 1919). The ASRS does not neatly fit into their model because it represents an all-grade rather than craft formation. It was nine years later that the craft unionism of ASLEF was born. There are also problems in how to categorise the ASRS in terms of its policy towards industrial relations. It was founded with large amounts of support from middle class origins, most notably Michael Thomas Bass, the Liberal M.P. for Derby (see Bagwell 1963, ch. 2; Reville 1989). Partly due to such support the union was conciliatory in tone, eschewing confrontation with employers in favour of negotiation and conciliation. ASLEF on the other hand was born out of the frustration with just this sort of policy, the break with the Amalgamated Society occurring in 1880 precisely because the union did not possess an adequate fighting fund to defend its members. Thus the later craft union was from the outset more confrontational in its stance towards the railway companies (26).

Defining railway trade unionism is made more complex by the arrival in 1889 of the General Railway Workers' Union (GRWU), which aimed to recruit all grades in the industry. This union was partly created by the upsurge in general unionism, or New Unionism as the Webbs' labelled it, in the late 1880s (see Clegg, Fox and Thompson 1964, ch. 2; Kapp 1989). Gupta (1960, 1966) has argued that the ASRS was already moving towards a more proactive stance with the companies before this period. He views the idea that the GRWU acted as a ginger group to the other organisation's conservatism as mistaken. Rather, after the formation of ASLEF, the ASRS had built up a fighting fund and reduced its role as a friendly society.

In membership terms the ASRS was heavily dependent on (and would continue to be so) the footplate grade, and it could therefore ill-afford to alienate or ignore the wishes of this body. Gupta points out that of the union's 12,799 members in 1875 49 % were locomen, with a further 26 % made up of guards, signalmen and shunters (1966, 126). Thus it is clear that, not surprisingly, membership was concentrated in those grades that were on higher rates of pay and experienced continuous levels of employment. Gupta has argued that the Amalgamated Society therefore does not represent a rupture with either past or future union formation. Rather, he notes the continuity and links with an older form of unionism. Gupta points out the way that the Union's efforts in the North East were encouraged by John Wilson, the Durham Miners leader (27).

The essential quality of the ASRS's stance before the formation of ASLEF shows a heavy imprint of liberalism. Gupta quotes the Union's aims and objectives as being to:

Promote good relations between employers and employed, to prevent strikes, and to advocate arbitration for the settlement of disputes (Gupta 1960, 18)

By the middle of the decade little seems to have changed. Here Evans the General Secretary of the Union is writing in a recruiting leaflet:

Does the Society encourage strikes? No; it avoids them as an evil to master and men. But it courts favour from the public and the press...(Gupta 1960, 23)

(28).

This quote is important in terms of its statement of aims but also because it lays bare what the Union saw as its main way of achieving better conditions for its members.



The Union attempted to win popular support for its policies in the press and Parliament and as part of this effort it attempted to manipulate public opinion, especially in areas such as safety and the connected issue of hours of work in the industry. In this sense there are important parallels with later trade union tactics (see Howell 1991; Strangleman 1995). Bass himself had become the railwaymen's champion by writing, as a shareholder, to the directors of the Midland Railway about the way they treated their staff (see Bagwell 1963, ch. 2; Revill 1989; Gupta 1960, ch. 2).

The issue of public safety on the railways had existed before the creation of the first permanent trade union. As was seen in the previous chapter there had been a series of parliamentary interventions on the subject over the years with a mixed record of success (Bagwell 1974, ch. 7). But there had also been a wider public debate on the issue. Simmons, in a chapter on the *Punch* cartoonist Tenniel, shows the way railway companies were lambasted over a number of years in the pages of this influential publication. He points out that:

*Punch* was never of any account as an originating force, a protagonist of new ideas. Its success...arose largely from its skill in depicting the prevalent opinions and attitudes of its time. It was, and it remained, a reflector (Simmons 1994, 134).

Thus the ASRS could build on a public opinion that was already receptive to some of the ideas the union wished to promote, and that this public opinion, if Simmons is correct, had been reflected in the pages of *Punch* by Tenniel since 1852, and by others from the mid 1840s. It was partly due to this deliberately moderate

policy of stimulating public opinion, rather than strike action, that disenchantment with the ASRS grew. And this unhappiness was most keenly felt in the ranks of the footplatemens, resulting eventually in the creation of ASLEF (see Bagwell 1963, 84-85; Gupta 1960; McKillop 1950, ch. 2; Raynes 1921, ch. 3).

From the start ASLEF leaders made much of the fact that theirs was a craft union and that the need for sectional unionism was born of the failure of general representation. Stress was placed on the differences between all grades, but those between the footplate workers and others were elevated to a new height. This apartness of grade is central to an understanding on occupational identity in the industry and informs the actions and attitudes of many contemporary workers. This is partly due to the way in which the arguments for sectionalism have been historically marshalled. ASLEF as a union has always had a keen sense of history and this has informed both of the official histories of the Union. The first, *Engines and Men* was written in 1921 by J. R. Raynes, 'a skilled Journalist and a writer of books' according to the foreword to the history by John Bromley, General Secretary and the instigator of the history. Bromley is clear as to the reason why the Union wanted its history to be written:

...I am able to write a foreword to this volume and present it to our members, in the hope and with the sincere wish that it may be a delight to every one of its readers; that older members may in its pages be able to fight their battles over again, and joy in the accomplishment of at least some of their early ideas, and dreams which have come true (Raynes 1921, ix).

But this aim was but half of the book's purpose, Bromley continues:

That younger members may, of reading of the "old, unhappy, far-off things  
And battles long ago," realise some of the immensity of the early struggles,  
and thereby be enthused to carry on the good work with renewed courage and  
ever greater energy (Ibid.).

He goes on to reinforce this notion of history as being the inspiration for future action.

Noting that having read the book members will feel a:

...keen desire to buckle on their own armour and perform deeds of "derring  
do" in carrying the Society to yet greater successes in the near and distant  
future (ibid.).

In the final paragraph of his foreword Bromley makes a last call to arms:

Yet we know there are yet greater heights to climb, greater events even than  
those recorded here are before us, and in humbly submitting this book to all  
our splendid members who man the iron horse or juggle with the electric  
mystery, I hope and believe that the men will be found to do credit to the  
heritage our pioneers have left to us, by fearlessly facing and overcoming all  
dangers and difficulties...(ibid., x).

The second officially sanctioned history of ASLEF was published in 1950.  
Again it was commissioned by the Union, but this time the choice of author was  
partly made with the need in mind to have:

...not only with insight, but with knowledge - concrete, detailed, intimate,  
first-hand knowledge of the work that is done and the life as it is lived, day in  
and day out, by the fraternity of the iron road (Foreword by Baty in McKillop

1950, v) (29).

The author chosen and described above, Norman McKillop, was himself a driver and an active trade unionist. Though the language deployed in the foreword to the later publication was toned down somewhat, the aim and purpose seems to have been very similar. Again there is the linking of the Union's history with the forward march of labour and social conditions, but in addition there is discussion of the progress of the grade as a body:

Consider our calling in the days of the Society's founders, when men miraculously preserved pride of craft despite appalling hours of work performed for a pittance in conditions of semi-slavery; and then read of the landmarks that one by one have been reached and passed by valiant effort and struggle...(Ibid., vi).

The paragraph continues with a list of events and battles won that reads like a regimental history; hours of work, recognition, membership, funds and holidays. Baty goes on to stress that this achievement was realised by the union drawing on its social resources:

I may be pardoned if I briefly point the moral that I believe it conveys [the Union's history]. It is, I think, that our Society owes its outstanding record of achievement to the fact that at no time has it functioned *merely as a machine*; it has been also at all times a living brotherhood of men prepared to devote themselves to the uplifting of our great craft and to the general welfare of all engaged in it (ibid., vii).

And again the appeal is made to the future and the winning of greater struggles by succeeding generations. Both of the histories seem designed to do similar things. They are attempts at a popular history that will be read by the grade and other workers. Both are packed with detailed descriptions of events, personalities and the build up of the Union in material terms. There are also justifications in both books for grade sectionalism above the general unionism of the ASRS, or later the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR). But what is possibly most important about them is the way they combine this historical purpose with a desire to inculcate or to reproduce in the grade, especially newer members of it, a sense of the occupation as a craft or calling. This is witnessed in the two forewords quoted from extensively above, but is a live and constant feature of the text in the two histories. These themes are often returned to or buttressed by the unfolding history of the grade. The historic role of the grade is implicated not only in the history of the railways but also in the improvement of conditions for the footplatemens and other grades. Both publications can be understood as being chapbooks or Whiggish histories from which the lessons of the past are absorbed by future generations.

The importance of the grade is witnessed in the way both histories, and the Union, look to George Stephenson as the 'father of the railways' and the fact that he was in effect the first engine driver by dint of his presence on the footplate of the Stockton and Darlington railway's pioneering service in 1825. Stephenson's picture appears in Raynes' book in a reproduction of an early Society emblem, there is also a drawing of an early Stephenson locomotive which appears in the latter book's frontispiece. Detailed biographical background to Stephenson are found in both



publications. In McKillop's first chapter, entitled 'The Race is Born', he specifically links the historical event with the creation of the grade:

...not only had he set in motion a new means of public transport, *but he had also brought to birth a new race of men* (McKillop 1950, 1) (Italics original).

McKillop links Stephenson's own biography with the grade and Union's history, here reference is made to:

...*The Comet*, had for a time as a driver T. W. Smith, who became an early member of the A.S.L.E.& F. It was fitting that the fate should have arranged it so; and that there should exist a direct link between Stephenson, the father of our craft, and the organisation to which we belong. It is also fitting, perhaps, that the story of Stephenson's career should be so much like that of the rise of the A.S.L.E.& F. Both reached success by the hard way. Both in the early days had to fight against prejudice and ignorance. Both had to display qualities of courage, determination and foresight in a degree surely unequalled in the nineteenth century story of progress (ibid., 3).

Both *Engines and Men* and *The Lighted Flame* are also soaked with arguments for the sectionalism of the Union. The justification offered in both revolves around the uniqueness and singularity of the grade with the implication that other grades would be unable to fully comprehend this quality. The executive early on stressed the necessity of the grade representing its own in a recruitment circular sent out by the Union:

The Rules have been framed by Enginemen and Firemen especially for your interests, the Executive duties are performed by men of your own class, your

officials are and will continue to be elected from amongst you, they are your servants, the General Secretary is an Engineman of long and practical experience, who knows full well the nature of your responsibility and anxious duties, and who has been elected by his fellow-men to take the management of their affairs (Raynes 1921, 44).

The issue of sectionalism, and the charge of selfishness had been a pertinent one between the two unions since the formation of ASLEF. There were various attempts to amalgamate the two but these usually fell on the issue of the form that the relationship would take, ASLEF favouring federation rather than outright merger (Bagwell 1963, esp. ch. 13; McKillop 1950; Raynes 1921). The Associated Society also tried to defuse suggestions of selfishness by appealing to the concept of the necessity of craft unionism as the only authentic way of representing grade sensibilities (30). The following quote from *The Lighted Flame* nicely illustrates the perceived need of separate organisation. Albert Fox of ASLEF here shares a platform with Chorlton, General Secretary of the Signalmen's and Pointsmen's Society:

“I am not going into a signal-box to interfere with Mr Chorlton and his men,” he said. “Neither am I going to allow Mr Chorlton to interfere with me and my men - because I know more about Enginemen and engines than Mr Chorlton. It is not merely a question of hours and wages with enginemen. There are a hundred and one ways in which they need protection in their calling, which are not known to other workers and which can only be taken in hand by men who have been through the mill. I have nothing disrespectful to say about other workers. They understand their work, and we allow them the

same privileges as we claim for ourselves.” (McKillop 1950, 78-79).

The question, of course, in relation to these official histories, is what impact and effect do they have on their audience? Just because they promote a particular identity of grade does not mean that there is a deterministic link between discourse and identity. Rather, I want to suggest that such histories formed part of a process, along with other factors, by which young members of the grade were socialised at the beginnings of their career. A number of the retired members of the grade who were interviewed in the research for the thesis had read *The Lighted Flame*, and several of them offered to lend me a copy of the book for background information (31). Issues of craft and skill were continually emerging in the formal interviews and in the informal discussion at other times (32). The theme is also a recurrent one in the autobiographies studied, with descriptions of the grade as a craft or calling being common (33).

For the signalling workers craft unionism has been a less attractive cause. Their own craft union, the United Pointsmen’s and Signalmen’s Society (UPSS) was established in 1880 (Bagwell 1963, ch. 13). This organisation acted mainly as a friendly society and Bagwell believes that its leadership was always more open minded over the question of co-operation than ASLEF. The UPSS always organised fewer members of the grade than the much larger ASRS. Thus the signal workers did not make the same claims to craft and calling as those on the footplate. This absence must be seen as due to a combination of the material reality of their less skilled status alongside the reluctance to engaged in a consistent mobilisation of such identities. The ASRS and its successors had little interest in stimulating such identities within the context of general unionism. Indeed it could be argued that the union has been



successful in suppressing sectionalism within its own ranks (See Bagwell 1963, 1982).

What this thesis attempts to argue is that such statements about grade, and by implication, identity on the part of the footplate workers are the outward or discursive manifestation of occupational identity and that in the normal run of events occupational identity takes on an altogether more practical sense. This distinction is itself drawn from Giddens' work on practical and discursive consciousness (Giddens 1984; see also Craib 1992; Bryant and Jary 1991). For Giddens human agency is knowledgeable about itself at both a practical, day to day, level and at the discursive level, whereby an actor can articulate what they do and why. In the former case there is an implied assumption about practical consciousness, which:

...consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression (Giddens 1984, xxiii).

In this sense, historically the footplate grades can be seen to have had a more developed sense of discursive consciousness which in turn fed back into their practical consciousness. Thus how the members of the grade 'go on' is based, in part, on their socialisation into these identities. This is equally true of all grades and occupations. The difference in the case of the footplatemen is the height to which this consciousness has been made discursive. In part this process of discursiveness and the feedback into practical consciousness is witnessed in the two histories explored above. I would argue that the effect that they have had, in combination with many other influences, is a heightening of the grade's own collective self-awareness. The

content of this awareness is the sense of history, the perception of their differences from other grades, their skilled or craft status and the struggles that have been fought to win and maintain such status. The way such knowledge is transmitted can be as direct as the actor reading one of these histories, but it is possibly more likely to come about over a much longer period where the actor is exposed to the process of socialisation into the identity of 'being' a footplateman.

Thus socialisation is understood as a process of social transmission over a long period, with knowledge about the grade, the work, the location, the company and crucially about other grades being passed down between generations (see for example Penn 1986). Although we have examined the footplate grade in the discussion of occupational identity, it is possible to argue that any railway grade will transmit identity in such a way between generations. This grade however has, partly through historical contingency and partly through design, gained a heightened sense of collective self awareness that has been nurtured and developed over time. For other grades the meaning of occupational identity may have been less discursively articulated. In part the founding of the craft union created a vehicle for such an articulation in its opposition to general unionism. Although there were other craft unions in the industry they were never as large or successful as the ASLEF or the ASRS. And the other group analysed in detail, the signalling grade, though having a strong self identity never articulated it in quite the way the footplatemen have.

Again Giddens is useful in terms of his discussion of the theory of structuration, the attempted dissolving or synthesis of the action / structure dualism. As part of such a project Giddens examines the way structures both enable and

constrain the actor. The former aspect of such a relationship is the way in which structure allows agency access to ways of behaving that would otherwise be absent, as part of the enabling element of structure. Giddens explores the role of resources:

Resources (focused via signification and legitimation) are structured properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction. Power is not intrinsically connected to the achievement of sectional interest. In this conception the use of power characterises not specific types of conduct but all action, and power is not itself a resource. Resources are media through which power is exercised, as a routine element of the instantiation of conduct in social reproduction (Giddens 1984, 15-16).

Such an understanding of social action is applicable to all occupational identities. Thus resources are structural properties that actors draw upon, reproduce and produce anew. For the purposes of this chapter what is interesting is the purchase such an understanding allows on the interpretation of grade action over time. Thus it is possible to see a grade identity as a process constituted in time and space that is both solid and open to manipulation. In the articulation of these identities, as part of the day to day work of being a railway worker, actors draw on the resources that have constituted the grade over time. These resources are themselves the product of active creation and manipulation by these same actors or their antecedents and continue to be so over time. The quality of the resource that individuals and grades can draw upon is historically contingent, and thus the ability of workers to act in a particular way at any point in time is in part their own creation, partly the product of historical

grade action and finally partly the product of historically derived social structures.

In the industry as a whole, and in certain grades in particular, the collective importance of history is essential to action. History is shot through both the relationships of work and the work itself. In terms of the latter, history is embedded in the workers' understanding of how it is to be carried out. As we have seen signal workers were trained and learnt their trade through historical allusion, by the passing on of knowledge with reference to historical incident. Such illustration was not temporally or spatially fixed. As was seen above illustration, interpretation and meaning were borrowed from events occurring on other companies which had perhaps happened many years before. Similarly for the footplate grade, history and historical allusion were important, again for understanding the job (34).

But history is also implicated in the labour process of many railway workers either directly or indirectly. By this I mean the way work is carried out with old equipment. For instance signal boxes could be a century old, and locomotives had a very long working life. As such, learning to use or work this equipment necessitated an acknowledgement of the past, fleetingly in a discursive sense, but perhaps more deeply in the practical sense. At a slightly higher level I would argue that this historical reflexivity can be witnessed in the awareness of many workers of the structure of the industry, or their particular piece of it. Firstly, this is due to the literature that has historically been produced about the industry, which is avidly read by those in the industry and which many may have engaged with before they entered railway service (35). Secondly, this historical quality is linked to the embeddedness of history in the individual. By this I mean the way in which individual actors are the

repositories of historical knowledge that at points is made discursive. These oral histories are then absorbed by the individual listening as part of their understanding of the environment in which they act and are retold to others, becoming part of the 'myths we live by' (Samuel and Thompson 1990).

What gives this phenomenon particular relevance in the industry under consideration is the combination of this developed discursive and practical sense of history with stability of employment over the very long duree. At its simplest some grades, footplate and signalling, were very stable in terms of turnover. Thus a working life may well have been spent in that grade or on the same occupational ladder. In terms of socialisation this is important because of the embeddedness of history in the individual who would be training the new recruit. For example many of the interviewees from the footplate had worked in the grade for nearly fifty years, joining the industry just before or during WW2. They were exposed to many workers who had themselves worked in the industry for up to fifty years taking historical experience of working life back to the turn of the century if not before.

For example a retirements page taken at random from the LNER staff magazine dating from 1944 offers the following: J. W. Hope, signalman at Corbridge fifty-four years service, starting at Greensfield in 1889 and Mr A. Pottage, a signalman at Norton South who retired in November 1943 with fifty years service starting as a booking lad in 1894 (36). Or from twenty-one years earlier, examples of the footplate grade: Driver Millican of Part Lane shed, Gateshead, retiring after fifty years service. This particular driver started as a cleaner in 1873, became a fireman in 1874 and a driver in 1888 (37). Finally, two notices of retirement in 1914 and 1913

respectively from workers who started their careers even earlier. Robert Nicholson who was finally to become a locomotive Inspector with the NER, and who had started as a platelayer in 1860, became a cleaner in 1866, a fireman in 1867 and in turn a driver in 1870 (38). Finally J. G. Brown of Tweedmouth shed who started in 1860 was made fireman in 1869, driver in 1872 and later went on to be a foreman (39).

The point being made is that these retirement notices are selected at random out of the columns of the respective company staff magazines. This is not to say that all workers spent their lifetimes in railway service, nor that every one would have been trained by someone of the sort of seniority displayed above. What is apparent is that there was an embedding of a sense of history within the job of many workers whose collective memory was shaped by their own experience and that of others. Thus stories and memories would become removed from their original source and become an active element in a live historical process. Raphael Samuel has talked about such a phenomenon as the 'theatres of memory'. Here he describes his thesis:

It is the argument of *Theatres of Memory*, as it is of a great deal of contemporary ethnography, that memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic...and that it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it (Samuel 1994, ix-x)

Further on he also argues for:

...the idea of history as an organic form of knowledge, and one whose sources are promiscuous, drawing not only on real-life experience but also memory

and myth, fantasy and desire; not only the chronological past of the documentary record but also the timeless one of 'tradition' (ibid., x).

What I want to suggest here is that the railway industry is a powerful example of agency as historically reflexive. Such a sense of history acted as a knowledge bank or resource from which railway workers in general and certain grades in particular were, and still are, able to draw for meaning and understanding. As such work and grade identities became invested with meaning and these allowed particular action or expectation on the part of the workforce and management. In other words, what is being described here is the historical process of attachment by the workforce to the industry. Such a relationship has an essentially autonomous quality about it, and although interest groups may try to manipulate this identity, it remains a product of the collective situated within a dynamic historical process.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the creation and reproduction of the industry's workforce, and has concentrated specifically on the signalling and footplate grades. It has been suggested that these grades were the product both of management manipulation and by an active participation of the workers themselves, to paraphrase E. P. Thompson 'It was present at its own making' (Thompson 1980a, 8). This activity is understood here as being formed or predicated on a complexity of social forces and cultural forms with the implicit understanding of the result as not a homogenous greyness but a witnessable similarity within a complexity of difference. Thus no two accounts of railway or grade work, be it in the context of oral history or autobiography, will be the same. Instead what is suggested here is an intelligibility of

meaning emergent from doing similar work in very different settings.

Classical theory, especially with reference to the division of labour and occupation, was employed to explore the tension within an analysis that saw the creation of new forms of work as alienating and less creative, and yet at the same time as implicated in the possibility of the creation and inferring of meaning. This discussion of occupation as a site for meaning was then used to furnish an understanding of the grade identification in the railway industry. It was suggested that certain grades, because of an historically privileged position within the division of labour and labour process, were able to mobilise such work identification as a resource to claim particular privilege. It was further suggested that this identification was itself an historical process that served still further to buttress that privilege. Giddens' notion of resources and reflexivity makes intelligible such a process, as the making discursive of what is usually the content of practical consciousness. It is suggested here that the act of making discursive identity feeds back into the practical level and in turn shapes future action.

This conceptualisation of the relationship between practical and discursive consciousness as being a two-way process is placed alongside the specificity of the industry with what I have suggested is an already highly articulated sense of the past. As part of production and reproduction railway workers draw on the past, and this is coupled to the generational stability over the long duree of the industry. Thus occupational socialisation took place in circumstances where history was embedded not only in the labour process but also in the individual and collective worker. Finally, it was argued that occupational identities and cultures were the product of a



series of influences over time. They are understood as the product of an active historical process and are therefore not independent variables that can be manipulated to suit a particular interest.

## Notes to Chapter 2

1. The concept of the aristocracy of labour further complicates this discussion with its insertion into the debate of a group of workers who gain a great deal of meaning from their work. See for example Gray, R. (1981) *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-century Britain c. 1850-1914*, London, MacMillan; Hobsbawm, E. J. (1986) *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson; Stedman Jones, G. (1983) *Languages of Class: Studies in English working class history 1832-1982*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
2. Weber's interest in occupation can be seen in his discussion of the methodological issues associated with researching them. See Eldridge, J. E. T. (ed.) (1970) *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*, London, Nelson University Paperbacks, 103-155.
3. For a discussion of this aspect of Weber's work see Marcuse, H. (1988) 'Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber', *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, London, Free Association Press.
4. See in particular Burke's critique of the ignorance of contemporary society juxtaposed with the wisdom of sedimented generations of knowledge Burke, E. (1986) *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, London, Penguin, 194-195.
5. In January 1948 a total of 641,000 people were employed by the B.R.B. Gourvish, T. R. (1986) *British Railways 1948-73: A Business History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 99.

6. For a discussion of the influence in France of military method see Stein, M. B. (1978) 'The Meaning of Skill: The Case of the French Engine-Drivers, 1837-1917', *Politics and Society*, 8, 3-4, 399-427.
7. Cross-grade transfers were not unknown but the individual usually experienced some form of opposition from both the grade they left and that which was being joined. For an account of a footplateman joining the ranks of the signalling grade see Gasson, H. (1973) *Firing Days: Reminiscences of a Great Western Fireman*, Oxford, Oxford Publishing Company; Gasson, H. (1981) *Signalling Days: Final Reminiscences of a Great Western Railwayman*, Oxford, Oxford Publishing Company, esp. chapter 1 'The Parting'.
8. Drivers were usually, but not necessarily, older than their mate. Such was the variation in popularity between sheds, even in the same area, that sometimes anomalies did occur. It was not completely unknown for workers to retire while still in the grade of fireman, never having had the seniority to make the position of driver's .
9. This idea of shed reputation is important in understanding the essentially moral quality in work relations. To transgress expected norms of behaviour could and did lead to sanctions being imposed. This seems to figure tacitly in many autobiographies of the two grades.
10. Only a qualified driver was officially allowed to actually drive a train but in reality most firemen gained experience through being given control of the engine by their drivers. Good drivers were seen as those who regularly allowed the fireman a

'turn'. Such a practice was ignored by supervisors and managers as it was recognised that this was custom and practice.

11. No two steam locomotives were the same, even if they were identical in terms of design. In addition to their individual characteristics the quality of its performance was also a factor of how far away from a boiler wash out, routine maintenance or a full overhaul it was. Factors such as type of coal and water used as well as driving and firing technique were also crucial. Almost any footplateman's autobiography will dwell on this subject.

12. A report from the secretary of Hull LNER MIC of 1923 gives an account of the kind of subject matter covered: 'Lubrication, the Westinghouse Brake, Superheat, the Vacuum Brake, the Control of the Valve from the Footplate and Rules and Regulations for Enginemen'. The article goes on to note that the branch has a membership of 120 with weekly attendance of between 70-80 drivers and firemen. *NER Magazine* 1923, 13: 152: 220.

13. The term 'Passed' refers to the fact that the individual cleaner, fireman or driver was passed or qualified to undertake the work but was not doing that work all the time. Only after a certain number of turns or shifts (over 300) actually doing the work would the worker be fully rated at the new status. At certain times, wartime especially, the new rate would be won quickly, but in times of slow promotion it could take many years.

14. The term 'links' refers to the system of work organisation of the footplate grades. Pools of work would be arranged and pairs of workers would work their way through the roster of that link until they got promoted to the next one. The links were

usually arranged with higher paying, better jobs, in the higher links. Mileage payment were made on many companies after workers went over a certain distance. This could add a lot of money to the wage if the worker was engaged in express working.

15. For details of working conditions and the presentation of them by reformers and their opponents see Select Committee on Railway Servants (Hours of Labour), House of Commons, Parliamentary Papers 1890-91 Vol. xvi, 1-99.

16. For an account of socialisation into skilled identities see; Penn, R. (1986) 'Socialisation into Skilled Identities', unpublished paper to the Labour Process Conference, Aston University. See also Fraser, R. (ed.) (1968) *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, London, Penguin.

17. In addition to Bradshaw's excellent example, accounts of being a box boy can also be read in; Burke, M. (Un-dated) *Signalman*, Truro, Bradford Barton; Newbould, D. A. (1985) *Yesterday's Railwayman*, Poole, Oxford Publishing Company. In addition the author was a box boy before becoming a signalman on the London Underground and recognises a commonality of experience with such accounts.

18. The footplate grade, or at least the drivers seem to fit all the criteria for membership of the Labour Aristocracy. What is interesting about the drivers as members of such a group is their lack of formal craft status: See Hobsbawm, E. J. (1986) *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson. For a wider discussion of the importance of respectability in Victorian society see; Thompson, F. M. L (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Britain, 1830-1900*, London, Fontana. Also Stedman-Jones, G. (1992)

*Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*, London, Penguin.

19. For an example of mobility within a railway career at a time of corporate expansion see Revill, G. (1994) 'Working the System: journeys through corporate culture in the "railway age"', *Society and Space*, 12: 705-725, esp. 715. Also see below for examples of mobility within the NER.

20. For a qualitative accounts of living in railway towns see Strangleman, T. E. (1996) 'Making their own history: The importance of working class autobiography for the study of railway workshops', unpublished paper to Forging a Past: Railway Workshops in Historical Perspective Conference, National Railway Museum, York, 14th November.

21. 'What becomes of Old Engine Drivers' Railway Herald Magazine, III: 209, June 1897. Cited in McKenna, F. (1976) 'Victorian Railway Workers', *History Workshop Journal*, 1: Spring, 317-338.

22. Report of Select Committee on Accidents on Railway, 1858. Evidence of J. Beattie. Cited in Kingsford, *ibid.*, 77.

23. For examples of the way in which Foucault's ideas have been used in industrial sociology see Jermier, J. et al (eds.) (1994) *Resistance and Power in Organisations*, London, Routledge; For an overview of criticisms of such moves see Thompson, P. and Ackroyd, S. (1995) 'All Quiet on the Workplace Front? A Critique of Recent Trends in British Industrial Sociology', *Sociology*, 29, 4, 615-633; Specifically in terms of the railway industry see Edwards, P. K. and Whitston, C. (1994) 'Disciplinary Practice: A Study of Railways in Britain, 1860-1988', *Work*,

*Employment and Society*, 8, 3, 317-338; Savage, M. (forthcoming) 'Discipline, Surveillance and the 'Career': Employment on the Great Western Railway 1832-1914', in McKinlay, A. and Starkey, K. (eds.) *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory*, London, Sage.

24. Most of the autobiographies of railway workers will give such examples, probably because they represent important and memorable events in a working life. They also appear regularly in the interviews carried out. Joe Brown, a retired driver from the North East told me that he had been involved in a house move using railway equipment and staff who were on duty at the time. Both staff and management benefited from such arrangements. In my own career in the industry I was involved in numerous cover-ups, once or twice my own mistakes, but more usually those of drivers.

25. For a study of the development of rule-based discipline in the industry see; Hudson, K. (1970) *Working to rule: Railway workshop rules: a study of industrial discipline*, Bath, Adams & Dart.

26. The view of general unionism's radicalism juxtaposed with the conservatism of craft union has been qualified since the Webb's time by, amongst others, Hinton, J. (1973) *The First Shop Stewards Movement*, London, George Allen and Unwin. Criticism of the Webb's thesis is also witnessed in the disputation of the concept that only permanent unions represent 'proper' trade unionism, see Musson, A. E. (1972) *British Trade Unions 1800-1875*, London, Macmillan.

27. Gupta, P. S. (1966) 'Railway Trade Unionism in Britain c 1880-1900', *Economic History Review*, 19, 1. notes the way the ASRS was embedded in the North

East in contrast to London. He points out that the union had built links with others in the region. Irving, R. J. (1976) *The North Eastern Railway Company 1870-1914; an economic history*, Leicester, Leicester University Press also reflects on the way trade unionism in the region helped to foster it in the railway industry. Again this is partly due to the way the board of the NER was representative of regional industrial interest and was therefore used to trade unionism.

28. The Railwayman's Catechism, Sept. 17th, 1875, Cited in Gupta, P. S. (1960) *History of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants 1871-1913*, unpublished D. Phil Thesis, Oxford, 23.

29. Foreword by J. G. Baty, General Secretary of ASLEF 1948-56 in McKillop, op.cit. v-vii.

30. For a comparison with France where there was a merging of craft and general unionism in the industry see Stein, op. cit.

31. Several interviewees offered to give or lend me *The Lighted Flame* as well as other material relating to the unions. The tradition of the Union commissioning its own history is continuing with the writing of a third official full length popular history by C. Dave Wilson (1996). The Union contacted him after seeing his book *Forward! The Revolution in the Lives of the Footplatemen 1962-1996*, Far Thrupp, Sutton, discussion with the author 28/1/97. In contrast the NUR/ RMT has generally been content to let academics write its history see Bagwell, P. S. (1963) *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen*, London, George Allen and Unwin.



32. Formal, semi-structured interviews were carried out in the home of the interviewee. Several were undertaken with two retired workers. In addition, many visits were made to a retired railway workers social club in Newcastle where discussion was less formal.

33. The phrases 'craft' or 'calling' crops up in many of the autobiographies of footplatemen. The best example of this, along with a heavy religious theme can be seen in Mason, F. (1992) *Life Adventure in Steam: A Merseyside driver remembers*, Birkenhead, Countrywise. Other descriptions of the trade include 'cult', 'race' and 'brotherhood'. Discussion of craft in similar publications for the signalling grade is much rarer although most discuss skill.

34. Most drivers would have a practical understanding of locomotive development. This is witnessed in the union histories. McKillop, N. (1950) *The Lighted Flame*, London, Thomas Nelson, for example has two chapters devoted to their development entitled 'Mostly Locomotives' and 'Locomotive Design'. Again almost without exception the autobiographies of footplatemen have accounts of locomotive design. Very few signallers go into the technicality of the equipment they used.

35. There is an extraordinarily large range of literature, including books and magazines on railways covering all aspects of the industry past and present. This is widely read by current and retired workers. For a discussion of this phenomena see Kellett, J. B. (1969b) 'Writing on Victorian Railways: An Essay in Nostalgia', *Victorian Studies*. 13: 1: 90-96; Strangleman (1996) op.cit..

36. *LNER Magazine* 34, 1, January 1944, 14.
37. *LNER/NER Magazine* 13, 147, March 1923, 78.
38. *NER Magazine* 4, 44, August 1914, 187.
39. *NER Magazine* 3, 25, January 1913, 20. These last two cases are testimony to the speed of promotion in the Nineteenth Century railway industry.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Organisation and Management of the Railway Industry**

## **1948-1979**

### **Introduction**

This chapter gives an account of the structure, organisation and character of management within the British railway industry between 1948, the date of nationalisation, and the watershed year of 1979. The continuity with previous organisational strategies and styles at all levels, described in chapter one, is noted. It opens with an analysis of the process of nationalisation itself and puts into context the ideas and forces that inspired it. Alongside this idea of continuity, stress will be placed on the subsequent and frequent changes made to the organisation as various managements and governments attempted to grapple with the fundamental structural weakness of the undertaking. The aim is also to illuminate the character of management within the organisation, not only at the top of BR, but at middle and lower management levels. To that end this chapter will draw on autobiographical and biographical material of various chairmen, managers and supervisors whose careers were either wholly or partly contained within the period. Alongside such issues will be placed some of the problems that management in the period had to cope with: experience and effect of the long boom, rising wages, the problem of productivity, government interference, contradictory aims and objectives, in addition to almost continuous waves of organisational structural change and haemorrhaging of traffic.

## Nationalisation 1948

As part of the post-war Labour Government's commitment to public ownership of certain key industries, the railway industry was nationalised on 1st January 1948. As such it became British Railways with the Railway Executive (RE) at its head. This Executive was itself part of a larger organisation, the British Transport Commission (BTC). The BTC was given the role of a holding company for all of the nationalised inland transport undertakings, which like the railways, had entered public ownership from the beginning of 1948. The RE was therefore the largest of five such executives under the umbrella of the BTC, the others being for London Transport, Docks and Inland Waterways, Road Transport and finally Hotels. The BTC itself, based at 55 Broadway in London, reported to the Minister of Transport. Below the RE was a series of six area boards: Eastern, North Eastern, London Midland, Scottish, Southern and Western roughly based on the Grouping companies of 1923 (Bonavia 1971, pt. 2; 1981, 14). The BTC, and therefore each of the executives, was given the rather broad and vague objective 'to provide...an efficient, adequate, economical and properly integrated system of public inland transport' with the aim of breaking even 'taking one year with another' (Pollins 1971, 168).

What then lay behind the decision to nationalise, and why did the structure take the form it did? Calls to nationalise the railway industry had been made in union and other circles since before the turn of the century, and as we saw in chapter one the state had allowed itself, under Gladstone's 1844 Railway Act, the ability to take control of the industry (1). The Labour Party had made a broad commitment to public

ownership in its adoption of Clause IV, as part of the revision of its constitution in 1918 (Pelling 1976, 43-44; Miliband 1987, ch. 3). When the decision to nationalise the industry did take place it was based on several factors, not simply on this pre-existing, and rather vague intention embodied in Clause IV. The policy emerged firstly, out of the combination of the experience and outcome of the war, with its legacy of massive destruction and associated backlog of repairs. Secondly, there was the growing popularity of the idea of a planned economy and the need to ensure that economies of scale were realised in various sectors of the economy. Nationalisation was not therefore simply the realisation of a socialist commitment to public ownership made thirty years previously, but rather it was the meshing of the pragmatic needs of the period, the growing consensus of economic opinion as to the best business form, and political commitment to public ownership (Cunningham 1993; Millward and Singleton 1995; Saville 1993; Tomlinson 1982, ch. 4).

The lack of ideological influence on the nationalisation programme is noteworthy and important for understanding both why the process took the form it did, and, as Tomlinson has suggested, partly explains its subsequent lack of success. Faced with the problem of how the nationalised industries were to be administered, the Labour Government, in the absence of any other, lent heavily on the concept of the public corporation. This model had proved successful in the pre-war period with its adoption for the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) of 1933 (see Barker and Robbins 1974, chs. 15 and 16). The aim was to create a unit that was publicly accountable but not under the direct control of ministers. In addition this solution was favoured because it was not representative of interest groups. Saville (1993) has

argued that Morrison's preference was for such corporations to be run by businessmen and technical experts rather than local and national politicians or representatives of the workers employed within the industry (2).

Although there were some established models to follow, such as the LPTB and the BBC, the nationalisations after the war were driven by organisational pragmatism. Little in the way of detailed policy on the form and content of public ownership had actually been thought through. This situation is illustrated in a quote from Manny Shinwell discussing the situation he inherited in the coal industry:

I found that nothing practical and tangible existed. There were some pamphlets, some memoranda produced for private circulation, and nothing else. I had to start with a clean desk (Shinwell, quoted in Thompson and Hunter 1973, 6).

And Saville notes this was true for most if not all of the new undertakings:

There were few detailed blueprints for the conduct of nationalised industries. The Fabian Society had extolled some ideas, as had the Labour Research Department, but they were hardly prescribed reading for Ministers, civil servants and businessmen. The *New Statesman and Nation* had much on nationalisation, but little on detail (Saville 1993, 43).

Tomlinson has powerfully criticised this paucity of ideas on so central an issue, arguing that the assumption of many on the left was that the legal form of ownership above all else was crucial to socialised industry. The result was that little if any detailed attention was given to the form and content of the relationship between management and workers within the 'socialised' firm (Tomlinson 1982). Given this

lack of a clear conceptualisation about the form public ownership should take it is not altogether surprising that there was much continuity between the pre-war private and post-war public undertakings. In many ways this can be seen as the logical extension of the wartime practice of seconding technical, business and labour expertise, with sectarian advantage supposedly laid aside in the national interest. Gourvish discusses this continuity in organisational personnel:

The Railway Executive of 1948 was essentially a body of experienced railwaymen of the old school. Their average age on appointment was 57. General Sir William Slim...was the only full-time member with no prior knowledge of railways. The others had all joined the industry before the age of 21 and had accumulated an average of 40 years' service by 1948. With the exception of Michael Barrington-Ward and John Landale Train... all of the group had entered the industry straight from school and had thereafter worked for only one company (Gourvish 1986, 35-37).

The only concession in the direction of workers' control was in the appointment of W. P. Allen, formally of ASLEF, onto the board of the Railway Executive and John Benstead, of the NUR, to that of the BTC. Both these men resigned from their respective union posts to guard against conflicts of interests, again showing the commitment to consensus (*ibid.*, 123-124). There was also the genuine commitment on the part of BTC, along with other nationalised undertakings, to be seen as good or even model employers (see Pendleton and Winterton 1993, 1-2).

The employment of so many managers from the old companies is easy to appreciate in the circumstances of postwar Britain but it entailed, as was the case in

other industries, the allocation of jobs to those who had been and still were actively hostile to the concept of public ownership. Pearson, who had been an officer in the LMS and later went on to become a member of the BTC, describes in his autobiography the drawing-up and mounting of a campaign of opposition against plans to nationalise the industry (Pearson 1967, ch. 7). A similar account of the opposition to the Labour Government's programme can be seen in Elliot's memoirs, although the motives for the campaign were perhaps somewhat more material than ideological:

It was decided, rightly in my opinion, to launch a public campaign against nationalisation, the real objective of which was to obtain the best compensation for the Companies' shareholders who, it was felt, would be at risk if the Boards agreed to nationalisation without a struggle (Elliot 1982, 66).

These same officers and board members of the old grouping companies were the very people who now populated the new Railway Executive. Elliot tells of the misgivings about the new organisation that were shared by many in it including Eustace Missenden, former Southern Railway General Manager and first Chairman of the RE!:

Missenden told me privately that he heartily disliked the whole thing [Nationalisation and its organisational structure]. As Chairman, he was merely 'primus inter pares' with his colleagues on the Executive, and in no sense Chief General Manager of British Railways. He added that he had made his mind up to retire as soon as possible....The whole thing was bound to



break down sooner or later, and I should try not to get involved (Elliot 1982, 68).

Elliot, who succeeded Missenden as General Manager at the Southern and later as the first Chief Regional Officer of the Southern Region, was also offered the chairmanship of the RE on Missenden's retirement in 1951. He was himself surprised by the offer from a Labour government, admitting to Barnes, the Minister of Transport:

'I am not a Socialist. In fact I was a member of the Carlton Club until 1948 and resigned only because I didn't think it was right to accept a major post in a nationalised industry and remain a member of a Conservative club' (ibid., 80).

It is clear from the rest of Elliot's account of this process that neither Barnes nor Attlee saw his personal politics as any barrier to his appointment. There was, therefore, at the top of the RE a group of men who had actively opposed the nationalisation of the industry, believed that the form it had taken was flawed, and even doubted its long term survival. As we have seen, the decision to ensure a degree of continuity was based on the pragmatism and specificity of the period, but it also has to be placed in the political context of the time. Within the labour movement there was hostility to the idea of workers' control. This can be explained partly by the idea that such control would conflict with the aims of a centrally planned economy but also speaks of the elitist fear of the 'workers' within the Labour Party, and, more broadly, in part of the electorate. Attlee's administration aimed at consensus, and not at representing particular interest groups, in spite of the rhetoric of 'being the masters now', thus class war was not on the agenda. Therefore ownership of the industry,

rather than the way it was run was seen to be the crucial point (3).

Turning to the financial arrangements of nationalisation there was even greater scope for the pessimism felt by the senior members of the organisations. The main problem for both the BTC and the RE was the arrangement by which the shareholders of the former companies were to be compensated. The basic issue was that in order to effect a smooth transition to the public sector the shareholders were given high levels of compensation, far and away above what their assets were worth (see Bagwell 1982, chs. 3 and 4; Gourvish 1986, ch. 1). This situation was made worse by the fact that the successor organisation had to live with the interest payments on this debt, still further compounded by the financial aims and objectives set for them by the government. In short the railway was expected to provide a public service at as cheap a rate as possible. It achieved this by cross-subsidy of services, thereby not covering the costs on many of them. Partly because of this public service objective, the RE was not building up sufficient funds to renew its assets and pay its share of the inherited interest charges. This had the effect of forcing the RE, and all the public corporations, into the more expensive strategy of borrowing capital for investment rather than financing it out of profits, thereby adding still further to future interest payments. This situation was made worse later on by the use of the nationalised industries as blunt instruments of economic control, as part of successive post-war governments' management of the economy, coupled with the downturn in traffic levels (Thompson and Hunter 1973; Foreman-Peck and Millward 1994; Saville 1993).

## The Experience of Management

The continuity in senior personnel was also mirrored at lower levels in the new organisation. For many managers and supervisors in the industry there was little initial change with the onset of public ownership. Frank Hick, who had begun his career on the NER in 1922 and was later to become Operating Chief of the North Eastern Region described his feelings about the transition:

Strangely, this did not make much impression on me and did not change in any way my outlook towards my work...and that is how many of my contemporaries felt (Hick 1991, 74).

Likewise Frank Ferneyhough, who had been a supervisor before nationalisation noted his feelings:

Most of us in the railways wondered anxiously what would happen. Nothing did, at least not immediately of any significance. The trains still ran. Locomotives still chuffed, and ticket collectors clipped the tickets. Changes could come only slowly, and the immediate impact was sure to be far greater in the management structure than at stations, depots and works (Ferneyhough 1983, 153).

Management remained deeply embedded within the industry, we saw in the previous chapter how generations of railway workers were socialised into grade and industrial identity and this is no less true for those higher in the organisation. As was seen in chapter one many managers were either recruited from the shopfloor or were socialised and promoted through a system of management training that valued a 'hands on' approach. At its most formalised this type of training was realised in the

Traffic Apprentice scheme which, as we saw above, was instigated by the NER before the turn of the century (Bell 1951; Irving 1976). Such was the perceived success of this method of training future managers that it was continued by the LNER and formed the basis of BR management training, used until relatively recently. Many of the senior managers in the latter organisation who had spent their whole career on the railway were a product of this scheme, which relied heavily on trainees doing 'real jobs' on the ground. This empiricism was also replicated by those managers who were promoted through the ranks rather than benefiting from the accelerated promotion of the formalised scheme (4).

Common to both career ladders was the way in which the individual concerned was socialised, or embedded, in the culture of the railways, becoming a 'railwayman'. Most of the autobiographies considered here reflect at some point on the idea of 'being a railwayman', and it is obviously done with a sense of pride. The importance of this for my overall thesis, and this chapter in particular, is the access that it allows us to understand the relationships within different management levels as well as between management, supervisors and workers. It is argued here that what built up over time was a mutual respect between management and workers over some aspects of work organisation. This is not to deny the divisions between such groups as a result of their contradictory positions in the employment relationship (Brown 1988). What this does, however, imply is the importance of charting the contours of such relationships in grounded examples, finding that such objective divisions in reality are mediated by historical and subjective factors on both sides.

Such an issue is encountered in Roberts' discussion of the need for a theory of the missing subject, rather than reducing individual action to individual psychology or reifying it to a property of structural force. Following the work of Abrams (1982), Roberts attempts to secure an understanding of subjectivity through 'the empirical study of "becoming" of identities and societies' (Abrams quoted in Roberts 1993, 126-127). Thus an adequate conceptualisation of the employment relationship is dependent on an understanding of situated, historically mediated action made accessible by detailed excavation of work culture and interaction.

In the railway industry, the employment relationship and the respective identities of workers and management were the products of generations of socialisation playing on the actor. Their understanding of this relationship was therefore mediated through the lens of their experience of joining and acting within a specific context, at a particular historical point. This is not to deny the complexity of factors influencing individual identity, rather we must recognise the multifaceted relationship between, in this case, management and their work, made intelligible through empirical research. Factors that need to be addressed within such an exploration would include class, age, and the point of the life cycle that the actor was at.

In some cases the sort of early, or pre-socialisation into the industry for managers and supervisors is common to that experienced by many railway workers. Awareness of, and enthusiasm for, the industry was an important part of their decision to pursue a career on the railways. Here Frank Ferneyhough describes his early experience:

Virtually from birth, in all my innocence and ignorance, I was hooked and caught, bound hand and foot, gagged and brainwashed by the vivid sights and sounds of steam railways. They ingratiated themselves into my sense and invaded my very bloodstream along with mother's milk. Against such infiltration, what chance was there for a chaste and unprotected child! (Ferneyhough 1983, 20).

This particular autobiography is of value for the sense in which this interest in, and respect for, workers in the industry stays with Ferneyhough throughout his career as a supervisor and manager. Here he describes the awe in which he held drivers when he was a Station Master, and therefore technically in charge of them:

Engine drivers can be formidable fellows. When necessary, they can cut you down to size by doing nothing - just ignoring your very existence in a deep, dark grey, stony silence. For me they were a very special breed. Not like ordinary chaps (*ibid.*, 87).

