REVISITING SHOP STEWARDS AND WORKPLACE BARGAINING: OPPORTUNITIES, RESOURCES AND DYNAMICS IN TWO CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

Recent accounts of workplace union representation have emphasised the exclusion of shop stewards from management decision-making processes, and have posited a shift in shop steward activity away from dealing with collective issues through bargaining, towards dealing with individual issues through casework, as part of the wider decline of union influence. This thesis challenges those accounts by showing that they utilise a problematic conceptual framework and rest upon questionable empirical foundations. An alternative framework is proposed which incorporates a clearly conceptualised definition of bargaining – something missing from previous accounts – and which develops and synthesises conceptual elements from Marxist-influenced sociologies of work, bargaining theory, and industrial relations scholarship. It is shown that efforts to influence management decision-making and to restrict managerial prerogatives continue to figure prominently in shop steward activity, even though the reduction of union influence is undeniable and formal arrangements for union-management relations have been recast. Moreover, these efforts are often to some extent successful. This analysis is supported by considerable evidence from two detailed workplace studies, including an innovative use of diaries, which contribute important new insights into the activity of contemporary shop stewards.

This thesis argues that the persistence of shop steward bargaining is best understood in relation to underlying dynamics of conflict and exploitation within the employment relationship under capitalism. Bargaining processes are explored in terms of changing patterns of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources, which are linked to changing management practices. While the form and location of bargaining processes have changed, the prevalence of issues around the effort bargain and frontier of control demonstrate the continuing influence of the dynamics of workplace relations on patterns of shop steward activity. While further research is required, the theoretical and conceptual framework developed in this thesis suggests that similar processes are likely to be found elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to shop stewards everywhere, and to two in particular: my Mum and Dad, first among equals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What do shop stewards do?

Once, providing an answer to this question would have been relatively straightforward. In the 1960s and 1970s, detailed workplace studies produced field-defining accounts in which shop stewards featured as important actors (for an overview, see Kelly 1998: 6-7). More recently, answers have been less readily available. From the 1980s, there was a remarkable decline of research in this area. The focus of industrial relations shifted away from the workplace, as researchers sought explanations for dramatic declines in union size and influence in macro features of employment and a stronger focus on management (Brown *et al.* 2009, Hyman 1987: 27). Although the decline of case study research has been disputed (Fernie and Woodland 1995; McCarthy 1994; Millward and Hawes 1995), there can be little doubt about the almost complete disappearance of the workplace ethnographies that were previously well established (Greene 2001: 4). Case studies of shop stewards declined significantly by the mid-1990s (Terry 1995: 215), and disappeared almost completely thereafter (*cf.* Terry 2003, 2010). Now, field-defining research in industrial relations comes not from detailed studies of the workplace but from large-scale surveys, particularly the WIRS/WERS series (discussed in Chapter 2). Whatever the benefits of such methods, and there are many, they are poorly suited to investigating industrial relations processes at workplace level (Strauss and Whitfield 1998: 15). The shortage of recent research on shop stewards therefore reflects both shifting priorities and changing methods in industrial relations. As a result, though, the shop steward in the workplace has gradually slipped from view. The question – What do shop stewards do? – is now far more difficult to answer with any certainty.

The central issues are not just empirical, but also theoretical. Alongside the shortage of factual evidence about what shop stewards do, there are theoretical questions about the significance of such activity and how best it can be understood. Broadly, the literature contains two contrasting views of shop stewards. The first, what might be termed the *workplace bargainer view*, emerged from the classic studies of the 1960s and 1970s. In this view, shop stewards take 'all the opportunities presented to them' (McCarthy 1966: 70) to bargain with managers on behalf of their members, over a variety of issues, especially collective ones. More recently, this view has been displaced by what will be termed the

current standard view of shop stewards. According to this view, which is based mainly on evidence from management surveys, shop stewards no longer bargain to any significant extent, and have shifted their attention from collective issues to individual representation and casework (see Chapter 2). Clearly, the current standard view stands in strong contrast to the workplace bargainer view. Unfortunately, the lack of recent research specifically examining shop stewards has meant that testing these accounts has not been possible. In other words, theoretical progress has been limited for want of empirical investigation.

This study therefore attempts to rectify the research deficit by returning to the tradition detailed of workplace studies, to investigate once more the activities of shop stewards. The research contributes important new insights, both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, the first ethnographic study of shop stewards for some thirty years provides considerable and important evidence concerning their day-to-day activity. Theoretically, the study attempts to re-think the shop steward role by theorising it more explicitly within the dynamics of workplace relations; a dimension insufficiently developed in recent accounts, which have commonly focused on agency and subjective factors, such as workplace traditions or union policy.

The argument of this thesis is that shop steward bargaining is not dead. While the overall weakening of workplace union organisation is beyond doubt, changes in workplace relations and management practices have not led to the end of efforts by shop stewards to influence the decisions of managers and the regulation of work. Rather, stewards have adopted new methods in response to new circumstances. This account therefore develops from a critique of the current standard view, which wrongly claims that shop stewards no longer bargain. This is not to deny significant changes in shop steward activity since the era of the classic studies. For instance, the decline of collective action suggests that shop steward activity has moved considerably towards individual casework. However, the lack of research on shop stewards means that the significance of individual casework has been missed. As will be shown, individual casework can have significant collective consequences – and both managers and shop stewards recognise this. Likewise, it is now common for meetings between shop stewards and managers to be designated 'consultation' rather than 'negotiation'. Once more, though, these processes have been left un-researched, on the faulty assumption that 'consultation' is simply another name for unilateral management decision-making (see Section 2.1). In both these areas – collective vs. individual and

negotiation vs. consultation – an excessive focus on formal designation has been highly misleading. Starting from the perspective of sociological content rather than institutional form, this research will show that contemporary workplace practices can and do result in genuinely bargained outcomes, and should therefore be considered aspects of workplace bargaining relations.

However, despite the persistence of bargaining identified by this research, the workplace bargainer view is not sufficient for understanding contemporary shop stewards. The context in which stewards operate has been transformed since the period of the classic studies. Workplace relations have been remodelled under the impact of powerful social and economic forces. In manufacturing, hugely increased product market competition has undermined the bargaining position of unions. In the public sector, repeated waves of 'reform', marketisation, competitive tendering, outsourcing, privatisation, new management methods, and the impact of government austerity policies have transformed the experience of employment. Continuing high levels of unemployment have weakened the bargaining position of unions. Changes in the law to restrict strikes accompanied a decisive shift in state policy away from the long-standing encouragement of collective bargaining. Now, unions face hostility from the state and employers alike. The introduction of legally enforceable employment rights has contributed to a huge growth in the pursuit of individual grievances against employers, on issues that might previously have been dealt with by collective bargaining. Given the scale of such changes, it is not surprising that the workplace bargainer view no longer gives an accurate account of shop steward activity.

Even so, some aspects of the workplace bargainer view are surprisingly robust. As will be shown, some of the central issues dealt with by shop stewards in the classic studies can be clearly identified in the activities of contemporary shop stewards. In particular, the effort bargain and frontier of control continue to account for a significant proportion of shop steward activity. A further motivation for the present study was to show that the methods of the classic studies can still generate rich insights into workplace relations, and it will be argued that such methods remain crucial for understanding shop steward activity.

This thesis will argue that shop steward activity is best understood in terms of the continuing dynamics of conflict and exploitation within the employment relationship under capitalist relations of production. This might seem an obvious point: don't we already know

that conflict and exploitation run through the employment relationship? Isn't this bound to be a feature of workplace union representation? Yet, as will be shown, previous accounts have not sufficiently developed this basic insight. Mainstream industrial relations continues to sacrifice theoretical development in favour of empirical description (Howell 2005: 8; Kelly 1998: 16-17). Accounts influenced by labour process theory too often reduce complex workplace processes to expressions of simple categories, such as 'control' or 'resistance' (Thompson and Smith 2010: 13). Even Marxist accounts posit 'a largely abstract and ahistorical capitalism' (Howell 2005: 12). Instead, the present account integrates a number of conceptual elements into a theoretical framework that can trace (non-deterministic) linkages between a historically concrete understanding of capitalism and the activity of shop stewards in particular workplaces. Elements will be drawn from Marxist accounts of exploitation, interests, and conflict; from critical realist conceptions of structure and agency; and from game-theoretic treatments of bargaining. In so doing, this study develops a generally applicable framework for understanding shop stewards and their role in workplace bargaining. By combining considerable new empirical evidence with theoretical and conceptual clarification, this thesis aims to provide fresh answers to that motivating question – What do shop stewards do?

A note on terminology

The term 'shop steward' might be seen as outdated, having been widely replaced by 'union representative' (usually abbreviated to 'union rep'). Nevertheless, the old title will be used here for three reasons. First, this is the term used in a large proportion of the literature in the field, especially the classic studies. Second, the union reps in both case studies referred to themselves as shop stewards. And third, it distinguishes the role from other union representatives, such as the well-established safety rep, the union learning rep, and more recent innovations such as specialist reps dealing with equality, disability, and green issues (Moore 2010; Terry 2010: 290-91). The term shop steward will be used here to denote the lowest level of lay workplace union representative, commonly (though not always) representing union members at section level, and dealing with general employment issues, such as terms and conditions of employment, grievance and disciplinary issues, and work organisation and intensity.

These introductory comments have indicated the broad empirical and theoretical concerns

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of the present research. The remainder of this chapter sets out the rationale for undertaking the research, and outlines its main features. First, the case for renewed research on shop stewards is set out, after which the research questions that framed the empirical investigation are introduced. Next, the research design is outlined, followed by a summary of the main argument. Finally, an overview of the rest of the thesis introduces the principal conceptual elements for re-thinking the shop steward role in relation to the dynamics of workplace relations.

Why study shop stewards?

Prior to 1980, the central place of shop stewards in industrial relations research seemed secure. Reasons for this interest are not hard to discern. During the long post-war boom, dealing with shop stewards became a pressing fact of life for managers in many sectors of employment, and management problems quickly became research topics for the mainstream pluralist industrial relations of the time (Hyman 2009: 36). When, in the 1970s, pluralist orthodoxy was challenged by a new generation of radical and Marxist researchers, who started from a sympathy with workers rather than with managers, the focus on workplace union organisation only strengthened. Indeed, for much radical research, the workplace was the *sine qua non* of industrial relations. The prominence of shop stewards in all these accounts reflected an unusual feature of industrial relations in Britain; namely, the primacy of workplace union organisation, and the consequent importance of bargaining at workplace level and below (Terry 2003: 257). Unlike much of Europe, the growth of multi-employer bargaining in Britain had not seen the workplace 'excluded from hostilities' (Sisson 1987: 13). In the 1960s and 1970s especially, vigorous bargaining was an obvious feature of workplace relations.

During this period, the diverse currents of British industrial relations shared a common view of the shop steward role, as tied to workplace bargaining. Opinions varied, though, about the consequences of shop stewards' bargaining role. For many employers, shop steward bargaining was an unwelcome interference with managerial prerogatives (Hyman 2003: 43). For governments, it was the cause of wages drift and balance of payment difficulties (*ibid*.: 48-51). For Flanders (1968), it was the unruly force undermining formal bargaining structures. For Donovan (1968: 56), shop steward bargaining was 'more of a lubricant than an irritant'. Others emphasised the irritant aspect (Brown 1973: 127-32; Turner, Clack and Roberts 1967: 214). For some radical commentators, bargaining was potentially a source of

shop steward weakness, leading to accommodations with managers, with the interests of rank-and-file workers taking second place to maintaining 'good bargaining relations' (e.g. Beynon 1984: 116; Nichols and Beynon 1977: 156; Lane: 222). Despite these important differences of interpretation, though, industrial relations scholars and practitioners from across the field saw shop stewards as, first and foremost, workplace bargainers.

Dramatic changes since 1980 have transformed workplace relations. An obvious question follows: what effect have these changes had on the role of shop stewards? Union membership has fallen by more than half, but shop steward numbers have declined even faster, from a high point of some 335,000 in 1984 (Darlington 2010: 127), to around 150,000 today (Charlwood and Angrave 2014: 5). The decline of multi-employer bargaining has, if anything, increased the importance of workplace union organisation (Fairbrother 1994; 2000), despite a range of difficulties faced at that level (Gall 1998). Shop stewards continue to be the first point of call for many thousands of union members who have problems at work (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013: 191). For many union members, it remains the case that 'the steward *is* the union' (Marsh 1963, cited in Terry 1995: 209, original emphasis). Academic commentators continue to refer to shop stewards as 'the dynamic heart of the British union movement' (Terry 2003: 257), or 'the lieutenants of the rank-and-file' (Gall 2005, cited in Darlington 2010: 126). Moreover, unions still have over six million members (BIS 2014), and around one third of unionised workplaces have a union representative on site (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013: 58-59). So, what are shop stewards doing in workplaces where unions continue to organise?

Although shop stewards appear in studies of workplace union organisation (Darlington 1994; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; Dundon 1998; Gall 2003a; McBride 2004; 2006; 2011), and sometimes in research on union organising (for an overview, see Gall 2009; Simms *et al.* 2013), the shortage of direct research on shop stewards poses serious difficulties for understanding how the role has changed. Accounts underpinning the current standard view rely heavily on data from WIRS/WERS management surveys. Yet, large-scale surveys are not well suited to investigating the detail of workplace relations. Furthermore, the resurgence among managers of unitarist views (Edwards 2003: 10), which are commonly opposed to the representation of employees by trade unions, means that management statements must be considered problematic sources of evidence about the activities and influence of workplace union representatives. Yet, when findings from managers and union

representatives are at odds, there has been a tendency to give greater credence to the management version (e.g. Brown and Nash 2008; see Chapter 2). Empirically, these accounts rest on questionable evidence drawn from problematic sources using unsuitable methods. These accounts also suffer from an over-reliance on formal distinctions derived from pluralist analyses of collective bargaining (see Chapter 2), seemingly forgetting the importance of informality in workplace relations established by those same studies. The continuing importance of workplace union representation in Britain, combined with the problematic nature of many recent accounts, strongly suggest that a resumption of research on shop stewards would be beneficial.

This section has established the need for renewed research on shop stewards. As noted, this research was motivated by a very general question – What do shop stewards do? However, this question is too broad to form the basis of rigorous research. Therefore, more specific research questions were devised. These are presented and discussed next.

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of research questions is to position empirical investigation in relation to theory, and to inform the selection of data-gathering methods. This section outlines the research questions used in the present enquiry.

Q1. To what extent do shop stewards seek to influence the regulation of employment relations?

This question directly addresses the issue of shop steward efforts to influence management decisions, on the assumption that the free exercise of managerial prerogatives would indicate no such influence. The regulation of employment relations was for decades at the centre of industrial relations research in Britain; regulation, that is, in the sense of the nature, origin and enforcement (or not) of the various sets of rules surrounding day-to-day practices in employment. The literature features a familiar typology of *unilateral controls* (by workers or management) and *joint controls* (Flanders 1975: 83-128). In recent years, formal mechanisms of joint control have receded (Blyton, *et al.* 2011: 7). Some care is needed, however, because formal appearance and actual content may not coincide. For

instance, seemingly unilateral worker controls often originate in working practices shaped by management decisions over technology and investment, while apparently joint controls can emerge when one party is under duress (Batstone 1988: 168-71). Consequently, research in this area must be sensitive to potential divergences between formal arrangements and actual workplace practices.

It is important to note that this research question concerns the extent to which stewards *seek* to influence, not the extent to which they succeed in influencing. The degree of actual influence is important, not least because repeated failure may discourage subsequent efforts. Nevertheless, this research aimed to understand the social process of bargaining, rather than measure its outcomes. While shop stewards undoubtedly have less influence in the workplace than they did thirty years ago, it matters for the analysis whether they are seeking to influence management decisions and finding it difficult, or whether, as in the current standard view, their attention is directed elsewhere.

Q2. What bargaining opportunities and resources, if any, are shop stewards using?

As will be shown below, the literature contains numerous examples of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources that shop stewards have used to pressure management (Section 3.1). Therefore, it was important to establish empirically whether any such features were present, even if covertly. It is well known that shop stewards in the classic period commonly used brief work stoppages to pressure managers, and equally well known that these small sectional strikes are now rare. Therefore, the research had to be sufficiently sensitive to register the presence of less obvious bargaining opportunities and resources, including any novel or unexpected forms.

Q3. What bargaining activity, if any, are shop stewards engaged in?

This question was the crux of the research. If no bargaining could be found, then the current standard view would be secure; if bargaining processes were present, then an alternative account would be possible. However, gathering evidence that might answer this question faced two difficulties. The first difficulty was empirical. Contemporary forms of bargaining may be novel and/or covert (Edwards *et al*. 1995: 287), and data 'elusive' (Armstrong *et al.* 1981: 27). The second difficulty was theoretical: how could bargaining be defined? Surprisingly, no systematic attempt to define bargaining could be found in the previous literature (Section 3.2); perhaps because no definition was required when bargaining was an

open feature in many workplaces. Now, however, when the continued existence of workplace bargaining is denied, such a definition is indispensable. Therefore, a definition of bargaining was developed (Section 3.2), and used throughout this study.

So far, this chapter has outlined the rationale for the present research, set out the broad historical and intellectual context, and introduced the research questions. The next section gives an overview of the project, introduces the methods adopted for gathering data, summarises the main argument, and outlines the thesis structure.

1.2 Overview of the research

This section outlines the overall structure of the study. It starts with a brief sketch of the research design, followed by a summary of the argument. Finally, this section presents the structure of the thesis as developed in the following chapters.

Research design

The classic period of shop steward research coincided with a series of ground-breaking workplace studies; part of a long and important tradition in British industrial relations (Brown and Wright 1994). Celebrated studies include Lane and Roberts (1971), Brown (1973), Beynon (1984 [1973]), Hill (1976), Nichols and Armstrong (1976), Nichols and Beynon (1977), Batstone *et al.* (1977; 1978), Armstrong *et al.* (1981), Pollert (1981), and Edwards and Scullion (1982). Cumulatively, these studies achieved a high point of empirical detail and analytical sophistication (Kelly 1998: 6-7). The intention of the present research was to revisit this tradition by assembling really detailed evidence concerning the activities of contemporary shop stewards. An exploratory case study research design was adopted, using qualitative methods to investigate social interactions, processes and meanings. Workplace observation was selected as the principal research method, a decision influenced in good measure by the classic studies. Additional methods included in-depth interviews and an innovative use of diaries. Two case studies were selected: shop stewards in a London Borough council (hereafter, London Borough), and shop stewards in a UK auto plant (hereafter, Big Car). Each case study lasted six months. Findings were contextualised by

documentary sources, and data were analysed thematically with the aid of NVivo software. Thus, the account below is based on the type of detailed evidence that is unavailable to the large-scale surveys that have recently dominated industrial relations research.

Of course, the advantages of qualitative research must be balanced against its disadvantages. Whereas the current standard view of shop stewards is based on a representative sample of thousands of workplaces, the present research is based on only two case studies. This difference poses a familiar question: how can case study research challenge evidence from a representative sample? The answer starts by recognising that while findings of case studies cannot be generalised statistically to a population, they can be generalised in relation to theoretical claims (Yin 2009: 38). Therefore, it will not be claimed that the stewards in this study were representative of the whole UK population; indeed, the cases investigated were atypical in important respects (see Chapter 4). However, knowledge is never based on empirical findings alone; it requires a conceptual and theoretical framework to order and interpret evidence. As will be shown in Chapter 2, the claims of the current standard view are not only empirical, but also involve conceptual distinctions and assumptions that are highly questionable. An important part of the argument is therefore a conceptual critique of the current standard view, which is then supported by detailed evidence from the case studies.

Generalisation from this research is consequently in two parts. The first is the critique of the current standard view that shop stewards no longer bargain; a view which has become very widespread in industrial relations (Section 2.1). Undermining such claims is therefore a theoretically generalisable conclusion of considerable importance. The second aspect of generalisation concerns the extent to which similar processes to those identified by this research might be found elsewhere. While it will not be claimed that shop stewards everywhere are doing what the shop stewards in this study were doing, it will be argued that the role of shop stewards is best understood in terms of the overall social dynamics of the workplace; the complex of conflict and cooperation, formal procedures, informal arrangements, and hidden practices that continue to characterise workplace relations under capitalist relations of production. While these issues are often acknowledged in industrial relations literature, they are seldom developed at any length, being more usually passed over briefly prior to the presentation of empirical results. By contrast, this account discusses theoretical and conceptual issues at some length (Chapter 3), to establish a firmer

conceptualisation of workplace relations, as the basis for generalisation. That is, to the extent that the social dynamics which explain the findings of the present research are common to other workplaces, by inference, it is therefore likely that shop stewards elsewhere may be involved in similar processes to those discussed here. Of course, such claims require the support of further empirical evidence to become firmly established. Fortunately, the production of knowledge is an incremental process: the critique of an established view and the presentation of a plausible alternative amount to a worthwhile contribution. Therefore, the discussion now turns to a summary of the overall argument of the thesis.

Summary of the argument

The argument of this thesis starts from a critique of the current standard view of shop stewards, which, despite its widespread currency, is significantly problematic. Conceptually, it relies upon a series of questionable distinctions; in particular, between negotiation and consultation, and between collective and individual issues. This thesis will demonstrate that these sharp distinctions are unsustainable. Methodologically, the current standard view is dependent on large-scale management surveys, and this thesis will show that the evidence generated by these methods is insufficient for grasping shop steward activity. These conceptual and methodological difficulties point to the need for different conceptual and empirical approaches.

Empirically, this research found that shop stewards in the case studies were significantly engaged in efforts to influence management decisions, and thereby to influence the regulation of employment relations. These findings contradict claims that shop stewards are no longer involved in workplace bargaining and no longer deal with collective issues. Thus, the empirical findings of this study strongly support the conceptual critique of the current standard view, which is therefore significantly undermined. In particular, shop stewards were considerably engaged with issues related to the effort bargain and frontier of control. Furthermore, patterns of shop steward activity had shifted with changing management methods. In the absence of traditional, strong bargaining sanctions, especially the sectional strike, shop stewards had developed alternative bargaining resources, some of which were novel and unexpected.

Theoretically, the (re)definition of bargaining developed below permitted the identification

of bargained outcomes in a number of workplace practices, and therefore of the persistence of bargaining in the day-to-day activities of shop stewards. These findings are best explained in terms of the underlying dynamic of exploitation within the employment relationship, which tends to generate and re-generate conflict in workplace relations. Detailed theoretical discussion (Chapter 3) shows that these processes are robust features of employment under capitalist relations of production, which will therefore be common to other workplaces. This suggests that similar processes are likely to be found elsewhere, and that shop stewards are likely to be engaged in similar practices.

The general tendency towards conflict at work is mediated by management practices, which vary over time and across different sectors of employment and workplaces. Particular management methods generate characteristic patterns of bargaining opportunities and resources. Shop steward activity tends to cluster in these areas, creating *clusters of contestation* and bargaining. This is not to pre-judge the precise nature, extent, or content of actual bargaining processes, which must be determined empirically. Nevertheless, the empirical findings and theoretical arguments of this research suggest that shop steward bargaining is likely to be far more common than has been recognised in recent industrial relations research. Although in considerably modified forms, shop stewards continue to occupy a significant place in workplace bargaining processes.

Structure of the thesis

The argument outlined above will be developed over six main chapters, following a straightforward structure. Next, Chapter 2 presents a critical overview of previous literature on shop stewards. The current standard view of shop stewards is outlined in detail, and a number of conceptual and methodological problems discussed. Then, the contrasting workplace bargainer view of shop stewards is presented, followed by a discussion of shop stewards typologies from previous accounts. Chapter 3 begins the theoretical work of developing an alternative approach to thinking about shop stewards, locating their role in the social relations of the workplace. This work provided conceptual clarity in the interpretation of research findings, and set out a basis for subsequent generalisation. Chapter 3 also develops the definition of bargaining missing from previous accounts.

Chapter 4 discusses the research design and methods adopted for the fieldwork, emphasising the importance of ethnographic research for investigating workplace relations.

Chapter 4 also introduces the diary-based method developed for this study. Finally, Chapter 4 presents background material on the two case studies; providing contextualisation, outlining formal collective bargaining arrangements, union structures, and so on. The main research findings are presented in two chapters. Chapter 5 presents the case study in local government, looking at shop steward organisation, the principal collective issues, patterns of individual representation, and relations between shop stewards and managers. Chapter 6 adopts a similar structure in presenting findings from the car plant case study.

Following the presentation of findings, Chapter 7 discusses their implications for theory. First, answers to the research questions are presented, strengths and limitations of the research assessed, and a basis for generalisation outlined. Next, it is argued that the findings of this research significantly support the critique of the current standard view outlined in Chapter 2, that elements of the workplace bargainer view remain valid, and that distinctive patterns of shop steward contestation suggest the influence of underlying dynamics. Then, an assessment is made of attempts to understand shop steward activity by using typologies, which, it is argued, are problematic. Finally, an alternative account of shop steward activity is presented, which argues that shop steward activity is best understood in terms of persistent dynamics of exploitation and conflict within workplace relations, mediated through changing patterns of bargaining opportunities and resources. A brief concluding chapter rounds up the main contributions of the research.

Two assumptions

Two important assumptions are made in the account that follows. The first concerns the experience of employment under capitalism, as lived by workers. In a telling phrase, Connell (1983: 31) refers to 'the life-long wrestling match with the experience of wage-labour'. It will be assumed, here, that this is what it feels like to be a worker under capitalism. In technical terms, the phrase encapsulates important features of workplace relations; exploitation, conflict and cooperation, effort bargain, frontier of control, and so on. More importantly, though, it captures the feeling that the struggle at work is not necessarily focussed on the employer: very often the struggle is with the job itself, just getting it done and getting home. Yet, it is the struggle with the job that often leads to the struggle with the employer. Of course, there are many coping mechanisms or 'survival strategies' (Noon and Blyton 2002: Ch.9) for dealing with the life-long wrestling match. These include a variety of workplace practices: fiddles, 'making out', joking, sabotage, whistle-blowing, or escaping

(summary overview in *ibid*.); and all manner of things that workers do to distract and console themselves when they are not at work, such as escapism, football, music, hobbies, consumerism. But the unrelenting nature of capitalism means that every time they go to work, workers face the same wrestling match, and another method for dealing with it will also always be there; the option of challenging (individually or collectively) the effort bargain, the frontier of control, and the employer. For this reason, capitalism is never able to do away with the tendency towards workplace conflict. As a result, one of the options for dealing with the experience of work, one of the potential coping strategies, is union organisation and representation. This research explores contemporary forms of dealing with the wrestling match by such means.

The second assumption concerns the character of the individuals who put themselves forward as shop stewards. In another memorable phrase, Hyman (1997: 318), when discussing the emergence of European Works Councils and information and consultation committees, says: 'intelligent trade unionists should have little difficulty in turning these facilities to their advantage'. While the actual degree of difficulty might be disputed, 'intelligent trade unionist' captures the spirit and character of shop stewards in the account below. Of course, there are no guarantees of successful outcomes, which would depend upon many factors outside the control of those individuals. Nevertheless, an assumption of this research is that shop stewards are indeed intelligent trade unionists, capable of surveying the circumstances in which they find themselves, and identifying features that might be turned to advantage.

Conclusion

The problem that this research set out to investigate can be viewed in a number of ways. Marx and Engels (1984: 482) famously commented that the class struggle is 'now hidden, now open'. If the classic studies of the 1960s and 1970s examined the open variety, this research investigated the hidden; the unseen arm-wrestling between managers and shop stewards that is not registered in strike figures or other official statistics. Alternatively, from an orthodox industrial relations perspective, this study examines an important area of workplace union representation that has become significantly under-researched. Consequently, renewed investigation would be timely and worthwhile, in order to assess

the impact of wider changes in employment on day-to-day workplace relations and the role of shop stewards. More metaphorically, it could be said that shop stewards used to carry a big stick – the strike weapon – which they could use to threaten management. Since they no longer carry the big stick, the question arises: what are they doing instead? Have they given up trying to influence management, as the current standard view claims? Or have they found other means by which to press their claims? However these questions are conceived, providing answers required considerable efforts of fieldwork, analysis, and theoretical clarification; which are detailed in the following chapters. Throughout these necessary detours, though, it should be born in mind that this research set out to answer one basic question – What do shop stewards do?

Chapter 2: Two views of shop stewards

The extensive industrial relations literature on workplace union organisation and bargaining presented a number of challenges for the current research, of which this chapter will address one in particular: the presence of two strongly contrasting views of shop stewards; the current standard view and the workplace bargainer view. Consequently, this project starts with an examination of these views, and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Previous accounts have also attempted to classify shop stewards according to various typologies, some of which, especially that of Batstone *et al.* (1977; 1978), have become well known and influential, and therefore warrant examination. In view of these considerations, this chapter begins with an exposition of the current standard view, followed by a critique that focuses on conceptual and methodological issues. The chapter then discusses the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards, before finally reviewing the typological approach to understanding shop steward activity. First, though, a brief historical overview of shop steward research is presented to contextualise the subsequent discussion.

Setting the scene

It is almost one hundred years since shop stewards first became a subject of interest for industrial relations researchers. Although shop steward organisation had emerged in industries such as engineering in the later nineteenth century, it was the explosion of militant steward organisation around the time of the First World War that led to the first serious research and pioneering studies from Cole (1973 [1923]) and Goodrich (1975 [1920]). Tough economic conditions in the 1920s and 1930s saw the retreat of steward organisation (Clegg 1979: 23) and a decline in research. Shop steward organisation began to recover in some industries – especially those related to rearmament – from the late 1930s, but it was after 1945, with conditions of full employment, that unions more generally were able gradually, if unevenly, to regain strength (Campbell *et al.* 2007: 81-88). The growth of strong workplace union organisation (*ibid*.: 94-98) saw the return of research interest in shop stewards. By the 1960s, concern about the balance of payments led governments to consider incomes policies, and an accompanying public debate developed about the causes of wages drift; for which shop stewards received significant blame (Marsh 1963; McCarthy 1966; Donovan 1968). Industrial relations research of this period established the view of

shop stewards as fundamentally tied to bargaining within the workplace (Terry 1978). This view received official endorsement when it was adopted as a central component of the Donovan Commission's analysis (Donovan 1968). Over the next decade, shop stewards and workplace bargaining featured in a blossoming of industrial relations research that remains unequalled (Kelly 1998: 6-7). By 1979, Clegg's (1979) overview gave shop stewards pride of place as the subject of his first substantive chapter.

Since then, however, shop steward organisation has been drastically reduced. During the prolonged period of union decline after 1980, steward numbers fell dramatically. This decline followed a period of extraordinary growth, from an estimated 175,000 in the mid-1960s to around 200,000 in the early 1970s, reaching an estimated 328,000 by 1980 (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 3-6). Shop steward numbers in manufacturing were reduced by the effects of recession in the early 1980s, but the growth of shop steward organisation in the public sector saw the total number rise to an estimated peak of 335,000 in 1984 (Darlington 2010: 127). The mid-1980s proved a turning point, however, and by 1990 the number of shop stewards had fallen precipitately to 178,000 (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 7). The decline continued, if more slowly. In 2004 WERS estimated that only 128,000 stewards remained, a decline of some 60 per cent since the mid-1980s (*ibid*.: 6). In the same period, union membership fell by around 40 per cent, so the ratio of union members to shop stewards rose sharply, from around 1:25 to 1:37 (Darlington 2010: 129). By 2004, there was a renewed 'thinning out' of shop stewards (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 124). Only 34 per cent of workplaces with a recognised union had a union rep on site in 2004; a figure which more or less stabilised at 32 per cent by 2011 (van Wanrooy, *et al.* 2013: 58-59). Nevertheless, in 2004, some 80 per cent of union members were employed in a workplace where a shop steward was present (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 8). Other estimates put the total number of shop stewards somewhat higher; for instance, the DTI estimated 146,000 in 2007 (Darlington 2010: 127). The TUC claim that the total number of union reps of all kinds is around 200,000 (Simms *et al.* 2013: 55). Estimates based on WERS 2011 suggest an increase in steward numbers to some 150,000 (Charlwood and Angrave 2014: 5). Strangely, the authors describe the increase from 2004 (128,000) to 2011 (150,000) as 'broad stability' (*ibid*.: 11). Overall, though, there can be no doubt that '[t]he shop steward network was ... considerably less extensive by the turn of the twenty-first century than it had been some twenty years earlier' (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 11). The question for this research, then, is what qualitative changes have accompanied this significant quantitative reduction?

2.1 The current standard view assessed

In recent years, a number of influential accounts have established the current standard view of shop stewards across industrial relations and related fields. Despite its widespread acceptance, the starting point for the present research is that this view is significantly problematic. Therefore, this section presents a critique. First, the current standard view is outlined, after which conceptual and methodological problems are examined. This critique also indicates directions for the alternative account developed in subsequent chapters.

The current standard view

According to the current standard view, the decline of trade union strength led to particular changes in shop steward activity. Specifically, the current standard view claims that shop stewards have lost their previous role in workplace bargaining. Terry (2004: 205) reaches 'the inescapable conclusion that workplace trade unions no longer negotiate to any significant extent on behalf of their members'. McIlroy and Daniels (2009: 141) agree: 'overall [shop stewards] no longer negotiate to any significant extent'. For Brown (2010: 263), 'negotiation over work organisation is no longer commonplace'. Commentators also note a decline in the range of issues subject to negotiation (Charlwood and Angrave 2014: 30-33; van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013: 80-82). Having lost their traditional role, it is claimed, shop stewards are restricted to consultation, at best; failing that, stewards 'simply received information' (Charlwood and Angrave 2014: 30). Terry (2003: 263) claims that 'consultation rather than negotiation is now the dominant collective workplace relationship.' Similarly, Brown (2010: 263) states, 'collective bargaining has tended to be[come] more consultative' (see also Brown and Nash 2008: 101).

Instead of bargaining, for Brown *et al.* (1998: 73-5), the main function of workplace unions is now to help employers through painful adjustments to increased competition (presumably, similar arguments would apply in the public sector). Likewise, Millward *et al.* (2000: 179) see workplace unions 'reduced to the role of legitimizing to the workforce the changes that management wanted to make'. Numerous accounts detect 'the growth of "hollow shell" trade unionism' (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 14-15; Heery *et al.* 2004: 1; McIlroy and Daniels

2009: 99), whereby collective bargaining arrangements continue to exist despite 'exerting negligible influence over managers' (Heery *et al.* 2004: 1; see also Blanchflower *et al.* 2007: 289; Millward *et al.* 2000: 138-83). In conclusion, Charlwood and Forth (2009: 89-90) state, 'Steward organisation can indeed be caricatured as a shell of facilities from which their procedural role and substantive achievement have been hollowed out.' Overall, then, in the current standard view, shop stewards are now peripheral figures in workplace relations in Britain.

Furthermore, according to these accounts, shop stewards have shifted from dealing with collective issues to individual representation and casework. Charlwood and Forth (2008: 15) claim 'the balance of stewards' activities... [is] tilted less towards the determination of the wage-effort bargain and more towards individual casework' (see also van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013: 147-56). The growth of individual employment rights is often seen as encouraging moves away from collectivism (Dickens 2012; Dickens and Hall 2003). The huge influence of the WIRS/WERS analysis (Colvin 2011; Milward *et al.* 2006), to which the distinction between individual and collective issues is integral, means that this view appears very widely. For example, from the Marxist left, Darlington (2010: 128) says that shop stewards today 'spend less time than previously on collective bargaining issues such as wages and conditions and more time on representing individual members in relation to welfare work, grievances and disciplinary cases'. Similarly, a study of new forms of workplace activism assumes 'an increasing tension between collective organisation and individual representation' (Moore 2010: 30; see also McKay and Moore 2007). For the current standard view, this distinction between collective and individual issues underpins the perceived shift in shop steward activity away from the workplace bargainer role. All in all, the current standard view paints a bleak picture of shop stewards unable to influence management over collective issues, reduced to helping out union members when they experience individual difficulties.

Conceptually, the current standard view is built around a series of distinctions. Besides distinguishing sharply between collective issues and individual representation, the current standard view also sees a clear distinction between negotiation and consultation. For Terry (2010: 280), in negotiation,

> 'Eventual agreement represents acceptance by both parties and hence can be characterized as a shared decision or … "joint regulation". In this sense therefore

negotiation constitutes a replacement of managerial prerogative by a commitment to joint regulation of the employment relationship.'

By contrast,

'Consultation differs from negotiation in several important respects. First, it is a process that retains the managerial right to take the final decision. Thus ... it is ultimately a process of unilateral regulation' (*ibid*.: 281).

Similarly, for Charlwood and Terry (2007: 322), negotiation is defined as joint regulation, while consultation is:

'a fig leaf cover for management unilateralism ... [which] does not require the deployment of bargaining power [by unions] and leaves final decision-taking rights with employers'.

Thus, consultation is seen as a form of unilateral management decision-making. Furthermore, it is argued, genuine negotiation requires the use or threat of sanctions as 'bargaining power' (*ibid*.). The marked decline of strike activity shows that stewards are not using bargaining sanctions to any significant extent: therefore shop stewards cannot be bargaining, *by definition* (Terry 2010: 281).

These sharp conceptual distinctions enable the current standard view to construct a hierarchy of discrete bargaining forms: negotiation implies joint regulation; consultation leaves decisions in the hands of management; provision of information implies a union with no real influence over management; finally, management increasingly acts entirely without reference to the union (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 152-3; Terry 2010). Although Gospel and Willman (2003: 145) describe the 'rising hierarchy' view as 'increasingly questionable', the point is not developed, and these categories have not been significantly challenged. Yet, these conceptual distinctions are highly questionable, and without them the whole edifice of the current standard view of shop stewards is severely weakened. A conceptual critique is presented next.

Negotiation and consultation
The current standard view relies upon a sharp conceptual distinction between negotiation and consultation. Yet, although this distinction is found in legal and regulatory contexts (Acas 2014a: 19-28) and in textbooks (Hyman 1997: 316), it is doubtful that it can be maintained in the messy reality of workplace relations, where 'consultation inevitably

overlaps with negotiation' (Burchill 2008: 85; see also Marginson 2014). Definitions of workplace phenomena are not fixed, but emerge within complex social processes. As Batstone *et al.* (1978: 13) showed, even a feature as apparently robust as a strike is subject to 'social processes of strike definition', which determine whether a work stoppage is seen as a strike, or merely 'a pause for discussion' (Turner *et al.* 1967: 53). There seems little reason to assume that similar processes may not also apply to how particular workplace practices become defined as negotiation or consultation. Indeed, Hyman (1997: 316) has argued that the erosion of formal bargaining arrangements means that 'in practice the distinction [between collective bargaining and consultation] has become increasingly blurred over the years and will continue to be so'. This notion of *blurring* is appealing, and can be applied to other categories of workplace relations, as will be seen in what follows. Conceptually, then, the distinction between negotiation and consultation appears more problematic than the current standard view allows.

The distinction drawn by the current standard view between negotiation and consultation draws on an older literature on *joint consultation*; a form of collective arrangements which first came to prominence at the time of the First World War and the Whitley process (Lyddon 2007). Joint consultation was strengthened considerably during the Second World War, with the establishment of 'joint consultation committees', intended to increase production by encouraging an exchange of information between management and unions. In many large workplaces, joint consultation committees continued into the 1950s (McCarthy 1966: 32). Meanwhile terms and conditions remained subject to formal negotiations, under separate collective bargaining arrangements. On paper, then, the separation between collective bargaining and joint consultation was the fore-runner of the distinction between negotiation and consultation claimed by the current standard view.

However, when researchers looked at joint consultation in practice things were not nearly so straightforward. Researchers found it was often difficult to distinguish the outcomes of joint consultation from those of collective bargaining, because consultation could lead to genuine agreements between managers and union representatives (McCarthy 1966: 34). For Clegg and Chester (1954: 326), the distinction between joint consultation and negotiation could become 'blurred'. Furthermore, joint consultation was a genuine and significant *increase* in the scope of collective bargaining, which was largely limited to rates of pay, hours of work, and working conditions (*ibid.*: 331). By contrast, joint consultation

saw union representatives in discussions with employers on issues such as company finances, plans for investment, new machinery, production schedules, changes to work organisation. Thus, far from being sharply separated, negotiation and consultation comprise a 'double helix' (Wedderburn 1997: 30) running through the history of British industrial relations.

Although research in this area is limited, there is more recent evidence of the blurring of negotiation and consultation. For instance, WERS has shown that in workplaces without trade unions, 'a surprising amount of negotiation is reported on health and safety and on pay and conditions' (Gospel and Willman 2003: 150). Where unions are present, less negotiation is reported on pay, but more on health and safety (*ibid*.). The finding that employers negotiate over pay where no unions are present poses difficulties for the current standard view: if negotiation requires the use or threat of sanctions, it is hard to see how non-unionised workplaces conduct more negotiations than unionised ones. The figures for health and safety are particularly important, though, because in this area the law is well-known: employers are required to *consult* (Acas 2014a). Thus, in an area where there is a clear legal framework of consultation, almost a fifth of employers report that they *negotiate* with union representatives (Gospel and Willman 2003: 150). This suggests that managers' definitions of negotiation and consultation are less clear than the current standard view assumes; that is, a 'blurring' of negotiation and consultation rather than sharp separation. Furthermore, research has found that formal arrangements need not coincide with workplace reality. For instance, in a shipyard with a single-union recognition agreement, managers regularly bargained with several unions (McBride 2004: 128-30). At Royal Mail, management policy designed to exclude union representatives from formal bargaining resulted in widespread *informal* bargaining (Beale 2003: 84). Findlay *et al.* (2009: 236) found that even when managers did not deal with stewards directly, they were 'ever-present ghosts at the management table', influencing management decisions. Once more, this evidence undermines the sharp distinctions of the current standard view.

Further evidence of the blurring of negotiation and consultation can be found in WERS data from union representatives, who consistently report higher levels of negotiation than do managers (Brown and Nash 2008). Although WERS data from union representatives is somewhat limited, in 1998 and 2004, they reported roughly twice as much negotiation as

did managers.[1] Unfortunately, the authors effectively dismiss these findings in preference for managers' statements. The authors comment on the union representatives' responses:

> 'We might speculate that this does not reflect actual behaviour, so much as the fading of memories of what constituted negotiation in a past era when collective bargaining was more robust' (*ibid*.: 100).

It would be preferable, though, to replace speculation with investigation.

While most recent accounts have neglected such complexity, Hyman (1997: 318) has been more astute, arguing that as traditional bargaining arrangements become less influential,

> 'collective bargaining may at times constitute a hollow shell ... Other processes of representation may at times provide resources that strengthen the potential for effective negotiation.'

Hyman's use of the term 'effective negotiation' introduces a point that will become a recurring theme of this research; namely, an emphasis on the social content of the process, not simply the institutional form. Thus, Hyman (*ibid*.: 318) foresees that trade unionists may take up the formally very limited opportunities presented by European Works Councils and Information and Consultation regulations, 'turning these facilities to advantage in their handling of collective bargaining'. Subsequently, Waddington (2011: 159) documents exactly this development, showing that European Works Councils have at times 'assumed a negotiation function'. The insight that trade unionists might pursue bargaining via novel institutional arrangements again supports the argument that negotiation and consultation may become blurred and difficult to separate.

Altogether, then, both historical and contemporary evidence suggests that the sharp distinction made by the current standard view between negotiation and consultation is highly questionable. Next, discussion moves to a second conceptual distinction central to the current standard view of shop stewards; that between collective issues and individual representation.

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[1] WERS 2011 reports little change in management responses, but does not report responses from union representatives (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013: 85).

Collective issues and individual representation

The current standard view makes a second sharp distinction between collective issues and individual representation. Unfortunately, the relationship between collective and individual issues is seldom explored in industrial relations and related literatures. While the classic literature commonly focussed on collective bargaining (Flanders 1975), recent accounts have stressed the 'individualisation' of employment (Blyton *et al.* 2011; Dickens 2012; Dickens and Hall 2003). In reality, though, employment exhibits both collective *and* individual aspects. Notably, the Webbs (1902: 178-9) tie together individual interests and collective representation in their definition of collective bargaining as a process which sets terms and conditions for individual workers by a process 'in which their interests have been dealt with by representatives'. Locating the role of shop stewards in the nexus of these issues therefore requires conceptual clarification and empirical investigation, rather than a priori judgements (*cf*. Townsend and Richards 2011).

It is important not to start with a stereotypical view of shop stewards in previous eras. McCarthy (1966) and McCarthy and Parker (1968) explored the question 'What do shop stewards bargain about?', and listed issues including incentive schemes, special payments, allowances and grading, job evaluation and merit money, conditions, clothing, hours of work, discipline, and other grievances and claims (McCarthy 1966: 10-14). Many of these remain familiar today, and plainly entail a mix of both individual and collective issues. Furthermore:

> 'in every workplace with shop stewards they acted as spokesmen [sic.] for those facing disciplinary charges, and here the aim was to secure removal or reduction of the sanctions proposed. Thus examples were given where dismissals were changed to suspensions, suspensions to admonitions, and admonitions to apologies – all following the intervention of a steward. Naturally, they were not always successful' (*ibid*.: 12-13).

The importance of individual representation even during the heyday of workplace bargaining suggests important continuities with contemporary steward activity. Furthermore, as Kelly (1998: Ch.4) has shown, lack of collective action cannot be taken as evidence of lack of collectivism. It does seem likely, though, that the widespread introduction of formal procedures for many workplace issues has had an impact on shop steward activity. Procedures for grievance and disciplinary issues, for capability and performance (McKay and Moore 2007; Taylor 2013) now feature significantly in shop stewards' workloads. Consequently, the relative proportion of individual casework in shop

steward activity is more significant (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 215).

Unfortunately, the literature on individual workplace conflict is underdeveloped (Saundry and Wibberley 2014). Nevertheless, what research there is suggests that a complex interweaving of collective and individual aspects continues. For instance, in unionised workplaces, informal contacts between managers and union representatives are important for resolving individual cases (Saundry and Dix 2014; Saundry *et al.* 2011; Saundry and Wibberley 2014). Kelly (1998: 136, n.3) introduces the category of 'semi-collective' issues, defined as individual issues pursued by collective means. Conversely, other evidence suggests that collective issues may be pursued by individual means. Although the Employment Tribunal (ET) system has been criticised for weakness in protecting workers from unfair treatment at work (Dickens 2012; Dickens and Hall 2003), individual cases in the form of ET rulings can and do have significant impacts upon collective conditions of employment. In 2004, WERS (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 227-8) found that for workplaces with more than 500 employees, some 60 per cent had faced an ET case in the preceding 12 months, and around half had changed workplace procedures as a consequence. Clearly, some individual cases have significant collective impacts. The huge increase in ET claims since around 1990 (Renton 2012: 1) suggests that shop steward may have developed alternative means for pressuring management following the decline of strikes. Although this shift has generated considerable debate (Colling 2012; Dix *et al.* 2009; Drinkwater and Ingram 2005; Kersley *et al.* 2006: Ch.8; Knight and Latreille 2000; Latreille *et al.* 2007), it is clear evidence for the co-mingling of individual and collective issues, not sharp separation. Again, this undermines the conceptual framework of the current standard view.

Problems of methodology

The current standard view is built almost entirely on evidence from the WIRS/WERS series of surveys, but this heavy reliance on quantitative research presents further difficulties. In part, this is because large-scale surveys are generally ill-suited to exploring micro-level processes in the workplace (Greene 2001: 5; Strauss and Whitfield 1998: 15). However, there are particular problem with WIRS/WERS data regarding shop stewards, because it is mainly based on responses from managers (Terry 2010; Brown 2010; Brown and Nash, 2008; Brown *et al.* 2009). Yet, WERS treats managers' responses unproblematically. That is, when a manager reports no negotiation with union representatives, that is taken as evidence that in fact no negotiation is taking place. Although WERS includes evidence from

senior union representatives, it is relatively limited and often downplayed in favour of management statements (for instance, Brown and Nash 2008, discussed above). However, this unquestioning methodology is 'sociologically naive' (Hill 1974: 213), because social actors' statements reflect not only their experiences but also their values and norms (*ibid*.: 226-35). WERS fails to take this into account. This matters because it is well documented that unitary views have become widespread among managers in recent years, and unitarism is normatively strongly opposed to bargaining (Edwards 2003: 10). Indeed, management has been active in 'seeking to redefine the workplace ideology of collective relations' (Terry 2004: 214). Consequently, given that large parts of British management wish to see shop stewards excluded from management decisions, manager statements on this issue should not be taken at face value.

A similar point is made by Marchington and Parker (1990: 224):

> 'One of the problems with research based on questionnaires sent to senior managers is that it is better at identifying intentions and aspirations than establishing the precise nature of employee relations in practice.'

As a result, 'the practice of employee relations on the shop floor rarely conforms with policy pronouncements or intentions espoused at corporate headquarters' (*ibid*.: 258). This is not to say that management statements on workplace relations should be ignored; rather, they should be considered part of the phenomenon under examination. The informality of workplace relations can involve managers in a shifting complex of deals, accommodations, and hidden practices (Edwards 1989). Indeed, previous research has identified managers who denied bargaining in principle, but bargained regularly in practice (Goodrich 1975: 62; Turner *et al.* 1967: 92). Yet, this possibility remains unexplored in WERS-based research. Overall, the reliance of the current standard view on management surveys must be considered problematic.

Further methodological difficulty with WERS data derives from the construction of the questionnaire. Where a union is recognised, WERS asks managers a series of questions about bargaining arrangements, including:

> 'Are there any committees of managers and employees at this workplace, primarily concerned with consultation, rather than negotiation? These committees may be called joint consultative committees, works councils or representative forums' (WERS 2011: 40).

Subsequently, managers are asked about a list of potential bargaining issues. In 2004, these included pay, hours of work, holiday entitlement, recruitment, training, grievance and disciplinary procedures, performance appraisals, and health and safety (WERS 2004: 63-65; Brown and Nash 2008: 101; this list was reduced in 2011, see WERS 2011: 52-54). Managers were asked:

> 'For each of these issues I'd like to know whether management normally negotiates, consults, informs, or does not involve unions at all over these matters' (WERS 2011: 52).

Managers' responses are then compiled as quantitative data for subsequent analysis. Besides the difficulties discussed above concerning managers' responses, a further significant problem arises; namely, that the distinction between negotiation and consultation does not emerge from the data, but is built into the survey *a priori*. The WERS questionnaire assumes the existence of these distinctions and places them in a hierarchy. That is, the WERS methodology assumes what it claims to find. As a result, WERS findings in this area must be considered significantly problematic.

This section has outlined the current standard view of shop stewards, and presented a critique of its conceptual and methodological shortcomings. This critique also points towards an alternative approach. Methodologically, it underlines the need for 'a more rigorous empirical analysis of the workplace' (Hill 1974: 226) if the contemporary role of shop stewards is to be properly understood. Conceptually, it indicates the need to reappraise older frameworks for understanding shop stewards – as presented in the next section.

2.2 The classic accounts

So far, this chapter has outlined problems in the current standard view of shop stewards, and suggested that an alternative approach is both necessary and possible. As a first step towards this end, this section gives a critical overview of accounts of shop stewards produced during the classic period of workplace research, the 1960s and 1970s. It will be

argued that the contribution of these studies remains relevant to the study of shop stewards, despite significant changes in employment relations and workplace practices. First, the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards is outlined, after which discussion moves to the various typologies developed to account for variation in steward behaviour.

The shop steward as workplace bargainer

During the long post-war boom, informal workplace bargaining became widespread, and the profile of shop stewards in industrial relations research rose steadily. From the point of view of the present study, the principal conceptual contribution of the resulting wave of classic studies was the notion of the shop steward as workplace bargainer. Accounts from this period 'define shop stewards as negotiators first and foremost, and this definition has been largely adopted ever since' (Terry 1978: 17, n.62, citing Clegg *et al.* 1961). This conception of the shop steward underlies the Donovan Commission conclusions regarding 'two systems of industrial relations', the formal and the informal: 'The bargaining which takes place within factories … usually takes place piece-meal ... Unwritten understandings and "custom and practice" predominate' (Donovan 1968: 261). McCarthy and Parker (1968: 53-56) found that while the scope of shop steward bargaining varied, it was more widespread and established than was previously thought, and was generally accepted by managers. Famously, Donovan (1968: 56) concluded:

> 'For the most part, the steward is viewed by others, and views himself [sic.], as an accepted, reasonable and even moderating influence; more of a lubricant than an irritant.'

Flanders (1968: 552) characterised shop steward bargaining as 'largely informal, largely fragmented and largely autonomous'. Overall, Donovan consolidated what became the accepted view of shop stewards, as 'essentially shopfloor bargainers' (McCarthy 1966: 70; McCarthy and Parker 1968: 65).

The analysis of the role of shop stewards in workplace bargaining was further developed by Brown (1973). Although his study focuses on the 'hot-house conditions' of piecework bargaining, Brown (*ibid*.: 23) argues, 'the analysis should have a relevance beyond the confines of piecework payment systems'. The study centres on informal bargaining, and a central feature is 'custom and practice' (C&P). Brown develops Flanders' notion of shop stewards as the 'principal guardians' of C&P (cited *ibid*.: 131). Brown (*ibid*.: 127-32) also

challenges Donovan's description of the steward as 'more a lubricant than an irritant' (see above), finding that in some circumstances shop stewards deliberately foster disputes in pursuit of particular aims. Moreover, Brown was not the only researcher to take this view (Darlington 1994: 38; Terry 1977; 1978; Turner *et al.* 1967: 214).

Brown (1973: 136) develops a model of 'shop-stewardliness', which is seen as comprising 'four implicit principles of shop steward behaviour' (*ibid*.: 133). These principles are: 'the pursuit of unity … among his [*sic*] constituents' (*ibid*.: 133); 'the pursuit of … equity among his [*sic*] constituents' (*ibid*.: 133); 'maintaining a good bargaining relationship with management', with trust identified as particularly important (*ibid*.: 134); and, 'the reduction of uncertainty' for constituency members, which is 'a very broad heading' (*ibid*.: 136). Brown (*ibid*.: 135) found that stewards gained a number of benefits from good bargaining relations with managers, including reducing uncertainty and 'speeding up the bargaining process'; indeed, for Brown, 'trust appears to be an unmixed asset in negotiations' (Walton and McKersie 1991, cited *ibid*.: 135).

For Brown (1973), stewards were centrally involved in maintaining frameworks of informal rules and understandings governing bargaining over piece-rates. Bargaining might be collective but equally might take place between rate-fixers and individual workers (*ibid*.: 131). By linking collectively established custom and practice with individual bargaining, Brown's account bridges the conceptual gap between collective and individual issues (see also, Partridge 1978). Brown (1973: 6, n.6, *et passim*) also makes significant use of the notion of 'effort bargain'. Unlike elements of shop steward typologies such as 'union principles' (see below), the effort bargain is a continuing feature of workplace relations, even though the terms of the bargain have shifted markedly in recent years. Furthermore, while Brown's research centres around effort bargaining, aspects of shop steward behaviour such as 'the pursuit of equity' and 'the reduction of uncertainty' correspond closely to 'frontier of control' issues. Consequently, Brown's model is potentially applicable to a variety of workplace practices.

Significantly, by the close of the classic period of workplace studies it was becoming clear that shop steward activity could change its focus. Edwards and Scullion (1982: Ch.7) showed that with the shift from piecework to measured day work, rather than the decline in workplace bargaining that many had predicted, stewards shifted the focus of their activities

within the wage-effort bargain from bargaining over wages towards bargaining over effort. Furthermore, stewards' organisation and activities were found to be significantly influenced by historical development and workplace traditions (Terry and Edwards 1988). Increasingly, it became clear that steward responses could not simply be inferred from structural factors (*ibid*.: 216). Rather, similar structural determinants can and do produce varied outcomes.

It is important to remember that the bargaining practices described in many of the classic studies were far from evenly spread across employment (*cf*. Edwards and Scullion 1982). It is well established, though often forgotten, that these studies were heavily concentrated in a small number of the most strongly unionised industries; what Terry (1978: 3) called 'the engineering paradigm' (see also, Terry 1988). Other industries, and earlier periods, such as the 1930s, had seen much weaker shop steward organisation (Clegg 1979: 23). In one of the few studies of less strongly organised workplaces during the classic period, Armstrong *et al.* (1981) found far less evidence of firmly established workplace bargaining practices; in particular, an absence of the custom and practice traditions of the engineering industry. Similarly, studies of more quiescent workforces in the 1970s (Nichols and Armstrong 1976; Nichols and Beynon 1977) appear closer to contemporary workplaces than do the auto factories of Batstone *et al.* (1977; 1978) or Beynon (1984). Consequently, the shift in workplace relations since the 1970s might be less than it appears when judged against the most strongly organised examples. Moreover, insofar as the effort bargain and frontier of control are continuing features of workplace relations, it is possible that elements from the workplace bargainer view might still be recognisable in contemporary shop steward activity.

Shop steward typologies

The classic studies also proposed various typologies for categorising different approaches to the shop steward role, of which the best known was developed by Batstone *et al.* (1977). Batstone *et al.* (*ibid*.: 34) distinguished among shop stewards on the basis of variations in the way they dealt with workplace issues, most notably contrasting 'leaders' and 'populists'. The typology has two dimensions: degree of attachment to 'union principles' (*ibid*.: 24-29), and relationship with union members (*ibid*.: 29-32). According to this typology, leader stewards had stronger attachment to 'union principles' and sought a *representative* relationship with members, attempting to influence which issues were pursued. By contrast, populist stewards had less attachment to union principles and tended to have a *delegate* relationship with members, acting as a mouthpiece for members' grievances. Within the

factory studied it was found that the well-organised shopfloor had a higher proportion of leader stewards, whereas the more recently organised and less strong staff side had relatively more populist stewards (*ibid*.: 36). Leader stewards tended to foster 'good bargaining relations' (*ibid*.: Ch.7) with managers, which they valued as a source of information and influence. Significantly, leader stewards secured better outcomes for the members they represented than did populist stewards (*ibid*.: Ch.10). Batstone *et al.* (*ibid*.: 45-52) also identified a 'quasi-elite' (QE) of senior (leader) stewards who were influential in decision-making processes within the shop steward body.

Despite an enduring influence, this typology has drawn criticism, particularly over the conception of leaders and populists. Darlington (1994) develops a sustained critique, in particular taking exception to the evident preference for leader stewards over populists, and for 'good bargaining relations' over consistent opposition to management (*ibid*.: 14-26). Willman (1980) takes a similar view, seeing in the close relationship with managers signs of 'management sponsorship', though Marchington and Parker (1990) found little difference in practice between supposedly 'management-sponsored' and more 'independent' union organisation. Another line of criticism argued that shop stewards cannot be categorised according to leadership style, because individual stewards adopt different styles according to the issue and circumstances (Broad 1983; Pedler 1973; Partridge 1978; Willman 1980). But, as Marchington and Armstrong (1983: 34) point out, it is insufficient to note variation; the point is to explain it, which the Batstone typology attempts to do. Overall, though, these accounts agree that Batstone *et al.*'s first dimension is the more secure; that is, how much stewards attempt to shape the issues raised by members.

The second dimension, 'union principles', presents greater difficulties. While it has been criticised as vague and 'too generalised' (Willman 1980: 41, 48), the real difficulty is that it is too specific. Batstone *et al.* (1977: 11) acknowledge the difficulty of defining 'union principles', yet pick ones that suit their purpose, such as 'collective unity' and 'fairness'. However, no firm grounds are provided for this choice. Empirically, Marchington and Armstrong (1983: 37) found that stewards commonly expressed strong support for 'union principles', but with little agreement as to what those principles might be. An alternative approach is offered by the Webbs (1902: 595) who comment,

> 'As soon as it is realised that Trade Unionists are inspired, not by any single doctrine ... we no longer look to them for any one consistent or uniform policy'.

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This recognition of the varied arguments and rationales used by trade unionists offers a far more flexible approach for research in this area. Such an approach can also accommodate a notion of *strategy* on the part of shop stewards (Marchington and Armstrong 1983: 3). For instance, looking again at Batstone's two groups of shop stewards, on the shopfloor and in the offices, it is plausible that stewards in different circumstances might emphasise different principles. A strong, well-established shopfloor organisation might see stewards stress collective unity principles against excessive sectionalism; meanwhile, stewards among newly organised workers might stress principles of social justice and the right to organise (Batstone *et al.* 1977: 27-28). It is difficult to see why some of these principle should be considered more 'trade union' in nature than others, in the way Batstone *et al.* propose. The difficulty of defining 'union principles' led Marchington and Armstrong to dispense with this dimension altogether, replacing it with 'integration into the steward network' (*ibid*.: 37, 40) to generate a modified typology (*ibid*.: 42-46). Today, however, the dilapidation of steward networks suggests this dimension is less likely to be helpful. Overall, difficulties in this area suggest that the dimension of 'trade union principles' is unlikely be helpful in analysing the activity of contemporary shop stewards.

Darlington (1994) proposes an alternative model based on three dimensions: the relationship of stewards to management, characterised by 'a tension between *resistance* and *accommodation*'; the relationship of stewards to members, characterised by 'a tension between *democracy* and *bureaucracy*'; and, the relationship of stewards to union full-time officers, characterised by 'a tension between *independence* and *dependence*' (*ibid*.: 28-31, original emphasis). In a useful counter to Batstone's more fixed categories, Darlington provides considerable evidence to show that shop steward activity can be charted on these dimensions, and that steward organisation shifts between approaches, even adopting divergent styles simultaneously when dealing with differing issues (*ibid*.: 20-22). However, Darlington's conceptualisation of the three dimensions of his model as dynamic contradictions (*ibid*.: 33) is problematic. Although there certainly are tensions in the relations of shop stewards along the dimensions that Darlington identifies, it is not clear that they form dynamic internal contradictions in the Marxist sense. Indeed, the motive forces that Darlington identifies as driving the three dimensions remain largely outside the three-dimensional model, in factors as diverse as 'product market crises', 'hostile economic and political climate', defeats of major unions during the 1980s, the influence of 'new

realism', fear of plant closures and unemployment, and weakness of a left alternative within the labour movement (*ibid*.: 260-261). In theoretical terms, then, Darlington's model appears more as a useful heuristic device for charting and categorising shop steward activity, rather than a theoretical explanation of that activity (see further discussion, Section 7.3).

Unusually, Darlington (1994: 72) also considers the political beliefs of shop stewards, which were found to be influential in steward leadership styles (see also, Marchington and Armstrong 1983: 46). More recently, Darlington (2009a; 2009b) has re-emphasised the role that socialist militants often play in developing robust workplace union organisation. Although it remains rare for industrial relations research to take up the issue of politics, a number of studies have pointed to links between socialist militancy and trade union activism (Cohen 2011; Darlington 2013; Gall 2003a; Hinton 1973; Kelly 1988; McIlroy 2007a; 2007b).

In summary, while the analytical framework can be questioned, the lasting insight of Batstone *et al.* (1977) is the identification of differentiation among shop stewards, who approached their role in different ways. Critics of the leader/populist typology have proposed alternative models, but these generally remain descriptive, and important questions regarding underlying causes and dynamics remain unanswered. Underlying all these typologies is the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards. Despite many changes since the classic studies were carried out, insofar as the effort bargain and frontier of control continue to be features of workplace relations, the possibility remains that shop steward activity may display elements of continuity with those studies. An advantage of Brown's (1973) approach is that it leaves open the question of what methods shop stewards adopt to pursue the ends of 'shop-stewardliness'. This conceptual flexibility would allow for the purposeful adoption of different methods on the part of shop stewards, according to different issues and circumstances, and according to subjective influences such as political commitment. However, before such factors can be considered, it is necessary to establish a theoretical basis for claiming some degree of continuity in workplace relations from the time of the classic studies to the present. The next chapter will commence this task.

Conclusion

As this chapter has made clear, previous literature in this area contains two contrasting views of shop stewards. In the classic studies, shop stewards are seen primarily as workplace bargainers. By contrast, the current standard view sees shop stewards as no longer significantly involved in bargaining, restricted to dealing with individual issues, with no significant bargaining sanctions at their disposal. Despite its widespread diffusion through industrial relations and related fields, the above discussion has shown that the current standard view contains significant conceptual and methodological difficulties. In particular, the sharp conceptual distinctions of the current standard view, between negotiation and consultation, and between collective issues and individual representation, must be considered problematic. It does not follow, though, that the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards is adequate. Too much has changed in workplace relations for the classic accounts still to be sufficient. Consequently, an alternative approach is required.

The argument presented in this chapter therefore poses the question as to what alternative approach might provide a better framework for grasping the activity of contemporary shop stewards. One important conclusion is the need to adopt different research methods if the methodological problems of the current standard view are to be avoided. Consequently, an alternative methodological approach is presented in Chapter 4. The second conclusion of this chapter is that an alternative conceptual framework must avoid the sharp distinctions and formalism of the current standard view. Therefore, the next chapter develops a firm theorisation of the underlying structure and dynamics of workplace relations, within which shop steward activity and workplace bargaining processes can be (re)conceptualised.

Chapter 3: Bargaining and workplace relations

Industrial relations research has a long-standing insecurity about theory (Kelly 1998: 15). Famously, the once dominant Oxford school thought an ounce of theory for every pound of facts was the correct proportion (Cappelli 1985, cited in Friedman and McDaniel 1998: 122).[1] Not surprisingly, then, empirical research is the 'most potent tradition' (Brown and Wright 1994: 153) in industrial relations. Descriptive accounts, both qualitative and quantitative, predominate (Kelly 1998: 16). Typologies are numerous but general frameworks for understanding workplace relations are far less developed (*ibid*.: 18-21). Dunlop's (1958) 'system' continues to make appearances in textbooks almost 60 years after publication (e.g. Williams 2014: 8), despite its obvious encumbrance of Parsonian functionalism. Even the wave of Marxist critiques during the 1970s left little in the way of lasting theoretical contribution. While other areas of social science witnessed an 'explosion' of Marxist theory during the 1970s (Callinicos 2007: 261), the leading Marxist in industrial relations saw Marxism not in terms of developed theory, but as 'a particular *perspective* to the understanding of this world', which 'could be summed up without too much distortion in just four words: *totality*, *change*, *contradiction*, and *practice*' (Hyman 1975a: 4, original emphasis). Although Hyman (*ibid*.: 4-7) expands a little on these four words, no attempt is made to link industrial relations theoretically to an account of the political economy of capitalism. No wonder, then, that it took a historian, not an industrial relations specialist, to note the poverty of Marxism in industrial relations research (Howell 2005: 12).

Unfortunately, Hyman's (1975a: x) hope that 'this book [may] soon become redundant ... by stimulating more, and better, Marxist scholarship' was never fulfilled. Subsequently, Marxism went into full decline in industrial relations, as elsewhere. In the related field of labour process theory (LPT), which originated in the Marxist resurgence of the 1970s, the labour theory of value was placed firmly outside its 'core' framework (Thompson 1990: 99). Before long, the race towards Foucault was in full flow (Thompson and Smith 2010: 18). The return of LPT from those further shores has not, though, seen much by way of fresh theorisation, and analysis is still dominated by familiar dichotomies of control and

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[1] Ackers (2007: 79) has Clegg saying, 'an ounce of fact is worth a pound of theory'.

resistance, or the control–resistance–consent triad (Thompson and Smith 2010: 11). In industrial relations, the break from Marxism was systematised by Edwards (1986), and has since been reinforced by Hyman's (1999) rejection of the 'imagined solidarities' of class. The now dominant 'radical pluralism' (Ackers 2014: 2608) has generated little systematic theorisation. Compared with other areas of social science, industrial relations theory remains significantly underdeveloped.

The theoretical weakness of industrial relations matters because adequate explanation requires theory as a framework for the analysis and interpretation of empirical findings. More particularly, for the present research, any attempt to generalise from case study research depends upon theoretical clarity (Section 4.1). Consequently, an important priority of the present research was to establish a firm theoretical basis for understanding the dynamics of workplace relations and bargaining processes, and therefore for grasping the role of shop stewards within those relations and processes. Given the weaknesses outlined above, considerable conceptual and theoretical preparation was required to resolve some of the difficulties, and to assemble a more adequate framework for theorising shop stewards within an overall account of employment under capitalist relations of production. This chapter presents that work and the solutions proposed.

The chapter starts from the same place as much recent scholarship in the field, with a discussion of the employment relationship; which has correctly been seen as a fundamental concept of industrial relations (Ackers 2014; Edwards 1986; 2003). Unlike other recent accounts, though, the employment relationship is then linked theoretically to two central features of workplace relations; namely, the effort bargain and frontier of control. Next, the chapter presents a framework for understanding workplace bargaining processes, based on a two part conception of *bargaining opportunities* and *bargaining resources*. The remainder of the chapter develops a theoretical discussion of other aspects of workplace relations. First, features of day-to-day workplace relations; specifically, conflict, cooperation and managerial relations. Then, discussion turns to interests; a notion which has been largely discarded from industrial relations, but which offers the potential for theorising non-deterministic links between structure and agency. Finally, the chapter develops a definition of bargaining, and explores some of its implications. Incorporating elements from bargaining theory, this definition was indispensible for the present study, and represents a genuine contribution to industrial relations theory.

3.1 Towards an alternative account

This section develops a theoretical approach to understanding shop steward activity that avoids difficulties encountered by the current standard view, by starting from the dynamics of workplace relations rather than from formal bargaining arrangements. Analysis starts from the nature of the employment relationship, and the effort bargain and frontier of control to which it gives rise, which emerge as relatively robust features of workplace relations. The discussion then considers bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources as influences upon patterns of shop steward activity. Although little recent research has focussed directly on shop stewards, they have made appearances in a range of other studies, which are drawn upon here. The discussion brings together concepts that will be familiar from previous industrial relations scholarship, but linked in a more theoretically explicit manner than is usual.

The employment relationship, effort bargain, and frontier of control

In common with much recent industrial relations research, this account takes as its starting point the nature of the employment relationship (Blyton *et al.* 2011; Edwards 1986; 2003), which has important implications for the study of shop stewards. As Brown (2010: 255) states:

> 'negotiation permeates the relationship between employer and workers ...
> Employment is, by its nature, an open and unusually long-term relationship …
> Bargaining is central to how employers and workers cope with this transactional
> uncertainty'.[2]

That is, the nature of the employment relationship means that some form of bargaining will be a continuing characteristic of relations between employers and employees. This is not to pre-judge the form or content of such bargaining, still less its outcomes, which must be determined by empirical investigation. Nevertheless, the employment relationship structures the context within which shop stewards are active (Section 3.2).

Two features of workplace relations root shop steward activity in the dynamic of the employment relationship: the effort bargain (Baldamus 1961; Edwards 1986) and the

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[2] This initial insight is seemingly lost in Brown's subsequent analysis of shop stewards and workplace bargaining.

frontier of control (Goodrich 1975; Hyman 1975b; Edwards 1986). The effort bargain (Baldamus 1961; Edwards 1986) refers to the amount of effort that workers expend in the course of their employment. Since effort is exchanged for wages, an alternative term is the wage-effort bargain, though the two terms have essentially the same meaning: here, *effort bargain* will be preferred, except where the wage aspect is specifically emphasised. Although Baldamus sees effort in physical terms, there seems to be no reason not to include the mental effort of non-manual workers in this category.

The widespread intensification of work in recent decades (Brown *et al.* 2006) can be seen as a shift in the effort bargain in favour of employers and to the detriment of labour. In Marxist terms, this shift reflects a drive by capital to restore profitability by increasing the rate of exploitation of labour. In this way, the effort bargain can be conceptually linked to wider political economy. Although Baldamus was not a Marxist, there is a clear compatibility of the two approaches (Eldridge 1998). Theoretically, the combination is productive: the political economy of capitalism (Marx) drives a requirement for employers to revisit the intensity of labour and the effort bargain (Baldamus). Thus, wider dynamics of political economy drive workplace processes that disturb previously established work relations, threatening perpetually to generate and re-generate conflict between workers and managers (*cf.* Hyman 1975a).

The frontier of control concerns 'issues of discipline and management' (Goodrich 1975: 20) and 'the moral aspect of subordination to discipline' (Clay, cited in *ibid.*: 27). Typically, frontier of control issues include 'the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not to be controlled at all, and the demand to take a hand in controlling', and 'the demand for the right make suggestions about the conduct of work' (*ibid.*: 37, 43). Goodrich (*ibid.*: 56-62) emphasises that the frontier of control is subject to continuous adjustment, moving back and forth as the balance of power shifts between workers and management. Discussions of power in industrial relations are often fraught with difficulties, particularly in relation to how it might be specified and measured (Kelly 2011). While it seems obvious that the conduct of bargaining must reflect relative power resources, the problem so far has resisted solution. Fortunately, Bacharach and Lawler (1981: 44) offer a conceptual refuge:

> 'Repeated attempts to conceptualize power are based on the assumption that it can and should be a precise term — a term subject to unambiguous definition and measurement. In contrast, we argue that power is inherently a *sensitizing concept* … [that] points to a series or range of phenomena but not in a manner that allows

precise definition or measurement.'

This approach will be taken here: power will be treated as a 'sensitising concept' and no attempt will be made at 'precise definition or measurement'. One general distinction will be utilised, however: following Silver (2003) and Wright (2000) this study will distinguish between workers' *structural power* and *associational power*. Structural power derives from the position of workers in the division of labour; associational power is based on the organisational strength of workers. Both forms are likely to carry implications for shop steward activity.

As Edwards and Scullion (1982: 167) put it, the frontier of control and the effort bargain 'cannot be divorced'. How might shop stewards fit into these workplace bargaining processes? Obviously, stewards may have a role in formal negotiation or consultation. Stewards may also deal with issues informally. It is important to note, though, that stewards can play an important role even when not directly involved. For instance, under piecework systems, workshop bargaining commonly involved only individual workers and rate-fixers, without the direct participation of a shop steward (Roy 1952; Lupton 1963). Instead, the steward's role often lay in enforcing the bargaining space within which individual workers were able contest and constrain management freedoms (Brown 1973). Thus, the freedom of individual workers to bargain over effort depended upon shop stewards maintaining a frontier of control restricting management's ability to unilaterally decide the pace and distribution of work. These complex linkages between individual and collective aspects of the effort bargain and frontier of control warn against simplistic approaches to conceptualising the place of shop stewards in workplace relations, raising the possibility that stewards may still play some role as guardians of workers' individual rights, despite other changes. The discussion turns next to a proposed framework for mapping variation in workplace bargaining processes.

Bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources

A conceptual difficulty of the current standard view not discussed previously lies in its definition of bargaining sanctions as industrial action: 'muscle', as Terry (2010: 281) calls it, in a remarkably gendered turn of phrase. This definition is excessively narrow. As McCarthy (1966: 21) warned, an absence of strikes 'should not lead one to conclude that no sanctions are being employed'. Non-strike sanctions can include withdrawal of co-operation,

overloading the grievance procedure, and restriction of output (*ibid*.: 19-25). There seems little reason to assume such practices no longer take place. Indeed, it is well known that shop stewards today are considerably engaged with grievance procedures. Consequently, the possibility of contemporary non-strike sanctions cannot be dismissed without more careful research. Moreover, a reconsideration of bargaining sanctions is in order, to move beyond the narrow conception of the current standard view. As a first step, workplace bargaining will be analysed in terms of *bargaining opportunitie*s and *bargaining resources*.

It has been known at least since the Webbs (1902) that trade unions deploy a variety of means in attempting to deal with employers: 'the Methods and Regulations actually used by British Trade Unionism … [comprise] three distinct instruments or levers, which we distinguish as the Method of Mutual Insurance, the Method of Collective Bargaining, and the Method of Legal Enactment' (*ibid*.: 150). The present research is similarly concerned with methods 'actually used'. The argument, here, is that these methods vary. For instance, Edwards and Scullion (1982: 181-199) established that the change from piece-work to measured day work in the engineering industry saw shop stewards shift from bargaining over pay to bargaining over effort, while workplaces in the garment industry exhibited little overt bargaining over effort or pay. If, as McCarthy (1966: 70; McCarthy and Parker 1968: 65) found, shop stewards use 'all the opportunities presented to them', then one approach to understanding shifts in shop steward activity would be to examine shifts in available bargaining opportunities.

The notion of opportunity has seldom been explored in industrial relations research. One exception is Kelly (1998), who sees patterns of collective action as related to changing opportunities (*ibid*.: 25, 27, 37), influenced by 'the policies and actions of employers and the state, and the balance of forces between rulers and subordinates' (*ibid*.: 37). This view derives from Tilly (1978: 98-142), where opportunity is seen as conditioned by factors such as repression (or facilitation), which can increase (or decrease) the costs of collective action (*ibid*.: 100-106). According to this view, an opportunity for collective action occurs when the balance of forces is such that, for members of the mobilising group, the potential (perceived) costs of action are lower than the expected benefits. By breaking down the process of mobilisation into a number of constituent elements, including opportunity, Kelly (1998) is able to develop an analysis of periodic waves of workers' struggles; both in Britain since 1979 (*ibid*.: 39-65), and in the longer history of industrial capitalism (*ibid*.: 83-107).

Despite the sophistication of Kelly's analysis, however, this view of opportunity is linked to *collective action* rather than bargaining, which may involve little or no collective action. Consequently, this approach is less suited to the present research.

An alternative approach, which does link opportunity to bargaining, can be found in studies of piecework (e.g. Brown 1973; Lupton 1963; Roy 1952). Although under-theorised, these studies show bargaining clustered around rate-setting, the process whereby a rate of pay was agreed at the commencement of each new job. In a detailed study of wages drift in the engineering industry, Lerner and Marquand (1962) conceptualised the place of bargaining in piecework, noting that some piece-workers negotiated pay-rates several times each day:

> 'The same machine may be re-set or readjusted three or four times a day to enable the machinist to work on three or four different batches of work … Yet it is a concomitant of such changes that the opportunity arises for pieceworkers to negotiate new rates' (*ibid*.: 52).

Thus, 'occasions when the bulk of the [wage] increases are awarded are occasions when there are discontinuities of production' (*ibid*.: 53). The study also noted, 'opportunities which pieceworkers have to negotiate new rates when there are discontinuities of production' (*ibid*.: 54). The key insight, here, is that discontinuities of production offer an opportunity to re-negotiate the wage-effort bargain. In 1962, under conditions of full employment, pieceworkers were able to negotiate more pay for no increase in effort (*ibid*.: 32). More recently, in conditions of much less secure employment, employers have secured more effort for no increase in pay, resulting in the widely recognised intensification of labour. Nevertheless, Lerner and Marquand's (1962) insight suggests that a clustering of bargaining processes around discontinuities in production may remain a feature of workplace relations.

Although this area has not been studied systematically, there is recent evidence from a variety of sources that new management practices can lead to new bargaining opportunities. For instance, at Royal Mail, the introduction of management briefings saw the rise of 'wrecking practices', as described by Beale (2003: 87):

> 'Reading newspapers, falling asleep, unit reps hijacking briefing sessions to address their members, and particularly the exploitation of briefings as paid rest periods were commonly reported'.

Other studies found similar examples of management initiatives becoming rudimentary means for workers to pressure management. Marchington and Parker (1990: 221) found that briefing sessions, intended to pass information one-way from management to workforce, had instead developed into two-way channels of communication where grievances could be raised by employees and resolved by line managers. Similarly, in a large supermarket chain, a management initiative intended to improve customer service had an 'unanticipated consequence … that employees used its language and concepts to try to bring managers into line with worker expectations' (Rosenthal *et al.* 1997: 498-9), especially over increased worker autonomy and the respectful treatment of staff by managers.

The spread of formal partnership agreements, though limited, has seen union reps apparently adapt older bargaining practices to new conditions; for instance, emphasising legitimacy over cooperation (Terry 2004), or representing over partnering (Harrisson *et al.* 2011), or continuing to police management (Cook and MacKenzie 2015), or attempting to gain greater influence in the workplace (Oxenbridge and Brown 2004: 195). There is no reason to expect that similar adaptive processes might not be found elsewhere. Where formal collective agreements remain in place it is likely that they would continue to offer shop stewards and other union reps opportunities for bargaining. Furthermore, if changing management methods can lead to shifts in bargaining opportunities, then similar reasoning can be applied to sanctions and other bargaining resources.

Bargaining sanctions are sources of leverage used by one party to place the other party under pressure. It used to be common for shop stewards to use small and short strikes to pressure managers, in pursuit of demands or grievances (Edwards 1983), particularly over 'perishable' issues (Hyman 1989: 24). The decline of strikes means that this previously important sanction is now rarely used, which has been taken by proponents of the current standard view as evidence that shop stewards no longer bargain (Terry 2010). Considered from the point of view of leverage, however, the category of sanctions can be broadened to include other ways of pressuring managers. This wider category of potential methods for pressuring managers will be termed *bargaining resources*. On this view, sanctions are a sub-set of the larger group of bargaining resources that shop stewards may use to pressure managers.

Bargaining resources that do not involve strikes are highly varied. As noted above, McCarthy

(1966: 19-25) found non-strike sanctions including the restriction of output and withdrawal of cooperation. When examining the 'methods and effects of shop steward bargaining' (*ibid*.: 16) McCarthy also identified the use of comparisons, informal arrangements and unwritten agreements, and 'the short circuiting of supervision' by taking issues directly to higher management over the heads of local managers and foremen (*ibid*.: 16-28). A number of these methods would be familiar in workplaces today, and all can be included in the category of bargaining resources. Other documented examples include political exchange (Korpi and Shalev 1979); legal and quasi-legal employment regulations (Heery 2011a); European Works Councils (Waddington 2011); national agreements, especially in the public sector (Ironside and Seifert 2000: 50-55); professional standards and/or statutory professional status (Burchil and Seifert 1993); supply-chain pressure and adverse publicity (Graham 2013); forms of organisational misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999); or 'resistance through persistence' (Collinson 1994: 45).

The literature also contains examples of less visible means of pressuring managers. Goodrich (1975: 143) noted 'nagging and sulkiness'. Edwards and Scullion (1982: 174) document a group of women garment workers who regulated piecework by means of pressure on the man responsible for distributing work, who confided, 'it was more than his life was worth to be seen to be unfair'. Surprisingly, the authors (*ibid*.: 169) conclude, 'no ... control [over the effort bargain] was present here'. While it can be argued that such action represents little real challenge to the overall effort bargain (*ibid*.: 168) it does nevertheless represent effective interference by workers in management relations. Contemporary shopfloor relations, in a context of little industrial action and a significantly more female workforce, may well exhibit other unexpected bargaining resources. However, restrictive *a priori* definitions, as found in the current standard view, will limit the sensitivity of research to any such 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 2008).

Other bargaining resources appear similarly insubstantial and difficult to assess. For instance, Armstrong *et al.* (1981) found, in three less-strongly organised factories, that legitimacy and de-legitimisation was used by shop stewards in efforts to undermine managers, a process which also involved the 'mobilisation of bias' (*ibid*.:44-45; Batstone 1977: 10-11; Lukes 2005: 6-7). The classic era of bargaining research established the importance of comparison as a method of establishing legitimacy for demands or grievances (Brown 1973; Brown and Sisson 1975; McCarthy 1966), and even 'coercive comparisons'

(Ross 1948: 53). Outside of formal pay negotiations, Brown's (1973) appreciation of the importance, for shop stewards, of pursuing the 'equitable treatment' (Section 2.2) seems to imply the use of comparative measures of fairness. In the absence of stronger bargaining resources, use of legitimacy and comparison may be a feature in contemporary workplaces.

Research continues to find examples of informal bargaining. In one of the very few recent case studies of workplace union organisation, Stevenson (2005) looked at the role of workplace union representatives among school teachers during bargaining over proposed redundancies. Alongside a formal process involving senior lay officers, school level reps held informal meetings with local managers, and with members, acting in concert with the senior officers involved in negotiations. Although they played no part in the formal process, the school reps' informal activity was found to be a key influence on outcomes (*ibid*.: 228-9). Similarly, Mulholland's (2004) study of unionised workers in an Irish call centre found informal bargaining processes and a variety of informal sanctions. These examples indicate the ability of workers and their representatives to innovate means to influence management decisions, using novel and informal methods outside formal arrangements for negotiation or consultation. Of course, informal approaches also lie outside the conceptual framework of the current standard view, again suggesting an alternative approach would be fruitful.

Sometimes, bargaining opportunities are more directly tied to the availability of bargaining resources. The growth of individual employment rights is one important example. Despite the weak and limited nature of these rights, grievance and ET procedures have real impacts on employer practices (Section 2.1). Moreover, research has found shop stewards using grievance procedures in a targeted way. For instance, a union organising campaign saw shop stewards organise a campaign of 45 formal grievances in three months against arbitrary and authoritarian management (Findlay and McKinlay 2003). More generally, Heery (2011a: 80) has discussed 'the strength of weak law', arguing that unions have integrated employment rights into bargaining, creating 'a new hybrid in which legal regulation is fused with collective bargaining and trade unions use the law as a resource' (*ibid*.: 73). Heery (*ibid*.: 89) concludes that 'substantive law has not displaced collective bargaining but has been incorporated within it as a precedent, sanction and standard'. Again, these accounts tie together collective and individual issues in a way that challenges the sharp distinctions of the current standard view.

Traditionally, studies of workplace conflict have focused on strikes, an indicator easily measured by quantitative methods (Edwards *et al.* 1995). The decline of strikes therefore poses significant problems for researchers, because attention must turn towards 'other, more covert, forms of conflict' and 'small-scale and informal means through which workers counter managerial control of the workplace' (*ibid*.: 283). Unfortunately, this type of resistance 'tends to be covert and difficult to discover' (*ibid*.: 287). Edwards (2010) makes a convincing case for seeing forms of workplace misbehaviour in terms of attempts to influence the effort bargain, which are often to a degree successful. Studies of worker recalcitrance and organisational misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Martinez Lucio and Stewart 1997; Richards 2008; Thompson and Ackroyd 1995) show that worker resistance has not disappeared, but has changed and adapted to new circumstances. This raises the possibility that shop steward activity may also have adapted, developing new bargaining resources in response to changing bargaining opportunities. As Edwards *et al.* (1995: 310) conclude, 'the detailed examination of the conditions, processes and consequences of workplace resistance has the potential to develop new understandings'. Again, this indicates a need for detailed research, specifically focussed upon shop stewards. Positioning bargaining opportunities and resources within workplace relations also requires theoretical development; the following section attempts to do this.

3.2 Theoretical considerations

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, theory is essential if this research is to make claims to generalisability. Consequently, this section addresses theoretical issues in the analysis of workplace relations. Usually, the shop steward role is seen in terms of agency, with an emphasis on the steward as social actor. In one version of this approach, the steward is seen in terms of a set of simple relations between groups; whereby the steward has relations, on the one hand, to ordinary workers, and on the other, to managers. This is the familiar 'man with two masters' (Lane 1974: 195) view of the classic studies, with stewards seen as occupying an intermediate bargaining position between the two groups (see also Darlington and Upchurch 2012: 88-90; Hyman 2012: 155-157). A second version of the agency approach to stewards emphasises their subjective qualities; such as, 'trade union principles' (Batstone *et al.* 1977), political commitment (Darlington 2009a, 2009b),

workplace traditions (Terry and Edwards 1988), or 'militancy' (Gall 2003a). The focus on agency in radical accounts of the 1970s (e.g. Beynon 1984; Hinton 1973; Hyman 1975a; Lane and Roberts 1971) represented a welcome corrective to the institutionalist approach of much that preceded. Emphasis on agency as an analytical category in industrial relations strengthened considerably during the 1980s, with growing interest in management strategy (Hyman 1987: 27). In the 1990s, influential studies sought to redress the balance by reinstating a notion of *worker* agency (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Martinez Lucio and Stewart 1997; Thompson and Ackroyd 1995). Emphasis on agency has continued up to the present, especially in radical and Marxist-influenced accounts (e.g. Atzeni 2014;[3] Taylor *et al.* 2015). Of course, these considerations are important and must form part of a full account. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with agency has led these accounts to significantly downplay the importance of structure.

This study adopts a different approach, starting not from social actors but from the structure and dynamics of social relations. Here, shop stewards will be seen not in terms of simple, untheorised relations to other groups of actors – upwards to managers and downwards to workers, as it were. Rather, the role of shop stewards will be seen in relation to the dynamic social relations of the workplace, of which the employment relationship is the defining structural feature, and exploitation the crucial dynamic. By theoretically situating the activity of shop stewards in terms of workplace relations that exist more widely, a basis can be provided for generalising from the case studies. Consequently, this section will deal at some length with theoretical issues in conceptualising workplace relations under capitalism. First, the discussion examines aspects of the employment relationship that are usually passed over briefly: conflict, cooperation, and managerial relations. In particular, *cooperation* is given significantly more consideration than is usual. Next, the notion of interests is discussed at length, in an effort to reinstate this important concept in the analysis of industrial relations. Finally, a definition of bargaining is presented and discussed, which represents a genuine contribution to debates in this area.

Conflict, cooperation, and managerial relations

The notion of conflict is frequently invoked in industrial relations and related research, but it seldom receives the consideration it deserves as a central aspect of workplace relations.