Such an attitude also stresses the importance of situating such encounters within a framework that recognises the centrality of the individual's point at the life cycle. Ferneyhough was himself appointed to his post while he was in his mid-twenties, while the grade he is so obviously in awe of here contained workers who could be in their mid-forties, fifties or sixties. Thus Ferneyhough's relationship with such men is permeated by respect for their grade and experience as well as emotion that would be recognised outside industry, simple respect for age. Thus there is a moral quality to the intersubjective relationships between grades and management and supervisors. This element of respect is also reflected in other autobiographies, notably Hick's, who

describes his thoughts about the members relief signalling grade he managed in the York area during W.W.II:

Their knowledge of the signalling and safety regulations, at that time in many different boxes, and their ability to work the Morse single needle telegraph instrument were fundamental to the job, and I constantly marvelled at their contribution to the running of the railway...A highly intelligent set of men, they needed careful handling, but once you got their confidence they proved to be the most loyal and supportive bunch of fellows one could ever wish to meet (Hick 1991, 56 and 59).

It is clear from many such accounts of managerial life in the industry that much store was put on being a 'railwayman', that is to say developing an attitude to the work that valued the specificity of the work above that of being a 'manager'. Elliot, who had had a military background before joining the Southern Railway, speaks here of his 'conversion' after joining the Operating Department:

So it was that by degrees, almost sub-consciously, I found myself thinking as a railwayman. How I did it I don't really know, but of this I am sure, that without the patient instruction of those older and far senior to me, I should have been sunk without trace (Elliot 1982, 45).

In Fiennes book we get a series of descriptions of his respect for railwaymen, and clearly he considers himself one of them, one of his own self-imposed rules being 'Behave to railwaymen as a railwayman' (Fiennes 1973, 30). In the same book's introduction Fiennes discusses his own relationship to his work:

The story is about someone who came slowly and reluctantly to grips with the basic realities of a railway job and against all expectations and reason was absorbed by the magic of the thing (ibid., vii).

For many of the managers quoted in this chapter, one of the main stimuli for this respect (and for the obverse from the workforce) was the experience of war. In all the books W.W.II is mentioned, often given its own chapter, and obviously had a profound effect on the actor's behaviour and attitudes towards those they were already, or would later be in charge of. Here Hick again pays tribute to railway workers but in the context of war:

I can only say again and again what valiant chaps those trainmen were, as indeed were all railwaymen working at ground level during those hazardous and uncomfortable days (Hick 1991, 55).

He later describes the aftermath of the bombing raid on York in April 1942 which saw the railway targeted and the station suffer a direct hit:

Soon we had to help the staff from the station who knew of our hide-out and who were in various stages of injury and shock. My friend John Grant appeared, dishevelled, battered and bruised, black and grim, unable to understand how he had escaped from a totally collapsed building...Everyone who could help rallied round, and outside Inspectors acted as additional support in whatever direction they were needed...a philosophical mentality developed, and people just 'had to get on with it' (ibid., 61-62).

Gerard Fiennes, who had also personally experienced the Baedeker attack described above, reflects here on the experience of war in teaching him his trade:



...that railways and railwaymen have a great scope and a great gift for improvisation...we tend to forget that in 1939 and 1940 we made radical changes to the freight working through the controls at an hour or two's notice, and that we followed it up with a Train Circular next day. So I learnt how to improvise, how to clear or get round - mentally and physically - accidents, traffic jams in yards, terminals and lines. I have never been frightened of any traffic situation since (Fiennes 1973, 25).

This experience of war and the respect it engendered could be double-edged, with the work practices essential to war time difficult to combat in the post-war period. Hardy describes the tension that management faced, in his case seven years after the end of hostilities:

...in many large passenger and freight terminals, marshalling yards and locomotive depots, practices grew up, again as a matter of expedience, that would never have been tolerated before the war and should never have been allowed to persist when peace returned. Only too well do I know the patience, determination and, dare I say it, the degree of courage needed to eliminate the bribery and corruption that had been used to get work done under the dreadful wartime conditions in London, particularly during the bombardments (Hardy 1989, 19).

Thus management in the post war period bore a heavy legacy of tradition mixed with the experience of war. What had developed was a deep sense of the management within the industry as being part of it, not as a discrete practice undertaken by a separate group. This is not to say that the industry was closed to new

ideas or that training was completely empirically driven, and the Traffic Apprentices scheme was seen as an excellent example of management pedagogy. Rather what is argued here is that management in the industry were implicated in its very practice by the process of socialisation, training and managerial practice. What the memoirs from wartime exemplify is the moral aspect of these social relationships, whereby industrial relations were overlain with personal ones. Hardy's account shows the very real problems that this presented for management in the post-war period in that work practice had taken a particular form during the dark days of war when those employed in the industry had worked heroically. It was difficult to tackle these after the war precisely because the same actors on both sides of the employment relationship were implicated in them (5).

It must also be acknowledged that much of the possible tension between capital and labour was defused or redirected by the elaborate form of industrial relations that had been a feature of the industry since the first decade of the century. This had grown into a multi-layered procedure with scope for discussion at local area, regional and national level. This system was itself coupled with a deeply embedded set of rules and regulations that provided great stability in the industry during the period (Edwards and Whitston 1994; Ferner 1988; Gourvish 1986, 120-133; Pendleton 1991a, 1991b).

## **Changing Directions**

With the return to power of the Conservatives in 1951 the structure of the industry was changed again. The period witnessed a privatisation of much of the road transport element of the BTC empire, an area that had been heavily invested in. As

part of the reforms carried out by this administration the BTC took direct control of the railways centrally, abolishing the Railway Executive. The aim of this move was to strip out an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy while devolving power to the regional level (see Gourvish 1986, pt. 2; Bagwell 1982, ch. 4). In reality these revisions did nothing of the kind, with even greater levels of centralisation emerging. In part this was due to the appointment of Sir Brian Robinson, a former General in the British army, to the post of Chairman of the BTC. As part of this change Robinson introduced a military-style chain of command system which further removed power from lower levels of the organisation, concentrating it in the centre.

1955 saw the advent of a long awaited investment programme in the industry, the Modernisation Plan, which aimed at the complete renewal of the rolling stock and much of the infrastructure of the industry over a period of fifteen years costing £1,240 million (Gourvish 1986, ch. 8; see also Bonavia 1981, ch. 11). This plan was to see the complete eradication of steam traction from the railway, to be replaced by electric or diesel motive power. This investment has usually been seen by most commentators as wasted on ill-thought out and untried designs, and on projects that were decades too late (see Fiennes 1973). In essence, some have argued that the Modernisation Plan attempted to replace, like for like, what existed before the plan, the thinking being that if only the industry could update rolling stock and other facilities it could compete effectively with the road transport industry and the private car.

Gourvish has attempted to be more balanced in his account of the plan and the investment that flowed from it. He points out the kinds of pressures that were on the

industry and, by extension, its management. In essence the railway was still attempting to provide a national public service at low cost, while at the same time it was under political pressure which pushed the industry in contradictory directions. On the one hand, there was an expectation of breaking even and investing wisely, and on the other, criticism if any attempt was made to rationalise or close parts of the system. As Gourvish says:

The social service aspect of railway marketing remained firmly in the minds of most senior railway officers, and it was encouraged by the public clamour whenever closure proposals were announced (Gourvish 1986, 209).

In understanding the motivation for investment, or any type of management decision on the railway we must be aware of the complex and ultimately contradictory influences at work. Again what must be stressed here is the historic legacy that the nationalised industry continued to bear. Many of the lines and facilities on them were duplicated elsewhere and were the result of competitive pressures on the industry in the Nineteenth Century. These investments were effectively made redundant, or surplus in the aftermath of the Grouping of 1923. Although there were some initiatives to remove excess capacity, efforts in this direction were hampered by external pressures: political pressure from local MPs, from the Ministry of Transport, from local residents or customers and finally from within the industry both at shopfloor and management level. Thus the financial state of many of the industry's services was known about some years before they were publicly exposed in the Beeching plan (see below). The tactic that BR relied on was to cross-subsidise these loss-making services by maximising traffic on profitable ones. Put simply, this meant

the maximising of gross income in order to maximise net profits. In many ways this was a tactic that railway managers had long used, and Hick in his autobiography, discusses the situation on the LNER in the inter-war period:

The measure of success or otherwise was, I believe, simply an estimation of receipts taken from the number of passengers carried by each train. No real costings were then available - a full train was a good train (Hick 1991, 44).

The point was that in the absence of detailed costing statistics it was assumed that an extra full, or well loaded passenger or freight train would add to the profit, or at least not make a loss for the organisation as a whole. The problem was that these extra or marginal services may well have been uneconomic when the full nature of their costs was exposed. The historical difficulty for railway management, to this day, is that so many of the costs for one particular traffic are shared with others and that much of the capital deployed is sunk, thus the 'true' cost is not amenable to simple calculation. It was this aspect of railway economics that was exposed in the critique offered by Beeching and others (Hardy 1989; Joy 1973; Pollins 1971).

While the strategy of maximising gross profit could work in an era of expanding traffic, its weakness was exposed with the rise of road-based competition and the growth in the level of rail industry operating expenditure. As Gourvish has highlighted, both sides of the railway's business were weakening in the 1950s with the share of total passenger mileage falling from 21 per cent 1951-53 to 14 per cent in 1960-62. Likewise on the freight side of the business in Britain ton-mileage carried fell by 23 per cent with market share falling from 45 to 29 per cent (Gourvish 1986, 173). The decline in these results led government to look for new solutions to the

industry's problems.

### **The Beeching Era**

The early years of the 1960s saw yet more reorganisation of the transport industry in Britain with the passing of the 1962 Transport Act (see Bonavia 1971, pt. 3). This saw the abolition of the BTC, and with it any pretence of planned co-ordination of inland transport originally envisaged under the terms of the 1947 Act. For the railway industry there was to be a simplified structure with the creation of the British Railways Board (BRB). The spur to this change were the growing losses by the industry and dissatisfaction with the organisational structure within it. To head the new Board, the Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, chose to appoint Dr. Richard Beeching, an industrial chemist with ICI. His only connection with the railway industry had been as a member of the Stedeford Committee set up to examine the organisation of the industry in 1960, he being there because of his outside business expertise (Bonavia 1971, 101-127; Gourvish 1986, ch. 9).

Marples' aim in appointing Beeching as Chairman, and in the reorganisation, was to set the industry clearer commercial directives by freeing it of historical obligations. There was also the desire to bring in new managerial talent to the industry. The new Chairman published his ideas on the future of the industry in the *Report on the Reshaping of British Railways* of March 1963, popularly known as the Beeching Report (6). In very basic terms the report attempted to identify those areas that were loss making and those that made profit, or which with the right level of investment could be made profitable. Beeching's aim was to rid the railway of those traffics that it could not carry profitably, concentrating instead on fast passenger

services and bulk high speed freight, in other words play to the inherent strengths of the industry. As part of this process, the report identified those areas which were to be cut, including the widespread closure of many lines, services and stations. Here Hardy, a railway manager, who wrote a sympathetic autobiography of Beeching, explains the cold logic behind the report:

The studies clearly showed a remarkable variation in loading in different parts of the country. One-third of the route mileage carried but 1% of the total passenger-ton miles of BR.... Similarly one-third of the route mileage carried 1% of the total freight-ton miles...One-third of the stations produced less than 1% of the total passenger receipts and one-half produced a miserable 2% (Hardy 1989, 73).

There was a parallel concentration of traffic on key routes and stations, with less than 1% of the stations producing 26% of passenger receipts, and the figures for the freight side replicated this pattern (ibid.). Against this analytical, 'scientific' exposition of the facts, the previous management strategy looked amateurish by comparison, and the implication was that it had taken a non-railwayman, from the private sector, to identify and resolve the industry's problems.

In many way the influx of 'outsiders' as part of the Beeching era was but the latest instalment in an ongoing process that had begun with the nationalisation of the railways in 1948. The new Chairman brought into the organisation new talents from outside the industry, forty officers being imported from external sources between October 1961 and April 1963 (Gourvish 1986, 337). In addition, there were high-profile appointments, to board level who were then given functional responsibility (7).

For the management and staff outside the centre of the organisation there was a mixed reception for the report. Again, the understanding of the quality of this reaction is important in examining the management of the railways at this time. Beeching's cool impersonal logic meant redundancy for many railway workers (8). As Hardy shows this was appreciated by those asked to carry out the plan:

But how did railwaymen feel? I was alright, I had a good job and, so far as I knew, good prospects, but what of those thousands of men whose lives were to be undercut by that long, long list of names of stations and lines to be closed? How could these men and women be expected to applaud the constructive elements? Many of them hated everything that Beeching seemed to represent...(Hardy 1989, 69).

This illustrates C. Wright-Mill's distinction between public issues and private trouble, (Wright-Mills 1967) in the disjuncture between the formal rationality of widespread closure programme, for the future good of the industry and the destruction of careers and lives that had been devoted to that very industry. The keenness of this loss is obviously felt by Hardy who had worked at grass roots level, but could still see the validity of the aims of Beeching (and his plan). At the level of the shopfloor many railway workers suspected that traffic was being deliberately lost to the road transport sector, but for management and supervisors too there was bemusement and frustration at having to turn traffic away and thereby lose revenue (9).

Once again the importance of being (or not being) a railwayman comes to the fore in the Beeching era and more widely in the decade as a whole. In many senses it was the fact that such identities were challenged or questioned that brought the issue



into relief. The employment of many 'outsiders', coupled with the influx of several waves of consultants during the 1960s, made discursive such identities in much the same way that industrial action in the 1980s and 1990s was to do for the footplate and signalling grades (10).

Coterminous with this attack on the established management of the industry there was also a self conscious attempt to develop a new identity for the railways. Haresnape (1979) describes the way BR tried to re-focus its image during the late 1950s and 1960s. He believes that the logic behind the move was the growth in competition from road and air services (*ibid.*, ch. 12). Symbolically, the most important moment of this process was the re-equipping of the West coast main line from Euston to North West England and Glasgow. Much was made of clean electric traction used on the route and the rebuilding of the London terminal, with the associated destruction of its famous Doric arch, the latter now viewed as the touchstone of post-war architectural philistinism (see Dixon and Muthesius 1985, ch. 3; Pearson 1967, chs. 13 and 14; Richards and MacKenzie 1988). There are interesting disjunctures aesthetically between this modernising impulse within the industry when compared to later image building which looks to much earlier periods for its inspiration (see chapter 5). Samuel (1994) has drawn attention to the way:

Where the 1950s and 1960s were good at making the old look new, the 1970s and 1980s were no less resourceful at establishing what was called... 'instant oldness' (Samuel 1994, 77).

Paralleling this modernisation was the development of the railway preservationist movement and an allied heritage publishing industry which nostalgically celebrated

this particular aspect of Britain's industrial past (see Hollingsworth 1981; Kellett 1969b; Payton 1997; Sykes et al 1997; Whittaker 1995; Wilson 1996, esp. ch. 3).

In his autobiography Fiennes discusses of the aftermath of the shake out of the 'Old Guard' when he took over as General Manager at Paddington from Stanley Raymond, later to become Chairman of BRB:

He had gone like a destroying wind through the traditional practices of the Great Western. He had symbolically stripped the works of Brunel and Pole and Milne from the Board Room and the corridors down to the basements and cast the attitudes to the four winds. The staff were at odds about it all. Many were frankly bolshie; many were dazed; some were frightened; some were in transition from those three states of mind to the knowledge that something very useful had happened to them; very few were wholeheartedly on Raymond's side (Fiennes 1973, 94).

Fiennes, like Hardy, was a manager who could see both sides in the debate over rationalisation of the industry. Both saw the necessity of changing patterns of service, but both had been socialised into a railway culture as managers that valued 'being a railwayman'. Both were clearly in an ambiguous position as they saw the logic of the new order but also realised they were implicated in a system of management that had a reciprocal element to it. There was also a resentment, clearly evident in many of the autobiographies, that the organisation, or its antecedents were not businesslike (11). This tension can also be examined in terms of notions of emotion and nostalgia within the organisation, as Putnam and Mumby have argued:

Emotion, then, is not simply an adjunct to work; rather, it is the process through which members constitute their work environment by negotiating a shared reality (Putnam and Mumby 1993, 36).

And Fineman (1993, ch. 1) has stressed the importance of studying the organisation as an emotional arena rather than seeing such subjective factors as simple variables. It is argued here that the 'railwaymen' within BR management were emotionally attached to their occupational identity in a way that those coming new to the industry could not be. One way of understanding this clash is through nostalgia. Gabriel (1993) has argued that nostalgia acts as a resource that older, or marginalised members of the organisation draw upon when their identity is challenged, and such emotion therefore acts to legitimate pre-existing knowledge and cultural practice.

The opposite of nostalgia can equally be used as a resource. Gabriel employs the term 'nostophobia' to chart the way some actors in organisations demonize, rather than celebrate, the past. Thus the organisation becomes a battleground whereon competing collective versions of the past are traded (Gabriel 1993). While such explanations add a richer understanding of individual and group behaviour within the organisation it is important to stress that organisations are more than the sum of opposing discourses. These discourses are themselves materially linked to practices in the organisation over time, thus our use of such conceptualisations once again has to be embedded with the complexity of historically situated social forms and actions.

Bonavia, himself a career railwayman, eloquently discusses the tension between 'insiders' and 'outsiders':

There was however one consequence of the new style of 'business management' for which the 'Beeching boys' were largely responsible. This was a reaction against any concept of public service and even more against the idea that anyone could be in railways because they liked railways. That was 'playing trains' and it was supposed to have been a fault of past generations of railwaymen (Bonavia 1981, 133-134).

Therefore the very love for the job, the embeddedness of the management, individually and collectively in the work was seen as a disadvantage and, indeed, the very cause of the parlous state of the industry. Such criticisms of the nature of management within the industry fundamentally challenged the occupational identity of those who aspired to be 'railwaymen'. In many ways the challenges to occupational identity in this period foreshadow the wider attack on public sector management that began in the late 1970s. To be a worker, or in management, in the public sector, was seen as due to the fact that the individual couldn't find a job in the private sector, rather than being an active career choice (Pollitt 1993).

It would be wrong however to imagine that the influx of new managers, consultants and other non railwaymen destroyed the older 'Culture of the Railroad', as Gourvish has described it (1986, 388). Again Bonavia describes the grudging respect that those inside received from those 'outside':

...the 'old hands' decided that the quality of the new blood was variable. It would be an over-simplification to say that the new men came to scoff and remained to pray; but if they had expected to find railway managers fumbling with problems that only needed firm handling, they soon learnt that this was

not so, and that the general level of competence among railwaymen was at least as high as in large-scale industry generally (Bonavia 1981, 133).

The author later touches on the same issue and notes the transitory nature of the newcomers' presence:

Tensions sometimes were felt between the Beeching 'new men' and the 'regulars' of the railways. But in many cases a *modus vivendi* was established, and some of the 'hard-faced men' from industry identified themselves closely with their railway colleagues. In a few cases, a sigh of relief went up when the stranger within the gate decided to return to the outside world (*ibid.*, 218).

The resentment felt about outside interference in the industry was very real and is exemplified in a reported conversation that Peter Parker had with Bill Johnson. Parker was sounding out Johnson after being offered the Chairmanship of BR by Barbara Castle in the late 1960s, a position that Johnson was subsequently offered and accepted:

Johnson, at sixty, made no bones about his opposition to an outside appointment. Railways needed a rest from political interference: that was the attitude of the railway managers. They were fed up with outsiders coming in, getting a gong and getting out. No railwayman could get to the top through the scramble of politicians, civil servants, consultants - and 'outsiders'. I interrupted, genuinely puzzled, "What about Sir Stanley Raymond?"

"He's not a real railwayman, he's only been with us for ten years, he came from the buses" (Parker 1991, 146).

Beeching left the industry after the return of the 1964 Labour Government and was replaced by Stanley Raymond (Gourvish 1986, 344-374; Hardy 1989, chs. 6 and 7). This did not, however, witness a period of stability after the turmoil of the previous era. The closure programme continued, albeit at a reduced rate, and the redundancy of many thousands of railway workers continued (Bagwell 1982; see also Wedderburn 1965). In addition new priorities were set by the Labour Government for transport policy, culminating in the 1968 Transport Act (Bagwell 1982, ch. 5; Bonavia 1971, 128-132). This legislation finally gave recognition to the public service aspect of the BRB's losses by allocating a grant for running socially necessary, but loss making services. In addition the Act wrote off a large amount of debt incurred by the Board, and finally separated out profitable and loss making sections of the freight side of the business, with the latter being transferred to a separate body. The aim was to set the industry on a new footing with profit and loss clearly separable and to encourage management to act commercially. In spite of these reforms and the earlier Beeching-inspired ones' the financial position of the railways continued to deteriorate. True, costs were falling and productivity was rising, but revenue was falling at a faster rate. This was due to a combination of factors: a switching of freight to the roads, reduction in some flows and the ongoing rise in private motoring, itself part of the long post-war boom with its associated affluence (see Dyos and Aldcroft 1974, ch. 12; Pollins 1971).

In addition to the major reorganisations mentioned above, the BRB also brought into the organisation a series of management consultancies, who were to advise on the possible shape that the management and board should take. Gourvish

tells of the damning report of regional management on the North Eastern Region in the late 1950s, prepared by Urwick, Orr and Partners. At national level the influence of outside consultancies was felt' with Cooper Brothers, Production-Engineering (in 1966) and Mckinsey (in 1968) all carrying out studies (12). Major enquiries into the nature of the organisation were held in 1960, 1967/8, 1973, and 1976/7 (in the period under consideration). At times these reorganisations simply reinvented what had previously existed. Some of the efforts of Beeching in developing functional responsibility, for example, had recreated a strong departmental form of control which had previously been viewed as mistaken (Gourvish 1986, 340-341). On the ground, this change was considered by management at best as an unwelcome distraction. Fiennes juxtaposes his pre and post nationalisation experiences:

I reflect now that pre-war the L.N.E.R. set up an organisation in 1923. It stood the test of time, give or take a little, until 1947. Since then I have been re-organised in 1948-9, 1953, 1955, 1956-7, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1966-7 (Fiennes 1973, 74).

The same author gives a snapshot of the bureaucracy associated with the position of a Chief Operating Officer in the 1960s organisation, to which the kinds of reorganisation alluded to above only added:

After a fortnight, Ena [his secretary] and I added up the score. The average number of sheets of paper through her to me each day was 292. The number of days on which I should be sitting on a Committee was 212 out of the next 250 (ibid., 75).

Mapped onto this uncertainty (in terms of organisation at the macro and mezzo level) was the constant turnover in Ministers, with eleven different ones between 1948 and 1974 (Gourvish 1986, xxvi-xxvii; see also Bagwell 1982, 5; Bonavia 1985a, ch. 2). This position, although in the Cabinet, has traditionally been seen as a junior one which has been used as a stepping stone to more exalted briefs, a trend that continues to this day (Bagwell 1996). There was also a tendency by all the post-war governments to use the nationalised industries as the instruments to control the economy, either by increasing, or more usually, by cutting investment levels. Such moves were often made at very short notice and played havoc with investment plans that might take nearly a decade to come on stream. The railways were also used as a tool in the fight against inflation with government interference in prices for both freight and passengers witnessed during the period (Joy 1973, 18 and 46; Gourvish 1986, 185-186).

In spite of all of these changes the management culture at the end of the period (under consideration) remained one where there was a strong identification with the industry. Many senior officers and lower level management were career railwaymen, who had worked in the industry for much of their adult life. At the end of the period the Chairmanship was given to Peter Parker, who had spent his career in private industry. His autobiography gives a fascinating account of this railway culture at all levels of the organisation as well as his own immersion in it. Several years into his appointment Parker felt he had become part of the industry in much the same way as Elliot before him had:



I had become a passionate railwayman, with the special zeal of a true convert. I was enjoying the years of comradeship in BR. I had never felt alone. 'The railway community' was a vision that I found compelling...I believed in what I was doing and I loved it (Parker 1991, 251).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the structure and organisation of the industry from its post-war nationalisation to the eve of the 1980s. It examined the process and the ideas that lay behind the absorption of the industry into the public sector. The lack of overt ideological zeal with which this change was planned and enacted is important both for understanding the shape nationalisation took and perhaps its failure. Many of those populating key positions within the newly formed BTC, and the RE below it were either actively hostile to, or unhappy with, public ownership. Many had worked in senior positions in the old Grouping companies against the plan. That these senior staff were recruited unproblematically into the new organisation says much about the pragmatism and the narrowness of the intellectual ideas behind public ownership. In many ways nationalisation was seen as the ultimate prize in and of itself, and once the question of ownership had been settled it was assumed that the rest would naturally follow on. Coupled to this the Labour Government under Attlee's leadership was keen to be seen as the Government of all the people, of consensus. Thus any notions of workers' control were easily brushed aside.

In terms of objectives for the industry the railways, along with other nationalised undertakings, were expected to behave in the public interest, with the supply of goods and services at the lowest possible cost. This had profound

implications for the future of the industry with little attention paid to its long term ability to fund badly needed investment out of profits. Instead new investment was expected to come from borrowings that incurred higher debt levels than necessary. The railways' finances were also hampered by the more than generous compensation paid to the previous shareholders. Again the railways had to carry this burden of debt repayments and make good a backlog of repairs and renewal from the industry's time in the private sector, which itself had had similar difficulty because of its historic legacy of over capitalisation (see chapter 1).

These financial issues were to become increasingly pressing with the decline in the profit levels in the industry. This was caused by a mixture of rising labour costs and increased competition from road transport. Both of these factors were caused in part by the growing affluence of the post-war period, putting pressure on wage rates inside the industry and siphoning off traffic as a greater proportion of the population gained access to the private car.

Historical continuity and specificity are important in understanding the role and nature of management within the industry during the period. Like those at the very top of the industry there remained a stress on continuity. Management and supervisors were the product of internal labour markets which had been a feature of the industry since the middle of the Nineteenth Century (see chapter one). Like the operating grade, the management had a strong occupational and company identity which survived the process of nationalisation. This culture was based on a form of training and promotion that put a heavy emphasis on 'learning on the job', while this was seen as a great strength it was also criticised as being too empiricist, with too

much attention being paid to operational matters and too little focused on strategic goals. An occupational morality had developed between some of the managers in the industry and their staff because they were embedded within the moral order of the industry, and the intensity of this relationship was further heightened by the mutual experiences of war and the post-war consensus. The concept of being a railwayman as a manager was challenged during the 1960s with the arrival of managers and consultants from outside the industry. This caused a great deal of resentment within the established order as traditions were questioned. Though some reforms did take place it was gradually realised that the management within the industry were doing a reasonable job under difficult and contradictory circumstances. Most balanced commentators agree that, given the restraints and pressures on the BRB and its management, the organisation had done reasonably well over the period when comparison was made with other public and private sector management (Gourvish 1986, ch. 13; Saville 1993, 57-58; Forman-Peck and Millward 1994, ch. 9; Thompson and Hunter 1973, 29-30).

The problem for the industry and those that worked in it was that as the 1980s loomed the railways were faced with difficult options and choices. Many of the productivity gains that were seen over the previous thirty years had been made in an environment of full male employment coupled with economic growth. The 1970s, however, witnessed a challenge to this stability. There was a combination of a downward pressure on wages in the industry as inflation began to bite, along with a further loss of traffic. The end of the 1970s saw the election of a Conservative administration whose leader and close advisors were actively hostile to the public

sector as a whole, and the railway industry in particular. This combination of events coincided with the need to renew much of the investment that had been made in the 1950s. All these factors meant significant restructuring in the industry was inevitable.

### Notes to Chapter 3

1. For details of the movement towards nationalisation in the railway industry see Gourvish, T.R. (1986) *British Railways 1948-73: A Business History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press esp. ch. 1; Foreman-Peck, J. and Millward, R. (1994) *Public and Private Ownership of British industry 1820-1990*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; Crompton, G. (1995) 'The railway companies and the nationalisation issue 1920-50', in Millward, R. and Singleton, J. (eds.) (1995) *The Political Economy of Nationalisation in Britain 1920-50*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
2. McKibbin talks about the way 'Labour always plays the game by other people's rules'. See McKibbin, R. (1991b) 'Homage to Wilson and Callaghan', *London Review of Books*, 13, 20, 5.
3. Distrust of the 'workers' and, by extension, workers' control can be seen as a product of the class background of some the leading intellectuals in the Labour Party, see Carey, P. (1992) *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, London, Faber.
4. Of the autobiographies of managers within the industry discussed here several worked their way up the organisational ladder; in Hick, F. (1991) *That Was My Railway: From ploughman's kid to railway boss, 1922-1969*, Kettering, Silver Link Publishing, he describes his career as starting as a junior clerk; Pearson, A. J. (1967) *Man of The Rail*, London, George Allen and Unwin, begins his career as a junior clerk; Ferneyhough, F. (1983) *Steam Up! A Railway Remembers*, London, Robert Hale, again as a junior clerk; Fiennes, G. (1973) *I Tried to Run A Railway*, London,

Ian Allen, enters railway service as a Traffic Apprentice with the LNER in the inter-war period.

5. Far more was made of the heroics of the home front in W.W.II, the LNER for instance produced a commemorative book celebrating the company's contribution to the war effort. This included a section on the staff, see Crump, N. (1947) *By Rail to Victory: The Story of the LNER in War-Time*, London, LNER. This same company made much of the heroic action of James Nightall and Ben Gimbert who were involved in saving the town of Soham by detaching a wagon of burning explosives from their train, Gimbert appeared in the September and November issue of the *LNER Magazine*, vol. 34 nos. 9 and 11 1944. For a reflection of the wider heroic quality of drivers see Clowes, P. (1997) 'George Cross Drivers', in *Steam World*, February, 116, 24-28.

6. The evidence for the report was based on a traffic census carried out in 1961. For a sympathetic account of the report and the impact it had at all levels in the organisation, see Hardy, R. H. N. (1989) *Beeching: Champion of the Railway?*, London, Ian Allen. For a more academic treatment of the report and the thinking behind it, see Gourvish op.cit. pt. 3.

7. Tension between outsiders and insiders is most notable in Bonavia, M. (1981) *British Rail: The First 25 years*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, esp. ch. 13-16.

8. Staff numbers fell in the calendar years of the Beeching period from 508,000 to 380,000, Hardy, op.cit. 60.

9. There was great suspicion among railway workers as to the motive for the Beeching plan, and these fears were heightened by the fact that Marples, the Minister

of Transport who appointed Beeching had an interest in the roads programme. These fears will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

10. There are interesting parallels between the debates of the Beeching era, and more widely the 1960s and the 1980s, in the perception of management as a generic practice or one that is dependent on the process in which it is embedded. This will be explored more fully in subsequent chapters.

11. There is considerable resentment in railway management circles as to the idea that there was little or no commercial acumen in the industry, and this is reflected in many of the autobiographies quoted in the chapter. Hardy, *op. cit.* 19 discusses the effort in the 1950s to control costs; It must also be remembered that many managers had worked in the pre-nationalisation 'commercial' companies.

12. The use of consultancies in the context of railways is most fully explored for the period under review in Gourvish 1986, *op.cit.* esp. pt. 3.; For the impact of Mckinsey on BR see Bonavia, M. R. (1971) *The Organisation of British Railways*, London, Ian Allan, 133-150. The regional impact of consultancy is seen in Hick's discussion of the report of Urwick Orr and Partners, Hick, F. (1991) *That Was My Railway: From ploughman's kid to railway boss, 1922-1969*, Kettering, Silver Link Publishing, 96. It is interesting to note that Cooper Brothers, later to become Coopers and Lybrand would become one of the main consultancy firms in the privatisation process.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Experience of Labour 1948-1979**

#### **Introduction**

As we have seen, the railway industry was nationalised in 1948 as part of the post-war Labour Government's commitment to public ownership of key aspects of the economy. This chapter parallels the previous one in examining this process with reference to the response from those who worked in the industry, in particular from the two grades that form the basis of the study. It will be argued that, as with management, there was at first little difference between state and private sector ownership. For those employed 'on the ground' the work they engaged in initially remained much the same as it had before. However, taken as a whole, the period from 1948 to 1979 does witness fundamental upheaval in the industry as a result of organisational and managerial change, the modernisation of the railway, the replacement of steam traction with that of diesel and electric, and the closure programme undertaken by Beeching.

The chapter examines the importance and relevance of the effect which a combination of these factors had on the occupational and industrial identities of those in the footplate and signalling grades, in particular the question of de-skilling and the resultant loss of status. It is argued that this loss, or change in status needs to be examined within the context of the contemporary labour market together with the point of the life cycle of those individual actors studied. It is suggested that within industrial sociology the analysis of the period tended to see these changes as between



instances of comparative statics rather than as an historical process. As such the parallels between the contemporary debate over 'types' of industrial workers will be juxtaposed with the discussion in the post-war era of working class community. The implication is that there was a similar 'discovery' of the traditional proletarian railway worker at the very point when they were seen, by some, to be disappearing as a group.

## **Nationalisation**

Nationalisation was met with overt celebrations, Bonavia notes:

So far as the rank and file were concerned, while there seemed to be no immediate change in their work, those who were keen union members were pleased that nationalisation marked the conclusion of a campaign waged for many years by the railway trade unions. On the Sunday following the changeover, the National Union of Railwaymen held mass meetings in many large railway centres. More than 2,000 railwaymen attended the London meeting in a West End theatre, addressed by the Union's President (Bonavia 1981, 20).

The author goes on to list a number of events held to mark the commencement of state ownership including 'a smoking concert' held by Stourbridge No. 1 Branch ! (ibid.). Norman McKillop, writing the official history of ASLEF in 1950 spoke of the changed environment that nationalisation heralded:

Out of a chaos of almost accidental undertakings the whole of the railway resources were now directed to one end. The ideal we had pursued down the years was now an accomplished fact. We also had achieved what our founders had set out to do....The 'old unhappy days' are gone forever, and in

their going have left us also with a changed approach. Even before this great event of nationalisation we had developed a new sense of responsibility, a new assessment of those who sat at the other side of the negotiating table; by 1948 we had long known that the problems were not confined to our side alone, and this new set-up would merely mean a closer understanding, a new feeling - that we were at last sitting 'round the table' and not on the opposite side to that of our new employers (McKillop 1950, 359-360).

This quote is heavy with the kind of expectation about nationalisation that saw state ownership as almost an inevitable rational process. Organised labour had won their seat at the table and were equal partners in building the future. Again, detailed discussion of what nationalisation actually meant was seen as unimportant (Lane 1974, esp. chs. 7 and 8; Tomlinson 1982; Williams undated)

But there seems to have been little in the way of the events of symbolic importance held to mark the paralleled change of ownership in the coal industry one year before. Beynon describes the scene at Horden colliery in the Durham coalfield:

A hatchet was buried at the base of the flag pole at the top of which the new blue and white flag of the NCB was unfurled. In this simple ceremony, a critical break with the past was symbolically registered (Beynon et al 1991, 123).

Perhaps the difference in tone of the two events speaks of the level of bitterness felt in the coal industry, a legacy of the inter-war period or even earlier (see Outram 1997; Powell 1993, ch. 6). It would be wrong to suggest that there was no ill-will felt between railway workers and the Grouping companies. Harry Friend, a

fireman and driver in various sheds in the North East, describes the attitude felt by some towards the old companies:

We had had a lot to put up with with the private companies. When they had the General Strike in 1926 in the eastern region, when the drivers and firemen came back to work they had to work a three day week and they lost three days. It was a six day week then, not a five day week... and the cleaners at Durham were put on to a two day week and they were married men. So basically when we were nationalised we thought it was for the better, we were rid of the LNER and it's now the British Transport Commission. So it was an improvement (Harry Friend, interview 1995) (1).

But in spite of the transition into public ownership little had changed, and the same interviewee noted:

One day we worked for the LNER, the next day it was BR. The wages weren't altered or anything like that. We thought naturally working for a government concern...it was a better thing (ibid.).

These twin themes of expectation and little actual change are repeated in several of the interviews carried out. Tom (Tiny) Clementson, a fireman at Heaton shed in 1948, discusses his memories of the period:

Well it didn't make any difference to our department. Them that had worked for the old company before the war thought nationalisation was going to make a big difference, but it made very little difference to us. You used to hear tales of before the war when the depression was on and the chief clerk used to come down (they used to call him the good news clerk!) come down and give them

their notice like, they were made redundant, finished (Tom Clementson, interview 1995).

Bradshaw, a signalman on the BR London Midland Region (LMR) and later the Western Regions (WR), compares the optimism felt by some with the pessimism of others:

Young socialists like myself now eagerly and confidently awaited announcements of wage increases and conditions equivalent to postal workers and other civil servants, the promise of enterprising plans for modernisation and expansion, and electrification of all main lines...The more mature of our compatriots were far more sceptical...(Bradshaw 1993, 106).

These different attitudes towards, and experiences of, nationalisation have to be put in context within the historical moment and life cycle of the actors involved. For those who had worked for the old Grouping companies before the war there was a sense in which that period was one marked by depression and retrenchment. The industry had seen lay-offs and redundancies as well as industrial bitterness in the wake of the General Strike (see Bagwell 1963, ch. 17; McKenna 1980, 62; McKillop 1950, ch. 15; Potts 1996). However, for those workers who had entered railway service just prior to, or during the war the experience of work had been qualitatively different. One possible explanation for this changed experience was the increase in the strategic power of labour as a consequence of the upturn in traffic levels with the start of hostilities and the associated tightening of the labour market. Most of the older drivers interviewed for this thesis entered railway service in the period 1937 to 1942. Such was the demand for labour in the locomotive sheds of the North East that

many of the interviewees said they could never remember cleaning engines at all. Rather they were quickly given the status of passed cleaner and were employed as fireman on a semi-permanent basis. This was in contrast to the pre-war years when a new entrant to the same department might have to wait a decade to be a fireman (see chapter 2; also see Farrington 1984, 32-73; McKenna 1980, ch. 5). Thus the war seems to have represented a break with the experience of work in the inter-war, and in some senses this ameliorated the collective bitterness towards the old companies. As we saw in the previous chapter, managerial attitude and practice towards lower grades was, to a certain extent, modified under the stress of war and continued into the post-war period (see Fiennes 1973, ch. 3; Hardy 1989, ch. 1).

Several interviewees noted the way in which the original optimism was quickly dashed. Gilly Young had started his railway career at Rothbury shed in Northumberland, but was at Heaton by the time nationalisation was enacted:

We all thought at the time it was the saviour of Britain's railways, of the railway system as we knew it...thought it could do nothing but good; it was a good idea at the time but it wasn't allowed to work out that way. But slowly when the Tories took over it was all chopped away you see, so it was a good idea in the early days, but it was destroyed (Gilly Young, interview 1995).

Others spoke of the way the levels of bureaucracy quickly increased. George Deownly was a fireman at Botanic Gardens shed in Hull at the time:

It was a good thing, [nationalisation] the only thing was they made too many chiefs. Instead of sticking to the same kinds of staffing arrangements that was already there they increased the office side. And as the staffing arrangements

went up, we only had a certain amount of inspectors and the inspectors increased as well (George Deownly, interview 1995).

This latter point is interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, it highlights the impact of the increasing bureaucracy at the micro level as a result of the corporate form adopted with public ownership in 1948 which is reflected in the historical record of the time (Bonavia 1971, pt. 2; Gourvish 1986, chs. 1 and 2). Secondly, it is indicative of a class tension. The office workers are by implication white collar workers and therefore something 'other' than the manual working class railway operating grades. Penn (1986), in his discussion of the socialisation of workers into skilled identities, talks of the way such groups set themselves apart from white collar or managerial groups, as well as the unskilled and other trades (see also Eldridge 1968, ch. 3; Steiger 1993). It could also be argued that this interpretation is echoed in Goodrich's (1975) discussion of the way British workers desire to be left alone at work, and the implication is that (from the quotes above) if the workers had been left alone, nationalisation could have worked (2).

Thus state ownership initially changed very little for the workers in the industry on a day-to-day level. The detailed labour process remained much as it had during the war as traffic levels remained high with little capital investment being made. It is important to explore the nature of employment in the footplate and signalling grades in order to understand the way in which the post-war experience of work was interpreted. The next section will therefore analyse the question of skill in the labour process of each of the two grades and the challenges to these identities in the face of technological change and closure.

## **Skill and the Labour Process**

### **Footplate workers**

In 1950 there were over 90,000 workers employed in the footplate grades. Of this number there were nearly 18,000 men and boys deployed on the associated support needed in order to cope with the labour intensive traction that steam engines represented. By 1978 this figure had fallen to just over 26,000 (Bagwell 1982, 45).

The range of occupations associated with steam is shown by Bagwell:

There were engine-cleaners and chargemen engine-cleaners; boiler-washers and chargemen boiler-washers; coalmen; firedroppers; steamraisers; locomotive shunters; cranemen; shedmen; storekeepers; timekeepers; hydraulic and pumping-engine staff and the water-softening plant attendants (Bagwell 1982, 52).

And this is not to mention the numerous engineering trades that would be found on most sheds of any size. This army was needed to drive and service the large fleet of some 19,790 steam locomotives; in contrast there were one-hundred diesel locomotives and just seventeen electric locomotives (*ibid.*, 50). Because of the dominant position of steam traction, the knowledge and skills required to operate it had changed little in the period since the beginning of the industry. As Hollowell notes:

Though they had developed considerably in complexity and had been codified in detail, by 1960 the technical skills of locomotivemen had survived fundamentally unchanged for well over one hundred years. This is not

surprising since the basic steam technology remained throughout this time, albeit with refinements (Hollowell 1975, 232).

But what were these technical skills, and were they technologically specific? The fireman's work consisted of far more than simply shovelling coal onto the fire (see Farrington 1984, 52-73; Hollingsworth 1979; McKenna 1980, ch. 5). As we saw in chapter two there could be a infinite number of detailed combinations that both of the crew would have to cope with as part of their normal shift. Here Frank Mason, who worked on the LMS before nationalisation and BR LMR afterwards, describes the art of creating the perfect fire in the locomotive:

The fireman is especially alert in these early stages. He needs to assess the quality of the engine, the fuel, the load and the driver; if not his regular mate or known by reputation. He closes the door and watches the chimney for smoke. If it is black he will open the door a little, smile and sit down, or prepare coal for his next firing. If the smoke is patchy he takes hold of the shovel, opens the door and using his shovel blade as a deflector of air, directs the air in a sweep across the fire to see if one part is brighter than the whole. Without this trick of experience, the tremendous glare and heat prevents good observation (Mason 1992, 23).

The fireman's object was to keep the engine's boiler pressure just below the point where the safety valve lifted. The blowing of this valve represented wasted effort and fuel and was frowned upon by management as well as drivers. The crew would regulate the steam pressure by using the injectors which, as their name suggests, injected water into the boiler (see Hollingsworth 1979, 20-22). Another



aspect of the skill can be seen in the way on entering a station the fireman had to ensure, as far as possible, that the exhaust from the locomotive was 'clean'. Thus a sufficient fire had to be built up on the run into the station by which time the coals would be red or white hot. The difficulty here was juggling the prevention of more smoke than was necessary with the requirement to produce the steam pressure that would be needed for the exit from the station, as well as ensuring the engine's safety valve didn't blow off (see for example Spooner 1986).

Of course the fireman's job was crucially affected by the skill or otherwise of the driver. There could be a great variation in driving styles, and the difference could be as much as a ton of coal shovelled in a shift for the fireman between a skilled and a less skilled driver. One of the most important factors governing the difference was the use the driver made of the 'cut off', Tiny Clementson explains:

On the end of the boilers you had fore gear and reverse gear and it was 45, 35, 25, 15 mid gear. Then it went 15, 25 the other way round. So when you started an engine away you opened the regulator and then you've got a port of steam. Once the engine gets working when you wind it up you bringing it into 35, 25, 15 you shorten the travel of the valve. When you are full gear the valve gans [goes] right forward and right back. Your ports open longer, you're getting greater amounts of steam in the cylinder. So when the engine gets moving and you get the steam up you're what we used to call 'notching up' and you shorten the travel of the valve, it was opening and shutting sharper...the sharper you shut the valve the greater the expansion period, you

don't get as much steam in but...it works more economical (Tiny Clementson, interview 1995).

Tom Richardson, another fireman at Heaton shed describes the difference skilful use of the gears could make:

One driver would take it as far as he dare take it before it came into back gear, and so you were running at good speeds on the expresses and you weren't burning coal or using water, where another chap would only wind it back so far and it was roaring up the chimney and all you did was stand and belt coal in (Tom Richardson, interview 1995).

The same interviewee went on to describe what this meant if the latter technique were adopted by the driver, as was the case with a regular mate of his:

I used to empty the tender going to Edinburgh, the lads at Heaton had filled the firebox and the tender was choker-block, but when we got to Haymarket, that was the passenger shed in Edinburgh, it was empty! (ibid.) (3).

Driving style was but one aspect of the fooplateman's skill. In addition to this there was the need for route knowledge, and the ability to stop a particular train at any point. 'Knowing the road' was important for both members of the crew but for the driver it was essential. Route knowledge could be built up as a fireman but a driver would have to sign for a particular route before he could take a train on it independently. To this end he would be given weeks or even months to learn a new stretch. Semmens, in his biography of Kings Cross engineman Bill Hoole, describes what route learning meant for a driver in an area radiating just five miles from the London terminal:

It took Bill between two and three months to master all the yards that he was now expected to know. Throughout this time, he would be booked out with a regular driver each day and spend the shift with him on the footplate. Not only were there something like 1,000 signals to learn, but he had to pick up the various operating practices, as well as the positions of the “jack catches” (as the G.N. vernacular referred to trap points), protecting the running lines, that marked the yard limits (Semmens 1966, 69).

Frank Mason records his experience of route learning on the LMS:

At last I was permitted to ‘rehearse’ Preston. The day was dull and I was making good progress on the ground, sketching every signal on a large sheet of paper with indelible pencil. Sometimes I walked up many steps to enquire from signalmen. Every signal and distant signal was recorded, every subsidiary, every ground disc and each route had to be followed through...(Mason 1992, 39) (4).

The point to emphasise in discussing the skill involved in learning route knowledge is not simply the sheer act of remembering all the many miles that a driver was qualified for, but that this was combined with the ability to recognise those same signals at night or in periods of poor visibility (5).

In addition to route knowledge and technical driving skill there was the related competence of braking trains. For passenger trains which were fitted with a full air or vacuum brake this was not as much of an issue (6). Most goods trains before the Modernisation Plan era of 1955 were loose coupled and therefore relied on the brakes on the engine and those in the guards van at the rear of the train. In addition, on

particularly steep gradients the crew would 'pin down' a certain number of the brakes on the wagons (7). Harry Friend, who at the time had just been made a driver at Consett shed, described his first experience with a runaway train:

...I completely lost control and we became a runaway train, or 'amain', being the North Eastern Railway expression. I ran through two block sections, Knitsley and Lanchester, and eventually stopped beyond Witton Gilbert some 9 miles away....The signalmen were aware that the train was amain and special arrangements were hurriedly made to divert the train if necessary up the bank towards Bishop Auckland at Baxter Wood Junction near Durham (Friend 1994a, 8) (8).

Runaways such as the one described above could occur at very low speeds:

...you can actually be out of control at five miles an hour, in fact less than that...a lot of people think "the train's out of control, he's doing 50, 60 miles an hour", it wasn't the case; you could have an engine brake full on or being applied, you could have wagon brakes down, but if you hadn't the amount of correct brakes down you could be out of control at five miles an hour...(Kevin Ward, interview 1995).

There was also a considerable amount of skill involved in keeping the couplings tight going uphill on an un-braked train, the driver, fireman and guard would work together to prevent a snatch occurring which could result in a divided train (9).