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[3] Atzeni (2014: 10) uses the term 'self-activity', but the focus is clearly on agency.

Here, a more thorough treatment will be presented. Initially, it is useful to distinguish 'two distinct senses [of conflict], namely underlying antagonisms or clashes of interests, and concrete actions such as strikes' (Bélanger and Edwards 2013: 7). It is the latter sense which commanded the attention of the classic studies of workplace bargaining, and which continues to attract interest from industrial relations researchers (for instance, Gall 2013; Gall and Cohen 2013; Godard 2011; Hebdon and Noh 2013; Kelly 1998; Moody 2013). However, for the most part it is the former, analytical sense which will be employed here. The following account is drawn mainly from Marx, though important elements are shared by mainstream industrial relations (Ackers 2011; 2014; Edwards 1986; McGovern 2014a) and 'core' labour process theory (Thompson 1990).

Industrial relations scholars have considered conflict at work from a number of well-known perspectives, which are usually treated cursorily (Edwards 1986: 19). The un-favoured unitarist view sees conflict at work as a non-legitimate intrusion into essentially cooperative workplace relations; a view usually seen as reflecting management perspectives (*ibid*.: 19-21; Fox 1966). By contrast, the pluralist approach, versions of which have dominated industrial relations, sees conflict at work as legitimate and even inevitable, although there have been variations in the degree of legitimacy which conflict is permitted (for instance, Edwards 2014a vs. Flanders 1975). Pluralism also often entails a normative aspect, so that although conflict may be legitimate, it is seen as something best avoided – or dealt with in a civilised way if it cannot be avoided. Thus, Clegg (1979: 452) states: 'the record of industrial conflict in Britain goes back for two centuries or more, but so far it has been contained'. For many pluralists, the method by which such conflict could be contained is collective bargaining, which Burchill (2008: 4, 76) described as 'the pluralist concept *par excellence* ... [and] something encouraged by those who take a pluralist viewpoint'. Thus, while conflict is seen as potentially pathological to society, collective bargaining, especially in its institutionalised forms, is 'a means to social stability … a process of concession and compromise which helps bind society together' (Clegg 1979: 455). By accepting that conflict was 'endemic' (Fox 1966: 399) in industrial relations, pluralist scholars produced a series of detailed and insightful accounts, particularly of collective bargaining arrangements and the regulation of employment relations.

In the 1970s, pluralist accounts were subject to searching criticism from more radical scholars, who, though varied, commonly shared a starting point in the sociology of work,

often influenced by radical political ideology (Ackers 2011; Edwards 1986: 24-26). These writers emphasised conflict in industrial relations, against the institutional approach of pluralism (esp. Hyman 1975a). Pluralism was criticised for failing to grasp workplace conflict and change, despite important institutional insights (Edwards 1986). Many of these critiques were informed by Marxist ideas (Hyman 1975a; see Ackers 2014). Indeed, the 1970s have been called 'golden days' for Marxism in industrial relations (Gall 2003b: 321; see also, Hyman 2006). Although, as Clegg (1979: 456) notes, differences among Marxists and pluralists can be greater than the differences between them, nevertheless, Marxists generally see conflict not as a potentially pathological threat to society, but as constitutive of the social relations of capitalism. Whereas classic pluralism (usually) sees conflict as *inevitable* between interest groups, Marxism (usually) sees conflict as *inherent* in the social relations of capitalism (*cf.* Edwards 1986; Hyman 1975a).

It is helpful to distinguish between pluralism before and after the encounter with radical and Marxist critiques. One important theoretical consequence of the encounter between pluralism and Marxism, as Ackers (2014) has pointed out, was that many essentially Marxist categories were imported into the emerging 'radical pluralism' which subsequently became the mainstream approach in British industrial relations; an approach systematised by Edwards (1986), whose notion of 'structured antagonism' (*ibid*.: 5) shows the clear influence of Marx (see also Edwards 2014a; McGovern 2014a; and see below). Since then, though, there has been a tendency to eschew further theoretical development in this area: in industrial relations, theorisation of conflict usually stops with mention of 'structured antagonism' (Frege and Kelly 2013: 8). This continuing theoretical weakness has resulted in a number of difficulties (discussed below).

For Marx, conflict between workers and managers is rooted in the wider category of the relations of production, whereby capital and labour are conceived as two poles of a social relation driven by exploitation. Capitalist employers extract surplus labour from workers through ownership and control of the means of production, which means that workers have no means for making a living other than to sell their ability to labour – their 'labour power' – to capitalists in return for wages. Employers set the terms of employment, ensuring that workers produce greater value than they receive in the form of wages. Marx sees conflict with wage labour as a fundamental aspect of capital: 'Capital is productive of value only as a *relation*, in so far as it is a coercive force on wage-labour, compelling it to perform surplus-

labour' (cited in Callinicos 2014: 200, original emphasis). Moreover, the same essential relation exists between employers and workers, even when, as with local government workers, no surplus value is produced: as Fine and Saad-Filho (2010: 47) put it, 'being unproductive [of surplus value] is no obstacle against capitalist exploitation'. Inside the workplace, the requirement of the employer to secure the transformation of the purchased labour-power into a certain amount of concrete labour structures the labour process (Braverman 1974; Edwards 1986; 2003; Marx 1976: 283-306). This process takes place within a fundamentally unequal relationship (Marx 1976: 439-454; Edwards 2003). As employers use their economic power to organise production, including the direction of labour, conflict is generated between capital and labour, managers and workers. Consequently, the relationship of capital and labour will be a recurring source of antagonism. In this sense, conflict in the workplace is not just a question of what workers do; it is fundamentally a question of what employers do.

Contra Burawoy (1979), then, the factory is not principally the site of the manufacture of consent: capitalist workplaces generate conflict. Capitalist relations of production mean that workplace relations will be a recurring source of conflict. This does not entail, though, that such conflict will necessarily be expressed in consistent ways; indeed, expressions of conflict are likely to vary (Gall 2013). Nor does it prejudge the outcome of that conflict. Nor does it mean, *contra* Ackers (2014: 2609), that a commitment to conflict as a theoretical category for the analysis of workplace relations obviates the need for empirical investigation of actual workplaces; any more than using the theory of gravity to understand the motion of planets means that astronomers no longer look into telescopes. What it does mean is that the continuing, underlying dynamic of exploitation generates conflict which forms 'a central, ever-present and ongoing dynamic of contemporary employment' (Gall and Hebdon 2008: 589). Moreover, the process of exploitation provides a dynamic that drives other features of employment relations and the organisation of work (Gall 2003b). In the present research, then, conflict will be seen as a *structural tendency* (Callinicos 2009: Ch.2), driven by the exploitation at the heart of the employment relationship, which continually threatens to upset previously established work relations (Hyman 1975a: Ch.1).

Besides the generation of conflict, it is important to appreciate that workplace relations are also characterised by *cooperation*. Unfortunately, the literature on cooperation in the workplace is significantly underdeveloped in comparison with the literature on conflict.

Edwards (1986: 21) argues that unitarism has correctly recognised the cooperative side of employment. However, as unitarist accounts deny conflict (Fox 1969) they are unhelpful for present purposes. Accounts that focus on conflict commonly treat non-conflictual elements as anomalous or requiring special explanation. For instance, labour process theory has been criticised for making excessive use of the simple dichotomy of control versus resistance (Edwards 2007). In these account, employers appear as only interested in control (which in reality is not their only concern), while an absence of resistance by workers is too often treated as aberrant. Thus, Burawoy's (1979) influential explanation for an absence of conflict posits *consent* as an outcome of management strategy (Clawson and Fantasia 1983: 673). Here, the employment relationship is theorised only in terms of conflict, while elements of cooperation require additional explanation (management strategy). A similar limitation can be discerned in Edwards' (1989) spectrum of 'conflict and accommodation'. Edwards' perspective has the advantage of recognising the importance of non-conflictual elements within employment (1986: Ch.1, Ch.2), an insight that informs some of the most perceptive accounts of workplace relations (e.g. *ibid*.: Ch.6; Edwards and Scullion 1982; Terry and Edwards 1988). However, even here the conflictual aspects are theorised as the foundation of employment ('structured antagonism'), while non-conflict is treated as the aspect that requires additional explanation. Thus, Edwards (1989) sees non-conflictual relations as 'accommodation'; that is, conflict placed under limitations. Similarly, Bélanger and Edwards (2007: 713) see 'workplace co-operation' in terms of 'conditions promoting compromise'. The shared starting point of these approaches is to theorise the employment relationship in terms of conflict only, consequently treating non-conflict as the aspect requiring special explanation. Not surprisingly, then, despite a number of studies that have looked at workplace cooperation empirically, Edwards *et al.* (2006: 125) claim that 'a theoretical framework to grasp workplace co-operation is lacking'.

Yet, the essential elements of a framework for grasping workplace cooperation are not lacking: they can be found in Marx's writings. For Marx, production under capitalist relations has a dual nature: it is irreducibly social and cooperative, as well as exploitative (Adler 2007; 2009; Harvey 2006; Marx 1976; Rattansi 1982). Indeed, Marx's account of the division of labour in *Capital* includes a chapter entitled 'Cooperation' (Marx 1976: 439-454). This aspect of Marx's writing has attracted little attention in the field of industrial relations, even from Marxists; for instance, Darlington (1994: 35) mentions the cooperative aspect of production, but Marx's writings are not discussed, and the concept is not integrated into Darlington's

overall analysis. More recently, Atzeni (2010: 27) has discussed Marx's analysis, arguing that cooperation in the labour process is the source of solidarity between workers, and of collective action. The difficulty with this reading, however, is that it focuses only on relations among workers, ignoring Marx's understanding that the division of labour also entails cooperation between workers and managers. For Marx, (1996: 335-6) capitalists play an active role in the coordination of production:

> 'All combined labour on a large scale requires, more or less, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious working of the individual activities … The work of directing, superintending, and adjusting, becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under the control of capital, becomes cooperative.'

Formulations that see relations between workers and managers only in terms conflict miss this important aspect. In reality, researchers can expect to find both conflict *and* cooperation in workplace relations, not only among workers, but also between workers and employers; although there is no reason to expect that both aspects will appear in similar measure or in common forms across different sectors of employment or workplaces. Furthermore, workplace conflict and cooperation are not simple binary opposites that vary in an either/or fashion; rather, they exist concurrently.

Marx's insight that the coordination of production is 'one of the functions of capital' has important implications for understanding the role of management. As the scale of production increases, individual capitalists are unable to play this role themselves:

> 'An industrial army of workmen, under the command of a capitalist, requires, just like a real army, officers (managers), and sergeants (foremen, overlookers), who, while the work is being done, command in the name of the capitalist. The work of supervision becomes their established and exclusive function' (Marx 1996: 337).

As Adler (2009: 66) has put it:

> 'To emphasize conflict is not to deny the simultaneous need for cooperation in production. Indeed, the large-scale capitalist enterprise depends crucially on cooperation to coordinate its complex division of labor, and managers play a key productive role in that coordination.'

Thus, the dual role of management combines *both* the control of labour for the extraction of surplus labour (generating conflict), *and* the coordination of production (cooperative aspect). Developing Marx's approach, Carchedi (1977: 61-65) emphasised that this dual

function is embodied in individual managers. That is, individual managers are constrained by both imperatives; by the need to control labour *and* the need to coordinate production.

In turn, the dual role of management influences the nature of *managerial relations*; that is, 'the relationships that define how this process [work] takes place' (Edwards 2003:8; see Flanders 1975: 88-89). As Edwards (2003: 8) continues, once market relations have established the rate of pay and hours of work,

> 'managerial relations determine how much work is performed in that time, at what specific task or tasks, who has the right to define the tasks and change a particular mix of tasks and what penalties will be deployed for any failure to meet these obligations'.

The frontier of control and the effort bargain are established within this process, and reflect the degree to which managerial prerogatives are constrained and managerial relations interfered with (Goodrich 1975; Hyman 1975a: Ch.1; Hyman 1975b). For the present research, the ability (or otherwise) of shop stewards to interfere with managerial relations is central to determining whether stewards continue to have any role in bargaining. Relations between shop stewards and managers will be influenced by the dual role of management, which is structured by tendencies towards both conflict and cooperation. This is important because it means that each manager has to bridge both aspects, opening the possibility that bargaining leverage might be applied to particular managers according to whichever aspect is under most pressure in the concrete circumstances of a workplace. Thus, an understanding of conflict and cooperation as dual aspects of workplace relations opens the possibility of a wider grasp of shop steward activity than does a more narrow focus on conflict alone.

This discussion has linked important aspects of workplace relations to the underlying nature and dynamic of the employment relationship under capitalist relations of production, thereby providing a theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of research findings. Generalisation from those findings will depend in part on showing that similar processes might be found elsewhere. Therefore, discussion turns next to the notion of interests, which can provide a link between the structure of workplace relations and actions of social agents.

Interests

In recent years, the notion of workers' interests has fallen into disfavour in the field of industrial relations. This is important because the concept of interests offers a way to link structure and agency (Callinicos 2009: 139-151). If, as has been argued above, the nature of the employment relationship gives important elements of structure to workplace relations, especially in the form of an underlying dynamic of exploitation, how does this structure relate to the agency of social actors within the workplace? A concept of interests can bridge this analytical gap. For many years, though, 'rigorous analytical treatment of this crucial topic [was] quite simply non-existent', being replaced by 'casual empiricism' (Kelly 1998: 6). More recently, the concept of interests – particularly, class interests – has been the subject of more explicit rejection. The purpose of the following discussion is to present a critique of accounts that have sought to excise the concept of class interests from industrial relations, and to propose its rehabilitation, based on a non-determinist Marxism informed by a critical realist view of stratified social structure.

Theoretical attempts to jettison class interests take two main forms. The first is the disappearance of workers' interests into a problematic version of social constructionism, which starts from increased workforce diversity (for instance, Blyton *et al.* 2011; Heery 2011b), a view which has come into industrial relations from mainstream sociology (for a critical overview, see Crompton 2008). Thus, Simms and Charlwood (2010: 133) argue:

> 'shared geography, lifestyle and community was challenged by social change and economic restructuring in the latter part of the 20th century … Together these [changes] … mean that an increasing diversity of interests compete for attention'.

Similarly, Hyman (1999: 98, 94) sees 'increasing heterogeneity within the labour force' *inter alia* causing problems of 'interest aggregation', and calls for a rejection of Marx's understanding of 'working-class interests' as 'imagined solidarities'. Likewise, Simms *et al.* (2013: 24) see 'an increasing diversity of workers' interests', undermining 'the processes [by which] solidarities and collectivism are socially constructed' (*ibid.*: 28). For Simms and Charlwood (2010: 127),

> 'Worker interests are socially constructed … What workers think and feel about their employment reflects their norms and expectations, acquired through, amongst other things, education, family, friends, community, the media, managers and co-workers.'

That is, for these accounts, 'socially constructed' workers' interests have been significantly

undermined by 'social change and economic restructuring'.

Unfortunately, this is not good sociology. The term 'socially constructed' invokes Berger and Luckman's (1991 [1966]) classic work, but these accounts carry none of their radical not-taken-for-granted-ness towards the social world. Instead, this version of 'socially constructed' is partial, and applies only to some aspects of social reality: 'workers' interests' are 'socially constructed' and therefore vulnerable, while 'social change and economic restructuring' suffer no such difficulties. Yet, there are numerous accounts which show how recent economic and social change were constructed by neoliberalism (for an overview of a very considerable literature, see Davidson 2013). Moreover, as critical realism has shown, social reality certainly *is* socially constructed; but it is no less real for all that (Archer *et al.* 1998; Bhaskar 1998).

A serious problem with this (selective) application of social constructionism is that it undermines any notion of structure in the employment relationship. Yet, the experiences of people at work do not simply 'reflect their norms and expectations'. They are also significantly shaped by forces that are part of a structured social system (however that is defined). Indeed, a recent overview of the sociological debates on class has called for the restoration of structure as an indispensible element of analysis (Crompton 2008: 25-26). While trade union activity, interest representation, and solidarity certainly cannot be reduced to a mechanical expression of class structure, the exploitative nature of the employment relationship means that the capital-labour relation *is structured* – and this structure must be incorporated into the analysis. Accounts that neglect this feature are fundamentally weakened.

A second challenge to the notion of workers' interests derives from Edwards (1986: 28), where the Marxist account based on 'conflict of interest' is rejected. Edwards' argument is that a simplistic notion of class interests is inadequate for explaining the complexity of workplace relations; because in practice workers can have numerous interests, which may or may not coincide with the interests of other workers (Edwards 2003). In place of 'conflict of interests' Edwards (1986: 5, *et passim*) proposes 'structured antagonism', a formulation which has been taken up widely, though less often credited to its source (Bélanger and Edwards 2013: 8). There are, however, a number of problems with Edwards' approach.

First, although Edwards is concerned to reject Marxism, its influence on his account is obvious. Thus, Edwards' (1986: Ch.2) 'theory of conflict' starts from the premise that 'the capitalist can exploit the worker because the latter lacks the means of production and must sell his or her labour power in order to live' (*ibid*.: 65). Edwards makes considerable use of concepts such as 'mode of production' (*ibid*.: 66, 65), 'exploitation' (*ibid*.: 65), 'necessary and surplus labour' (*ibid*.: 66), 'circuit of capital' (*ibid*.: 67), 'use value' (*ibid*.: 67), 'exchange value' (*ibid*.: 67), and even 'law of value' (*ibid*.: 67). Yet, none of these concepts are referenced to their source, Marx's *Capital*. Nor does Edwards mention that many of the authors he cites in support of his rejection of Marxism are in fact Marxists themselves; for instance, G.A Cohen (61, *et passim*.), Maurice Dobb (*ibid*.: 61), Michael Burawoy (*ibid*.: 62), and Sam Aaronovitch (*ibid*.: 67). This is indeed a strange rejection of Marxism.

Secondly, the Marxism rejected by Edwards seems an infirm specimen. While Edwards is on firm ground when rejecting crude and mechanical accounts of class interest, his claim (*ibid*.: 28) that in Marxism 'all interests are supposedly reducible to, or at least based on, class position and … the interest of the working class is held to be the overthrow of capitalism', is both imprecise and entirely unsupported by references. The view presented for criticism is, in the words of Collier (1998: 273-4), 'a certain simplistic Marxism, which has occasionally existed and more often been imagined by anti-Marxists'. It is not the case that any sophisticated version of Marxism sees all workers as only having a singular and essential class interest and no other interests beyond that one. For instance, many Marxist accounts have shown great sensitivity and insight regarding tensions between workers' general interests and the narrow sectional interests of particular groups (Darlington 1994; Hyman 1975a; Gall 2003a).

Of course, it is necessary to reconcile at a theoretical level the potential for cross-cutting sectional interests and underlying class-based interests. The issue can be clarified somewhat by considering the interests of capital. While notions of workers' interests are commonly disputed, the idea of capitalist class interests seems more secure. Indeed, what Miliband (1985: 16) calls the 'class struggle from above' has been well-documented; a process whereby representatives of capital have pursued a major political project in support of their class interests (Chibber 2009: 364-366). Furthermore, the claim that underlying common class interests may exist alongside more superficial (though still important) sectional differences appears less mysterious when applied to the well-known conflict between

industrial capital and finance capital.

Here, critical realism is useful. Importantly, critical realism conceives of social reality as not only structured, but as *stratified* (Bhaskar 2008; Collier 1998), in the sense of levels of determination. This allows for an account of a basic conflict of material (class) interests, overlain by other levels of conflict, such as sectional ones. Overlaying levels of conflict are *not*, in this view, reducible to underlying conflicts or interests; but nor do they escape the influence of those underlying structures (Callinicos 2009: Ch.2; Collier 1998). Thus, the capitalist class has an interest in preserving and (at times) increasing exploitation; conversely, the working class has an interest in resisting and (at times) reducing the rate of exploitation. Class interest seen in this way does not rely on a shared conscious awareness by actors of common interests, and nor are underlying class relations done away with because agents are unaware of them.

For instance, a group of workers might have a (vigorously expressed) narrow sectional interest, alongside an underlying class interest (which might be completely unrecognised). The underlying class interest, rooted in exploitative relations of production, is not negated by the overlying narrow sectional interest. Consider, for example, sectional demands for the maintenance of pay differentials in the 1970s, or efforts by groups of white male workers to exclude women or black workers. Such demands had real and important effects. Yet, the sectional strength of those workers to pursue their demands has since been significantly undermined (if not entirely destroyed) by underlying class interests, as capitalists closed factories and reorganised production in order to increase the rate of exploitation. The narrow sectional demands of some group of workers were no match for the class interests of capital. A stratified conception of social structure facilitates an understanding of both immediate sectional demands, as well as the underlying dynamic of class interests, without reducing one to the other.

This understanding of interests is quite different from that found in pluralist accounts. For pluralism, conflict emerges from the activities of interest groups (usually termed work groups), who press claims for and on behalf of their members, and who may thereby come into conflict with other interest groups (Brown 1973: 132-133; Clegg 1972: Ch1; 1979: 53-55, 455; for a critique of such treatments of work groups, see Hill 1974). This view is drawn from political pluralism, and sees interests in terms of *expressed wants*, or 'revealed

preferences' (Callinicos 2009: 140). It is this definition of interests, which focuses (more or less) on what people say they want, that has led to the foundering of the notion of structured workers' interests on the rocks of diversity.

Fortunately, an alternative approach is available which does not rely upon the conscious formation of groups around declared interests or expressed wants. Marxism identifies an underlying antagonism, based on exploitation, which tends to generate and re-generate conflict between capital and labour, employers and workers. Such conflicts may or may not be consciously expressed, and any expressions may be partial and/or contradictory (see discussion in Callinicos 2009). This approach incorporates an alternative understanding of interests which sees them as based not on social agents' expressed wants, but on their *structural capacities* (*ibid*.: 85-102) to pursue and satisfy those wants:

> 'To be aware of one's interests, therefore, is more than to be aware of a want or wants; it is to know how to go about trying to realise them' (Giddens, cited in *ibid*.: 146).

Thus, 'a worker and a capitalist have very different ways open to them of realising their respective wants' (*ibid*.: 147); and this applies even if those wants, such as a Chelsea season ticket, coincide. Crucially, the structural capacities available to any individual to satisfy their wants are significantly determined by overall class structure. That is, relatively enduring social structures of employment will continue to present certain options to particular agents, based on their position in the relations of production; which is not to say that other factors, such as race or gender inequalities, do not also affect individuals' ability to satisfy their wants. Nevertheless, in relation to potential conflicts between particular groups of workers, the underlying dynamic of exploitation constitutes a recurring class-based interest, regardless of any overlaid (perceived) divergence of immediate interests. Moreover, this underlying class-based interest, this structural capacity, continually presents workers with particular ways 'to go about trying to realise' their wants.

For instance, a capitalist may express his wants for a holiday villa in Marbella and a new Ferrari, and seek to realise those wants by increasing the rate of exploitation of workers in his factory, thereby acting in accordance with his class interests. By contrast, a worker in the factory may express her wants to pay the rent this month and to purchase insurance for her second-hand Ford Fiesta, and seek to realise those wants by securing a pay-day loan. This would be to act against her class interests, by introducing yet another capitalist to profit

from her labour, increasing her rate of exploitation. Or, she might attempt to realise her wants by joining a union to seek a pay rise through acting collectively with her fellow workers, in which case she would be acting in accordance with her class interest by seeking to reduce her rate of exploitation.

The question of whether the union is able to successfully represent her class interest and secure a pay rise is another matter, which, though clearly related and very important for the new member, should nevertheless be treated separately for theoretical purposes. The important point about class interests, in relation to union organisation, is that the underlying reality of class as social structure will keep posing this collective response as an option for workers. Therefore, it is likely that collective responses based on class interests will recur; in critical realist terms, there is a tendency, an underlying casual generative mechanism (see discussion in Section 4.1).

It is not the intention, here, to privilege class-based relations between capital and labour in the workplace above other potential sites of resistance by subordinate groups. Yet, as Bélanger and Edwards (2013: 8) note, it is possible to retain a conception of the employment relationship as 'distinct'. It might also be added, given the importance of work in society, that the employment relationship is in any case a worthwhile object of investigation for social science. This is not to say that the experiences of all workers are identical; nor is it to suggest that there are no other systemic social relationships or structures influencing the experience of individual workers (Collier 1998). Nor does the structured nature of the employment relationship automatically translate into a shared awareness of that structure in the minds of workers, much less a uniform consciousness of common class interests. Nevertheless, while social structure needs careful research and theorising, as do interests consequent upon that structure, there are no grounds for dismissing such notions altogether.

The approach outlined here entails a defensible notion of interests, seen as conceptually distinct from expressed wants (though these may coincide in practice). In critical realist terms, class interests are real generative mechanisms, operating at a lower level of social reality than expressions of needs and wants. This view can encompass diversity among workers while maintaining a notion of underlying common interests based on structural capacities. Put concretely, individual workers may wish to spend their wages on many

different things, influenced by varied and diverse 'norms and expectations'; nevertheless, these workers share a common interest in decreasing the rate of exploitation to which they are subjected by employers. This approach thus situates the role of the unions in terms of interests representation, not of interest formation. The former is quite a big enough job.

Next, the discussion addresses a startling absence in the literature on shop stewards and workplace relations: the lack of a definition of bargaining.

The missing concept: what is bargaining?

A surprising feature of the considerable literature on workplace bargaining is that it does not appear to contain any systematic attempt to define bargaining. Yet, for the present research a definition is essential, and therefore the following discussion develops one. This definition incorporates elements from bargaining theory but is also compatible with the conception of workplace relations outlined above, centred on the employment relationship conceived as a relationship of exploitation, and characterised by both conflict and cooperation.

The field of bargaining theory employs a definition of bargaining that is broadly shared across an extensive literature (Bacharach and Lawler 1981: 4). Muthoo (1999: 1, original emphasis) gives a typical account:

> 'Any exchange situation … in which a pair of individuals (or, organizations) can engage in mutually beneficial trade but have conflicting interests over the terms of trade is a bargaining situation … Stated in general and broad terms, a *bargaining situation* is a situation in which two *players* have a common interest to co-operate, but have conflicting interests over exactly how to co-operate'.

Similarly, Bacharach and Lawler (1981: ix):

> 'When two or more individuals, groups, or organizations experience a conflict of interest, and when they wish to resolve their differences because it would be mutually beneficial to do so, they decide to bargain … whether the conflicting parties are nations, corporations, or unions'.

Likewise, Fisher *et al.* (2012: xxv) define a bargaining situation as, 'when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed (as well as some that may simply be different)'. Furthermore, game theory specifies that:

'the outcome of bargaining depends on *both* players' bargaining strategies: whether or not an agreement is struck, and the terms of the agreement (if one is struck), depends on both players' actions during the bargaining process' (Mutthoo 1999: 6, original emphasis).

Again, this aspect is widely accepted (Bacharach and Lawler 1981: 4-6). The advantages of this definition of bargaining lie in its simplicity and flexibility, and in its wide acceptance across the bargaining theory literature.

Unfortunately, bargaining theory also presents significant difficulties. Commonly, bargaining theory adopts a game-theoretic approach, using applied mathematics in analyses which bear little resemblance to real-life bargaining situations. Largely, this is because the concern is not to understand the process of bargaining but to calculate its outcomes, in order to address a technical problem in marginal economics concerning how prices are fixed in exchange. Consequently, bargaining theory makes significant assumptions that remove key aspects of real-life bargaining. Muthoo (1999: 333-41) notes a number of consequent 'omissions', including assumptions that the same issue is not bargained over repeatedly; that bargaining circumstances, such as market conditions, do not change; that parties do not form coalitions; that no mediation takes place; that all agreements are enforced fully; and that only one issue is bargained over at a time. Other assumptions derive from rational choice theory and marginal economics (classically, Nash 1950; see Bacharach and Lawler 1981; Bacharach *et al.*: 1981). In particular,

'The assumption that bargainers will accept a common definition of their situation, and hence, a common set of rules governing their behaviour in that situation, is the most fundamental assumption in game theory' (*ibid.*: 15).

Even the apparently reasonable assumption that parties act rationally actually assumes that 'both parties are aware of the logic or rules that purportedly dictate their choice of strategies, and are prepared to accept them' (Bacharach *et al.*: 8). Game theory also assumes that parties 'have complete and perfect information on their own and the other's situations and on possible outcomes of the bargaining' (*ibid.*: 6), and that,

'the parties have no opportunity to influence each other's choice of strategies by the information they control, and they have all the information they need to anticipate each other's choices … [and] that the parties have no opportunity to create new outcome combinations, for example, by suggesting that the outcomes in the game be linked with outcomes in another game' (*ibid.*: 8).

Any familiarity with actual bargaining demonstrates the inadequacy of these assumptions. As Heap and Varoufakis (2004: 31) put it, this is bargaining without 'blundering' or 'creativity'. In reality, 'bargaining, like any conflict situation, is riddled with uncertainty and ambiguity' (Bacharach and Lawler 1981: 50). Indeed, Bacharach and Lawler (1981: ix) go further, arguing that 'bargaining arises from conflict'. What is excluded by the assumptions of bargaining theory is the importance of 'social location' (Heap and Varoufakis 2004: 302) in explaining complexity in human interactions. Consequently, the auxiliary assumptions of games theory must be set aside, in order to end 'the strict separation of action from structure' (*ibid*.: 32). Once this is done, a workable definition of bargaining emerges.

On this basis, a definition of bargaining suitable for industrial relations research can be offered, as follows. Bargaining may be defined as a process involving three components. First, parties: bargaining requires two (or more) parties. Second, interests: the parties must have interests at stake, some of which are shared and others that are opposed. Third, outcomes: the outcome(s) of bargaining are determined by the actions of both parties. When all these three components are present, there is a bargaining situation, and the social interaction taking place can be characterised as a bargaining process. This three-part definition was used in the present study.

A number of implications follow from this definition, and are dealt with below; but it is worth making two points immediately. First, it is interesting to note that games theory has far less difficulty with the notion of interests than recent accounts from industrial relations and related fields (see above). The definition of bargaining derived from games theory can easily incorporate employers and workers as parties with interests, some of which are shared and some of which are at odds. For bargaining theory, the shared interest lies in the *trade* (Muthoo 1999: 1). That is, workers and employers have a shared interest in the exchange of labour power for wages; not, as in many accounts from industrial relations, a shared interest in the continued profitability of the company (e.g. Edwards 2003: 17). Although profitability might be a consideration for workers in an actual bargaining situation, on this view, the shared interest lies in the exchange of work for pay. This does not represent a shared interest in the making of profits, which continue to accrue to the capitalist. The opposed interests of capital and labour, of workers and employers, lie in the terms of the trade. That is, workers have an interest in trying to secure favourable terms for the sale of labour power; in Marxist terms, a reduction in the rate of exploitation. This

conception of interests therefore refocuses attention on the importance of the cash nexus (Westergaard 1970).

The second point returns to the criticism of the current standard view presented above. The definition of bargaining developed here gives a firm theoretical foundation for the critique of any sharp conceptual distinction between 'negotiation' and 'consultation'. Despite differing formal designations, a common feature of these forms is that management may, as a consequence, adjust its decisions in the light of actual or perceived response(s) of workers and/or union. That is, both forms may entail genuine bargaining. By the same token, real bargaining content may be entirely absent, regardless of formal designation. Consequently, empirical investigation is needed to determine actual bargaining content, which cannot be deduced from *a priori* definitions, as the current standard view attempts to do (Section 2.1).

Some implication of the definition

The definition of bargaining outlined here carries a number of further implications for research on shop stewards and workplace bargaining. To begin with, it means that some phenomena cannot be considered as bargaining. Here, bargaining is defined more narrowly than in some misbehaviour studies, where 'negotiation' has been reduced more or less to the meaning of finding a way to get through the experience of work, but without altering it at all (*cf*. Kelly 1998: 132). Furthermore, situations where management prerogatives are constrained by technical, or economic, or other factors external to the parties to the employment relationship cannot be considered as bargaining – although such factors might be used as bargaining resources by the parties.

The definition proposed here can encompass a considerable variety of bargaining forms. On this definition, bargaining may be hidden or open, formal or informal. Processes formally designated as negotiation, consultation, or provision of information, may all appear on a continuum of bargaining forms, from stronger to weaker. This continuum does not, though, consist simply of formal designations laid side by side. Nor, as argued above (Section 2.1), is there a hierarchy of discrete forms. Rather, the bargaining continuum should be seen in terms of variation in the third term of the definition; that is, the extent to which shop stewards influence management decisions and actions. This research investigated whether, and how much, bargaining content, thus defined, could be identified in the activities of shop stewards in relation to managers.

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An appreciation of potential variation on the bargaining continuum can be gained from Clegg's (1972: 248-50) overview, which emphasises the variety of forms that workplace bargaining can take. At one end of the spectrum, bargaining may involve written agreements. Alternatively, 'there need be neither signed agreements nor recognised procedures' (*ibid*.: 248). Instead, bargaining may comprise verbal agreements between a manager and a shop steward. Or, there may be several informal agreements over time that result in a particular way of working, but about which no clear agreement can be said to exist. Moreover, 'there is no clear line between bargaining of this sort and consultation' (*ibid*.: 249). Understandings can emerge 'without any conscious decision by management', or even 'without any conscious decision at all' (*ibid*.: 249). Ways of working can be established even though 'no one can remember why' (*ibid*.: 249). Summarising, Clegg (*ibid*.: 250) states:

> 'It is therefore common for domestic bargaining to regulate industrial relations in a plant by a mixture of written agreements, written understandings, unwritten understandings, informal arrangements and customs and practices (some of which might not be accepted as binding by the management).'

It is notable that Clegg habitually uses the term 'bargaining', and clearly sees a spectrum rather than a series of sharply defined forms (similarly, Clegg 1979: 232-244). Although Clegg does not specify the bargaining spectrum in terms of a clear conceptual framework, on the definition developed above all his examples can be considered as forms of bargaining, since the outcomes are determined by the actions of both parties.

This definition may also apply to workplace processes that superficially have nothing to do with bargaining. For instance, Kuhn's (1961) US study found bargaining embedded in grievance procedures that were formally not part of collective bargaining. The terms of collective contracts specifically removed many issues from bargaining during the life of the contract, but Kuhn found many such issues raised and effectively bargained over under the formally entirely separate grievance procedure. Kuhn (*ibid*.: 78) concluded that, in practice, grievance procedures had been transformed by workplace union representatives into 'year round, continuous collective bargaining'. Elsewhere, Batstone (2015) identified 'arms-length bargaining', in which employers and unions did not even meet; rather, employers estimated what would be acceptable to the workforce and unions, and then made an offer in the knowledge that it would probably be accepted. In a similar process, Evans (1973: 100) noted

managers taking soundings from shop stewards prior to deciding a course of action. Though quite different in institutional forms, these examples entail processes that conform to the three-part definition outlined above: two parties; interests, in common and opposed; and, outcomes determined by the actions of both parties. Furthermore, since the first two parts of this definition are common to all employment relationships, variation of bargaining forms can be seen in terms of differences in the degree to which the outcomes are influenced by the parties.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed theoretical issues that are usually treated briefly, if at all, in industrial relations research. The lengthy detour has, however, established related conceptualisations of a number of key features of workplace relations. This is not to claim that the discussion in this chapter exhausts all the possibilities for social relations in workplaces. Nevertheless, the argument here is that, whatever else is going on, the structured dynamics discussed in this chapter will be present very widely. Consequently, a firm theoretical basis has been established that may permit careful generalisation from the case studies presented in later chapters.

The understanding of shop stewards proposed in this study is thus rooted in the employment relationship, seen as a defining feature structuring workplace relations. This chapter has made a significant effort to develop a strong theoretical account of this relationship, as one which is driven by a dynamic of exploitation, which gives rise to relations of both conflict and cooperation between workers and managers, and in which class-based conflicts of interest are a central feature. Conflict in the workplace is therefore not just a question of workers' interests; it is fundamentally driven by employers' interests. The notion of interests, seen as structural capacities, has been used to link the structured dynamic of exploitation within the employment relationship to the agency of social actors in the workplace, in a non-deterministic connection. Furthermore, the dynamic of exploitation means that the effort bargain and frontier of control will be common features of workplace relations cross capitalist employment, and will continue to confront shop stewards. Thus, central aspects of workplace relations and the issues that shop stewards deal with have been shown to be rooted in the nature of the employment relationship.

It can therefore be expected that the role of shop stewards in any given workplace is likely to reflect this underlying reality to some extent. This is not to prejudge the forms or outcome of actual workplace processes. Questions for empirical research, then, concern the extent to which such dynamics can be identified in the observed activity of shop stewards. If shop steward activity is found to reflect the dynamics theorised in this chapter, that would suggest that such processes might be taking place more generally, since these dynamics are rooted in the employment relationship that is a common feature of workplace relations under capitalism.

This chapter also developed a definition of bargaining, missing from previous accounts, that is similarly rooted in the nature of the employment relationship. This definition implies a continuum of bargaining processes, rather than a hierarchy of forms. Furthermore, it was shown that patterns bargaining can be mapped in terms of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources. Therefore, a further empirical issue for the present research was the investigation of the location, nature, and extent of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources in the two case studies. This leads the discussion to a consideration of the empirical research. It was argued previously that the almost lost tradition of workplace ethnography is particularly well suited to investigating the workplace relations and processes discussed in this chapter and the previous one, which are crucial to understanding the role of shop stewards. Therefore, the next chapter will deal in detail with the issues involved in a return to those methods.

Chapter 4: Methodology, research design, and case studies

Some twenty years ago, Terry (1995: 215) noted that detailed case studies of shop stewards, once well-established in industrial relations research, had declined significantly. Since that time, Terry's regular surveys (2003; 2010) have found no revival of research in this area. As a result, the empirical evidence on shop stewards is currently severely under-developed. One of the main motivations of the present study was to contribute to filling this gap in the empirical research, and to do so by reviving the methods of detailed workplace study. Therefore the challenge was to devise a project for a single researcher, with a very small budget, which was nevertheless capable of producing a sufficient quantity and quality of evidence to support a re-conceptualisation of the role of shop stewards in workplace relations. This chapter outlines the methodological issues raised by these considerations, and examines how they influenced the selection of research design, data-gathering methods, and data-analysis.

Designing research involves a series of choices, and this chapter is structured by the choices made in the course of this study. The chapter particularly emphasises three issues: a defence of small sample case studies; the diary-based method developed for the present study; and reliability, validity, and generalisation in qualitative case study research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the critical realist approach to theory-building, and a defence of inductivism. The discussion then outlines the research design and methods adopted. First, the choice of qualitative case study is explained, followed by data collection methods. Next, operational issues are outlined, including case study selection, access, research ethics, and data analysis. A final section gives background information to contextualise the two case studies.

4.1 Theory to research, and back: principal methodological considerations

The fundamental methodological difficulty for the current research was how to gather data in a theoretically ill-defined context. Theory is crucial to human perception of the world,

even at the everyday level, and is absolutely essential for systematic, scientific research (Chalmers 1999). Consequently, the weakness of theory concerning shop stewards presented serious difficulties for the present research in deciding what to look for, and even where to look. Questionable theory rendered any attempt to derive clear research hypotheses problematic. Therefore, a deductive approach was rejected.

One response to theoretical weakness is to develop new theory using an inductive approach. However, inductivism presents problems of its own; specifically, the difficulty of verification (Chalmers 1999: Ch.4). That is, logically, even a very large (or infinite) number of events cannot prove a generalisation to be true, while only a single counter-event is sufficient to falsify it. This argument has commonly been used in favour of deductive research. Unfortunately, in the field of industrial relations, attachment to deductivism has often had negative effects; in particular, leading to ad hoc 'hypotheses' only weakly related to theory, or based on common sense assumptions (Kelly 1998: 21-23). The standard critique of inductivism, though, is based on a problematic empiricist understanding of scientific knowledge, which has been subject to serious criticism from a critical realist perspective, particularly in the work of Bhaskar (1998; 2008). Therefore, this section outlines an alternative approach to theory-building that includes a defensible version of inductivism.

For Bhaskar (2008), the widely accepted empiricist conception of scientific laws is fundamentally flawed. On the empiricist view, a law-like generalisation is a statement about the 'constant conjunction' of observed events, such as 'When A, then B' (*ibid*.: 33-35, *et passim*). Bhaskar counters this view of scientific laws by pointing out that in nature constant conjunctions are extremely rare; therefore, the real basis of scientific knowledge must lie elsewhere. In place of constant conjunction, Bhaskar (*ibid*.: 47, *et passim*) sees scientific laws as comprising the identification of 'generative mechanisms', or tendencies, which are not observed directly, but which have real causal effects in generating events which can be observed (*ibid*.: 48-50). Generative mechanisms may result in observable constant conjunctions, but these are rare because the natural world is an 'open system' (Collier 1998), where many generative mechanisms operate simultaneously, mutually modifying the outcomes of each other. As a result, the causal effects of one generative mechanism may be completely obscured by the effects of others. Hence, for Bhaskar, it is logically impossible that observed constant conjunction can be the basis of laws in natural science.

Rather, in the natural sciences, constant conjunctions are produced by human intervention, through the application of the experimental method. By excluding all other influences except the one that is of interest to the researcher, experiment constructs an artificial 'closed system', in which events caused by only one generative mechanism may be observed (Bhaskar 2008: Ch.2). Consequently, the constant conjunctions which empiricism claims as the stuff of natural laws are, in an important sense, the products of human activity rather than naturally existing events waiting to be observed (*ibid*.: 33-36). The experimental method has been crucial to the progress of science because it permits the identification of underlying causal mechanisms, in a way that is not possible in natural settings.

In the social sciences, these issues are particularly acute, because society is a fundamentally open system where constant conjunctions are absent, and experimentation is not possible in any significant sense. Therefore, constant conjunction cannot form the basis of theory-building or theory-testing in social science (Bhaskar 1998), and the relationship of observation to theory must be viewed differently. Since it is empiricism's focus on constant conjunction that underlies the standard critique of induction, Bhaskar's undermining of empiricism therefore also undermines the empiricist critique of induction. Once the definition of scientific laws as constant conjunction is rejected, then induction appears in a new light (Bhaskar 2008: 214-228).

For critical realism, the key issue for knowledge-claims based on induction is not the impossible task of assembling an infinite number of examples of constant conjunction, but the achievable task of carefully documenting sufficient examples of a phenomenon to suggest the existence of some underlying, if unseen, causal generative mechanism (*ibid*.: 219-220). Consequently, a broadly inductive approach becomes defensible: careful observation produces evidence suggesting the existence of an underlying generative mechanism, and such observations inform and direct further investigation, in a series of (hopefully) ever-closer approximations to a description of the underlying generative mechanism. Here, the task of social science becomes *explanation*, rather than prediction (Sayer 2010). The notion of 'demi-regs', i.e. semi-regularities, has emerged in critical realism as a useful operational concept to describe the partial regularities that often occur in social science, and which may indicate the existence of an underlying generative mechanism (Lawson 1998: 149-153). Various terms have been used to describe the social scientific

process (e.g. 'retroduction', 'retrodiction', etc.; see Edwards *et al.* 2014), but essentially the approach is iterative; that is, the familiar movement back and forth between data and theory. This theoretically informed, iterative, version of inductivism was adopted for the present study.

Implicit in this argument is a rejection of the grounded theory approach to theory-building, which is often associated with ethnographic and case study research. In practice, grounded theory too often neglects previous theory, producing accounts that are 'theory "lite"' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 8). Although existing theory around shop stewards has numerous problems, it is not the case that there is no theory at all (Chapters 2 and 3). Consequently, existing theory was not dispensed with, even though it could not provide a secure basis for deductive hypotheses. Instead, elements from existing theory were used to guide the design and conduct of the research — what Malinowski memorably called 'foreshadowed problems' (cited in Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 21; see also Yin 2009: 18). Here, previous accounts supplied a number of 'foreshadowed problems', including conflict and cooperation, frontier of control, effort bargain, bargaining opportunities and resources, bargaining relations, leaders and populists, shop-stewardliness, formal and informal bargaining, intra-organisational bargaining, mobilisation, and legitimacy (Chapters 2 and 3). This non-exhaustive list includes concepts that may be useful for, a) assessing the current standard view of shop stewards and, b) the development of new theory. As will be shown below, despite a number of difficulties with the overall theorisation of shop stewards, these concepts did nevertheless provide useful components for re-thinking shop stewards and workplace bargaining, and it would have been significantly counter-productive to abandon them.

This section has established the principal methodological bases for the present research. The next section discusses the design of research suitable for gathering data with which to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, with due sensitivity to 'foreshadowed problems'.