Skill in the footplate grade operated at the level of technical competence and tacit knowledge. In many instances such skills operated simultaneously, as the labour

process required both the technical ability to drive the engine in combination with a detailed understanding of the whole range of functions in which this was carried out. In this sense, skill was socially constructed, 'what else could it be?' (Roberts and Strangleman 1997). But underlying this construction was the material reality that technical competence was dependent on long periods of socialisation and training. It was in this training that tacit skill was built up. As described in chapter two, this saw socialisation into work identities in such a way as to transmit knowledge between workers and, to some extent, between generations with the allusion to events and accidents that could serve as lessons.

Recognition that the footplate workers were skilled is most vividly demonstrated early on in the industry's history by the North Midland Railway strike of 1842-3. When the company hired blackleg labour in order to cope with the loss of labour, such was the loss and damaged sustained to the company's capital equipment that it was forced to take back the original strikers (see Robbins 1967, 132-139). As Hollowell (1975) makes clear the skill levels within the grade remained fairly constant throughout the period of steam traction in spite of innovation. Indeed it could be argued that with the rise in the power levels of locomotive the drivers were becoming collectively more skilful as loads increased.

Similarly managerial control over its footplate workforce remained characterised by what Friedmann (1977) would have described as 'responsible autonomy' rather than 'direct control' strategies. As we saw in chapters one and three, in spite of sophisticated management forms in the industry, the control over the footplate grade could never be as great as that exercised over factory labour or even

other grades in the railway industry (10). The main reason for the failure of direct control strategies, had they been tried, was the character of the labour process itself. By implication the workplace of the driver was not amenable to close scrutiny by supervisors or foreman, as to do so would have meant deploying another worker on each footplate. In this sense footplate workers and other railway grades enjoyed similar levels of discretion as say construction workers or long-distance lorry drivers (Hollowell 1968). But even had there been scope for such a strategy, specifying 'the right way' to drive a particular engine would have been difficult if not impossible. The reason for this, as we have seen were the multiple layers of complexity in which the 'simple' act of driving a train took place. Rather than 'one best way' there were numerous combinations of techniques open to the driver. Practical control over the footplate remained the domain of the driver into the diesel and electric age although has been challenged more recently (see chapters 5 and 6) (11).

This is not to say that the footplate grade was not supervised at all. Control over the labour process was enacted by different supervisors at separate points in the day. When booking on or around the confines of the shed the workers were under the control of the shed master or running foreman, who allocated duties and changed rosters as operational requirements dictated. The relationship between the crews and supervisors was far from straightforward with much negotiation occurring in order to get work done. The foreman held the 'gift' of overtime jobs which could be denied to those not in favour, but equally he had to ensure good will on the part of the crews (12). Control over the labour process was partly enacted indirectly by the sanction of the timetable, but even here the grade, through their union representatives, had a say

in its design and implementation (see Pendleton 1991a). On the road or at times of being formally qualified the footplate workers were under the direction of footplate inspectors. But direct intervention in the routine labour process was rare. Many drivers would never have an inspector ride with them and when they did there was little by way of intervention:

I've never known them interfere, anything like that. Well I think it was more than their job was worth to interfere with a driver...He would probably have got a mouthful...and the next stop we made, say Darlington, "You will be off".

The drivers were the drivers in them days !(Tom Richardson, interview 1995). In part, this lack of intervention was based on the experience of the driver in comparison with the inspector. Some inspectors would have entered the grade after only a short period as a driver themselves, thus lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the drivers. This represents an interesting paradox of an internal labour market allied to a lifetime of leaning of manual trade, with those in charge of the grade knowing less in most cases than those actually doing the work. The same interviewee explains:

I mean half of them had never done what we had done as drivers. They were no sooner made a driver than they were made a foreman and then an inspector or something like that. So they generally kept quiet because they hadn't had the experience. You didn't learn to be a fireman overnight (ibid.).

This same point was touched on by several respondents and was given extra salience by the response of Harry Friend who had eventually become Chief Traction Inspector at Newcastle. He believed that he gained respect and a good deal of legitimacy from his personal biography, having 'done the job' both as a fireman and driver over most

of his railway career before taking promotion (13). These observations echo Goodrich's discussion of the way in which workers police the 'frontier of control' by adopting various tactics which undermine the legitimacy of the supervisor or manager in making interventions (14).

The failure, or inapplicability of direct control strategies allowed much autonomy for workers in the labour process. This was more true of freight work, as these types of traffic were far more loosely timetabled. Again the variability of the steam locomotive could be used by the crew in order to gain or lose time. Thus slow speeds could be justified by appeal to the rundown condition of the particular locomotive (15).

### **Dieselisation and footplate skill**

As we saw in the previous chapter, in 1955 the BTC published its Modernisation Plan which aimed at the complete eradication of steam traction in the industry within fifteen years (Gourvish 1986, ch. 8; Haresnape 1981). All of the inter-war Grouping companies had experimented with alternatives to steam, indeed as seen in chapter one, the NER had pioneered the use of electric traction on parts of its network (see Allen 1974, ch. 25; Irving 1976). In spite of these early moves, outside the London Underground and the considerable Southern network of electrified lines, the steam engine was the main source of motive power. Though objectively modernisation was to de-skill the collective workforce this was not upper most in the minds of those involved in the plan. Indeed, as we shall see, the introduction of diesels was far from unproblematic in terms of skill reduction. There were some grades that suffered 'Death by dieselization' in Cottrell's (1951) phrase. Most of the



forms of labour in Bagwell's list (see above) were to lose their *raison d'être* with the introduction of new technology. But other workers saw their skill levels increasing as motive power became reliant on electro mechanical and later electronic equipment. This tendency of simultaneous de-skilling and up-skilling is noted in Penn (1994).

The drivers involved in the modernisation process were trained on the new traction by instructors employed by British Railways, and as such this marked a turning point. This had hitherto been the exclusive province of the Mutual Improvement Class movement (MIC) (16). Harry Friend recounts the initial training course in the North East area:

The principal looked after the class room instruction. Five days were allocated for this activity out of a fifteen-day course. The remaining ten days were spent 'outside' on a static Class 40 [one of the Modernisation plan prototype diesel locomotives] for three days before going into traffic for handling experience purposes (Friend 1994b, 242).

The same author highlights the implications for the drivers involved:

A class consisted normally of eight drivers and two practical instructors. In retrospect it was a turbulent period. The drivers in the beginning were the senior hands at Gateshead depot, men in their sixties. To sit for five days in a classroom and be confronted with basic electricity...cumulators, heat compression engines and so on proved to be wildly traumatic in many cases. Some were totally bewildered and never came to fully understand diesel-electric traction (*ibid.*).

Another driver, at the time based at Tyne Yard, describes his experience of the change over:

It was all strange, we were steam men, and they suddenly chucked a diesel at you like, and you had to learn it. I found when you eventually got to know them and work with them they were better to work than steam engines, they were easier and more comfortable (Bob Howe, interview 1994).

But within this more formalised training scheme there was still a major role for the kinds of informal knowledge and tacit skill that had been a prominent feature of steam traction. The drivers who were converted to diesel traction still had to make use of these informal knowledges if they were to do their jobs effectively:

BH: Really the company got away with murder, learning us the diesels. When they introduced the diesels they just put us through as quick as possible “yer passed”. Well really when we were passed there were times when we were lost. Fault charts [officially provided manuals] were useless. You found out eventually through experience, sitting and listening in the messroom. “Oh I failed” and someone would say “Well what did you do?”...“Oh I did such and such” and you kept that in your head, and sure enough it happened. MM: You always remembered that Tim, you remembered that more. I mean you got all the fault charts out, trying to fathom the fault out on the fault charts - would take you half an hour to fathom the charts out, they were that complicated. Since then they have simplified them, but only through the likes of Bob’s era getting into trouble (Bob Howe and Morris Mowbray, interview 1994).

This account, and others obtained through interviews, emphasises of the importance of the oral tradition in this sort of work, coupled with personalised knowledge. Put simply, the respondent proffering the advice is seen as legitimate by his work mates. Morris Mowbray here gives a vivid description of the unofficial fault finding and problem solving with regard to the brake system adopted by some at Tyne Yard:

You would be sitting in the middle of the messroom and somebody would say “Hey I shoved a pencil up the middle of the RCR and we got vacuum straight away and away we went”. But you always remember that Tim. And then someone would say “Hey he put a pencil up the bugger the other day I’ll gan and try it”. But all these things was through fellas getting into trouble, through failures, built the fault charts up that way. We were thrown in the deep end really (Morris Mowbray, interview 1994).

Thus once again the footplate grade built up knowledge through active involvement in the labour process. Thus in no sense could the movement from one form of traction to the latter be interpreted as the Bravermanian separation of conception and execution (Braverman 1974). Rather, as Elger has noted:

A more adequate account of the transformation of the labour process would involve a more complex and sustained analysis of the historical development of capital accumulation, the contradictions to which accumulation gives rise and the manner in which such contradictions develop and are resolved in class struggle within and beyond production (Elger 1983, 33).

And the complexity of the issues facing management beyond the direct control of labour has been recognised by others. Tomlinson (1982) is critical of those engaged

in the labour process debate for privileging this aspect of management's role above any other. In doing so he believes that theorists have produced a functional account of management which ignores:

Problems which govern the activities of most managers - marketing, cash flow, supply of components, quality control, etc. - are striking by their absence because they are not readily assimilable to the assumed over-arching question of the management of labour (Tomlinson 1982, 25-26).

A similar point is made by Hyman (1987). Therefore the collective reduction in skill that dieselisation represented for the footplate and allied grades must be contextualised in the complexity of decisions and contradictory management aims and goals. Such decisions are further complicated by the factors of cheap fuel oil vis-à-vis coal, the tightening labour market in key parts of the country and political and patriotic pressures to source the majority of the new forms of traction from inside the UK. This latter point resulted in a rash of ordering untried designs from a wide variety of manufacturers which had had little or no experience of building new forms of traction. This situation was made worse by regional autonomy which resulted in ordering of yet more non-standard types (17). The policy of ordering a wide variety of differing types had implications that the footplate grade could recognise:

The steam engine basically were all the same, you could get on any steam engine and it was like second nature, you could drive it straight away...But diesels were slightly different in regard to failure, switches and stuff like that, relays, release buttons for the brakes and that, all in different places. They could have standardised them more. Type 4s and the type 3s both English

Electric, both nose ends, so the same switches could have been put in them, but they weren't, they were totally different...you know it just made it more complicated for you to remember (Morris Mowbray, interview 1994) (18).

This discussion must also stress the need for continued high skill levels within the grade in the wake of dieselisation. In addition to the changing technical competency alluded to above that grew organically from the experience of work there remained other elements of skill such as route knowledge, as well as the driving of un-fitted trains. Indeed some of those interviewed indicated that in a variety of respects driving a diesel could be more skilled because of the greater power output in comparison to steam traction. Some also noted the tendency to lose the ability to hear where you were in the enclosed cab of the diesel. Control over work was also retained by the footplate workers through their unions' continued involvement in the planning of shift rosters and the allocation of work at and between depots (19).

### **Signalling workers**

In 1950 there were 25,190 signal workers employed on BR. By the end of the era in 1978 this figure had dropped to 7,961, a fall of nearly 70% (Bagwell 1982, 44). Bagwell points out that this decline in numbers is more marked in the 1970s with the move to ever-larger power signalling boxes where tens, or even hundreds of miles of route mileage could be concentrated for control purposes. In some ways there are strong parallels for this grade with Hollowell's (1975) notion of unchanged skill levels. Like the footplate grade, the basic technology of signalling had remained unaltered in many areas. In many cases the original frame was still in use, perhaps with additional safety devices added on an ad hoc basis (Blythe 1951). There had

been some concentration of signalling before the war with the introduction of powered points and colour light signalling, but this was usually confined to busy main lines. If an area was still mechanically operated, there were restrictions imposed on the size of the area controlled by the ability of the signal worker to physically pull the lever over and therefore change the points.

The analysis of skill with regard to the signalling grade is perhaps more problematic than was the case with the drivers and fireman, with the training period for signal workers being, initially, much shorter (see chapter 2). However, the grade did usually begin their career in small, quiet boxes away from the mainline. Only later, as vacancies occurred and they possessed the seniority to gain promotion, was a move to more important and challenging locations made (see for example accounts in Newbould 1985; Warland 1992). The skill in working in the signalling grade came with the combination of knowledge of the location along with that of the train service which the box controlled. The main problem was in the routing of trains without delaying others. Until the decline in later years many boxes witnessed a variety of traffic throughout a twenty-four hour cycle. The challenge was to allow conflicting shunting movements, or see slower freight trains through a particular section without delaying fast passenger trains. Adrian Vaughan, a signaller on the Western region of BR in the 1950s and 1960s explains the kind of issues to be weighed up:

The business of working goods trains up and down the line from loop to loop between the fasts was subject to so many variables that it was more of an art than a science. One had to consider whether a goods train was a fast 'C' - headcode vacuum or a very slow 'H' - headcode freight; whether it had just

started out of the loop or was running at its normal speed; or whether the following fast had started from Swindon or was running through at full speed. Then there was the less categorical consideration: how 'well' was the goods running; who was the driver; had the engine given an impression of health or weakness to the signalmen further back along the line (Vaughan 1984, 259).

And a similar illustration of judgement on the spur of the moment can be seen in this illustration from the North East:

Now when I was at Heaton I'd get a freight bleep in from Newcastle on the screen, and I would find out where the express was, say Durham or whatever, now I used to watch this freight on my diagram and I could tell by the track circuits how fast it was going. Now if he was a good runner I'd say right, he's got ten minutes to Morpeth, he'll do it, the way he's going, and at Heaton you could just look through your window and see him belting down the main line (Stan Fairless, interview 1994).

Even when a decision had been made on all the available information there was no guarantee that the crew of a particular train would respond to the benefit of the doubt offered to them as Vaughan illustrates:

It was far from unknown for drivers to ease their engine's effort when they saw Challow's up distant showing 'All Right' because they then knew that they were not going to be put 'up the shute' to languish for an hour and could afford to take things easy. My sign language asking for the engine to be opened up would be replied to with a big 'V' sign! (Vaughan 1984, 260) (20).

Most of the signal workers interviewed relate similar stories of using their knowledge of particular drivers in order to plan their next move (21). The importance of technical knowledge for the signal worker went beyond that of the signalling equipment under their direct control - it clearly extended to a working understanding of locomotive practice and performance. Newbould gives an account of how a fellow signalman he was training with taught him a lesson:

I was still short on experience and at 3 a.m. one Sunday morning, I learnt an important lesson; to always think in advance. At that early hour, traffic was light, so when the Locomotive Shed Foreman telephoned that an engine off Mexborough Shed was to proceed light to Wath Yard, I got off my chair to send the engine forward to Mexborough No. 1 box. My mate had a quick glance at the clock and told me to let the engine stop where it was...I knew the express was due to pass in fifteen minutes but the light engine would have cleared West Junction, with time to spare before the express turned off at the junction, but the order had been given so I sat down again slightly puzzled. The express slowly passed with a long and crowded train and, because of the gradient and speed restriction, it stopped and stuck in the section, with the driver sounding the engine's whistle for assistance. Fred sent the light engine into section to act as a banker and, after a few moments, the express train was assisted off the curve and sent on its way without undue delay. I now realized that the light engine had been held back in anticipation of such an event happening, for although the curve was close to the locomotive shed, it might



have been quite a while before an engine would have been ready to assist (Newbould 1985, 23) (22).

The author goes on to note that this was completely unofficial and that there was no evidence for the occurrence on paper. The grade could also modify their equipment in order to make it more efficient or less inflexible. Under block semaphore signalling there are just two positions to fixed signals, stop and proceed, and some of these had distant signals placed some way before them which acted as repeaters of the main one (see Blythe 1951). Vaughan illustrates how these were used to regulate the speed of trains to avoid them having to slow down too much or even stopping which would delay the service as a whole (and is worth quoting at length):

Sometimes, when a vacuum goods had been allowed to run up the main to Steventon on a tight margin, the following fast came up rather quicker than anticipated or the vacuum took slightly longer than usual to creep into Steventon loop, and, as a result the fast was facing a hard check at Wantage Road. What was required was a CB radio system from signalman to driver so we could tell him to ease his speed - maybe lose thirty seconds - so as to avoid passing a distant signal at 'Caution' which would oblige the driver to slow right down in case a stop signal was at 'Danger'. In the absence of short-wave radio we used our signals. The up distant signal at Challow would be held at yellow 'Caution' for a carefully judged period after the train had passed Uffington and switched to green 'All Right' just before the driver passed it - probably with the throttle shut and with his hand on the brake. The IBS distant and home signals were 1500 yards apart on dead-straight track so we

could allow the driver to pass the IBS distant signal at 'Caution' and immediately clear the home signal to 'All Right' (23). The driver would by then have 'touched' the brakes and would then release, having got the message from two distant signals in succession that he was running up close behind another train. By easing his speed a little he avoided being brought to a hard check at Wantage Road (Vaughan 1984, 251-252) (24).

This knowledge base that signal workers learnt was a mixture of the characteristics of the geography of the area, the types of traffic carried, along with the human factors alluded to above. Such knowledge would be learnt as part of the initial socialisation into the grade, but would also come with the experience of doing the job when qualified. In addition to this embedded knowledge of a particular location there was also the 'real time' information being advanced by the signal workers either side or along the line. Thus decision were being made with reference to a multiple set of factors at once.

When modernisation came these skills and knowledge were not necessarily lost. In some senses the concentration of control into larger power boxes increased the knowledge needed by the worker because of the larger area, and increased number of trains, now under their control at any one time, as Pendleton has noted:

The organisation of work arising from technical change in signalling, however, does not necessarily bear simple comparison with manual operation, and whilst some aspects of decision-making may be lost by signalmen new forms may be gained. Signalmen's role in the conception and execution of tasks is thus best seen as changed rather than simply increased or reduced.

Increased control of the 'production' process as a whole, then, does not have any necessary implications for labour control (Pendleton 1984, 35).

The same author highlights the multiple factors that management took into account when re-signalling an area, and further, he stresses the need for an appreciation of the regional autonomy that was a feature of this process before the Beeching era (see Gourvish 1986, pt. 1 and 2). As we saw in the quote from Stan Fairless above modern 'push button' boxes required similar skills, and perhaps even greater levels, as the area controlled was that much larger. Kevin Ward describes working a large box on the East Coast main line:

At Ferryhill it was a one man signal box, I was in charge of the railway between Darlington and Durham Station, branch lines going onto the Stillington branch, onto the Leamside line, Ferryhill coal yard and the loop lines, slow lines, Coxhoe branch and East Hetton, a lot of railway...It took me a long time to come to terms with the responsibility...The biggest thing a signaller has to worry about is speaking to the right people. At Ferryhill we had 137 signal post telephones, where a driver rings into a signal box...(Kevin Ward, interview 1995).

Thus status for this grade was not necessarily adversely affected by, and indeed may have increased as a direct result of, new technology. The fundamental skills and knowledge and the way they were produced and reproduced were very similar to the period before the war. Alongside modern power boxes there were also older signal boxes with technology that dated back to the middle of the previous century.

## The Beeching Era and Closure

The period of the Chairmanship of Richard Beeching and the implementation of his plan was an important watershed for railway workers in general as well as signalling and footplate staff. These two grades suffered numerical reductions as a result of the modernisation programme in addition to the closures that were accelerated at this time. For the workers in the industry the impact of the closures was experienced differently in separate parts of the country as BR pulled out of particular traffics or closed whole lines (Bonavia 1971, 1981, ch.13; Gourvish 1986, pt. 3; Hardy 1989). Stan Fairless remembers having to fill in the traffic survey upon which the *Reshaping of British Railways* was to be based:

I was at Teesside at the time and each signal box received a graph to fill in of traffic positions over twenty four hours...all these forms were sent to a central point...so certain lines that fell below a point on the graph they closed the line, didn't matter about connections, or feeder trains. Beeching was a hatchet man, any silly bugger could have done what he did (Stan Fairless, interview 1995).

This sentiment was repeated by many of the interviewees. George Deownly, a passed fireman at the time, discusses the closures and their effect:

Anybody could have done what Beeching did. That man was not a railwayman for a start. Railways were an asset to the public, and branch lines like Hornsea, Withensea, Alston, lines I know, they closed them and when they closed these branches they didn't think of the people, the people did not

exist. They thought that everybody had a motor car (George Deownly, interview 1994).

Likewise Walter Mulligan discussed the human effect of closure:

It was a scandal: close this line, close that line. And there was men just literally thrown on the streets, Signalmen, that was one thing, they lived in the area and they were brought up in the area they were local people, and the little local sheds were all closed eventually (Walter Mulligan, interview 1994).

This stress on the individual and community effects of closure and rationalisation are important and are reflected not only in interviews carried out but also in the autobiographies of railway workers who lived through the period (see for example Newbould 1985; Smith 1972, ch. 8; Vaughan 1984). Emphasis is placed upon the community and the stability that the railway represented within it. In many ways the rural railway with its country station represented the community's link with the modern world. The brash newcomer of the mid-Nineteenth Century had become the slightly decayed but deeply embedded fixture of the settlement, and its workers important members of the community (see Payton 1997; Sykes et al 1997).

The best illustration of sense of the embedded historical continuity is found in the series of autobiographies by Adrian Vaughan who worked on the Western Region (WR) of BR from the 1950s (Vaughan 1984, 1987). His books reflect the continuity of railway employment down the years, describing the kind of work carried out by him as virtually unchanged from the turn of the century. Indeed Vaughan worked alongside several workers from much older generations, his socialisation taking the form outlined in chapter two (Vaughan 1984, esp. chs. 4-6) (25). Juxtaposed with this

Elysian fin de siècle vision of rural bliss, Vaughan posits his 'perfect job' being destroyed before his very eyes by a mixture of modern technology, non-railway management and the Beeching reforms. In his chapter concerned with this period, entitled 'Progress the Ogress', Vaughan compares the old railway with the new:

Steam engines and semaphore signalling were the heart and soul of the Western Region because the two systems generated the morale in the men that ran the railway...As a result the men's morale was high as they worked in the satisfying knowledge that they had a difficult job under control. The railway was a team of long-standing friends, the work was permanent and there was a feeling of good fellowship and security...Then came modernisation...I watched events from my signal box and felt the fires of outraged loyalty flames evermore furiously in my coal-burning heart as my railway was slowly dismantled - at great expense- in what seemed to me to be a quite unnecessary search for efficiency. We already had it (Vaughan 1984, 328-329) (26).

The same author compares the management qualities of the two eras:

In Hank's [former Chairman of WR] day Western Region ran a complicated network at or nearly at a profit, officials were very busy and those few who visited outlying stations such as Challow did so by train but in the years of decline after 1960 there appeared more frequently what I took to be the 'New Men' of the railway - and they rode in chauffeur-driven Bentleys (ibid. 343).

Vaughan's bitterness over this change was based on his view that the railway was deliberately being run down in order to make closure of lines or services easier. He saw this as being due to the new type of managers who were being employed at the

time, with no interest in the job, and who were simply unaware of the errors they were making:

The ranks of the new supervisory grades were being filled by recruits from universities and by the more ambitious booking clerks. After a two-year course these men - or boys - could take charge of railwaymen who had been in the service for forty years or more (*ibid.*, 344).

A similar point is made in Stewart's book (1982, esp. 127-128). Many of the interviewees and the autobiographers dwell on the subsequent loss of traffic during the 1960s and into the following decade:

Returning to Summerseat box for the second time, I took as a matter of course. Seven years had elapsed and the drop in traffic flow came as a shock. Freight had been reduced by one-half and passenger services had been cut back considerably (Bradshaw 1993, 113).

Thus decline in the industry was felt in a very personal way, and is linked to the immediate events and characters of those implicated in the changes. The new type of management, whose impact was explored in the previous chapter, was seen as being responsible for much of the loss in traffic and services. Importantly this was seen to be because the 'new men' were not 'of' the industry, they were not 'railwaymen'. Thus occupational identity is seen as rooted in the collective, even though attacks on it can be felt as immediate and personal. Again it is worth stressing here the emotional investment made in work by railway employees. Outsiders were viewed as lacking legitimacy within the industry because of their perceived lack of

commitment to it. We now turn to analyse the effect that these changes had on identity and status.

## **Occupational Identity and the Decline in Status**

The theme of decline and loss of status haunts the social historical and sociological literature on railway workers in general, and those of the footplate in particular (Groome 1986; Hollowell 1975; McKenna 1980; Salaman 1969, 1974; Wilson 1996). In all of these accounts this decline in status is explained by reference to similar events or causes, although the timing varies. Some, such as Hollowell, see the inter-war period as marking the initial decline in fortunes with the witnessing of static promotion, recruitment, and even occupational demotion as being not uncommon (Hollowell 1975, 240). McKenna, in discussing railway workers as a whole, believes nationalisation was the critical point:

By 1945 the status of railwaymen had gone, and for many railway work was the last resort...Nationalisation created no new loyalties in the industry. The state and its representatives appeared as remote as the private managers had been in attendance. The railway workers who retired in the 1960s had seen the best and the worst of private enterprise, and they went out of the industry with the knowledge that no industry before or since had engendered and fostered the corporate spirit which characterized the private railway companies and marked them off so clearly from other complex organisations (McKenna 1980, 63).

And the same author goes on to lament this loss. 'These men had lost something and they never retrieved it. British Rail has failed to give its workforce a specific,



corporate identity' (ibid., 64). In Salaman's analysis, changing status is linked to a variety of factors:

The railwaymen said two things were responsible for this decline in status level: the declining importance of the railways as a form of transport, and the decline in the relative economic position of railwaymen vis-à-vis other working-class jobs. It was also apparent that because of changes in the nature of railway work itself - its organisation, security and technology - the railwaymen too felt that it was very much less of a 'good' job, i.e. one that people admired and wished to have (Salaman 1974, 76-77).

For other commentators it was the ending of steam traction and the perceived or actual loss of skill that was the crucial factor in this downward trend. Clive Groome's book, based in part on semi-structured interviews with drivers, is perhaps the best reflection of this trend:

The ending of steam can only have come as an anti-climax, the drivers experienced an immediate fall in job satisfaction, no longer were the platforms crowded with enthusiastic onlookers. The "theatre" of the footplate had ended...The relative cessation of the need to display skill was noted at once...The driver now had a "desk job". The firemen re-labelled second men, were often removed to a separate roster, so that regular partnership ended. The sense of companionship and loyalty between the two grades was reduced...glamour was no longer any part of the job (Groome 1986, 57).

In many ways this concern with status, mixed with a sense of loss, displays parallels with the sociological discussions of post war working-class communities and

their perceived decline as a result of growing affluence. Roberts (forthcoming) has stressed the way what he has labelled the 'second wave' of community studies saw the working class as being, or becoming, less morally dense as a result of changing patterns of residency coupled with the effects of the long boom of the post-war era. The concern over loss can be seen in Hoggart's (1990) portrayal of working class community and, less positively, in the numerous publications of Jeremy Seabrook (1978, 1982, 1988). And this trend to some extent resurfaces in Hudson's (1995) portrayal of a former North East mining community. The recurring theme running through the latter two commentators' work is the idea that the British working class has been bought off from their historic, sometimes reformist, at others revolutionary, mission by the relative material affluence of the post-1945 settlement. Thus depth and dignity of traditional working class and their communities is exchanged for shallowness and concern for the petty or ephemeral.

This similarity between the treatment of occupational and social communities extends to the way (in the latter case) 'positive' aspects of such communities were 'discovered' at the very point they were being destroyed as part of new social housing programmes (See especially Young and Wilmott 1986). Roberts notes that this was literature built on previous social research which had seen these same communities as deviant forms. In the case of the railway industry this latter sentiment is perhaps absent but the sense of loss is consistent. Thus the railway workers, particularly those on the footplate, are of interest to industrial sociologists because they form part of 'traditional proletarian' occupational groups and communities. This sense of an occupation on the edge of losing, or having suffered tremendous loss in status, is

reflected in Salaman (1969, 1974) and also Hollowell (1975) whose fieldwork had been carried out some ten years earlier. These same groups were seen to be increasingly marginalised as a result of the restructuring of the economy, modernisation of industry and the growing affluence which combined to produce an 'instrumental orientation' to work. Lockwood discusses the trend in his seminal essay:

Although in terms of social imagery and political outlook the proletarian and deferential traditionalists are far removed from one another, they nevertheless do have some characteristics in common. They are first of all traditionalists in the sense that both types are to be found in industries and communities which, to an ever-increasing extent, are backwaters of national industrial and urban development. The sorts of industries which employ deferential and proletarian workers are declining relatively to more modern industries...(Lockwood 1975, 20).

The loss, therefore, is seen as the ending of the deep identification with work and the changing nature of the culture of work itself. With the railway worker representing the traditional proletarian to Lockwood's (1975) 'Privatised' or Goldthorpe et al's (1968) 'Affluent Worker' (see also Bulmer (ed.) 1975; Brown 1992, ch. 4).

What I want to argue here is that we need to tease out the complexity of the social processes occurring within this industry and more broadly in the economy as a whole. In addition we also need an analysis that can cope with the sociological and socio-historical commentaries that have been produced with regard to the industry. This chapter has already examined issues surrounding the transformation in

ownership and technical change with its associated implications for skill level and the experience of the Beeching era and closure. We now turn to the collective impact these factors had on the status of railway work and occupational identity, understood subjectively and inter-subjectively.

One of the greatest changes in terms of the status of railway work has been the decline in terms of pay and conditions (27). As was seen in chapter two, employment in the industry was highly sought after in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries because of the security it offered along with the chance of promotion (Kingsford 1970; McKenna 1976, 1980; Revill 1989, ch. 4). This privileged position was undermined in the inter-war period as a result of economic recession and corporate restructuring in the wake of the grouping of 1923. This trend was temporarily reversed in wartime but the decline in conditions and employment levels continued after the war. This was in a period when unskilled or semi-skilled jobs were in plentiful supply in many parts of the country as a result of the post-war boom (see Aaronovitch et al 1981, ch. 7; Leys 1989; Smith 1989, ch. 4). At the level of the workforce this contrast is reflected in the autobiographies as well as in interviews carried out. Several of the autobiographies written by former railway workers juxtapose their absolute love for the job with the poverty of the wages paid in comparison with other work available locally. Gasson gives a vivid account of the dilemma he faced:

Bill Prior [another signalman]...asked me if I was aware of the opportunities only a few miles away at the Morris Motors car factory. It seemed from his information that his son-in-law had joined the security staff there working the

same hours as we were doing but for five pounds a week more, plus a pension and pay, when off sick...I wrote to the factory for an interview and a couple of weeks later I was called to attend, and found everything that I had been told was true. I left that interview to discuss things with my wife, and although she knew that the railway was my life, that extra money and the conditions that went with it, were an opportunity not to be missed (Gasson 1981, 117).

Employment in the car industry is also mentioned in Bradshaw's reminiscences:

The railway fraternity soon learnt that substantially higher wages were now earned by unskilled labour in the new pressed-steel factory producing car bodies for the Morris Motor Company. To achieve a gross income of £12 a week, a signalman would need to work, in addition to his standard 42hrs, a 12hr Sunday and several hours of overtime, whereas in this new factory, it was possible to take home £15-£20 for a 40hr week, and have immunity from either responsibility or unsociable hours (Bradshaw 1993, 169).

In addition to the resentment at the discrepancy over pay and levels of responsibility there was also the question of long term job security:

Burrowing deep into this festering mass of disillusionment was added fuel of doubt and fear, fed by stories of the impending closure of many lines...Finally, there rose the eternal question: when, if ever, would a pension scheme be forthcoming?...In those early months of 1959 I recall no less than six local signalmen, all possessing nothing other than railway operating experience, leaving the service voluntarily to seek new careers (ibid., 169-170).

This could be a particular problems for railway management in urban centres where labour markets could be particularly tight. Harry Friend discusses the situation the London area:

Take down at Old Oak Common [engine shed outside Paddington] drivers, never mind about fireman, went to Mars bars factory [Slough] because they got far more money at Mars bars, 'cause Mars bars wanted good workers and they knew they would get them off the railway, particularly off a loco man (Harry Friend, interview 1995) (28).

There seems to be an almost ironic pride taken, reflected in this and other similar quotes, in the employability of railway workers in outside industry during this period. The implication was that management outside the industry recognised the traditional qualities that railway workers as a group supposedly possessed, while simultaneously those inside actively derided such identity (see Gasson 1981; Stewart 1982; Vaughan 1984, 1987).

What is interesting here is the regional variation in the experience of alternatives to railway work. For the interviewees from the North East, changing jobs in this period would have been less attractive than for those of comparable age and grade in the South. Thus you get accounts of increased turnover in lower parts of different grades. This turnover in staff also had implications for the status of railway work in two ways. Firstly, it further undermined the image of employment in the industry as people left and BR, in recruiting workers, had to be less selective than had previously been the case (see the critical comments in Bonavia 1985a, ch. 12). Secondly, the situation saw an undermining of status in terms of a reduction in

seniority needed to fill particular posts. In many ways this process had started during WW II with rapid promotion in order to cope with demands of traffic levels at the time. As noted previously, many of the retired workers from the North East could not remember cleaning engines during the war, being used for firing duties almost constantly. In the signalling grade the situation could be even more dramatic as younger, less experienced workers took positions that had previously been the preserve of senior employees. Bradshaw gives his own experience of the resistance he met in wartime:

Two days later I was appearing in the Hunts Bank Offices at Manchester Victoria, facing a Chief Inspector who must have given me just about every possible emergency situation to deal with...He...let me know in no uncertain terms that I was the youngest trainee signaller he had ever examined; also stressing that, up to the present time, a man had been extremely fortunate if he was able to become a signaller under the age of 30, let alone 20! He didn't know what things were coming to and had no doubt that the consequences of 'boys' of this age being given command of a signalbox would be responsible for many grave accidents in the future (Bradshaw 1993, 60).

Likewise Vaughan gives a very similar account of his experiences in the late 1950s, where it was the competition from other forms of employment that was the stimulus to rapid promotion:

...like most boxes in the area, no one else applied and I got the job. This caused a few eyebrows to be raised and Harry Strong [an older signaller] told me that I was going into a signal box after only nine months on the

railway whereas, before the war, men waited nine years for a tiny, Class 6 box (Vaughan 1984, 116).

As was the case with Bradshaw, the signalling Inspector was concerned with this development and tried, unsuccessfully, to block the move. It is interesting that it is also at the supervisory and management levels that such rapid promotion is seen as a problem, as well as at that of the shopfloor (29).

Status decline was also experienced by the loco men as a result of the end of steam traction. This seems to have been as a result of the changed inter subjective perception on the parts of other grades, supervisors and those outside the industry rather than simply the result of objective de-skilling of the labour process. Groome talks of the loss of respect from supervisors and other railway staff. One quotation from a driver on the Southern Region of BR in the 1980s stresses the problem in terms of age and generations:

In the old days they knew that the driver had done 15 years on the shovel before he passed out for driving...By the time he was in the top link say at Nine Elms [a shed on the SR], they knew the man at the front had done 20 to 30 years service, they couldn't be treated as boys...Nowadays you can have a man coming on the job....in five years he is doing top rank mainline trains....The man on the platform knows they've only been on the job five years and they treat him with contempt (Groome 1986, 68).

This linkage between the transition from steam to diesel overlaid with changing age profiles of footplate staff is echoed in many other accounts (30). Here George



Deownly, who eventually became a driver at Gateshead shed makes a similar observation:

Anybody thought they could do my job then, anybody could be a driver. Once the steam engine went away they all thought they could be drivers. When it became a diesel, all closed in, no rain, no cold...you got this attitude came from office staff and management that anyone could do it. In my humble opinion, that's when the drivers job went backwards to what it is today (George Deownly, interview 1994).

Morris Mowbray makes a related observation:

The driver's job really went out of the window when the steam engine went. The driver had a lot of authority in them days...he was *the* man, he was like the captain of the ship you might say in steam days. But once the steam engine went basically his authority and everything really went with it (Morris Mowbray, interview 1994).

Salaman's discussion of status also mirrors this view but there is also a link with a sense of moral decline in the collective, identified by several interviewees, within the body of railway workers:

When I joined the railways, a railwayman was king of the working class; now he's a laughing stock. From top to bottom in a lifetime!

When we first joined the railways forty years ago only the cream could get a job on the railways because it was the best job going. Now it's all different, now it's the left-overs, the scum that joins the railways (Salaman 1974, 76).

These kinds of attitudes are also reflected in Hollowell's discussion, where in one case decline is linked to immigrant labour being employed (Hollowell 1975, 231). What all these accounts indicate is that the status of railway work had declined and that somehow this is implicated in the identity of the collective worker. Perhaps the most important factors here are the related conceptions of age and generation. What is being coupled is the notion of decline with the type of workers recruited to the industry since its 'golden age'. This decline, as we have seen is multi-dimensional, complex and often contradictory. Decline at the phenomenological level is experienced as a very immediate and personal thing, but this is not to say that the experience of decline in status is felt at the same time or in the same way. In certain grades, the signal workers being a good example, tight labour markets in the post war period witnessed a more rapid turnover of staff, thus decline is implicated in the newcomers (31).

In the North East, where alternatives to railway work were less apparent, decline is experienced to a greater extent in terms of closure and the subsequent marginalisation of the industry, although this may be influenced by my sample. This regional quality to decline is important. In the interviews carried out the retired workers seldom criticised younger workers as not being 'proper' railwaymen as was the case with Hollowell, Salaman and Groome. In part, this was because the demographic features of the North East seem to be such that the firemen and later second men with whom the interviewees had worked along side had themselves been employed in the industry for some time by the time decline was apparent. Many of the retired drivers had joined the industry just prior or during W.W.II and were not

made fully fledged drivers until the 1960s. This seems to have been because a large cohort of staff in the locomotive department were taken on during wartime who subsequently stayed (see Glaister and Travers 1993, 40). After this time, recruitment was less common as staff levels were allowed to drop by natural wastage in the face of traffic decline, closure and technical change. Reluctance to engage in the sort of criticism of younger railway workers found by other sociologists may also have been a function of hindsight, as many of the older workers questioned had been retired for five or even ten years by the time the interviews took place.

For the social science commentators, especially those researching in the South East, such accounts seem to have been taken as a universalised experience, rather than that of a particular cohort of drivers, at a particular point in their life cycle during singular times. Thus you get quotes for example at the end of Semmens' biography of Bill Hoole where a Kings Cross official is quoted as saying on Hoole's retirement in 1959, nearly a decade before the end of steam: "There are no characters left now, only drivers" (Semmens 1966, 190). Or the case with one of Salaman's interviewees stating: 'The railways are finished now...We were the last generation to know what the railways were really like' (Salaman 1974, 72).

What I argue this produces is a static account both of the past and the future in terms of occupational identity. In such readings the high status is assumed to have been a permanent fixture of such identity in the past, rather than one that was open to negotiation and modification under pressure as part of the routine movements of the relative strength of capital and labour over time. While I would agree with Hollowell that there was much stability in the industry, and particularly amongst certain grades,

there was also always movement and change. One only need look in the retirement notices of the staff magazines of the early decades of this century to see the rapid promotion that had been a feature of the industry in its expansive phase in the Nineteenth Century (see chapter 2; see also Kingsford 1970, ch. 8; McKenna 1976, 1980; Revill 1989). At times this flux is lost from view in many accounts as authors engage in a discussion of comparative statics. By this, I mean positive views of the past are juxtaposed with negative ones of the present (see Groome 1986; Hollowell 1975; Salaman 1969, 1974).

In some ways these accounts of status decline and the coupling of this with qualitative decline in occupational morality can be linked with the contemporary discussion of the rise of the 'Affluent Worker' and the paralleled decline of the 'Traditional Proletarian'. This is not to say that there was not a decline in the status of railway work or that such a change did not herald a change in the management attitude towards the workforce. Rather we have to be alive to the multi-layered complexity that this particular industry represents. As such, we need an analysis that can deal adequately with macro level shifts in the economy and the way in which these are interpreted and dealt with by actors at all levels in the organisation. Such a study must not only include historical organisational accounts, but must also listen to and integrate oral and autobiographical sources. In this latter sense the railway industry is uniquely privileged.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has brought the experience of labour up to the eve of the dramatic changes that were to occur in the 1980s. But, as we have seen, it would be

wrong to view the period of state ownership from 1948 as stable. Rather, the three decades after nationalisation were turbulent and traumatic for many who worked in the industry. Nationalisation itself for many ordinary workers initially meant very little by way of change. Their jobs, and the environment in which they worked, changed little, and were to remain so until the advent of the modernisation programme which really started to make an impact in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The optimism that had been felt by some workers in the industry in 1948 was gradually eroded by the experience of nationalisation as a result of rationalisation and job insecurity. It was argued that both grades examined displayed skill levels which, though modified in the process of modernisation, remained intact afterwards in the sense of technical competence and in the reserve content of knowledge that was required. In the cases of both the footplate and signalling workers' labour process there is little evidence that management actively attacked skill levels, for the new technology created new demands on skills that in some ways could only be coped with precisely because of the kinds of autonomous cultures that had been a feature of both grades outlined in chapter two as well as this.

The Beeching era and the consequent loss of traffic was seen as a difficult period for all railway workers. Quotes from interviews with contemporary railway workers and the published autobiographies indicate the resentment at the insertion of managerially defined market logic into the industry. Closure was often felt in a very personal way with an appreciation of the non balance sheet factors that were implicated in a particular line or service's loss. In some cases in particular there was tremendous resentment at the way non-railwaymen, personified in Beeching himself,

were seen to be destroying the long term viability of the industry under the guise of rationalisation. Again such a process was felt in a very personal way by some as occupational and industry identities were questioned and to some extent marginalised by Beeching's 'New Men'.

Finally the question of the decline in status was discussed. It was suggested that the contemporary discussion of occupational identity and community during the 1960s and 1970s saw employment such as railway work being populated by the kinds of 'Traditional Proletarian' workers identified by Lockwood and others. And it was these very actors who were, by implication, marginalised by the changes taking place in Britain during the post-war period. It was suggested that the accounts which were obtained from railway workers at the time strengthen the conceptualisation of profound change in the nature and outlook of such workers and that this was particularly true of younger workers in the industry. I have suggested that while there were undoubtedly changes taking place during the 1960s these were but the latest in a series and that in many senses to see the industry as ever being static was and is a mistake. Rather the status of the industry and those who worked in it was always in motion and that the relative decline of the railways was a product of events rooted in the Nineteenth Century rather than simply those of the Beeching period.

What was also stressed was the way this phenomenon can be witnessed in the sociological, and socio-historical accounts that have been written, with different prioritisation of the factors responsible for the decline. In understanding the complexity of the picture presented we must be able to grapple with the way in which this decline was experienced by different actors in the organisation, and crucially the

way in which the point in the life cycle and the actor's membership of a particular generation or cohort is deeply implicated in any detailed understanding of such processes. Thus it is suggested that the way the decline in the industry was experienced was different for particular actors in certain grades. A further level of complexity is added by the regional quality in the industry with very different labour markets pertaining in separate parts of the country.

By the late 1970s, therefore, there had been considerable change in the industry in terms of technology, productivity, work practice and managerial strategy. But in spite of such changes there remained on the railways recognisable industrial and grade identities. These identities were implicated in the very process of socialisation when the actor first joined the industry. Thus the work-based culture was shared by the many grades as well as supervisors and management and had shaped the industrial relations system at the local regional and national level. Thus the railway workforce that went into the new decade was both the product, and the reproducers of, a living work culture sustained over several generations.

## Notes to Chapter 4

1. It is worth noting that Harry Friend did not enter railway service until the late 1930s, nearly a decade and a half after the General Strike. In the interview carried out with him he stressed the way it was still alive as an issue in the memories of those he first worked with. Frank Mason, who worked on the LMS at the time of the strike gives a very powerful description of his experience: 'I remember also the sense of shame we felt for our leaders as the strike ended, when we went back to report for work and suffered more degradation as we stood in a long queue which stretched from the office complex down the hundred yards of the depot and down the bankhead. We were kept standing a long time, which we thought was purposeful, until the long ribbon tucked into the office passage and our comrades started slowly to emerge with sad eyes, or blazing anger. All were treated alike (probably by prior instruction). The boss sat behind his desk (he lived in our street and we had played with his boys). "What do you want?" was his standard question. "Have you worked here before?" "There is no job for you!" We'll have to see: keep coming up!' ' Mason, F. (1992) *Life Adventure in Steam: A Merseyside driver remembers*, Birkenhead, Countrywise, 154-155.

2. Goodrich talks of the limited horizons of British craftsmen in only wanting to be left alone rather than actively engage in workers control but '...by the very pride in that individual skill it stiffens the refusal to be controlled'. Goodrich, C. L. (1975) *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics*, London, Pluto Press, 40-43; Hoggart explores working class experience of class by using the concept of



'them' and 'us', the former outside the immediate, the friendly and the understood.

Hoggart, R. (1990) *The Uses of Literacy*, London, Penguin, ch. 3.

3. The North East railway term for rough treatment is 'braying'. Thus 'to bray the engine', 'braying the fireman', 'braying the fire'. Several of the footplatemen interviewed talked of 'going home with a wet shirt' as being symbolic of having been worked especially hard by their driver during a shift.

4. Mason goes on to describe having to learn completely a signal gantry with no fewer than 39 separate signals on it. A 'Distant' is a repeating signal placed to the rear of the one it applies to, which gives extra information to the driver. A 'Subsidiary' is a signal that allows limited movement within a section, especially when it is already occupied. A 'Ground Disc' is a type of shunt signal which allows limited movement on a section of track.

5. Footplate workers often describe how they use a combination of senses in learning the road. The visual sense is the most vital, but in steam days the sound and feel of the track under the engine could be very important especially in periods of reduced visibility.

6. Passenger trains had by law been fitted with continuous brakes since the end of the Nineteenth Century. The two systems were based on air or vacuum. In each case the brake block is normally held on to the wheel, only released when it is blown off by air pressure or sucked off by vacuum. A 'fitted' train usually refers to the presence of a continuous brake on a freight train. Equally an 'un-fitted' train relies on the brake on the locomotive and that on the guard's van. Brakes could also be pinned down on individual wagons but not while the train was moving at any speed.

7. The practice of pinning down brakes ensured that there was sufficient friction preventing trains running away down steep gradients. The exact number of brakes pinned down was a function of the steepness of gradient, the adhesive qualities of the rail, the type of locomotive, the weight of the train and the skill or foolhardiness of the crew.

8. The author went on to say that the shed master at Consett gave him only a light caution as the road was recognised as a difficult one, thus was almost a rite of passage

9. One of the best examples of the skill required in keeping couplings taut can be found in the fictional account of a US train driver relating the different problems encountered in taking very long trains over undulating landscape, Kingsolver, B. (1992) *Animal Dreams*, London, Abacus, 292-296.

10. See ch. 1; Also Edwards' discussion of the transformation of management control strategies on US railroads shows the greater reliance on hierarchical control rather than direct control: 'Organization manuals that several railroads prepared - complete with "principles" of management, organizational charts, separation of the firm into divisions, and so on - indicated the distance these firms had come from the entrepreneurial firm'. Edwards, R. (1979) *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, London, Heinemann, 30.

11. Wilson describes the way BR issued a *Handbook for Railway Steam Locomotive Enginemen* in 1957, he stresses the irony of this move given the decision to scrap steam traction made two years previously, Wilson, C. D. (1996) *Forward! The Revolution in the Lives of the Footplatemen 1962-1996*, Far Thrupp, Sutton

Publishing; An excellent comparative example of railway worker autonomy from Canada can be found in: Morgan, R. E. (1994) *Worker' Control on the Railroad: A Practical Example "Right Under Your Nose"*, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canadian Committee on Labour History.

12. Although running, or shed, foremen were in the position to 'tell' a driver what to do, in practice it was the case that the relationship was open to considerable negotiation. Thus bribes of the kind Hardy described using were a regular occurrence, Hardy, *op. cit.* Hardy's account resonates with my own experience of running station managers who supervised train crews on London Transport. Some managers had such a rapport with the staff under them that they could get drivers to do virtually anything, whilst others could quickly get into trouble if the service deteriorated and there was the need for flexibility. For the sociological importance of this negotiated order see Roberts' discussion of the relationship between foremen and craft workers in the shipyards on Wearside Roberts, I. P. (1993) *Craft, Class and Control*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, esp. ch. 4; also Brown's exploration of the indeterminacy of the employment relationship with regard to the negotiated order of work 'The Negotiated Order of the Industrial Enterprise', in Martins, H. (ed.) (1993) *Knowledge and Passion. Essays in Honour of John Rex*, London, I. B. Taurus and Co.

13. Harry Friend had joined the industry in the late 1930s and took promotion to the inspectorate only in the 1980s, finally becoming Chief Traction Inspector at Newcastle in the mid 1980s. Thus the charge of inexperience would be difficult to level against him. This respect was mutual as he told me that he was once riding on

the front of a train with a driver and a manager. The driver had transgressed the rules in some way which meant the inspector having to give a verbal warning. This was done at the next station but only after Harry had told the manager to leave the cab area, thus the dressing-down was in private and did not involve a public loss of face for the errant driver.

14. Goodrich *op. cit.* 136-139 examines the way workers in the printing, mining and engineering industries resented interference or even refused to work in front of a supervisor.

15. The variability of steam engines could be and was used by footplate workers for a variety of ruses in order to lengthen or shorten their working day. Time could be lost filling up the tender with water, raising steam or oiling, all of which were legitimate excuses for delay, and difficult, if not impossible, to prove as being time wasting. Tiny Clementson told me of the amount of overtime that could be gleaned from working the timetable 'properly' in order to miss particular trains which would have taken a crew back to their home depot. Joe Brown related several stories about the Weardale branch in Durham where, having knocked over a sheep or lamb on the track they would take the carcass to a certain signalbox where the signalman was known for his ability to combine butchering and cooking skills. Thus the train crew and the signalman would enjoy a meal while the train stood off the mainline 'having its brakes pinned down'. These illustrations echo Roberts' discussion of Jesus Ibarrola's work on the 'porosity' of work whereby the working day or an individual task is open to negotiation or is malleable by the workforce as a result of the indeterminacy of the employment contract. Roberts, I. P. (1993), *op. cit.*, 130.

16. Diesel traction did not completely destroy the MIC movement - it continues to this day, although a shadow of its size at the peak.
17. BR ordered 11 different prototype diesel-electric types from seven separate manufacturers. In addition the LMR order several trial fleets of electric locomotive for the west coast electrification. Finally such was the regional autonomy allowed to BR engineers that the WR ordered and built up a considerable fleet of diesel hydraulic locos, which were declared non standard in the 1970s and eventually scrapped. See Gourvish (1986), ch. 8; and Haresnape (1981) *British Rail Fleet Survey: 1 Early Prototype and Pilot Scheme Diesel- Electrics*, London, Ian Allen.
18. 'Type' refers to the horse-power range in which several classes of diesels were placed. English Electric was the manufacturer of several early diesel types.
19. Drivers', through their trade unions, maintained a great deal of control over their rosters. Local Departmental Committee (LDC) reps had an active input into decisions as to how work was to be shared out between various depots. This has been the source of much ill-feeling between groups of drivers, especially in times of declining traffic. This can be understood as the horizontal dispersion of conflict, in Burawoy's phrase. By this he means the way that the true nature of the employment relationship is concealed from the workforce, conflict becomes that between groups of workers rather than between workers and management. Burawoy, M. (1982) *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*, London, University of Chicago Press, 65-73.
20. 'Up the shute' refers to a train being signalled into a passing loop or onto the slow line, thus allowing a faster train to pass. This is known in the North East as

'going inside'. In periods of heavy traffic, trains could be held for several hours while waiting for a 'path'.

21. This aspect of the relationship between footplate workers and signal workers is important because it illustrates the negotiated order to work. If the signal worker had been let down by a driver in the past they would rarely give them a second chance if a margin was tight. Therefore the driver felt obliged to clear the section quickly. The other side to the relationship was the way a driver, if a delay was interpreted as a mistake or avoidable, would deliberately drive off slowly. I have personally experienced such treatment from a delayed driver who crossed a junction at under five mph when the line speed would have allowed speeds in excess of thirty mph. This situation of negotiated power would seem to reflect Burawoy's observation of the relationship between machinists and the 'trucker' at 'Allied' with each having power over the other which could be deployed in different ways at different times, Burawoy (1982) op. cit., ch. 4; Vaughan relates the story of being conned by a driver into letting him run early because he was 'going to be late for his wedding'. This was a tactic that could only be used once on a young inexperienced signal worker! Vaughan. A. (1984) *Signalman's Morning / Signalman's Twilight*, London, Pan, 260.

22. A 'light engine' is a locomotive with no train to work. Banking refers to a train being given assistance by a locomotive in the rear, particularly common on steep gradients.

23. 'IBS' (Intermediate Block Signal) is an automatic signal used to replace a signal box which only served to make a section smaller, thus increasing the line

capacity. A 'Home' is the signal that allows entry into a section, usually a station platform.

24. This unofficial use of the equipment by the worker parallels descriptions of the ways workers in factories modify machines to make them more efficient in the autobiographies of engineers employed in railway workshops, see for example Taylor, C. (1995) *Life in a Loco Works*, Sparkford, Oxford Publishing Company.

25. The rural quality of railway work is witnessed in many of the published autobiographies of railway workers. Warland, a signalman on the WR and Southern region tells of being expected to help out at harvest time in between trains at a local farm! Warland, J. (1992) *Light Relief: Tales of a relief Signalman in the 1950s*, Sparkford, Patrick Stephens; One of the interesting features of the many such autobiographies is the range of experience of location that is displayed, thus such rural experiences of labour can be juxtaposed to urban inner city work places.

26. There are strong parallels between Vaughan's anti-modernist writing and those of Tom Rolt who wrote expansively on industrial archaeology. Both were ironically fascinated with the products of industrialisation but were profoundly disturbed by its contemporary developments, see Rolt, L. T. C. (1978) *Narrow Boat*, London, Methuen; This theme is also explored in Wright, P. (1996) *The Village that Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham*, London, Vintage, esp. pt. 1.

27. Comparisons between pay rates, relative to outside industries, is difficult to make for a number of reasons, e.g. who is included/ excluded etc. Gourvish 1986, op. cit. 218, compares the earnings of adult male railway workers with those outside the industry. In 1948 this group's wages were 94% those of manufacturing industry and

98 % of all industry, by 1959 the same figures were 88 % and 91 %. The differential gap between grades of labour in the industry were also narrowing during this period with the drivers' rate as a percentage of a 1st year porter falling from 200 % in 1939 to 148 % in 1960, and in the same period the comparative figures with the highest grade of guard were 138 % down to 118 %. However there could be massive variation in earnings for different grades. An illustration of the variety between workers can be seen in the account by Semmens of Bill Hoole's pay when on the top link at Kings Cross. This link involved mileage bonus work as well as lodging turns: 'The basic rate for drivers had gone up the previous December to £9 12s. 6d. a week, and after the strike, following a Court of Inquiry, this was raised to £9 18s. 0d. Bill, of course, received a much better average wage than this because of mileage, so that during his two weeks on the "Elizabethan" that summer, he earned £32 14s. 5d. and £34 12s. 8d., plus £1 1s. 3d. expenses each week. Indeed, his income tax came to £7 18s. 0d. on his second week, which was as much as a man would earn weekly in his first year of driving up to December 1954'. Semmens, P. W. B. (1966) *Bill Hoole: Engineman Extraordinary*, London, Ian Allan. Several interviewees in the North East illustrated status decline by alluding to the fact that many of the drivers they had known before the war had bought their own houses and that their pay rate had been comparable with, or greater than, that of a police sergeant.

28. Tight labour markets were a particular problem in London and the South East. Bagwell, op. cit. 281-290, highlights the problem that London Transport faced in terms of recruitment in 1973: 'During this critical year the numbers of unemployed persons in London and the South East fell from 159,000 to 101,400 or from 2.1 per



cent to 1.4 per cent of the workforce, while the number of unfilled vacancies more than doubled from 99,200 to 202,200'; Several of the informants who worked on LT remember the problems such figures presented on the ground, one spoke of the way even very senior staff were leaving the job they had been employed on for over 30 years. Others told of the number of cancellations needed because of inadequate numbers of train crew.

29. From my own experience working on London Transport very quick promotions could occur after many years of stability. In my own time I gained a position of a Metropolitan Line relief signaller with only four years seniority, whereas I had been a box boy to signallers in the same position who had had to wait perhaps ten to fifteen years. Another signaller with whom I worked gained promotion to a senior signalling post after a decade and a half on the job and was referred to as the 'boy', as many of the other workers were in their fifties or sixties. An excellent example of the stability in railway work can be found in the biography of Bill Hoole. Here you get a sense of the stability which the seniority system produced for senior members of a grade, with drivers knowing years in advance where they would be in terms of the link at a particular shed, Semmens, *op. cit.*, esp. chs. 4-6.

30. Studs Terkel interviewed a retired US railroad engineer (driver) and he made very similar comparisons about the moral fibre of the younger workers. The same interviewee also spoke of the difference in supervision: 'The old days, when you had engineer, he was the boss. He was respected as a man and his judgement was respected from the top of the ladder to the bottom. That's gone now. They can get an

eighteen-year-old kid out of high school and make him a train master, and you try to tell him right from wrong, he's liable to have you up for insubordination. In the old days, you had judgement on your trains and what you could do. When you figured you had too much, you'd tell the train dispatcher. Your word was law. Respect's lost'. Terkel, S. (1990) *Working*, New York, Ballantine Books, 561.

31. Roberts, op. cit. 187, notes the way older generations of shipyard workers on the Wear blamed younger ones for being responsible for the river's decline because of their position as workers at the time of closure.

## **Chapter 5**

### **British Railway Management and Organisation 1979-**

**1997:**

### **From Commercialisation to Privatisation**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have examined the development and operation of railways in Britain up until 1979. It was seen that an adequate understanding of the strategies used by successive railway managements in the public and private sectors can only be attempted if the analysis is grounded in historical perspective. It has been argued that the way in which the industry developed in the Twentieth Century was as a direct result of the legal, economic and political environment it inherited from the previous century. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the management and workforce in the industry were both the product and the active creators of such a system. Management within the industry had developed strong internal labour markets with hierarchical and bureaucratic lines of reportage. The workforce also operated along and within clearly defined and sometimes rigidly enforced grade hierarchies. They were highly unionised and by the end of the 1970s, lowly paid in comparison to other workers. Earnings within the industry were raised by reliance on bonus payments, allowances and above all overtime.

This chapter examines the industry in the face of the changes brought about by successive Conservative governments since 1979. The initial section introduces the

context in which the party came to power with its identification of public expenditure and the public sector as both the symptom and cause of British economic decline. It will be argued that the conception of the problem and the policies subsequently adopted were heavily influenced by doctrinal ideology of the New Right. At its most basic this led to the labelling of the public sector, and in particular the nationalised industries, as failures along with all those who worked in them, regardless of their position in the organisation. It is suggested that this approach relied on a highly selective historical perspective, with the active editing of unsuitable evidence and the co-opting of that which could be useful. The BRB responded to this changed environment by attempting to seek accommodation between its corporatist past alongside the search for productivity gains. Such a policy led to the need for symbolic slaughtering of 'sacred cows' which resulted in a period of confrontation between the workforce and management.

The second part of the chapter seeks to explore the developments around the sectorisation of the industry during 1980s. It will be argued that this was a further attempt to distance the organisation from its past by developing a more market led approach. The final part looks at the process of privatisation in terms both of its conception and execution. Fieldwork evidence will be deployed from research carried out into a number of the organisations created as part of the process of privatisation. In each of these the wish to distance the organisation from its nationalised past is apparent, with a variety of strategies adopted in the process. Common to these, it is argued, is the use of history and its portrayal relative to the present and the future. This use of the past is at once purposefully superficial and

highly selective. Central to this process is the perceived role for labour within the new railways. It is suggested here that what is occurring is a 'greening' of 'brownfield sites', with the role of labour being prescribed by management in a far more active sense than has been the case hitherto. Material from both BR and London Underground Limited (LUL) is used in this section. This latter organisation is of interest as it remains in the public sector, and yet it has in some ways pushed the boundaries of culture change to a greater extent than those organisations now in the private sector.

## **The Context of Change**

The Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 against the background of a period of industrial unrest, labelled infamously as the 'Winter of Discontent' (Hay 1996b, 254). Hay argues that the period was carefully manipulated by the political right in order to juxtapose the strength and vision of the Tories with the carelessness and incompetence of the party in power. Hay further contends that the success of the Tories at the 1979 election was based on their ability to feed off and reflect popular public perceptions as to the relative power of the trade union movement (1). In many ways the strategy embarked upon in 1979 by the Conservatives was but a continuation of that of the Labour administration with its switch from quasi-Keynesian policies of the post-war era to the monetarist position, increasingly popular amongst economists (see Cockett 1995; Smith 1989; Stewart 1986, ch. 8). In addition there had been a change in the attitude of that government towards strong trade unionism and the issue of productivity (2).

The Thatcher project, as it in retrospect has come to be seen, was based on a conception of the economy and polity as being threatened by the unrestricted growth in the size and the scope of the state. Government was viewed as at best a necessary evil which should restrict itself to those aspects of life that the private sector could not or would not service. The aim was to liberate the private sector from governmentally imposed restrictions. Coupled to this was the reduction in the size of government via the tight control of public sector borrowing in order to free capital markets for efficient investment. Finally, it was planned to reduce the power of organised labour. It was felt that consensus politics, which had arguably been a feature of the post-war era, had led to a feather bedding of both trade unions and management in the public sector. The result, from this point of view, was that productivity gains were seen to be reduced by excessively greedy unions and weak management reluctant to face up to competitive pressures in previously tight labour markets (Hall and Jacques 1987; Hay 1996a, 1996b; Nichols 1986; Pollitt 1993, ch. 2; Smith 1989).

The new government sought to reduce public sector spending by restrictions on subsidy or grants and investment through the external financing limits (EFL) (see Ferner 1989, 2; MacInnes 1987, esp. ch. 4). In addition, the nationalised industries faced a range of policies which were designed to ensure that they acted like private sector organisations to an ever-greater degree. Strategies such as the devolving of budgets, creation of quasi-markets within larger groups, the use of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) to investigate the public sector, the selling of subsidiary businesses, and finally full privatisation were all used as part of this

process. On the supply side there has likewise been a range of initiatives, the aim of which was to free employers from the burden of unnecessary labour costs (3).

Running in parallel with these developments has been the valorisation by government of the role and status of 'management'. Pollitt (1993) argues that this has seen the insertion into the public sector of alien attitudes and concepts about the role of the sector and of those who work in it. This has resulted, he suggests, in the creation of a 'managerialism', whereby the role of a manager is viewed as a generic competence rather than an embedded skill or set of knowledges. Pollitt charts the rise of such attitudes both in Britain and the USA with the wholesale importation of private sector managers and techniques into public sector areas as well as government (4).

At the heart of these changes is the need for a reconfiguration of capitalism as a result of the end of the long post-war boom. Such a move has been described by Hay (1996b) as 'restating', or in Pollitt's (1993) work as 'retrenching'. The result of this has been to make state involvement in industry problematic in the face of increased global competition (see Aaronovitch et al 1981; Ferner 1988, 1989; Harvey 1989, esp. pt. 2; Hay 1996a, esp. pt. 4, 1996b; MacInnes 1987). This chapter aims to develop an analysis of the impact such changes have wrought in the railway industry, and in particular with respect to the process of privatisation which has occurred since the early 1990s.

### **British Rail in the Early 1980s**

Writing in his autobiography Peter Parker, Chairman of the BRB from 1976 to 1983, describes the situation the industry found itself in when he took office:

...in 1976, the public mood was bleak. Over the years people had become grimly accustomed to the railways being connected with rising payments from the tax payer, and the scale of the massive subsidies was taken as proof that the railways were massively inefficient. Railways had access to the public purse but apparently not the public mind or confidence. Always something of a music-hall joke, even in the good old days, they were now simply beyond a joke, clapped-out, unreliable, expensive and nationalised. The railways were no fun any more, the country had had enough (Parker 1991, 204).

With the arrival of the initial Thatcher government BR was faced with a dual problem. Firstly, the railways were part of the public sector which was seen as over ripe for reform, the prime instrument of which was to be budgetary discipline. This policy saw the progressive squeezing of the Public Service Order (PSO), the payment made in order to cover what were deemed to be socially necessary but loss making services. Pendleton has noted:

From 1983, a series of stepped reductions in government grant (the PSO) were imposed, with the result that by the end of the decade central government financial support for BR had been reduced by over 50 per cent in real terms...(Pendleton 1995, 218).

In addition railway investment was restricted as the EFL was imposed on the industry (5).

Secondly, the railways were to suffer because of the anti-rail traits in government and its advisers which associated the industry with collectivism, and the car as the ultimate expression of personal and individual freedom (6). Bagwell



compares the falling subsidy for the railways with the massive growth over the same period for the road sector. Investment in the latter rose from over £3000 million in 1981/2 to £6000 million in 1991/2 (Bagwell 1996, 120; see also Ferner 1988, ch. 4).

This combination of omens was all the more unfortunate given the pressing need for greater levels of investment required to replace the life expired equipment of the Modernisation Plan era dating back to 1955 (see chapter 3; see also Gourvish 1986, ch. 8). Parker and the BRB stepped up the search for greater levels of productivity, which they hoped would encourage the government to sanction more investment. At first the Board took the railway trade unions with them. Pendleton (1993) has described this period as one of 'tacit alliance', with the unions producing constructive suggestions as to how productivity gains might be made. Several authors have made the point that the railway industry was, until the early 1980s, marked by relatively good industrial relations. Bagwell notes that there were only four national strikes in the industry between 1948 and 1981 and that productivity had been gradually improved over the years (Bagwell 1996, 14) (7).

In the early 1980s the BRB produced six key demands on productivity; most notably these affected the train drivers' grade in terms of manning agreement and their line of promotion (Bagwell 1984, esp. ch. 7; Parker 1991, chs. 10 and 11; Pendleton 1991a). The sixth point, and the one that caused a series of damaging strikes during 1982, was concerned with flexible rostering. This was an attempt to move away from the guaranteed eight hour day which dated back to 1919 and was something of an article of faith to ASLEF in particular (see McKillop 1950, ch. 11; Raynes 1921, ch. 23) (8). The BRB aimed to replace the fixed eight hour shift with a

variable period of between seven and nine hours, with the ultimate aim of reduction in train crew depots and overall establishment (Pendleton 1991a, 1991b).

The importance of the issue of flexible rostering for our purposes is the light it sheds on the changing relationship between the BRB, the trade unions and the workforce. The dispute was seen as a symbolic shift away from the previous era of corporatist industrial relations, in this sense paralleling moves made in other nationalised industries for similar reasons (see Ferner 1988, 1989; Pendleton and Winterton 1993). It is interesting to note the way the strike affected Parker personally. Parker was himself a Labour Party supporter, indeed he had stood for the Party as a candidate in the general election of October 1951 (Parker 1991, ch. 4). His autobiography traces his movement from co-operation with the union movement to a position of hostility, describing the disputes over productivity as 'a necessary journey through hell' (Parker 1991, 262). The break made by Parker is illustrated in his discussion of tradition on the railways. In chapter three we saw how Parker had quickly seen himself, along with other railway managers, as a 'railwayman'. Later however, during the strike, it is clear that his view of that tradition was somewhat different. Here he draws a portrait of the grade of driver and their union, ASLEF:

The driver grieved over past glories. Once an engine-driver was what most boys wanted to be; now nobody bothered to stop and have a word with him about the journey, good or bad. Once the King of the Road, rising from cleaner, through fireman, to the throne on the footplate; now he was in unglamorous exile. Once he was inseparable from his locomotive, his castle and his home, cherishing it and its reputation for meeting the timetable, frying

breakfast on the shovel; now he and it were computer-programmed through the depot. Once sure of his place, superior, knowing the shedmaster; now he was adrift in the impersonal professional world of area managers and operating managers...Gradually the driver's grip on things was in truth slipping. It was as if esteem was lost with the loss of steam, self-esteem and other people's. And as I was bringing the chips down for change at the beginning of the Eighties, just when the union most required a prophetic, restoring vision, the executive was in the hands of class warriors battling in the trenches of 1919 agreements which had enshrined the sanctity of the eight-hour day (Parker 1991, 258-259).

At one level what this move represents is the working through of economic and political contradictions that had been present in the post-war settlement which had hitherto been diffused or managed in various ways (Aaronovitch et al 1981; Hay 1996a; 1996b; Leys 1989). Parker was in a position where he was pushing through reform against a trade union movement that itself was in a difficult position. Even if they had accepted the reforms proposed by the BRB there was no guarantee that the government would have allowed investment in the industry. And as Bagwell (1996) points out, given the anti-rail stance of the political administration this was by no means an unreasonable assumption to make (see also Bagwell 1984, esp. ch. 5). Pendleton (1991a) has also drawn attention to the symbolic nature of the battle and victory of the BRB over the flexible rostering issue, pointing out that after the dispute the estimated savings from the policy's imposition were possibly as small as 2.5 % (9).

## **Sectorisation**

As part of the process begun by Parker, the structure of the organisation was progressively modified from 1982 with the introduction of sectorisation (Gourvish 1990). The aim was to introduce a more market orientated approach to the railway with the clarifying of managerial role and responsibility. As part of this process five groups, or sectors, were formed within the organisation: Intercity, London and South East Passenger, Provincial and Freight and Parcels. The architect of these changes was Bob Reid who was to succeed Parker in 1983 as the Chairman of the BRB (10). Reid, unlike his predecessor, was himself a career railwayman having joined the LNER in 1947 as a Traffic Apprentice (Gourvish 1986, xv).

Reid's aim was to free-up and devolve decision-making in the organisation, allowing choices to be made at a more appropriate level. He believed that the previous structure had allowed frontline and middle managers to hide behind the bureaucracy and the industrial relations machinery of negotiation. This resulted in too many of the day-to-day operational decisions were being made at inappropriate levels. Sectorisation aimed at giving a sector director:

...clear 'bottom-line' responsibilities delegated to him and he is responsible for specifying to the Regional General Managers the standard of service he requires and the levels of expenditure and investment his business can afford (Reid in Foreword to Gourvish 1986, xvii).

As part of this process the area level of the organisation was abolished with these responsibilities being devolved or allocated at a sector or regional tier. The aim, as Bate has put it, was to:

...shift BR from being a “production-led” to a “business-led” organization more responsive and more commercially focused on grasping competitive advantage (Bate 1990, 88).

Reid’s contention was that in the past the industry had been dominated by engineering and operational considerations rather than marketing or commercial ones. Sectorisation aimed at breaking this cycle by the insertion of a market relationship between supplier (production) and customer (business sector). As Bate has stressed one of the greatest problems Reid identified was the culture and history in the industry:

For almost 100 years railways had a monopoly with no competition. Traces of that history still remain in the culture of the industry, which has been slow to believe that its monopoly has been broken...there has been a nostalgic hanging on to history (Reid quoted in Bate 1990, 86).

In distancing the organisation from its past, Reid attempted, like Parker before him, to send a signal to government that things had changed and that the railways were moving away from those aspects of the public sector that were viewed as disagreeable. As Ferner has put it:

...the reform process itself is part of the currency of political debate. Ministers are enabled to defend BR’s interests by arguing that its planning is now more ‘realistic’ and ‘professional’, rather than ‘over-optimistic’...and the entrepreneurial language of the ‘bottom line’ and ‘value-for-money’ enters the processes of political exchange and bargaining between politicians, civil servants and corporate actors (Ferner 1988, 65-66).

As part of the process of sectorisation the position of organised labour was challenged, with the devolving of power down the chain of command and the creation of separate businesses that increasingly pulled in different directions. Fairbrother (1996) has highlighted the way the devolving of budgets within large organisations represents a powerful way of controlling costs at lower levels of management. In discussing the problems faced by public sector trade unions and workers he identifies the changing structure of control:

A key aspect of the programme has been a reorganisation of the structures of management within the workplace and at a local level. In both local government and the civil service there has been a major decentralisation of operational managerial activities, as well as financial responsibilities, to the base unit of these bodies...This decentralisation of day-to-day operations has occurred within the framework of budgetary control and strategic decision-making at a corporate or headquarters level. It has involved the introduction and use of increasingly complicated financial indicators and controls (Fairbrother 1996, 115).

What was attempted here was the creation of devolved budget centres as a control strategy. The size of the budget was to be specified by the central organisation and left to the managers at a local level to 'decide' what to do with it. Thus the budget takes on the appearance of a formally rational structure within which the actors at the local level have to engage, rather than the substantively rational decision of the greater organisation. In other words there is a reification of

management's interpretation of the dilemma facing the organisation, diminishing room for manoeuvre for staff at a lower level and their trade unions.

This insertion of market logic into public, and indeed private sector organisations has been an important feature of the economy since the late 1970s. O'Connell Davidson notes the way in which the water industry:

Profit centre management both facilitated and intensified the more general shift away from a public service style of management towards a commercial, profit-maximising approach (O'Connell Davidson 1993, 49).

Likewise, du Gay and Salaman (1992) stress the trend in contemporary organisations away from bureaucratic control to that by markets with the privileging of the supplier-customer relationship both internal and external to the organisation. This type of 'management by stress' is seen by the majority of critical commentators to lie behind the adoption of strategies such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Just-In-Time (JIT) and some aspects of Human Resource Management (HRM) (see Beale 1994; Wilkinson and Willmott 1995; Stephenson 1996a; Storey 1992; Storey and Sisson 1993; Tuckman 1994, 1995).

It would be wrong to suggest that the process of sectorisation was totally successful or that its introduction was smooth. Paul Bate, an academic who acted during the 1980s as a consultant to BR regarding corporate culture, noted the differences between actors in the organisation which in many ways paralleled the tension between the 'railwaymen' and the 'Beeching boys' of the 1960s (see chapter 3; Bonavia 1981; Gourvish 1986, pt. 3; Hardy 1989). Bate highlights the division as between the established regional levels of management and those in the new sector

tier, interestingly linking the age of the organisational structure and the actors implicated in those positions:

British Rail is a good example of this contested cultural terrain. During the 1980s culture and counter-culture fought it out as the old guard in 'Production' clashed head-on with the young turks in the 'Sectors', each parading before the other ideologies and styles of thought which they knew to be provocative and unacceptable. The one side valued service ('value for money'/ the social railway), the other side profit ('money for value'/ the commercial railway). These were life issues, issues on which no inch of ground could be conceded. As one participant put it - a sector manager in fact - "there is a clash between those who seek professional management and those who see railways as a quasi-religion - something to which normal commercial disciplines shouldn't or couldn't apply" (Bate 1995, 150).

This tension within BR management is also echoed in John Storey's work, here he quotes a regional finance and planning manager:

The business side is being filled with younger, very good people. They are enthusiastic to make change happen. In contrast, the production people are older and more established, long on experience but reluctant to change. There is a struggle going on and one side will eventually come out on top. In my view it will be the business lot (Storey 1992, 206)

The problem for those wanting to make the changes to the organisation was the cynicism of some of those who had experienced 'culture change' before and saw



yet more change as a diversion. Again Bate quotes an interviewee in a senior managerial position:

During my thirty plus years it's been a series of revolutions. Energy is poured into something for a period of time, then it's "all change". It's not long before it is replaced by something else and then off we go again. All the previous energy has been wasted (Bate 1990, 94).

Such attitudes resonate with the experience of the 1960s, and continued into the 1990s. Bate goes on to argue that ultimately the 'old guard' were defeated:

Within five years of the introduction of sector managers and the 'business-led' culture, every one of the old regional general managers in production had moved jobs (in most cases not by choice) or had left the railways, and the responsibility for production had been handed over to the business directors (Bate 1995, 150-151) (11).

This last move had been made because of the tensions within the organisation caused by sectorisation. Bate has argued that BR went from having a two dimensional reporting structure based on regional and functional management to a three dimensional form where business sectors were mapped onto the existing ones (Bate 1990). This shift towards the dominance of 'business-led' culture culminated in 1991 with the introduction of the 'Organising for Quality' (O for Q) scheme which further strengthened the sectors, which then effectively became semi-autonomous businesses under the BRB, with the latter acting as a holding company. Under this structure each business had responsibility for their own production, engineering and

operations (see Gourvish 1990; Guest et al 1993; Harris and Godward 1997, 54; Pendleton 1995; Vincent and Green 1994).

The 1980s had also seen a range of other changes to the shape and nature of the BR structure with the progressive withdrawal from certain areas and the complete sale of a number of its subsidiary businesses (12). Thus BR during the 1980s had undergone substantial and far reaching change. It had moved to a business led form of devolved organisation, and to some extent solved some of the problems that had been a feature of railway management since the turn of the century. Much time, effort and money had been spent on this process, but it was seen by many in the organisation as the best structure that BR had had in its history.

## **The Process of Privatisation**

The Railways Act 1993 became law on 1st April 1994 after much debate in both Houses of Parliament (Bagwell 1996, ch. 13). The legislation was generally seen as very unpopular, Robert Adley, himself the Conservative member for Christchurch and Chair of the Commons Select Committee on Transport, described the policy as 'a poll tax on wheels'. Throughout the 1980s railway privatisation had been rejected on the grounds that it was too difficult, as it was recognised that a continuing public subsidy would be required if the social railway, first recognised under the 1968 Transport Act, was to be maintained. Nicholas Ridley, one of the many Secretaries of State for Transport (1983-1986) under Thatcher, and a keen advocate of de-nationalisation himself, advised her that railway privatisation would be 'a privatisation too far' (Harris and Godward 1997, 61; see also Ridley 1992). In spite of these objections the idea of creating a structure under which a sell-off could

be enabled continued to exercise the minds of various groups of the right during the 1980s (Harris and Godward 1997, ch. 5).

In the wake of the re-election of the Major government in the April of 1992, proposals for privatising the industry were unveiled in a White Paper (13). As Harris and Godward have argued, this document was heavily influenced by the ideas of the ‘think tanks’ mentioned above, and as such they believe that the policy and detail of it were heavily driven by ideology. John Major had himself mused over the possible shape that the privatised industry might take. In late 1991, according to a later article in *The Guardian* (17/2/92), ‘...John Major launched the idea of returning to the “good old days” of the four regional railway companies [the Big Four]’. This nostalgic view of the interwar period is reflected elsewhere in political discourse. Bagwell, quotes the right wing Conservative MP Sir John Stokes from a Commons Adjournment debate in 1991 comparing the nationalised industry with the Big Four era:

I remember the thrill of going to Paddington station en route to Oxford, and I remember the chocolate and cream coaches, the glorious engines and, of course, the station master in top hat and tails. Apprentices for the GWR had to go to Swindon to be approved. It was like joining a good regiment. The Railways were privately owned and the morale of the staff was high (quoted in Bagwell 1996, 133) (14).

The past in such discourse is used to conjure up a popular image that will resonate with popular memory, playing on a nostalgic hankering for an indeterminate time in the country’s history when it was more sure of its identity (Payton 1997; Sykes et al 1997). The political sub-text to this sort of imagery is the desire to return to a

situation when the workers were loyal to their company and had not had their heads turned by the lure of trade union promises (see for example Bonavia 1985a, ch. 12; Fiennes 1986; Pearson 1967, ch. 15).

The proposals contained in the White Paper included the creation of a separate track authority (later called Railtrack), the breaking up of the three passenger sectors (Intercity, Network Southeast and Provincial) into twenty five Train Operating Units (TOUs). In addition the freight sector was spilt into several parts. Trainload Freight, the part of the organisation that transported single products in train loads like coal or steel was itself to be divided up into three geographical areas. Many other units were created to take over the multifarious tasks of the BRB, with the eventual number of companies formed as part of this process numbering over a hundred (15).

This structure was the subject of much debate, and many within BR were unhappy about the disintegration of the organisational form that had emerged from the sectorisation and 'Organisation for Quality' processes. If privatisation was to go ahead it was argued by senior management, the sectors themselves should be sold off intact (16). In countering this position, government ministers argued that, if the moving into the private sector were to be a success, competition between the fragmented parts of the industry would have to be ensured. In other words, the structure of the 'new railway' was driven by ideological pressures rather than public or environmental interest. In the 1994 foreword to a Department of Transport booklet on the aim of the process John MacGregor, the Secretary of State for Transport, wrote:

The main objective of our proposals for the railways is to improve the quality of rail services by moving them into the private sector. We aim thereby to provide a structure and a pattern of ownership in which management is free to exercise its entrepreneurial talent. This will be achieved by loosening government control on the railways, by injecting competition and introducing market forces and by attracting investment from the private sector. New smaller companies will be more responsive to customer needs (Department of Transport 1994, 1).

MacGregor went on to praise what had been achieved under public sector management:

Privatisation is no criticism of British Rail or its past achievements, which have been considerable. British Rail's recent record on productivity, service, safety and punctuality is impressive, and it is known to run one of the most efficient railway systems in Europe (*ibid.*).

Interestingly just over twelve months before the same Minister had been less fulsome in his assessment, arguing the following in the debate over the then bill:

....it [BR] combined the classic shortcomings of the traditional nationalised industry. It is an entrenched monopoly. That means too little responsiveness to customer needs...Inevitably also it has the culture of a nationalised industry; a heavily bureaucratised structure...an instinctive tendency to ask for more taxpayers' subsidy (MacGregor quoted in Bagwell 1996, 139) (17).

In 1995 Brian Mawhinney, the third of four Ministers for Transport to be involved in the privatisation process, was also critical in a speech, arguing that even after fourteen years of greater customer focus:

...the old arrangements were flawed because they were producer-led. Most MPs will tell you that their travelling constituents thought the services offered owed more to the convenience of BR than they did to the passenger...It was the same old nationalised industry story: the management taking all the key decisions on a centralised, bureaucratic basis and without a stable financial regime. The command economy with a vengeance. This is not a criticism of BR management. It is a criticism of the structure (Department of Transport 1995, 4).

This last passage and that of MacGregor's from 1994, marked an important shift in the rhetoric over the industry and its management. Gone was the implication that the management within the railways were incompetent simply because they worked in the public sector. The problem was now portrayed as a function of the structure of state owned industry or the public sector generally. All that was required to solve the 'problem' was the freeing of the entrepreneurial spirit latent within the industry's management by means of privatisation. An alternative reading of this move could be that both Ministers realised that they were heavily reliant on the very managers, who had hitherto been criticised, to ensure that privatisation worked. These were the same actors who were expected to mount management/employee bids for the numerous companies and franchises, and to operate the system once in the private sector. Again

history became the plaything of the political process, its meaning malleable in the face of different sets of problems (18).

## **Privatisation**

I now want to explore the immediate run up to privatisation and the situation thereafter through a series of separate but interlinked themes: culture; corporate identity and image; history and nostalgia. These issues are developed in the analysis of how management within organisations created under the process of railway privatisation thought of, or portray their companies. It is argued that there has been a conscious attempt to denigrate the past in order to make the solutions or strategies subsequently implemented seem as the natural or necessary steps required in order to cope with the previous legacy of failure.

## **Changing Culture**

The 'cultural turn' in industrial sociology and management literature has a long pedigree, perhaps its genealogy reaches back to F. W. Taylor (1947) if not before. From Taylor onwards the concern with workplace culture could be seen as a recurring theme in both disciplines' attempt to handle the more intractable problems of the work environment (see Brown 1992, esp. ch. 1; Rose 1988). More recently, attention to this issue has been stimulated in part by the publication and subsequent proselytising of Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search Of Excellence* (see du Gay and Salaman 1992; Guest 1992; Willmott 1993). At the heart of the so called 'Excellence' literature and of that which followed, was a concern with the organisation's need to ensure that it possessed the 'right kind of culture' (see Champy

1995; Deal and Kennedy 1988). Underpinning such moves was the implicit understanding that successful cultures were essentially unitary rather than pluralist.

More recently there has been powerful criticism of such views. Lynn-Meek (1988) attacked what she believes is the misappropriation and subsequent distortion of anthropological and sociological understandings of the subject. In particular, she criticises the selective use of structural functionalist notions of culture, the attraction of which lay in the dualistic labelling of healthy/functional and non healthy/dis-functional parts of any organisation or group. Wright (1994) adds to this critique by pointing to the way:

Culture has turned from being something an organisation is into something an organisation has, and from being a process embedded in context to an objectified tool of management control (Wright 1994, 4).

Others working in this field echo this concern, exemplifying the way management attempts to deploy these very notions of corporate culture for market advantage. In the work of Catherine Casey (1995) this process is described as 'corporate colonisation'. In her case study she describes the way an organisation sought a fit between:

The person's values, attitudes and general orientations...with those promoted by the organizational culture. Consequently, specific traits and attitudes that are useful to the work and the team are stimulated and rewarded. Traits and attitudes that are unnecessary or that impede the process of the workplace culture, and therefore production are thwarted and suppressed (Casey 1995, 139).



In du Gay's (1996) work on the British retail sector, he highlights the way companies are increasingly screening their prospective employees. He argues that firms engaged on this sort of project increasingly look to 'make up' the kinds of workers required, leading to a situation where workers are:

... 'enterprising' subjects: self regulating, productive individuals whose sense of self-worth and virtue is inextricably linked to the 'excellent' performance of their work and, thus, to the success of the company employing them (du Gay 1996, 119).

Grint also reflects on the inherent danger in the attraction of culture change for organisations in seeing culture in a narrow unitarist way:

Just as dominant class cultures represent themselves as *the* culture by first undermining subordinate or counter-cultures, and then parading themselves as neutral or even natural, so corporations may follow a similar strategy... The long term aim is first to eliminate the institutional mechanisms that embody alternative cultures and then, once these have been removed, to represent the official culture not just as the only culture but actually as a perfectly normal way of seeing the world (Grint 1995, 178).

In some ways the changes taking place in the railway industry during the 1980s could be seen as having at their root this new managerial concern with culture. Indeed as we have witnessed, much of the criticism of the old industry's structure was focussed on its culture (Bate 1990, 1995; Guest et al 1993; Pendleton 1995). If Bate shows that the corporation attempted a 'culture change', Pendleton explores the way management in the various business sectors was increasingly keen to implement new

forms of work practice that were designed to tackle head-on the 'problem' at the micro and mezzo level. Seen in this light, the process of privatisation represents another stage on an already well worn path. A pamphlet from the influential Institute of Economic Affairs pointed out how privatisation might help speed culture change:

The fact that 70% of British Rail drivers will retire by the year 2000 may appear to be unfortunate because of new training costs, but it means that changes of attitude can occur through the natural process of replacement. For instance, if new, young staff are recruited by independent companies, it is not certain that they will choose to join the established rail unions, or any union at all (Glaister and Travers 1993, 40) (19).

The implication is clearly that older workers are less pliable because of their connection with trade unionism, and younger workers will be more so because of an absence of union commitment. In addition to the occurrence of this demographic 'time bomb' there has been a 'happy' coincidence in the contraction of the industry as part of the very process of privatisation. This has seen most if not all freight and passenger units shedding staff in the run up to their own sale (20). In Loadhaul, the company studied as part of this project, the chance to reduce levels of older staff had been taken. A Human Resource Development manager told me:

Ten years ago when I first joined we were having a mega panic because of age profiles of drivers. They were all nearly in their sixties...but because of concepts like Train Crew Agreement, rationalising of staff, reduction in staffing, Driver Only Operation and Variable Rostering and all the other things that have reduced staff numbers we are at a situation currently where

age profile isn't too bad. A lot of the older people have gone under voluntary severance schemes and a lot of those still here are waiting to go quickly because we have got an attractive severance package at the moment which they can see won't last after privatisation. So they are keen to take advantage of that...we are rapidly getting to the stage where we have got a young workforce (HRM Manager Loadhaul, interview 1995).

In this sense the older workers are 'softened up' before being offered 'voluntary redundancy', a practice that has been a recurring one in British industry over the last two decades (see Roberts 1993; Turnbull and Wass 1995). Another manager in the same firm spoke of the problems the issue of age presented for the organisation:

As time marches the barrier is getting lower, the new grade, the new people. The young people don't perceive as much as the old people... A lot of the generation of people we have got were from that generation [steam days, pre-1968], people older than fifty-five, they are the real old stalwarts, they are the people who create the biggest barriers, not maliciously, it's just there (Manager Loadhaul, interview 1995).

This concern with age was also echoed in an interview with a Train Crew Leader (21) in his late twenties. He spoke of the difficulties experienced in his interactions with older workers:

...you're always a lad until you've got fifty years in, that's just the way it is; I think the culture's changing slightly because it is getting younger, you'll see downstairs the supervisors are more my age, whereas at one time you'd have

found they'd have been driving for twenty or thirty years and they would have been fifty years old (Train Crew Leader Loadhaul, interview 1995).

Similarly the Industrial Relations Manager at Loadhaul differentiated between older and younger workers in the driving grade:

Some of them realise they can't hang on to too much tradition, the old ways would not be helpful to themselves or to the public...but it doesn't happen overnight. You can't destroy thirty years. Most of our employees now are under the thirty-five age group which would still give them something between, probably twenty to thirty years service - we've still got some people well over forty-five, it's the older workforce (Industrial Relations Manager Loadhaul, interview 1995).

One of the interesting features about Loadhaul during its transition to the private sector was the way they had been allocated their staff from the old BR organisation. When the sector organisations split into TOUs and numerous freight companies, drivers could, to a certain extent, opt to work for the company of their choice, subject to seniority. Loadhaul, was somewhere in the middle in popularity terms, since there were some mileage payments and shift allowances but not as many as the long distance Intercity companies. A training manager explains:

It varies [the age], the high point and low point is probably not so significant in Loadhaul but if you go to Regional Railways at Leeds - If you go there - one of my colleagues, he's a manager there in fact, he'll tell you the same, they've got people off the street...the majority of their staff are very young so they haven't got them barriers. You go to Intercity in Doncaster, them drivers used

to belong to us, split up, they've pinched fifty of our drivers, but there isn't one of them under the age of sixty, so you can imagine what there is over there in that prejudice - quite interesting to see what develops when these people retire - where they get the new ones from. I think they're going to pinch ours, that's what we fear (Training Manager Loadhaul, interview 1995).

One of the most pressing problems facing the new organisation was to convince the staff that the change was permanent. A Human Resource Manager reported:

The other big communications exercise is our new identity, I mean as soon as we became Loadhaul to actually get people to feel part of Loadhaul rather than part of BR...I think we're moving forward but I think there are still people whose view is "I joined British Railways and I intend to carry on working for British Railways and this privatisation won't happen"...and that's very difficult. You can tell people and you can tell them and tell them, but at the end of the day some people find it very difficult to accept that the great organisation that was a career for life is on its way out...We're trying to engender ownership and participation in Loadhaul (Human Resources Development Manager Loadhaul, interview 1995) (22).

Since the above interviews were carried out, Loadhaul, along with the two other former Trainload Freight companies (Mainline and Transrail), has been subsumed into the much larger, US owned English Welsh and Scottish Railway company (EWS). With this change in ownership have come more redundancies with others in the pipeline as part of a larger restructuring plan for the new combine (23). EWS have made even more explicit moves to 'change the culture'. Ian Braybrook,

the former head of Loadhaul was made Managing Director of the new company. In an interview he summarised his thoughts on culture:

As for staff-management relations, it is a fresh culture we need to acquire. The lack of the 'them and us' mentality, getting people to believe in the company, to *want* to work for the company...There is an old business school dictum which says: "To turn a company that is performing badly financially takes three years; to turn round a company which has inadequate systems and IT takes six years; to change a culture takes 20". Well we haven't got 20 years. We aim to change the culture in three or four (*The Railway Magazine*, August, 1997, 49-50).

In other parts of the 'new' railway this process of redundancy has also been allied with a targeted attack on the older culture. Within the organisation that gained responsibility for the track and signalling of BR, Railtrack, work practices at all levels have been changed, flexibility in terms of shift patterns introduced and a corporate culture change programme enacted. This latter move was launched in August 1996:

...a company-wide improvement programme- called C. Change to deliver the culture change that will make us a more flexible and customer focused organisation (*Railtrack 1997a*, 3).

Inside the organisation this process has been experienced before it was formalised in the C. Change programme. One manager I interviewed realised that things had changed during the signalling dispute of 1994 when he, along with other managers and supervisory staff, were put under great pressure to cross picket lines:

My boss said “Right you’re going to work a signal box, we’re going to run trains, we’re going to break the strike”...But most of the lads, most of the signalmen realised that the people like ourselves were in a no-win situation...It wasn’t us that were dictating the policy, it was coming from above and the supervisors that I’m responsible for and myself stuck out until the fourth and fifth week before we eventually succumbed...By the fifth week they were pointing at us and saying “You’re going in or you’ll be sacked as well”. And I’ve never come across that before, never come across it in all the years of being in the supervisory grade and recently the management grade. It was a nasty feeling. I hope I never experience it again, and I suddenly realised how much things had changed, the whole culture had changed (Railtrack Manager, interview 1995).

It would be expected that in periods of industrial dispute such issues come to the fore but a change in the culture of the organisation was also noted at other, less volatile times. In an interview with the same manager two years later he likened the situation he now found himself to that in Cambodia after the take over by the Khmer Rouge:

It’s like 1994 [the year Railtrack was established] was Year Zero. Anything that happened before that, they don’t want to know (Railtrack Manager, interview 1997).

Importantly here, the division between management and the shopfloor is blurred at one level because of the common experience of marginalisation in the face of corporate restructuring. Both the established workforce and management have common reference points and to some extent share an occupational morality.

This particular manager had, as part of the C. Change initiative mentioned above been on a course at a country house. This type of strategy is also noted by O'Connell-Davidson where the water company she studied, Albion Water, attempted to make a symbolic break with the past. As part of this process the company took its staff to just such an establishment (O'Connell-Davidson 1993, ch. 8) (24). The importance of such moves would seem to lie in the way they decontextualise normal workplace interaction, essentially appearing outside the employment relationship.

In many ways there are interesting parallels between these attempted culture changes and the experiences of those working for London Underground. In the late 1980s there were moves to introduce greater flexibility in parts of the system, culminating in a project called 'Action Stations', which aimed at producing multi-functional station staff grades (to reduce establishment levels). In the early 1990s a far more ambitious attempt at corporate culture change was enacted with the introduction of the 'Company Plan'. This was a radical and far reaching programme to change long established work patterns and practice:

...London Underground's wide-ranging plan consists of a package of measures which include staff reductions, salary status for all employees, the abolition of premium pay for weekend working, a reduction in the number of separate grades of staff from 400 to 70, and the replacement of promotion based on seniority to one based on assessed merit (Storey and Sisson 1993, 17).

In the lead up to the implementation of the Company Plan all existing staff were issued with new contracts, and generous redundancy deals were offered to those who 'chose' to leave the organisation. These payments were based on seniority and



therefore encouraged older more experienced workers to leave. Thus those who remained after the change had symbolically and physically signed-up to the changes and were then effectively deemed to have accepted them. Management referred to the period before the Company Plan as the 'Old World' and, predictably, that from its introduction as the 'New World' (25).