4.2 Research design: qualitative case study

This section sets out the research design and the reasons for adopting it. Since this project

intended to assess the overall character of contemporary shop steward activity, the research was designed to capture the broad range of issues that shop stewards dealt with, and the means used to deal with them. Happily, the research design and methods adopted here produced a wealth of rich data, and may therefore be of interest to other researchers. This section attempts to set out those methods sufficiently clearly that others might adopt them directly or adapt them flexibly to meet their own requirements.

Qualitative

Given the research questions this project set out to answer (Section 1.1), it was decided that qualitative methods would be required. The reason for this choice lies in the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods in social science. Whereas quantitative research seeks to attach numerical values to phenomena, and therefore pre-supposes a knowledge of what is to be counted, qualitative research is useful for 'contextual' research, where the aim is 'identifying *what* exists in the social world and the way it manifests itself', including 'the range of elements, [or] dimensions … of a social phenomenon (Ritchie 2003: 27, original emphasis). Since detailed knowledge of contemporary shop steward activity was lacking, and conceptualisation problematic, any attempt to attach numbers to aspects of shop stewards' activity would almost certainly have misled. Therefore, a quantitative approach was rejected in favour of qualitative, precisely to explore the elements and dimensions of shop steward activity.

Qualitative methods are recognised as well-suited to exploring the nature, parameters, and meanings of social activities, including relatively unexplored areas of workplace relations (Greene 2001: 119). Qualitative research is also used to 'understand the dynamics of a relationship' (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998: 15). It is important to note that the use of qualitative methods in this study does not imply a commitment to a social constructionist view of society, as is often the case for qualitative research (for instance, Whipp 1998). Neither is it assumed that qualitative methods are privileged in their ability to understand social reality, nor that quantitative methods are incapable of so doing. Rather, quantitative and qualitative are regarded as methods for investigating different aspects of social reality (Snape and Spencer 2003: 15). Qualitative methods are suited to:

> 'research questions that require explanation or understanding of social phenomena in their contexts. They are particularly well-suited to exploring issues that hold some complexity and to studying processes that occur over time' (*ibid*.: 5).

In terms of theory-building, qualitative methods are suited to 'generative' research, which aims at 'producing new ideas … as a contribution to the development of social theory', including 'new conceptions or understandings of social phenomena' (Ritchie 2003: 30). Plainly, such considerations applied for the present research.

Case study

Next, it was decided to adopt a case study design. Although qualitative methods and a case study are often treated as synonyms (Lewis 2003: 51), more explicit reasoning was adopted here. Recently, Yin (2009: 21) has championed case study as a research *method*, alongside other methods, such as experiment, survey, or historical research (*ibid*.: 8). However, this definition seems unnecessarily rigid. It is not clear why various methods might not be utilised within a case study format; for instance, the historical case study is well established in industrial relations research (for instance, Joyce 2013; Terry and Edwards 1988). Therefore, *case study* will be used here in the sense of 'research design' or 'research strategy … [which] can serve a variety of purposes and make use of a range of techniques' (Kitay and Callus 1998: 101, 102).

There is broad agreement on the circumstances in which a case study approach is suitable. For Kitay and Callus (1998: 101), case studies are 'particularly well suited' to studying 'complex social phenomena':

> 'The great strength of case study design is not simply that it … allows the researcher to place information in a wider context ... it [also] helps us understand complex social situations and processes' (*ibid*.: 104; see also Ritchie 2003).

Case studies are especially useful where 'the distinction between a phenomenon and its context is unclear' (Kitay and Callus 1998: 104). Similarly, for Yin (2009: 18), case studies are suitable when 'the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident', especially when the context is important for understanding the phenomenon. Certainly, the classic studies of shop stewards underline the importance of context. Yin (2009: 9) identifies the 'exploratory case study' as particularly suited to research that aims to establish not the 'incidence or prevalence of a phenomenon', but which aims instead to explore the *nature* of a phenomenon. Given the conceptual challenges arising from recent accounts of shop stewards, and the lack of direct empirical research, the designation *exploratory* seemed

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particularly appropriate for the current research.

Case studies have a long history in industrial relations, stretching back to the Webbs. However, case study research has recently drawn criticism for a claimed tendency to lack rigour. McGovern (2014b; 2014c) sets out 20 criteria[1] that are commonly associated with rigour in research methods,[2] and conducts a meta-analysis of workplace studies published as journal articles, to assess their reliability and validity against those criteria. McGovern (2014b) concludes that commonly there is 'no discussion of method', and that case study research is 'an unexamined tradition' or 'unquestioned faith'. While some of these criticisms reflect a rather narrow empiricist view of rigour, McGovern's starting point is valid; case study research must consider carefully its choice of research design, research methods, data analysis, and presentation of results.

However, it is less clear that the evidence presented supports McGovern's conclusions. In particular, it does not follow from the limited discussion of methods in journal articles that the field does not take methodological issues seriously. Indeed, the present research meets 15 of McGovern's 20 criteria,[3] even though the fieldwork was completed prior to McGovern's (2014b) critique; which suggests that an appreciation of these issues is in fact current within the field. Furthermore, McGovern's five remaining criteria are highly questionable. Indeed, adherence to these criteria, far from enhancing rigour, would have seriously undermined the present research. Of these, three were excluded for practical and

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[1] In a personal communication (McGovern 2014c), McGovern explains that a forthcoming journal article, based on the research presented at a plenary session of BUIRA Conference 2014 (McGovern 2014b), will use a slightly different selection of criteria. Since that research was incomplete at the time of the personal communication, McGovern's advice was to proceed on the basis of the criteria selected for the original presentation (as described in the following footnote).

[2] McGovern's (2014b) 20 criteria are: 'Describe the case study context', 'Engage in pattern matching (with other research)', 'Explain why the cases studies were selected', 'Draw analytical generalizations only', 'Draw on at least 10 interviews (obs) per case', 'Present evidence from both sides (of industry)', 'Set out the amount of evidence for each case', 'Explain what the cases are cases of', 'Attribute quotes to individuals', 'Acknowledge the limitations of the study', 'Use the organization's own name', 'Describe the data recording procedure', 'Draw on multiple cases (4 or more)', 'Discuss the researcher's influence on the subjects', 'Describe the data coding procedure', 'Explain why qualitative research was appropriate', 'Discuss the amount of access', 'Explain why case studies were appropriate', 'Explain how the evidence was analyzed', 'Explain the selection of individuals for interview'.

[3] The exceptions being: 'Engage in pattern matching (with other research)', 'Present evidence from both sides (of industry)', 'Attribute quotes to individuals', 'Use the organization's own name', 'Draw on multiple cases (4 or more)'.

ethical reasons: 'present evidence from both sides (of industry)' was unavoidably breached in one case study due to hostility from management, while 'use the organisation's own name' and 'attribute quotes to individuals' were set aside in order to protect participants from harm and to comply with undertakings given to participants and employing organisations (Section 4.4). The remaining two criteria were not used in the present research for clear methodological reasons. The first, 'engage in pattern matching (with other research)' is not obviously applicable to exploratory ethnographic research. The second, 'draw on multiple cases (4 or more)' warrants further discussion.

McGovern's claim that at least four case studies are required for rigour reflects an overly empiricist approach to research. Specifically, McGovern (2014b) claims that studies should include more cases than 'variables', in an argument derived from discussions of the 'small-N' problem; that is, the problem of how to draw theoretical conclusions from a small number of cases. However, there are a number of reasons for rejecting McGovern's approach. In the first place, writers such as Reuschmeyer (2003) and Flyvberg (2006) have argued convincingly that theoretical conclusions can be reached from even single cases, provided they are chosen carefully. Furthermore, even purely descriptive accounts can represent genuine advances in knowledge, because all science requires a large number of empirical examples to support generalisation and theoretical advance (Flyvberg 2006). Case studies are particularly useful for investigating phenomena with *many* 'variables of interest' (Yin 2009: 18). For the present research, not only was the number of variables expected to be large, but it was not possible to know beforehand how many would be involved. As exploratory research, it was important to *identify* variables. Consequently, an application of this 'criterion of rigour' would have required either a very large number of cases, each studied in far less depth, or an artificial restriction of the number of variables examined. Either option would have significantly limited the research, in both its empirical findings and its theoretical conclusions. The research would have been seriously undermined by reducing the depth of the case studies in favour of a breadth of coverage; that is, the application of this 'criterion of rigour' would in practice have significantly *reduced* the quality of this study.

Consequently, it was decided that the investigation of two case studies could be justified strongly on theoretical and methodological grounds. The choice of two case studies gave scope for some comparison, as evidence from each could be used to interrogate the other. Although single-case qualitative studies can produce theoretically significant results, the

introduction of a comparative element is beneficial (Reuschmeyer 2003: 324). At the same time, restricting the number of cases to two meant that each could be studied in depth. An important influence on this aspect of the research design was Batstone *et al.* (1977; 1978), where each case study lasted four months. However, there was concern that, given the weakening of shop steward organisation, four months might not provide sufficient data. Therefore, it was decided to investigate each case study for six months. In the event, such concern proved misplaced, and the research yielded abundant data. The combination of two studies for six months each proved extremely productive.

4.3 Data collection methods

Once a case study design had been selected, the next choice concerned research methods. Qualitative methods are varied, including observation and participant observation, in-depth and semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and various biographical methods (Lewis 2003: 56-61; Ritchie 2003: 34-8). Method selection was guided by the research questions, the 'foreshadowed problems', and the importance of gaining deep insight into the lived experience of shop stewards. Consequently, the first decision was that the research should collect 'naturally occurring data' (Lewis 2003: 56), due to the likelihood that context would be crucial, and the need for very detailed and accurate data (*ibid*: 56-57), which it might not be captured by elicited accounts. Perhaps more important was the issue of *interpretation* (*ibid*.: 57). Specifically, it was important to collect data independently of the interpretations of participants, because social actors' statements reflect their norms and values, hopes and aspirations, as well as their experiences (Section 2.1). With naturally occurring data, the interpretation of the researcher generates theoretically informed observation alongside the qualitative meanings and understandings of the actors themselves (Lewis 2003: 57). For these reasons it was decided that direct observation, of a broadly ethnographic type, would be the preferred data-gathering method. For purposes of triangulation, it was further decided that a mix of qualitative methods would be adopted. This section outlines its principal components.

Ethnographic observation
Ethnography is well-known for generating large quantities of rich, detailed, and 'thick' data

(Friedman and McDaniel 1998: 113-4; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 1-19; O'Reilly 2012: 1-27). The ethnographic study of work and workplaces is a long-established tradition (for an overview, see Friedman and McDaniel 1998). Many classic workplace studies used some version of ethnographic observation (Kelly 1998: 7). Consequently, it was appropriate that an effort to revive the tradition of workplace studies should adopt similar methods. The main method adopted was what is commonly known as non-participant observation[4] (Kelly 1998: 7); that is, the observer is present but does not participate in the activities under observation (for a fuller description of the fieldwork, see Appendix 1). This approach combined 'the benefits of being there' (Tope *et al.* 2005) with flexibility to move around the research site. Freedom for the researcher to move around was essential because, in both case studies, most shop stewards were relatively restricted in their movement around the workplace. Consequently, full participant observation would have unnecessarily limited the number of shop stewards included in the research.

Key advantages of ethnography include its 'immersive' nature (O'Reilly 2012; 108-9), though this is also one of its challenges. While immersion in the research setting provides unparalleled access to the detail of social interaction, context, and dynamics, the experience can be overwhelming for the researcher confronted with a mass of social interactions, struggling to decide what to record (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 141-7; O'Reilly 2012: 101-4), while at the same time working to establish field relations (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 63-96). Certainly, the start of each period of fieldwork was challenging (see Appendix 1). Fortunately, attention to the research questions and 'foreshadowed problems' provided a sound framework for orientation, and for selecting events to record. Furthermore, the 'relatively open-ended approach' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3) of ethnography permitted flexibility to explore unexpected findings during fieldwork; that is, the ability to ask different questions of different participants (Edwards 2014b). As Batstone *et al.* (1977: 275) note, 'observation in practice involves a number of research techniques, not least informal interviewing', and this view was born out during the present research.

It is important to emphasise that ethnographic research methods are compatible with a

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[4] Contemporary ethnography has rightly identified considerable complexity in the parameters and dynamics of 'participation' and 'observation', and different authors use different terms for characterising the balance between the two. Nevertheless, outside of specialist discussions, 'non-participant observation' is as good a term as any. For detailed and useful discussion of the issues involved, see Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 79-86), and O'Reilly (2012: Ch.4).

realist approach to the production of knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 5-18). Ethnography is often associated with radical interpretivist or constructionist approaches to social theory (*ibid*.: 7). For example, Friedman and McDaniel (1998: 116) argue that '[i]n ethnographic research, subjects' experiences are considered … absolutely primary to understanding social action'. Put like that, ethnography appears more like a theory of society than a research method. By contrast, the broadly Marxist and realist approach adopted here seeks to retain an important notion of *structure* alongside subjective experience and agency. Fortunately, other ethnographers have adopted a similar approach to structure and agency (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 188-9). Indeed, O'Reilly (2012: 6) explicitly stresses the importance of 'a theoretical perspective that … understands social life as the outcome of the interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life'. Consequently, ethnographic observation was adopted as a data-gathering method, within an overall Marxist theoretical framework, realist ontology, and 'sociological imagination' (Mills 2000).

Criticisms of ethnography include lack of rigour, and the difficulties of generalisation from small samples (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 32-3). These issues are dealt with below in the discussion of reliability, validity, and generalisation. Before that, the discussion examines other methods adopted alongside ethnography.

Diaries

Dairies offered the potential for gathering data from a wider layer of shop stewards than could be observed directly by one person, and therefore the use of some type of diary-based method for data collection was considered from an early stage in the research. However, difficulties with access in one case study made the method much more important than was originally envisaged (see below), and therefore the method deserves a fuller discussion.

Diary-based methods have not often featured in industrial relations research but there are a few examples, which yielded mixed results. Schuller and Robertson (1983) had reasonable success from asking shop stewards to keep a weekly log of time spent interacting with union members and managers, and Broad (1983) successfully used diaries to track shop steward issue-handling over a period of twelve weeks. By contrast, Partridge (1977; 1978) asked a group of shop stewards to complete a diary of activities one day per week for ten weeks,

which yielded enough data for a broad estimate of stewards' range of activities (Partridge 1977), but '[u]nfortunately, not enough incidents occurred during the course of study to test any overall pattern' (Partridge 1978: 193). Consequently, in order to develop a suitable method, it was necessary to look beyond industrial relations research: fortunately, there is a considerable literature in other fields,[5] which proved most useful.

Diaries present researchers with both a 'unique window' and 'dilemmas, irritations and problems' (Bolger *et al.* 2003: 610). An important advantage is that, by utilising more or less contemporaneous recording, diaries offer a way of overcoming the 'perils of recollection' which is 'often plagued by biases' (*ibid.*: 581, 585; see also Alaszewski 2006). Research diaries take a wide variety of forms, from the highly structured and quantitative event-log used in psychology (Stone *et al.* 1991) and health research (Clayton and Thorne 2000), to the reflective and autobiographical journals of feminist research (Bell 1998), or integrated with photography in urban geography (Latham 2003).

Diary methods also present researchers with a number of challenges (see Bolger *et al.* 2003 for a useful discussion). First, they are very demanding of time and effort for researchers and especially for participants. Consequently, some participants can be expected to drop out. Second, it is known that diaries provide incomplete records, because no participant fills in their diary every day (Johnson and Bytheway 2001: 193). Nevertheless, for the purposes of qualitative research, incomplete records from a larger number of participants are considered more useful than complete sets from a smaller sample, providing data that could not be collected in any other way (*ibid.*: 200, *et passim*). In this study, the disadvantages were more than made up for by the wealth of data collected concerning everyday shop steward activity. Furthermore, diary accounts were triangulated with evidence from other sources, providing a good level of reliability.

The specific form of diary method adopted was a version of the hybrid 'diary:diary-interview' method developed by Zimmerman and Wieder (1977a; Johnson and Bytheway 2001: 184-5; Latham 2003: 2001-2; Spowart and Nairn 2014; Toms and Duff 2002). This method was developed as an alternative to more conventional ethnographic methods, in order to produce similarly rich data in circumstances where the researcher cannot be

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[5] Thanks are due to Dr. Saira Lee of Stirling University, who used event-log style diaries as part of her PhD research on workload in the IT industry, and who very helpfully introduced me to the non-industrial relations literature on diary methods.

present; that is, 'those situations where the problems of direct observation resist solution' (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977a: 481; Alaszewski 2006: 112-5). In the case of Zimmerman and Wieder (1977b), the research was an investigation into student sub-culture. The researchers decided that they would not fit in easily for the purposes of standard participant observation, and sought an alternative approach. Interestingly, the questions Zimmerman and Wieder (1977a: 483) wanted to answer were strikingly similar to the questions of the present research:

> 'What do these people do all day? What varieties of activities do they engage in? How many people do they interact with? What kinds of relationships obtain between people? What is the typical temporal sequence of events? And so on. Interviewing by itself was inadequate for the purpose of establishing a clear picture of such activities, in part because we were uncertain of the right questions to ask.'

Described in this way, the diary:diary-interview method seemed especially suited to the present research.

Unsurprisingly, the diary:diary-interview method combines diaries with interviews. Participants in Zimmerman and Wieder (*ibid*.: 486) kept diaries for one week, after which lengthy interviews (up to five hours each) were conducted, based on the diary entries (*ibid*.: 491; for a critical view, see Spowart and Nairn 2013: 329-30). However, the method needed some adjustment to suit present requirements. First, the experience of Partridge (1978) suggested that the period of diary-keeping would need to be longer. It was anticipated that shop stewards might be less active than in the 1970s, and that issues might take longer to resolve. Therefore, stewards were asked to keep diaries for as long as they could manage within the six month time-frame (further details in Appendix 2). The second adjustment concerned the diary-interview. Instead of conducting a single long interview at the end of the period of diary-keeping, it was decided to keep in contact with participants through a series of short diary-interviews. Arrangements were made to meet with diarists from time to time during the fieldwork, in order to review diary entries, to record entries digitally (using the camera on a mobile phone), and to talk over the entries with the diarist. Generally, diary-interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Again, this combination proved highly productive (Appendix 2).

The use of diaries alongside observation raises the question of whether diary evidence should be seen as naturally occurring or generated data (Ritchie 2003: 34-7). Alaszewski

(2006) concludes that diary methods produce data that shares some characteristics with naturally occurring data, but also has aspects in common with generated data, because '[d]iary keeping is a sophisticated activity involving a set of social conventions and requiring access to specific resources' (*ibid*.:116). One of the 'specific resources' required for keeping diaries is literacy, which can be a serious issue in some circumstances (e.g. Meth 2003: 202-3). However, for the present research, it was considered that lack of literacy was unlikely to be a major issue, because contemporary shop steward activity in the UK is significantly concerned with written policies and procedures, and therefore any sample of shop stewards is likely to have a high literacy rate. Consequently, it was concluded that potential benefits significantly outweighed potential difficulties, and therefore diary-based data collection was included.

This innovative use of diaries and diary-interviews produced very rich and detailed data, as will become clear in the following chapters. Together with ethnographic observation, diary:diary-interview also contributed to the third research method adopted; namely, in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews

In qualitative research in employment and workplace studies, interviews are 'the primary means of accessing the experiences and subjective views of actors' (Whipp 1998: 54). Indeed, the use of interviews has increased in recent years; partly due to difficulties gaining access to workplaces for observation, but also due to a perceived unwillingness on the part of university ethics committees to approve such research (Tope *et al.* 2005: 473). While the use of interviews can also be justified on the grounds of efficiency and practicality (*ibid*.: 472), other considerations were influential here.

Interview methods vary greatly, and researchers face choices about what form to use. The most commonly recognised issue is the degree to which the interviews are structured (O'Reilly 2012: 119-22). For instance, the highly structured format used in WERS is described as an interview by its exponents (Kersley *et al.* 2006: 7-8). At the other extreme, ethnographic interviews may be entirely *un*-structured (Legard *et al.* 2003). Somewhere in between, the Webbs described their preferred approach as 'a conversation with a purpose' (cited in *ibid*.: 138). In the face of these choices, the usual compromise solution is the 'semi-structured' interview. Unfortunately, 'terms are not necessarily used consistently' (Arthur

and Nazroo 2003: 111), so what is meant by 'semi-structured' varies significantly. In reality, the notion of a completely unstructured interview makes little sense (Legard *et al.* 2003: 141). Helpfully, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 101) prefer to see the interview not in terms of structure, but the degree to which it is 'directive'. This approach makes explicit the parameters of interviews in a way seldom found in accounts utilising the catch-all 'semi-structured': in reality, almost *all* interviews are semi-structured.

In keeping with ethnographic tradition, interviews conducted for this research will be termed *in-depth*. These interviews comprised a mixture of directive and non-directive elements: an open and discursive approach for most areas of interest was combined with a small number of clearly defined directive questions (Legard *et al.* 2003: 153-4). Interviews schedules (Appendix 6) were designed mainly around themes that emerged from the fieldwork, and questions used by Batstone et al (1977), and by WERS (2004, 2011). Some actual WERS questions were included in interviews with senior HR managers (Appendix 6; Chapter 6). In-depth interviews were carried out towards the end of each period of fieldwork, with shop stewards who had kept diaries, senior union representatives (who had not kept diaries), and a small number of managers. Placing interviews at the end of each case study permitted participants to reflect upon themes that had emerged during the research.

Documentary sources

Documentary sources did not form a large part of the research but were used to provide background information concerning the case studies and organisational context. Primary documentary sources included records of the union organisations in each case study, from which it was possible to gain an understanding of the historical development of the shop steward organisation, and broad changes in the types of issues that were dealt with. While union records were very numerous and substantial in one case study (London Borough), they were far more limited in the other (Big Car). Other primary documentary evidence came from employers. Unfortunately, these sources provided far less information than initially hoped. Management at London Borough proved quite hostile to the research (see below), and did not provide any documentary sources directly. At Big Car, although management's stance was far more helpful and constructive, requests yielded very little. Consequently, primary documentary evidence from employers was mainly provided by senior union representatives; including information on workforce numbers and

composition, (approximate) rates of pay, internal policies, and procedures for handling grievance and disciplinary matters.

Secondary documentary sources included a number of published works concerning the broader context of each industry, and the basic features of collective bargaining (see below). Fortunately, there is an extensive literature on both the auto industry and local government. Consequently, although some detailed information is missing from each case study, it was nevertheless possible to assemble sufficient background to contextualise research findings.

4.4 Further issues in case study research

This section outlines a number of further considerations in carrying out the case studies described above. First, case study selection and sampling are discussed, followed by problems of access. Next, discussion turns to ethical issues raised by research that might reveal recalcitrant behaviour, and how these were handled. Then, data-analysis methods are described. Finally, there is a discussion of reliability, validity, and generalisation.

Case study selection and sampling

There are significant advantages for research if case studies can be selected on clear theoretical grounds (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 28-35). Here, the crucial additional consideration was to select sites with enough shop stewards to make data-collection practicable within the immovable constraints of doctoral research: a fixed timetable, a lone researcher, and a very small budget. Consequently, it was decided to seek case study sites with functioning shop stewards' committees, so that one researcher could observe a number of stewards gathered together, on a reasonably regular basis. Although the relative decline of shop steward organisation meant that such cases would in some respects be unrepresentative, the priority of the study had to be to gather sufficient data. Furthermore, it was recognised that case-study research can never proceed on the basis of representativeness, and that any generalisation would necessarily be on theoretical grounds (see below). Consequently, the selection of atypical case studies was justified on purposive and theoretical grounds (Ritchie *et al.* 2003: 78-82).

It was decided to select one case study from the private sector and one from the public, also for purposive and theoretical reasons. Public and private sectors offer contrasting conditions for union organisation, and, as Reuschmeyer (2003: 232) argues, 'Considerable increases in the plausibility of theoretical claims can be gained if the second case is in light of theory and for specified reasons least likely to confirm it'. That is, theoretical claims are strengthened if similar results are found in dissimilar cases. However, as is often the case with ethnographic research, the selection of case studies was also influenced by access (*ibid.*; O'Reilly 2012: 86-91; see below).

Once case studies were selected, and fieldwork commenced, further sampling issues arose. The immersive nature of ethnographic fieldwork presents considerable challenges over what should be recorded, and when. It is not possible to record everything, and choices must be made from the very start. Sampling within each case study was therefore, once more, guided by purposive and theoretical considerations (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 35-40). The intention in both case studies was twofold: to capture the activities of a range of shop stewards, and to gather enough data to provide a basis for later analysis. In both case studies, efforts were made to select a broad qualitative spread of stewards as diarists, in order to gather data from across the range of steward activities. Similar considerations guided the selection of stewards for in-depth interviews. Mainly, participant for these interviews were selected from among the diarists, although in a small number (2-3) of instances at London Borough, difficulties in contacting stewards (see Appendix 1) narrowed slightly the range of participants at this stage. Differences in access meant that similar problems did not arise at Big Car (see below and Appendix 1).

Initially, it had been expected that one stewards' committee at London Borough would provide a sufficiently large sample of stewards, but this proved not to be the case. Consequently, while this committee, having the largest membership and meeting more regularly, provided the greatest proportion of research data, additional material came from a mix of the other stewards' committees in the case study (Section 5.1). In the case study at Big Car, stewards from one area similarly predominated in the sample, simply because they were the most readily accessible (Section 6.1). Differences in access at each case study site, and differences in shop steward organisation, meant that the process of recruiting diarists

was different in each case, as were patterns of participation and withdrawal[6] (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, in both cases, the lengthy period of fieldwork permitted insight into the activities of less accessible stewards, as well as observation of stewards who were not diarists, or who had dropped out of diary-keeping. While less detail was collected on the activities of some stewards than others, it was nevertheless concluded that the qualitative range of their activities was not significantly different from the stewards who participated more fully. Consequently, by the end of the fieldwork it was confidently felt that the research had succeeded in capturing the broad spread of shop steward activities in each case study. The experience did underline, though, that for ethnographic research, sampling considerations are often balanced against access difficulties – which are discussed next.

Access

From the start of this research, it was recognised that access might be a significant problem. Ethnographic observation would require entry to workplaces for significant lengths of time. A list was drawn up of trade union contacts, and advice sought from other researchers and union officers. A number of shop steward organisations were approached, with mixed results. Finally, senior union representatives at two employing organisations suggested that shop stewards at their workplaces might be interested in taking part in the study. From these contacts, further discussions ensued, and, once the steward organisations had indicated a willingness to participate, approaches were made to employers.

Contact with senior management at London Borough was initiated through informal approaches by union branch officers, and first responses were encouraging. Negotiations for access were conducted over several months, but, only two weeks prior to starting the fieldwork, senior management suddenly refused access to any council premises except the union office. As a result, access to shop stewards in the workplace became impossible, and observation at London Borough was restricted to shop stewards' meetings (though these were quite numerous and lengthy), and time spent in the office with senior stewards on facility time. Consequently, the diary-based element of the research became significantly more important.

By contrast, management at Big Car agreed access for the research with few restrictions.

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[6] This unevenness of participation also carried implications for the presentation of findings, which is discussed further below.

Access was granted more or less throughout the site, with the proviso that, for health and safety reasons, the researcher had to be accompanied at all times by an employee of the company. In practice, this meant some limits on movement around the plant, though this caused less inconvenience than might have been expected. Most of the time, most of the stewards at Big Car had their movements restricted by their work duties on the production line. Consequently, even totally free movement at Big Car would, in practice, have produced little evidence that was not available through other means. Again, restricted access at Big Car, though of a different order to London Borough, meant that diary-based research became more important than originally anticipated. As will be seen below, the diary:diary-interview combination proved most useful in both case studies.

Ethical considerations

The chief ethical concern in conducting the present research was the risk of harm to participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 213-17; O'Reilly 2012: 62-85). It was recognised that documenting shop steward practices might reveal activity that was in breach of employer policies, union policies, or even the law. Any individuals identified by the research might therefore be at risk of disciplinary sanctions by the employer. Moreover, breaches of employer policy might be found not only among shop stewards: managers might also engage in covert practices. For these reasons, it was decided that individuals who participated in the research would be given a guarantee of anonymity. Consequently, none of the participants are named in the account below. In order to address potential employer sensitivities, the same guarantee was given to the employing organisations. Furthermore, considerations of anonymity necessarily limited the background information given about each organisation, so that readers would not be able to identify employers or participants. As a result, less information is provided concerning the two case studies than some readers may have preferred. Nevertheless, it will hopefully become clear that the findings presented below are sufficiently contextualised.

A second guarantee, of confidentiality, was also given. Participants were assured that nothing they disclosed to the researcher would be repeated to other participants. In part, this guarantee was given to further reinforce anonymity. But it was also anticipated that intra-organisational bargaining might be an issue among the two groups of shop stewards (which proved to be the case). Since differences of opinion concerning union policy and practice can be sources of considerable conflict, it was important that participating shop

stewards felt comfortable in disclosing their personal opinions and beliefs, without fear that this might cause tension with other members of the union. In both cases, it was clear during the fieldwork that a number of participants would have been much less forthcoming had they not received this undertaking, and the research clearly benefited from this guarantee being given.

The issue of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality affected not only the conduct of the research, but also the presentation of the findings. Not only are participants not named, and quotes not attributed, but considerable efforts were made to conceal the sources of quotes and, in some cases, to deliberately disguise the identity of the speaker. For this reason, pseudonyms or other identifiers have not been used, because participants might recognise one another from known incidents reported in the findings, and on that basis might then discover other information concerning that individual, with potential repercussions in terms of conflict or exposure to harm. Consequently, two of McGovern's (2014a) 'criteria of rigour' – that participating organisations and individuals should be named (Section 4.2) – were set aside. Complying with these strictures would have had a devastating impact on the research by narrowing dramatically the findings that could be presented; a case of 'the annoying disregard of methodological discussions for the real world' (Reuschmeyer 2003: 322). The results presented in following chapters demonstrate that guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality contributed significantly to the quality of evidence, and therefore also to the theoretical generalisation that was possible.

Data analysis

The research at London Borough produced some 150 hours of observation and diary-interviews, 22 shop steward diaries, 18 in-depth interviews (14 shop stewards, 3 shop stewards/convenors (see Section 5.1), Branch Secretary), and a significant amount of documentary evidence. Research at Big Car produced around 450 hours of observation, 18 shop steward diaries, 25 in-depth interviews (15 stewards, four senior stewards, two convenors (see Section 6.1), and four managers), and a lesser amount of documentary evidence. Altogether, this amounted to a very considerable quantity of data to analyse (for further details, see Appendices 1, 3, 4, and 7).

Data were analysed thematically, with the aid of NVivo 9 software. The reasons for this choice of software were twofold. First, the internal architecture of NVivo means that the

project is held in a single file, making it easy to transport and store securely. Second, and more significantly, this was the only qualitative data analysis software available at my university, and cost prohibited the exploration of alternatives. It is important to appreciate, though, that computer software cannot substitute for researchers' analytical skills. Here, software was treated as an 'electronic filing cabinet' (Spencer 2012) for data-management, coding, cross-referencing of themes, etc., but not as a substitute for analysis by the researcher (Spencer *et al.* 2003: 208). Fortunately, good quality practical advice, guidance and training for NVivo is readily available,[7] and specialist training was undertaken to develop the necessary skills in thematic analysis.

Fieldnotes formed the great bulk of the data analysed. These covered observation in various contexts and notes from diary-interviews (Appendix 2). Fieldnotes were straightforward to work with in the software package. In-depth interviews were not transcribed because the software permitted coding of digital audio recordings. In addition to saving time, this method retained the rich variety of participant voices, including tone and emphasis, which would have been lost had the interviews been transcribed. Digital photographs of diaries entries were utilised far less than other types of data, because the main role of these had been in informing diary-interviews, and consequently evidence from diaries was recorded elsewhere.

The large quantity of rich and detailed data produced by the fieldwork was undoubtedly one of the main achievements of this research, and represents a real contribution to knowledge. However, the sheer volume of data created significant difficulties for analysis. To avoid bias, an effort was made to code as much of each day's fieldnotes as possible, minimising if not eliminating uncoded content because, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 155) warn, 'data ... need to be coded densely'. Unfortunately, NVivo is poorly suited to analysing data of this type and quantity. The user-interface is rather cumbersome, and does not facilitate quick and easy navigation once analysis extends beyond the first few themes. As increasing amounts of data were coded, individual themes became very large and difficult to work with. Consequently, once key themes were established, a word-search approach was adopted to speed up analysis. Inevitably, this meant that some parts of the data were analysed less intensively than others. Although it would be preferable to analyse all data in

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[7] This research made particular use of McDonnell (n.d.), and resources available via the Surrey University Caqdas Networking Project:
http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sociology/research/researchcentres/caqdas/

exactly the same way, logistics made this impossible, given the resources available. To minimise potential distortions, diary-interview data were given precedence for coding. Diary-interviews ran throughout each case study and provided a framework of data from ordinary shop stewards. Themes derived from the diary-interviews were then used to analyse more quickly data in which the voices of senior reps were more prominent, such as observation in union offices. In this way, activities of senior reps are seen from the point of view of ordinary shop stewards, rather than the other way around (for detail of themes, see Appendix 7).

Themes were established using most of the common techniques (for discussion and overview, see Ryan and Bernard 2003). Several important themes came from previous theory as 'foreshadowed problems' (Section 4.1). Others emerged from the data, through the use of 'scrutiny techniques' (*ibid*.: 88). These included scrutinising data for 'repetitions', 'indigenous typologies or categories', 'similarities and differences', 'linguistic connectors', and 'missing data' (*ibid*.: 89-93). Much less use was made of 'processing techniques' (*ibid*.: 94), although 'cutting and sorting' did lead to both the linking together of some themes and greater differentiation within others (*ibid*.: 94-96).

It is important to understand, though, that it is in the nature of ethnographic research for themes to emerge in the field, during data collection. The process of writing fieldnotes is inherently selective (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 142) and involves the researcher in a more or less continuous series of choices about what is to be recorded. Consequently, questions of analysis are posed from the earliest stages; what O'Reilly (2012: 29) calls an 'iterative-inductive' process (see also Ryan and Bernard 2003: 100). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 158) write:

> 'In ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues through the process of writing reports, articles, and books. Formally, it starts to take shape in the analytic notes and memoranda; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches.'

Consequently, a number of important themes were identified before the fieldwork was finished, and before any computer was switched on. Broad analytical dispositions were integral to the data collection process itself; for instance, curiosity about the relations and attitudes of stewards towards management, a sensitivity to elements of contestation, a

basic distinction between bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources.

The post-fieldwork stage of analysis deepened and developed these themes. It became clear, for instance, that a theme 'attitudes towards managers' was too general, and as the analysis progressed this theme was further subdivided as nuances of attitude emerged from the data. This theme-family expanded and differentiated, with sub-themes including: management accused of lying; management, arguments used; management challenged; management don't know job; management, motive attribution; management renege; management seen as helpful; management shifted; management, stewards helping. Thus, while major themes were significantly shaped by the research questions and 'foreshadowed problems', further development emerged from the data through use of the 'scrutiny techniques' outlined above. In this way, themes coalesced around a mix of 'foreshadowed problems' and 'demi-regs' in the data. Themes were not formally listed due to the difficulties of assigning particular parts of the data to a single area of concern. Instead, nodes were grouped together flexibly, in different ways for different aspects of analysis, discussion, and conclusions. In practice, the main themes utilised were those that shape the structures of Chapters 5-8 (further detail on nodes and themes is provided in Appendix 7).

The final challenge for data analysis concerned the presentation of findings. There has recently been considerable discussion within ethnography about problems of rhetoric and representation in written accounts (for an overview, see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 203-206). One response to such concerns has been to increase transparency by, for instance, naming participants (McGovern 2014b); an option which, as discussed above, was not suitable for this study. An alternative approach has been to provide a count of the number of participants quoted. However, for this research, such an approach would have been significantly misleading, because the nature of the fieldwork meant that quantity of data gathered from individual participants was extremely varied; moreover, this variation did not straightforwardly reflect the analytical importance of the evidence provided. Thus, some participants gave only very small amounts of data, but this was sometimes (on two or three occasions) very important for overall understanding. The unevenness of participation by stewards – stewards participated in the study as casual encounters in the workplace, participants in meetings, diary-keepers, and in-depth interviewees – meant that a simple count would misrepresent the status of participants. Therefore, the account below should be taken as based analytically on the fieldnotes, with all the rich unevenness that they

contain, including diary-interviews; together with in-depth interviews, and some use of documentary sources (Section 4.3). Quotations used in the account below are illustrative (White *et al.* 2003: 312), and due care has been taken to ensure that quotes reflect the diversity (*ibid.*: 313) of stewards' experiences and activities.

Reliability, validity, and generalisation

The reliability of research data is a key concern in qualitative research of all types (Lewis and Ritchie 2003: 270-273). The lengthy and immersive nature of ethnography is known for producing rich and detailed data, and that was certainly the experience here (Appendices 1 and 3). In both case studies, a point was reached about four months in when the fieldwork was producing little new data; only more examples of what had been seen before. That is, the areas under investigation had become 'saturated' (Spencer *et al.* 2003: 201). Further data collection seemed unlikely to reveal new insights, but it was decided to continue for the planned six months, in accordance with the research design. This strategy proved valuable. First, it confirmed that saturation was close to being achieved in most areas, giving confidence in the reliability of the findings; that is, confidence that another researcher, pursuing the same methods in the same setting, would have found broadly the same data (Lewis and Ritchie 2003: 270).

Secondly, extended immersion in the fieldwork setting continued to deepen understanding of issues that were already familiar. In one striking example, a few days before the end of the fieldwork at Big Car, a brief comment from one shop steward transformed previous understanding of an important aspect of lean production and team-working, leading to significant re-evaluation of previous evidence. Later, during data analysis, it was discovered that another steward had given the same information within a few days of the research commencing, some six months previously. On that occasion the fieldnotes record no sense of revelation, and the point was passed over quickly and forgotten. The difference in the impact of the two conversations reflected the huge development of understanding in the intervening months. Clearly, this example underlines the benefit of lengthy ethnographic immersion for researching workplace relations (*cf.* Tope *et al.* 2005). Again, the very considerable informational yield (*ibid*.) of the present research suggests that a good level of reliability was achieved.

The issue of *validity* has a somewhat different place in qualitative research as compared

with quantitative, and this is especially the case with ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 183; O'Reilly 2012: 226-228). While quantitative research is often concerned to establish the validity of individual constructs, for qualitative research, especially for ethnography, validity hinges on the overall account. Here, validity is deployed in this broad sense; whether the evidence, taken together, 'can bear the weight of the interpretation that is put on it' (Sapsford and Jupp 1996: 1, cited in Bell 2010: 120). A number of the principal concepts deployed in this research have a long history in the field, and can generally be considered trustworthy; for instance, conflict, cooperation, effort bargain, frontier of control. The meaning of these concepts was further clarified by the discussion in Chapter 3. In addition, the lengthy period of fieldwork enabled what might be called *rolling triangulation*, in that issues and events could be tracked back and forth between various participants (*cf.* 'data-source triangulation', Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 183). Consequently, reliance on single informants was largely eliminated. Stewards' accounts were tested and re-tested against the accounts of other stewards, thereby adding to confidence that the final account was non-misleading, and that interpretations were valid.

As noted above, the issue of generalisation has long exercised qualitative and case-study researchers. One response has been to forego generalisation, in favour of sophisticated description (Flyvberg 2006). However, the problematic nature of previous theory around shop stewards meant that a non-theoretical account would be unsatisfactory. Therefore, the present study adopted a different approach, and sought to generalise by placing the research carefully in relation to theory (Yin 2009: 38). Specifically, the research questions (Section 1.1) were designed to facilitate critical evaluation of the conceptual underpinnings of the current standard view, rather than simple empirical refutation. The combination of conceptual critique and detailed evidence permitted the development of an alternative framework for understanding shop steward activity (Chapter 7). Of course, confirmation or refutation of that framework requires further research. Nevertheless, it is the claim of the present research that the methods adopted here have contributed significantly towards a valid re-theorisation of this important area of workplace relations. Naturally, readers must make up their own minds as to whether this claim is justified.

4.5 Background

To contextualise the research, this section provides factual background on the two case studies, covering employment figures, union membership and density, collective bargaining arrangements, and union development.

Case study 1: London Borough

The first case study consisted of Unison shop stewards in a London local authority, which will be referred to as London Borough. At the time of the research, the Unison branch had just over 3,000 members, and London Borough directly employed around 4,200 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff, plus an unknown but significant number of agency staff (union branch officers faced persistent difficulties in obtaining figures for agency staff from management). However, determining membership density proved problematic for a number of reasons.

The uncooperative stance of senior management restricted access to figures on overall employment. While union branch officers made efforts to keep up to date figures for membership and density, their task was made considerably more complex by the combined impacts of new public management and government austerity policies, which had led to successive waves of reorganisation, privatisation, contracting-out, local management of schools (LMS), and a growing programme of redundancies. As a result, the directly employed workforce was undergoing a significant size-reduction, while the union membership overall was being fragmented among a large number of employers. At the time of the fieldwork, this 'local government' Unison branch represented members at more than 80 employers. Even so, some 76% of branch members were employed directly by the council; that is, some 2280 individuals. During the fieldwork, the branch received figures from Unison head office which put membership density at 49%, though this figure was disputed by senior union reps on the basis that those figures assumed wider eligibility for membership than was in fact the case (due to dispersed employment). A further complication lay in the figures provided to the branch by borough management, which expressed employment in terms of 'full-time equivalent' staff. Consequently, the total number of employees was somewhat higher than 4,200, due to the number of part-time employees. As a result of these difficulties, the best estimate of Unison membership density among London Borough employees was around 50-60%. This figure is somewhat lower than the 65% national average for local government (Gill-McClure 2014: 381), though this figure

also includes members of other unions. A few hundred of the workforce were members of the GMB,[8] and there were a handful of UCATT members in the direct works section; but Unison organised the great majority of union members at London Borough. This study focused mainly on Unison shop stewards who were directly employed by London Borough, together with a few Unison stewards employed by schools.

Collective bargaining arrangements at London Borough reflected the general situation in local government in England and Wales. The most recently introduced structure of terms and conditions, the 'single-status' agreement set out 'a single national pay scale, but allows for local determination of grading structures' (Gill-McClure *et al.* 2003: 269). As a result, while the main terms and conditions were not bargained over by London Borough union representatives, they had plenty of experience of collective bargaining over pay and conditions, as well as dealing with issues such as service reorganisation, redundancies, out-sourcing, and TUPE arrangements. At the highest level, the Corporate Joint Consultation Committee met approximately every three months, where the union was represented by senior branch officers (for lower-level union-management forums, see Chapter 5). Branch officers also had experience of dealing with private sector employers, though that was not a focus for the current research.

From the time of its formation in 1993 Unison was the largest trade union in the UK (Lyddon n.d.) until it was overtaken in 2007 by the formation of Unite (see below). At the time of the fieldwork, Unison's membership stood at some 1,301,500 (Certification Officer 2013a). Unison was formed during a wave of mergers, as British trade unions struggled to find ways of coping with significantly declining memberships and influence during the 1980s (Terry 2000; Undy 2008). The three public sector unions that merged to form Unison were: National and Local Government Officers (Nalgo), with membership mainly among white collar local government workers (the 'officer' grades – administrative, professional, technical and clerical, or APT&C), and also among administrative staff in public education and the NHS; National Union of Public Employees (Nupe), mainly made up of public service manual workers in local government and the NHS; and the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), most of whose members were nursing and allied staff in the NHS. In local government, this merger brought together Nalgo and Nupe; two unions with a long

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[8] The GMB organisation at London Borough was considered for inclusion in the research as a case study, but was decided against on the basis that it had few stewards and lacked functioning shop stewards committees.

history of rivalry, and somewhat different traditions of organising. Whereas Nalgo had long seen itself as 'member-led', Nupe's tradition was characterised as 'officer-led' (Terry 2000: 4). In part, this difference reflected important differences between the two unions' memberships; Nupe members tended to be in lower grade jobs, and were often geographically dispersed in small workplaces (Fryer *et al.* 1974: 21), while Nalgo members were in higher grade jobs in town halls and larger office facilities (Ironside and Siefert 2000: 48). During the 1970s and especially the 1980s, however, membership of Nalgo underwent a process of change which considerably shifted the nature of the union away from a model with a significant aspect of professional association, towards a more typically trade unionist outlook (Ironside and Siefert 2000: 30). In Nupe, the 1970s saw something of a shift away from its traditional centralised model of organisation (Williams and Fryer 2011: 133), with an increase in rank-and-file activism and independent shop steward organisation (Branney 2014), often under the sponsorship of left-wing full-time officers (Williams and Fryer 2011: 302; a description of Nupe shop steward organisation during the 1979 'winter of discontent' strikes can be found in Suddaby 1979).