What these illustrations have in common is an attempt on the part of management to move away from the past. In each, the age profile of the staff plays an important part. The older workers are seen as embodying the past, as backward looking and unprepared to change (26). Such processes could be understood as the disembedding modification and then re-embedding of a particular culture. Unlike Giddens' (1991, 242) definition I want to argue that the latter move can be made without necessary recourse to different spatial or temporal locale. Rather the disembedding/re-embedding process is carried out precisely because of spatial fixity. In this sense the stubbornness of particular identities or cultures leads to a need to rework the architecture of particular workplaces or firms *in situ*. Here again, Pollitt's (1993) notion of retrenching is useful in understanding such a process. Put simply, programmes and tactics such as those explored above allow capital to reconfigure the employment relationship in their interest, albeit temporarily.

### **Changing Identity and Image**

Since the 1970s there has been increased interest in, and use of, (on the part of companies) image change as part of a process of organisational distancing from its own past (27). It would be wrong to understand contemporary developments as being without precedent. Organisations have long consciously used image and livery to

symbolise and project identity, and this is reflected in industrial design (Heskett 1980), and in architecture (Dixon and Muthesius 1985; Richards and MacKenzie 1988, esp. chs. 1-4). Indeed, it could be argued that in terms of the industrial corporations the railway companies have been in the vanguard of such developments (see for example Haresnape 1979). What is interesting is that in the case of both architecture and industrial design, railway undertakings have used image in order to project solidity and modernity at different times. Heskett argues that the streamlining of trains and locomotives in the interwar period was due to shifts in competition:

In many cases, greater attention to visual identity was a response to pressures of competition. During the inter-war years, the growth of alternative forms of transport, such as motor cars, coaches and aircraft, had caused the railways to suffer a serious loss of passenger revenue. In consequence, they updated their approach not only by introducing new forms of motive power such as diesel and electric engines, but also by cultivating an image of speed and modernity. Streamlining was widely used to this end (Heskett 1980, 127) (28).

Contemporary academic interest in image change likewise sees competition as one of the most important stimuli. Alvesson (1990) for example argues that with the increasing rate of flux in the global economy and the more problematic social order, a heightened sense of identity, culture and image is created. Alvesson goes on to suggest that image has increasingly been important because of shifts in the economy away from substantive areas, such as manufacturing and extractive industries to the service sector where product is perhaps less tangible. Finally, he believes that

corporations have become far more conscious of their ability to make and manipulate the news by way of publicity stunts or press launches.

In the lead up to privatisation of the railways, image and identity have been increasingly used to herald change. In the case of Loadhaul, corporate identity was a priority in the wake of its separation from the larger freight sector. As a leaflet, produced for internal consumption, explained;

Trainload Freight North East begins a new era in October 1994 as we take the next step towards becoming a British Rail subsidiary. We will quickly need to develop an identity distinct from British Rail and from the other former Trainload Freight businesses who will soon be our competitors. Corporate identity is the total visual impact of an organisation; the name and how it is presented...Loadhaul Ltd. is the chosen name. It is succinct, describes our activities and gives us a clear identity without breaking all links with our past (Loadhaul document 1994).

Loadhaul was created as a separate organisation in April 1994 as one of three Trainload Freight companies set up to ensure competition in the rail freight market. The new identity was launched in the summer of the same year. However, Loadhaul, along with its 'competitors', was taken over in February 1996 by a consortium headed by the American railroad Wisconsin Central Transportation. Ed Burkhardt, the American manager of the parent company insisted that his company would only be interested in buying all three companies or none. In an interview with *Rail Magazine* Burkhardt is quoted as saying 'I wish we could get that money back' in reference to the amount spent by the three independent Trainload companies on creating their

new, short lived, identities (29). In late April 1996 Wisconsin, then trading as North and South railways launched its own 'new' livery, using the brand name of English Welsh and Scottish Railway (30). The EWS organisation and image was designed to pull together the three Trainload companies along with Rail Express Systems (RES) the operator of Royal Mail trains and later Railfreight Distribution (RfD).

Corporate identity has played an increasingly strong part in the marketing strategy of Intercity East Coast (31). As part of this company's transition into private sector ownership an image change was called for. Interestingly it was to the past that the company looked. Here the choice is explained in the company's 'in-flight' magazine:

East Coast has updated its image to reflect its status as a dynamic railway on the move in an environment which is itself fast changing. The new look was conceived by the leading international brand consultancy, Interbrand. Interbrand reviewed the company's previous visual identities, selecting an early LNER concept as being particularly interesting. Interbrand's aim was to develop an elegant signature and symbol, combining modernity with tradition, which would clearly communicate that the service offered by East Coast is premium-quality, efficient and friendly (32).

In the same magazine, attention was drawn to the record breaking speed run between Newcastle and Peterborough in June and to the publicity that the company were deriving from it (33). Again this echoes public relations exercises carried out in the inter-war years by the Grouping companies (see for example Harris 1987).

This image did not last long. In March 1996 the East Coast franchise was awarded to Great Northern Railways Limited (GNR), a subsidiary of Sea Containers whose other operating companies include Hoverspeed, SeaCat and the Orient-Express (34). In an interview Christopher Garnett, Chief Executive of the new company, discussed the choice of the name GNR and was asked whether he was aware of that company's past:

...it's tied-in absolutely to the brand...Yes, we'll build on the past, but I think we have to have colours and an image that are relevant to the 1990s. The product has to be the fastest trains in Britain - the East Coast has always led the way there and we will continue to do that...We'll be a trail blazer - but we're not going back to the past - that's why we haven't used the name London & North Eastern Railway (35).

It is interesting to note the way history is being used as a 'brand' attached to a 'product', something that is itself capable of being marketed. As the French historian Le Goff put it '...memory has thus become a best-seller in a consumer society' (Le Goff 1992, 95). By the late summer of the same year Garnett was able to inform East Coast passengers:

You may be interested to learn that we have plans to make some changes to the company's name and look. Internationally-acclaimed designer, Massimo Vignelli has been commissioned to create a striking new livery and trademark for East Coast which we plan to unveil this autumn (36).

By the next issue of the same magazine the plans were beginning to take shape with an announcement that:

This autumn East Coast will change its name to Great NorthEastern Railway [sic] and will introduce a new identity to herald a new era in rail travel (37).

By the following edition the design for the new livery and corporate identity had been completed, Garnett announced:

The most visible change is of course the new name - Great North Eastern Railway - and colour schemes to match. Inevitably, this will be shortened to the initials GNER, and I expect (and hope) that this acronym will be as well known and respected as the LNER was some 50 years ago...New names and colour schemes make the most obvious statement about moving away from the British Rail past (38).

At around the same time a leaflet was issued showing the new livery with a 'new' liveried train symbolically emerging out of an 'old' Intercity East Coast one under the banner 'The new golden age of rail travel is arriving' (39).

How then are we to understand this play with corporate identity and image in the contemporary railway industry? In this regard the railways are little different from other industries with their periodic corporate 'make overs', or 'face-lifting operations' in Alvesson's work (1990, 384; see also Olins 1994). Alvesson suggests that the very awareness and use of image in the contemporary business world sets in motion its own contradictions in terms of an acceleration of the shelf life of any particular image:

The increased interest in producing images creates competition between companies such that '...the contexts of western societies are overcrowded with

symbolic representations, forcing organisations to create stronger and maybe falser images to make an imprint on the context' (Alvesson 1990, 284) (40).

One result of such a process is the borrowing or manipulation of previously used images or design, Raphael Samuel has described this trend as 'retrochic' (Samuel 1994, esp. pt. 1). He highlights the way retrochic is:

...playful and theatrical in the way it appropriates artefacts and uses them as icons or emblems. According to the theorists of postmodernism, retrochic differs from earlier kinds of period revival in that what it does is parodic. It is irreverent about the past and only half-serious about itself (ibid., 95).

Samuel goes on to suggest that there is little necessarily new in such borrowing:

Revivalism, the recycling of old images, the taking up of lost inheritance, has been a leitmotiv of European culture ever since the quattrocento's discovery (or rediscovery) of classical antiquity (ibid., 110).

This tension between the idea that what is occurring, in terms of corporate identity and their use of symbols for marketing purposes, is new or merely the continuation of a well established trend is explored in Harvey's work (1989). Harvey attempts to rescue a materialist understanding of the contemporary world as still being capitalistic, but that change has occurred in the way it operates. He adds that this dynamic tendency within capitalism has always been a central feature of the system. Below the surface froth of rapidly changing images and identity capitalism as a system still operates in much the same way as it did in Marx's day. As Harvey argues these changes:

...when set against the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation, appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as a sign of the emergence of some entirely new postcapitalist or even postindustrial society (Harvey 1989, vii) (41).

What I want to suggest is that the use of image and corporate identity is not necessarily new, nor that it represent a new stage of capitalist development but rather that it is a logical progression within the existing social and economic order. What is perhaps novel is the speed at which new images are created and recreated in line with perceived market expectation. We now go on to explore more fully the use and perhaps the abuse of history as part of the process of privatisation.

### **History - The Nostalgia of Organisations and the Organisation of Nostalgia**

In his essay on organizational nostalgia Yiannis Gabriel (1993) discussed the role of nostalgia within the workforce as an organising emotion. Gabriel argued that such an emotion was an important source of identity and meaning for older employees, especially where change had taken place. As part of this process 'past' and 'present' were juxtaposed ideologically with a positive reading of the former and negative of the latter. Thus marginalised workers could be understood to derive ontological security, individually and collectively, from their sense of the past. This was most fully celebrated in the failure of the new, supposedly improved system of organising work (42).

Similarly the same author points out that being an established member of a workforce does not necessarily mean that every actor invests in such understandings.



Some will actively decry the past, arguing that change was both necessary and an improvement on the past. Gabriel labels such action as 'nostophobia' (Gabriel 1993, 136). To build on Gabriel's understanding of nostalgia, and its obverse, I want to argue that it is not simply the actors at the shopfloor level that use and find meaning in the deployment of such emotions or characterisations. Rather, organisations can and do make use of them as part of both the process of culture change and of corporate identity modification.

In the new Railtrack organisation, set up in 1994, we have seen the way the company has undergone a culture change process already, after only two years in existence. But the corporate divorce from its past was occurring in a 'subtler' way at least eighteen months before. A Railtrack manager, who had joined BR in the 1960s described the way he felt increasingly marginalised within the 'new' organisation. He discusses here his experience of managers' meetings:

I'm finding even now, that there's only myself as a manager, and another guy as a manager...who have any length of service and who can relate to problems happening...what I find alarming and frightening because there's times when we're sitting and I say I've got twenty-five years in and Fred has thirty-seven years, but we're sitting there and there might be something relevant happened to me. Because we relate to, we had similar problems...you can tell because the people who are above you weren't on the job at that particular time because they haven't got the service in, they cannot relate and they find that because they cannot relate to what you're trying to help them with, you're not reminiscing, I'd be the first to say I don't mind reminiscing...but at the end of

the day it's relevant to what we're about at a particular meeting (Railtrack Manager, interview 1995).

This disengagement with the past and those identified with it has had particular outcomes in this case, with an effective silencing of experienced supervisors and in this example managers:

Because it happened twenty and fifteen years ago, or before that, they find that threatening because they can't identify with what we're about...Oh yes, that railway culture's been challenged, but at the end of the day, for as long as we intend to run trains, there'll be problems and by all the old hands being told to shut up and get out, somebody should say "hang on now, why didn't we listen to them" (ibid.).

The outcome for this manager at least was that he effectively bit his tongue at meetings where his experience would have been valuable in solving generic railway industry problems. This would seem to reflect Grint's concept of corporate 'domination over the silenced' (1995, 180).

Railtrack were also engaged in rewriting the past during the damaging signal workers strike of 1994 (Strangleman 1995). Throughout the dispute the company portrayed the strikes as holding on to outdated custom and practice and there was much discussion of 'Spanish practices'. These, taken out of context, looked unreasonable but in reality were historic devices for gaining extra sources of pay outside the annual wages round, and were tacitly acknowledged by both sides (see Bagwell 1982, esp. chs. 5, 6 and 10; Gourvish 1986, chs. 4, 7 and 12). Thus Railtrack

could, and did, represent themselves as a thoroughly modern management attacking a trade union dinosaur (Strangleman 1995) (43).

In the case of GNER the corporate relationship with its past is a little more problematic and complex. James Sherwood, the head of Sea Containers (the company that owns GNER), had commented that his company needed to ‘get rid of the communist approach to running a railway’ (44). And, as quoted above, Garnett, the Chief Executive of GNER spoke of ‘moving away from the British Rail past’ (45). However, later reflections on the past in company literature sees history being reflected in a more positive light:

We are proud inheritors of traditions of speed, safety and service going back nearly 150 years. Now under private management, we intend to build upon these traditions and strive for new levels of excellence in the age of high speed train travel (46).

Similarly, another company document talks of:

Great North Eastern Railway Limited is our new company name replacing Intercity East Coast Ltd. which we inherited from British Rail. Great North Eastern Railway...is a new name with a sense of the history, the romance, of the great days of railways. Our aim is to recreate the golden era of railway travel by setting the highest standards of service, speed and quality. The name comes with new train liveries and corporate design. Over the coming months, our trains will be repainted in stylish dark blue livery set off by a red stripe and company crests (47).

This theme of evoking romance was also highlighted in an edition of the company's passenger magazine *Livewire*, here an article discusses an advertising promotion:

The campaign builds on the golden era of train travel, and the quality of service evoked by the GNER name...GNER also recognises that rail travel can be as much an emotional experience as a practical one...(48).

Thus GNER trades on the past in several different ways, at once complementary and contradictory. It has an interest in rubbishing its past, or that which it inherited from its nationalised predecessor. As part of this process it needs to distance itself in terms of corporate culture and identity. At the same time, it explicitly trades on (or off) its past drawing on both pre and post Grouping companies (GNR, NER and LNER) as well as the undoubted progress in speed made in the BR era (49). In addition to this chameleon like existence, with the eclectic borrowing of traditions and symbols, the same organisation is also involved in the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). This is defined by the authors as:

...a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. *In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 1) (emphasis added).

In GNER's case, the company has attempted to make just such a link with history, and simultaneously invented a new livery and attached a insignia that mimics a coat of arms, above which is the phrase 'route of the Flying Scotsman' (50). These symbols

and livery, produced for the company by a North American design consultant, are attached to a train which was the product of the late Twentieth Century. This train and the infrastructure on which it runs were the product of a nationalised industry (51).

In the case of the freight company studied, Loadhaul and later EWS, the use and abuse of the historical record takes on a different style. The original reason for splitting up the three Trainload Freight companies from the larger freight sector in 1994 was to allow them to be more 'customer focused' and 'responsive' to market need. This, it must be remembered, was the impetus behind the Sectorisation process in the first place beginning in 1982 (see Bate 1990, 1995; Gourvish 1990). These three companies were profitable, indeed the combined organisation was the single most profitable part of the BR organisation (52). As we have seen, the EWS takeover of the three separate businesses was because:

Few bidders [private sector] were interested in individual companies because of the 'threat' of competition from the other two - but the outright purchase of all three was an attractive proposition (53).

As the new Managing Director of EWS put it:

The government was lucky given the sales process and the way things looked that events have ended up the way they have. Fortunately, we have a business of the right shape and the right size (54).

Ed Burkhardt was more critical of the BR past than his Managing Director, in a letter to all the employees of the organisation, reported in the railway press he wrote:

BR poisoned the well wherever it went...It ran off single wagon shipments and made it impossible for anyone but the largest shippers to use rail...Even

among the remaining trainload operators, British Rail made enemies through unmitigated greed in pricing and forced customers to buy their own wagons and even their own locomotives...The result is well known, a steady decline towards oblivion in rail market share (55).

And later in the same piece he explicitly addressed culture and history:

Most of their ideas [freight customers] of what a railway can do (or cannot do) for them were shaped from a lifetime of dealing with British Rail. That means we have a real task on our hands to change our act, and, by so doing, change our image to that of a truly customer orientated organisation...We have a huge task on our hands to reverse this sorry history (56).

Ironically, or perhaps inconveniently, the reason why BR had 'poisoned the well' was in their continuing quest for business efficiency and the pursuit of a profitable core business. It was precisely because of this that wagon load freight had been targeted by the Beeching reforms in the 1960s, and that this market was largely ignored thereafter (Gourvish 1986, pt. 3; Hardy 1989; Munns 1986, chs. 5-10). Such traffic finally fell victim to the greater push for commercialisation. Similar economic rationality and market logic had driven the sectorisation process and the subsequent creation of the three separate Trainload Freight businesses in 1994.

These same businesses, though only in existence for a very short time, had begun to compete fairly seriously with each other for the existing business left on the rails. Whilst carrying out fieldwork at Loadhaul in 1995 I was told by a supervisor that one of the company's locomotives had been 'sabotaged' by a rival company's staff whilst it was being serviced at a 'foreign' depot. The aim was to demonstrate to

potential and existing customers that Loadhaul was an unreliable supplier and that they should transfer their business to the rival firm (57). A Train Crew Leader gave an example of the competition between the rival companies. Loadhaul attempted to save on the expense of hiring in a rival company's crew wherever they could, and here he describes the way he identified an opportunity for such a saving by observing the actions of a 'foreign' crew that manned part of the journey of a Loadhaul flow:

...[I was sent on a] spying mission if you like - I was sent out to monitor noise levels at Biggleswade, and looking at the timing of the diagram (58). I filled in a report saying I could do the job...they [Loadhaul management] said "OK, investigate it, do some more timings, have a ride out, do the shunting timings". But so they [the rival company's crew] wouldn't see what I was doing, I didn't want them to get an inkling of what was happening, so I went in the car and was watching from the bushes at the side of the railway. That's how we got the job, by proving it could be done. It's a Loadhaul contracted flow of traffic, but because we're a small geographical area we're forever buying in train crews from other areas...(Train Crew Leader Loadhaul, interview 1995).

It has to be remembered that although the companies were separate businesses by this stage they were still wholly owned subsidiaries of the BRB. Under the old BR system optimum use had been made of crews within given agreements, yet now they were being asked to work rosters that sometimes saw them having to work fewer productive hours so that as much of the work as possible could be carried out 'in house' rather than sub-contracted to rival companies. Thus working arrangements

that objectively were economically irrational, made perfect sense within the system created in order to introduce competition in the privatisation process (59).

So, as was the case with GNER and Railtrack, Loadhaul/EWS's relationship to its own past was problematic, sometimes to be drawn on but usually as something to be used as a symbol of failure. As Ramsay has put it:

Dismissive backward glances, intended only to contrast the tarnished past product with the latest shiny device, mark the typical limit of retrospective analysis (Ramsay 1996, 157).

The dualistic coupling being made here is that public ownership is inherently unsuccessful and, conversely, private ownership inherently successful. This situation is complicated by the fact that most of the new organisations still employ many older career railwaymen and women, with all the management and supervisory staff interviewed at Loadhaul having worked for BR for some years before the privatisation process began, and several managers even having started their careers in the early 1960s. And this is true of many of the managerial positions in other parts of the 'new railway'. Roger Ford pointed out that of the twenty-five TOCs, there were only two in which, after franchises were let, the manager leading the organisation that had not worked for BR previously; one of these was Garnett of GNER (60).

### **History, Culture, Identity and Image**

In order to understand events in the contemporary railway industry we need an analysis that can deal with the multi-layered complexity of organisational form and action. This analysis needs to be able to cope with the complex interaction of culture, identity, image and history. The evidence presented so far has separated these issues



and the task now is to attempt to integrate them. Although the examples drawn from the fieldwork carried out could be seen as disparate, representing different areas of the industry, I want to argue that they are separate aspects or moments of a particular trend. Furthermore, the railway industry in this respect acts as a microcosm of similar trends in much of industry.

What is being suggested here is that identity, image, and culture are increasingly being consciously used and manipulated by management in order to project a message of differentiation for both external and internal consumption. In so doing they attempt to distance themselves from others in the marketplace and, more particularly here, from the past of the organisation itself. Thus culture and identity change programs are used to draw a line under the past failures (real or imaginary) of the organisation and mark the beginning of a new era.

This is witnessed in LUL's Company Plan of the early 1990s, Railtrack's C. Change initiative, Loadhaul/EWS restructuring and GNER's image reworking. In each of these organisations there is a complex relationship with its own past, its own history, with the first three organisation all desiring to shift away from it, to rubbish it, to damn it. But nonetheless the organisations are still dependent on the past in terms of assets, customer base and staff knowledge and skill. In the case of GNER the relationship is yet more complex with a wish to both harness and disown the past simultaneously. The tactic used here is to select those parts of the organisation's history that are convenient, or 'suitable' in Hobsbawm and Ranger's phrase, and reject those that are not. Thus the 'Golden Age of Railways' is a useful marketing tool with which to attract customers. Likewise the image of nationalisation, carefully

cultivated as a byword for failure, has utility in being the yardstick against which to measure success in the new organisation (61).

The common link in all these organisations is the way both the past and the present becomes something which is open to manipulation by management in an altogether more conscious way. Importantly the ability to intervene in the contemporary period is predicated on the cultivation of the idea of 'crisis'. As part of this process management is projected as the body which can solve the problems which confront the contemporary organisation. At its most developed in the railway industry this trend witnesses the rise of a new class of 'railway baron', able to sort out the railways and their problems (62).

The solution to the 'crisis' in the railway industry, along with many others is to make a break with the past in terms of structure, image and culture. The attempt is made to redesign the corporation as if from scratch, to gain the perceived benefits that companies locating in green field sites enjoy (Garrahan and Stewart 1992; Graham 1995). Thus in Casey's work we learn of a corporate change program where workers have to reapply for their jobs and attempt to align themselves to the corporation's design of employee working within a 'designer culture' (Casey 1995, esp. ch. 6). In du Gay's work we are shown the way a number of companies attempt clean breaks with the past. As du Gay points out:

...the discourse of enterprise announces itself as a 'revolution' in opposition to previous failed forms of governmental endeavour. It demands a clean break with the past in order to guarantee a future that does indeed 'work better'. In

so doing, it tends to forget its origins, to eradicate its initial contingency, and thus to objectify itself (du Gay 1996, 149).

The author goes on to argue that enterprise 'prefers a *tabula rasa* on which to write its compositions' (ibid.). Similar points are made in Grint's work on Business Process Reengineering (BPR), quoting Hammer's summary of the process - 'don't automate obliterate' (Grint 1994, 180) (63). In the work of John Storey on HRM we learn of an underlying logic to the welter of management activity:

There was some degree of commonality in the initiatives, which extended even across the sectors. The touchstones were a retreat from proceduralism, an emphasis upon adaptability, direct communication with employees, 'managerial leadership', and the moulding of a more tractable employee stock (Storey 1992, 77).

The problem with making such change is that organisations and the actors within them are not blank slates waiting to be written on. There is resistance to change, there is a contestation over the very 'problem' the organisation faces. As we saw above in the railway industry one of the solutions to this situation was to remove large numbers of older workers. As Margaret Mead points out:

In large organizations that must change, and change quickly retirement is a social expression of the same need for flexibility. The removal of senior officers and elderly personnel, all of who in their persons, their memories, and their entrenched relationships to their juniors, reinforce obsolescent styles, is paralleled to the removal of grandparents from the family circle (Mead 1978, 49).

Mead makes the distinction between postfigurative, cofigurative and prefigurative cultures. A postfigurative culture is one where the future repeats the past, the young learn from the older. Cofiguration refers to a situation where the present is a guide to future action. Finally prefigurative cultures are distinguished by the elders learning from the younger. Mead makes the point in terms of the family that to remove an older generation from a family setting for whatever reason is to do violence to historical consciousness:

With the removal of the grandparents physically from the world in which the child is reared, the child's experience of its future is shortened by a generation and its links to the past are weakened. The essential mark of the postfigurative culture - the reversal in an individual's relationship to his child or his relationship to his own parents - disappears. The past, once represented by living people, becomes shadowy, easier to abandon and to falsify in retrospect (ibid.).

Building on Mead's concept I want to argue that the link between organisational interest in culture, image and identity can be seen in this wish to create a situation where there is little organisational resistance to change, or where this is minimised. The aim therefore it would seem would be to achieve a 'greening' of 'brownfield' sites (Strangleman and Roberts 1996a, 1996b). By this, I mean the attempt on the part of organisations to emulate what are perceived to be the benefits that new companies setting up in greenfield sites enjoy. This is the ability to specify the way the organisation will be run and operated, to be able to organise work to its own design and the ability to select its staff. Culture, identity and image are three

aspects of this greening process. Their manipulation represents a shifting of the frontier of control between capital and labour, a kind of disembedding of the relationship wherein the role of labour is sent out of kilter or balance. Within this moment or space created by the greening process the frontier of control, the architecture of the relationship, is redrawn with a prescription of what is possible and the proscribing of what is not. Thus, as Mead suggests, the past becomes easier to manipulate, falsify or abandon altogether. The contingent link between an organisation and its past, ideologically at least, is broken.

But such a process is not without numerous contradictions. Firstly, in the organisation breaking away from its past and starting 'anew' it runs the risk of sustaining damage if the new start fails, or, as in the case of the railway industry, is itself replaced quickly afterwards. Ramsay (1996) points to the scepticism induced in not only the workforce but the management in organisations where change takes place on a regular basis. Subsequent 'investment' on the part of organisational actors in the latest culture is difficult to sustain if it is perceived that the next managerial fad will be along soon (64). Secondly, this turnover in corporate fashion has a tendency to accelerate as organisations attempt to be seen as new or at the 'cutting edge'. This is reflected in, and is partly a product of, the growth in the numbers of consultancy firms, who naturally have a vested interest in the new and the novel at the expense of the old or traditional (see Clark 1995) (65).

Thirdly, an organisation's ability to deal with the problems it faces are undermined by a lack of critical analysis of its own past. In reaching for what appears to be novel, it may be condemning itself to repeat previous mistakes (Ramsay 1996,

159). The very ability to understand this situation may be reduced by the silencing or removal of those actors who have experienced, or have knowledge of a problem, and thus organisations may experience a kind of 'corporate memory loss'. Finally, the process of greening a brownfield site can never be complete or a static phenomenon. Rather, culture is a living thing which adapts and changes, and in short is best understood as a process, which perhaps can be manipulated in the short term but is essentially autonomous. Thus as Mead talked about one generation of configuration becoming in the next generation postfigurative again, so too will the 'green' workforce take on the feature of a more established one.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the commercialisation and privatisation of the British Rail organisation and also drew on material from London Underground. What has been suggested is that governmental involvement in, and attitudes towards the industry, along with the public sector as a whole, have been heavily influenced by ideology. There was a growing conceptualisation on the political right during the 1960s and 1970s that the state sector in its different manifestations was both a symptom and a cause, possibly the most important cause, of the decline in international competitiveness of British and, more widely, metropolitan capital. The public sector was portrayed as having strong trade unions and weak management who were too willing to concede to the demands of organised labour rather than seeking productivity rises and cost cutting measures. This in turn led to a crowding out of the private sector, with investment made more difficult by the high cost of borrowing.

Similarly the strength of labour in the public sector was perceived to drive up wage costs in the private sector.

In the railway industry after 1979 this anti-public sector attitude and rhetoric combined with a doctrinaire dislike and distrust of collective, public transport. The future was seen to lie with the car and the heavy goods vehicle, the train was seen as an old fashioned and outdated as a mode of transport. The result for the industry, again with the rest of the public sector, was the introduction of various policies and strategies which sent a signal that change would have to occur. The 1980s saw the squeezing of subsidy levels for loss making services (PSO) and restrictions on the absolute amount that could be gained for investment, regardless of the potential return. BR management responded to these signals by developing a new relationship with their unions and staff, with previously good industrial relations exchanged for a more confrontational stance, resulting in a series of disputes and disagreements. This was seen as sending a message both to labour and the government that 'things had changed'. Coupled with this swing away from corporatist styles of industrial relations was the adoption of new organisational forms and management styles.

During the 1980s and early 1990s there was a progressive move away from the historical industry model of an organisational form based on geographic and functional dimensions to one increasingly based on business sectors. This was summed up in Bob Reid's phrase of moving away from a 'production led' organisation to a 'customer led' business. It was argued that this linked with a delayering of the industry would make it more customer focused and responsive to change in the environments in which it worked. This move was based in part on a

critique of the culture and history of BR and the railway industry before it. The organisation and, by implication, those who worked in it were portrayed as inhabiting a past where tradition, nostalgia and custom counted for more than business efficiency. This process reached its height with the 'Organising for Quality' program in the early 1990s. This effectively created vertically integrated business sectors responsible for most of their functions.

The re-election of the Major government in 1992 saw renewed interest in the question of privatisation of BR. This had been rejected during the Thatcher years as presenting unique problems in that there would be a continued need for subsidy in the private sector. The decision to go ahead with the sale effectively destroyed what was seen to be one of the best organisational forms BR had had since 1948. It replaced the five vertically integrated business sectors with twenty-five TOUs/ TOCs, six freight companies, Railtrack, three Rolling Stock Leasing Companies (ROSCOs) and numerous other smaller fragments concerned with the maintenance and supply of the industry. The cost of the sale in terms of consultancy fees, sweeteners, write offs, redundancy payments and reorganisation cost has been estimated as between £5 billion by Harris and Godward (1997, 139) and £11.4 billion by Bagwell (1996, 153) (66).

The second part of this chapter has shown the way several elements of the 'new railway' have developed in the transition to the private sector. It was argued that we have witnessed an active targeting of an older organisational culture which is seen as a problem for the new organisations. Evidence was presented that showed that this culture was both implicitly and explicitly marginalised. One of the most



common strategies in 'changing the culture' was the targeting of older sections of the workforce for redundancy packages.

Linked with culture change initiatives has been the active manipulation of image and identity during this period. This has commonly meant attempts to move away from the BR past. What differentiates the new parts of the industry is their choice of image. Some like Railtrack and EWS have gone for a new identity altogether, whilst for others such as GNER have a more problematic relationship with their past in which history can become a source of positive meaning.

What I am arguing is that this chapter has a common theme in terms of the conceptualisation, use and abuse of history. Successive Conservative governments from 1979 actively attempted to rewrite the history of the post war settlement, if not earlier periods (67). The failure of the railway industry was therefore seen as being predicated on its place in the public sector. This is a deeply ahistorical view which disregards much historical, organisation and political scholarship indicating that BR management were quite successful given the complex and contradictory position they were in (see Gourvish 1986, esp. ch. 13). In the same vein it could be argued that many of the problems faced were actually the creation and legacy of the private sector in the first place, and specifically the laissez-faire policies of successive Victorian governments.

This manipulation of history and the past is also witnessed in the rejection of from consensual industrial relations during the 1980s. At times, tradition is seen to be something of value, to be proud of. At other times however, this legacy, particularly in terms of the culture bestowed on the present is characterised as the problem. The

past becomes the shackle on the present. Older members of the workforce are seen to stand in the way of progress, and are portrayed as irrational elements to be removed. Thus tradition and history becomes almost an essentialist trait in parts of the workforce, just as the young are seen to be 'flexible' and prepared for change.

In many ways the newly privatised companies, and to a certain extent the BR units before them, trade on this vision of the past, using it as the broad framework for their own rewritings. It suits them to create a past that has failed in order to present their organisational strategies and policies in a progressive light. In adopting such methods the past is actively created and recreated and fed back for internal and external consumption. The past is plundered too for its potential to offer commercial opportunity, becoming something to be nostalgically wallowed in. It is here that I would defend the so-called 'heritage baiters' against their critics, notably Samuel (1994) (68). What is effectively overlooked in his analysis is an understanding of the relative power of capital and labour within the labour process and the wider circuit of capital accumulation. At all levels of the capitalist employment relationship the actors bring different amounts of power or resources upon which to draw. The corporation has the power to decide, to a great extent, how the boundaries of the company will be redrawn, which images and identities to select and what the 'culture' of the organisation will consist of. In this sense corporate culture has been disembedded and re-embedded, or to use Bate's (1995) phrase 'unfrozen' and 'refrozen' in a different way. In the process the architecture of the relationship between capital and labour has been redrawn. In so doing the resources built-up and used over time by labour are either completely removed or modified and thus active

resistance is, in the short term at least, made problematic. This last point is important since, unlike Bate's notion of relative statics, in reality workplace culture is inherently intractable and fluid, and thus will develop in the process of re-embedding. It is to the role of labour in the process of privatisation that we turn in the next chapter.

## Notes to Chapter 5

1. Hay provides a detailed reconstruction of the 'Winter of Discontent' and the way it both reflected and constructed popular mythology about the power of trade unions and the Labour Party's relationship with them, Hay, C. (1996b) 'Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the "Winter of Discontent"', *Sociology*, 30, 2, 253-277; For a positive reappraisal of the Wilson and Callaghan governments and their economic record see McKibbin, R. (1991b). Discussing the tactics that would be used in the forthcoming (1992) election he argues: 'The Conservative strategy is, therefore, more likely to take a folk-historical turn: that the alternative to any sort of Conservative government is impossible and that this is historically demonstrated by the disasters of the Wilson and Callaghan governments from 1964 on. This is a powerful argument because it has only to be insinuated, not made explicit; it needs merely to reinforce what are already a number of conventional wisdoms', 'Homage to Wilson and Callaghan', *London Review of Books*, 13, 20, 3-5, October, 3; E. P. Thompson's 'Writing by Candlelight' gives an insight into the middle class distrust and fear of organised labour. The author brings out the contempt felt for 'workers getting above their station', Thompson, E. P. (1980b) *Writing by Candlelight*, London, Merlin.

2. Perhaps the most high profile hard-line manager brought in by the Labour government was Michael Edwardes, appointed to what was then the state owned British Leyland (BL) in 1977, see Edwardes, M. (1983) *Back From the Brink: An Apocalyptic Experience*, London, Collins. For an account of the changing relationship between the Labour Government and organised labour see MacInnes, J.

(1987) *Thatcherism at Work: Industrial Relations and Economic Change*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, esp. ch. 3; Also Leys, C. (1989) *Politics in Britain: From Labourism to Thatcherism*, London, Verso, revised edition, esp. ch. 6.

3. For details of anti trade union legislation see Beale, D. (1994) *Driven by Nissan?: A critical guide to new management techniques*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 7-9; MacInnes, op. cit., 54-59; Leys, op. cit., ch. 7; One way to understand the developments during the 1980s and 1990s in terms of public sector personnel strategies would be to see them as new 'model' employers that private sector companies were encouraged to follow, an inversion of the previous notion of the public sector as a 'model' employer as a result of good conditions of service see Beaumont, P. B. (1992) *Public Sector Industrial Relations*, London, Routledge.

4. In addition to Pollitt's work, that focuses particularly on the NHS, see O'Connell Davidson, J. (1993) *Privatisation and Employment Relations: The Case of the Water Industry*, London, Mansell; May, T. (1994) 'Transformative power; a study in a human service organization', *The Sociological Review*, 42, 4, Nov., 618-638, as an example from the probation service.

5. Support from public funds for BR were, during the 1980s, the lowest in Europe, as a percentage of GDP, falling from a high of 0.3 % in 1983 to nearly 0.1 % of GDP in 1990. The Community of European Railways average in the same years was 0.7 % and just under 0.5 % respectively, Bagwell, P. S. (1996) *The Transport Crisis in Britain*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 7; A detailed comparison between government financing of state railway in Britain and Spain can be found in Ferner, A.

(1988) *Governments, Managers and Industrial Relations: Public Enterprises and their Political Environment*, Oxford, Blackwell, esp. ch. 4.

6. Mrs Thatcher's hostility to the industry was legendary in railway circles. Peter Parker recalled an early meeting with her: '...she had come to luncheon with us at BR as Leader of the Opposition, accompanied by Norman Fowler, then the Shadowiest of Transport Ministers. She had talked to us about nationalization with a hearty, dismaying adamancy: to be nationalized, she explained, was an industry's admission of failures. She did not spell out the implication, that - well chaps, it must follow surely - only failure would work in the public sector', Parker, P. (1991) *For Starters: A Life in Management*, London, Pan, 304. For more general anti-rail sentiments amongst right wing politicians and thinkers see Bagwell, P. S. (1984) *End of the Line?: the Fate of the Railways Under Thatcher*, London, Verso; Bagwell (1996) op. cit. ch. 12; Bonavia. M. (1985a) *Twilight of British Rail?*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, esp. ch. 13.

7. Industrial relations in the public sector were not, until the 1970s, seen as a problem. The 'problem' area was the private sector, as Beaumont op. cit. commenting on the Donovan Commission, noted that the public sector hardly got a look in.

8. The date still had a central place in a commemorative booklet published by the Union to mark its centenary in 1980, the author describing the 1919 agreement as: 'ASLEF members today could properly regard it as their Old Testament. It set out the basic rules and structures of the footplatemen's pay and conditions of work and it still reverberates in the background of all contemporary negotiation', Murphy, B. (1980)

*ASLEF 1880-1980: A Hundred years of the Locoman's Trade Union*, London, ASLEF, 30; An NUR/RMT member who had been on the executive of the Union and had lectured members of ASLEF on the relationship between the two unions told me 'they're still going on about 1919!'.

9. The impression that the flexible rostering issue was symbolic rather than just about flexibility per se was borne out by the Human Resource Development Manager at Loadhaul: 'I didn't work for the railway before 1982, so I don't know how it used to be, but people I've talked to say yes it has given some degree of improvement. But the overall view is that the improvements gained weren't worth the aggro and the bad feeling, and the hassle that came from it (HRM Manager, interview 1995). Pendleton argues that the flexible rostering dispute acted as an enabling agreement rather than as a successful attempt to introduce flexible work practices. Indeed, he has suggested that its implementation added another layer of complexity to the rostering arrangements made at a depot level. This, he points out, resulted in the addition of more spare days into roster cycles. Interestingly, it was to the local union representative that BR looked to work out the new arrangements, in line with traditional practice, since they were considered the experts, Pendleton, A. (1991a) 'The Barriers to Flexibility: Flexible Rostering on the Railways', *Work, Employment and Society*, 5, 2, 241-257.

10. Rather confusingly the two Chairmen of the BRB to succeed Peter Parker were both called Bob Reid. Bob Reid I, as he is normally referred to, took the job from 1983. Bob Reid II replaced him in 1990. Parker describes Bob Reid I as 'one of them', meaning his political view point was conservative, Parker op. cit. 309. The

strength of Reid's criticism was given extra legitimacy because of his insider status. May (1994) op. cit. 620, discusses the way insiders during a period of organisational change '...alluded to their 'cultural capital'...in the organisation and reflected the new order by challenging outdated beliefs in the old'. Again, this would seem to reflect Gabriel's notion of nostophobic workers within companies that don't look back on the past as a 'golden age', their view having legitimacy because of their personal biography, Gabriel, Y. (1993) 'Organizational Nostalgia - Reflections on the "Golden Age"', in Fineman, S. (ed.) *Emotion in Organisations*, London, Sage.

11. This kind of removal of those managers who were not sufficiently enamoured of the new regime is reflected in other literature dealing with culture change programs. O'Connell Davidson, op. cit., 56, notes this process in the water industry: 'Many of those managers who were unsympathetic to privatization were gradually shunted through a number of posts across to the National Rivers Authority, or effectively demoted through the new structures that were emerging...Other managers experienced meteoric rises through the organization, with supervisors and junior managers being promoted to new posts as heads of freshly established profit centres...'; Such strategies are also witnessed in du Gay, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*, London, Sage.

12. The BRB was forced to sell off profitable subsidiary business during the 1980s. These included British Transport Hotels, Sealink UK and British Rail Hovercraft, see Bagwell (1996) op. cit. 122-123.



13. Department of Transport (1992) 'New Opportunities for the Railways', Cmnd. 2012, HMSO, London, cited in Harris, N. G. and Godward, E. (1997) *The Privatisation of British Rail*, London, Railway Consultancy Press.

14. Nearly forty years before this speech Harold Macmillan, a former director of the GWR, wrote a letter about the plans to restructure the BTC suggesting: 'Why not restore the old names and titles? For instance, Western Region should be called the Great Western Railway. The head of it should be called the General Manager, as he always was. It would also give great pleasure if the old colours were restored. Our men used to be proud of their chocolate brown suits and all the rest;...The regimental system is a great one with the British and it is always a mistake to destroy tradition. I am quite sure from my own talks with old friends in the G.W.R. that they would welcome recovering their identity. They don't care about who owns the shares, what they care about is their own individuality', cited in Gourvish, T. R. (1986) *British Railways 1948-73: A Business History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 571.

15. Exact numbers of organisations created by the privatisation process are difficult to calculate since there has been some consolidation in particular sectors, see Glover, J. (1996) *National Railways: A Guide to the Privatised Railway*, London, Ian Allan; Bagwell (1996) op. cit. chs. 13-14; Harris and Godward op. cit..

16. There was hostility inside and outside of the industry to the way in which the system was broken up for privatisation. Much of this critical internal comment was not publicly aired as it would have jeopardised future careers. In a BBC Panorama programme on rail privatisation it was reported that in a meeting between ministers, their civil servants and the top forty-five BR managers, there was unanimous

opposition to the plans from the latter group. The programme cited an inside source as saying 'One of them [the managers present] said they had been cycling over a tight rope over Niagara Fall for the past four years, now they were being invited to do the same thing only backwards', BBC Panorama, 12/12/94. The overwhelming impression given by the managerial and supervisory grades interviewed here was that they were anti-privatisation. In a letter summarising a poll of their members in the Executive grades the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) it was indicated that 91% of those replying were not in favour of privatisation, letter reporting Railway Bill survey, 29th October, 1993. The theme of lost opportunity haunts the pages of a book published to celebrate the achievements of the Intercity organisation. In one chapter Chris Green, the then Managing Director of Intercity, writes: 'It [privatisation] brought to a premature end the most successful organisation that the railways had enjoyed since nationalisation'. Vincent, M. and Green, C. (eds.) (1994) *The Intercity Story*, Sparkford, Oxford Publishing Co., 121. One of the main criticisms of the form of privatisation chosen was the loss of vertical integration that had been a feature of the O for Q reforms.

17. Commons, Hansard, 6th ser. vol. 218, 27 February, col. 156.

18. The architecture of the privatised system is very complex. The TOCs are franchises that are bid for by the private sector or by the existing BR management. Franchises have been let for a variety of periods between five and fifteen years, at the end of this period the franchise is re-let. Thus the staff, most notably the drivers, are only on long term loan to the company and would remain with the franchise if the

original company lost out in the next round at the end of the franchise. Most of the other parts of the railway have been 'simply' sold off.

19. These two authors are very influential thinkers. In addition to writing on the fate of BR, Glaister, S. and Travers, T. (1993) *New Directions for British Railways? The Political Economy of Privatisation and Regulation*, London, Institute of Economic Affairs, they have also subsequently published Glaister, S. and Travers, T. (1995) *Liberate the Tube! Radical proposals to revitalise the London Underground*, London, Centre For Policy Studies. Glaister has acted for the government in an advisory capacity on Trunk Road Assessment and was a non-executive director of London Regional Transport from 1984-1993, and has also worked on transport studies for the World Bank.

20. Bagwell (1996) op. cit., 14, suggests that some 28,358 jobs were lost from BR between 1987 and 1994, overall numbers falling from 143, 804 to 115, 446. The same author points out that official figures show that as part of the privatisation process £303 million had been spent on redundancy payments and early retirement, with a total of 13, 114 workers lost, *ibid.*, 148.

21. The grade of Train Crew Leader (TCL) emerged during the 1980s. Their role seems to be somewhat different from the former footplate inspector. This could be seen to be as part of a trend towards the development of HRM strategies in the industry. In the Loadhaul organisation the TCL would have a number of drivers under him and would be expected to perform several functions including the annual inspection of an individual driver (see chapter 6). There seems to be considerable

variation in the content of the work that this grade perform both within the old BR organisations and in the successor companies.

22. LUL likewise has had problems convincing its staff that theirs is no longer a job for life. In employee surveys carried out by the company workers cite job insecurity as a reason for lack of satisfaction in work. As a result of this, no effort is spared to remind employees: ‘...the reality of the 1990s is that no company is able to guarantee a job for life to anyone...People must understand that job security can still exist, but that in the new world that security will come from within the individual not from the company. The secure employee will always ensure that they have relevant skills that are in tune with the requirements of the marketplace’, Jon Filby of the Employee Development Team LUL, quoted in *U Magazine: The magazine for London Underground People*, 8, March, 1995, 13.

23. The Trainload freight businesses had in the period 1992-1994 cut their workforce from 15,000 to 9,000. In the wake of the takeover by EWS, staff numbers fell from 7,500 to 5,000. In between these dates the three separate companies had their own redundancy schemes, ‘Moving Rail Freight Into the 21st Century’, 6 supplement in *Rail Magazine*, 290, 23rd Oct.-5th Nov., 1996. Most of the other parts of the former BR organisation have made redundancies, the highest profile of which has been the redundancy package introduced by South West Trains where 70 drivers out of a total of 700 nominated for redundancy and left the company unable to cover its rosters.

24. O’Connell Davidson describes a course that workers within Albion Water organisation were sent on: ‘For two days, the craftsmen were treated to the kind of

perks normally reserved for management. They stayed overnight at a seventeenth-century manor house converted into a conference centre, and were provided with lunches and a three-course dinner. A social outing to play skittles at the local pub was also included in the programme. The general aim was to develop an *esprit de corps* amongst the craftsmen, encouraging them to identify with their new position as a separate unit with the Albion Water structure' op. cit., 178.

25. The Company Plan was developed for London Underground by external consultants. The main aim was to simplify the grade structure by breaking down demarcation lines and streamlining the pay structure. Ironically some of the conditions that were challenged as part of this process had been put in place in order to attract recruits during the very tight labour markets of the 1960s and 1970s, see *Trainmen's Motivation Survey*, London, London Transport Executive. This report, published in 1974, was based on a survey of the driving grades and recommended many enhancements to conditions of service and the content of rosters (see also chapter 4 for discussion of tight labour markets in London). London Underground also ran courses of the type described by O'Connell Davidson in the wake of their Company Plan changes. In the LUL case some of the staff were treated to a week in a five-star hotel on the south coast where, to quote one interviewee, they were: 'Brainwashed with management bullshit'.

26. This parallels finding in a light engineering company studied as part of another project. In one company those older workers that did not want to be part of the new 'culture' were openly referred to as 'jurassics' and were invited to take voluntary redundancy, or, as it was called there 'opening the window of opportunity',

Strangleman, T. and Roberts, I. P. (1996a) 'Deconstructing the Autonomous: The Cultural Cleansing of Workplace Identity' unpublished paper to Occupations and Professions: Changing Patterns, Definitions and Classifications conference, University of Nottingham 11-13 September. Similar accounts can be found in du Gay (1996) *op. cit.*.

27. Sectorisation of BR saw a tremendous growth in livery and symbol deployment. This was done to differentiate the separate parts of the railway from each other and the past. In the Vincent and Green's (1994) *op. cit.* book on Intercity a whole chapter is devoted to the development of corporate identity and livery. Under a picture of the new logo developed during the late 1980s the caption reads: 'The emerging INTERCITY brand in 1987, still showing a token allegiance to BR', 68. Such moves have also been seen in other former nationalised companies. Both British Telecom (BT), and British Airways (BA) have made high profile livery/identity changes in the past decade and a half see 'Flights of imagination', *FT* 11/6/97 and 'Corporate pipers changing their tunes', *Observer* 15/6/97, both published in the wake of BA's latest livery re-launch. The *FT* article reported: 'At BA the new identity is part of the organisation's "second revolution", launched by Mr Robert Ayling, BA's chief executive, to prepare the airline for the next millennium. The first revolution, culminating in BA's privatisation in 1987...'

28. Early British railway companies were well aware of image and identity and the power that it could have on the public perception of their organisation, for an example from the Midland Railway see Revill, G. (1994) 'Working the system: journeys through corporate culture in the "railway age"', *Society and Space*, Vol. 12,

705-725; For examples of companies self consciously manipulating image and identity see Bennett, A. (1997) GWR and corporate identity, unpublished paper to Railway, Identity and Place Conference, Truro, 31 May; For a wider discussion of the same company's publicity see Wilson, R. B. (1987) *Go Great Western: A History of GWR Publicity*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles. Sir John Elliot's autobiography highlights the way the press was used by the interwar railway companies to achieve favourable coverage. In the case of the Southern Railway the aim was to promote the idea of the company as modern and forward looking as a result of its electrification policy Elliot, J. (1982) *On and Off the Rails*, London, George Allen and Unwin, esp. ch.s 1-4.

29. *Rail Magazine*, 272 February 8-21, 1996, 32.

30. *Rail Magazine*, 278 May 8-21, 1996, 7.

31. The BRB and the Intercity sector was increasingly aware of its identity as a brand which could be marketed successfully see Vincent and Green (eds.) (1994) op. cit..

32. *Livewire*, August-September 1995, 7.

33. *Ibid.*, 6 and 7.

34. 'Who are the new owners of Intercity East Coast?', Intercity East Coast leaflet 28th April, 1996.

35. *Rail Magazine*, 278, 8-21 May, 1996, 25-26. The company later ran into trouble using this name as another TOC operates out of Kings Cross under the title West Anglia, Great Northern. The original Great Northern Railway Company was incorporated in June 1846, formed by a union between the Direct Northern and the

London and York companies, subsequently amalgamating, vesting, leasing or taking over twenty-six separate companies until itself forming part of the LNER in 1923, see Smith, D. (1988) *A Genealogy of the LNER and A Chronology of its Antecedents*, Hartlepool, Glebe Publications. For details of the company and its combination into the LNER see Allen, C. J. (1971) *The London and North Eastern Railway*, London, Ian Allen, chs. 1-8; Bonavia, M. R. (1985b) *A History of the LNER: 1. The First Years, 1923-33*, London, Guild Publishing, ch. 1-2. Samuel makes a point relevant here to the rediscovery of older identities in a footnote: 'As if shamefaced about the boldness of its new design, Liverpool Street Station has just added ornamental gates with the words 'Great Eastern Railway' inscribed in a cast-iron, multi-coloured medallion. It is as though the station were turning its back on not only half a century of BR...but also on the amalgamation of 1922 which produced the LNER...', Samuel, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory: Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London, Verso, fn. 4, 115.

36. *Livewire*, August-September, 1996, 5.

37. *Livewire*, October-November, 1996, 6.

38. *Livewire*, December-January, 1997, 6.

39. 'The new golden age of rail travel is arriving', GNER leaflet, 1996.

40. This quote is from Berg, P. O. and Gagliardi, P. (1986) 'Corporate images: A symbolic perspective of the organization- environment interface', Working Paper, University of Lund, Sweden, 20.

41. Given this sort of statement at the front of Harvey's book it is difficult to see how certain commentators make the assumption that he is putting the case for



postmodern or postcapitalist society, this is apparent in Casey, C. (1995) *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialism*, London, Routledge, esp. ch.s 1-2; also Mestrovic, S. G. (1991) *The Coming Fin De Siecle: An Application of Durkheim's Sociology to Modernity and Postmoderism*, London, Routledge, 163-165.

42. This notion would seem to parallel what Gouldner (1964) referred to as the 'Rebecca Myth' in *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, New York, Free Press. I am grateful to Richard Brown for this reference. There are also parallels with Casey's (1995), op. cit., group of workers whom she describes as 'defensive selves', ch. 6. See also Samuel and Thompson (eds.) (1990) in their discussion of oral history: 'The past here functions as a kind of reverse image of the present, a time when "everyone was neighbours", and life was more secure...and the whole is overlain or mediated by an overwhelming sense of loss', Samuel, R. and Thompson., P. (1993) *The Myths We Live By*, London, Routledge, 8-9.

43. Railtrack's publicity presents an interesting mix of modernity and tradition. The company's annual report and accounts for 1996/97 is illustrated with specially commissioned art work that deliberately mimics older forms of railway poster art. One shows the interior of a modern signally centre with three operator in suitably dramatic poses. The difference between this art work and that it seeks to emulate would seem to lie in the managerial statements at the bottom of the poster with phrases used such as 'culture change', 'team work' and 'excellence'.

44. *Rail Magazine*, 278 May 8-21, 1996, 22.

45. *Livewire*, December-January, 1997, 6.

46. Introduction to GNER 1997 Passenger's Charter leaflet.
47. 'The new golden age of rail travel is arriving', GNER leaflet, 1996.
48. *Livewire*, December-January, 1997, 8.
49. The East Coast main line consistently benefited from investment during the BR era. In the early 1960s the route saw the introduction of 100 mph 'Deltic' locomotives, the late 1970s saw the replacement of these with High Speed Trains (HST) capable of 125 mph. Finally the majority of these units were themselves replaced by electric '225' units in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These sets are designed for a maximum speed of 140 mph but continue to run at 125 mph because of track restrictions.
50. While the logo used does look like a coat of arms it is not registered as such. Portcullis Pursuivant of the College of Arms was interviewed by *Rail Magazine* when the image was launched and stated: 'Whilst the elements within the emblem could possibly be combined in some way to make a coat of arms, the emblem as such is not a coat of arms and has been composed without reference to the College of Arms', *Rail Magazine*, 291, November 6th- 19th, 1996, 7.
51. Other parts of the former BR empire draw on older imagery - the Great Western Franchise, (the former Intercity Great Western) makes some reference to the Grouping and pre-Grouping company of the same name. The Special Trains Unit was one of the first parts of the organisation to be sold. It began to paint the fleet in a livery derived from that of the LNWR which became part of the LMS in 1923. The initial owner was Pete Waterman, the record producer. While Waterman was keen to draw on the nostalgia of the railways, (he is himself a rail enthusiast), he nonetheless

was critical of 'old-fashioned' working practices. In an interview for the radio travel magazine show 'Going Places' he stated: 'There has to be a Wapping on the railways', BBC Radio Four, 25th June, 1994.

52. In the financial year 1993/4 the combined Trainload Freight organisation made £85 million, representing a return on sales of approximately 20 %, *North East News: The Newspaper of Trainload Freight North East*, August, 1994, 3.

53. 'Moving Rail Freight Into the 21st Century', supplement in *Rail Magazine*, 290, 23rd Oct.-5th Nov., 1996, 4.

54. *Ibid.*, 6.

55. *Rail Magazine*, 291, 6th-19th November, 1996, 17.

56. *Ibid.*

57. When the Trainload Freight companies were created they were split geographically giving each of the units comparable amounts of traffic. Traffic flows were allocated by origin, thus if a consignment of steel started its journey in Teesside it 'belonged' to Loadhaul. Subsequently, however, any company could bid for a flow. The problem for Loadhaul was that, because of the historic concentration of traffic in the North East it was a very small area and thus had to buy in crews from other companies if a flow could not be taken 'out and back' from a depot at the edge of its territory within the nine hour period allowed for under the existing train crew agreement. This left business vulnerable to poaching from other companies who could work their crews into the smaller company's area. This will be explored more fully below.

58. A diagram refers to a certain timetabled allocation of work.

59. Because the practice of buying in of 'foreign' crews is expensive the operating companies will avoid doing so as much as they can. This led to some very apparently irrational moves such as Intercity Cross Country sending two drivers early in the morning from Derby to Newcastle by taxi in order to bring (into traffic) its first service from Newcastle. This was economically rational because to hire a driver from Intercity East Coast/ GNER would have been more expensive. This aspect of the 'new railway' is more fully explored in the next chapter.

60. *Modern Railways*, May, 1997, 264.

61. Interestingly, Richard Branson, the head of the Virgin Group which runs the West Coast and Cross Country Intercity franchises, has shifted from being positive about the achievements of BR to a more critical stance. The former approach can be seen as in line with his consensual managerial style, the latter can be read as a product of the amount of criticism that the Virgin Rail Group is attracting, in particular of the troubled West coast mainline (see Christian Wolmar 'Can Branson get back on track?', *New Statesman*, 7/11/97). In an 'in-flight' magazine Branson talks of '...facing the daily challenge of undoing the 30 years of neglect, demoralisation and structural decline we inherited', *Hotline*, Autumn/ Winter 1997. At the bottom of an advert for West Coast services the line 'Light at the end of the tunnel' is placed by the company logo, Virgin Trains advert, *Manchester Metro News* 7/11/97.

62. The personality of management seems to have become increasingly important within the 'new' railway. To some extent this can be witnessed during the 1980s with the building-up of certain key figures within the industry, in particular Chris Green

the director of the London and South East sector which he repackaged as Network Southeast from 1986. With the process of privatisation the focus has shifted to managers of the groups emerging to take control of franchises and companies. Thus the phrase 'Railway Baron' is attached to Richard Branson of the Virgin Group (Intercity Cross Country and Intercity West Coast, *The Railway Magazine*, May, 1997, 4-5), Brian Souter of Stagecoach (SWT and Island Line, *Railway Magazine*, Nov., 1996, 16-17), Christopher Garnett (GNER, *Rail Magazine*, 278, 8th-21st May, 1997, 22-26), Ed Burkhardt (EWS, *Rail Magazine*, 271 and 272, 31st Jan- 13th Feb., 1996, 24-29, and 30-34). The interviews in *Railway Magazine* are under the banner 'The New Railway Barons'. The popular railway press, in particular *Rail Magazine*, seem intoxicated by the idea of the 'strong men' now taking over the industry, moving it away from the dead hand of bureaucracy.

63. Hammer, M. (1990) 'Reengineering Work: Don't Automate, Obliterate', *Harvard Business Review*, (July-August).

64. It would seem that there is a strong tendency toward diminishing returns with companies constantly reaching for the 'new' and the 'modern'. Workforce and managerial investment in the new project or program must be diminished if the last culture change was sold to them as solving all the organisation's ills. In a construction company where I carried out research the ability to introduce the Investors In People (IIP) had been made more difficult because of the perceived failure and irrelevance of a project to introduce BS5750. IIP was seen as another fad that would likewise fail. In the case of LUL the Company Plan has subsequently been replaced by Project Everest. A LUL manager interviewed highlighted the problem 'I

think calling it Everest was a mistake. I mean what happens when we get to the top, Everest is the biggest one isn't it?' (LUL Manager, interviewed 1995).

65. Clark suggests that the market for management consultancies grew by 200 % between 1985 and 1992, Clark, T. (1995) *Managing Consultants: Consultancy as the Management of Impressions*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, ch. 2; Twelve separate consultancy firms were used as part of the privatisation process of BR, and by the end of 1996 the figure spent on such advice had reached £450 million, Harris and Godward, op. cit. 130.

66. The main difference between these two figures lies in the inclusion in the latter estimate of the costs associated with the write-off of Union Railways, the BR company that operated the Channel Tunnel Eurostar passenger trains. These were effectively given to the London and Continental Railways consortium in return for the private sector building the high speed rail link between the tunnel and London. As part of the deal the consortium was given the British share of the rolling stock and a considerable amount of redundant former railway land around St. Pancras and Kings Cross in the capital, see Bagwell op. cit., 152-153.

67. The rewriting of the past can be seen in Thatcher's annexation of 'Victorian Values' in the run up to the 1983 general election. For a discussion of this use of history see Samuel, R. (ed.) (1991) *History Workshop: A Collectanea 1967-1991*, Oxford, History Workshop. See also Wright, P. (1985) *On Living in an Old Country: the national past in contemporary Britain*, London, Verso.

68. The term 'heritage baiters' is a term coined by Samuel to describe a wide range of critical commentators who were uneasy at the way heritage and history was

being used in contemporary Britain, viewing it as essentially a conservative development. Samuel's argument, developed at length in his *Theatre of Memory* op. cit. esp. pt. 4, is that this use of history is essentially positive, allowing a widening and democratisation of what counts as 'history'.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Occupational Identity, Commercialisation and**

## **Privatisation 1979-1997**

### **Introduction**

This chapter seeks to explore the role and nature of occupational identity in the contemporary railway industry. As such it will delineate the extent to which there has been change within these identities since 1979. In many ways, the evidence presented here will mark both continuity and change within the social relationships of the grades studied when compared with previous chapters dealing with labour. Chapter four charted the near continuous decline in the status of grade and workforce as perceived by both academics and the workers themselves. To a great extent the current chapter marks continuity in that story of decline. Those interviewed speak of an industry undergoing enormous change in both its structure and its style of management. Like previous chapters there is much evidence of lost morale, but what is interesting here is that those interviewed range from workers on the point of retirement through to those in their mid to late twenties. Where this current work is perhaps different from previous accounts of railway workers' lives (see Groome 1986; Hollowell 1975; McKenna 1980; Salaman 1969, 1974; Wilson 1996) is the recognition of the essentially autonomous workplace culture which manages to survive in the face of tremendous upheaval, and that further, culture itself has been the conscious target of management reforms.



The chapter opens with a discussion of some contemporary debates within the sociology of work concerning the nature of identification with employment and occupation. I will challenge the idea that we are currently witnessing the end of occupation and work derived meaning. It will also be argued that there has been a tendency within such discussions to over-emphasise the extent of individualisation within workplaces and the power of management to control and design workplace interaction. The second part of the chapter deals with the issue of socialisation in contemporary work, using that enjoyed by current employees within the footplate and signalling grades as an example. It is argued here that their socialisation marked important continuities with those described in earlier chapters.

The third section questions the extent to which there has been a 'culture change' in the industry since 1979. Evidence for this is drawn from fieldwork carried out into the Loadhaul/EWS companies, Railtrack and the London Underground. Again material from this latter organisation has been included because of the extent to which culture change initiatives have been imposed on the company's employees. The next section deals with the emergence of market logic and a hardening of management attitudes towards the workforce. The extent to which these and other kinds of image changes witnessed in the previous chapter impact upon the established staff will be assessed. Finally, the chapter draws together these various discussions in attempting to understand the effect of these developments within the current railway workforce, posing the question to what degree have management been successful in the 'greening of a brownfield site'? (see chapter 5; also Strangleman and Roberts 1996a, 1996b). It is argued that in attempting to change work culture as part of a

desire to move towards a more pliant labour regime organisations run the risk of damaging elements of a traditional set of social practices that are necessary for the reproduction of a stable, competent and flexible workforce.

## **The Contemporary Discussion of Work**

Work-based culture and identity has recently become an area of great interest within industrial sociology and related disciplines. In many ways such a focus represents a revival of literature that developed during the 1960s and 1970s as part of industrial sociology's exploration of meaning in, and orientations to, work (see Goldthorpe et al 1968; Brown and Brannen 1970a, 1970b; Bulmer 1975; Salaman 1974 among others). The difference between this and much contemporary literature would seem to be that the earlier concern to map a collective sense of work identification has been replaced by one in which the focus resides at an individual level (see for example Casey 1995; Ezzy 1997; du Gay and Salaman 1992; du Gay 1996; Grey 1994; Knights 1995; Knights and Vurdubakis 1994; Newton 1996; O'Doherty 1994).

Arguably the two most significant recent interventions within this debate have been those by Catherine Casey (1995) and Paul du Gay (1996). In Casey's *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialism*, she argues that work is no longer a significant arena of meaning. In 'post occupational' employment, solidarity in work consists of a kind of loose identification with one of three orientations to a managerially-imposed unitarist model of work practice. Workers are part of a collective insofar as they are 'colluders', 'capitulators' or 'defensive' selves. Thus these groups are an individualised set of actors who only collectively share individual traits. Collectivity

therefore becomes essentially a category or typification, rather than a basis, or resource, for action.

In du Gay's *Consumption and Identity at Work* this kind of approach is echoed. Building on his earlier and highly influential piece with Salaman (du Gay and Salaman 1992), du Gay describes similar developments in the contemporary British retail sector. Here shop workers are encouraged to become 'entrepreneurs of the self', highly individualised employees who take personal responsibility for their own career path rather than rely on older, more bureaucratic, forms of corporate advancement. Thus such workers are made subject in two distinct but complementary ways. Firstly, they are subject to the technologies of power and secondly, they are subject to self knowledge. Like Casey, du Gay is critical of such a process and charts the 'losers' in this new environment, the victims of the 'cult(ure) of the customer' who are left high and dry after the wave of corporate restructuring. In both of these influential accounts management appears almost to be all powerful and omnipresent, able to 'make-up' workers in du Gay's work, or 'design the corporate self' in Casey's, as they wish. The result is a situation where the workplace is effectively given up as a 'contested terrain' (Edwards 1979). In Casey's view:

The industrial legacy of the centrality of production and work in social and self formation hovers precipitously with the post-industrial condition in which work is declining in social primacy. Social meaning and solidarity must, eventually, be found elsewhere (Casey 1995, 2).

Accounts such as these have not gone unchallenged within the discipline. Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) have been vocal critics of two distinct trends which

have elided to form a similar outcome, namely a situation perceived to be 'All quiet on the workplace front' (see also Nichols 1994; Thompson 1993). Thompson and Ackroyd are critical of this view and of those who take the low level of industrial disputes as a positive indicator of workplace harmony and an absence of resistance. They see this reading of the contemporary world of work as intelligible only in the context of two trends within industrial sociology. Firstly, the tendency on the part of some authors to take at face value the claims of management, managerialist writers, gurus and consultants over the efficacy of new forms of work organisation. The result of this is to see conflict at work resolved by a mixed battery of TQM, HRM and employee involvement strategies amongst others. Secondly, Thompson and Ackroyd see the rise in the use of Foucauldian concepts within the discipline, particularly the adoption of the imagery of the panopticon, as contributing to an image of industrial quiescence. This has led, they believe, to an analysis which effectively rules out resistance, with workers becoming self monitoring, self disciplining subjects. They conclude by calling for more detailed research and analysis at the workplace level, a point endorsed by Roberts (1996) and Stephenson (1996b).

What I want to argue in this chapter is that while issues of subjectivity and ontological security are important in understanding the perceptions of workers this cannot be enough. Rather, the study of work, employment and occupational identity has to be based on the detailed examination of the process of intersubjective and collective action over time. By focusing on the individual, or even more narrowly the self, it is unsurprising that the experience of work is seen to become irredeemably impoverished, something which is to be surrendered and escaped from. Evidence

presented in this chapter, and the previous ones stresses the importance of viewing occupational identity as a collectively produced and reproduced phenomenon and not something that can be, or ever could be, grasped adequately at the level of the individual self. The following section charts such a process within parts of the contemporary railway industry workforce, emphasising the continuity with the past.

## **Socialisation into an Established Culture**

In many ways the socialisation process for the majority of contemporary railway workers has much in common with previous generations' experience. Indeed, this continuity is even more marked as many of the workers quoted in this chapter were themselves trained by and then worked alongside some of the retired workers quoted in earlier chapters (1). The majority of informants commented on the nature of age profiles when they began working in the industry. This experience was often mixed, marking another continuity with the past. A Loadhaul driver who began his railway career during the late 1970s describes his impressions:

They were nearly all in their fifties when I started. There had been no young blood for years and years. We all got stick. There were some awkward blokes there when I started, I know some packed it in because of them. Guards especially would pack it in because of a few rough moves with the regulator (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995) (2).

Another driver from the Teesside area relates similar attitudes to younger workers:

The first driver I went with was 'Horrible Herb', I felt like putting my notice in after two days with that bloke. Wouldn't talk to me, treat me like a bit of dirt. And then I went on with another driver and he was totally different

again. You could talk to him, have a laugh. Brought home an important lesson, no two people are alike. He was just the old guard of drivers and they didn't think much of firemen. Really for anyone to respect you on the railway you have got to be on for at least four or five years, so you're going to stop on the job, you're not a fly-by-night (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

This latter point emphasises the moral aspect to career progression, with the young worker having to prove that they have a commitment to the industry and are therefore 'worth' investing time and effort in as a person. Again this would seem to resonate with the kinds of experiences older workers had in the footplate grade with regard to being 'accepted' (see chapter two). One driver who began his career during the 1980s explained why he thought some of the older drivers were at times uncooperative:

I think when they first started on the railway they had to do fireman's duties, all the shovelling and everything, and we didn't have anything like that. Basically what happened was we went there, we got on the engine put waa [our] feet up and looked out of the window for a five hour shift or whatever. Whereas they would have had to have been shovelling away coal all day and doing horrible jobs and a lot of them were very disillusioned about how the railway was going then. Most of them would have agreed that it had been a great job in the 1960s and '70s - it was a really great job, you could take great pride in. Most of them in the '80s couldn't wait to get out (John Oliver, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

The same interviewee spoke of his fear when working with his first driver:

When I started, it was really scary 'cos there was an older driver there they used to call Doctor Doom, he was one of the accommodated men (3), cos he had a dickey ticker so he had to just work on the shed all the time. And he showed us around and he was a right doom and gloom merchant saying to us 'the depot's going to be closed in a year yous wasting your time coming here' (ibid.).

David Baker's experience of working with older drivers was more positive:

I mean I was in awe of these drivers when I first started you know. I just looked up to these fellas, so they were all like idols. I just did the best I could to please them (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

This type of respect is also found elsewhere in autobiography of railway workers (see for example Bradshaw 1993). This respect was based in part on the account that these older workers gave of their early careers:

They were telling you about the job all the time, just how they were treat by drivers when they were young lads. I've heard them say they could spend a whole shift and the driver wouldn't talk to them. He'd be shovelling coal and the driver would just kick the shovel out of his hand when there was enough coal on the fire. So you could understand why they were jealous of us like. The like of me coming on the job and being made a driver in next to no time (ibid.) (4).

Such descriptions of the importance of an oral culture at work again emphasise the continuity of social processes within the footplate grade despite the

changing nature of the labour process. This is also reflected in other branches of the industry. A signalman in his thirties describes some of those who trained him in the early 1980s:

There seemed to be a lot of older ones on then. All of them seemed to be in their fifties. More older ones than what there were younger ones. All of a sudden you had a lot retire. They were all all right, used to really enjoy it. There were always one or two who couldn't be bothered like. You used to go in and they didn't used to open their mouths all shift (Sean Allen, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

Similarly the parallels with signal workers on the London Underground are striking. Bill Webster, who started his railway service in 1958, remembers his impression the age of those who trained him made on him at the time:

A lot of older blokes. The Met was almost all old blokes, old relief signalmen, old chaps. When you're younger they all look older don't they (Bill Webster, signalman LUL, interview 1995) (5).

Interestingly, although older workers from the former BR companies hint at the familial nature of their workplace, this is far more common among Underground staff. Thus the same interviewee said of his early impression of the company: 'I thought it was like a family concern in those days, I used to enjoy it' (ibid.). Another who had joined as a box boy during the 1960s echoed this sentiment 'It was like a big family, at Chiswick you were all transport people, it's a shame it's just changed' (Bob Ridge, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995) (6).



Similarly the experience of socialisation into the signalling grades on LUL was very similar to that on the mainline railways. Here Simon Gilbert, a box boy and later signalman on LUL from the 1980s describes his early impressions:

Enlightening in some ways. When I first started it was good because they [older staff] had the knowledge, and being as how you were a young geezer as well if you got into trouble they would sort you out straightaway - look after you (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

The age profile of drivers on LUL also seems to have mirrored the BR case, here a female driver describes her experience in the early 1980s on one of the more senior lines:

When I was working as a guard, and even when I qualified as a driver, you still had people who were from the war years, so there was always reference to some sort of golden age which frankly I don't think existed. That generation was always telling you about how it used to be, how they used to have to practically polish the drivers' boots when they were guards, and how they were treated, and how the barriers are now broken down. I heard a lot of stories like that (Amanda Hall, driver LUL, interview 1995) (7).

These accounts speak of a common experience of socialisation within a railway culture that is also paralleled in other male dominated occupations (see Fraser 1968). As discussed in earlier chapters, Penn (1986) described the process of socialisation into skilled identities as being one part of an inter-linked triumvirate of such roles, the others being occupation and class. During such a period of socialisation, which does not terminate when the actor becomes a fully fledged adult

worker, the norms, values and expectations of the group are transmitted. Importantly, this is a social and collective process that occurs over time. At the end of the period of apprenticeship or training the younger worker has at least some idea of what to expect, and what not to accept on the part of other workers, management and supervisors (8). What in some senses is being described is a moral community, where, at least in part the rules by which the collective operates are also a product of it.

The moral dimension to established workplaces can also be witnessed in the quality of supervision or management enjoyed. A recurring theme amongst interviewees across the railway industry was the respect for previous styles of management when compared with those of the present. Not surprisingly perhaps this was most keenly felt by the older workers. Here a signaller on the point of retiring remembers signalling inspectors he worked under during the 1940s and 1950s:

We had signals inspectors in those days who were good but they would give you a good tousing if you were in the wrong, but you knew you deserved it. They didn't pull you up for silly things like some do now. The thing is it's like parents, there's things you wouldn't like your parents to know you are doing, your parents would tell you off if they found out, but they've probably done the same themselves...(Ken West, signaller Railtrack, interview 1995).

Another Railtrack signaller on the point of retiring compared the pettiness of the present with his experience of the past:

Management are just out to pick little daft faults. If you miss out an entry in your book you could get a Form One for that. They just used to ring it in red 'Don't do it again' (John Porter, signaller Railtrack, interview 1995) (9).

The same interviewee told me of a derailment he had had years before at Trimdon County Durham which had been his fault and which he had duly owned up to. A message was subsequently sent to him by a signalling inspector:

‘Ask relief signalman Porter to be more careful in future’. That’s all it was, it didn’t even go on my record ! (ibid.).

On the Underground such sentiments are shared by older workers, one describing the type of supervisors and management when he first joined London Transport in terms of being ‘real railwaymen’ (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995). Another echoed the comments made above with regard to BR:

We had Divisional Inspectors then, they were more like men. They wouldn’t drop you in the cart, if they could square something up for you they would. Not like this lot today, slime balls a lot of them (Huw Evans, signalman LUL, interview 1995).

Another current worker who had started his career during the late 1960s explained the basis of the respect that some managers received:

District Inspectors then had all come through the grades so they knew what they were talking about. So they did earn quite a lot of respect from the other staff, one or two exceptions who were useless. There again it wasn’t really a manager’s job then, just a line of promotion for any of the grades. It wasn’t until they started to call them *managers* that they started, that they were managers and everyone else was staff. A lot of the older ones would knock before they came in the box, which you wouldn’t get with some of the newer

ones. If the hat came off it was a friendly visit (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

The two points about 'knocking' and the 'hat coming off' are important as they are both concerned with respect for office. In knocking before entering the workplace the superior was showing respect for the worker and their position. Frank McKenna (1976, 1980) talks about the importance of the railway worker's bailiwick representing a defensible space and an important aspect of grade identity. Likewise, the hat is a symbolic representation of office which is 'symbolically' taken off, inviting a more relaxed atmosphere and implying equality of station.

It is instructive to compare these accounts of respect for management with those found elsewhere in sociological literature. Nichols and Beynon (1977) discovered similar comparisons between older and newer managers at 'ChemCo':

'...now he was a real manager, a man's manager he was'... 'Phil got the job going'... 'With Phil they'd get the job out.' 'Phil might as well have been one of them.' 'Phil had the human touch.' (Nichols and Beynon 1977, 35).

These represent similar themes to those that emerge from interviews carried out with railway employees, namely authenticity, ability, skill and humanity. Workers seem therefore to be more prepared to offer respect to those managers whose authority is not simply reducible to their office, but rather possesses a legitimacy embedded in the labour process, workplace interaction, and the person. Gouldner (1964) found strikingly similar attitudes among workers comparing older and newer managers, coining the phrase the 'Rebecca Myth'. Gouldner makes the point that such comparison is highly selective in its juxtaposition of positive and negative imagery.

This further resonates with Gabriel's (1993) work on organisational nostalgia where the past as experienced by an older, marginalised, workforce is a source of positive value. Such value, Gabriel argues, can be found in older work patterns, workers, managers or supervisors and even buildings. We now go on to examine the impact of culture change initiatives on the established workplace.

## **Culture Change?**

In the previous chapter we saw that the kind of 'railroad culture', to use Gourvish's (1986) phrase, supposedly endemic in railway circles, was identified as one of the major problems facing the industry (see Bate 1990, 1995; Gourvish 1990). But Glaister and Travers (1993) recognised the potential opportunity in the 'demographic time bomb' that BR faced, namely the chance to rid itself very quickly of a sizeable portion of its older workforce, particularly drivers. In addition, the industry's restructuring and continued loss of some traffic meant that voluntary redundancy schemes were made available. Such schemes were made more attractive to older workers by a combination of levels of severance pay and a change in the type of supervision enjoyed. John Oliver describes why so many of the older generation were prepared to take severance over the last decade and a half:

Most of them really really wanted early retirement, just to get out, just sick of the way the railways were being run. In the '80s and 90s the driver wasn't treat with any respect by management, you were just a driver and 'You get on it and you do it' sort of thing. The way you used to get on in management was through the footplate. You'd be a driver and you'd have a good chance of getting a supervisor's job. It started to become a more of a yes man kind of a

job, a lot of them would kiss up to management would get a chance of management vacancies. An awful lot of young managers who hadn't done sort of footplate service were getting managerial posts. And so a bloke telling them what to do when they had never done it themselves (John Oliver, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

This kind of treatment is reflected elsewhere in accounts of the industry (Groome 1986; Terkel 1990, 555-561). The same driver continued to talk about the change that such an exit of older staff had brought:

Most of them were great, all gone now unfortunately. It was totally different really them and the younger drivers, total chalk and cheese. Some of these older drivers just wouldn't do anything unless they knew they had to do it. If they thought it wasn't in their job contract they wouldn't do it and management couldn't do anything, so as soon as they started to get sort of phased-out the younger drivers started to get messed around a lot, exploited. [Management] Saying 'You've got to go there, you've got enough time'. With the old drivers they knew sort of like everything, if the gaffer had come in and said 'Right you've got to take this train to York' and he'd been sitting spare for four hours he'd say 'Oh I haven't got time' so they'd be arguing saying 'You have got time' 'no I haven't'. They could list out every single time, every single break they were entitled to, the rests, how long it would take you to run round the train, sort of minutes would mount up so they wouldn't be able to do it in their eight hours. And basically there was nothing they could do. But these days management just say 'If you don't want to do it pick

up your cards on the way out'. They could never get away with it with the older drivers (ibid.) (10).

This is reflected in other interviews with Loadhaul drivers:

The job's changed since I joined, all these old fellas are finished, they are trying to change things. They had a lot of power these fellas and they are trying to change that now. They would refuse to go somewhere and that would be it you know fail the engine or something, not on purpose but they could be picky about it and find it [a fault] (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

Another driver with the same company made similar observations:

It's totally different now, it's a younger job. Most of the older hands have retired through voluntary redundancy, and coming of age at sixty-five, I mean the age profile now, the average when I started was mid-fifties. But now I would say down to mid-twenties. It's a young man's railway but the again we're a smaller workforce. It's good and bad, in one way you're working with people of your own age, in another way there are serious erosions of the job, we're more in line with lorry drivers! (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994).

This point about age was reinforced in an informal conversation with younger drivers who worked for Loadhaul. I asked them whether, had the older workers still been on the job, they would have accepted the changes in working conditions and supervision. One of the group said 'They never would've accepted it, never and management wouldn't have pushed it either'. The point here is that almost

irrespective of the validity of such claims the younger workers perceived the older members of the workforce as resisting management pressure, and that management at times had to respect that. Furthermore, it is important to stress that such resistance was in part predicated on the legal requirements within the industry that certain grades were not only conscious of, but had historically helped to create and police. It is almost as if authority resided in the older members of the workforce and acted as a powerful resource in and of itself (11). It is interesting to speculate to what extent the older workers' moral authority described above was itself the product of a particular labour market context. This group of workers had been embedded in an industry where the strategic power of labour had been relatively high for much of the post-war era, as was the case in other sectors of the British economy (See Bagwell 1982; Hay 1996a, 1996b; Leys 1989; MacInnes 1987; Smith 1989).

For workers in Railtrack the situation was slightly different because staffing levels were to a large extent technologically dependent, with a box remaining staffed to a certain level regardless of traffic flow. It is only when older boxes controlling small areas are closed by newer control centres that workers are displaced, therefore the scale of redundancy schemes open to older staff in the signalling grades were not as great as those of the footplate. One younger signaller however noted the change in age profile and the wish of remaining older staff to leave the organisation as quickly as possible:

There aren't the characters now, since the old boys have gone. If the older ones that are still on the job, if they got a decent settlement a lot of them would go now, a lot of them just don't want the change, morale is really low at



the moment in the signalling grades (Ted Pearson, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

Another Railtrack signal worker approaching the statutory retirement age explained the position he found himself in during the restructuring of the company:

I was deemed 'surplus to requirement', I was disassociate from my job and you had to reapply! There's me and another old signalman about to retire, he can't get away quick enough, and my two months is going to be the longest two months! (John Porter, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

The situation on LUL was different again. Of all the areas of the rail industry studied the changes witnessed on the Underground were perhaps the most far reaching and deliberate in terms of their effect on the established work culture. One LUL signalman describe the implementation of the Company Plan discussed above:

The Company Plan was sold to the staff and the public as a new renaissance for LUL. I think the advertisement was a sun rising above the horizon, you know the *future*. I give them their credit, they did their homework, they got a company in from America on some fantastic fee and they really went into it and waited until the union was really weak and then pounced (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

What seems to have particularly annoyed workers who experienced the introduction of the Company Plan was the issuing of new contracts by post. The importance for such a tactic on the part of management is that the issue becomes essentially a personal one in the home, rather than a collective one at the workplace. And such a strategy has been replicated in other parts of the railway industry as well as separate

sectors in the British economy (see Kennedy and Lavalette 1997; Parker 1991, chs. 10 and 11; Storey 1992; Storey and Sisson 1993). The same respondent spoke of his letter:

They wrote everyone a letter, I had one through the post telling me if I didn't sign the contract, I mean it was nicely worded. 'Dear Huw, bla bla' - and at the bottom 'you have twelve weeks to sign after which time if you do not sign then we will consider this to be your notice and you will be dismissed forthwith' (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Another signaller with over thirty years seniority spoke on the same subject:

If you didn't sign it they gave you twelve weeks notice. I thought they treated us disgustingly. See, what the trouble is, you've got this element at the top who are so spiteful that they don't give a cuss about anyone and if you don't like the Company Plan you was out of the door. I mean what sort of system is it that they can only be right and everyone else is wrong? I can understand they want loyalty but is that any way to get loyalty? Is the big stick the way to get loyalty? 'If you don't do that I am going to smash your head in with this hammer'. I was fifty-six so I thought that's enough (Bill Webster, signaller LUL, interview 1995).

Again the issue of age and generational change were perceived to be important reasons for the move:

Most of the people of my age group [mid-forties] and above, and younger ones want to get out. It's going back to the Victorian days. The managers just laugh at you now if you say you're going to get a union rep 'Do what you

like'. It was like a family and people used to stick together, it broke down completely. What Denis Tunnicliffe (12) said was 'I want an industry run like McDonalds', used the McDonalds concept. You know, you have a captain and you have a team and if you don't fit into that you're out. And by getting rid of all the older guys and having a lot of the younger guys who don't know any different (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

The same interviewee echoed some of the views expressed by the workers on BR:

Now they have a young workforce that weren't brought up in the railway proper like I was and they bully them and they get away with it. I've seen a lot of young blokes being bullied 'cos they are too frightened to say anything. A lot of staff are really frightened of the management, and the way they are treated (ibid.).

He went on:

They want to get rid of the old school that knew the job. Denis Tunnicliffe, his view is that it will modernise the railways, modern conditions, get rid of all these antiquated agreements - in his view holding the Company back. But in actual fact most of the agreements that we had had advantages. They worked for the benefit of the guys but they also worked for the benefit of the railway because people were happy with their lot and were a team. That's all gone, that's what they call modernise (ibid.).

By targeting older workers and the sets of work practices that had grown up over time, management are effectively changing the architecture of the employment bargain within a particular organisation. The older workers, in some senses, are the

very embodiment of work culture and practices that are now deemed to be irrelevant. Such workers are embedded in a system that is portrayed as having failed or as being problematic. The unequal amount of power which capital and labour bring to the employment relationship is further exaggerated in two senses. Firstly, management's own contingency, its role in creating the historical structures of work, can be conveniently manipulated, forgotten about or, better still, can itself be targeted as part of the 'creative destruction' that 'culture change' represents, a symbolic confessional and absolution. Secondly, control can be exercised by the editing-out of a potential source of power that labour has at its disposal. Older forms of power and knowledge can be destroyed or marginalised not only by the removal of older workers but also, as we have seen in the redesign of the labour process within a changed organisational structure, an effective 'greening of brownfield sites' (see chapter 5, also Strangleman and Roberts 1996a).

In this sense attractive redundancy schemes become an effective safety valve, releasing much critical pressure. As was seen in the previous chapter many workers have left the railway industry by such schemes under state ownership and this continues with the transition to the private sector. Such schemes also play another role in that they are portrayed as essentially liberal ways of dealing with those workers who do not wish to be part of the 'new culture'. The choice of whether to stay or leave essentially becomes an individual one. Undoubtedly they are partly successful in breaking down a collective responses to such moves precisely because of the existence of difference within the workforce, the most important here perhaps being that of age. For those workers in their fifties or sixties who have spent much of their

career in the industry seniority-based redundancy payments represented an attractive option. At the other end of the spectrum younger workers may see the 'new culture' as one that is beneficial to them since they were disadvantaged, initially at least, by seniority based promotional schemes. In addition, the removal of so many older workers opens up new opportunities in itself.

A more problematic group is that which finds itself in the middle. Those workers who have joined and been socialised into an organisation where seniority counted for much. What is interesting is that this group is potentially large, with many of the workers interviewed here considering themselves as part of the 'old school' who yet may only be in their mid to late twenties or early thirties. For this group especially, the 'liberality' of the opening of the 'window of opportunity' (Strangleman and Roberts 1996a, 1996b) that redundancy represents is interpreted as totalitarian (13).

Two LUL workers discussed the options they were offered, the first was in his mid-twenties:

There was a hell of a lot of voluntary severance. Management called the voluntary severance 'Happy to go - Happy to stay'. Those that went couldn't wait to go, they knew what was going to happen with the Company Plan and they didn't want to stick around. And those that were left behind weren't 'Happy to stay' they just had no bloody choice! (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

And similar views were expressed by a member of the grade in his forties:

They were running a 'Happy to go - Happy to stay' policy, They were offering severance to people who were supposed to say 'Great, I'm happy, I'm going to go, I'm going to get severance'. And anyone who doesn't take it is going to stay at work because they're happy. That's their [management] attitude now, not the fact that people have got a great big mortgage and a family, want a job, want some money (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Thus the material from LUL represents an extreme account of the ability of management to 'green' a 'brownfield site' in that they can require their staff to actively and positively sign-up to new contracts and conditions. Opposition to such programs is mediated and diffused by the appeal on the part of the organisation to the logic of individual freedom and choice which the individual worker was presented with. At another level these kinds of developments represent a pushing back of the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich 1975) in the sense that the collective ownership of work and the workplace is effectively challenged. This is achieved by a number of separate but related means. Pre-eminent among these is the ending of seniority as the effective means of promotion. Thus the rights to particular jobs are removed with these subsequently becoming the gift of management rather than the almost automatic right based on length of service (14). The attack on seniority-based occupational ladders parallels those made on the traditional craft apprenticeship (see for example Storey and Sisson 1993, 38). In both cases, such schemes are portrayed as irrational, unscientific and exclusionary. In contrast, promotion purely on merit is seen as rational, scientific and essentially meritocratic. As part of this process newer forms of

selection are cloaked in scientific garb, especially the introduction of psychometric testing or even biodating (see Graham 1995; Storey 1992; Storey and Sisson 1993).

But the formal rationality of promotion by merit is undermined in its application. One of the recurring themes in workers' comments about revised forms of promotion and advancement was that they were now based increasingly on personal relationships between management and individual workers. In the case of Railtrack one signalman commented:

Seniority seems to count for very little now, it's if your face fits you're in, if not hard lines (John Porter, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

A younger worker in his thirties discussed the relative merits of the systems:

It could be frustrating but you made your way up there and you knew when passed the Block anyone in front of you they had the first chance of getting any jobs, any one behind you you knew you'd beat them. Then they brought the suitability clause in, like you go for interviews, now you go for other jobs and if they don't think you're suitable, even though you're senior to a bloke who might have been on five years, and you might have been on twenty, if you're not suitable that's what it goes by (Sean Allen, signalman Railtrack, Interview 1995) (15).

On the Underground one of the arguments for the ending of seniority as a significant factor in the promotion of staff had been its discriminatory aspects. This notion was challenged by a female driver:

Management uses that argument in a very cynical way, they say to us it's better for women if you do away with seniority and it's better for women if

you have a competency based, suitability-based ways of working, and this is a lot better for women. That's only true if you're talking about management grades, not true when you're talking about the vast majority of the ranks. You can't look for feminisation with a shrinking workforce (Amanda Hall, driver LUL, interview 1995).

The move to a system of promotion based 'simply' on merit had particular repercussions within an industry contracting as a result of lost traffic, or in the case of LUL and Railtrack because of the introduction of new technology. At the time I was engaged in my research interviews were being carried out the first stage of the recruitment for a new control room which will eventually signal the whole of the LUL's Central Line. A signal worker explains the effect it had on the staff involved:

On the Central Line over there it's getting really bad, because you've got twelve signallers who have got the jobs up in Wood Lane [the site of the new room] and the rest of them, fifty-seven signallers that are going to have no jobs when the Central Line boxes close. And when all the interviews started for Wood Lane there were some very dubious things went on. Signalmen were working double shifts, treble shifts. They wouldn't close boxes, they'd squeal on another signalman, get someone else in trouble. All started stabbing one another in the back, and their excuse was "Oh I've got in for Wood Lane. I don't want to dirty my cards", 'cos they were ever so scared they were going to lose their jobs. The management have got it sewn-up so tightly workers are stabbing themselves in the back (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995) (16).



This state of affairs produces an interesting situation whereby the system of promotion based on merit which is held to be more formally rational than previous ones actually produces a compliant but in some cases dishonest set of applicants. In contrast, the previous system based on seniority and suitability could be seen as also being formally rational in that it was based on bureaucratic rules which were considered as objective and fair, a central characteristic Weber identified as a feature of a modern organisation (Gerth and Wright Mills 1948, ch. 8; Weber 1964). Indeed, one explanation for the adoption and long term survival of such a systems within the industry was the very fact that it was not seen as over-personalised and arbitrary in its application (see Gratton 1990) (17). Thus newer forms of management, based on an understanding of the discipline as a science (Pollitt 1993) were at once heralded as more rational and objective, but were perceived by sections of the workforce to be based on personality and capricious management values.

There are also parallels here with other contemporary literature on work-based culture, in that the employment relationship increasingly is presented as individualised (Casey 1995; du Gay and Salaman 1992; du Gay 1996; Grey 1994). Such accounts stress the trend towards more fragmented and individualised workplaces. Here workers become responsible for their own career. To be successful is to become an 'entrepreneurial self' (du Gay and Salaman 1992; du Gay 1996), or even where a career is the projection of the 'self' (Grey 1994). The attraction for management in such individualisation is in part precisely because it is corrosive of collective responses and opposition to a managerial agenda (see Beale 1995; Storey 1992, esp. ch. 9; Storey and Sisson 1993, esp. chs. 8-9).

What has been explored in this section is the challenge to previous work based culture primarily through the attack on established patterns of workforce production and reproduction. It has been argued that such moves on the part of management have been effective in reducing the amount of resistance faced in implementing change. We now turn to some of the implications which this has for workplace interaction between staff and between staff and managers.

## **A New Managerial Culture?**

In many ways the trend towards tighter managerial control on the railway workforce had its origin in the 1980s, as we saw in the previous chapter. The themes highlighted by Groome (1986) indicate a hardening of management line coupled with a lower level of respect for staff, in his case footplate workers. Such a tightening of labour policy at the board level was examined in the previous chapter (see also Ferner 1988; Pendleton 1993, 1995). Ferner in particular demonstrates the mechanism by which the pressure on public finances were filtered through the industrial relations system and on to the shopfloor (Ferner 1988, esp. ch. 6-9).

In the contemporary industry this pressure was felt to have gradually increased. Most of the drivers believed they were liable to far greater levels of supervision and direct management control than had been the case earlier in their careers. One of the main instruments of this control was perceived to be through the Train Crew Leader (TCL) structure. This grade had replaced the older grade of traction inspector, but their duties were, in a formal sense, wider with a greater focus on personnel matters than in the past. Such a focus would seem to mirror Storey's (1992) understanding of the way personnel functions are in some organisations

increasingly devolved to front-line managers (18). One driver described his own experience:

There's more interference now - in the past if, you kept your nose clean and you did your job you would never see them. Now you see them all the time and I think they are spoiling it. The way they're on your back all the time. Now there is more, they're called Team Leaders like. I think that's from abroad that, that idea, they want to send 'em back and all. They're like Gestapo they're always on your back whereas the old inspectors weren't, it was a more relaxed atmosphere (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

Another driver described his thoughts:

Basically the drivers' boss is the Train Crew Leader and some of them were great, but some of them just didn't have the experience for it...they're actually based at Tyne Yard now, they've got a little room, and they're responsible to make sure trains only do five mile an hour in the yard. A lot of the old drivers resent that 'cos it's just crazy (John Oliver, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995) (19).

Again the issue of age surfaced both in terms of that of the Train Crew Leaders and the workers they were supervising:

I mean there were lads younger than me [early thirties], had only been on the railway a few years and they went for these Team Leader jobs and they got them, and you can imagine an older driver having to work with him, you know it's all wrong. I don't agree with that at all. The old blokes divven [don't]

like it at all, they just try to ignore it I suppose (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

This concern for the erosion of age as a criterion was also surfaced in the question of who trained drivers. During the 1980s the position of 'minder drivers' had been created' whose role was to take a trainee driver after they had completed their basic driver training course. Much of this supervision of practical experience in the past had been undertaken by traction inspectors:

What gets me a little bit is some of these minder drivers, the ones where they're just doing it for the money, they get extra money per shift and they just haven't got the experience. Maybe I am old fashioned but I reckon you need ten years of driving experience before you can ever dare teach someone to drive a train, whereas some of them might have been on for just two (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994).

And the same interviewee went on make a similar point with regard to high levels of supervision and management:

The structure of management has certainly changed. For a start off the composition of management always came from the lower ranks, people who had worked their way up, and that was the case until about ten years ago. And then it's just people coming in straight from University, no experience of the railway industry at all, or the practical workings of it (ibid.).

The same driver went on:

There is a lot of resentment of, say, a University graduate, who has just majored in history, what the hell does he know? All a degree proves is that

you are able to take things in. You are capable of being educated. One interpretation of that is you are capable of being brainwashed into the values they want you to espouse. There's not a lot of respect for the management in the workforce (ibid.).

For Railtrack staff these issues were also relevant, again the issue of legitimacy deriving from work based experience arose constantly in such discussions.

A signalman with over forty years service pointed out:

The old management used to come up through the grades. Now the big bosses if they've got seven years that's a lot. I know they've got degrees and this that and the other but a degree in history doesn't help you out with railway work. If the old men, old railwaymen, if they start to talk about the old days a glazed look comes over the eyes of management, they're not interested, it's 'Oh here we go again the "Olden Days"' (John Porter, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995) (20).