These processes were certainly reflected in the character of the Unison branch at London Borough. Shop steward organisation within the Nalgo branch started to develop in the 1970s and grew strongly in the 1980s (Section 5.1), under the impetus of the repeated conflicts between local government workers and the Thatcher government (Ironside and Siefert 2000). Consequently, although Nalgo shop stewards at London Borough witnessed defeats of major unions during the 'coercive pacification' (Hyman 1989: 199) of the 1980s, steward organisation emerged relatively strong and intact. By contrast, the Nupe branch, which had developed shop steward organisation during the 1970s, was decimated by the imposition of 1980s Conservative policies, such as privatisation and Compulsory Competitive Tendering, which cut swathes through Nupe's membership in local government, destroying large parts of its activist base (Branney 2014). The relative weakness of shop steward organisation in Nupe, as compared with Nalgo, combined with the shift in local government employment in the 1980s, meant that in London Borough the merger of Nupe and Nalgo essentially resulted in the extension of Nalgo-style organisation across the new Unison branch. Evidence of that tradition, including what were in 1993 quite novel aspects of union organisation, such as 'proportionality' and 'fair representation' (Terry 2000: 5), was still clearly in evidence in London Borough during the fieldwork (Chapter 5). Overall, the Unison branch at London Borough maintained a good level of shop steward organisation and

activism, which stood comparison with any of the stronger branches of the union (*cf.* Kerr *et al.* 2002; Waddington and Kerr 2009).

Case study 2: Big Car

The state of union organisation at the second case study was far easier to ascertain. The Big Car plant was part of a foreign-owned multi-national motor vehicle manufacturing company. At the time of the research, the workforce comprised around 1,800 directly employed hourly-paid workers and staff, plus some 1,600 workers employed by several contractors. Union membership among the directly employed workforce, where this study focused, was high; in some areas approaching 100%.

The Big Car plant had operated a lean production regime for some 20 years. Early accounts of lean production (e.g. Womack *et al.* 1990) adopted a supportive, pro-management approach. More recently, the 'dark side' (Thompson and Smith 2010: 16) of lean production has been emphasised, with research focused on the intensification of labour under lean in manufacturing (Delbridge 1998; Garrahan and Stewart 1992; Stewart *et al.* 2009). Research has also been critical of the recent introduction of lean management techniques into clerical work (Carter *et al.* 2013a) and the public sector (Carter *et al.* 2013b). In these accounts, workers are seen as increasingly subordinated to the demands of rationalising management, with consequences manifest in ever-increasing pace and pressure of work, routinisation of tasks, 'management by stress', and increased physical and mental work pressure, leading to workers reporting significant levels of physical and mental ill-health (Carter *et al.* 2013a). Moody (2007: 106) argues that the acceptance of lean production by US unions signalled the 'surrender of the workplace' to management, and Stewart *et al.* (2009: 22) argue that 'lean was designed to deal with [shop] steward power once and for all'. Overall, these accounts present a bleak view of the impact of new management methods upon shop steward organisation. However, some accounts caution against taking the claims of lean at face value. Freysennet (2009) argues that even in the auto industry genuine lean production is rare; more usually, aspects of lean are mixed with other management methods. A recent study of lean in the civil service characterises it as 'post hoc rationalisation' (Martin 2013: 11) rather than a coherent package. At Big Car, features of lean production management included: team-working, just in time (JIT) supply of components, detailed job design and time-sheets, 'continuous improvement process' (CIP) or *Kaizen* work-reorganisation, continual efforts by management to reduce labour, and the encouragement by

management of 'suggestions' from the workforce to improve production efficiency.

In common with other car plants, there had been a significant reduction in employee numbers over recent years, which had been exacerbated by the impact of severe recession in the European market for automobiles after 2008. Shortly before the fieldwork started, union and management had concluded an agreement for the introduction of a new model at the plant, and planning for this was a background theme during the fieldwork. While this deal involved a number of concessions (full details of which were secret), it also guaranteed continued production at the plant, including several hundred new jobs from the recruitment of a third shift; generally the deal was considered a successful outcome. While exact figures on pay could not be obtained, the consensus among stewards was that, even after concessions, jobs at the plant were still among the best in the area, with pay and conditions significantly in advance of most employers in the locality.

A further effect of recession in the motor trade was short-time working at Big Car during the fieldwork. In recent years, the union had agreed to an annualised hours arrangement, whereby workers would remain at home during periods when production was not required, but still be paid as normal, while at times when greater production was required longer shifts and Saturdays would be worked for no extra pay. Although such agreements have drawn criticism from some sections of the union movement (Gall and Allsop 2007: 809-811), the agreement at Big Car was generally popular. Recessionary conditions meant that one or two 'down-days' per week was common, and had been for quite some time. Many workers had accumulated 200-300 hours 'owed' to the company, with no sign that pay-back would be any time soon. Furthermore, the agreement limited how often workers could be required to work extra hours, even if demand revived significantly. Consequently, during the fieldwork, down-days were viewed more or less as extra paid time off.

Collective bargaining at Big Car was carried out through a fairly simple structure. At UK level, a National Joint Negotiation Committee (NJNC) dealt with terms and conditions for hourly paid workers at all the company's UK plants. Stewards in this study all represented hourly paid workers, who made up the great majority of employees at the plant. At plant level, a series of union-management forums dealt with local aspects of those agreements, as well as plant-specific issues (Section 6.4). At European level, a company-wide forum operated along European Works Council (EWC) lines. For senior union reps at Big Car, this provided an

important source of information about company intentions. The agreement for investment in the new model had taken place at this European level, in negotiations that included plant union representatives but excluded plant management.

The history of trade unionism at the plant shared features found across the industry (*cf.* Cohen 2013; Thornett 2011). The relative militancy of the 1970s had long since receded, under the tough reality of increased product market competition, recently exacerbated by recession. Plant closures elsewhere in Europe during the previous decade had met little effective opposition, and the plant union, with some influence from Unite head office, had agreed to concessions on terms and conditions to keep the plant open (Section 6.1). Unlike the experience of the auto industry in the US, however, the union organisation at Big Car had not made a virtue of concession bargaining (*cf*. Moody 2007). Instead, the union had adopted a policy towards new management practices, in general, that could be broadly characterised as 'engage and change', whereby changes 'were implemented through a process of local bargaining which resulted in joint controls over outcomes in many areas' (Stewart *et al.* 2009: 39).

Since its formation in 2007, Unite has been Britain's largest union. As with Unison, Unite emerged from a period of union mergers, triggered by huge membership declines in the 1980s, which continued in some sectors throughout the 1990s (Lyddon n.d.). Based predominantly in the private sector, and especially in manufacturing, its constituent unions had been hit particularly hard during the 1980s recessions. At the time of the fieldwork, Unite's membership stood at some 1,134,430 (Certification Officer 2013b). The process of Unite's formation was spread over a series of mergers, lasting several years. While there is not space here to discuss these in detail, the key previous merger brought together the main engineering union, then called the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU), and the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union (MSF), to form Amicus in 2001. The AEEU was itself a result of the 1992 merger of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and the electricians' Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU). Amicus subsequently took in transferred members from the Graphical, Paper and Media Union (GPMU – itself the product of many mergers) and the banking union Unifi. Finally, in 2007, Amicus merged with the Transport and General Workers' Union, to form Unite; then, and still, the largest UK union. Unite has a complex internal structure, with, at the time of the fieldwork, some 24 'Industrial Sectors' organising in different branches of

industry, reflecting the complex history of mergers of which the abbreviated account above is only part (for details of the current 22 sectors, see Unite 2016).

At its formation, Unite was seen as something of a stalwart of the right wing of British trade unionism. However, the election of Len McCluskey as general secretary in 2010 signalled a repositioning of Unite firmly on the left of the big trade unions in the UK. Recent years have seen Unite critical not only of Coalition and Conservative government austerity policies, but also openly critical of New Labour's record in office, and pressing Labour for a turn towards social democracy. Moreover, this political move to the left has been accompanied by efforts to utilise a more determined version of the 'organising model' than has been typical of UK trade unions. Developed in the organising department of the TGWU, this model had registered some significant successes; for instance, organising some 18,000 workers in the meat packaging industry (Cimorelli 2012; Graham 2011). Although some within the left of Unite have been critical of McCluskey's leadership for timidity in practice (Cimorelli 2012), there seems little doubt that the change of political direction at the top of the union has encouraged many workplace activists.

The shop steward organisation at Big Car clearly reflected a number of the processes outlined in the above discussion. In particular, the merger of Amicus and the TGWU to form Unite had forced together two organisation with a history of rivalry. Due to the balance of membership numbers within the plant the formation of Unite saw the former TGWU stewards' organisation taking the leading positions. Furthermore, both politically and in terms of steward organising, strong support for Len McCluskey's leadership reinforced the self-confidence of the workplace union at Big Car, which had been built up out of its own resources over previous decades. This coincidence of internal strength and external endorsement combined to produce a shop steward organisation of considerable strength and confidence.

A note on fieldnote notation

In the account which follows, considerable use is made of excerpts from fieldnotes made during observation and diary-interviews. In these, a system of notation was devised that needs to be explained for the benefit of readers. The main concern during the fieldwork was to capture the issues under discussion, together with the views, motivations, arguments,

and rationales of shop stewards. The system of note-taking developed to reflect those requirements. Notation styles were adopted to distinguish between: 1) direct quotes from participants; 2) points made by participants during discussions (the bulk of the notes); 3) thoughts or comments from myself as observer. In addition to the three types of notation used in the fieldnotes, for the excerpts reproduced here it was necessary to add further material, at various points, to make the notes comprehensible to readers. For transparency, this additional material was also distinguished. Unfortunately, the outcome of this process was that the notation became increasingly complex and cumbersome to read. Therefore, it was decided to simplify the presentation where appropriate, in order to aid comprehension. As a result, the excerpts used below are not always direct copies from the fieldnotes. Great care was taken, though, to ensure that excerpts retain the sense and feel of the originals. Despite these efforts, however, readers may well find the fieldnote extracts unwieldy and awkward to read – at least, at first. For this I can only apologise, and rely on the justification that the technical complications of the notation system were designed for transparent recording of observations. If, as a consequence, the fieldnotes are difficult for others to read, that seems to me a preferable difficulty to the alternative; namely, and easy read at the expense of accuracy. The following account explains how the notation system works.

In the account below, excerpts from the fieldnotes are indented, and placed within single inverted commas, 'like these'. The layout of excerpts is the same as in the original fieldnotes, with separate lines representing the succession of points made by a participant, indicated by a dash at the start of the line, - like this. A change of speaker is indicated in the original fieldnotes by the inclusion of a name at the start of a line, followed by a dash and a summary point, e.g. 'Sheila - disciplinary meeting coming up'. In the reproductions here, names have been removed (Section 4.4). Word-for-word quotes from participants appear in double inverted commas, "like this". Original verbatim comments from myself appear in italics, *like this*. During the fieldwork, additions to the notes to clarify context or meaning were added in square brackets, [like these]. Recent additions to the notes, for reproduction here, have been added in curly brackets, {like these}. As will be clear, this device was mainly used to remove the names of participants, which appear in the fieldnotes but not in this text, where shop stewards appear as {Steward}, convenors as {Convenor}, etc.. In passages where a number of stewards are engaged in discussion, individuals are designated as {Steward 1}, {Steward 2}, {Steward 3}, etc.. It should be noted, though, that these designations are used afresh on each occasion, so that there is no individual to whom

{Steward 1} applies throughout and who could therefore potentially be identified (for ethical considerations, see Section 4.4).

Although this approach gives the fieldnote excerpts a somewhat artificial appearance, it does make plain the provenance of the various parts of these texts, and clarifies the process of their production. Hopefully, readers will find the benefits of clarity outweigh any drawbacks of style.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the research design and methods adopted for the present study, and the reasoning behind the choices made. Since this study was exploratory in nature, a case study design offered significant advantages. Moreover, for attempting to understand the dynamics of complex social relations, which could not easily be separated from their context, case study was doubly appropriate. Furthermore, the research questions required fundamentally qualitative answers, and detailed evidence. Consequently, a return to ethnographic case study was strongly justified. Finally, while multiple-case studies carry a number of advantages, it is not the case that small-N studies cannot achieve rigour, nor that they cannot produce theoretically significant finding. It should be noted that the research design and methods adopted were strongly influenced by the preceding theoretical discussion. That is, in order to address the theoretical issues which are central to the present research, and to answer the research questions posed at the start of this account, the ethnographic case study approach was appropriate.

Yet, the justification for this research design and these methods rests not only upon theoretical foundations. It is an important argument of this thesis that a return to this type of research is overdue. During the classic era of industrial relations research, detailed ethnographic studies provided field-defining accounts. By contrast, recent field-defining research has come from quantitative methods and management surveys. Not only does this represent a shift in methodology, it also represents a shift in the workplace actors whose voices form the basis of those accounts: a shift from the voices of workers to the voices of managers. While it is of course the case that managers matter in workplace relations, significant advantages accrue to research that investigates directly the actors themselves; in

this case, shop stewards. The next two chapters present the results of the research. These chapters give a central place to the voices of shop stewards, and contribute a significantly greater basis of empirical findings than is found in other recent accounts. Although the challenges faced by this research were considerable, the following chapters demonstrate that the effort was worthwhile.

Chapter 5: London Borough

This chapter presents the main findings from the fieldwork conducted among shop stewards at London Borough. These findings are a significant contribution to research in this area, detailing stewards' day-to-day activities, meanings and intentions, arguments and explanations, in a way that has not been done for some 30 years. The stewards at London Borough dealt with a wide range of issues, from everyday queries about council procedures and policies, to the inevitable workload of individual representation, the effects of frequent work reorganisations, and the impact of central government austerity policies triggered by severe economic recession. The fieldwork produced considerable rich and detailed evidence of how shop stewards handled these issues, in ways that were sometimes familiar and sometimes surprising. The account which follows discusses first the nature of shop steward organisation at the Borough, followed by the collective issues stewards dealt with, then the place of individual representation in the work of stewards, and finally stewards' relations with managers. Although the presentation in this chapter might appear narrowly descriptive, the selection and ordering of evidence constitutes the first stage of analysis, which will be further developed and deepened in subsequent chapters.

5.1 The shop steward organisation

In the Unison branch at London Borough there were around 50 shop stewards, organised into four committees. Three of these committees reflected the structure of council administration, which was divided into 'Directorates': Housing and Adult Social Care (HASC); Children, Schools and Families (CSF); and, Culture and Environment (C&E). The fourth stewards' committee, Central Services, was not based on a directorate but covered various non-service providing departments, including finance, ICT, and benefits processing. Each shop stewards' committee was made up of the stewards elected (usually unopposed) in each of these four areas. In turn, the shop stewards' committees each elected either a convenor or two co-convenors, depending on the internal structure of the directorate

represented: C&E and Central Services each elected a single convenor, while HASC and CSF both elected two co-convenors. The co-convenor arrangement was tailored to the hybrid nature of these two directorates, which had only been formed in recent years as a result of the seemingly never-ending process of council reorganisation. The former social services department had been split into two: adult social care had been joined to the former housing department, to form HASC, while social services for children and families had been joined to the former education department, forming CSF. In HASC, there was one convenor for the housing side and another for adult social care; and in CSF, there was one convenor for schools and education, and another for children's and young people's social services. Thus, the management structure of London Borough was imprinted on shop steward organisation.

By agreement with council management, convenors and co-convenors were on 50% facility time, and all but one continued to work in regular council employment for half the working week. The exception was the convenor of C&E who was also the branch health and safety officer, a position which also attracted 50% facility time, making this individual in practice a full-time union representative. The only other union representative on full-time release was the branch secretary. A small number of other branch officers qualified for facility time, though none were on more than 50% release. Altogether, then, some 4% of union reps at London Borough were on full-time release. The ordinary shop stewards were officially allowed two hours per week away from their jobs to perform trade union duties, though this arrangement appeared to be applied flexibly in most cases, with few reported disputes. Even so, stewards reported that at busy times two hours was often insufficient.

The distribution of shop stewards across London Borough was markedly uneven; largely, but not entirely, reflecting the unevenness of union membership (*cf.* Kersley et al 2006: 148). Broadly, HASC had the strongest union organisation with some 22 stewards. However, this figure masked considerable unevenness; of the HASC stewards, all but two were in the housing side, reflecting a history of strong union organisation within the former housing department. Indeed, housing was generally the strongest area of union organisation at London Borough, with a membership density around 75%. As one housing steward proudly stated, 'We're the people who say no'. Yet, even within housing, there were significant sectional variations in union membership and steward organisation. Thus, among Estate Officers (housing management) there was high membership and good steward coverage, whereas homeless hostels and housing estate caretakers had high union membership but

very few stewards. One consequence of the shortage of shop stewards was that stewards from housing management often had to cover other areas for representation purposes. Meanwhile, the adult social care part of the directorate, which included mental health social workers and care homes for the elderly, could boast only two shop stewards among some 500 union members. Indeed, so weak was shop steward organisation in adult social care that the convenor was actually a steward from housing, representing and bargaining on behalf of members in an area where she was not herself employed.

The CSF stewards' committee had a similarly uneven composition, with a clear contrast between the two parts of the hybrid directorate. The great majority of CSF stewards were from the education side, representing members in school administration and classroom assistants. As in HASC, social workers were significantly under-represented, with only a single shop steward despite being a significant part of the workforce and having membership density above 40%, and strong union organisation in the past. More uneven still, the C&E stewards' committee reflected a highly varied directorate, including the transport depot, library staff, and senior town hall planning departments. Union membership was patchy, below 10% in some areas, and stewards were unevenly spread and few in number. Central Services was another disparate grouping, with weak union membership in most areas and few stewards apart from in housing benefits. Overall, the constantly changing structure of the council presented significant organisational difficulties for union organisation at London Borough.

Shop stewards' committees were the main organising forums for stewards at London Borough, meeting to share experiences, discuss issues, and devise responses. The composition of the stewards' committees broadly reflected the composition of the council workforce; more than half the stewards were women, and there was a significant minority of BME stewards, though not as high a proportion as in the overall workforce. Two London Borough diarists self-identified as LGBT. Most committee meetings featured a round-up of issues to be taken to management by senior stewards and convenors at their regular directorate and corporate level meetings. Generally, issues to be forwarded to management were filtered by the stewards, to ensure that matters were taken in the first instance to local managers, and only promoted upwards in the formal apparatus if problems could not be resolved at the lower level. The HASC stewards' committee met monthly; the CSF committee met twice in each school term (to fit the working arrangements of most

stewards in the directorate); and both the C&E and Central Services committees met semi-regularly. Stewards' committee meetings typically lasted two to three hours, and provided an opportunity for very full discussions among the stewards, although with varying degrees of dependence on the convenor. Besides these meetings, stewards also met regularly on other bodies involved in the running of the Unison branch. The Branch Committee met every six weeks and was made up of shop stewards elected from the stewards' committees, together with directly elected branch officers. A more informal Branch Officers group, mainly composed of stewards, met roughly once a month, in between Branch Committee meetings. Overall, the shop steward bodies at London Borough were characterised by a highly democratic and egalitarian atmosphere, with open and lengthy discussions.

Evidence from union branch records and interviews shows that, in common with much of local government, shop steward organisation is a relatively recent development at London Borough. From the mid-1970s, there was unofficial steward organisation in some areas of the former Nalgo branch, such as social services, but formal recognition of stewards representing officer grades did not take place until 1980. Remarkably, considering the prominent place of individual representation in current trade union activism, records of the Nalgo branch report that 1979 was the first year in which branch officers formally represented a member at a disciplinary hearing, though unofficial shop stewards had been carrying out this function since the mid-1970s. One longstanding steward recalled 'the battle to set up stewards' organisation in the 70s and 80s', and contrasted the current situation with her own experience of becoming a steward, saying,

> "I became a rep because we had a dispute as soon as I walked through the door".

More recently, recruiting new stewards had become more difficult in many areas, as indicated by the uneven spread of shop steward coverage:

> '- you're just not getting younger people who are coming in and wanting to be reps…
> in the 80s it was still expanding
> "We used to do mad things … Now it's more grown up and sensible"'.

Some of the ways shop stewards had become 'more grown up and sensible' will be clear in the following account of their activity at London Borough; an account which contains some

themes familiar from the literature, alongside others that were more novel and surprising.

Findings from the fieldwork show that shop stewards at London Borough dealt with a wide variety of issues. There were many instances of stewards giving small pieces of advice to individual members, on issues such as new workplace procedures, how to operate the latest IT system, or how to apply for jobs in other departments. Other areas of shop steward activity dealt with more serious aspects of the employment relationship, including terms and conditions of employment, the rights of management to reorganise work, or to discipline or even dismiss individual employees. Inevitably, this activity included a significant amount of individual casework, though the nature and import of individual representation was not uniform. During the research period the stewards also dealt with a surprising number and variety of collective issues. This is an important point because, while the current standard view, that shop stewards no longer deal with collective issues, has been criticised, it was expected that collective issues would tend to arise in unexpected ways, in covert forms, through novel combinations of bargaining opportunities and resources. Yet, in many cases, shop stewards were dealing very directly with entirely familiar collective issues, such as terms and conditions, work organisation, the effort bargain, and frontier of control; as described in the next section.

5.2 Shop stewards and collective issues: contracts and work organisation

Early in the fieldwork it became apparent that shop stewards in London Borough were dealing with collective issues far more than expected from a reading of recent literature. Two issues in particular presented stewards with significant challenges and took up a considerable amount of their time and effort. The first of these was the proposal by council management to bring in new contracts for staff, with what the stewards saw as worse terms and conditions, including elements of performance-related pay (PRP). The second was dealing with the effects of repeated re-organisations of council services; a continuing feature of new public management in the borough, recently exacerbated by the impact of government austerity policies. The distribution of these two issues within shop steward activity, and the ways in which stewards dealt with them, were patterned in distinctive and unexpected ways. These patterns later proved significant in identifying underlying dynamics of workplace bargaining, as will be shown in following chapters. First, though, details of

workplace practices are set out.

New contracts

London Borough management had indicated to the Unison branch its intention to introduce new contracts some 18 months prior to the commencement of the fieldwork; if possible, through a collective agreement. This led to a lengthy period of negotiation, which was still not complete by the end of the study. During the collective bargaining process, the Unison branch raised objections to a number of proposed changes, and on some of these council management agreed to make changes. For instance, around 250 low-paid workers were eligible for additional 'out of hours' payments for working evenings and weekends, which made a significant difference to their take-home pay. When the council proposed to remove these bonus payments under the new contracts, union representatives from the branch objected to cuts in pay for these workers; in response, management agreed to increase basic pay to compensate. The council also signalled that it was willing to make one-off payments to employees as an inducement to switch contracts, and that it was willing to discuss figures with union reps on this issue. On other matters, the council refused to make changes. By the time that the fieldwork took place, the main negotiations were over and had resulted in no agreement on the introduction of new contracts, which stewards continued to oppose.

At this point, London Borough management announced that the new contracts would be rolled out anyway, on a voluntary basis, with a one-off payment of £1000 for any member of staff who signed up. The council also indicated that new starters would be on the new contracts, as would any member of staff starting in a new post, either voluntarily or as the result of significant job reorganisation. The union representatives realised that this approach by the council, making sign-up voluntary, made it virtually impossible to have a lawful trade dispute on the issue; one convenor described the strategy as 'very clever'. Stewards also recognised that the £1000 payment would be attractive to a significant proportion of borough employees, including many union members, especially because at the time of the research a national pay freeze had been in place for some three years, despite relatively high inflation, and many borough employees were feeling financial strains. Nevertheless, the branch launched a 'Don't Sign' campaign, prepared publicity material making the case against signing, and ran a series of departmental union meetings on the issue.

The two most significant issues in the proposed new contracts, in the view of the stewards, were the proposal to introduce PRP for staff above the lowest grades (the bulk of branch members), and a proposal to break the contractual link between rates of pay in the council and national pay awards. Although, at the time of the study, a national pay-freeze had been in place for three years, stewards identified the threat to nationally pay awards as a significant issue likely to undermine future pay rises. Other detrimental terms included reduced holiday entitlement and an increase in the working week from 35 to 36 hours.

London Borough stewards were strongly opposed to the introduction of PRP, which was seen as inappropriate for the type of work carried out by council employees in the provision of services. One convenor contrasted her work with manufacturing:

'- if you were on a production line, making light bulbs… {those can be counted}
- but it's so dangerous because it's subjective ... if you're doing a job like ours, it's hard to see how you can measure performance'.

There were also significant concerns at the prospect of having future pay rises linked to annual management appraisals, a system widely seen as unreliable and open to manipulation by managers. As one steward put it,

'- the general feeling seems to be its just an excuse to cut pay
- [management are making] ...a lot of fuss about appraisals... but it's subjective.... there's no system [for doing appraisals consistently]...
- {There is a} history of HR playing fast and loose... So, expect them to turn round and say, there's a limit on who can get the good grades'.

This is, of course, a perception which is familiar from the literature on PRP (Brown *et al.* 2003: 197). Scepticism about management appraisal was widespread among stewards, and was commonly reported as an argument used with members to encourage them not to sign. For instance, a steward in a section with a particularly difficult manager reported asking her co-workers,

'do you really want {named manager} sorting out your pay?'.

The undermining of management legitimacy by shop steward was apparent across this case study (*cf.* Armstrong *et al.* 1981).

The issue of new contracts had been identified by stewards as being significant at an early stage. It figured prominently in discussions at shop stewards' committee meetings long before management moved to introduce them, and continued to be a major topic of discussion among stewards at their meetings during the fieldwork. By contrast, this issue arose much less frequently in stewards' diaries. Fieldnotes from diary-interviews show that stewards' comments on these issues usually arose as a result of questioning from the researcher, rather than from diary entries. Indeed, only around one in four mentions of PRP resulted from diary entries. When questioned, stewards usually reported some low-level activity on this issue, such as distributing printed information, responding to member queries, directing members to other sources of information, or initiating discussions with members either singly or in small groups. Some stewards had previously organised shop meetings on the new contract issue, though these had generally been poorly attended. Later, as the roll-out of new contracts approached, stewards attended management-organised briefings, where they were able to gather information on management proposals, and where they commonly disputed management claims about supposed benefits of the new contracts. In some of these briefings, stewards were able to put managers under considerable pressure in front of a large number of workers, and stories of these encounters passed around the workforce, often promoted by other stewards in order to undermine management claims about the contracts.

However, it was notable that stewards were generally somewhat downbeat when discussing their activity on the contract issue. Fieldnotes record that when asked about performance-related pay, one steward groaned, another rolled her eyes, and another laughed despondently. Many stewards experienced difficulties when trying to raise the issue with members in the workplace. The following exchange from a diary-interview indicates some of the difficulties reported by stewards:

> '*What about {new contracts}?*
> {Steward} - I've been telling everyone not to sign up, putting posters up....
> *Is it having an effect?*

{Steward} - No idea - I never get a response'.

Another stewards said of the issue,

'- there have been queries... [and] talking around the team....

- but no one has sat and talked to me about it

- they're all a bit worried... some will sign but maybe don't want to mention it to a

steward...'.

Another steward, who was known for having a distinctly jaded view of union members, found further evidence for his opinions in the low level of responses among members on this issue:

'- {I've} already had one member saying he wants to take the money, {saying} 'Why can't we have Performance Related Pay? Why is the union stopping me getting £1000?'

- ... I was so angry, I just walked out. ...

"We're going to have a lot of people taking it."

- I know, in a couple of years time, if I'm still here... there will be a lot of people who will be moaning that they've lost money, or lost holiday...

"They can get stuffed"'.

Overall, evidence from diaries and diary-interviews suggests that stewards had difficulty raising this issue with constituents, despite having identified it as an important priority.

As events developed, however, circumstances changed such that stewards were able to raise this issue more effectively with members. Stewards reported that members showed more interest in the contract issue when management started to roll out the new contracts, initially in the CSF directorate. Stewards in other areas, especially HASC, thought that management had chosen this course of action because CSF was one of the less strongly organised parts of the council workforce, and that management would therefore face less opposition. (Most CSF stewards were employed in and by schools, and therefore the new contracts did not apply to them; the Borough employed part of CSF had only 4-5 stewards). Stewards thought that management was pursuing a strategy of trying to secure high levels

of sign-up to the new contract in weaker areas, before moving on to stronger sections. This is evidence that management had adjusted their actions in response to expected union opposition. Yet one of the effects of the initiation of the new contracts in CSF was to raise the profile of the issue both within CSF and more widely across the council workforce, thereby opening fresh opportunities for stewards to raise it once more within their own constituencies. As one HASC steward put it:

> '"it's only just starting to be a talking point"
> *Why has it become a talking point now?*
> {Steward} - because they've sent out information to CSF
> - [management are] pushing it with staff there
> "people work with people in CSF - word gets out."
> - we've had shop meetings {previously}, so it's kind of at the back of people's minds
> "but they've had team meetings and briefings", so it's more up front…
> "They're asking people … to sign"'.

As a result, stewards reported more enquiries from union members regarding PRP and other contractual issues. Another steward said,

> '"Now, the realisation is hitting"'.

As a result, some stewards were able to make greater headway on this issue, though not all reported a similar experience. Nevertheless, union meetings on the subject of the new contracts were held at this time in the larger offices, and stewards generally reported good attendances.

By the end of the fieldwork at London Borough, the new contracts had been rolled out across the workforce, and around 60% had signed. Though exact figures were not available, rates of sign-up appeared to be uneven across departments and sections, in part reflecting union membership density and organisation; for instance, sign-ups were lower in housing. As predicted by stewards, the key factor in encouraging workers to sign was the £1000 inducement at a time of pay freeze and inflation. A sizeable Unison branch meeting voted to ballot on industrial action over the threat to the link with national pay bargaining, but this did not result in an actual ballot taking place, after the intervention of Unison regional

officials. Significantly, around three quarters of the stewards who took part in in-depth interviews at the end of the fieldwork said that they did not believe the union branch would have been able to stop the new contracts being introduced. This contrasts to the only one or two stewards who expressed such a view openly in the steward committee meetings. Although the interview evidence may include an element of recollection bias (Section 4.3), it may also partly explain the reticence with which stewards pursued this issue among their constituents. Certainly, this finding raises questions concerning intra-organisational bargaining processes, given that the union appears to have embarked on a course of action that many of its leading activists believed would end in failure.

The evidence concerning the new contract issue shows that the attitude of union members was an important influence on the issue-handling activity of shop stewards. When members' level of awareness and concern over the new contracts was low, stewards had difficulty raising the issue, and were unable to foster a widespread sense of grievance, despite having identified it as a priority for campaigning. As the new contracts were rolled out by management the issue became more prominent in the awareness of union members, and most stewards found it easier to make progress in terms of their agitation and propaganda on the matter. Even so, other stewards continued to experience difficulties (see discussion in Section 7.4). However, difficulties encountered on this issue should not be taken as evidence that the stewards in London Borough were not dealing with significant collective issues. In fact, diaries and diary-interviews recorded considerable activity around the other main collective issue; namely, service reorganisation.

Service reorganisation

Despite its much lower profile in committee meetings, the main area of activity for collective representation by stewards at London Borough was the continual process of service reorganisation, as managers sought to introduce new management structures, new procedures and ways of working, and to reduce the workforce. Dealing with reorganisation accounted for a very significant amount of time and effort on the part of stewards. It was also an area where the influence of shop steward activity upon both management decisions and outcomes for union members could be clearly discerned.

Given the relatively low priority of this issue in stewards' committee meetings, its prominence in diary:diary-interview evidence was surprising and unexpected. The evidence

shows that stewards' activity in this area was largely in response to pressures from the membership and their immediate concerns about work organisation and practices. High levels of shop steward activity in this area reflected their willingness to respond to issues which were prioritised by members. By contrast, the same stewards had much more difficulty raising their own priorities with members. A common experience was that when a reorganisation was announced, it quickly became a main focus of activity for the relevant shop steward, diverting attention from other issues. When asked if his members had shown much interest in the contracts issue, one steward reported:

'- there was a bit ... Until the restructure - But then everyone was consumed by whether they were keeping their job or not
How long has the restructure taken?
{Steward} - 5 months, ish'.

Although reorganisations sometimes involved redundancies, and this had become more common, usually jobs were lost through natural wastage and 'ERVR' (Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy). However, reorganisations generally involved changes of duties and workload, which caused considerable anxiety:

'{Steward} - although people have got jobs, still an immense amount of worry
- new job descriptions…?
- workload increases? same work with one less team member …
- more and more being asked of them…
- annual appraisal… mine's gone down from 4 to 3... Can't really figure out why'.

Departmental reorganisations usually had direct impacts upon work organisation, working practices, and often upon work intensity, even when they did not lead to job losses. Consequently, each reorganisation had the potential to shift the terms of the effort bargain, and the impact of these changes on stewards' constituents meant that union members prioritised the immediate effects of the reorganisation; as a result, these figured prominently in stewards' workload. The overall impression from diaries and diary-interviews was that stewards experienced far fewer difficulties raising this issue than when dealing with the issue of new contracts, and this difference seems to have been driven predominantly by the differing attitude of union members to the two issues.

Reorganisations varied significantly. Some affected only one team of six or seven workers; others affected hundreds and involved outsourcing, privatisation and transfer of employment under TUPE regulations. During the fieldwork, the convenor in adult social care was dealing with the outsourcing of care homes for the elderly to a private company on a 30 year contract. This involved the TUPE transfer of a significant number of employees, and the convenor had been involved in many months of negotiations with the private care company over terms and conditions for the transferred workers. In fact, the decision to transfer the workforce (but not ownership of the homes) dated back some four years. As a result of the negotiations, the convenor had succeeded in gaining improved terms above the legal minimum required by the TUPE regulations; for instance, enhanced redundancy terms. By the time of the research, though, the collective bargaining process had almost expired, and the transfer date approached (though it had previously been put back significantly). The convenor felt she was running out of options for further bargaining:

'- at the moment, I'm stuck in a position

- people say, what's the union going to do

- but I think, without industrial action, there's not much... and staff in care homes have never taken action - they were always exempt'.

Similarly,

'- we're never going to get a major campaign of action from people in the residential care service

- {…} because it's a service that's client led...

Do the staff all feel that commitment?

{Convenor} - Oh yeah, definitely - you couldn't work in that sort of environment if you didn't... It's demanding work and crap pay'.

The absence of collective action did not mean that the convenor had no bargaining resources to deploy, however. The issue was raised at steward committee meetings where a number of approaches were discussed, and other activity was outlined in diaries and diary interviews. For instance, stewards were aware that borough management had concerns of its own over the transfer; in particular, that continuity of service might be undermined if

significant numbers of staff left after transfer to private sector. Stewards considered that continuity of service was an issue which could be used to exert pressure on management over terms and conditions of employment.

Elected councillors and senior management were also sensitive to concerns over the quality of service provision by private sector providers, especially in relation to very low rates of pay, which could be portrayed as undermining standards of care. During the fieldwork, the care company announced its intention to cut pay by around half for transferred staff, described by the convenor as 'a bombshell'. The company proposed to buy out terms and conditions under the TUPE transfer, by offering £24,000 to each worker to give up the London Borough rates of pay. The standard rate of pay for care-workers would drop dramatically to only £7.46 per hour, well below the London Living Wage that the council had recently committed itself to ensuring was the minimum for outsourced labour. Branch officers contacted senior elected council members, pressing them to secure the London Living Wage for workers on these contracts. However, the union's political efforts achieved no results, as councillors expressed concern but pleaded that this contract had been signed long before the recent policy on the London Living Wage. Nevertheless, the union did attempt to initiate a publicity campaign intended to embarrass the council and the company. Discussion at a stewards' committee was as follows:

> '{Steward 1} - we need to get this in the press... people think council staff get the London Living Wage...!
> {Convenor} - I spoke to [councillor responsible] last night - she was not aware of the wages...
> [Someone] - "She's a waste of space..."
> [Someone] - "They've 'committed' to the London Living Wage"
> {Convenor} - no... [they haven't]
> - they have said, new contracts [will get the London Living Wage]…
> - This was signed three years ago...
> - ok - we'll have a meeting - some embarrassment factor...
> {Steward 2} - what wages are the top managers getting?
> {Steward 3} - do comparisons... put the comparison out. It makes people think, "Hold on! that pay is top dollar compared to what the workers are getting…"
> {Convenor} - in fact, one member has come to me and said she won't work on those

wages - she'll quit and work as agency - as agency workers, they can get £10 an hour in other industries...

{Steward 4} - carers and relatives will be outraged at the treatment of elderly rellies

{Steward 2} - have the council done consultation?

{Convenor} - three [four] years ago...

{Steward 2} - did the consultation tell relatives that carers would get a big pay cut?

{Convenor} - we raised this recently [with the council] - when are you going to tell people?

- they said, "we're not - if you go to press, it will just scare people" - obviously, we do have to be careful...

- [summing up] ...ok, thanks... that's helpful... and I will pick some brains...

{Steward 5} - do any of the big wigs have people in care?'.

The conversation referred to here, between convenor and councillor, took place at a public meeting campaigning against the closure of a local hospital, which was attended by a number of London Borough shop stewards, elected councillors, and local Labour MPs. This political channel of contact with councillors was utilised by senior stewards on a number of occasions during the fieldwork. This time, councillors refused to take action on care home pay, and the buy-out offer remained in place as the deadline for transfer approached. The convenor summed up the situation regarding the offer:

'- they say its voluntary, but the threat is, if you don't {accept}, they will come back later and give less…

- I think {the workers are} stuck with TUPE regs {…} But they can change after transfer [briefly explains ETO][1]

{…}

- we have got {London Borough} redundancy rates transferred.... So the bottom line is, if staff are transferred over, they can keep the terms under TUPE, and if they later get reorganised, they can get {London Borough} redundancy'.

In this case, then, in a context where stewards could see no possibility of collective action, the stewards could still make use of bargaining resources including: the framework of legal

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[1] 'ETO' stands for 'economic, technical or organisational' reasons, which are grounds on which it is permissible to alter contractual terms after a transfer of employment under TUPE regulations (Acas 2014b: 37-38).

regulation; political pressure via elected councillors and the link of unions to Labour; reputational sensitivities of the private firm and borough council. As a result, while none of the union reps were happy with the outcome, union bargaining expertise did have an impact on the course of events and improved the terms of the transfer above legal minimums.

Another group of workers who were unlikely to take industrial action were social workers. Nevertheless, here, too, there were alternative bargaining resources available to union reps. Among social workers in CSF, dealing often with child-protection issues, there was little enthusiasm for industrial action which might put children or young people at risk. Among these workers, a culture of long hours had developed, which regularly saw significant unpaid overtime and working weeks up to 50 or even 60 hours. Furthermore, there was only one, relatively inexperienced, steward in this group. Nevertheless, a CSF co-convenor described the influence that social workers were able to have over local managers from time to time. This influence stemmed from the recognition by managers that the service depended upon the continuing good will of the workforce; specifically, their willingness to undertake very large workloads and a great deal of stress. From time to time, management announced an intention to introduce new work arrangements of some kind, to which the workforce were opposed. In these circumstances, if feeling among the workforce was sufficiently strong, the convenor would adopt the tactic of hinting to management that the introduction of the proposed measure might have a detrimental effect on the goodwill of the social workers. Although the convenor could recall no cases of the social workers actually withdrawing good will, and was skeptical that they might ever actually do so, he nevertheless maintained that this approach had been successful in getting management to change decisions in the past. Although the fieldwork recorded no actual instance of the use of this bargaining resource among these social workers, credibility is added to these claims by the use of similar methods by social workers in mental health teams.

During the fieldwork, social workers in adult social care were engaged in a protracted dispute with management concerning a reorganisation of mental health teams (further details in Section 5.3). Once more, these workers were unlikely to take sustained industrial action, due to their commitment to service-users. Union organisation in this area was not especially strong, with membership around 50% and only one steward. Branch officers traced the weakness of union organisation among social workers back to a long, bitter, and

ultimately defeated strike some 20 years previously. After the defeat, many activists left the council, and convenors who came later were seen as having undermined union membership and steward organisation by pursuing an excessively legalistic 'servicing model' of trade unionism (Simms *et al.* 2013: 7). More recent efforts had seen union levels maintained, but few new stewards.

Even so, social workers and stewards were still able to put pressure on management. When the reorganisation was announced, stewards used the legal requirement on mental health trusts to consult with service-users, in order to temporarily halt the reorganisation pending consultation. The original management proposal included significant down-grading of workers, but these plans were dropped in the face of union opposition. Collective bargaining then agreed a new grading structure and team organisation. One result of this reorganisation was that the new division of labour, whereby teams specialised in only one type of case instead of a mixed workload, proved so unpopular that significant numbers of social workers left the service to go and work elsewhere. As a result, staff shortages were undermining service-provision, and social workers began again to raise their opposition to the reorganisation once more. As the convenor expressed it:

'"It's a mess"...
- they {management} did acknowledge yesterday that it's a mess...
- ...people have lost confidence'.

The steward agreed:

'- there's a system that works... it's not very good but it does work....
- now they've organised a meeting on Thursday. They've not consulted with us - we've said we're not going to go to the meeting, because they've not consulted
- forty social workers could do a vote of no confidence'.

In the event, this staff meeting was entirely boycotted by social workers, which drew a response from management:

'{Convenor} - ...the boycott of the open day... the pressure from that worked... They came to us saying they wanted a meeting'.

Collectively, social workers composed a letter to management stating their grievances:

> '{Convenor} - the letter is from people in the mental health teams - they wrote it, but wanted it to come from the branch.... {Branch Secretary} has amended it...
> "There's quite a good bunch in the mental health teams ... they're quite stroppy ... keep it ticking over, really"
> {…}
> - we're sending the letter to the Director, Assistant Director, HR senior business partner {…} and Head of Case Management'.

Significantly, this group of workers had an additional bargaining resource at their disposal. Because of their legal role in the issuing of orders under the Mental Health Act (commonly known as 'sectioning'), these social workers were registered as Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and carried a warrant card. As a result of the dispute over reorganisation and the strength of feeling generated, social workers let it be known to management that they were considering handing in their warrant cards. Because of the legal requirement on the council to provide the AMHP service, this was a significant threat:

> '{Convenor} - Social workers are talking about handing their warrant cards in... That would put the Trust under a lot of pressure.... We've written to the Head of Services, to say you've got this bomb coming... And they've done nothing about it...
> {…}
> {Steward} - a couple of people have talked about it... We had a shop meeting'.

By the end of the research, this issue was still unresolved; but nevertheless this example shows that important bargaining resources can be available in the absence of strike action. Using a combination of the legal regulatory framework, tacit job knowledge, quitting and labour shortage, collective non-strike action, threats of collective action based on occupational factors, and pressure on individual managers, these workers and their shop steward were able to pursue a reasonably effective course of action aimed at changing management decisions over the organisation of work. Furthermore, their efforts resulted in clear movement from management on the issues concerned.

A similarly broad mix of bargaining resources was used by stewards in housing during a lengthy reorganisation. Here, Borough management were closing five local housing offices and centralising services in one large office facility, which was already used by a number of other services. To accommodate a growing concentration of workers in one building, a hot-desking system was introduced, whereby Estate Officers worked two days per week in the central office, with the rest of their week spent closer to the estates they managed (there was also an option of working from home one day per week, which many took up). Issues of steward contestation in this reorganisation included the provision of mobile IT equipment (which was resolved relatively quickly), and the facilities that staff would be using on days when they were not in the central office, which developed into a more protracted wrangle. Stewards reported somewhat derisively management plans for 'agile working' from 'touch-down' points. In two neighbourhoods, stewards considered the facilities on offer significantly sub-standard, with management proposing that staff should work from cafes, community centres, and libraries; locations that stewards felt were entirely unsuitable for housing work, which involved confidential material and often required private interview rooms. Stewards in these areas conducted a campaign lasting several months, aimed at securing improved facilities. By the end of the fieldwork, these stewards reported that they had gained improvements. Though none were entirely satisfied with the outcome, they had pressed Borough management to make other council premises available for housing workers, closer to the estates they managed. A number of these were refitted to suit the new purpose, though stewards had to continue pressing for further changes even after the reorganisation was complete. In one case, a steward organised an informal boycott of one outlying office, which lasted for several weeks until suitable alterations were made.

Housing stewards employed a number of means for pressuring management over collective issues. In line with other research on team working (Section 3.1), stewards reported that work organisation issues were often raised in team meetings; a tactic which could be sustained over lengthy periods. One steward described their usual approach to taking up issues with management:

"We moan like fuck until they realise there's a problem."

Stewards commonly put problems and proposed solutions to management in terms of maintaining standards of service provision. Of course, these efforts were not always

successful. Nevertheless, stewards recounted numerous instances where pressure had resulted in modifications to management decisions. One steward recalled that shortly prior to the fieldwork period, a new IT system for logging housing management casework had been brought in, leading to changes to established ways of working that staff and stewards regarded as making the job more difficult. In particular, exception was taken to fixed admin procedures built into the software, which removed autonomy and enforced rigid ways of working; for instance, requiring the production of pro forma letters at set points. Stewards felt these set procedures removed professional discretion from housing workers, reduced the standard of service, and wasted time. Stewards repeatedly raised these issues over several months, until management finally agreed a modification to the software: the addition of a "skip" button, so that workers could bypass set tasks, thereby returning flexible control of the labour process into the hands of housing workers.

In a further example of bargaining resource innovation, two stewards in one housing office had given a name to a practice that was reported more widely. The continual flow of new management initiatives and modifications to ways of working – some large, many small – meant that stewards often faced questions from members and had to decide which, if any, of these to challenge. Stewards knew from experience that raising strong objections to a management announcement could result in managers becoming more determined to enforce a new way of working. Stewards had also noticed, though, that management initiatives often fell into disuse after a short period, as attention shifted elsewhere. Therefore, these stewards had adopted a tactic of selectively ignoring management initiatives, in the hope and expectation that these would simply disappear. The two stewards called this method the 'body swerve'. These stewards reported occasional informal work group meetings to discuss particularly unpopular new management instructions. When the result of discussion was that shop stewards advised a 'body swerve', staff would resume normal working, quietly ignoring the instruction until it fell into disuse. Altogether, alongside relative numerical strength and organisational capacity, stewards in housing displayed considerable ingenuity in devising ways to influence management decisions.

Bargaining in consultation

The term 'consultation' was much in evidence at London Borough. Union-management forums at directorate and corporate levels were designated 'Joint Consultation Committee', service reorganisation involved a less formalised 'consultation' process, and stewards

referred to 'consultation' often and in many contexts. However, the almost ubiquitous use of this term disguises important complexity in relations between union and management, and undermines the simple conception of the current standard view. Notably, the protracted period of bargaining prior to the introduction of the new contracts bore little resemblance to the current standard view's notion of consultation, despite the fact that all formal talks took place under the auspices of the Corporate Joint Consultation Committee (CJCC). First, the process departed from the standard definition of consultation in that management approached the union with clear and detailed proposals, worked out in advance through the hiring of management consultants. Yet, the standard definition of consultation states that it should take place when proposals are at an early stage of development (Acas 2014a). The approach of London Borough management therefore departed from formal consultation in this important respect.

Secondly, the lengthy period of talks in the CJCC very much resembled old-fashioned collective bargaining negotiations: management sought agreement from the union on the new contract (proposal); the union rejected the plans and raised a number of specific objections (counter-proposal); management agreed to some changes (concessions); the union continued with other objections (further counter-proposals); finally, the talks reached stalemate with no agreement (failure to agree). In the face of continuing union opposition, management announced the £1000 offer for any employee who signed the new contract; an inducement intended to overcome union resistance. The version of the new contracts that management rolled out included (limited) concessions made in response to union opposition. Despite the fact that this process took place entirely under the official auspices of 'consultation', it is difficult to see how it can be described other than as traditional 'labor negotiations' (Walton and McKersie 1991). Stewards were also able, on numerous occasions, to secure modifications to management decisions and actions during 'consultation' accompanying service reorganisations. Consequently, stewards were exercised in trying to secure what they saw as proper consultation, in a role similar to Flanders' notion of stewards as 'guardians' of custom and practice (Brown 1973: 131); though, in this case, stewards were concerned to uphold other standards of management conduct. At London Borough, consultation entailed frontier of control issues, and stewards understood it as offering opportunities for them to influence management decisions. This evidence clearly undermines the assumption of the current standard view that bargaining content can be read straightforwardly from the formal designation of union-management

forums.

Proponents of the current standard view might object at this point, pointing to the relative weakness of union responses, the 60% sign-up rate for the new contracts (see above), and the union's inability to decisively see off management plans. Such objections conflate two issues: the outcome of management initiatives, and the nature of the process taking place. In terms of outcomes, it is not the claim of this thesis that workplace unions have retained their previous bargaining power. The decline of union strength is real and well documented. It is therefore no surprise that union organisation at London Borough encountered serious difficulties when faced with a sustained attempt by management to undermine terms and conditions. Nevertheless, in terms of the overall process, despite problems with mobilisation, and intra-organisational bargaining difficulties, shop stewards and branch officers gained initial concessions, maintained their opposition, ran a campaign against signing which management were forced repeatedly to respond to, and achieved further modifications to management's plans through political exchange via links with the elected council's Labour administration. In terms of social content, it is difficult to see how this process can be described other than in Walton and McKersie's (1991: 4) terms, as distributive bargaining, a 'subprocess' of labour negotiation. This evidence also undermines the assumption of the current standard view that an absence of traditional industrial action must mean that no negotiation can take place.

The notion that consultation is essentially unilateral management decision making is further undermined by evidence from London Borough which shows stewards approaching JCCs as a forum for raising issues and concerns of their own. This aspect is entirely missing from the conception of consultation in the current standard view, in which the role of union representative is solely to comment on management proposals. Not only did London Borough stewards actively select issues to take to management at JCCs, they were often able to secure modified outcomes. Thus, in this case study, formally designated 'consultation' processes operated in practice as a two-way channel of communication and bargaining between shop stewards and managers, and not as a one-way channel for shop stewards to comment on unilateral management decisions.

Overall, then, evidence from London Borough significantly undermines the sharp separation of negotiation and consultation upon which the current standard view of shop stewards

depends. Next, discussion turns to another distinction of the current standard view; that between collective issues and individual representation.

5.3 Shop stewards and individual representation

As expected, individual representation and casework formed a significant proportion of the activity and effort of shop stewards at London Borough. Evidence from diaries, diary-interviews, observation of shop stewards' meetings, and in-depth interviews, all demonstrated the importance of individual representation for these stewards, and for the union members they represented. Precise numbers for individual cases handled by stewards were difficult to estimate because the fieldwork combined several data-gathering methods over an extended period, which made accurate counting problematic. For instance, stewards might refer to a single case in different ways, using tacit knowledge, so that its identity was unclear. Some cases made repeat appearances in the data, as stewards detailed numerous stages in the development of a single case, especially the more complex or stressful ones; a source of repeat-reporting. At the same time, evidence from diary-interviews showed that stewards often under-recorded individual casework in their diary entries. Despite these difficulties in providing accurate numbers, however, it was clear that shop stewards at London Borough dealt with a large amount of individual representation and casework.

To a considerable extent, the significance of individual representation for these shop stewards was a direct response to methods employed by management. During the fieldwork at London Borough, the branch office received figures for the number of case hearings which had been held during 2012, for which the total was a little over 600 individual meetings held under procedures relating to sickness absence, disciplinary matters, performance and capability, and grievance. Bearing in mind that one individual case could have up to three meetings (investigation, hearing, appeal), the total figure does not equate to 600 individual employees. Furthermore, some individuals would not have been union members, thus not requiring union representation. Even so, the figure of 600 hearings probably represents 200-400 individuals, or between 5% and 10% of the entire workforce. Generally, stewards felt that this heavy use of formal procedures was driven by the HR

department. Moreover, insofar as employers pursue a policy of management by procedure, shop stewards will not be able to avoid considerable activity in this area. What the present research makes clear, however, is the sophistication of shop steward responses; at least, in this case study.

Overall, the research gathered an abundance of rich and detailed evidence concerning the activity of London Borough shop stewards in this area, revealing a far more complex reality than has been assumed by recent accounts. Shop stewards in this case study experienced individual representation as a responsibility and sometimes a burden, but often also as an opportunity to contest management decisions and actions. In important respects, individual representation by shop stewards in this case study can be seen as an encounter between new public sector management and the 'intelligent trade unionist' (Section 1.2), in a context of limited opportunities for collective action. The fieldwork revealed that the overall picture was considerably more complex than the headline number of cases might suggest. The next sub-section examines ways in which cases varied, and the ways in which stewards understood and responded to those differences.

Variation in individual casework

During the fieldwork at London Borough, it became clear that individual representation could not be treated as an undifferentiated whole. Rather, individual casework varied in important ways. This finding is important because the current standard view treats individual representation and casework uniformly as representing a departure from dealing with collective issues. Moreover, shop stewards at London Borough were well aware of variation within the workload of individual representation they undertook. Casework varied in a number of ways, but this presentation will focus on two broad areas: first, differences in the amount of casework carried out by shop stewards; and, second, differences in the nature of the cases and therefore also in the importance that shop stewards attached to them.

Concerning the first aspect of variation in casework, given the ubiquity attached to individual representation in the recent literature, an unexpected finding of the present research was that some stewards clearly did a very great deal of individual representation, while others did comparatively little or even none at all. Commonly, convenors, co-convenors, and some branch officers carried the greatest burden of casework; indeed, it

was fairly common for some to report attending three hearings in a week. In part, this reflected the level of shop steward organisation within a department or directorate. Thus, for instance, in Adult Social Care there were some 500 union members but only two shop stewards; not surprisingly, the co-convenor carried a very considerable workload of individual representation in this department. This convenor commented:

'- All you do ... most of the time ... is representation.
"I hate it"
- … not really hate... but it's tiring.... Management tie you down. It keeps you busy, and you don't get time to organise'.

Such a view plainly chimes with aspects of the current standard view, which sees the growth of individual representation as restricting shop stewards' ability to represent workers on collective issues (Section 2.1). By contrast, housing had a far greater number of experienced stewards, who did the majority of individual representation; consequently, the co-convenor here did much less. Thus, it was in areas with a shortage of stewards that convenors carried the greatest burden of individual casework.

In some areas, variation in the amount of individual representation reflected a rudimentary division of labour, a considered strategy by stewards for dealing with this workload. For instance, the branch secretary, branch chair, and one other experienced steward between them carried a large proportion of the most difficult cases; an arrangement based mainly on their experience and expertise. In two areas – housing benefit, and libraries – stewards had devised their own informal division of labour, such that some stewards specialised in individual representation while others concentrated on collective issues. Furthermore, new and inexperienced stewards conducted no individual representation at all. In some instances, this was because they were awaiting formal union training. More generally, handling casework was considered quite onerous and demanding, so new stewards had to learn the ropes before going solo, as it were; often, this meant shadowing more experienced stewards, or some other informal mentoring arrangement.

The research also found evidence that the amount of individual representation and casework carried out by shop stewards varied over time, and both between and within departments and directorates. This aspect of variation appeared to be related to changing

management practices, whether at the level of individual managers' behaviour and preferences, or in relation to changing management systems, such as the introduction of new HRM policy. One longstanding steward contrasted the current level of formal procedures with the situation when she had first become a union rep:

'- years ago, when I became a steward, I didn't do any of that

- we had a few stewards, [and] the assistant branch sec, {who} would do that

- there was less of it – definitely... less disciplinaries, less sickness {cases}

- we had reps who {did} casework and quite liked it, but it was across the whole council - now I do the same [amount] for half a department'.

Thus, the long-term shift in management methods appeared to be one influence on the increase in the amount of individual representation that shop stewards were conducting.

Stewards also reported that the amount of individual casework could vary over shorter timescales. One commented:

'- Individual cases massively goes up and down for me

- a year ago had far more than now

- I hardly ever used to get underperformance ... Now, I've had four in the last 18 months..... I reckon I've [pause for thought] ... to be honest, I can only think of one before then'.

This steward, from housing, also had an explanation for these changes:

'- Partly ... one of our new managers - she's mrs climb-up-the-greasy-pole

- ... she's been through 6 estate officers. One, she's done twice on underperformance, and we cut a deal [for early retirement]. She's had three temps {...} walk out on her, saying she's impossible to work with....

- All the others, to be honest, they weren't fuck-ups. They just didn't do everything she wanted'.

While this instance links an increase in individual casework to the conduct of one manager, stewards also linked changes in the amount of individual representation to shifts in wider

management priorities. One convenor saw a number of factors behind an increase in individual casework across a directorate:

'- we got figures recently for sackings ... definitely up - figures for the worst sanctions
- sackings, capabilities ... going up....
- periodically they do ... but also, the new contracts ... trying to put people under pressure'.

Questions concerning stewards' attribution of motives to management will be discussed further below (Section 5.4). Suffice to note, here, that stewards commonly linked changing management priorities to variations in the amount of individual representation and casework that they undertook.

The second aspect of variation in stewards' workload of individual representation and casework concerned the nature of the cases themselves. At the most simple level, one steward stated:

'- Some cases take a long time, but some are over quickly'.

More significantly for the purposes of the present study, there was significant variation in the degree to which individual cases entailed issues that were specific to one employee, as compared with cases entailing issues that were more widely applicable to a number of employees. That is, some cases could be considered properly individual, while others carried collective weight. An example of a narrowly individual case involved a worker accused of misusing a council travel card to the amount of £13, described by a convenor as:

'He's a bloke who's been naughty'.

Other examples of the more narrowly individual type of case included: two former friends who had fallen out badly, leading to significant inter-personal conflict and a formal grievance; arrangements for a member who returned to work with limited mobility after a broken ankle; a retired caretaker at risk of losing council accommodation; an older employee with severe arthritis seeking early retirement on ill-health grounds; an appeal over a job evaluation; a member being bullied by team-mates; a member overseas during a

sabbatical year, concerned about re-deployment; an application to the Unison hardship fund. A few stewards were dealing with cases of long-term sickness absence, which usually revolved around the unfortunate circumstances of one person. Some of these cases could be very time-consuming for shop stewards, carrying on for many months, and often involving very distressing circumstances. In the most serious cases, stewards generally had two main aims. First, stewards were keen to maintain employment wherever possible. Second, stewards were significantly concerned to ensure that members were treated sympathetically and fairly by management; in particular, by the fair and reasonable application of procedures.

This second consideration – the fair and reasonable application of procedures – also applied in even the simplest of individual misconduct cases, and indicates an important linkage between individual cases and the wider collective issue of the establishment and maintenance of standards of management behaviour. As one steward expressed it:

> '"One thing I always try and find out ... Does the manager treat everyone the same?"
> {…}
> *Equal treatment - why is that important?*
> {Steward} - "It's a good defence"
> - if the manager is not being fair, it's a good point against them in a hearing - grounds for a grievance'.

Similarly, a convenor discussed the place of equal treatment in the wider context of bargaining relations between union reps and management:

> '- Management are supposed to treat people fairly and consistently...
> - what we're dealing with is where they haven't
> - they apply rules differently
> - that's about where you are in the hierarchy
> - also about who you are
> - HR are supposed to be the moderating factor, but they're not
> {…}
> - there's no system that looks at comparators properly, "so we have to use our cunning"…

{…}

- We want people dealt with consistently

- consistent application of procedures

- If they're inconsistent, you can often make an individual case into a wider

campaigning case

{…}

- the whole point of having negotiated procedures... ultimately it's about equality

- decent trade unionists come from the point of view of the equalities we've fought

for... framework of equality

{…}

- It becomes part of the way you deal with things

- there's enough inequalities

- …class... people at the bottom are treated like shit ... people at the top... nice little

earner…

"My indignation gets in the way."'

The commitment on the part of stewards at London Borough to the fair and equitable treatment of workers by managers shows a clear continuity with Brown's (1973) notion of 'shop-stewardlines' (Section 2.2). Thus, even quite narrowly individual cases shaded into collective representation if stewards thought management had applied procedures unfairly.

Individual cases might be linked to collective issues in other ways. One steward reported an individual case of work-related stress that was perceived as being caused by work organisation. The steward pressed for work reorganisation or workload reduction in order to allow the member to return to work. Of course, such measures might then apply to other workers, thereby developing a collective aspect. Even where work reorganisation applied to one member only, the impact of shop steward activity was to constrain management decision-making. Some of the most serious individual cases led to senior stewards and convenors becoming involved in discussions with management concerning the operation of important procedures, such as the safeguarding of adults with learning difficulties, and control of medication in care homes. These examples represent a considerable *extension* of the scope of shop steward activity – certainly, as compared with the issues handled by stewards in the classic studies. Consequently, evidence from the fieldwork showed both that collective issues could and did arise in individual cases, and also that the significance of

the collective aspect varied.

Furthermore, shop stewards at London Borough understood that individual cases could carry significant collective implications. Discussing the relationship of collective issues to individual casework, one convenor said:

'- many issues, like sickness, or disciplinary cases where someone's done something stupid, you can't generalise it. You just have to deal with the case. With sickness, people often don't want the details known, [they want to keep it private].
- some things you can't make collective … {for instance} if someone's had a lot of sickness'.

This convenor continued:

'"If it's one worker you might try, and if it's a group of workers you might try harder, if it's got an organisational outcome"
What do you mean by 'if it's got an organisational outcome'?
{Convenor} - "If it's something you think there's going to be a gain in extending union organisation"
- but that would involve the members pushing it
How?
{Convenor} - "I suppose… [pause] You might see… [pause] If people were unwilling to perform part of their job"
- or a petition
"Or ... just go public with it, really."
How does that make a difference?
{Convenor} - "It means that if you've got a dispute - formal or not - that makes management nervous - and therefore they get more inventive about finding a way to agree part of your demands, or something"'.

This convenor was particularly thoughtful about the potential of individual cases to carry collective significance. Evidence from in-depth interviews suggested that around a third of the stewards who participated saw individual representation explicitly in terms of collective relations between workers and management. A general commitment to fair treatment of

individuals, though, was almost ubiquitous in stewards' expressed motivations for conducting individual representation. Moreover, regardless of how explicitly they linked individual and collective issues, it was clear during the fieldwork that individual casework often involved stewards in direct challenges to managerial prerogatives, especially in relation to frontier of control issues. Consequently, the next sub-section will present a more detailed consideration of the manifestation of collective issues in individual casework.

Collective issues in individual casework

As suggested above, some of the individual representation carried out by shop stewards at London Borough involved dealing with issues that had important implications for collective relations between workers and management. The interpenetration of individual and collective issues in such cases can be illustrated by two examples. It is not the suggestion, here, that these two cases were typical of individual casework at London Borough. Rather, these examples have been selected for detailed discussion because they show most clearly the linkages between individual and collective issues, and therefore permit the exploration this important analytical point.

The first example involved the mental health social workers discussed above (Section 5.2), who worked in teams alongside NHS staff and social workers from a neighbouring borough. In a somewhat complex arrangement, these social workers were employed by London Borough but the service was managed by the NHS Trust covering the two boroughs. Early in 2012, NHS management undertook a major reorganisation, which led to some three months of negotiations with union representatives from the NHS unions and from both local authorities. The outcome of these negotiations was an agreement on new job descriptions and a new grading structure for these workers. Up to this point, then, stewards and convenors dealt with this issue via traditional collective bargaining methods.

The collective bargaining agreement was not the end of the matter, however. The convenor who represented the social workers during the collective bargaining subsequently represented twelve members in individual cases, which the convenor described as 'fallout':

> "12 individual cases, out of 70 ish members in {London Borough}. That's quite a high proportion."
> - mainly over reconfiguration of teams and change of duties:

"We insisted people had a choice - first, second, third…"

[i.e. a choice over where they were redeployed to.]

I ask if these cases were basically about making management stick to the agreement that had already been made?

{Convenor} - yes. Making management stick to an agreement already made'.

Many of these cases were appeals or grievances lodged where the member and convenor believed an individual had been wrongly regraded. The convenor ran through the individual cases (although in fact only eight are recorded in the fieldnotes):

'1. another reorganisation…

2. reasonable adjustment

3. appeal

4. appeal

5. downgraded worker refusing extra duties, which are thus effectively unpaid

"She's protected on pay, so basically we've got 3 years to have this argument... And we will"

- {Pay} protection negotiated in reorganisation procedure in 2010 (ish) - automatic if downgraded one grade

6. {Employee} not paid additional increments for new duties and promotion...

"It took us from June until last week {October} ... Backdated now".

"They've got such a high turnover of people in HR, no one remembers what was agreed."

7. protected pay

8. appeal of relocation to team with night and weekend working... {on grounds of} health and reasonable adjustment. May come up again'.

Here, then, the pursuit of individual cases was clearly and explicitly an effort by union representatives to enforce the terms of a collective agreement. This evidence is plainly a challenge to the current standard view of shop stewards, which sees individual casework as sharply separate from collective representation and bargaining. Viewed in terms of bargaining opportunities and resources, the negotiation of a new grading structure represented a fairly traditional bargaining opportunity. By contrast, the use of a series of grievance cases to press management over the interpretation and implementation of the

collective agreement represents a novel and unexpected bargaining resource, which was clearly being applied to constrain management's freedom to act unilaterally. It is difficult to see how this unfolding process could be described other than as the pursuit of collective ends by individual means.

The second example of collective issues arising in individual representation involves the dismissal and later reinstatement of a caretaker on a council housing estate, who was sacked for gross misconduct – 'bringing the council into disrepute' – after an altercation during which she swore at a member of the public. This case continued for some weeks and was a focus of considerable attention for shop stewards, branch officers, and managers, as well as drawing comment from other workers, elected councillors and tenants' representatives. This case will be examined in some detail to draw out the complexities of individual and collective issues involved. The following account draws on several diaries and diary-interviews, and observation in three stewards' committee meetings, to provide a rounded view of events and of the framework of understanding applied by stewards. Although not a run-of-the-mill example, this case illustrated themes in individual representation that were found across a range of other cases.

It should be noted that this case raised issues of race and gender that might be considered from the perspective of intersectionality, but which cannot be developed here for lack of space; nevertheless, they should be made explicit (McBride *et al.* 2014). The complaint against the caretaker, who was a young white woman, included an allegation that she had made a racist comment towards the complainant, an older Asian man. The caretaker denied the allegation of racism, and made a counter-claim that she had been subject to obscene sexual comments and gestures by the complainant. The shop steward who represented the caretaker during the formal process, including denying the charge of racism, was a middle-aged Black British woman. A second, very experienced, steward closely involved in the case was a middle-aged white woman. These two stewards both worked as frontline housing workers in the nearby housing office, and representation in this case fell to them due to the lack of stewards among the caretakers (Section 5.1). The choice of a Black steward to defend a complaint of racism was a deliberate ploy by the stewards to strengthen that defence; stewards and convenors who worked with and knew the accused, including the two lead defenders, were confident that the caretaker was not a racist and that the allegation was false.

As noted, the complaint which led to the dismissal included an allegation of racial abuse, which the caretaker denied, which none of the shop stewards believed, and which management did not pursue (see below). The caretaker had previously given evidence against the complainant in a separate case brought by the council, and claimed she had been subjected to a lengthy campaign of harassment from him as a result. Indeed, management confirmed that they had previously received complaints from her about this individual, but had taken no action. On this occasion, the caretaker admitted, she had lost her temper and used the word 'fuck'. Nevertheless, despite these mitigating circumstances, the caretaker was dismissed after a disciplinary hearing.

For the stewards, this outcome was unexpected. Although the case had been discussed collectively between stewards at an early stage, there was no expectation that it might lead to dismissal, and consequent expressions of shock when it did. As one steward put it:

> '- verbal abuse, but mitigation - long running dispute because caretaker had given evidence {…}
> - didn't expect that
> "It was a shock"
> - eight years good service, the tenants love her'.

According to the stewards, such a case would usually be expected to result in a reprimand and written warning. Consequently, an appeal was lodged using the formal disciplinary procedure, and the following meeting of the HASC shop stewards' committee discussed how to proceed. As a result, the strategy pursued by the local stewards was developed in conjunction with the convenors and other stewards on the committee. One aspect of these discussions was the pooling of knowledge of the disciplinary procedure, council policies on misconduct, and previous experience of stewards in handling this type of case. One steward argued that management was at fault:

> '{Steward 1} - {London Borough} have failed because they put her in that situation…
> {Steward 2} - it's not as simple as that, because she could have walked away'.

In this exchange, Steward 2 is an experienced frontline worker, whereas Steward 1 works in

an office with limited public-facing duties. Consequently, Steward 2 has a different understanding of the type of argument that might succeed in the appeal, based on a detailed knowledge of the policies which apply to frontline workers, and greater experience of dealing with conflict situations. This is an example of job knowledge being significant for issue-handling by shop stewards.

Besides discussing formal representational aspects of the case, stewards also outlined collective approaches towards the appeal process. These took a variety of forms, which can be seen as bargaining resources:

> '{Steward} - we had five tenants' reps doing supportive statements, {and a} petition' {...}
> {Steward 1} - we're going to talk to people about going to councillors
> {Steward 2} - we can call a lobby of the appeal {…}
> - caretakers would have to take time off [to attend the lobby] ....
> - at least, we want convenors there...
> {Steward 3} - there's a strong feeling about this - caretakers might take time off...
> {Steward 2} - we can get stewards from {nearby offices}…
> - caretakers might look at strike action ... We can say to caretakers, if she's sacked, do you want to walk out on strike?
> {Convenor 1} - I'll be at the lobby
> {Convenor 2} - I'll be there, too'.

Subsequently, the caretakers' section held a well-attended union meeting at which a motion was passed in favour of a lobby of the appeal hearing. The meeting also agreed to approach management for time off to attend the lobby. Thus, in the run-up to the appeal hearing shop stewards adopted a twin-track approach, combining expertise in formal individual representation, and, at the same time, organising collective actions.

At this point there were indications that the case had also become a focus of attention for managers, both in HR and line management. During a diary-interview with a convenor, an email arrived from a steward involved in the case, to say that the head of the caretaking service (who had refused caretakers time off to attend the lobby) was requesting a meeting with the steward:

'"Oh! {Named manager} is offering {steward} a meeting"

"She {the steward} wants to know who will go with her. I will."

Does {steward} say what the meeting's about?

- Yes - {manager is} saying, "...can't allow time off, but can agree to a meeting to discuss the concerns raised in your motion" ... [he's saying] you can have access to my calendar ... let me know who's coming [to the meeting]'.

A further indication of management concern about this case came from HR, in the form of complaint to the branch secretary about the conduct of the steward conducting the representation; specifically, protesting about the involvement of tenants' reps in the case (which had in fact been at their own initiative). Somewhat oddly, HR mis-identified the steward involved, which led to several confused telephone discussions between the secretary and the two HASC convenors before the mix-up was clarified. One of the convenors commented that the involvement of tenants' reps 'used to be part of campaigning', but had become less common.

The stewards pressed on with organising a collective response to the dismissal. The lobby of the appeal hearing took place, attended by tenants' reps, a number caretakers who had booked annual leave to attend, stewards from nearby offices, and convenors. Placards were made. One steward described the lobby as, "A good little crowd". The steward representing the dismissed caretaker later said that the lobby made her 'feel better about doing it'. Later, the Branch Secretary described the elements of mobilisation in this case as "entirely unrepresentative". However, while this example of individual casework was unusual in the mobilisation of a collective protest at the appeal hearing, other individual cases did generate lower levels of collective mobilisation, such as office-level union meetings. Furthermore, small-scale lobbies outside council meetings were quite commonly employed by the branch over a number of issues, and clearly featured in these stewards' repertoire of contestation.

At London Borough, dismissal appeals were heard by a panel of three elected members (councillors). In this case, the appeal was successful and the caretaker was reinstated, described by one steward as, 'a great outcome'. This news was received with considerable jubilation amongst workmates and stewards, with one steward reporting, "People were

jumping round office". This suggests that a significant proportion of workers had some understanding of the wider (collective) implications of the result of this individual case.

At the stewards' committee meeting following the reinstatement there was considerable discussion of the case. Some discussion focussed on the conduct of the formal representation and procedures. However, the discussion also looked at two aspects that involved significant collective issues; namely, efforts to attribute motives to the managers involved, and wider implications for other workers. Again, this evidence supports the notion that individual cases can be significant in terms of collective issues. The steward who had represented the caretaker at the formal hearings explained the wider collective significance of this case:

> '- people were worried...
> - we're dealing with different people all the time...
> [i.e. some people are very offensive and abusive towards council employees.]
> - you try to keep calm... then you come back to the office and let off steam...
> "We're not robots, we're only human beings"
> - ... you've got to give us some leeway...
> - ... they can give you a rap on the knuckles for losing your temper - but not ruin your life'.

The concern of other workers was that one mistake under provocation could result in dismissal, because frontline council staff regularly deal with abuse from members of the public. Consequently, securing the caretaker's reinstatement maintained previous standards and reaffirmed the circumstances in which managers could and could not take a decision to dismiss. This is plainly an example of an individual case which has implications for the frontier of control and limits on managerial prerogative. Here, the words of the steward who attended the formal hearing are informative: 'they can give you a rap on the knuckles for losing your temper — but not ruin your life'. This statement clearly carries an understanding of what management may and may not legitimately do. It concedes a right of management to discipline workers in certain circumstances, and at the same time carries a firm denial of what managers may not legitimately do. That is, the statement shows a clear sense of limiting managerial prerogatives. In this instance, then, this steward saw her and the union's role in terms of preventing management from doing something that they

wanted to do, but which the stewards thought they should not be able to do. This is clear evidence of an outcome that resulted from the actions of both parties; that is, it is a bargained outcome.

The same steward also thought there were implications for the image of the union:

'- It's good... people see you can turn things round…

{…}

- it's a good recruitment tool…

{…}

"...it encourages everybody"'.

That is, this steward had an understanding of collective implications of this individual case, in terms of frontier of control issues, and in terms of strengthening collective union organisation (*cf.* the attempted dismissal of 'Gary' in Taylor and Bain 2003: 162).

It was clear that management also appreciated the wider implications of this case. Shortly after the reinstatement, HR sent an email to convenors stating that this case did not form 'a precedent', which was discussed at the following stewards' committee:

'{Steward} - HR said it's not a precedent....

[General derision.]

{Convenor} - they said the same thing with {another case} last year

- well, they don't get to decide.... It is a precedent.

- we need to look out for it... And be on the offensive'.

Finally, the stewards also discussed the grounds upon which the councillors had rescinded the decision of management to dismiss the caretaker. Collective issues and motive attribution were to the fore. The steward who did the individual representation described the turning point in the appeal hearing:

'- the way it came across... the manager had only listened to HR - they only looked at the incident, and councillors berated them...

"I was expecting thanks and goodbye" [like usual...]

"I'd never seen that before, when councillors turn on a manager... I had expected them to turn on me."

- it was when they interrogated the manager - that's what swung it

{...}

- {We} came out of the meeting and half an hour later she got the phone call saying she'd been reinstated...

- the best part was, in the appeal... they agreed she wasn't racist... a councillor said to the manager, so, you've sacked her for saying Fuck?'.

The presence of the councillors was seen by stewards as introducing a significant outside influence and constraint on management. One convenor summarised:

'- if anyone... is sacked, you've got far more chance of being reinstated in front of a members panel than at an ET'.

Overall, then, this case exhibits a considerable and significant intertwining of individual and collective issues, and also shows that stewards had an understanding of, and an orientation upon, those issues.

Stewards developed explanations of management's course of action in this case, which centred on the perceived role of the HR department. For instance:

'{Convenor} - "I think there's an issue with HR being off the leash…"

- the one I did last year [an appeal that got reinstatement]...

- she had done something wrong, but [the sack was] out of proportion....

- HR really pushing it...

- but they pushed it too far - it looked bad in front of councillors....

- she'd made a mistake, but hadn't defrauded the council, or acted dishonestly…

{...}

{Steward 1} - why do you think they went down that route? {i.e. dismissal}

{Steward2} - I think there's something going on here.... {they} just sacked another steward. HR seem to have made a change - if you swear.... if you lose your temper ... They're saying if you are a front line worker, you cannot be a human being or make a mistake

{...}

{Steward} - is this someone in HR who's decided to say, we can do you whenever we want to…?

{Several} - yes, it looks like it. It's a general push'.

This view was supported by several stewards who knew the manager who had taken the original decision to dismiss, who was widely seen as a fair and reasonable, and therefore unlikely to dismiss someone in such circumstances unless under pressure from higher management. The dismissal was taken as evidence that HR had been driving the disciplinary process, not the manager:

'{Convenor} - need to understand, HR are pressing managers to sack people - we need to remind management that HR are only there for advice

{...}

"{we} have to say to managers, it is your decision".'

{...}

{Steward 1} - so, it looks like manager was only listening to HR...?

{Steward 2} - yes'.

Furthermore, stewards expressed an understanding of the importance of the changing relationship between HR and line management:

'{Steward 1} - if HR are driving it, what do management think about it?

{Steward 2} - some don't like it, but they won't break ranks...

{Steward 1} - can't we put out some sort of communication?

{Steward 2} - we need to be aware of what their role is

{Convenor} - absolutely...

{Steward 2} - need to make sure that managers know they should be running it, and HR are there to advise...

{Convenor} - most managers don't have the training and confidence to run the hearing...

- but you've got a few who are trained and confident enough to actually run the hearing, and challenge HR. Then you get a better hearing'.

Once more, this discussion demonstrates the significant frontier of control issues that run through many individual cases, of which the stewards at London Borough were certainly aware, and which guided their approach to dealing with their workload of individual representation.

Overall, evidence from London Borough demonstrates that individual representation and casework can and does entail significant collective issues. Consequently, this evidence undermines the current standard view of shop stewards, which sees in the growth of individual casework a move away from dealing with collective issues. While the case of the dismissed caretaker has been discussed at greater length than others, carried greater collective significance than many, and showed a greater range of shop steward responses, nevertheless, the fieldwork at London Borough found qualitatively similar issues embedded time and time again in the more mundane, everyday cases. It should be noted that the first detailed study of shop stewards for some thirty years had no difficulty in uncovering a great deal of evidence to show the intertwining of individual and collective issues in these cases. As such, this evidence presents a serious challenge to the widely accepted view that when shop stewards are engaged in individual representation, they are not dealing with collective issues. The final part of this chapter sets this aspect of shop steward activity in the broader context of union–management relations at London Borough.

5.4 Shop stewards and managers: attitudes and impacts

Evidence from London Borough shows that shop stewards reported some variety in their relations with managers. Commonly, stewards reported broadly friendly or at least business-like relations with local managers. One steward stated:

> '- my manager likes to talk things over
> - uses me as a sounding board
> - so far I've been able to put her off ... She likes to be popular ... I know her weak spots … [but] I'm reaching the limits'.

Many stewards reported regular informal discussions with managers, which could at times be used to resolve issues on behalf of members. Thus, some instances of proposed changes

to holiday working rotas and minor alterations of duties were dropped by managers after informal shop steward action. For some stewards, such contacts with managers were so commonplace that they were initially not included in diary entries, coming to light only in diary-interviews. Fewer stewards reported informal meetings with more senior managers, though some did; for instance, over more difficult and protracted individual casework. Generally, this was limited to more experienced and confident stewards. One longstanding convenor said of her relationship with managers,

> '- I think that I've really grown up... Age and experience... I'm not intimidated by any of them'.

The experience of this steward reflects a common feature of relations between a number of senior unions reps and a number of senior managers, who had often known each other for many years, even having worked together at some point. At the highest levels of management, however, such relations were much less common, due to frequent changes of management personnel via external recruitment of executives.

Stewards also reported elements of tension with managers. For instance, one characterised relations with managers in his office as,

> '"Cordial with a certain amount of kvetching"'.

During a diary-interview, this steward was unwilling to discuss certain issues in the cafe close to his workplace, in case he should be overheard. Other stewards were of the opinion that management in this office could be difficult and hostile towards unions reps. Not surprisingly, this steward also said that he was careful when raising problems with management, making sure he adopted a calm and polite manner. Generally, a similar approach was adopted by stewards across the council, in order to avoid conflict that distracted from the matter in hand. Furthermore, senior union reps were keen to reduce opportunities for management to single out individual stewards for disciplinary action. Thus, individual authors were not named in branch newsletters, apart from purely factual reports and features. For instance, during the dispute over the new contracts, one convenor said of the newsletter:

'"We don't name check"

- it makes it easier to get them...

[i.e. easier for management to target individuals]

{...}

"management are really pissed off about the stuff we're putting on there"'.

Overall, then, relations between shop stewards and managers showed a mixed pattern: commonly business-like, in some cases friendly, but with elements of tension in some areas, particularly if stewards were engaged in contesting managerial prerogatives.

During the in-depth interviews, stewards were asked whether they thought the union at London Borough had any influence over management and management decisions. With only two exceptions, the stewards agreed that the union did have an influence over management, which they almost all described in terms of 'restraining' or 'moderating'. That is, stewards saw their activities as having a real, if limited, impact on management and managerial decision-making. Notably, the two exceptions, who thought the union had no real effect on management, were both very experienced and long-standing stewards. This contrasts with the characterisation by Brown and Nash (2008: 100) of stewards who report contemporary union bargaining influence as looking back to 'a past era when collective bargaining was more robust'. In this case study, the reps who saw union influence as least significant were among those who had personal experience of greater union influence.

The lack of research evidence from managers in this case study presents difficulties for interpreting stewards' expressed views on management relations. Fortunately, the second case study did have access to managers, and here it was found that stewards' accounts of relations with management significantly coincided with managers' accounts (see Chapter 6). This suggests that the method adopted were robust, and that findings from this case study can likewise be considered reliable. Observation and diary:diary-interviews produced a good deal of evidence from multiple sources showing numerous instances of managers modifying their course of actions after the input of shop stewards. Consequently, the evidence from London Borough shows that the actions of shop stewards had real and, at times, significant effects on managerial decision-making.

Conclusion

The first important finding of the case study at London Borough was that, *contra* the current standard view, shop stewards were handling collective issues to a far greater extent than is commonly asserted in recent accounts. The implementation by senior management of new contracts involved stewards in a significant campaign around fundamental collective issues of terms and conditions of employment. Lengthy negotiations saw collective bargaining of the classic type. While most of the formal bargaining was conducted by a small number of branch officers and senior stewards, a much wider layer of shop stewards directed their efforts towards the mobilisation of union members around this issue, despite the difficulties outlined. These efforts were successful in securing a number of changes to management proposals. Other collective issues regularly dealt with by these stewards included pay and grading, work rosters, work duties and job requirements, and workload. Continual service reorganisation saw considerable shop steward activity around work organisation and effort. Plainly, the growth of individual representation and casework at London Borough had not seen the end of stewards dealing with collective issues. Nor did formally designated 'consultation' procedures constitute unilateral decision-making by management. Despite numerous difficulties, shop stewards at London Borough were clearly able to use consultation processes to pursue collective issues, to secure modifications to management decisions, and thereby to affect outcomes for the union members they represented.

The second important finding concerned the character and significance of individual representation. Again *contra* the current standard view, this case study found that individual casework was significantly varied, and could not be straightforwardly counterposed to collective issues. While some individual cases were narrowly individual in character, others carried considerable significance for collective workplace relations. Moreover, both stewards and managers were aware of these differences and adapted their approach accordingly. Thus, not only had the growth of individual representation not seen the abandoning of collective issues by shop stewards, but a close examination of actual casework revealed collective issues embedded in a significant number of those cases. This aspect of casework is entirely missing from accounts adopting the current standard view of shop stewards.

These findings contribute significantly to the argument of this thesis. Clearly, evidence from the case study at London Borough strongly supports previous criticisms of the current standard view of shop stewards. In particular, the evidence undermines sharp conceptual distinctions between negotiation and consultation, and between collective issues and individual representation. It is also apparent that shop stewards at London Borough had at their disposal a significant range of bargaining resources, some of which were recognisable from previous studies while others were novel. In terms of developing an overall analysis, it is clear that shop stewards in this study continued to be occupied to a considerable extent with issues relating to the effort bargain and the frontier of control, suggesting important continuities with earlier periods of workplace bargaining. This case study also found an unexpected patterning of shop steward activity. In particular, while stewards had difficulties in mobilising union members around the issue of new contracts, effort bargaining was significantly clustered around service reorganisations, while frontier of control issues tended to cluster around individual representation and casework. These distinctive patterns will be discussed in Chapter 7, where they will be linked to underlying dynamics of workplace relations. Before that, Chapter 6 presents the mains findings from the second case study, at Big Car. Despite very considerable differences in industrial context, union organisation, and day-to-day issues, it will be seen that the activities of these two groups of shop stewards shared important continuities as well as divergences.

Chapter 6: Big Car

This chapter continues the presentation of research findings, with the case study at Big Car. As did the previous chapter, this account details shop stewards' day-to-day activities, meanings and intentions, arguments and explanations. Again, these findings are a significant contribution to empirical research in this area. In particular, the first detailed study of shop stewards inside a lean production auto manufacturer in the UK sheds significant new light on the capacity of shop stewards to adapt to new management methods. Shop stewards at Big Car dealt with a wide range issues, which in places overlapped with their counterparts at London Borough, but which was in other respects significantly different. Issues the stewards dealt with ranged from everyday queries over pay-slips, holiday entitlements and the like, through individual casework representation, to the tough reality of lean production, and questions concerning the continued existence of the plant. Again, as at London Borough, some of the methods utilised by stewards at Big Car were familiar from previous research, while others were more unexpected and surprising.

This chapter follows the same structure as Chapter 5, to enable broad comparison across the two case studies. The first section outlines the structure and workings of shop steward organisation at Big Car. The following section describes the main collective issues that stewards dealt with, including surprising and important evidence of bargaining within the lean production system; an area which, according to many previous accounts, has secured unilateral management control and the exclusion of stewards (Section 4.5). Next, the chapter presents evidence concerning individual representation and casework, which again challenges the conceptual distinctions of the current standard view of shop stewards. A final section discusses relations between shop stewards and managers more generally.

Unlike the previous case study, at Big Car the research had good access to managers, and this provided additional evidence to support the overall argument of the thesis. For the most part, evidence from managers was used to aid triangulation, to help assess evidence gathered from stewards. Mangers' accounts strongly supported stewards' accounts, adding to confidence in the quality of evidence gathered. The focus of this chapter, though, remains firmly upon the stewards, their activities, and their accounts; consequently,

relatively little evidence from managers is presented, apart from on a few specific points. Once more, while the presentation in this chapter might seem entirely descriptive, evidence has been selected, ordered and presented so as to comprise the first stage of analysis, which will be developed and deepened in subsequent chapters.

6.1 The shop steward organisation

Unite the union organised across the plant at Big Car, with high membership density, more than 50 shop stewards, and four convenors. Together, these union representatives comprised the plant shop stewards' committee. At local level, stewards were organised into eight smaller 'shop committees'. At the time of the research, the plant was operating two shifts, and each shop committee covered one shift in each main production area. Each shop committee also elected a senior steward. Senior stewards and convenors were on full-time release, some 16% of all union representatives. The remaining stewards spent their shifts working on production, fitting in shop steward activities as best they could during very short work-breaks, or haggling with supervisors and local managers for time away from the job to carry out this or that aspect of their trade union duties. In contrast to London Borough, all the stewards and convenors were white men, reflecting the almost entirely white and male workforce. There was some variation in age, though, with the generally younger workforce in the more physically demanding General Assembly area (see below) electing younger stewards, mainly in their 30s.

Arrangements for meetings of the shop stewards' committees at Big Car were quite different from London Borough. The full plant shop stewards' committee met relatively rarely unless there were major issues to discuss, which was not the case during this research. Meetings of this committee were held at 6.45am so that stewards from both day and night shifts could attend. During the fieldwork there were three meetings, which were very well attended, with almost all stewards present. The conduct of the meeting was also very different from London Borough. After a few brief business items, the convenor made a lengthy and detailed report of recent activity and then took questions. The convenor's report and other items of business led to very few questions and no discussion, so that the meetings lasted only a little over an hour. Apart from one or two factual questions the

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stewards listened in silence. Stewards offered two explanations for the limited discussion. First, it was said that arguments more often arose over the most important issues, such as pay or the future of the plant; but nothing of this sort was on the agenda at the time of the fieldwork. Secondly, stewards were wary of voicing disagreement with the convenors, which could result in being 'shot down' in front of an audience. Instead, stewards took detailed notes to report back to their section, showing impressive organisation and seriousness.

Meetings of shop committees were even more constrained for time, usually taking place during lunch breaks, which lasted only 23 minutes, because of difficulties getting stewards off the line at other times. Meetings were usually called by the senior steward, on an *ad hoc* basis, to report back on particular local issues or update on developments at plant level. Although these meetings were more informal and conducive to open discussion, time constraints meant that in practice discussion was limited. Consequently, for these shop stewards, disagreement and discussion was not a normal practice in formal settings. Instead, discussion took place elsewhere.