This last point echoes the observation made in the previous chapter by an older manager in the same organisation. Both shared the experience of having their past overtly devalued by their seniors. The past as a resource is attacked by management as lacking legitimacy, and is seen as being incapable of producing anything of value only subjective nostalgic reminiscences of a bygone era. This case has important similarities with Nichols and Beynon's (1977) discussion of different managerial styles in ChemCo. Like the examples drawn on here they found unflattering comparisons being made by staff between older experienced managers who were prepared to roll-up their shirt sleeves and young university educated ones

who were 'all slide-rule' (Nichols and Beynon 1977, 36). Importantly the new kinds of managers the interviewees here described did not have the legitimacy of a 'relevant' degree, unlike their equivalents at ChemCo. This lack of relevance emerged in an interview with an LUL driver:

They've now said experience is irrelevant because this is a business and we want managers who will treat this like a business, so in the last year there's been more and more graduate trainees at almost all levels, so you get twenty-two year old graduate from Leeds University, Business and German who's running a group, that sort of thing. The only place they've shied away from doing that is on the trains. It's almost like there's been a conscious policy that the people immediately managing the drivers should be still people with lots of operational experience, I'm not sure whether it's because they think they need it, or because they think drivers won't stand for it, and they know the drivers will not give those people respect...drivers won't give people respect if they haven't done their bit and put in their time (Amanda Hall, driver LUL, interview 1995) (21).

Another younger Railtrack signalman spoke of the difference between older supervisors and managers who had come through the grade and newer ones who had not:

Some haven't been in the cabins before and you can tell by some of the attitudes they've got when they come in the cabins and the way they come across. They put themselves on a pedestal, talk down to you some of them. So you can tell the ones that have been in the cabins and those that haven't.

Some of them are all eyes, when they come in, looking at everything (Sean Allen, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

One interpretation of the last observation, and others above, would be to see it as a function of differing class locations that the two sets of actors inhabit. This is perhaps more profound now than in the past because of less mixing on a day-to-day level that earlier management training schemes involved. It could be argued that the process of 'becoming a railwayman' was important both for the individual manager as well as the staff they would eventually supervise, in some senses mediating the class relationships at the point of production (see chs. 1 and 3; Fiennes 1973, esp. chs. 1 and 2). Ironically it was precisely this empiricism that was subject to criticism at BRB level during the 1980s (Bate 1990, 1995; Gourvish 1990). The experience described by several of the workers above echoes that found in more phenomenological accounts of class (see for example Fox 1994; Hoggart 1990; Sennett and Cobb 1993). While I would not suggest that class has been absent as an issue historically within the industry it could be argued that the 'professionalisation' of management, insofar as such positions are increasingly being filled by graduates, may represent a hardening of class divisions. The perception in all three areas of the industry studied here was that a previous legitimate line of promotion had narrowed (22). This process is further exaggerated by the tendency to see management as a generic set of competencies rather than an embedded skill, thus legitimacy derived through work based knowledge is marginalised (see Pollitt 1993, esp. ch. 5).

In the case of LUL, there was also a sense in which the staff felt themselves to be over managed when compared to the past. This was seen to have been a gradual change:

During the 1980s with the ending of the staff shortages, that's when management began to change, macho management...The GLC was done away with, the government took over LUL ...Lines were spilt away from lines, managers started to be from outside, there was a definite change, the morale was beginning to go down. You started to get a bit of macho management from the top but not from the railwaymen...a lot of people got promoted up to managers that should never have been let loose (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995) (23).

Another discussed the size of the management structure post Company Plan:

When you think when I joined quite a few years back you had a Divisional Inspector who was in charge of two lines and Station Masters and that was basically it to run the railway. Now you've got a Line General Business Manager; Area Business Manager; Line General Manager; Train Service Manager; Service Control Manager; Duty Operations Manager; Duty Train Manager; Train Crew Managers and they all have support staff. Secretaries to run the railway, why? We still do the nitty gritty of running the railway....What the hell do they all do? (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995) (24).



This kind of moral outrage over perceived managerial waste was juxtaposed with the state of the equipment that was in day-to-day use. A worker from the Victoria and Northern Line control room explained:

The equipment is falling to bits because it's old stuff. Our buttons fall away in our hands, they just come off and fall on the desks. It's just well past its best (Bob Ridge, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

And such observations were echoed in other interviews:

Our phones are still the original handsets [early 1960s]. When the telephone lineman comes to repair them they have to carefully dismantle them on the floor. When you see inside them they're held together with rubber bands and fag papers! (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Similar accounts of poor equipment were also given in press reports during the Railtrack signalling dispute of 1994 (see Strangleman 1995). Another senior signalman who works in the control room responsible for signalling the Northern and Victoria Lines gave a graphic illustration of being over managed:

They [management] seem to be in the room more than ever now, since we had the Company Plan. In the peak whereas usually there should be ten or eleven people sometimes there is up to twenty-five people. A lot of them are surrounding the stage at the back looking over the controller's shoulder and when we have an incident there's too many governors saying what to do. Some of them stand there with a clip-board and say nothing 'cos I don't think they really know what they are looking at, that's what we think, it's dangerous sometimes (Bob Ridge, senior Signal operator LUL, interviewed 1995) (25).

While management were becoming more interventionist in a 'hard' sense, there were also increases in the 'soft' types of intervention. In the case of Loadhaul the role of Train Crew Leader was in part designed to move away from the traditional disciplinary function to an emphasise on counselling and leadership qualities. The drivers interviewed were extremely cynical about such a move precisely because the TCL role was also still in part a disciplinary one:

I wouldn't tell them anything, they'd put you straight on the 'Driver at Risk' register. Say if you were married and you had problems they might take you off the front straight away, that's got implications if more redundancies come up or someone new takes us over (Steve Chitty, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995) (26).

Again LUL has adopted a far more sophisticated HRM strategy. As in the Loadhaul example the 'soft' version of HRM was being stressed, as a train driver explained;

At the same time they are also attempting to have a culture change in that a 'Mr Nice Guy' type of thing. They're trying to train them in communication skills and in people skills, they're trying to train them how to listen to people, how to talk to people, very much talk softly but carry a big stick, because they do have more immediate power (Amanda Hall, driver LUL, interview 1995).

As part of this same process all LUL staff now regularly receive 'Personal Development' (or 'Professional Development' for supervisory or managerial staff) by way of three monthly meetings with their manager. As in the above account staff were cynical about these meetings in part because there were 'hard' edges to the interviews:

Now they've brought in this Professional Development and it's supposed to give people a pride in their job, tell you where your going. Take today, one bloke went up there and straight away it's 'where's your tie, you should have a shave, those socks aren't right' straight away the geezer's on edge. A lot of these managers don't know how to handle people (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Most of the workers interviewed pointed out the contradiction in the level of control now exercised over much of their work when compared with the stated corporate aim of empowering workers:

How you personally develop people is how we first went into the job, taking ownership of the job, the job's taken all that away, so you need managing and the next week they're saying you've got to be personally developed, and of course it's just a joke. On one of my interviews the manager asked me 'how would I like my career to develop?' I said 'I want three years off to study at college' they just laughed (Robert Bright, signal control centre assistant LUL, interview 1995) (27).

One signalman spoke of the resentment he felt at such interviews. The implication was that to be *just* a signalman was not enough and that they should be applying for other jobs, particularly those in management:

I said 'I've always been a signalman, and that's what I want to carry on doing', but they don't seem to understand that (Fred Ross, senior signal operator, interview 1995).

This seems to be an important aspect in a dissolving of occupational or craft identity. The implication is that a 'successful' career is one where the actor moves on quickly, not staying in one job for any length of time. The logical conclusion is that to choose to stay in one grade is an admission of failure. Again this echoes du Gay's (1996) point about the enterprising subject being recognised as the only truly moral one. There are also parallels with Grey's (1994) concept of the career as the projection of the self wherein the pursuit of an individual's career becomes a self disciplining device within a highly individualised labour process. There is perhaps an important point of difference in that Grey's study was based upon trainee accountants who would generally be assumed to come from middle class backgrounds and be University educated. Thus for such workers the adoption of such strategies is not necessarily alien in quite the same way it is in established railway work which traditionally has had highly structure career paths and occupational ladders.

Ironically railway staff in all three organisations complained that opportunities to move within or between their grades was restricted in the contemporary industry. In the case of the former BR companies this was due to the effective ending of cross-transfers between the different sections. If a worker now wanted to join a different company they had to apply to join in the same way as anyone outside the organisation, losing the benefits and protection offered by tenure and seniority. In the case of LUL, workers felt less prepared to apply for other jobs because of fear of redundancy caused by constant reorganisation. Thus workplace insecurity seems to have produced a less 'entrepreneurial' workforce than that which enjoyed a higher level of stability, underpinning and support (28).

## **The Emergence of Market Logic**

One of the most important changes that has occurred in the railway industry over the past decade and a half has been the privileging of market logic above that of a public service tradition. We saw in the previous chapter that the BR organisation underwent a series of reforms that attempted to make the industry more customer focused (see Bate 1990, 1995; Ferner 1989; Gourvish 1990; Pendleton 1993, 1995; Vincent and Green 1994). Such developments can be interpreted as part of a trend within both the public and private sectors towards a more market driven approach (see for example Ferner 1988; du Gay and Salaman 1992; Pendleton and Winterton 1993; Pollitt 1994). Within the railway industry such moves have witnessed the wholesale development of market mechanisms, such as budget centres as well as the increasing adoption of targets, more commonly referred to on LUL as Key Performance Indicators. This section examines the way these trends have been received and understood by the workforce. It is argued that these developments represent an immersion in market logic which is corrosive of hitherto strong workplace cultural patterns.

Under BR a quasi market logic had gradually been developed since 1982 with the genesis of the sectorisation process. This in itself had created many irrationalities in the quest for the allocation of cost and revenue between parts of BR (see Gourvish 1990) (29). With the creation of the privatisation structure this situation was intensified, and many of the previous arrangements, made on the basis of 'gentlemen's agreements', were now formalised in thousands of separate legal contracts (30). Thus operating companies now bought 'paths' from Railtrack in a

timetable. If Railtrack failed to provide a particular path it paid penalties to the operator. Similarly if the operator's train missed a path or delayed the service they paid fines to Railtrack who then compensated other operating companies for delays.

In the Loadhaul organisation this change had seen the increased stress on budgets to a far greater extent than hitherto. One driver described the experience of such an insertion during a safety brief:

They'd go through sort of accident reports 'one wagon came off, the cost was £300,000', trying to put it on the drivers, how much it costs, the cost of a derailment. I mean we all just said they want to spend some money on improving the track so accidents wouldn't happen, it came down to costs all the time. Costs, costs, costs everything was costs, you as a driver would cost so much, and a train would cost this much (John Oliver, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

Another driver stressed the change in the content of their work:

With diagrams for instance, they want you out of the yards in twenty-two minutes. From actually signing-on to leaving the yard. They want it as quick as possible because it's all money-orientated (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

The same driver discussed the way the change was presented to them by the management, again the safety brief was the occasion for such messages:

Well it's been hammered into us that we're working for a private company now. We have these safety briefs every so often and the Team Leader will fill you in on what's happening and what you've got to do. They tell you about

the job, tell you what it's going to be like, this new regime. They tell you to pull you socks up, that you've got to leave the yard in twenty-two minutes, crazy (ibid.).

Another driver employed by the same company talked about the cost implications of his actions:

I was on a flow out of Tyne Yard the other day and just as I was about to leave the yard I wanted a crap. I missed my path and it cost the company £500, it's the most expensive shit I've ever had! (Steve Graham, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

One Loadhaul driver highlighted the complexity of the emerging railway:

We're all supposed to be competing with one another. I find it so flaming ridiculous it's so bureaucratic. I mean Railtrack now all the companies have got to pay them to operate on their track. But when a train's late compensation claims and counter-compensation claims start flying around. Say Railtrack had a signalling failure and it delayed a train by one hour and it incurred penalty clauses from British Steel because we were delayed, so we in turn have got to claim from Railtrack, but in turn if Railtrack can prove it was down to someone else they might claim from them (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994).

One of the main issues that arose in interviews was the irrationality of market logic with regard to the crewing of particular flows of traffic:

We used to have a flow of oil from Jarrow to over Manchester way, we used to take it down the east coast route to Wakefield where we would get off and a

Transrail crew would take over. They'd [BR] built a refuelling point and all sorts there. But Transrail pinched the traffic off us and now it goes over the West line to Carlisle and down the west coast. It's a longer way round, but it's just so they can change crews at Carlisle so they can do it in the nine hours and won't have to hire in Loadhaul crews (Terry Hawkins, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995) (31).

Ironically though LUL has not as yet been privatised it has adopted the logic of internal markets and targets to a far greater extent than the former BR organisations (32). These targets are partly used by senior management in the allocation of performance related pay to senior and middle management. The targets cover a range of measures but the ones that most impinge upon the staff interviewed here were those of mileage and headways between the service (33). Several of the signalling staff from LUL illustrated the problems that these targets represented on a daily level:

Since the Company Plan you get a lot more managers in there now [control room]. They're a lot more worried about so called service quality, mileage and headways. They've got so many targets to meet, but it seems to me that you can't always have the one *and* the other. They want headways met and they want mileage met but if you get an incident where you get late running trains you've got to turn trains short to provide a headway on the opposite working. But again you lose mileage because they're not completing their full run. So if you let them complete the mileage to keep targets for mileage up you lose out in the headways which to me is simple to see, a lot of managers, they can't see that (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).



Another signaller who works in the same control room echoed these problems and highlighted the extent to which the target system had been pushed:

Nowadays it's all gaps and 'Where is the next train'. We're always holding trains 'cos we can see the whole line. We're all holding trains then they want to know why they're all late, why is the train service falling to pieces, they can't have it both ways. And there's all these graphs on the walls, all these red and green lines 'are we keeping our headways up?' all this sort of thing. They get their money through the amount of train mileage they run, they don't want lost mileage. I mean last year they were running trains around empty with faults on them, not in passenger service, just so they can say they have got the mileage in although the trains are just running with just the driver and the guard not doing anything. It's ridiculous but that's what they've got to do, even the governors agree it's ridiculous (Bob Ridge, senior signaller LUL, interview 1995).

Another signaller explained the way such targets were seen as an alien imposition on their duties:

They [management] don't care about shutting the job down. They will take the delay but they want to run up the mileage all the time (34). They think like it but we don't, 'cos we're still signallers. All you're thinking of is keeping the service running whereas they're thinking of it as a business, keeping the mileage up they are delaying trains which is detrimental to the passengers - or the 'customers' as they want to call them - which from a signaller's point of view he doesn't want to do, he doesn't want to delay trains, he wants to keep

trains running. It's very hard from our point of view of running it along the lines of a business 'cos when you're in a signal box signalling trains you're not thinking about mileage. This is what they are trying to push onto signalmen (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Other interviewees noted the way this system of targets had increased the pressure not only on themselves but on middle management as well:

They're scared, instead of coming in and understanding, they come in and all they are worried about is headways and trains in service. And as soon as they see something that doesn't fit in they start panicking because they end-up getting the bollocking from someone, especially the DOM [Duty Operations Manager]. If there's an interval in the service it's down to him why the interval was there. Not find out why it's happened, because a passenger left a bag on a train or a points failure it's straight down to the DOM, so they're more worried about it, they also get performance related pay (Fred Ross, senior signal operator, interview 1995).

This last example would seem to be an illustration of the concept of management by stress that many commentators on new forms of management have argued is at the heart of initiatives such as TQM, JIT, and HRM. The idea here is that by maximising outputs and restricting inputs the overall quality of the process and product will improve. This is achieved by the emphasis of the customer/supplier relationship both inside and outside the organisation, with each part of the production process being more demanding on its suppliers and more submissive to its customers in turn. Such an approach is designed to expose the weakest link in that chain, be it

management or worker (see Beale 1994, esp. ch. 2; Kirkpatrick and Martinez Lucio 1995; Stephenson 1996a; Tuckman 1994, 1995; Wilkinson and Willmott 1995).

Crucial to such developments would seem to be the extent to which the workforce can be 'immersed', in this kind of market logic (Willmott 1993). May (1994) similarly discusses the way workers and managers are 'enrolled' into managerial change by virtue of the fact that they are responsible for compiling statistics or working within budgets. Du Gay and Salaman (1992) argue that increasingly this metaphor of the market and the relations therein come to inform every aspect of life, not just the workplace. The market becomes *the* moral organisational and social form (see also du Gay 1994, 1996).

What I want to argue is that railway industry management, in both LUL and former BR organisations, are faced with a problem in that the imposition of such market mechanisms and associated targets are met with hostility and outright rejection by the staff. This in part precisely because they are not perceived to be legitimate parts of their labour process. Indeed the evidence examined here would suggest that the workforce views the imposition of such devices as irrational and bureaucratic. In the case of the Loadhaul drivers they saw what they perceived to be a petty tightening up on their duties and roles at the same time as millions of pounds were being squandered on successive corporate make-overs and in the quasi competition that had begun to emerge. They saw traffic being pushed off the railway because its collective cost base was increasing in the search for individual economic rationality. In other words, what was economically rational for one company made little sense at the level of the industry where co-operation had existed hitherto.

Interestingly on the Underground the imposition of market logic has been resisted because it is seen as an irrelevance to providing a public service after incidents occur (35).

### **Changing Corporate Identity**

As was seen in the previous chapter corporate identity has become an important site of manipulation. But how is this change received by the workers within the organisation? The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out during late 1994 and 1995 at which point the Railtrack had just been established as a separate company. In the case of Loadhaul the company launched its new image during the period of research. Previous to this incarnation Loadhaul had been Trainload Freight North East when it had been set up as part of the privatisation process (see chapter 5). At times, fieldwork had an unreal air about it with workers unsure which company they now worked for (36). One driver discussed the changes the organisation had been through:

It's a little bit different with privatisation. We're getting a little bit more of a sense of the industry and who we are working for. We've finally been brainwashed into realising we don't work for BR anymore. But we have changed our name twice since then. We were North East Freight Operating Co.. Then we went to Trainload Freight and now we've become Loadhaul. It's given someone a good job painting locos. We're all going to be seen as competing with each other (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994).

The same driver continued:

We're supposed to be in competition and we haven't even got a sense of identity ourselves. I mean the next thing they tell us is that we are Loadhaul, why I don't know, to reflect our image and what we do. But North East Freight would have done just as well. I will be worried if we change our name that often because companies that do that have usually gone bankrupt, adopt another name, and make a fresh start! (ibid.).

In the case of Railtrack the workers interviewed had had a little more time to adjust to their new identity, nonetheless the pace of change had been frenetic:

There's that many changes, like with the conditions of service and they're going to change the shift patterns. They've made too many changes in such a short space of time. They take a lot of getting used to (Sean Allen, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

Another signal worker commented on the change of image:

The only impact it's made was changing the name and a new uniform, 'nice' green with a logo on it (Larry Nobles, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995).

One older worker commented on the choice of name:

'Railtrack' what a load of rubbish. I don't know why they choose that because I've worked for the LNER, British Railways, British Rail, Railtrack just doesn't have the same ring (John Porter, signalman Railtrack, interview 1995)

(37).

In short the workers interviewed here did not express ownership in the 'new' organisations as was hoped by their managers (see ch. 5). Although change had been experienced in the past it was the speed with which it now occurred that disturbed

workers. Investment on the part of workers in corporate identity could in the past be seen as a gradual process that was part of socialisation. In the acceleration of turnover in corporate identity, organisations would seem to be in danger of losing worker identification with their company. Cynicism would appear to be an entirely understandable reaction to a 'new' image if the workers still remember the promises made at the last such 'launch'. Within the passenger sector it will be interesting to see how such identification is handled by the staff and management since individual franchises can last between five to fifteen years, seven being the usual length. There is therefore a 'sell-by' date for the new railway corporate identity, with a set period by which time a company must give up its franchise if it fails to renew its contract.

### **The 'Successful' Greening of a Brown Field Site?**

In this final section I want to pull together some of the themes discussed in this and previous chapters. The following will therefore consist of a review of how far the evidence presented here fits with or contradicts that found elsewhere in contemporary discussions of work. It will be argued that while culture change from the point of view of management may have been successful it has been done at potentially enormous cost in terms of workforce reproduction and commitment. Furthermore it is argued that the process of greening an established workforce cannot be permanently successful.

### **Continuity and change?**

How far then does the material presented here differ from previous studies into railway, and particularly footplate occupational identity? (see Groome 1986; Hollowell 1975; McKenna 1980; Salaman 1969, 1974; Wilson 1996). Rather

disturbingly there are very strong parallels with these studies in the self perceived decline in status on the part of the railway workers. Indeed some of the quotes here have an almost timeless quality about them. Take for example one from a driver based at Thornaby on Teesside:

‘We used to be the creme-de-la-creme now we’re the scum of the earth’ (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994). These words could have been attributed to workers interviewed in most if not all of the studies cited above. The difference is that this quote was from a driver in his early thirties and not at the end of his career.

The evidence presented here depicts a set of occupations and grades which have undergone substantial and continuous change over the last decade and a half. Again this echoes some of the experiences of workers cited in previous chapters. It could be argued that the process of change seen recently is simply the continuation of that experienced by other workers since 1923. And that further, the reaction on the part of the workers is in similar ways a nostalgic harking back to a golden age that never was.

Another similarity that we must be aware of is the undertaking of research precisely at a ‘crisis’ point for an occupation or grade. To some extent all of the studies alluded to above have been carried out in such circumstances. Those of Salaman (1969, 1974) and Hollowell (1975) were concerned with the decline in status attributed to the failure of railway industry wages to retain comparability with other workers, coupled with the associated erosion of craft identity attached to steam traction. This latter theme is also picked up in other studies, most forcibly in that of Groome (1986). In Groome’s account it is the retirement of the last of the steam

drivers that is seen to precipitate the 'crisis'. McKenna (1980) and Wilson (1996) see railway employment as at a turning point, again the timing of their publication is important, with the former the result of research carried out during the 1970s and the latter appearing in the midst of the process of privatisation.

Similarly this thesis has to be seen as a project embedded in its time. It too shares the weaknesses, and strengths, of the other studies in that it has used material from employees interviewed who were undergoing immense disruption to their working lives. But does this then mean that the kinds of changes described here are simply 'more of the same', that they mark a continuation in a downward trajectory of a particular occupational grouping? I argue that there are important differences both in the qualitative and quantitative experience of change on the part of the workforce.

The main difference, I believe, has been in the very conscious and deliberate targeting of the 'culture' of the workplace on the part of management over a sustained period. This has in part occurred because of the adoption of the assumptions made about organisational culture that have increasingly become part of the academic and managerial canon (See Peters and Waterman 1982; Peters and Austin 1986; Peters 1992, 1995; Deal and Kennedy 1988; Champy 1995 amongst others). The influence of this 'cultural turn' within British management circles can be seen in many of the critical contemporary accounts (see Beale 1994; du Gay and Salaman 1992; Guest 1992; Willmott 1993). The direct influence of such thinking about culture with regard to the railway industry is witnessed in those accounts by academics who were engaged by BR during the 1980s and 1990s as 'culture consultants' (see Bate 1990, 1995; Guest et al 1993). As we saw in the previous chapter the kinds of cultural



explanations offered by the so called gurus seem to explain the relative failure of metropolitan and particularly British capital. For the management of the nationalised industries such prescriptions were especially attractive because of the savings that could potentially flow from new forms of flexibility arising from 'cultural revolution'. In the case of the railway industry an axiomatic link has been forged between the structural problems that the industry faced and the culture of the workplace. Such an analysis has been successfully mobilised to justify and legitimate organisational change (Bate 1990, 1995, Gourvish 1990).

At the same time there has been a growing critique of some of the assumptions made about organisational culture in the guru literature by sociologists and anthropologists (see Lynn Meek 1988; Willmott 1993; Wright 1994). As argued above, they point to the misunderstanding and manipulation of social scientific ideas on culture in such works, and the assumption of not only unitarist conceptualisations of the workplace but also the view that managers can un-problematically devise, change or manipulate culture to their own requirements.

Bate (1995) in my view misreads such criticism. He sets up the somewhat polarised dualism between those less critical managerialists who present recipes for corporate culture change and social scientists whose understanding of the way cultures work lead them to argue that management can have no influence on them. Bate's position, somewhat predictable given his sideline in consultancy work as well as working in a business school, is to argue for the possibility, indeed desirability of 'positive' culture change within organisations. Where Bate misses the point is that the academic criticism of culture change programs is based on the assumption that

while it is possible for management to implement change they cannot script every interaction within the workplace. Indeed, they may well be doing actual damage to the existing culture.

In the case of the railway industry, management's ability to modify culture would seem to be 'successful' with a series of initiatives carried out a number of years. But this success has perhaps been in a negative rather than a positive sense. What seems to be occurring within the industry, both in the former parts of BR and in the LUL is the erosion of traditional identification with work. The account given by interviewees here is of a stripping out of older workers who represented a kind of moral opposition to management which in turn allowed younger workers the ability to draw on resources that sanction autonomous action. With the round of redundancies coupled with the effects of the 'demographic time bomb' in certain parts of the industry, the age balance within the workforce had been profoundly altered with a lowering in age of the collective worker.

The perception amongst the workers who remained was that management had sought to appropriate this vacated space by demanding greater levels of flexibility as well as being increasingly prepared to engage in confrontational or macho management. While many of the workers interviewed here considered themselves part of an older culture their position and their ability to resist such change were marginalised by a group of younger workers 'who don't know any different'. But importantly this pliability towards managerial demands seemed to be at the expense of a commitment to the work.

A driver in his early thirties who had been in the industry over fifteen years noted the difference in the younger workers:

I don't think they're keen now, not like we used to be, not like the old fellas. I was keen I don't think these ones are. I think their only subject of conversation is football not railways, anything but railways. It's only the odd one that's interested, so it's changed a lot for that. I mean you take Morris [one of the older drivers interviewed] he is still keen, a lot of the older fellas are still keen. It was a better job in their day, it must have been harder but I think there was more companionship, it was a better railway I suppose (David Baker, driver Loadhaul, interview 1995).

Another driver of roughly the same age noted this same lack of interest in the job and the implications it had for technical knowledge:

I think the route knowledge now is sadly lacking in the younger ones. For instance between Darlington and Ferryhill you're sat [on an engine] and you point and people just can't put names to places. To me I find it very useful in case you break down and you need to get to the nearest public telephone, where the nearest pub is, that sort of thing, somewhere you can summon help, they just haven't got that knowledge (Gary Hill, driver Loadhaul, interview 1994).

This was in vivid contrast to his own socialisation:

By being with older drivers they kept telling you 'Ee when I were a lad there used to be a siding here and a signal box there' and they used to tell you the place names (ibid.).

In the case of Railtrack several older signal workers expressed the view that some of the younger workers were not as committed to the job as they had been. A couple of workers spoke of having to help younger signalmen out because they didn't fully understand the implications of some of the moves they were making. Perhaps a more symbolic sign of decline was the perception that younger workers failed to take a pride in their place of work. A signalsman in his sixties discussed the point:

A lot of the younger ones don't bother. It's nearly always the older blokes that keep it clean. If I am in a place I like to keep it clean. We were taught as a book lad to keep the cabin clean and that's it, it stuck (John Porter, signalsman Railtrack, interview 1995) (38).

This sense that new and younger workers were less committed to the job is perhaps even more pronounced in the case of LUL since the Company Plan. One signal worker in his forties compared younger workers with his own experience:

I was proud of being a signalsman, of my job, of being a Met man. I joined the railways because I was interested in railways, now people join the job because it's a job and it's quite well paid compared to outside industry. I talked to one young bloke and he said 'oh I just push the buttons and pull the leavers' (Huw Evans, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

Another who had joined in the 1960s reflected on the same experience of younger workers:

It wasn't *just* a job to me, now it's *just a job*. Now people are just looking for a job and they'll do anything because there's just not enough jobs outside (Fred Ross, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

A worker in the same room pointed out his fears:

Seniority doesn't count for a lot, I think someone who has stayed on the job with twenty to thirty years in, they've sort of been loyal to the job. And they know their job well and they know what they're talking about. That doesn't seem to count anymore. They're not worried. I think it's dangerous, that's what we all think. The job isn't as safe as it used to be 'cos you haven't got the people with the knowledge who know about it (Bob Ridge, senior signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

These accounts of a generational difference are supported by a signaller in his mid-twenties who had started his career pre Company Plan:

It's getting worse, the main reason is there's a bunch of kids in the grade because of the mass exodus of the older geezers during the voluntary severance. A lot of people now have a very laid back sort of attitude to the job, if it screws up they couldn't care less. It's difficult to know how you can be proud considering the way it's going, years ago you would come in and look forward to doing the job. Now you look at your watch and want to go, especially now with the people you've got in the grade who don't give a toss about their grade and don't take any pride in it (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995) (39).

Thus it seems that management, in BR and the successor companies as well as LUL, have been successful in the 'greening' process. The workforce, particularly that part of it that joined after the 'culture change' initiative was enacted, appear to be increasingly pliant in the face of management demand, more willing to accept

uncritically what is asked of them. For this part of the workforce the social structures that sanctioned greater levels of plurality at the point of production are absent or greatly eroded. Similarly for older workers, and by older I mean those socialised into the traditional culture, their ability to access such resources is restricted. There is no longer the kind of moral density existent in the collective worker that previous cultural forms were etched onto, and beneath them they have a set of workers whose expectations of the workplace may be radically different from their own.

However, if we place this situation within the framework developed by Mead (1978) we can perhaps see a series of contradictions for management. In the process of 'greening', management could be understood to be attempting to create a cofigurative culture wherein the young become the role model for the younger. This is in contrast to traditional societies where the older generation provides such a model. As we saw in the previous chapter in such circumstance: 'The past, once represented by living people, becomes shadowy, easier to abandon and to falsify in retrospect' (Mead 1978, 49). Mead views such cofiguration as a feature of those societies that have undergone shock, or have been up-rooted, where the knowledge of the elders is of little or no relevance to the younger generation or may simply be entirely absent. Importantly for this work Mead goes on to suggest that cofiguration will normally last but one generation, as cultures revert back to postfigurative form after the singular circumstances that created change have passed or become normalised.

Thus postfigurative cultures must be seen as re-emergent processes. The one off gains that can be made by management as part of a culture change programme are

fragile in the face of changing market situations within a dynamic capitalist economy. Put simply the claims made by management in enacting change in the workplace are vulnerable over the medium and long term to the effects of greater competition. Thus the 'one off' change that solves all the organisation's problems is probably but one in a series (see Ramsay 1995; Strangleman and Roberts 1996b) (40). The reaction of the workforce to the failure of the first program may make the corporation vulnerable to a reversal of the 'greening' process, a browning of a greenfield site.

The potential re-emergence of opposition and resistance within a workplace is an issue that managements are obviously aware of, and one option seems to be the celebration of permanent frenetic change, conveniently matching the corporate form to that of its markets in the 'nanosecond nineties' (Peters 1992) or 'the rough weather we're sailing in today' (Champy 1995, 76). The utility of such permanent revolution has filtered down to the level of management. O'Connell Davidson quotes a manager from the water industry extolling the virtues of mixing the company's supply of labour by using in-house staff and external contractors:

I don't think to a limited degree a bit of uncertainty is a bad thing, that they're not entirely sure that they are secure, so that they work harder to make sure the company goes (O'Connell Davidson 1993, 155).

And a similar sentiment is quoted by Storey reporting a conversation with Geoff Armstrong, Research Director of Metal Box and Chair of the CBI Employment Committee:

He propounded the view that because of the tendency for old habits to re-establish themselves and for complacency to creep back in rather rapidly, there

was merit in engendering an almost permanent sense of crisis. This could be engineered through the timely release of information, through periodic reorganization and through a constant flow of initiatives (Storey 1992, 151).

Once again such moves are not without contradictions. While the ability to set out of kilter a workplace culture could be beneficial for management, it also has profound disadvantages, both for the employees and the organisation. Firstly, one could point to the problems this sort of constant flux creates in terms of the simple reproduction of the workforce. It could be argued that some of the problems that the railway industry is now facing are caused by the decline in the kinds of experience of socialisation that have until very recently been a feature of railway work (see chapters two and four). The constant change has had a profound effect on the transmission of norms and expectations to new employees within what remains a working class occupation. Perhaps this is one explanation of the trend towards more formal methods of training and supervision (41). These developments parallel the 'crisis' in training currently being experienced in the construction and engineering industries. Like the railway industry, training there is increasingly becoming formalised and based on the attainment of discrete competencies rather than being historically part of a more rounded social experience (see Penn 1986; Roberts 1997; Strangleman and Roberts 1996a, 1996b).

Secondly, the removal of familiar structures within the workplace may make more likely the creation of an anomic workforce. The evidence presented within this chapter would seem to suggest that the railway industry in parts has and is suffering from such an absence of social stability. Interestingly there are important parallels



with the accounts in some railway worker's autobiographies, where they describe their experience of the 1960s. Several note the way other workers, or indeed themselves, leave the industry altogether for the stability of the factory or alternative forms of employment (see Bradshaw 1993; Gasson 1981; Newbould 1985; Stewart 1982; Wilson 1996, esp. ch. 2). In the contemporary industry this sense of anomie seems to be a product of various factors, such as constant organisational change, rapid turnover in staff, greater managerial interference on a day-to-day level coupled with a greater sense of job insecurity (42). The result for more established members of the workforce is a situation where they are critical of a lack of commitment to the job on the part of newer or younger workers, while they themselves recognise that such workers should not really display such loyalty (43). The result in terms of the established workforce was a desire on the part of many interviewees to leave railway service altogether despite a very real interest and commitment to the industry (44).

There is evidence that management senses this danger and attempts to fill this cultural vacuum. Casey talks about how the company she studied attempted to fill this gap left by the absence of previous 'naturally' occurring social relationships, coupled with the instability of the workplace. She argues that the company created a designer culture which attempted to script the relationships and create team spirit:

The new designer culture of Hephaestus Corporation furbished with the sentiments of team and family, and diligent and dedicated employees is not primarily created by its participants. But, none the less, their engagement with it produces the everyday form of workplace culture. The designer culture is a simulated culture (Casey 1995, 135).

To an extent, this attempt has been seen in the case of LUL with their adoption of a highly developed HRM strategy with a regular round of personal development interviews and team building exercises. But, as Casey herself recognises, these managerially inspired designer cultures are always impoverished versions of autonomous culture. These artificial impositions cannot hope to mimic the flexibility within 'the real thing'. Sosteric (1996) in his study of a Canadian restaurant-bar notes the way management made changes to a previously highly successful and popular establishment by attempting to transform the existing culture of the staff. This involved the ruling out of the previous spontaneity and variety of possible interactions between the staff and their customers. The result was that the bar suffered from a considerable downturn in trade precisely because of the new, changed and false atmosphere (45).

Such observations bring us back to the work of Durkheim on the division of labour and occupational or professional groups (1964; 1992). As was seen in previous chapters Durkheim envisaged a new role for professional and occupational groups within modern organic societies. Their role was to fill the gulf between the individual and the state by developing sets of ethics according to which distinct occupational groups could function. Durkheim emphasised the difference between the aims of such groups and the former guilds which he believed had become discredited by their over emphasis on the economic role. The essential point that Durkheim argued in relationship to such groups, and the moral code they lived by, was that their ethics had to be the autonomous creation of the group itself and that, if

it were to be successful, it could not be perceived as an externally imposed set of values.

While Durkheim's vision of such groups may have been ideal typical, rather than a description of actually existing social forms, it does offer a potentially fruitful critique of contemporary culture change initiatives with the tendency of such programmes, indeed their explicit aim, to destabilise existing patterns of social solidarity. From the evidence presented here and in previous chapters it would seem that in attempting to introduce 'culture change' programs management's prescriptions may be, to paraphrase Guest (1992), 'right enough to be dangerously wrong'. By this I take him to mean that such programs can and do have a profound effect on the workforce and the social relationship at the workplace. But, in making such change, management actively destroys, or at least does damage to, the autonomous and creative quality within the workforce which they are keen to exploit. This point echoes that of Willmott (1993) and is also latent in Casey (1995) and du Gay (1996). Furthermore management dissolves the emotional links between organisations and their staff, and with them the organisational 'glue' that Fineman (1993) believes such feelings represent.

In contrast to accounts such as Casey and du Gay's I would argue that there is some room for optimism within what must be accepted is a fairly bleak world of work. This optimism can be found if we understand workplace culture and occupational identity as a fundamentally social process rather than, as in many accounts of the contemporary workplace, an area where workers become individualised subjects who are the passive victims of successive waves of managerial

control strategies. Although such schemes can do great harm to collective experiences of employment the workplace remains a distinctive and important, though not exclusive, source for identity and meaning.

The evidence from the railway industry would suggest that identification with work and specific grades remains strong for an important section of the workforce. The greening process can never be complete because of the enormous and continual cost such a policy would involve. Furthermore there is little evidence to suggest that the immersion of the workforce in the logic of the market has rendered the kinds of changes that some commentators have claimed (Casey 1995; du Gay 1996), but rather, to quote Pollitt's observation:

There is some evidence to indicate that the thrusting talk of decentralized management and of getting closer to the consumer has not penetrated very far down the hierarchies of our government departments and public services. In our study of the NHS we found such sentiments far more often on the lips of senior managers than ward sisters or rank-and-file consultants (Pollitt 1993, 85).

Indeed the imposition of the measures of such a system may even have strengthened an oppositional culture towards contemporary management. The idea that workers have become greatly individualised, becoming self monitoring subjects should be countered. In spite of the rise in the level of the technologies of surveillance workers are aware of their power within the labour process and the potential for disruption if autonomy were too greatly restricted. Indeed, it is the historic and continuing intractability of the employment relationship within a dynamic economy (Brown

1988) that both restricts and creates new possibilities for autonomy and resistance (see also Hyman 1987).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has studied the impact of corporate change on an established workforce. It has sought to frame these developments within the sociological literature which deals with contemporary orientations to, and identifications with, work. As part of this the idea that there is little or no resistance to managerial initiatives has been disputed. It was argued however that 'culture change' programmes which have increasingly become a feature of managerial and 'guru' prescriptions have been adopted by organisations as an attractive 'solution' to their perceived problems.

Such programmes have been eagerly embraced in the railway industry since the early 1980s. Their attraction was seen to lie in the way they sanctioned change in the very architecture of the employment relationship, specifically the ability to distance the organisation from previous structural contingency with regard to the existing workforce and the conditions of service that they enjoy. It was argued that potential opposition to these kinds of moves is marginalised by the active manipulation of difference within the workforce, which in the case of the railways was generational. A critical mass of the workers were given the chance to leave the organisation with generous redundancy packages, younger employees were attracted by the new meritocratic structure where promotion opportunities in the short term may be enhanced. The process is portrayed as essentially benign with the appeal to notions of individual choice, to leave or stay. In the wake of such schemes, or at

times coterminous with them, has been the move to a sharper form of management control within the 'new workplace'. The railway industry has seen a greater emphasis on managerial control, in both hard and soft senses, through both direct supervision allied to a battery of targets, internal markets and budget centres.

The central question posed by this chapter has been the extent to which these changes have affected the autonomous culture within an established workforce. To what extent has there been a 'greening'? The removal of older workers had a profound effect on workplace culture but, as was seen earlier, such a move still leaves intact a significant number of workers who were socialised into older cultural forms. Although this group's ability to draw on the resources that older social structures represented has been weakened it has not entirely vanished. As such this group remains a powerful check on managerial ability to impose an entirely new culture.

In part it has been suggested that the opposition to the new culture imposed on the established workforce is derived from the perception of its quality when compared with the past. While it is recognised that previous work cultures may have been exclusionary and subject to unequal power relations there was at least a sense in which there was a pluralism inherent in them. Thus management's ability to manage was restricted by a workplace moral order that acted as a resource with which the employees could resist arbitrary and capricious decisions and actions, and in turn use as a basis for action. The new culture that is being offered is fundamentally a unitarist one where workers are made subject to corporate whim, at the same time as organisations make statements about empowerment.

But there would seem to be serious contradictions for management here. In targeting and actively damaging the old culture it runs the risk of jeopardising an effective reproduction of its workforce in the future. It has been argued that stability within the workforce is necessary not only for the transmission of technical competency but also a range of tacit skill and knowledge. The result can be understood as a kind of corporate memory loss within the workforce. There is also a related danger of a loss of moral order in the workplace which is predicated on some level of stability. This has not only been of use to the workers but has been historically functional for management. The central problematic for management would seem to be that while autonomy within any workplace, but especially the railways, is essential, management desire to control this autonomy. Thus they end up restricting the very thing of value. The final contradiction within this debate must be the way in which the one-off culture change program can never be entirely successful over the medium and longer term. Even if all the established workers were made redundant the essentially autonomous nature of workplace culture would ensure that resistance and desubordination at the point of production would re-emerge.

## Notes to Chapter 6

1. Some of the younger workers interviewed for this study were contacted through the retired workers who had trained them. The ability to name older workers acted as an important source of reassurance to some current employees who were understandably nervous about speaking to me as it was in strict contradiction of their contracts.

2. 'A few rough moves with the regulator' refers to the practice of opening up the regulator - the accelerator on a diesel locomotive. On a long train this would have the effect of snatching the coupling throughout the train. On a loose coupled train with a guard's van at the end the full impact would be felt. Thus by the time the van started to move the locomotive could be doing a considerable speed. Guards quickly learnt to brace themselves in the van. At least two of those interviewed who had been guards reported breaking bones because of such a practice.

3. The phrase 'accommodated men' is a reference to those workers who were no longer fit to drive on the main line. Thus they were 'accommodated' within the rosters, usually shunting within the confines of a yard. Such a practice seems to date back to the Nineteenth Century, being an aspect of paternalism within the industry. See chapter two also McKenna, F. (1976) 'Victorian Railway Workers', *History Workshop Journal*, 1, Spring.

4. It should be stressed that this particular interviewee had taken about eight or nine years to become a driver but would have worked with others who had taken perhaps thirty years to achieve the same status.



5. 'The Met' is a reference to the Underground's Metropolitan Line, until 1933 the Metropolitan Railway. This line has always been one of the most popular ones to work on for a variety of reasons. For drivers, even now, it is attractive because it has three main branches and therefore the content of their work is more varied. Added to this, the great majority of the route mileage is over ground and not monotonous 'tunnel work'.

6. The idea of 'family' in terms of London Transport has a multiple possible interpretations. The sense in which it was used by the interviewees was to express how LT used to include bus as well as Underground workers. In addition there was a vast array of subsidiary work which was until recently carried out in-house. On my first day on the Underground I and about forty other recruits were given a pep talk by the then operations director of the railway Charles Cope. He asked who in the room had a family member already on the job and I seem to remember I was one of the few who didn't raise a hand, although I did have a cousin 'on the buses'. The Cope's were an Underground family themselves with Charles being succeeded in the mid 1980s by his brother John.

7. Interestingly this driver said that such older drivers had been more willing to accept her than younger ones because they had remembered working with women during the war in a variety of roles including in the grade of guard.

8. For an account of the way such socialisation is breaking down in the contemporary construction and engineering industries see Roberts, I. P. (1997) 'The Culture of Ownership and the Ownership of Culture' in Brown, R. K. (ed.) *The Changing Shape of Work*, London, Macmillan.

9. The 'book' in this context is a railway term for the train register which records each train passing a particular point. Those of BR/Railtrack in Block worked areas are more complex as there can be up to six entries per train. In computer controlled areas the booking of trains is done automatically. A 'Form One' is a reference to the initial stage of the BR disciplinary machinery.

10. The phrase 'run round' refers to the uncoupling of a locomotive from one end of a train and attaching it at the other, a move carried out after arrival at a terminal station or shunting manoeuvre. The point about doing the allotted duty in eight hours is that if it was likely that the work would take longer than this the driver could refuse to do the job. The respect that supervisors showed to older workers can be seen in the following quote from a Loadhaul instructor: 'The one thing I was told when I first came to the inspectorate side was one of the old boys who's just finished "The best way for you to get on at the moment is to *ask* the old hands, *tell* the young hands". I adopted that policy, it's amazing how once you start demanding they dig their heels in the job stops' (Instructor Loadhaul, interviewed 1995)

11. During fieldwork I shadowed a Train Crew Leader (TCL) for the day and while waiting for him in a corridor at a train crew depot I saw an argument between a driver in his late forties or early fifties and a young Train Crew Supervisor (TCS). The TCS had allocated a job to a junior man that by the local agreements should have been this particular driver's. It was clear from the interaction that the supervisor was scared of the driver as he knew he was in the wrong.

12. Denis Tunnicliffe is the Managing Director of LUL.

13. In another piece of research carried out in the engineering industry a Team Leader in a factory referred to workers who would not accept the changes enacted by the firm as the 'jurrasics' see Strangleman, T. and Roberts, I. P. (1996a) 'Deconstructing the Autonomous: The Cultural Cleansing of Workplace Identity', unpublished paper to ISA Conference, Occupations and Professions: Changing Patterns, Definitions and Classifications, University of Nottingham 11th -13th September. In a conversation with a friend who I had worked with on LUL I was informed that had I stayed on the job I would have been considered a 'dinosaur', I was at this time twenty-five.

14. In the case of LUL before the Company Plan, each worker in a particular grade would nominate their preferred set of jobs. If a vacancy occurred and they were the senior applicant they would get the post subject to qualification. A death in the signalling grade on LUL could be the occasion for some rather black humour as the seniority list would be pulled from the locker and moves that this death 'allowed' would be worked out. The autonomy for workers that seniority as a system allowed is seen in a story that was told to me when I worked for LUL about a conversation between two signalmen whom I had known. An Area Manager had entered the box and was known to be rude and officious. Ignoring the latter's presence one of the signalmen started a rhetorical conversation with the other. 'Here it's bad about all this flexibility they're bringing in now in the management grades isn't it. They say they'll have to cover any grade, even shit house attendants. I expect Area Managers will want high grade working for that!' At which stage the Area Manager turned and

left the cabin. The point is that there was nothing that he could do to the workers since they were carrying-out their duties correctly.

15. 'Passing the Block' refers to the theoretical examination BR/Railtrack signal workers undertake. All signalling positions in the railway industry have always been subject not only to qualification but suitability.

16. Double and treble shifts refers to the working of normal shifts end on end. Thus a 'double' would be sixteen hours or more, and a 'treble' would be twenty-four hours. Such shifts were always voluntary but to not undertake one in the context of a personalised promotion system the worker would be running the risk of appearing 'inflexible'. If a signal worker was not relieved after a reasonable period they would be fully entitled to close their box, providing that there are no trains left in the section they control. The pressure for jobs in newly established control rooms is intensified by the practice of opening up applications to workers outside the grade. This is a cause of much resentment within the grades and is seen as a disciplining tactic in itself.

17. Gratton here discusses the situation in the North American system: 'A more coherent rationale for the Pennsylvania's labor policies lies in a deeply embedded system of compensation by seniority. Unlike distant pensions, rewards for tenure offered tangible lures to workers of every age; they encouraged career-minded applicants to seek railroad work and discouraged turnover among current employees. As "standard corporate policy" on major railroads by late nineteenth century, seniority-based compensation was not an imposition of unions, but a management tool for securing a stable and experienced labor force...The recourse to seniority rights

revealed central management's desire to decrease turnover, to cultivate an expectation of fair treatment from loyal workers, and to restrain the "arbitrary power" of local officers' Gratton, B. (1990) "'A Triumph in Modern Philanthropy": Age Criteria in Labor Management at the Pennsylvania Railroad, 1875-1930', *Business History Review*, 64, Winter, 630-656, 634. For discussions of seniority within a British context see Kingsford, P. W. (1970) *Victorian Railwaymen: the Emergence and Growth of Railway Labour 1830-1870*, London, Frank Cass and Co; McKenna (1976) op. cit.; McKenna, F. (1980) *The Railway Workers 1840-1970*, London, Faber and Faber.

18. Pendleton labels BR's personnel policy during the late 1980s as being 'Hard HRM', Pendleton, A. (1993) Rail, in Pendleton, A. and Winterton, J. (eds.) *Public Enterprise in Transition: Industrial Relations in State and Privatized Corporations*, London, Routledge.

19. Tyne Yard is a freight depot in Gateshead, south of Newcastle. It opened in the early 1960s and was part of the Modernisation Plan's attempt to centralise freight marshalling and distribution. Most of the retired drivers I interviewed had moved here after their sheds had been made surplus to requirement. One of the regular duties of a TCL is to attempt to trap 'speeding' drivers with hand-held radar guns similar those used by the police.

20. The same worker gave me an illustration of the way knowledge can be lost. A steam engine, Blue Peter, had called at Durham station on an enthusiast's special during 1994. On leaving the station the engine's wheels went into a high speed spin because of a lack of traction. This signaller had years before worked at the same

station and told a manager after the accident that such large trains had always had the assistance of a banking engine in the past. The manager kept denying this because if this fact emerged Railtrack may well have been liable.

21. During the process of research I heard numerous accounts of the way the business aspect of management was privileged above that of the operating side. One senior signal woman in a letter told me of an incident at Hammersmith station where a points failure had resulted in the need to secure the road. This involves placing a scotch block (piece of wood) in the open end of the points and placing a clamp underneath the closed end. When she phoned to ask the station manager to do this he asked what a set of points was !

22. Class differences between some managers and their staff is quite apparent in the autobiographies of railway managers, this often emerges in a paternalistic sense. See Bonavia, M. R. (1981) *British Rail: The First 25 Years*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles; Fiennes, G. F. (1973) *I Tried to Run a Railway*, London, Ian Allan; Hardy, R. H. N. (1989) *Beeching: Champion of the Railway?*, Shepperton, Ian Allan.

23. London Transport was effectively re-nationalised in 1984 when responsibility for it was removed from the Greater London Council (GLC). See Glaister, S. and Travers, T. (1995) *Liberate the Tube!: Radical proposals to revitalise the London Underground*, London, Centre for Policy Studies, 11-13.

24. In 1988 LUL had devolved budgets down to line level. Previously, each line had been grouped with another into a division which had shared cost with regard to management and secretarial support. Such a move witnessed a loss of many economies of scale. Perhaps the worst example of which was the case of the East

London Line, the shortest in London with only eight stations on it, two of which were owned by BR, and a further one that was only open in the peak hours. The maximum number of trains that could run on the line was just five, four in the off peak period. As part of these changes the line gained five managers and secretarial support staff. Previously it had had no permanent managers, these visiting the line only rarely. The joke among the staff was that there was a manager for every train!

25. The room described in the passage is Coberg Street Control room, near Euston in central London. It was built during the 1960s to operate the Victoria and Northern Lines. Illuminated diagrams of the two lines hang from the walls and the signalling is monitored by the senior signal operators. The signalling is controlled by punch card program machines, a full timetabled service contained on one roll. Each signal operator will control a particular part of the track from their desk. At most there would be five operators to control the Northern line and two for the simpler Victoria Line. At the back of the signal operators' desks are those of the line controllers and it is here that management congregate. At times there can be a great deal of verbal banter between workers at managers' expense. Direct control and supervision is more easily undertaken in these centralised establishments. There remain a number of smaller boxes on the underground where the staff would not see a supervisor during their whole shift under normal circumstances

26. The 'Driver at Risk' classification relates to a series of points which are allocated for various misdemeanours or problems. The TCL shades in the number of points for an individual driver after a particular transgression. This system is highly

formalised when compared to the accounts of traction inspectors in the past who were allowed far more discretion when dealing with drivers. See appendix three.

27. The same interviewee gave an account of another worker who was undergoing assessment for performance related pay. This was in part based on the carrying out of a management inspired project. This particular worker had not completed it but managed to convince his supervisor that to not give him the points necessary for the rise would place in jeopardy his own rise.

28. Historically railway workers have been willing to move around for promotion within their grade or to supervisory positions. Privatisation has had the effect of tying workers to particular companies at particular locations. There has also been an effective narrowing of opportunities within the individual companies with the amount of delayering that has occurred in recent years. In the case of the Underground, workers can apply for other jobs but if they fail to qualify their former job is no longer held open for them. Thus by trying to go for promotion a worker could inadvertently make themselves redundant.

29. The ability to accurately allocate costs within the industry has been the railway equivalent of the Holy Grail as so many of the costs of services are shared. See Joy, S. (1973) *The Train That Ran Away: A Business History of British Railways 1948-1968*, London, Ian Allan.

30. An illustration of the amount of paperwork is shown in a quote from Ivor Warburton, director of the then Intercity West Coast TOU, in an interview with the BBC's Panorama (12/12/94): 'I have 4,500 staff as my main asset, desks, computers and other office equipment and a 22 foot high pile of paper that's growing daily as we



move towards completing the 840 contracts that complete the train company of today'. In the same program Chris Green, the then director of Scot Rail, noted his 360 contracts, with each station having their own separate one, 100 pages in length. Bagwell estimate that the combined cost of legal, financial and public relations fees as part of the process of privatisation has been £48 million, Bagwell, P. S. (1996) *The Transport Crisis in Britain*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 148.

31. Transrail was one of the two other freight companies competing with Loadhaul, the other being Mainline. All three were sold to the same consortium and now operate under the EWS banner in co-operation. During research I was given many illustrations by drivers of the waste of the 'economically rational' system that had been set up as part of the privatisation process. One driver spoke of having to take a taxi from a yard near Edinburgh back to Newcastle because there wasn't a return load for him to drive. Similarly another told me of a railway van having to follow by road his train in order to pick up a driver from Carlisle.

32. This illustrates the ideological pressure that the Conservative Government exerted over corporations in the public sector. This is perhaps an explanation of the market system developed for the train load freight companies explored in this and previous chapters.

33. Mileage as a target is measured by the actual mileage operated as a percentage of the timetabled amount. Thus if a train was cancelled its mileage would be subtracted from the amount operated. Headways measure the time interval between trains. The aim is to operate a service with even headways to avoid overcrowding on trains or station platforms. If there is a long gap between trains the next service

through the road will be delayed because of heavy traffic. The skill for the signal operator is to recognise when gaps may occur and hold trains at particular points - this process is known as regulating.

34. 'Shut down' refers to the way a location can come to a halt because of trains being blocked by other trains or signal failures. 'Taking a delay' refers to the system of allocation of blame for a delay.

35. Several workers gave examples of how they deliberately sought to miss targets primarily to get back at particular managers as they knew that their PRP would suffer as a result. Such tactics ranged from the delaying of trains to taking days off sick. Such action would seem to be an example of de-subordination as described as Miliband, R. (1978) 'A State of Desubordination', *British Journal of Sociology*, 29, 4, 399-409.

36. This amnesia over identity occurred more than once in interviews carried out but the best example was at a company safety brief day when a driver turned to a colleague and asked 'who the bloody hell do we work for now?'. The rapid turnover in image was brought home to me on another visit to the Doncaster HQ of Loadhaul. I had to go into a TCL's room which was full of now-redundant literature with previous corporate identities stamped on them. This is in contrast to older forms and documents produced by earlier railway companies that were in many cases over-stamped as required.

37. An interesting twist in railway companies playing with image surfaced in an interview with a buffet steward who worked for Intercity East Coast. He told me that during the 1980s the company had attempted to attract 'young glamorous women' to

work in on board catering in a conscious attempt to promote an airline image to the public. See for example Vincent, M. and Green. C. (eds.) (1994) *The Intercity Story*, Sparkford, Oxford Publishing Co. The same worker claimed that many of those workers had left the industry because it had failed to live-up to this image. GNER have attempted to draw parallels with airline operations in more than one sense, the most interesting one is Christopher Garnett's statement reported in the railway press about the cost of railway staff compared to that of their competitors: 'He added that railway on-board rates of pay are already much higher than those of domestic airlines... "14 months into the franchise I'm pleased with the way things are going: culture change is coming, but it is slow."' *Modern Railways*, August 1997.

38. Pride in the appearance of a signal box is often noted in railway worker autobiographies, both by signal and footplate grades - the latter when they had to visit the boxes as part of their duties. As a signaller in my first box in the mid-1980s I polished the brass fittings everyday. Perhaps one of the poignant accounts of the grade taking a pride in the appearance of the box is given by Adrian Vaughan, a signaller on BR Western Region, who gives an account of returning to a station and a box that had just closed: 'The great goods shed - Brunel's good shed - was being demolished by a gang of contractor's men wielding sledgehammers and to my admittedly unhappy gaze they had the appearance of particularly loutish pirates. One of them called to me: "Hey! If you're looking round - go up into the signal box - the whole place is polished up as if it would never close - they were some daft beggars those signallers."' Vaughan, A. (1984) *Signaller's Morning/ Signaller's Twilight*, London, Pan, 354.

39. In a more recent conversation with the same worker he told me that things had deteriorated still further with some of the newer workers holding personal conversations on mobile phones rather than resolving signalling problems in their area or leaving boxes unattended to go to local shops. Interestingly he said that older workers were nominating for boxes and rooms where there was a 'traditional atmosphere', rather than put up with the behaviour of some of their newer colleagues.

40. LUL continues to face a squeeze on its budget and so have been forced to introduce more redundancies in the wake of the Company Plan. One worker commented: 'Since the Company Plan, there's been the Company Plan mark two. All introduced bit by bit. At the time they said "That will be all we need to get us fit for the future". There was 5000 staff, a quarter of the Underground went through the Company Plan. We knew straight from the beginning that wasn't the end of the Company Plan, we knew there would be more to come' (Simon Gilbert, signal operator LUL, interview 1995).

41. The training school at Loadhaul had achieved BS 5750/ISO 9000. Staff in the school admitted that they nearly drowned in the paper work. The best illustration of the formalisation of procedure can with the example of the Trainmans Annual Practical Assessment. This had grown from a three page document in 1994 to one containing no fewer than thirty-nine pages a year later. The TCL were expected to fill in each of the pages fully. Again the discretion that had been a large part of the traction inspector's job had been lost. One TCL told me informally that 'It's almost as if senior management don't trust us'. See appendix two.

42. During the interviews carried out with BR staff, workers and managers would often wish that they were already in the private sector so that at least the chronic insecurity would be over. Indeed one trade union activist positively wished for privatisation so that the management team in charge of his TOC would lose their jobs.

43. Use of temporary and part time forms of labour is now far more common in the 'core' railway labour force. LUL has for some time been employing signal workers and guards on one-year contracts, and recently employed many new drivers on the Piccadilly Line straight from the street. Traditionally these have come from the guard's grade but the near total spread of driver only operation rules out this tactic. The speed with which these latter workers were recruited, trained and qualified led them to be labelled by existing staff as 'boil in the bag drivers'. Great Eastern TOC has recently announced it wishes to recruit 'commuter guards' for some of its services between London and Essex. These workers would act as the guard on the train then do a full day's work in the city and return home again acting as a guard, see 'Great Eastern "commuter guards" scheme meets storm of protest' *Rail* 311, 13th-26 August 1997, 12.

44. Discontented workers may also be a factor in the problems faced due to higher than expected staff turnover in other parts of the rail industry. Regional Railways North East TOC has run into problems over its need to cancel services because of lack of drivers, 'Rail firm is fined for axing trains', *Guardian*, 30/7/97.

45. There would seem to be similarities here with Hochschild's work on emotional labour, in particular the way airline stewardesses and stewards have to learn to smile 'properly'. Airlines are forced into stressing in publicity that their

smiles are genuine to an ever greater extent, as passengers are increasingly aware of the way such emotions are being manipulated, Hochschild, A. R. (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, ch. 1.

## Conclusion

The railway worker has long exercised a particular interest in popular imagination. From the start of the industry in the 1820s this group have been present in public consciousness. When Charles Dickens (1967) wrote his popular short story *The Signalman* he was tapping into an already well established image. Here was a responsible, self improving, conscientious - if ultimately doomed - example of Victorian respectability. It was this same respectability that Michael Bass the Liberal MP for Derby drew on when he publicly chastised the Midland Railway for its treatment of its workers. The same company's intransigence led to the founding of the ASRS in the early 1870s, with much help from Bass and other middle class philanthropists (see Bagwell 1963, ch. 2; Gupta 1960, 1966; Revill 1989). Public opinion was also stirred by the damning criticism in the pages of *Punch Magazine* offered by the cartoonist Tenniel. Again the railway workers are seen as blameless respectable actors, while the directors are guilty of pig headed intransigence (see Simmons 1994, ch. 10).

The railway companies themselves have always had an interest in not only their corporate identity but also in that of their staff. The Victorian railway company wished to employ the cream of the contemporary labour market. It needed responsible and trustworthy servants whose work involved a great deal of autonomy (Joby 1984, ch. 1; Kingsford 1970). McKenna (1976, 1980) has likened the bargain struck between capital and labour in the railway industry to Hobbes' Leviathan. With workers surrendering their rights for the protection of the state, in this case the railway company. But these same companies were also concerned to promote

positive images of themselves. Thus the Victorian railway was at once modern and progressive, while being solid and dependable. It was both at the forefront of contemporary design and yet borrowed heraldic devices from the middle ages, and built railway stations in Gothic and Classical styles.

In the first half of the Twentieth Century these twin concerns with identity and image were built on. In the inter-war era the LMS and LNER companies strove vigorously to be the fastest between London and Scotland. In these 'Races to the North' (themselves a revival of similar competition in the 1890s) the footplate crews were lionised by their respective companies and became household names. And railway managers were keen to appear in publicity photographs with their still be-sooted drivers and firemen (see Harris 1987; Walley 1994). This notion of the heroic worker perhaps reached its zenith in WW II when the 'Home Front' received more active attention than it had during the Great War (Clowes 1997; Crump 1947).

Again this period is marked by the Janus faced use of image. There was a greater stress on modernity, as serious competition from other forms of transport began to bite. This modernising impulse is especially marked in London Transport and the Southern Railway's respective electrification programmes and the paralleled use of contemporary architectural idioms. At the same moment all the Grouping companies drew on the past, both their own corporate past and national history (Haresnape 1979, chs. 1 and 2; Wilson 1987).

Nationalisation saw no great change in the symbolic portrayal of the present and past. A post-war version of the heroic worker theme was popularised through a series of posters commissioned by the BRB by the artist Terence Cuneo. These



portrayed various grades at their work including a signaller in 'On Early Shift' of 1948, and footplate workers in 'Clear Road Ahead' of 1949 vintage (See Harris 1997). These images themselves reflected an earlier iconography produced for the Grouping companies and their antecedents. Latterly, however, BR was inclined to present itself in a more modernist register. From the 1955 Modernisation Plan onwards there were a series of image launches which attempted to rescue the railway from its own nostalgia. To this end no effort was spared in the demolition of the organisation's association with the steam age. The identity promoted was a push button world of clean diesel and electric trains gliding effortlessly between newly constructed modernist stations built from concrete and glass. From the late 1960s much was made of the new generation of trains - developed with the aid of aero-engineers - such as the Advanced Passenger Train (APT) and the High Speed Train (HST).

Throughout this period there has also been another conceptualisation of the workers in the industry by both managers and politicians. This was the periodic hankering for a return to an older type of worker. In many ways this individual can be seen as the railway equivalent of Nichols' (1986) 'Old Burt', that archetypal British worker. Thus Harold Macmillan and Sir John Stokes (see their respective quotes in chapter five above), although speaking thirty years apart are describing a similar character. This nostalgia directed at the type of workers in the industry is also echoed in the writing of many managers within the industry, see for example Bonavia (1985a) or Fiennes (1986), and on the shopfloor by writers such as Vaughan (1984). In both of these of these readings (political and industrial) there is an implicit sense in

which contemporary workers in the industry are either not of the same moral quality or that they have been led astray in to the world of politics by trade union activists. There is a wish to return to a world before the levelling tendency of the post-war settlement had allowed the lower orders getting above themselves. It was this desire, I would suggest, that John Major was attempting to draw on in his conceptualisation of the organisational form for privatisation in his desire to return to the 'good old days' (Guardian 17/2/92; see also chapter five above).

Juxtaposed with this overtly nostalgic reading of workplace identity has been the desire on the part of BR and its successors to reinvent its staff as part of a wider organisational shift to a 'customer focused' railway. In this register the cultural inheritance of the workforce is identified as its very problem, and little effort has been spared in the exercising such cultures from the 'new railway' (see Bate 1990, 1995). In chapter five we saw the way in which EWS, GNER, LUL and Railtrack had all instigated culture change programmes to exorcise traditional ways of organising work.

Thus the railway workforce can historically been seen as inhabiting a particular space in popular, political and management imagination. But there have also been other images and identities that jar and contradict these safer ones. Thus in the Victorian era such work could be portrayed as 'Proper slavery' (Woodward 1997). Such interpretations of the realities of railway life were highlighted by the growing trade union movement within the industry after 1870. Symbolically the break with an unchallenged paternalism is witnessed in the industrial action in the early years of this

century, and again during the General Strike when only a small minority of workers 'remained loyal to the old Company' (see Potts 1996).

In the post war era there has also been an alternative reading possible of railway work. Beneath the rhetoric of modernisation such employment became increasingly poorly remunerated when compare to other industries. Some chose to leave the railway altogether while others that stayed pushed their respective unions to demand improved conditions. And finally privatisation has increased a sense of insecurity in the industry with continued rounds of redundancy.

The point to draw from the above interpretations of image and identity is that both management and workers are active in the creation of these. The workforce are active creators and re-creators of their own identities, but they do so in contexts that are the products of legislation and corporate design. Railway workers have always appropriated and reinterpreted the space around them. They developed their own culture and patterns of social interaction. These were both defensive and offensive, constraining and enabling. But perhaps the most important point to stress is that such identification with work has always, and will always be a social process.

Therefore workplace culture in this, or any industry needs to be studied as the product of a complex social world and not simply one that can be pulled from the shelf of a cultural consultant. What we, as sociologists or historians, need is an approach that is creative in its apprehension of work identity and meaning. We need the ability to combine the study of the industry and organisation at macro, mezzo and micro levels with the minutiae of workplace interaction. And that furthermore such a study must recognise ongoing social processes within this complexity. Such a

synthesis is probably more important now than ever before as many workplaces experience profound change. It is vital that in such an environment critical social scientists do not all turn their critical gaze upon issues of consumption and simultaneously reject the workplace as an arena for possible meaning. What is called for is, in effect, an historical industrial sociology of the workplace.

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Workers*, London, RMT.

*Tubeline: The Newspaper for staff of London Underground Limited*, London, London  
Underground Limited.

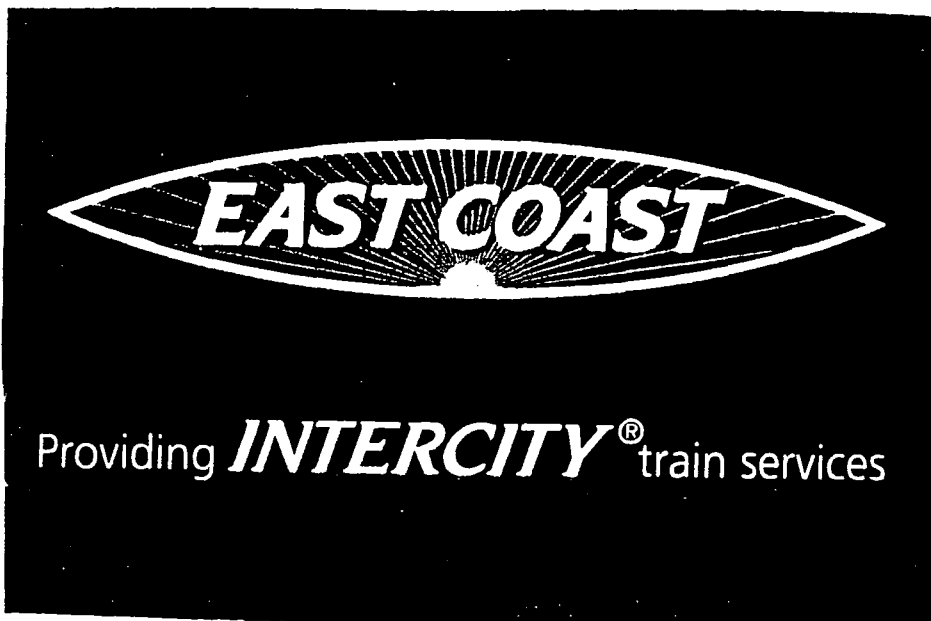
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Trident Communications.

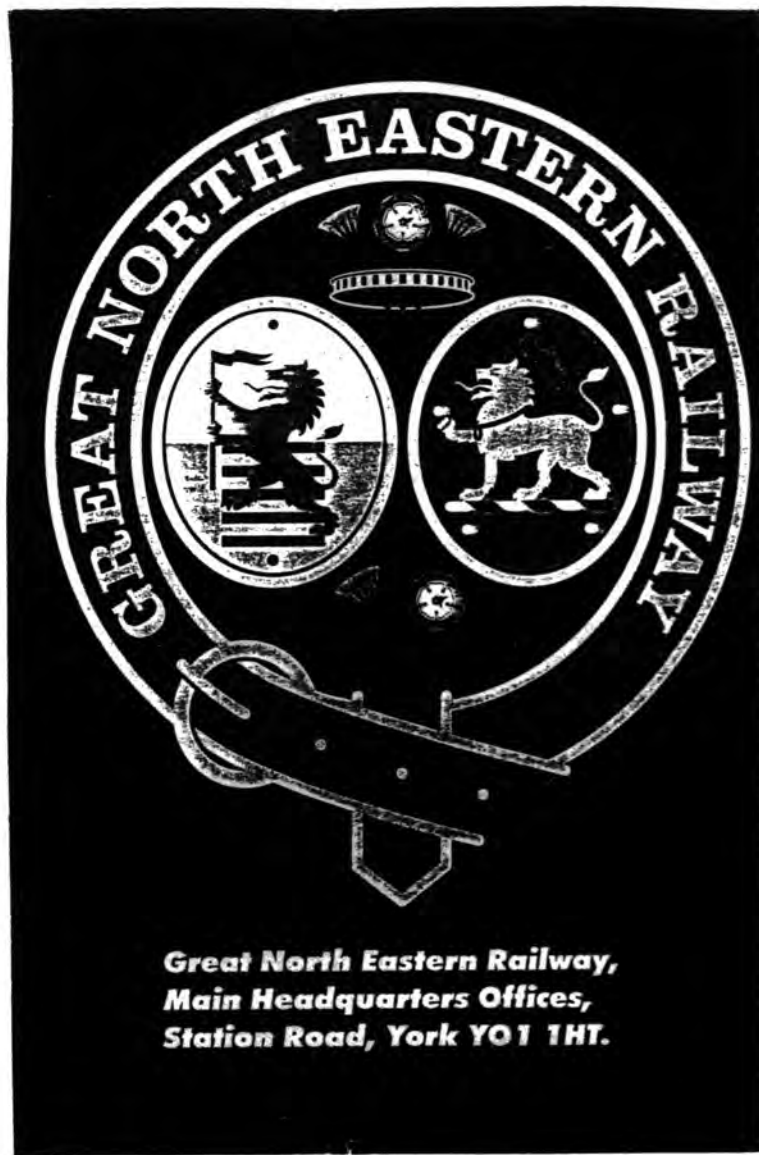


# Appendix One

## Identity on the new railway

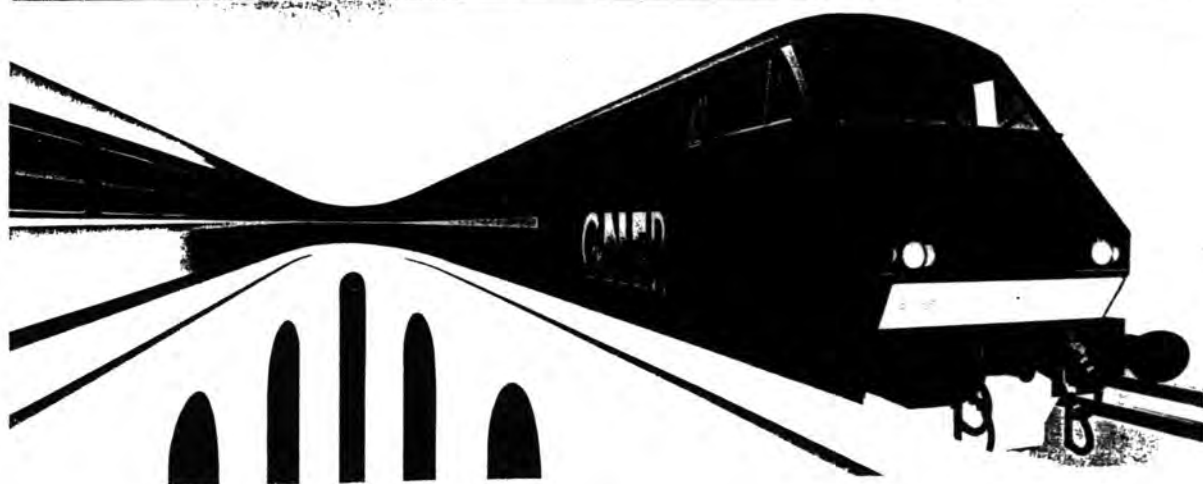
- 1:1 LNER company symbol from the inter war period.
- 1:2 Intercity East Coast symbol that explicitly borrowed from the former LNER, from publicity material in 1994.
- 1:3 GNER publicity material from 1996.
- 1:4 GNER publicity material from 1996.
- 1:5 Internal Publicity for the launch of Loadhaul's new identity in 1995.
- 1:6 The new corporate identity chosen by EWS in 1996.





**Great North Eastern Railway,  
Main Headquarters Offices,  
Station Road, York YO1 1HT.**

The new golden age of rail travel is arriving



# load haul

## The New Name and Identity

Trainload Freight North East begins a new era in October 1994 as we take the next step towards privatisation by becoming a British Rail subsidiary. We will quickly need to develop an identity distinct from British Rail and from the other former Trainload Freight businesses who will soon be our competitors.

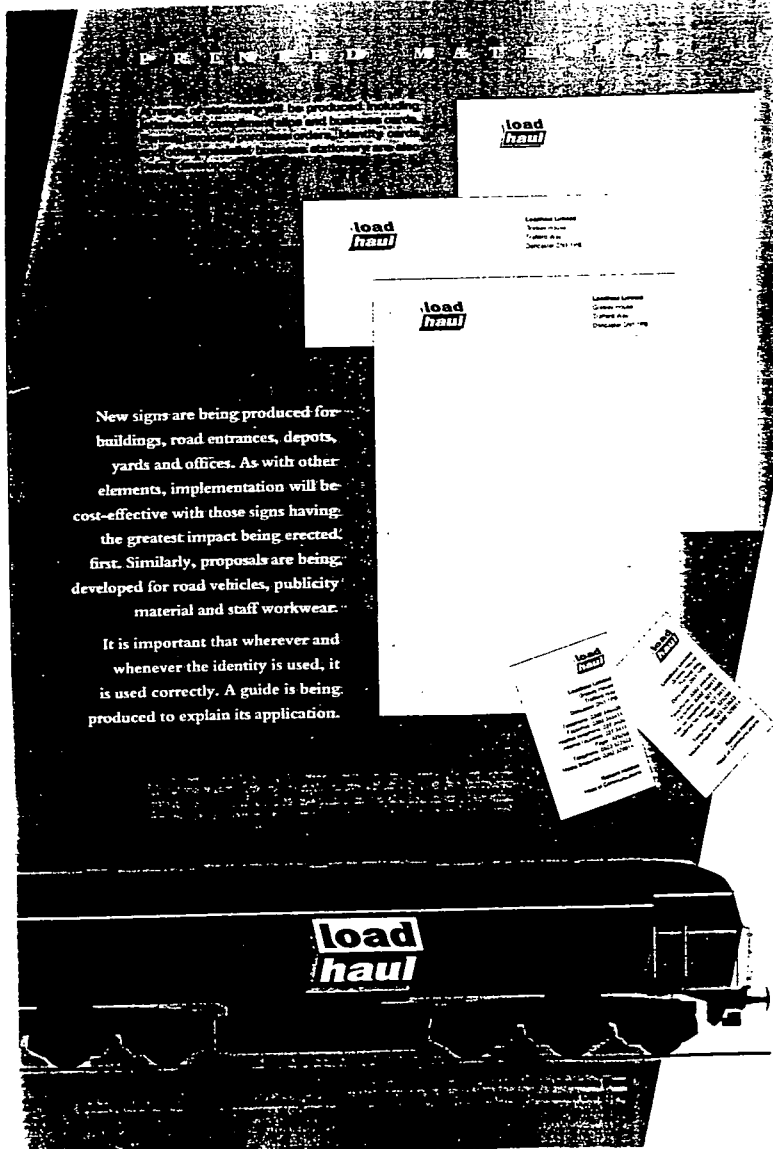
Corporate identity is the total visual impact of an organisation; the name and how it is presented, signs, stationery, vehicle livery, uniforms and publicity material.

This is a major task for an organisation of our size. However, the transition will be managed sensibly and cost-effectively.



Loadhaul Ltd. is the chosen name. It is succinct, describes our activities and gives us a clear identity without breaking all the links with our past.

A strong identity is important for our staff, customers and the other groups and opinion formers who will play a key role in our transfer to the private sector. It is a good platform for expressing our aspiration to be the best rail freight company and the customers' first choice heavy haulier.



New signs are being produced for buildings, road entrances, depots, yards and offices. As with other elements, implementation will be cost-effective with those signs having the greatest impact being erected first. Similarly, proposals are being developed for road vehicles, publicity material and staff workwear.

It is important that wherever and whenever the identity is used, it is used correctly. A guide is being produced to explain its application.



# **English Welsh & Scottish Railway**

**The UK's largest  
rail freight operator**

---

**English Welsh & Scottish Railway,  
310 Goswell Road; London EC1V 7LL**

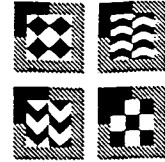
## **Appendix Two**

### **Increasing bureaucracy in the new railway**

2:1 Front page of a Trainman's Annual Practical Assessment form dating from the early 1990s, used by Train Crew Leaders.

2:2 By 1995 the same form had increased to forty two pages with each competence now having its own page.

# TRAINLOAD FREIGHT - NORTH EAST DEPOT STANDARDS MANUAL



**Form 11** 1st Edition, April 1994

*SUBJECT TO INSPECTION.*

## TRAINMANS ANNUAL PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT

### 1 TRAINMANS DETAILS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PAY No: \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE THIS ASSESSMENT: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE LAST ASSESSMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2 TRAIN DETAILS

LOCOMOTIVE NUMBER	WTT No	TIME	FROM	TO	DOO	WEATHER CONDITIONS

DURATION OF ASSESSMENT: \_\_\_\_ hrs \_\_\_\_ mins

In Sections 3 and 4, insert either Y (Yes), N (No), or X (Not Applicable) in each box.

### 3 EQUIPMENT AND UNIFORM CHECK

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HVV                 | <input type="checkbox"/> SPECTACLES AUTHORISED    | <input type="checkbox"/> SPECTACLES WORN + SPARES | <input type="checkbox"/> FULL UNIFORM RECEIVED               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OPERATING NOTICES   | <input type="checkbox"/> CARRIAGE/ BR 1 KEYS      | <input type="checkbox"/> NOTE BOOK                | <input type="checkbox"/> BAG                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HARD HAT            | <input type="checkbox"/> TRACK SAFETY CERTIFICATE | <input type="checkbox"/> APPEARANCE ACCEPTABLE    | <input type="checkbox"/> SAFETY CRITICAL WORK IDENTIFICATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> WTT                 | <input type="checkbox"/> WATCH                    | <input type="checkbox"/> WHISTLE                  | <input type="checkbox"/> NOT TO GO LABELS                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HANDLAMP            | <input type="checkbox"/> FLAGS                    | <input type="checkbox"/> WHITE PAGES inc FTLB     | <input type="checkbox"/> PINK PAGES                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TRACK CIRCUIT CLIPS | <input type="checkbox"/> TAIL / SIDE LAMPS        | <input type="checkbox"/> DRIVERS SLIPS            | <input type="checkbox"/> BRAKE STICK/ SHUNTING POLE          |

#### STATIC EQUIPMENT IN BRAKE VANS

- |  |                                     |                          |                          |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> TRACK CIRCUIT CLIPS | <input type="checkbox"/> DETONATORS | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|



Form 11 2nd Edition, April 1995

**SUBJECT TO INSPECTION**

**UNIT 1: PREPARE FOR DUTY**

Element 1: This element covers booking on and off, and personal preparation for duty.

**LOADHAUL OPERATIONS  
DEPOT STANDARDS MANUAL**

N/A  Assessment Method  Comp't  Not Comp't  Assessors Name  Date

1.1 Driver books on & off in an approved manner

Remarks:

Action Taken:

N/A  Assessment Method  Comp't  Not Comp't  Assessors Name  Date

1.2 Information regarding the train to be worked is sought and verified where necessary.

Remarks:

Action Taken:

W - Written evidence      N/A - Not applicable      D - Direct observation  
 Q - Questioning          Comp - Competent          O - Other



## **Appendix Three**

### **Increased Formalisation in the New Railway**

3:1 Driver at Risk/ Poor Performance form used by Train Crew Leaders in Loadhaul/EWS and other form parts of BR.

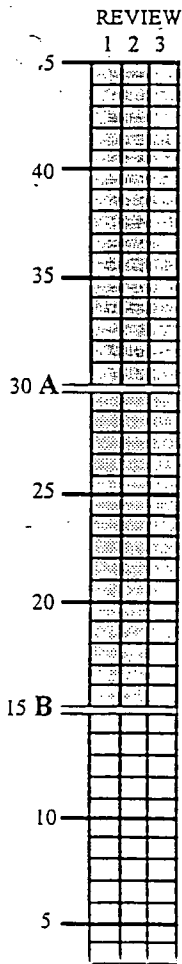
# CONFIDENTIAL

## DRIVERS AT RISK / POOR PERFORMANCE

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Depot \_\_\_\_\_

D.O.B \_\_\_\_\_ Nat Ins No. \_\_\_\_\_

This document must be placed on every Driver's personal file and retained at the Depots regardless of whether it is filled in wholly, partially or not at all. Records, should be traced back 5 years for Signals Passed At Danger, and 2 years for "At Risk" issues and Poor Performance factors, to make this document accurate.



The thermometer graphs on this page are designed to assist the reader to recognise a Driver at Risk / Poor Performer instantly. It is based on three categories:-

- Category A, 30 points and over: Identified as Probably At Risk / Poor Performing.
- Category B, 15 - 29 points: Identified as Possibly At Risk / Beginning To Offend.
- Category C, 0 - 14 points: Entries in this Category should be noted, but no action to be taken in respect of this document, unless deemed necessary by the individuals' Operations Manager.

The driver must be interviewed when entering categories 'B' or 'A' with a view to identifying any problems or needs. For each Driver, a review date should be determined according to the level of risk, but must be reviewed as a minimum every 2 years, and, if the driver is deemed to pose a lesser risk, 10 points must be subtracted from his total score and a fresh column started.

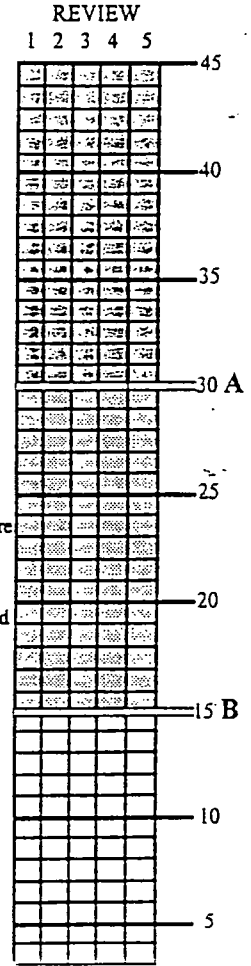
The records of Category C Drivers should be reviewed annually, and, if the Driver is deemed to pose a lesser risk, 5 points must be deducted from his score and a fresh column started.

No Category 'A' Probably At Risk driver will be allowed to drop below Category 'B' for a period of two years. The monitoring records on pages 4 and 5 of this document should be completed by the person taking the interview.

The thermometer must be filled in using the same brightly coloured ink or highlighter pen every time points are added and must be checked to ensure it reflects the correct score that has been entered in the instances column (numbered 7 - 8 overleaf).

The scoring of the "As applicable" categories are left to the discretion of the person completing the document to decide the gravity/condition of the incident/Driver concerned and to reflect it in the score.

Entries for Failing To Sign For Notices should only be entered onto this form after the two reminder letters have been issued from the TCL / Supervisor concerned.



Should be updated ONCE, and in no circumstances

Performance

Sections 1,2 & 3 should be scored on the  
"At Risk" Thermometer

NUMBER OF INSTANCES IN EACH CATEGORY

1 Signals passed at danger without authority

		1	2	3	4	5
a. Misjudged	POINTS ALLOCATED 10					
b. Disregard	15					
c. Misread	15					
d. Miscommunication	15					
e. Uncategorised	15					

2 Safety of the Line

a. Speeding - more than 11 MPH in excess.	15					
b. Speeding - between 4 & 10 MPH in excess.	10					
c. Station overrun.	10					
d. Collision / derailment.	15					
e. Unauthorised Back Cab driving.	15					
f. Unauthorised persons in driving cab.	5					
g. Unauthorised change of Duty.	5					
h. H.V.V non compliance (2nd Occurrence).	5					
i. Safety of the line incidents. — As applicable —						
j. Driver involved in fatality. — As applicable —						
k. Miscellaneous. — As applicable —						
l.						

3 Miscellaneous

a. Moonlighting.	5					
b. Domestic arrangements.	5					
c. Changing of Turns on a regular basis.	5					
d. Personal problems.	5					
e. Accident Prone.	5					
f. Long Term Sickness.	5					
g. Post Assessment Training.	5					
h.						

This section to be scored on the Poor Performance thermometer

		NUMBER OF INSTANCES IN EACH CATEGORY				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>4 Poor Performance Issues</b>						
a. Failure Of Practical Assessment	POINTS ALLOCATED	15				
b. Poor Practical Assessment, ie: subject to Corrective Action on assessment		10				
c. Failure Of Rules Assessment		15				
d. Poor Rules Assessment, ie: just enough to gain competency		10				
e. Subject To Formal Discipline		15				
f. Subject to Final Warning		15				
g. Learning Difficulties		10				
h. Subject To Informal Discipline, ie: Suitable Conversation / minor misdemeanours		10				
i. Subject to Managing Attendance Procedures		10				
j. Consistently Late On Duty		5				
k. Failing to use Personal Protective Equipment		5				
l. Failure to wear supplied uniform		5				
m. Misuse of Equipment / Publications		5				
n. Poor Attitude (refusal to obey instructions)		5				
o. Failure to sign for Notices (3rd [or more] continuous occurrence) (This class is aimed at those individuals who fails to sign for notices on a frequent basis, as opposed to the "one-off" error)		5				

*Drivers who qualify for a Category A rating automatically score 15 points on the opposite thermometer scale. Likewise Category B ratings score 10 points on the opposite scale. These additional points should only be added once for each occasion, and not cumulatively.*

*Additional Notes:*

## **Appendix Four**

### **Methodology**

This appendix provides a brief discussion of the methodology deployed in the production of this thesis. In turn it examines the carrying out of semi-structured interviews, their transcription and analysis, the use made of non-participant observation techniques, an elaboration of some of the ethical issues involved in this research project and finally the triangulation of evidence and materials used in the production of the thesis.

From the beginning I intended to use oral history techniques in the gathering of material for the thesis. It was originally envisaged that twenty workers from each grade- ten each from BR and LUL - would be recorded. However the research process is rarely as smooth and straight forward, a point clearly echoed in Buchanan et. al. (1988) and Turner (1988). Thus while I have carried out a total of forty semi-structured interviews, the exact mix is somewhat different from that originally planned, and in addition a further four lengthy discussions with individual workers was undertaken. Of the semi-structured interviews seven were from the managerial or supervisory grades - five from Loadhaul, and one each from LUL and Railtrack. Eleven retired drivers from the North East were contacted through a retired group in Newcastle, in addition two retired signalmen were contacted in this way. In terms of current workers I interviewed seven drivers with the Loadhaul/ EWS organisation, and four current signal workers with Railtrack. In addition to this number I interviewed a member of the on-board catering section of ICEC/ GNER. A total of

eight interviews with current or very recently retired staff from LUL. Here seven signal workers formed the majority of the informants plus one female train driver.

Interviews, which were all taped, were carried out in a variety of surroundings during late 1994 and 1995. All but one of those carried out with the managerial and supervisory grades took place at their organisation, and varied in length between one and two and a half hours. In the case of the Railtrack manager I interviewed him in his home because he spoke to me in an unofficial capacity. The remaining interviews with workers, both retired and current were carried out in the home of the individual. The one exception to this was a signalman from the Hartlepool area who suggested I met him at his place of work. Interviews, especially with those who were retired, were very informal. This was something I actively sought as I wanted to put the informants at ease as far as possible, a strategy recommended in Thompson (1988, ch. 7). There seem a marked difference between the generations here with older, usually retired workers, needing fewer prompts or questions, such discussions usually averaging two or three hours. Younger interviewees seemed a little more inhibited, recordings here lasting ninety minutes, with one lasting barely three quarters of an hour. This may be a result of the former group being less inhibited, more willing to treat the process as a kind of confessional (see Thompson 1988, 116-117).

All the interviews were of a semi-structured nature (see May 1997, ch. 6). By this I mean that I had a set of open ended questions that I would put to each of the informants, usually beginning with one designed to get them to discuss how the stated work in the industry. The resultant answer was in most cases a quite detailed description of their career progression to the present. This type of information proved

both interesting in and of itself but also stimulated the process by which the account of career would be framed. In addition it was invaluable to me to have such an description at the beginning of the interview which could be referred to later on. I usually preferred to carry out an interview with a single informant but in three cases I was presented with, and accepted, the chance to talk to pairs of retired workers. This proved an interesting and useful development when compared to those carried out with individual actors. Although the questions that I sought answers to did not fundamentally alter during the research process at a number of points new areas and themes emerged that were subsequently fed back into the research process. The best example of this was the Mutual Improvement Class movement (MIC). While I had been vaguely aware of this form of mutual self improvement from secondary reading, I quickly came to realise the importance for those older workers who had experienced and benefited from the movement in its heyday. Thus, subsequently, I included questions designed to stimulate discussion on the issue in other interviews.

Analysis of the material produced from the interviews was undertaken in a number of ways. Initially I would note down what I saw to be important issues either at the time or shortly after the interview had ended. This was also necessary because usually fascinating comments would be made as soon as the record stop button had been depressed on my tape machine. At a later date I would listen through each tape making detailed headings as to what had been said, the kinds of issues raised and noting at length quotes that I thought to be particularly useful. Again this process became increasingly lengthened after the initial couple of these notation transcriptions had been undertaken. I found my self increasingly cross referencing with other tapes

and with the published autobiography of railway workers. In the case of current workers I found such cross referencing also included material derived from newspaper cuttings containing information about the industry. I was also lucky enough to be able to get fifteen of my tapes professionally transcribed. In these cases I would still make my notes having listened through the tape and would use these as an index for the full transcript. While the fully transcribed interview would be ideal, I believe that actually listening and subsequently re-listening to interviews is the best way to analyse such data. Much detail would seem to be lost if contexts and emphasis is lost in the written form, a point echoed in Stephenson (1996b).

In addition to the formal interviewing process I also engaged in other forms of qualitative data collection. The most important examples of these are in terms of the non-participant observation techniques alluded to earlier in the thesis, particularly chapters five and six (see also May 1997, ch. 7). While carrying out fieldwork at Loadhaul I was offered the chance, and willing accepted, a number of opportunities to shadow members of staff. I spent two days with a Train Crew Leader while he went about a variety of duties. In the first case I travelled with him on the footplate of a freight train from Peterborough to Doncaster while he was inspecting a driver and secondman. On a second occasion I was able to attend a safety brief at Loadhaul head quarters at Doncaster. In both instances I was able to observe not only the official duties of a number of grades but also note the extensive nature of the 'negotiated order' within the organisation (Brown 1993). Interestingly I was able to compare these occasions with my own experience of 'participant observation' when I had been employed on LUL. Again what must be highlighted was the continual dialogue



between my fieldwork, the sociological literature on organisations and my personal experience of working in the industry.

While undertaking fieldwork at Loadhaul I did not reveal that I had previously worked in the industry. This was a conscious decision as I was concerned that to do so may well have jeopardised access to the organisation, a recognition of the 'political' nature of research (Beynon 1988). At all times I attended interviews in a formal suit. While this seemed to strike the 'right' chord with the managerial and supervisory interviewees it did not help in attempting informal conversations with workers on those days. Suspicion of 'suits', and 'outsiders' generally, was heightened by the immanent privatisation process. In this context a 'suit' meant potential trouble and I was therefore eyed wearily.

My 'insider' status was always revealed to shopfloor interviewees and this was useful in a number of ways. Firstly, because I had a technical understanding of the industry I could ask the kinds of questions that made sense to workers who could then expand on more interesting subjects, alleviating the need to dwell on the 'basics'. Secondly, having worked in the industry was very useful in reassuring current workers that their identity would not be revealed in the course of this thesis. At all times I undertook to conceal the identities of all current workers. My insider status helped me in terms of working out the variety of ways in which workers could be identified, and likewise where detail could be given without jeopardising confidentiality.

I originally set out with the explicit aim of developing a triangulated research framework from which to study notions of work identity. As part of this process I

have attempted to mesh primary and secondary material with my own research findings. For example management, workers and trade unions documentary, secondary accounts, biography / auto biography have been compared and contrasted with my own self generated interviews. Here mention must be made of the advantages to be had in researching within the railway industry. Not only is the industry blessed with a massive array of secondary material, but has historically stimulated the publication of autobiographies of its workers and managers. While these have to be treated, along with all evidence, in a careful manner they none the less provide a richness that is under exploited (see my discussion elsewhere Strangleman 1996). By using auto/biographical sources it is possible to explore how major events in the industry were experienced by workers and managers at the time. Thus the General strike appears in a number of autobiographies most notably Hick (1991) and Mason (1992). Likewise nationalisation figures in Elliot (1982) and Bradshaw (1993). And finally the Beeching era is an emergent theme in Fiennes (1973) and Vaughan (1984). Given the state of the railway publishing market it can quite confidently be predicted that today's railway workers and managers will produce similar accounts. The point to be made here is that the historical record can be examined and tested by the deployment of those working at different points within the industry, and across time and space. Such an analysis not only allows the conformation of evidence but interestingly exposes productive disjunctures between narratives. One example of the latter instance would be the way in some, less critical, historical analysis the General strike is viewed as having little bitterness attached to it

when biographical material and my own oral histories perhaps challenge such assumptions.

This thesis has attempted to use a triangulation of research methods, evidence and approaches in order to grasp the way in which occupational identity is formed, produced and reproduced. It recognises the inherently subjective nature of autobiographical material and oral history techniques but see these as necessary in order to understand the complex multi dimensional process inherent in identity formation. It is argued that such material when used in conjunction with other sources allows the researcher access to a novel appreciation of social processes.