From time to time, stewards at all levels complained that convenors took decisions and even made agreements without consulting the stewards who would have to deal with the consequences. At the same time, the convenors personally were held in very high regard by stewards, and often credited with keeping the plant open. Nevertheless, the difficulty for stewards in raising differences and disagreements at the top level meant that certain issues were discussed quietly, away from the main union office. Indeed, the fieldwork discovered a number of practices that were not part of official union policy or company procedure, and which remained hidden from both higher management and senior union representatives. At the level of senior steward and below discussions among stewards were very frequent, with often daily contacts between senior and line-level stewards, and close relations between neighbouring stewards.

On one issue in particular, though, there was agreement across stewards and convenors alike: the need to keep the plant open, even if this meant making concessions to management. One older steward contrasted the current situation with the 1970s:

> 'we're all a bit more realistic nowadays… [about] where we need to be to survive'.

Importantly, concessions were viewed as a necessity rather than a virtue; in contrast with other accounts of concession-bargaining (Moody 2007). One long-standing steward put it like this:

> '- …it's a matter of keeping jobs:
> "But not at any price"
> - … a case of giving up as little as you have to'.

At the time of the research, the plant was waiting for a new model to be introduced, for which further concessions had been made, though many of the details had not been made public. Two experienced stewards discussed the situation:

> '{Steward 1} - a victory over a company which closes is no use to me…
> {Steward 2} - The best outcome for me will be if they take on a whole shift of young people'.

Senior union reps in particular were proud that the plant was still open, and still employing several thousand workers on some of the best terms and conditions in the area. One of the younger stewards contrasted his experience of work with long-term Big Car employees:

> '- … the guys who have been at {Big Car} since they were 16 don't understand what the world of work is like outside:
> - this is my twenty-fifth job… I've been here eight years
> - I worked for an agency… 11 jobs with them in different factories…
> *How old are you?*
> {Steward} - 34'.

This general view was shared by the great majority of the stewards who took part in the research, and who broadly accepted the rationale of the need make concessions to keep the plant open. A small number of stewards thought the union had given away too much, but this was a distinctly minority view, and most supported the approach adopted by the convenors. Nevertheless, it was not the case that contestation and shopfloor bargaining had been eradicated by the general consensus among stewards on the need for concessions. Indeed, as will be shown in what follows, the fieldwork uncovered considerable evidence of

shop steward contestation and bargaining.

Senior reps from Big Car were clearly influential at national level in Unite, at least within the sector, and stewards from the plant had gone on to become regional or national FTOs. Senior reps were also strong supporters of the broad left organisation within Unite, and of the incumbent general secretary, Len McCluskey. At the start of the fieldwork, an election for the post of general secretary was underway, and the stewards worked hard to turn out a good vote for McCluskey. In some regards, both local and national FTOs showed a degree of dependence on the union organisation at Big Car; not least in terms of electoral support. Certainly, the convenors did not adopt a subservient position towards the national union leadership. On one notable occasion, a convenor was observed giving a very severe dressing down to someone over the phone; after the call, the convenor said he had been talking to an assistant general secretary of Unite, who had changed the date of a sector committee meeting without consulting the lay chair of the committee. This convenor was proud of his status as a lay representative, and considered that to become an FTO would be to lose influence and independence. Clearly, these convenors were confident of their position within the wider union. The following section discusses how shop stewards at Big Car dealt with collective issues inside the plant.

6.2 Shop stewards and collective issues: job times and lean production

As at London Borough, it quickly became obvious during the fieldwork that shop stewards at Big Car were dealing with collective issues far more often than would have been expected on the basis of recent literature. Moreover, this activity focused significantly around central aspects of the lean production system; in particular, the job-time system of work organisation, and accompanying *Kaizen* and continuous improvement process (CIP) procedures. This section discusses in detail how shop stewards at Big Car dealt with these issues. First, general features of the job-time system will be outlined, before discussion moves to work re-organisation processes under *Kaizen* and CIP.

Job times and lean
The lean production system at Big Car meant that every task on the production line was

specified in detail on a job-sheet. With few exceptions, a job-sheet was attached to each work station on the line, detailing the work to be carried out there. For shop stewards, the contents of job-sheets were a significant focus of activity. Stewards generally developed a good understanding of the job-sheet system, and some had become real experts. Before examining the place of job-sheets and job-timings in shopfloor bargaining processes, it is necessary first to explain the system in sufficient detail to understand the aspects that were important for shop stewards.

At the time of the research, General Assembly (GA) was producing 33 cars per hour, down from 51 cars per hour before the recession. Individual workers were assigned to work stations marked out on the floor beside the production line, and worked on each car in turn as it moved steadily along the track. At that speed of production, each car was in front of each worker for 109 seconds, known as 'takt time'. Managers, production engineers, and *Kaizen* teams attempted to fill as much of that time as possible with work. Job-sheets detailed the tasks to be carried out on each work station. Jobs were broken down into a number of 'operations', which were then further sub-divided into 'elements', each of which attracted a set portion of time. Job elements were put together in a laboratory away from the production areas, by technicians working from a menu. Every walk, reach, pick, bend, push, etc., was allotted a time, some down to as little as 0.2 seconds, and these times were listed on the job-sheets. As an example, one job-sheet showed a total job-time of 99.16 seconds, covering 31 individual operations, which were further broken down into 100 job elements, printed across 4 sheets of A3 paper. A worker was required to carry out those operations, in that order, within the 109 seconds takt time. For the workers, the job-sheet detailed the repetition of their working day. As one car moved off, another was arriving, and the 109 second cycle started again, 33 times an hour, 9.5 hours each day. Overall, the detailed specification of job-times represented a formidable management effort to control labour on the line.

Although the intention of lean production was to fill each 109 second takt-time with work, this was seldom achieved. Often, technical issues restricted management's freedom to organise and re-organise work. On a most basic level, some jobs had to be done before others. For instance, cars had to be painted before seats were fitted. The same principle applied to myriad other parts, which had to be fitted before they were connected, inserted before they were tightened, or adjusted before they were checked. Other difficulties

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stemmed from the layout of the production line itself. So, some components needed a power-tool for fitting, but these were not available at every work station. Sometimes, the floor area around a work station was crowded with bulky parts awaiting assembly, preventing the delivery of additional parts to that location. All these technical factors and more restricted management's freedom to organise work in the way they wanted.

Consequently, in practice, the amount of work-time detailed on each job-sheet varied. For example, one section with 12 operatives had job-times that varied between 91.1 and 107.87 seconds. Such jobs were known as 'under-takt', because not all the 109 seconds was filled. In theory, management could add work to those jobs, to reduce labour elsewhere. Indeed, the search for such reorganisations, though not straightforward, was a continuing management priority (see below). While most jobs were 'under-takt', some jobs were 'over-takt'; that is, they had more work allotted to them than 109 seconds. Usually this resulted from variation between individual cars, according to what 'options' were specified; for instance, engine size, engine type, left-hand drive, automatic gearbox, fancy interior, leather seats, sun-roof, sat-nav, bike rack, alloy wheels, fancy alloy wheels. The list of options was very long. As a result of options, some operations were performed on every car, but others were not. So, on a work station with options, the job-sheet included operations and job-elements for every option, all with different job-times. These job-sheets could become very long and complex; one example included some 200 job-elements and ran to nine A3 pages; all to cover just 109 seconds takt-time. Sometimes, particular options took a job over-takt. But management might then argue that those option were rare, and the rest of the job was under-takt, so on average the job remained within agreed limits. If a particular option was indeed rare, and the job was on average under-takt, then stewards and workers would usually accept an occasional over-takt option. However, predicting the numbers for each option was not an exact science, and a succession over-takt options could push the average over 109 seconds. Consequently, the issue of options was often a source of conflict between management and workforce, on the question of whether a job was over-takt in practice, even if it looked under-takt on paper.

Significantly, job-sheets and timings were subject to contestation and bargaining on a regular basis. An important issue for shop stewards was whether the job-sheets accurately reflected the work done on each station. This was important because, as far as the stewards were concerned, production workers were paid an hourly rate to do the work on the job-

sheet, and therefore any elements not recorded on the job-sheet were seen as unpaid work. Stewards commonly described the importance of checking job-sheets in terms of ensuring that workers were paid for all the work they did. As one commented:

> '- if all the elements aren't in, then people are doing work they're not getting paid for'.

Whenever work was reorganised, which happened often, shop stewards examined the new job-sheet in detail to see that it gave an accurate account of the job, and in particular to check for any missing elements. Another steward criticised management over new job-sheets on a job that was being reorganised:

> '- they've been cutting corners - shaving the times to suit them... leaving things out...
> - we've found a few of those …
> - I don't know if they thought we wouldn't notice'.

There was a widespread feeling among stewards that management persistently manipulated times on the job-sheets. On several occasions stewards had difficulty obtaining copies of revised job-sheets from managers or *Kaizen* teams, and pressed over several days to secure them. Stewards often found discrepancies which led to new job designs being amended. A former steward said of missing elements,

> '- they do it on purpose
> - it makes us, the plant, look more efficient on paper
> - but men {sic.} are doing work they're not getting paid for
> - we'd have a row…
> - I don't care whose fault it is - I just want it put back in
> *Did you get stuff put back in?*
> {Steward} nods, and says definitely:
> "Oh, yeh."'

This example indicates one reason why stewards placed considerable importance on spotting missing elements. Despite their expressed scepticism over how the job-time system was managed, it was possible for stewards to get missing items of work reinstated onto job-

sheets. This had two effects; first, it limited the effort required of a worker on that particular job. As one steward put it:

> '- it might only be half a second here, a couple of seconds there...
> - two or three seconds doesn't sound like much... but it means a lot to the guy who's doing the job all day'.

Secondly, ensuring that all of the job-elements were recorded on a job-sheet restricted management's ability to add further work in the future. It became clear from early in the fieldwork that the contestation of job-sheets by shop stewards had real impacts on the effort bargain of workers in their section. The high priority placed on this issue demonstrates the continuing importance of the effort bargain for these stewards. Furthermore, shop steward contestation in this area clearly constrained management's freedom to reorganise work, showing the continued relevance of the frontier of control for understanding shop steward activity in this case study.

The regular highlighting by stewards of job-sheet irregularities contributed to a widespread perception that management were culpable in this matter, which contributed towards a cumulative delegitimising of the job-time process as a whole. Many stewards had become adept at utilising such instances to undermine the legitimacy of particular managers. On one occasion, an experienced steward suspected a manager was fiddling job times, and repeatedly and publicly requested copies of the new job-sheets, which the manager appeared unwilling to produce. In fact, unknown to the manager, the steward had already obtained copies of the job-sheets and knew there were discrepancies. When the manager finally produced the job-sheets, omitted elements were confirmed, and stewards publicly accused management of deception. As a result, this manager was removed from the project by senior management, and the job-sheets were re-issued with the missing elements included. As a supervisor commented,

> '"They were bluffing the timings and they got caught bluffing the timings."
> - and now no one trusts them'.

The undermining of trust that resulted from instances of missing job-elements had repercussions for relations between stewards and managers. One senior steward

summarised:

> 'they do that - they say it's an oversight - then… it'll keep on happening, until we get fed up… [and] think they're a liar, and deal with someone else'.

The ability of stewards to short-circuit the managerial hierarchy in this way showed a strong element of continuity with older accounts, such as McCarthy (1966: 29-32).

Stewards had also devised various other methods for dealing with jobs that were considered over-takt. One method involved addressing arguments directly to management during the CIP process (see below). Another common method was to stop the line. The lean production system at Big Car included a component of team working whereby, if there was a production problem, a worker could pull a cord and stop the line so that a team leader could sort out the difficulty before re-starting the line. Stewards had adopted the tactic of making sure that the line was stopped if a job was felt to be over-takt. Rather than increasing the pace of work to finish the job before the car moved on, the line was stopped while the worker, continuing at a normal pace, finished the operations on the job-sheet. This method was summarised in advice from a senior steward to a line-level steward about how to contest an over-takt job:

> "Pull the fucking cord and stop the line".

The success of this tactic depended on workers observing a norm for effort and speed of work, rather than working faster to keep up with the production line. This practice is therefore a clear example of restriction of output. Significantly, the tactic was widely adhered to by workers on the production line. The few workers prepared to work faster than the norm were discussed by stewards and other workers in derogatory terms. Generally, stopping the line had the desired effect of getting management's attention, often followed by a resolution of the issue. As one senior steward put it:

> '"Everyone comes running when you stop the track - and usually mob-handed as well".

One reason for this effect was that the company kept records of down-time, which was

costed at £12,000 per minute. Down-time appeared next to the name of an individual manager or supervisor, and sections that recorded a lot of down-time became a focus of attention. Managers were therefore keen to minimise interruptions to production. Hence, small stops to the line, which did not significantly affect overall production levels or profitability, nevertheless put significant pressure on individual managers and supervisors.[1] By adopting this tactic, stewards could bring significant pressure to bear on managers to address discrepancies in job-times and job-sheets.

The importance of job-sheets for shop steward bargaining meant that some had developed considerable expertise concerning the job timing system. One GA steward was regularly approached by others for advice on timings and job-sheets. On one occasion supervisors from another section approached him with concerns that jobs in their area were much tighter than the job-sheets indicated. The steward checked some 22 job-sheets and identified 49 seconds of work missing, commenting,

> 'the supervisor who asked me was … happy as Larry'.

When the missing work was added in, some jobs went over takt, meaning that work would be removed and redistributed, reducing effort. At first sight it might appear odd that supervisors in a lean production setting should be 'happy as Larry' at the prospect of reducing the output of workers in their section. However, supervisors were under scrutiny over down-time, and one consequence of jobs being over-takt was that workers would stop the track more often. Consequently, over-takt jobs translated into an accumulation of down-time for that supervisor. Thus, workers' collective refusal to work faster than the norm meant that supervisors had an interest in not over-burdening workers in their section, so that smooth production could be maintained and down-time reduced. This finding

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[1] During the fieldwork there were 4-5 brief work stoppages of a different type. These all occurred over one 24 hour period of unusually cold and wet weather in May – after the plant's main heating system had shut down for the summer. Due to low temperatures or water leaking through the roof onto working areas, work halted for a few minutes on some sections while management rectified the problem with makeshift rain-protection or mobile industrial heaters. While management was keen to see work resumed, these stoppages were treated more as technical difficulties than worker recalcitrance; even though the workers involved voiced their complaints in strong terms. Although a case could be made for seeing these stoppages as forms of 'demonstration' strike (Hyman 1989: 24), they seemed to play little part in influencing established bargaining relations in the plant, and have therefore not been included in the main discussion.

supports the conception of the dual role of management as entailing both the control of labour and the coordination of production (Section 3.2).

While the research produced numerous examples of job-sheets which under-recorded work, there were also examples of job-sheets which included times for work which was not in fact performed. Stewards pointed out examples where time was allowed for walking between tasks which in fact were adjacent, meaning that no walking was required, or tasks that were timed separately but performed simultaneously. Sometimes a task was listed twice. One steward attributed these errors to the technician responsible for job-sheets in his area:

> '- he's clever - but he doesn't know the job…
>
> - he's just overworked… he spends all his time in the office, in front of a computer … he never comes and looks at the job, so he doesn't know how it really works, so his time sheets don't fit the job'.

While it cannot be said that these advantages in terms of effort had accrued due to the actions of shop stewards, it is significant that stewards kept quiet about discrepancies which favoured the workers they represented, because it indicates that the stewards viewed the job-sheet system in terms of effort bargaining, rather than as an aspect of a rational management system that they had bought into.

In other sections, *Kaizen* teams were more often on the line. Another steward had a different explanation for elements on a job-sheet which were not in the job. His view was that members of the *Kaizen* team sometimes deliberately padded out job-sheets with small pieces of non-existent work, because they were assessed by management, in part, according to how much of the 109 seconds was filled:

> 'the closer he can get them to the mark, the better is it for him'.

This steward added that phoney elements could be switched for real work at a later date.

In some areas job-sheets were left deliberately slack by management to allow for flexibility. For instance, a steward from a section towards the end of the assembly line said their times were kept under-takt so that workers could look for problems before final quality checks,

and either rectify them or notify management:

'We're fix or phone'.

In Quality Assurance (QA), where workers checked production standards, job-sheets were kept under-takt to allow management to temporarily add extra checks for particular production problems, known as 'hot items'. Hot items were a continual source of conflict between stewards and managers in QA, and stewards spent a lot of time monitoring them to ensure that takt times were not exceeded. Issues could also arise when hot items were removed from the job-sheet. As one steward explained, workers could get into the habit of doing the check even after it had been removed from the job-sheet:

'- I like hot items to change as fast as possible
- cos they become the norm if they stay in too long...
- and people do them without being paid for them'.

Again, this view that work done should not exceed work paid for, as detailed on the job-sheet, was typical of stewards' concern to maintain or shift the balance of wages and effort in favour of the workers they represented.

Thus, stewards were not concerned to correct inaccurate job-sheets if there were no adverse effects on the effort-bargain, and would not challenge faulty timings that favoured the workers they represented. Some stewards reported jobs on their section which looked very tight or even over-takt on paper, but which were not hard jobs in practice, and which they therefore did not challenge. This might seem an obvious point, but it does emphasise the motivation of these stewards concerning the effort bargain. More surprisingly, stewards might not challenge jobs that looked easy on paper but were much harder in practice. Again, the determining consideration was the overall effort bargain. One steward reported that on his section, if supervisors knew a particular job was hard, they would not try to put any extra work on it. Furthermore, since most teams rotated jobs, the hard ones were spread around. Counter-intuitively, some stewards thought that having a hard job on a team was advantageous when dealing with management:

'"It's always good to get a job in your team that's a bit ropey - you can play on it".'

Thus, the main issue for stewards in dealing with inaccurate job-sheets was maintaining or improving the wage-effort bargain.

Further evidence of this effort-bargaining approach was provided on a few occasions when the assembly line was found to be running slightly too fast, at around 33.5 cars per hour. These instances led to significant arguments between shop stewards and managers. On one occasion, workers realised that one section had been running fast all morning. As far as the stewards were concerned, this meant that the company owed those workers time for the extra work done. Managers agreed the line was running fast and had it returned to the correct speed, but were unwilling to agree that time was owed to the workers. After sharp exchanges with the manager responsible, and with the backing of convenors, a senior steward told the manager that, failing an agreement, he would personally stop the line for the amount of time owed. After this threat, the manager agreed that the time would be repaid. The manager and steward then jointly calculated that workers on this section were owed exactly nine minutes and five seconds, and the manager agreed to give them all an extra ten minute tea break that afternoon, which settled the dispute.

It was clear, then, that shop stewards in this case study saw the job-sheet as an important link between work done and payment received. Consequently, stewards attached a high importance to understanding job-sheets and the management processes which surrounded them. Stewards perceived a balance between work and pay, with work measured in the times listed on the job-sheet and pay measured by the hourly rate. It was also clear that effort bargaining remained a central feature of shop steward activity in this plant. As one particularly well-read convenor commented:

> '"You know that book, *We Sell Our Time*? - that's exactly what we do"'.

This comment is an interesting misremembering of the actual title of Stewart *et al.*'s (2009) *We Sell Our Time No More*. For these shop stewards, the workers at Big Car certainly did sell their time, and they were keen to maintain or improve the terms of the trade.

Work reorganisation: CIP and Kaizen

At the heart of lean production is the 'continuous improvement process' (CIP), based on the

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idea of *Kaizen*, a Japanese word meaning 'improvement' (Section 4.5). In theory, the CIP programme at Big Car applied to several aspects of work, including safety, housekeeping, and production quality. In practice, though, the main focus for management was the continuing drive to reduce labour, or 'headcount'. Consequently, the labour-reduction aspect of lean production was a significant focus for shop stewards at Big Car, and this section examines their activity in this area.

The CIP process at Big Car was subject to a collective bargaining agreement which had been in place for some twenty years. The union at plant level had agreed to lean production in principle while at the same time negotiating an agreed procedure for handling work reorganisation that ensured a role for shop stewards. In the words of one of its architects, this procedure replaced the 'chaos' that had gone before. The procedure gave the CIP process a formal, set-piece character, encapsulated in a phrase commonly used in the plant: 'doing a CIP'. The procedure for re-organising work required a meeting away from the production line, comprising supervisors, team leaders and shop stewards from both shifts. Formally, stewards' agreement was required before any work reorganisation was put into operation. Usually, reorganised work was then trialled across both shifts, in a process known as 'try-and-test'. Again, the stewards had to agree the proposed reorganisation before it was made permanent. This procedure ensured that shop stewards continued to have an influence in work reorganisation. The main focus of stewards efforts in the CIP process lay in attempting to limit labour reduction; as a senior steward summarised:

'- they can change a job - it's up to us to stop them taking a man out'.

Thus, in practice, far from being a mechanism of unilateral management control, the CIP process tied together the effort bargain and the frontier of control in a process that often involved significant contestation by shop stewards.

The grounds upon which a steward could legitimately oppose a CIP were limited under the terms of the collective agreement. If a steward registered a 'failure to agree' (FTA) to a CIP, management could go to the next level of union representative, all the way up to convenor. Convenors would not support a steward in opposing a CIP if it met the criteria set down in agreements. In those circumstances, the convenors would effectively veto the steward's FTA, agreeing the new work arrangements with management over the head of the steward.

Since the stewards knew the agreements and the policy of the convenors (and national union), it was rare for a steward to formally oppose a CIP if they had no chance of winning under the procedure. Hence, the importance of time-sheets: a CIP could be refused if it took a job over-takt, and the convenors would support a steward in those circumstances. If it was to be successful, steward opposition to a CIP had to fall within the criteria set out by the agreed procedures. Otherwise, the steward would have to come up with other methods for challenging the re-organisation of work, such as health and safety concerns, ergonomic issues, or other technical difficulties. Shop stewards commonly developed a detailed knowledge of the jobs in their section, including the physical lay-out, the tasks involved, any tooling requirements, particular technical difficulties, and any physically awkward or demanding job-elements. Stewards could and did make use of such difficulties in influencing management decisions on work organisation (see below).

When considering shop steward involvement in the CIP process at Big Car, it is important to understand that when production was reorganised to 'get rid of a job', that did not result in someone being made redundant. Thus, when a steward agreed a CIP, it was agreement to a reorganisation of work, and often an intensification, but not a redundancy. Rather, the person whose job had disappeared would stay on the team, as 'spare labour', until a vacancy arose elsewhere and the worker was redeployed.[2] In the meantime, this worker was available for temporary redeployment to areas of labour shortage. While plant management was committed to reducing labour, local management commonly valued having some spare labour available, because it gave them cover for absences in conditions where labour supply was deliberately kept very tight. Surprisingly, workers on teams with a spare person generally considered it not a benefit but a nuisance, because members of the team could be redeployed on a daily basis to fill gaps elsewhere on the production line. One steward recalled being on a team with a spare worker for ten years:

> '- when a job is got rid of, the man stays on the team until someone says, he's needed permanently over there...
> - having spare labour causes a lot of upset

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[2] This is the example, mentioned in Section 4.4, whereby I was given the same piece of information on two occasions during the fieldwork, but it only made a significant impact on my understanding of the CIP process on the second occasion; that is, after long immersion in the field had sensitised me to the importance of what I was being told. This example is a good illustration of an important benefit of the ethnographic method of research.

- … I used to say, can't we get rid of that man? I used to get really wound up, sent to a different job every day

- as a steward, I see it differently now...

[Because the union is committed to saving jobs.]

- [but] you always do your best to get the spare man put on a different team'.

Hence, the counter-intuitive finding that, despite the intensification of labour under lean production, having a 'spare man' on the team was generally considered unfortunate.

An important part of the shop steward effort on CIPs was ensuring that management stuck to the agreed procedure. During the fieldwork there were examples where managers attempted to reorganise work on an ad hoc basis. Described by one steward as a 'smuggled-in CIP', stewards resisted this strenuously and usually successfully. For example, a steward reported that managers in his section wanted to do a CIP without a formal meeting, while the line was still running. The steward was resisting this, and came to a senior steward for back-up, who offered the following advice:

'- If they want to do a CIP, get both shifts in, and the *Kaizen* men, and the stewards, and we'll say if it works or not...

- if they do it like this, just moving work about, that takes the shop steward out of it, and we won't have that...

- the shift manager said to the steward … "it's a new procedure"…

- well it's not a procedure we know about - and I'll ask {convenor} and he won't have heard of it either'.

In this case, the agreed procedure was enforced, the CIP was postponed, and this aspect of the frontier of control successfully defended.

In practice, some CIPs went through with little practical opposition from the stewards. These tended to be where management had correctly identified jobs with slack times, and where work could be redistributed relatively easily. One steward described management's approach:

'- they've got cuter...

- they look out for guys who look like they've got a bit of time…

"They don't miss a trick"'.

Stewards usually regarded such CIPs with resignation, using phrases like, 'it went straight in'. In such circumstances, stewards found it difficult to mount significant opposition to management, reflecting established union policy on the issue. Even where a CIP could not be prevented, however, shop steward influence often resulted in changes to aspects of job reorganisation that mitigated its worst impacts; for instance, minimising ergonomic stresses or other health and safety concerns. These factors were particularly important in CIPs involving workers with physical impairments (see below).

Management in each production area had annual targets for labour reduction. During the fieldwork, the target in General Assembly was 22 workers over the course of a year (out of a total of some 650). A senior steward commented:

'- I've seen the plans... they had a presentation about a month ago - 22 men by the end of the year...
- I said that's not feasible - they said, we like to aim high... I said it doesn't matter where you aim, that's not feasible'.

Another senior steward said,

'…the stewards now have to argue that managers are trying to reduce numbers too far, and look for arguments to protect labour'.

Stewards were adept at making the case that labour was short. One described the outcome of a CIP:

'- we didn't lose a man... [and] we only got a bit of work... we're quite happy about it...
- we only got three elements of work...
That's not a lot …
{Steward} - "Still have to moan about it"
- if you don't moan, they think they haven't given you enough'.

Clearly, these stewards saw individual CIPs within an overall process of labour reduction, but on which they could have some influence.

Although the number of workers required to run the plant was an issue of dispute between union reps and senior plant management, at shopfloor level day-to-day labour shortages were a constant source of difficulties, with important consequences for local managers. Often, it was difficult for managers to get stewards and team leaders 'off the line' so they could attend CIP meetings, and on numerous occasions CIPs were postponed as a result. As one steward said of a CIP,

> '- they cancelled it this morning [due to] a shortage of labour...!
> - they want to take a man out and they can't run the CIP because they've not got enough men!'.

On another occasion, after a failed try-and-test, a steward commented,

> '- to be honest, a try and test usually works...
> - [the reason for the difficulties] ... it's been the indecent haste... they're desperate to get that job moved...
> - {the problem is} labour shortages'.

This situation was exacerbated by a company policy of reducing overtime costs. Stewards explained that until recently CIP meetings had usually taken place on Saturdays, when there was no production, with the stewards, team leaders, supervisors and *Kaizen* team all coming in on overtime. At the time of the research, the CIP meetings had generally shifted to down-days (Section 4.5), with team leaders and stewards coming in while other workers were off. However, this opened the potential for further delaying tactics by stewards. Since a CIP required the attendance of stewards from both shifts, a down-day CIP meant that some stewards had to change shifts to attend. Generally, stewards resisted this, and on occasions refused entirely, citing issues such as childcare. For instance, two stewards were asked to come in for a CIP on a Monday day shift, despite being rostered on nights, and both said they were unavailable:

'{Steward 1} - [shrugs] - I'm on nights on Monday...

I bet you've got things to do on Monday...

{Steward 1} - I've got *lots* of things to do...

{Steward 2} - I've got lots of things to do, too - only, I've got to think what they are

{Steward 1} - you can take my kids to school if you want'.

Of course, labour shortages cannot be considered evidence of shop steward bargaining. Nevertheless, stewards were able to utilise labour shortages to delay CIPs and further labour reductions.

Labour shortages were not only of concern to shop stewards; it was clear that a number of managers were also unhappy with the amount of labour available. A senior manager told a group of stewards:

'- you know… I don't like lean'.

There was also evidence of managers colluding with stewards to preserve labour or to conceal the outcomes of CIPs, with the intention relieving shortages and maintaining smooth production. In one CIP that was observed in detail, a procedure which on paper reduced a team from six jobs to five, in practice resulted in one team member being moved to a different work-station and re-designated. On paper, all the lean production boxes had been ticked: management were happy, *Kaizen* were happy, the target for labour-reduction had been met; but without actually reducing labour. It was also clear that the stewards involved understood beforehand how the CIP would conclude. Once again, the dual pressures on management were apparent, both to control labour but also to coordinate production.

Delays to CIPs, whether due to opposition from shop stewards, or technical difficulties, or labour shortages, increased the pressure on managers over the schedule for labour reductions decided at plant level. Stewards were able to take advantage of this. A fairly common tactic was for stewards to allow a management plan to go ahead, knowing it would fail. For instance, a steward representing fork lift truck drivers reported,

'- if they put too few men on, we'll turn round and say it can't be done. If they ignore

us, we'll turn round and say, well get on with it....

- on one occasion, too few drivers were put on… and by the end of a week the offload racking was packed to overflowing, there was a backlog… and a queue of trucks waiting to be unloaded. Then, management realised their mistake and put more men on'.

Underlying this approach was the same collective refusal, noted above, to work harder than the commonly accepted norm; effectively, a collective restriction of effort. This attitude reflected the common understanding of the job-sheet system. Workers would put up (grudgingly) with management filling slack times. On the other hand, workers were generally unwilling to work faster just so that more work could be fitted into the takt-time.

Sometimes, though, CIPs provoked more open conflict and contestation. Exact numbers were hard to gauge because contested CIPs had a stop-start character, due to technical difficulties, labour shortages, and/or union opposition. As a result, some dragged on for months, and what appeared initially to be new CIPs turned out to be re-convened old ones. While total numbers were hard to assess, several CIPs were observed in which shop stewards put up significant resistance to management, utilising a variety of bargaining resources. One CIP had already been in progress for four months before the fieldwork commenced, and was still unresolved when the fieldwork ended, six months later. Management wanted to merge two jobs into one in an area of the stores. The workers concerned were both 'Restricted Fitness Employees' (RFEs); that is, workers with a physical impairment which left them unable to work on the assembly line under the tough conditions of lean production. Defending RFEs, who were usually older workers, was an important priority for the steward organisation in Big Car. In this CIP, stewards marshalled a considerable range of bargaining resources to frustrate management's efforts to do away with an RFE job, including health and safety regulations, occupational health assessments, ergonomic assessments, existing agreements and procedures, and job skills and occupational expertise. The shop steward opposition was so successful that the manager heading the reorganisation was removed from the project, and by the time the fieldwork finished it seemed likely that the plan would be shelved entirely. When interviewed, this manager described his frustration at the level of opposition from the stewards, and his under-estimation of their tacit knowledge of the job.

In another CIP, on a section of some 30 workers, management and the *Kaizen* team proposed getting rid of one job by moving a single large item of work, but with the knock-on effect that most other workers in the section would move jobs, requiring significant retraining. The training issue was significant because new job-skills took time to settle in, leading to a temporary increase in mistakes by workers, which caused faults and quality issues in production, increased down-time, and could end in disciplinary action against individual workers. This was an important issue for managers, who were under scrutiny over production quality and down-time, as well as for workers, who wanted to avoid disciplinary action over mistakes. In opposition to management's plan, stewards proposed an alternative: removing one job by redistributing work in small units, requiring few job-moves and little retraining – and less retraining meant fewer mistakes. The stewards' plan was calculated to appeal to all parties: managers, supervisors and workers. The meeting for this CIP lasted over three hours, with 14 people present, including supervisors, team-leaders, a *Kaizen* planner, and two shop stewards. In common with other CIP meetings observed, most of the discussion was conducted at a very high level of technical detail. It soon became clear, though, that tacit job knowledge, which the *Kaizen* process is supposed to appropriate for the company, was instead being used by the stewards as a bargaining resource to frustrate management plans to re-organise work. The stewards used this knowledge in a determined argument against management's proposal, and in favour of their own.

Around two hours into the meeting, the stewards' plan seemed to have the ascendency. During a tea-break, the lead steward confided that he thought he was winning: the quality arguments were convincing *Kaizen* and the supervisors, and the reduced job-reorganisation and retraining was winning over the team leaders and would carry the assembly workers. This represented a considerably sophisticated bargaining strategy, combining elements of 'integrative bargaining' and 'intra-organisational bargaining' (Walton and McKersie 1991). However, the steward revealed a further concern, which had not been voiced in the meeting: he believed that if the job was reorganised as management wanted, it would invite a further reorganisation almost immediately, which would get rid of another job. That is, the steward was thinking a couple of moves ahead:

'- I'm thinking of the next man down - to protect him...
- if we do it the way they want, it'll be a TL {team leader} next, because it'll be a two man team and you don't need a TL on two men...

"It'll be a freeby for them, and I'm not giving them freebies."'

The second steward agreed with this analysis of the situation, that the main issue at stake was saving the next job down the line. Again, this is clear evidence of a sophisticated bargaining strategy by these two stewards.

After the tea break, however, the meeting took an unexpected turn. A senior manager arrived and announced,

'- we want your input but there have to be guidelines...
- {you} come up with the proposals, and we'll view it at the end'.

The effect on the meeting was immediate. Participants understood this statement to mean that managers would ignore the outcome of the meeting if it approved a plan different from the one originally proposed by management. Someone angrily commented,

'What's the point of us being here if you're going to tell us what you want anyway?'

When the manager left the meeting the atmosphere was one of sullen resignation, and there were several half-joking comments deriding the stewards' failure to stop management's plans. Significantly, management's approach in this situation departed from the standard claims of lean to use workers' suggestions to make production more efficient. In this case, when workers' tacit knowledge was mobilised against management, the response was to push through reorganisation by more traditional means. Other stewards reported similar experiences; one expressed frustration at the way another CIP worked:

'"That was just stupid"
- you give 'em ideas... they just say no...
- the manager has his grand master plan... he won't hear any other thing...
- that's why we've ended up with a job now that we've got ergonomic issues on...
- they're all the same...
- they say at the end, it's your CIP... you wrote it down...
- {but} when the paperwork comes back, it's all different...
- it's paperwork... they just hide things in the times - that's my opinion'.

This evidence supports accounts which see the operation of lean in practice as less than systematic (Martin 2013), and less concerned with utilising the initiative of workers than is usually claimed. In this case study, although lean was a continual theme of management discourse, in practice, management methods showed significant continuity with older traditions of openly asserting managerial prerogatives.

Nevertheless, the assertion of management prerogatives in the lengthy CIP meeting described above did not entirely settle the matter, and the CIP continued to be contested by stewards and workers. In the complex reorganisation of work after the CIP meeting, one team was required to take on a small amount of additional work: six screws, divided between two jobs (three on each). The lead steward argued that, for technical reasons, this extra work would not fit into the job-times for that team and would result in excessive down-time. However, the supervisors were not convinced and pushed through the CIP, which fitted on paper. In the event, these six screws became the cause of continual production problems, and the cord was pulled many times to stop the line. Four months later, shortly before the fieldwork ended, the steward reported cheerfully that the CIP was to be reversed. Evidently, the whole team were pleased with this outcome, and the steward offered the following comment regarding the six screws which had been contested work:

'- the six screws - they'll fly in now, because the lads aren't taking the piss'.

That is, for more than four months, this team had systematically misled management about the difficulty of performing this work, until management were convinced to move it. Moreover, this was not the only example of stewards and workers misleading managers about production difficulties in order to influence the effort bargain; what Taylor would recognise as 'systematic soldiering' (Braverman 1974: 98; Rose 1998: 27). This approach by stewards reflects longer-term shifts in the frontier of control, inasmuch as covert methods could be effective without carrying so much risk as a more open approach. In this case, though, the team drew quiet criticism from other stewards for being so open about their deception. Despite their partially covert and hidden nature, shop steward contestation in this CIP show significant continuity with traditions of effort bargaining stretching back through Brown (1973), Lupton (1962), and Roy (1952).

Altogether, the evidence presented in this section shows the importance attached by shop stewards in this case study to the process of work-reorganisation under lean production. The evidence also indicates the various ways in which stewards attempted to deal with the issue, and by which they achieved some success in influencing outcomes. Implications of this evidence will be discussed at more length in following chapters. The next section looks at another important area of shop steward activity at Big Car: individual representation.

6.3 Individual representation

Unsurprisingly, the fieldwork at Big Car found considerable evidence of individual representation and casework by shop stewards. As at London Borough, though, this evidence significantly undermines any sharp distinction between individual and collective issues. Interestingly, stewards at Big Car took a somewhat different approach to individual casework, compared with their counterparts at London Borough. This section looks at how stewards at Big Car went about individual representation, and seeks to draw out the often complex interweaving of individual and collective issues.

Individual casework and shop steward bargaining

Individual representation was one of the activities most commonly recorded in shop steward diaries at Big Car. However, it would be difficult to conclude from this that individual casework was the main focus of stewards' activity. Several factors meant that individual casework, though relatively common at Big Car, usually had an appreciably different character from similar activity at London Borough. The first striking difference was that most cases were dealt with quickly. Hearings commonly lasted around 15 minutes, rather than the hour or more at London Borough. Nor did senior reps appear overburdened with casework, despite the fairly large number of individual cases underway at any one time. One senior steward commented on his workload:

> '"That might be typical. Two or three a week?"
> - they come in waves'.

Another senior steward said:

'- I've got a couple of case reviews before dinner and an absence after dinner...

- Could be worse'.

Furthermore, there was little evidence that stewards or senior reps spent significant amounts of time preparing cases. When this was commented on, one senior steward said:

'[pausing and pulling a thoughtful face]

"Probably about right."

- ... the thing is, whatever can be settled at local level, we do...

- ... [we] try and keep everything in-house, between the local steward and the local supervisor'.

Thus, the practice of dealing with cases at the lowest level ('in-house'), and the greater density of stewards, together with the smaller amount of preparation, limited the amount of casework that more senior reps were required to do. Nevertheless, some cases did require more work:

'- ... [I] take them as they come, things like that...

- if it's a sacking or something serious… [i.e. serious cases get more work]

- but this is in-house stuff...

"It doesn't really warrant it - if someone's employment's at risk, well, yeah."'

Overall, though, the approach of stewards at Big Car was notably different from those at London Borough, for whom individual casework was significantly more burdensome.

The first level of the disciplinary procedure involved a meeting with the member, the supervisor ('foreman'), and the local steward. At this 'in-house' stage, the steward would either 'agree' the outcome, or register a 'failure to agree' (FTA). The lowest level of formal sanction was a 'counselling letter' outlining required improvements, and above that was a familiar range of written warnings, final written warnings, suspension, and dismissal. An FTA from a steward triggered an appeal hearing, which would then go to the next level up, with the member represented by a senior steward at a meeting with a shift manager. If the case went higher still, a convenor would be involved and a senior HR manager. However, cases

rarely got to that level. Stewards would not FTA a disciplinary case unless they thought it was justified; that is, a genuine injustice, and a reasonable chance of winning an appeal. As one senior steward put it:

> "If you take it to {convenor}, it's got to be watertight"
> "He'd have my bollocks if I gave him a turkey."'

When stewards could see no reasonable prospect of a case winning, they generally would not pursue it further, and would 'agree' the outcome. It should be noted, though, that when a steward 'agreed' a case, it did not usually represent assent in the management decision; more commonly, it was a recognition that the outcome was the best that could be expected in the circumstances. As one steward commented with exasperation:

> '- the operator has fucked up again...
> - this time, I advised the guy... it's un-defendable'.

Usually, stewards reported that members were satisfied with this approach. One senior steward described:

> 'getting people to toe the line'.

That is, stewards often emphasised to individuals they represented how to avoid getting into trouble. Stewards generally knew who was at risk of disciplinary action, whether over attendance or quality issues. One steward said,

> '- every team's got one...
> [i.e. someone who misses things]'.

Another steward said of a member facing disciplinary action,

> '- he's been pulled before...
> - [that] job's dead easy...
> - but once he gets talking...
> [i.e. when he starts talking, he doesn't pay attention]

- he's a nice lad, but he's a bit clumsy... and forgetful'.

Consequently, the day-to-day individual casework, such as return to work (RTW) interviews or low-level disciplinaries, were often seen by stewards in terms of ensuring procedural fairness in the treatment of individuals by management, and preventing more serious trouble for the member, rather than challenging every management decision. The steward's attendance such cases might also serve other purposes:

'{Steward} says, whenever he goes in the office with someone, he writes it down in a book of his own to keep a record of what happened and when. He says this is useful for him, and it's also useful for his members. For instance, keeping track of dates in sickness absence cases:
{Steward} - they'll say to me, am I clear now? ... I can go sick again'.

Several stewards reported that an important part of their role was keeping records of disciplinary sanctions for the purpose of answering queries from members.

As at London Borough, stewards reported variation in the number and severity of disciplinaries. Sometimes, this was attributed to the disposition of individual supervisors. Some supervisors were less keen on pursuing individual cases:

'- a lot of the sickness... he's ok on that...
- he's never done all of his job on sickness and absences...
- he can Counsel as long as he wants'.

Or a supervisor might be absent:

'*Have you had quality issues?*
{Steward} - not really...
- my supervisor hit the sick, didn't he?
"We've not had to sit down with anyone for weeks"'.

Some supervisors were less highly regarded:

"We've got a new foreman and he's a tit"

- we were all in the office last Thursday... all five of us...

[i.e. the whole team.]

- I FTA'd them all... {and} the manager agreed {with me}'.

Stewards also recognised that individual casework varied with changing management priorities. One steward described the uneven distribution of disciplinaries in his section:

'- mine tend to all come at once...

- it's just the way it works...

- the foreman on my section… [pause] … I don't know if his manager pokes him with a stick... says to the foreman, do these ones'.

There was a general feeling among stewards that discipline had tightened up in recent years; for instance, over quality issues:

'- it never used to be {like this}… it was, let him know he's missed it...

[i.e. the supervisor told the steward to tell the guy he'd missed a part]

- now, management have clamped down on quality... management get onto the supervisors... pressure to discipline'.

Again, this is evidence of important variation in individual representation.

Stewards also reported that changes in production influenced individual casework. For instance, the introduction of new parts and processes led to mistakes and consequent disciplinaries for quality issues. Clusters of over-takt options led to operators being rushed and making mistakes. Sometimes, down-days saw a rush of disciplinary hearings to clear a backlog of cases, simply because individual workers and stewards were released from production:

'- when they can get the steward off and the guy... [they say] we'll do one'.

By contrast, there might be fewer disciplinaries when production levels were high:

'- they let things slide... when they're flying out the door'.

During the fieldwork, a management drive to raise production quality was widely seen by stewards as having increased the number of disciplinaries:

'- I've had quite a few in the office, over quality...
- ... been under scrutiny...
Is that usual or does it vary?
{Steward} - it seems to go through spells …
"A bit of a purge, as we say."'

It was clear that, for these stewards, individual cases were linked to management policies which affected the whole workforce. Again, this undermines the sharp distinction between individual and collective issues.

When individual cases did arise, the aim of the stewards at Big Car was to get the case dropped, where possible, or alternatively to get the severity of the outcome minimised. Stewards were surprisingly successful in these efforts. A variety of tactics were employed. Sometimes, stewards were able to show procedural irregularities, such as excessive delay in dealing with a case. One steward explained that he never tried to hurry a case along:

'- it doesn't bother me [if there is a long delay]
- I'll say, that's a month now, you can't do that'.

Similarly, a steward got a Stage 1 reduced to a counselling letter:

'- it was nine months ago... it's unfair... if it was nine weeks, ok...
Where did you put this argument - to a manager, or at the hearing?
{Steward} - at the hearing, I argued it'.

Some delays were caused because of labour shortages, and stewards were able to play on this. One senior steward commented after a hearing:

'"The people who were in that meeting... they had to release two people from the

line… Because I'm not going to do it without the local steward there…"

- if they want to do lots of cases, they have to release people...

"That line would have suffered because of that. Well, good."'

In other cases, there might have been inadequate investigation by management. One steward, said that he had 'quite a good success rate' in individual casework, and attributed this to management's poor preparation, especially a lack of proper investigation. The steward had a theory about why this happened:

'"The supervisors are under the cosh"

- I can remember... years ago, the supervisors could make decisions…

- now the managers tell the supervisors what to do...

- if they tell the supervisors to do somebody, it all depends on whether the supervisor does the research... but they're too busy...

- often, they've not done the research'.

Sometimes, stewards used detailed job-knowledge to show that technical problems had been the cause of a quality problem, rather than operator error:

'- they said I hadn't tightened a part... but it's [something technical]

- I said to them, I didn't have a red light...

- they found out the gun was faulty'.

Sometimes, real detective work was required. One steward described a case that involved a worker failing to fit an important part that was subject to 'error-proofing'; that is, an electro-mechanical system which stops the line unless the operator presses a button to confirm a part has been fitted correctly:

'- we fit a box... the stop/start box…

- …a light comes on and you press a button {'error-proofing'} …

- one got missed...

- the team leader came down and said, I've got to do a PPS... every man and his dog knows about it... even {senior manager}

What's a PPS?

{Steward} - it's a form... it's "the five why's"... "Why did you miss it?"... all that

- when we sat down and went through it, we worked it out...

- the night before, when he missed it... there was a power surge... all the power went out... it probably tripped the error-proofing {system}…

- he was on there from half-twelve to one, and the power went at ten to one...

- we can't work out the exact car... but it's close enough... when we said that, {shift manager} was happy....

Is he usually a good worker?

{Steward} - he's generally all right …

- he shouldn't miss any because of the error-proofing… he shouldn't have missed because of the light... so it's a good chance the power surge tripped it'.

Stewards were also able to use inexperience or lack of training:

'- where we used to have offline training, now it's online, which is not as effective... it's head count...

[i.e. training has suffered because of reductions in labour.]

Does the lack of training cause you problems, as a steward, with more quality issues?

{Steward} - "I just tell them where to stick it"

- I can get away with it for a period - about two or three weeks'.

Underlying all these example, then, is a sense of achieving a degree of fair treatment of workers by management; something that shows clear continuity with Brown's (1973: 136) 'shop-stewardliness' (Section 2.2).

Perhaps the most unexpected feature of individual representation at Big Car was shop stewards' bargaining with management over the outcomes of cases, which was a common practice in many areas. Bargaining of this type usually took the form of an arrangement between a steward and a supervisor or local manager, though they also occurred at higher levels. Stewards almost always referred to such arrangements as 'a deal'. Usually, the 'deal' was not a clearly defined *quid pro quo*, though it could be. More commonly, the process worked as a form of credit whereby a good turn, or favour, by one party would result in a benefit to that party at some point in the future, when the favour was returned. Evidence of

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this practice came up very frequently in the fieldwork, and was reported by many of the stewards; again, this indicates the high bargaining awareness and considerable sophistication of these stewards.

Stewards used a variety of tactics to achieve a 'deal'. Often, there was an overlap with the approach outlined above, whereby stewards would use a combination of mitigation (sometimes exaggerated) together with an element of bargaining, to influence a manager's decision. In the following case, a steward got a disciplinary case dropped. The following excerpts show this approach in context:

> '{Steward} - [I've had] the normal disciplinaries - where we look after each other
> "I've got away with a couple of those, I think."
> *How do you mean?*
> {Steward} - … a lad missed several things over the last months
> - I didn't lie as such...
> - I made a couple of points... [first] it's not his normal job... [second] he's doing the company a favour'.

That is, the steward mitigated this workers' error by pointing out that he was frequently sent to work on a job in another section, despite lacking experience. In fact, the steward confided, the worker knew the job quite well – hence, the steward's comment that he 'didn't exactly lie'. The steward continued:

> '- he's lent in from another line - he doesn't complain...
> - but he's done six {errors} in the last three weeks...
> *That's a lot...*
> Steward nods in agreement. It is a lot.'

Usually, this number of errors would result in disciplinary action, but in this case the steward was able to do a deal:

> '{Steward} - {the manager} accepted what I said...
> [i.e. the lad didn't get disciplined.]
> - it's the last chance - I've accepted, if he makes another, it's the PDP...

- I've explained to the operator, it's best deal I could get at the time

Can you often do that sort of thing?

{Steward} smiles.

{Steward} - "It can be done, yeh"

- depends who the operator is

- you look for away out... in the majority, you will find a way out - or a way to get lesser action'.

In this case, besides the overstated mitigation, the implicit bargaining element lies in the advantage to management of relatively hassle-free labour mobility, in exchange for leniency on the disciplinary issue. Furthermore, this example illustrates another feature of the handling of disciplinary matters at Big Car; namely, the 'second chance', reminiscent of Gouldner's (1965: 18-22) 'indulgency pattern'.

An offer from stewards of limited concessions on labour flexibility was a common element in deals with managers over disciplinary cases. In these cases, labour shortages became a factor working in favour of the stewards. The following example is from a diary-interview:

'{Steward} says he's only had a few issues. In his diary, there are a few individual cases he's dealt with. He picks out one of these, where he was particularly pleased with the result.

{Steward} - a possible quality issue...

[i.e. possible disciplinary over quality]

- wrong cables fitted...

[i.e. gear cables]

{Steward} says, when the car moves on from their section, the engine is put in, and various other parts, so it's been built up quite a bit before the next QA check. By that time, the gear cable is inside a lot of other stuff:

{Steward} - it takes three hours to get the wrong one out...

This is the kind of thing that leads to disciplinary action.

But {Steward} was able to do a deal, to get disciplinary action dropped.

{Steward} - the lad's got skills and they wanted him lent out as cover...

- he's happy to go... I talked to him [to check]...

- the deal was, they didn't discipline - and we'd let him get lent out...

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- he's out of turn on the rota...

- otherwise, they have to take the next guy on the rota... but he's not got the skills'.

Sometimes, a steward might be willing to break rules imposed by union policy:

'{Steward} - I had a case last week... a lad coming up for a Stage 3 {suspension}...

- they're short on the section... so I offered to lend myself out, and [arrange for] another guy to come in and cover... you're not supposed to lend out the steward, but I said I would do it... and I said, right, if I do that, I want the lad to get a counselling letter'.

In this case, the steward was successful.

Other instances show the credit-favours approach. In the following example, a steward from the fork truck drivers reported how he dealt with another Stage 3 disciplinary, which would otherwise have resulted in a suspension:

'{Steward} went to see the manager and said, do me a favour, just give him a bollocking and a warning - "I'm clawing one back" - if you do that you'll get kudos for not doing him when you could have, and he'll know you're not just out to get him (this lad thinks the manager is out to get him). The manager says, yes I'll take a bite of that. {Steward} says this manager will go for this sort of arrangement.'

Later, I asked the steward what he meant by 'clawing one back':

'{Steward} explains that this manager was in an area which is separate from the stores... with it's own allocation of drivers... If that area is short of drivers, the manager will come and ask the steward if a driver can be spared from the stores that day to go and work in his area. Formally, there are company rules and agreements restricting where and when drivers can be lent out - but if it's not too busy in the stores, the steward is willing to lend out a driver as a favour. Seemingly, the manager knows it's a favour, and from time to time {Steward} will "claw one back".'

On other occasions, special pleading was combined with more open threats. For example, a

steward representing a team of five operators facing disciplinary action explained:

> '- so I went in the manager's office... and basically whinged loads... and he let me off...
>
> - five Stage 1's and we got away with all of them... I couldn't believe it...
>
> - basically, through a bit of intimidation
>
> *What do you mean, "intimidation"?*
>
> {Steward} - basically... [we said] you do this, or we'll stop the line'.

Although these particular tactics were not typical, this example shares with others the overlap between individual representation and collective issues, both in the way stewards thought about individual cases, and in the ways they attempted to deal with them. Taken together, this evidence shows the significant extent to which individual and collective issues were intertwined in shop steward activity at Big Car.

Next, the discussion presents surprising evidence of a type of casework which became apparent during the fieldwork at Big Car: individual workers engaged in individual bargaining.

Individual bargaining

This section presents evidence of a type of individualised bargaining which does not appear in the previous literature, and which was therefore entirely unexpected. As such, it presents a challenge for previous accounts, as for this one. This evidence shows that a small but significant section of the workforce at Big Car took a distinctively individualistic approach towards improving their own position, especially in relation to effort. With high rates of sickness absence, poor work discipline, and a willingness to lie to both management and union reps, especially if an easy job was available, these were the workers who, as stewards commonly expressed it, 'took the piss' – in order to secure a relatively easy life inside the factory. Although not a large section of union membership, this group took up a significant amount of stewards' time in some areas, especially senior stewards and convenors, and therefore cannot be ignored in an account of shop steward activity. While the research did not focus on this area, and was not able to gather sufficient evidence for a full analysis, the findings suggest that comparable practices might be found elsewhere.

Although the practices discovered were certainly individual in form, nevertheless, these

cases also entailed important collective aspects; both in terms of the bargaining opportunities and resources available, and in stewards' responses to the challenges posed by these practices. Consequently, this evidence shows that even an apparently entirely individualised phenomenon cannot be understood or explained without grasping the essentially collective context and dynamics involved. The following account describes the main features of individual bargaining at Big Car.

One area where attempts at individual bargaining were relatively common involved the RFE scheme, whereby physically impaired employees were found less demanding jobs, so that they could remain employed at the plant, rather than face dismissal on capability grounds. A steward recounted that, at the time the scheme was set up, there were around 30 RFE staff; but once the scheme was set up, that number increased.

> '- what happened after that was the 30 or so in rehab went up to 40 or so...
> - people saw they were getting easier jobs, and thought this was a way to get one -
> and the numbers of people with back trouble, etc, started increasing...
> {...}
> - they started to get people {...} from all round the plant, who {stewards} thought
> were obviously making false claims, in order to get an easier job.
> - ... basically, they didn't want to work...
> "arseholes"'.

This steward was later involved with managers and Occupational Health (OH) staff in assessing applicants for an RFE job:

> '- when they first started having parts delivered {to the line}... towed behind little
> trucks, a lot of people thought, that's a nice job - driving round on a little golf cart...'
> {...}
> They interviewed 15 people ... All of these people claimed to have various serious
> health problems - like bad backs. But {Steward} says many of them looked like they
> spent a lot of time in the gym
> {...}
> {Steward} and the other interviewers said {to the interviewees}, well this job involves

pulling loaded dollies[3] out of the stacks and hooking them up to the cart - do you think you can do that? yes, they said.

So the interviewees were taken out into the warehouse area to do a demonstration. {...}

{Steward} - we asked them to pull dollies with axles on.. they're 690kg ... you have to pull them out and turn them... [to hook them up to the cart]

- after that, dollies with wheel nuts... over 800kg...

- of the 15, 14 did all the tasks, so the stewards, the managers, and OH all said, there's nothing wrong with you, and sent them back to their old jobs'.

Other stewards reported similar examples of feigned injuries in attempts to get easier jobs. These cases involved a complex interweaving of individual and collective issues that are familiar from recent industrial relations literature, but which were combined in an unexpected way: union reps devised and negotiated a procedure through collective bargaining, reinforced by equalities legislation, to protect the employment of mainly older and injured workers, in a context of lean production and work intensification, which encountered serious problems from individualised workers. In some cases, stewards engaged jointly with management in quasi-disciplinary action against individual bargainers, while in other cases, stewards were able to utilise resources of their own; such as peer pressure on malingerers, or an insistence on medical assessment for RFE jobs. Nevertheless, stewards' success in negotiating permanent 'light duties' jobs for impaired workers had the unexpected effect of placing stewards in a policing role over access to those jobs.

Stewards offered an explanation of this individualised behaviour, commonly describing this group as 'Thatcher's children', with the greedy and self-centred attitudes that implied. In 1998, Big Car had taken on an entire new shift, some 800 workers, known as the '98ers', and a disproportionate number of difficult members came from that intake. Other stewards, however, noted that several of the best young stewards were also 98ers. Similar difficulties arose with a second smaller intake in 2011. One convenor described,

'- guys who've been here two years who've had more sick than I've had in forty years'.

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[3] 'Dollies' was the term for wheeled platforms, of various types and sizes, used to transport parts around the plant, usually towed behind small LPG-powered trucks.

This convenor offered a different explanation for the behaviour of recent intakes:

> '- most of them came straight in off the dole
> - they had never been in a union before and many had never had a job before'.

These descriptions bring to mind accounts of growing individualism and the undermining of collectivity since the 1980s (e.g. Brown 1990; see discussion in Kelly 1998: 39-42). However, contrary to the unstated assumption of the end-of-collectivism thesis, it was clear that managers at Big Car saw no benefit in the attitudes and behaviours of this section of the workforce. If anything, these workers presented more problems for management than they did for the union organisation. A convenor who had represented a number of these workers at serious disciplinary hearings agreed:

> '- management know they have a lot of trouble with the 98ers
> - [shrugs] ... I say, well, *you* employed them'.

Clearly, if 'Thatcher's children' were characterised by a lack of collectivity, they were at least equally wanting in labour discipline and work ethic. While there is insufficient evidence, here, for a full analysis, it is plausible that for some groups of workers the existence of collectively bargained and legally supported individual rights can offer opportunities and resources for individual bargaining. Consequently, it is possible that similar practices may be found elsewhere. However, firm conclusions must await further research.

Overall, the evidence presented in this section shows that shop stewards at Big Car were dealing with individual representation and casework that was often linked to collective issues, both in terms of root causes and the ways that stewards addressed them. Linkages between individual and collective issues were often unexpected, and involved real complexity in relations between stewards, managers, and workers, at various levels. The final shorter section of this chapter will look more specifically at shop steward attitudes towards management in this case study.

6.4 Shop stewards and managers: attitudes and impacts

Although important aspects of shop steward attitudes towards management were visible in the preceding account, this section draws out more explicitly some of the common approaches and orientations that became apparent during the fieldwork. The most obvious finding was the importance attached by stewards to 'good bargaining relations' with managers. Stewards were often actively engaged in trying to shape relations with managers, rather than passively accepting whatever relationship management decided upon. This is not to say that stewards were always successful. Nevertheless, securing a relationship of trust and reciprocity was clearly a significant area of concern for these stewards.

The shop stewards at Big Car often expressed the importance they attached to having good relations with managers, especially at supervisor ('foreman') and line manager level. As one of them put it:

> "You have to have a working relationship, don't you?".

Stewards described the type of manager they appreciated:

> '- he's a good manager... he'll help people out'

> '- fortunately, the manager … is quite good and will help you out if he can'

> '- …I've got quite a good relationship... I prefer that - you can do deals'

> '- his managers were great about it...
> [They said] "put the books away"
> *What does that mean?*
> {Steward} - informal chat... sort of unofficial'.

By contrast, stewards had a low opinion of any seeming dishonesty by managers. The case outlined above (Section 6.2), where a manager was caught falsifying job-time sheets, led to that manager being removed from the CIP after shop steward protests. A meeting was held with higher managers, senior union reps, and the manager concerned, where the issue was

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addressed in very strong terms. One convenor described this meeting as 'a straightener', and explained the severe treatment of the guilty manager in that meeting:

> '"We abused him up hill and down dale"
>
> - … after this, {senior manager} got involved, and {manager} got a huge bollocking
>
> {…}
>
> {Convenor} - "{Manager} did get his comeuppance".'

There were other examples of shop stewards putting managers and supervisors under pressure to move towards good bargaining relations. One steward described difficulties with a new supervisor:

> '- we've got a temporary supervisor... we've been helping him out... he's learning the ropes
>
> - sometimes, we've had to come down on him...
>
> - he tends to be in your face too much... on one occasion words were thrown...
>
> [i.e. by the steward]
>
> {...}
>
> - people didn't like some of the decisions he was making... I had to confront that...
>
> - he's gradually learning the ropes'.

On one occasion, this new supervisor gave a work instruction which was seen as unreasonable, and the shop steward responded:

> '- I said to the lads, don't do it
>
> - there was consequences
>
> - the next week, the shift manager looked into it - to check what I'd said...
>
> {...}
>
> - the following week, he {supervisor} did it gracefully... we had a laugh about it'.

The steward explained:

> '- I was trying to make a point
>
> - perhaps... [I went] a bit overboard with my tone and words...

"But it did work"

{…}

- … that's why I've been voted in... the lads know I can do that...

- when calm conversation doesn't to work, you have be able to raise the fire a bit'.

This is an interesting version of 'helping out' a new supervisor while he learns the ropes. But it does illustrate efforts made by stewards to influence the behaviour of individual supervisors and managers in the direction of good bargaining relations.

A further example of this approach came from the fork truck drivers and concerned the lean production system of 'suggestions', whereby workers were encouraged to make suggestions for improving production in exchange for financial rewards – paid in proportion to the savings made. Some of the drivers were very experienced and possessed a high degree of job-knowledge, far more so than their managers. These drivers regularly came up with suggestions to improve efficiency, some of which had been taken up globally by Big Car, winning the top prize of £5,000. Stewards among the fork truck drivers had previously established that all suggestions would be channelled via senior stewards and submitted collectively, but with two rules: first, the suggestion must not reduce the head count; second, the names of all drivers would be added to the suggestion form, so that each worker received a share of the reward – up to £180 each. This method was well-established, and was used by the stewards to reinforce collectivity among the drivers.

On one occasion, prior to the fieldwork, a highly successful suggestion was made but no reward was forthcoming. It transpired later that local managers had claimed the suggestion for themselves, and the drivers lost their reward. The senior steward said,

"We got bit."

In response, the stewards organised a meeting at which drivers agreed they would put forward no more suggestions; effectively, a suggestion strike. This policy remained in place for three years, until shortly before the fieldwork commenced. According to the senior steward, when the offending manager was later 'done in' by higher management and replaced, the new manager made it clear that he expected a resumption of suggestions from the drivers. Stewards secured a clear undertaking that there would be no more

cheating on the rewards and decided initially to put in one suggestion,

"to get him on our side".

Other suggestions were withheld until the reward was paid, as a safeguard. During the
fieldwork, having secured the first payment, stewards were considering further suggestions.
In this part of the plant, then, suggestions had effectively been collectivised by the shop
steward organisation, and were even used as a bargaining resource.

As regards the impact that stewards were able to have as a result of established bargaining
relations, participants in in-depth interviews were unanimous in stating that the union did
have an influence upon management and management decisions at Big Car. A typical
answer was:

"Yeh, they've definitely got, in my opinion, they've got an influence."

This answer displays a second common, though not universal, feature of stewards' views on
this matter; namely, the feeling that the main influence of the union was at convenor level.
Another steward said of union influence:

"Higher up, yeh. We'll fight our battles down here… I think they have got a bit of
sway, but I think there's a lot of things that go on to get them that sway".

This steward went on to talk about concessions that the union had agreed in recent years,
with the intention of keeping the plant open. During the fieldwork, this issue formed a
continuous backdrop for many other issues. In the in-depth interviews, shop stewards were
asked whether they would agree with the view that the union had given too much away.
Only two stewards agreed that it had. Generally, stewards took a very pragmatic view,
seeing the concessions as necessary in unfavourable circumstances. One steward
elaborated:

"You can't help feeling like that {i.e. that too much has been given away} … you can't
help feeling that way. *But*, if it means keeping the plant open, then, I suppose, you
have to accept it… [pause] which, you know, doesn't go down very well. *But*, at the

end of the day, it's open and we're all working here, so looking back now, everything we've done here to keep it open… [pause] … we're still open, so it's worth it."

Thus, on an issue of central importance for the union organisation in the plant, the shop stewards largely shared a common view of the situation and a commitment to the union leadership's course of action.

Unlike at London Borough, the case study at Big Car was able to gather evidence from managers. Evidence from managers supported that from stewards in relation to overall union-management relations, and on details of specific incidents. Observation in 'unit consultation' meetings, fortnightly forums of senior stewards and production managers, supported stewards' accounts of management relations: business-like, at times tough, but with stewards retaining the capacity to influence management decisions, and to raise issues of their own and gain alterations to management actions. Furthermore, managers who were interviewed agreed with the verdict of stewards concerning union influence; that is, these managers were all of the opinion that the union had an influence on management decision-making. Interviews with managers were conducted towards the end of the fieldwork, after the main features of stewards' accounts had become clear. Therefore, corroboration at this point suggests the research methods adopted to investigate shop stewards had produced reliable evidence, as subsequently triangulated by evidence from managers.

Further evidence concerning bargaining relations in the plant came from an interview with a senior HR manager. In response to the standard WERS survey question about whether the workplace had a consultation committee (Section 2.1), instead of a simple yes/no answer, the manager spoke for eight minutes, describing a considerable number of joint union-management forums, at many levels. Some of these bodies were designated as 'negotiating', some as 'consultative', while others had neither term in their title. These arrangements involved a number of regularly scheduled meetings: European works council-style forum; Joint National Council and Staff Joint National Council, each meeting quarterly; Joint Plant Committee; weekly 'plant consultation meeting'; Health and Safety Committee; Safety Policy Committee. The HR manager also described a further series of meetings with union reps: 'employment review meetings' (potential dismissals); weekly 'absence control meetings'; 'RFE separation' (enhanced redundancy and early retirement schemes on ill-health grounds, with Occupational Health involvement); 'training steering meeting'. Overall,

this indicated a significant level of regular, formal contact between managers and union representatives, especially at senior levels.

When asked WERS questions about issues upon which the company negotiated, consulted, provided information, or excluded the union, the senior HR manager at Big Car was reluctant to answer in an either/or fashion. Summarising an approach to the union that included negotiation, consultation and the provision of information, the HR manager stated:

> "It would be all three, really … because that's generally how we get to the conclusion. It depends on what you're dealing with. … There's generally not negotiation because we work together on these issues."

It should be noted that there certainly were significant amounts of formal negotiation and collective agreements at Big Car. Nevertheless, this formal descriptor did not by any means exhaust the extent of union-management relations. In relation to the union, the HR manager said that on many issues,

> "they would have a point of view. That's where you've got the fine line of consult and negotiate, because we always have... [pause] the two come into play. … You've go to gauge what you're dealing with. You've got to sort of, think of your tactics and how you're going to get the best out of the situation."

Furthermore, in the HR manager's description of the numerous union-management forums, the same names came up repeatedly, making it clear that a relatively small group of senior managers and senior union reps met frequently, under many different auspices, and had done so over many years. That is, the HR manager described a set of established social relations between managers and union reps. The HR manager characterised union-management relations as follows:

> "So, I would suggest that we involve them quite heavily in terms of, sometimes consulting, sometimes informations, sometimes getting their agreement on stuff to go out – I also show them all the works notices … on any subject at all, before it's issued. So what I would say is, if you like, they're partners, very much partners - that's the way I view it … it's very transparent … there's no barriers between us in any way,

we've got excellent relationships. We don't always agree - of course we don't always agree. But I think we have a very mature relationship, and I think all those forums help us to do that."

For this manager, then, negotiation and consultation were closely intertwined aspects of an established *bargaining relationship*.

Finally, evidence from observation and interviews with senior union representatives showed that a number of issues came up in formally designated negotiation *and* consultation meetings, and were subject to both procedures. For instance, procedures for down-days were subject to an annualised hours agreement negotiated at JNC level, but weekly arrangements were discussed at plant consultation meetings. On more than one occasion during the fieldwork, union representatives refused management requests for corridor working at 'consultation' meetings, using aspects of the negotiated collective agreement. Thus, not only did some issues move between negotiation and consultation, but 'consultation' could leave managers unable to pursue their preferred course of action.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter gives a level of detail concerning the everyday activity of contemporary shop stewards that is unmatched in recent research. A number of issues stand out prominently. Contrary to expectations of the current standard view, shop stewards were clearly significantly engaged in bargaining activity. Moreover, shop steward bargaining was often, to some degree, successful. There was considerable evidence of effort bargaining by stewards. The link between wages and effort was made explicit by the job-sheet system, and shop steward activity in this area showed notable continuity with older traditions of workplace bargaining. Important frontier of control issues arose in the stewards' defence of the formal procedure for CIPs. Although this agreed procedure circumscribed the grounds on which stewards could oppose work reorganisation and labour intensification, this framework guaranteed the involvement of stewards in the CIP process, resulting in important restrictions on management freedoms. Individual and collective issues were clearly linked, especially through stewards' established practice of seeking

'deals' with management that exchanged temporary labour flexibility for leniency in disciplinary cases. Stewards had accumulated significant collective knowledge of new management methods, and had developed viable bargaining resources from aspects of those practices. Evidence from managers showed that they recognised the restraining effect of shop steward activity upon their prerogatives. These findings significantly undermine the current standard view of shop stewards, and also stand in significant contrast to previous accounts of lean production in UK car plants.

The research at Big Car also found considerable evidence of formally designated 'consultation' meetings which nevertheless embodied genuine bargaining processes. There was also clear evidence that stewards were successful in securing modified management decisions through the entirely less promising channel of CIP procedures. Evidence from the senior HR manager at Big Car further undermines the distinction between negotiation and consultation, especially in the blurring of issues across union-management forums at different levels within the plant and firm. While some issues were fixed in particular forums — such as pay-bargaining in the JNC — a significant number of issues were dealt with by more than one union-management body, crossing boundaries of formally designated 'negotiation' and 'consultation' arrangements. Evidence from this manager supported accounts from senior union reps. The complexity of answers given by this individual to standard WERS questions underlines the problematic methodology upon which the current standard view is based.

The close of this chapter concludes the presentation of empirical evidence. By adopting the methods of detailed workplace study, this research has gathered a depth and detail of evidence about the day-to-day activities of contemporary shop stewards that is unrivalled in recent accounts. However, the challenge of this project was not only empirical but also theoretical; to present a critique of recent accounts, but also to develop an alternative framework for understanding the activity of shop stewards. Therefore, the next chapter returns to conceptual and theoretical issues discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and re-evaluates those discussions in the light of the new evidence.

Chapter 7: Discussion

It was argued at the outset of this thesis that an adequate answer to its motivating question – What do shop stewards do? – requires not only empirical but also conceptual and theoretical work. The underlying problem is one of generalisation. It is not enough to say what *these* shop stewards were doing. The point is to draw some wider conclusions about what shop stewards do *in general*. But that is not a straightforward matter for case study research. Rather than basing generalisation on the relationship of a sample to a whole population, generalisation must be analytical, based on theoretical arguments about the significance of findings and how to understand them (Section 4.4). Therefore, this chapter returns to themes and issues explored in Chapters 2 and 3, which will be re-examined in the light of considerable new evidence.

The chapter begins with an overview of the research, which will present answers to the research questions, discuss its strengths and limitations, and outline a basis for generalisation. As may be clear already, the picture of shop steward activity that emerged from the fieldwork does not sit easily with the current standard view of shop stewards. Therefore, the second section of the chapter will revisit the critique presented in Section 2.1, to show how the new evidence supports that critique. The second section will also begin the process of theorisation by conceptualising salient features of the findings. The third section discusses possible explanations for these patterns by revisiting the shop steward typologies rooted in the classic accounts. Finally, the fourth section will present an alternative approach to understanding shop stewards that aims to be of more general applicability, and therefore potentially useful for researchers elsewhere. This framework will link patterns of shop steward activity to underlying dynamics of workplace relations, as mediated by particular groupings of bargaining opportunities and resources. In this way, the chapter will move from empirical findings, through a process of conceptual critique and theoretical development, to present a generalised way of thinking about shop stewards that moves closer to answering that initial question – What do shop stewards do?

7.1 Review of the research

This section presents an assessment of the research, starting with summary answers to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Subsequently, the strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, focussing especially on methodological and theoretical issues. Finally, this section outlines a basis for generalisation from the present research.

Research questions answered

Having presented the main empirical findings in the preceding two chapters, it is now possible to offer answers to the research questions presented in Section 1.1. At this stage, these answers are mainly empirical, and conceptual elements will be developed subsequently. Nevertheless, the essential features of the findings are clear enough.

Q1. To what extent do shop stewards seek to influence the regulation of employment relations?

Shop stewards in the two case studies sought to influence the regulation of employment relations to a considerable extent. These efforts accounted for a significant proportion shop steward activity. Stewards utilised a wide variety of means in attempting to influence management decisions, to restrict managerial prerogatives, and thereby to influence the regulation of employment relations. Furthermore, stewards were found to exert genuine influence, and were able to act as a 'restraint' on management. In some circumstances, shop stewards' influence was significantly greater; but even where their success was more limited, stewards continued to make such efforts. Of course, the transformed context of workplace relations meant that management exercised considerable control over many aspects of work organisation, etc.. Nevertheless, managerial prerogatives were contested and limited by the activity of shop stewards in numerous ways, and to a significantly greater extent than was expected.

Q2. What bargaining opportunities and resources, if any, are shop stewards using?

This research found shop stewards to be using a range of bargaining opportunities. Stewards' efforts to challenge and influence management decision-making often centred on opportunities presented by aspects of management practices, such as the CIP process at Big Car, or the extensive use of individual procedures at London Borough. Such opportunities might take individual or collective forms. Bargaining resources at the disposal of shop

stewards were numerous and varied. Some were familiar from previous periods; for instance, grievance procedures, withdrawal of cooperation, and political exchange (Section 3.1). Others appeared to be more recent in origin, and represented innovations by shop stewards in response to new management methods, such as the increased use of formal workplace procedures, or lean production. More narrowly, bargaining *sanctions* available to shop stewards were clearly less effective than those documented by the classic studies. Most obviously, shop stewards no longer had the strike weapon at their disposal to any significant extent, though the fieldwork did record a few small and brief work stoppages. Instead, shop stewards were using a considerable variety of other bargaining resources in their dealings with management, ranging from more collective to more individual in nature.

Q3. What bargaining activity, if any, are shop stewards engaged in?

Shop stewards were engaged in a considerable range of bargaining activities, under a variety of arrangements, from formally designated negotiation or consultation arrangements, or other formal contexts, to entirely informal, nameless, and/or covert practices. To a far greater extent than expected, shop stewards dealt directly with collective issues. Shop stewards were also able to influence management decisions and actions through individual representation and casework, which can be considered a form of bargaining insofar as it had effects in restricting managerial prerogatives. Differences in patterns of shop steward bargaining reflected differences in management practices; suggesting that shop steward activity had adapted to changing management methods, and a transformed context of workplace relations.

Having answered the original research questions on the basis of evidence from the two case studies, a further question arises: to what extent can these findings be generalised? The remainder of this section will assess the research, examining its strengths and limitations, and outline a basis for generalisation.

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study has two main strengths. The first lies in its empirical contribution, which brings considerable and important new evidence to discussions of workplace union representation and the contemporary role of shop stewards. The revival of ethnographic methods in this area has produced a depth and richness of evidence that is unsurpassed in more than three decades of industrial relations research, and which clearly demonstrates the advantages of

such methods over the large-scale surveys that form the empirical basis of the current standard view of shop stewards. The use of ethnography also overcame difficulties with relying on interview methods to conduct qualitative research (Section 4.3). In addition, the innovative use of diary-based methods has significantly developed a highly productive, if demanding, method, which has been significantly under-utilised in the field up to now. Hopefully, these methods will be taken up and refined by other researchers, in a wider challenge to the current one-sided dominance of large-scale surveys in industrial relations research.

The second main strength of the research is theoretical. This study has approached high level theory more thoroughly than is usually the case in industrial relations research: with only a few exceptions, such as Edwards (1986), 'mid-range' conceptualisation is generally preferred (Kelly 1998: 20). In this study, linkages between the day-to-day activities of shop stewards in the workplace and general social theory have been traced more consistently. Whereas social structure is often treated either simply as context, or narrowly as a restriction or 'constraint' on agency (Callinicos 2009: 1), the present study has shown how a more fully developed understanding of social structure and its relation to agency can contribute an appreciation of structure as *enabling* as well as limiting, thereby bringing a fresh perspective on workplace relations and hence on the role of shop stewards within those relations. The study has also contributed a definition of bargaining, which lends the present analysis a firm conceptual basis lacking in previous accounts.

There are also two main limitations of the study, both of which are empirical. First, there is the inevitable limitation of case study research: an unrepresentative sample. The characteristics of the case studies that made them amenable for investigation by a lone observer – namely, numerous shop stewards organised into committees that met regularly – meant that they were unlikely to be representative of shop stewards in general. Consequently, generalisation from the present study must be approached with caution. No claims will be made, for instance, about how common the specific activities recorded here might be across employment as a whole. The second limitation of the present research derives from its exploratory nature. Since this area has been significantly under-researched over several decades, it was necessary to design research that could capture a very broad range of shop steward activities. The inevitable down-side to this approach emerged during the fieldwork, as it became clear that some important areas would benefit from more

detailed research. Three examples spring to mind immediately: the CIP process at Big Car, service-reorganisation at London Borough, and individual representation at either (or both) could all form the basis of worthwhile, and probably fascinating, further study. The present research was prevented from developing a deeper understanding of these areas by the need to maintain a wider view of the overall spread of shop steward activity. Consequently, some questions that arise from the present findings must remain without definitive answers until further research is conducted. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this research has produced important insights that can be generalised; as the next sub-section will argue.

Basis of generalisation

Case study research cannot be generalised on grounds of statistical representativeness, and therefore another means must be found if the study is not to remain purely descriptive. While description plays an important part in the development of knowledge (Flyvberg 2006: 222), this research has further ambitions. Fortunately, case study research can be generalised on theoretical grounds (Yin 2009: 38). As noted in Chapter 2, previous theory around shop stewards can be divided into two broad approaches: the current standard view and the workplace bargainer view. This study's critique of the current standard view has focussed not on empirical refutation, but on the identification of conceptual difficulties. As will be shown in Section 7.2, the findings of this research strongly support that critique. Therefore, generalisation starts with undermining the theoretical propositions of the current standard view. Subsequently, an alternative framework will be presented (Section 7.4) that offers a theoretical account of general applicability; constructed from aspects of the workplace bargainer view, together with elements of Marxist sociology, and a new definition of bargaining drawn from bargaining theory (Chapter 3).

While it was beyond the scope of this study to fully test this alternative framework, it is possible to claim a degree of generalisability. First, the research has identified a number of 'demi-regs' (Lawson 1998: 149-153), which, according to critical realism, can form the basis for inductive generalisation (Sections 4.1, 4.4, and 7.2). That is, regularities in the findings indicate the effects of underlying generative mechanisms (Section 7.2) that are active more widely. This is not to say that the findings of this study would be observed in identical forms elsewhere. As Bhaskar (2008: 49) argues, generative mechanisms rarely produce identical effects, and often produce no observable effects at all. Nevertheless, the identification of generative mechanisms underlying the present findings does permit claims that there is a

tendency for such effects to be found elsewhere; claims that would, of course, require further empirical investigation to substantiate or refute. Second, this research has presented a strongly theorised and defensible account of the structure of workplace relations (Chapter 3), to which demi-regs in the findings can be causally linked (as will be argued in Section 7.4). Hence, by linking research findings to an overall analysis of the structured social relations of employment, it is possible to make claims about the types processes likely to be found elsewhere. While this approach cannot overcome entirely the difficulties associated with generalising from case studies, it does provide grounds for theoretical development and the production of new knowledge.

This section has provided summary answers to the research questions, assessed the strengths and limitations of the study, and argued that generalisation is possible on the basis of theoretical argument. That is, patterns in shop steward activity can be used to identify causal mechanisms linking aspects of shop steward activity to underlying dynamics of employment relations. Theoretical development thus combines sensitivity to 'foreshadowed problems' (Section 4.1), conceptual critique, and new evidence, to produce new knowledge. The next section begins this process by discussing the main conceptual implications of the research findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.2 Contemporary features of shop steward activity

This section starts the analytical process by expressing the main research findings in conceptual terms. It begins by revisiting the critique of the current standard view presented in Section 2.1; which, it will be argued, has been strongly supported by the research findings. Particular attention will be paid to the problematic conceptual distinctions highlighted previously. Subsequently, discussion moves to an interpretation of the overall findings, utilising the definition of bargaining introduced in Section 3.2. The section closes with a summary of the distinctive patterning of shop steward activity found by the research.

The current standard view (re)assessed
Central to the current standard view is the claim that shop stewards have moved away from

negotiation with management, towards consultation (at best). This view sees negotiation and consultation as clearly differentiated, with the former defined as joint regulation and the latter as a form of unilateral management control. Yet, this research found that processes not formally designated as negotiation could, and often did, produce bargained outcomes; in the sense of management modifying decisions and altering a course of action as a result of shop stewards' activity. That is, joint regulation was present in aspects of workplace relations that were, formally, not negotiations. Sometimes, arrangements formally designated as 'consultation' were the site of entirely conventional labour negotiations of the type described by Walton and McKersie (1991). Sometimes, issues were dealt with both in formally designated 'negotiation' *and* 'consultation'. Other practices resembled the description by Evans (1973: 100), of managers taking soundings from shop stewards as part of a decision-making process. Sometimes, management decisions were simply dropped in the face of worker opposition, leaving no formal trace of a changed decision by managers. Furthermore, shop stewards were clearly able to influence management decisions via arrangements that are not usually considered part of collective relations at all, such as grievance and disciplinary procedures and the CIP process. Thus, contrary to the claims of the current standard view, processes other than formal 'negotiation' nevertheless produced genuinely bargained outcomes. Consequently, the sharp conceptual distinction between negotiation and consultation is severely undermined by the present research. This finding fits with concerns voiced, though not developed, by Gospel and Willman (2003: 145) and Marginson (2014); with Hyman's (1997: 316) notion of 'blurred' categories; and with older accounts such as Clegg (1972), Clegg and Chester (1954), McCarthy (1966), and Kuhn (1961).

This research demonstrates clearly that workplace processes cannot be understood solely on the basis of formal designations. Rather, it is necessary also to consider social content. Few of the various practices investigated by this research were formally designated as negotiation, yet they frequently involved management making adjustments to decisions and actions as a result of the activity of shop stewards. According to the definition in use here, such processes constitute bargaining (this argument is developed further below). The disjuncture between formal designation and social content means that a sharp conceptual distinction between negotiation and consultation is unsustainable, and should be rejected. Furthermore, if negotiation and consultation cannot be clearly distinguished, then the claim that shop stewards have moved from one to the other is difficult to sustain. Thus, findings

of this research strongly support the critique of the current standard view outlined earlier. While the balance of power within bargaining relations has shifted significantly in favour of management, it is not the case that there has been a qualitative shift from a form that entails joint regulation to a form that permits only unilateral regulation by managers.

A second central claim of the current standard view is that shop stewards' activity has shifted significantly from dealing with collective issues towards individual representation. This claim has two linked aspects, one conceptual and one empirical. Conceptually, it is premised on a clear separation of the two forms. Empirically, it sees a significant measurable shift in the activity of shop stewards away from collective issues. Findings from this study challenge both aspects. Empirically, the significant involvement of stewards with collective issues must raise questions about the easy dismissal of steward activity in this area often found in accounts taking the current standard view (e.g. Brown 2010; Brown and Nash 2008; Charlwood and Angrave 2014; McIlroy and Daniels 2009; Terry 2004; 2010; van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013). At the very least, it suggests greater variation in the involvement of stewards with collective issues than is usually presumed. These findings similarly urge caution concerning the commonly heard claim that shop steward concern for collective issues is being undermined by individual representation (Charlwood and Forth 2008: 15) as part of '"hollow shell" trade unionism' (*ibid*.: 14-15).

Conceptually, this study presents a serious challenge to recent accounts. As with negotiation and consultation, this research undermines any sharp distinction between collective issues and individual representation. The research found that individual representation was far more varied and complex than it appears in the current standard view. Even the incidence of casework varied greatly, according to influences such as changing management priorities, differences between individual managers, and shop stewards' organisational arrangements. Thus, a category that appears entirely individual, in reality, entails numerous social (and therefore collective) determinants. Moreover, individual representation can, and often does, involve genuinely collective issues. Shop stewards understood the varied significance of cases and adjusted their approach accordingly, demonstrating a considerably strategic orientation towards individual representation. These important dimensions of variation in individual representation are entirely missing from the simplistic conceptualisation of the current standard view. The present findings show that individual representation is significantly varied, and cannot be treated as a homogeneous mass. Therefore, the positing

of an undifferentiated concept of individual representation, unproblematically counterposed to a simple concept of collective issues, is mistaken and misleading. Consequently, the involvement of shop stewards in individual representation and casework cannot be taken straightforwardly as evidence of a move away from dealing with collective issues. In important respects, individual cases often represent collective issues under a different flag. Again, this account significantly undermines the conceptual framework of the current standard view.

As noted previously, a further conceptual difficulty with the current standard view is its narrow definition of shop steward sanctions as traditional industrial action (Terry 2010: 281). This issue will be discussed in more detail below (Section 7.4), but clearly this research has produced considerable evidence showing that shop stewards can and do utilise a far wider range of bargaining resources in their efforts to restrict managerial prerogatives. For the moment, it must suffice to note that these findings support the earlier critique of the narrow view of sanctions (Sections 2.1 and 3.1). Again, the conceptual framework of the current standard view is found wanting.

Finally, the success of this research in producing a large amount of rich and detailed evidence vindicates the return to ethnographic case study, and supports the earlier critique of the methods underpinning the current standard view. The far greater depth and richness of the present findings emphasise the shortcomings of large-scale survey methods for exploring the complexity of workplace relations. Furthermore, the prioritising of responses from (often senior) managers in the WERS series appears particularly problematic. Perhaps most significantly, the findings of the present research strongly support the critique outlined previously (Section 2.1), of the inclusion in the WERS questionnaire of an assumption that negotiation and consultation can be sharply distinguished. The undermining of this distinction by the present research must introduce significant concerns regarding the validity of conclusions based on WERS evidence in this area. Taken together, then, findings from this study significantly undermine the methodology, and therefore the empirical basis, upon which the current standard view of shop stewards is constructed.

Overall, this research produced substantial evidence to support the critique of the current standard view of shop stewards outlined in Section 2.1; specifically, that negotiation and consultation cannot be sharply separated, that collective and individual issues cannot be

sharply separated, that bargaining resources are not limited to the strike sanction, and that large-scale survey methods are ill suited for investigating these areas. Consequently, the current standard view of shop stewards is significantly undermined. Therefore, the remainder of this section sets out elements for an alternative conceptual framework.

The persistence of bargaining

The most notable finding of the present research was the persistence of bargaining among shop stewards. This claim requires careful substantiation, given the wide currency of accounts that argue the contrary (Section 2.1). The first question is: To what extent can findings from the present research be interpreted as evidence of bargaining? On the definition developed in Section 3.4, bargaining comprises three aspects: the presence of two (or more) parties; that the parties have interests, some in common and some opposed; and that outcomes are influenced by the actions of both parties. In workplace relations, the first two aspects derive from the employment relationship. Therefore, the key issue for determining the presence (or absence) of bargaining is assessing the presence (or absence) of outcomes that are influenced by the actions of both parties. It can be assumed that, in most employment, managerial prerogatives will be exercised to organise production, discipline labour, and so on. Thus, the identification of bargaining resolves to determining empirically any influence of shop steward activity on the outcomes of management initiatives. In this regard, the findings were clear: in both case studies there was considerable evidence of outcomes influenced by the actions of shop stewards. Sometimes the effect of shop stewards in a particular instance could be significant; elsewhere, stewards' influence lay in an accumulation of small acts of contestation. Nevertheless, on the definition in use here, such outcomes are considered as *bargained outcomes*, and the processes from which these outcomes derive are *bargaining processes*. Therefore, on this definition, bargaining was present in both case studies, and to an extent significantly greater than anticipated at the start of the research.

This definition provides a framework for assessing a range of shop steward activities. Clearly, the definition can include negotiations under the formal arrangements recognised by WERS. At the same time, it also recognises that if the balance of power is very unequal, formal 'negotiations' might result in entirely unilateral management decision-making, with no restraint of managerial prerogatives, and consequently with no actual bargaining content. Conversely, by making bargaining an empirical question, this redefinition

acknowledges that bargaining can take place in processes other than formal negotiating arrangements; a possibility that is excluded from WERS and the current standard view by definition (Section 2.1). Most obviously, this redefinition allows that genuine bargaining can take place in formal 'consultation' procedures, insofar as outcomes show the influence of shop stewards as well as managers. Indeed, this research found numerous such examples that would not have been picked up by WERS because of the formal definitions it uses. Furthermore, the present definition also recognises that entirely informal arrangements between managers and shop stewards can entail bargaining content. Although this important feature of workplace relations was apparent to the classic studies, the present redefinition of bargaining gives those analyses a firmer conceptual basis. Thus, not only does the definition of bargaining developed here lead to a significantly different view of contemporary shop steward activity, compared with the current standard view, it is also compatible with accounts of bargaining from the classic studies.

Furthermore, on this definition, individual representation may be viewed as part of the overall bargaining process. Individual casework regularly carries important consequences for collective issues, and has important effects in limiting managerial prerogatives. While other research has established the impact of individual ET cases on managerial relations (Colling 2012; Dix *et al.* 2009; Drinkwater and Ingram 2005; Kersley *et al.* 2006; Knight and Latreille 2000; Latreille *et al.* 2007), this research has shown that cases which remain within an employing organisation can also have similar collective impacts. This is not to say that all individual representation is bargaining: as recognised by shop stewards in the case studies, some individual representation is purely individual in scope. The bargaining content of any particular case must be determined empirically; but, in conceptual terms, individual representation cannot be excluded from discussions of bargaining and bargaining relations.

It might be objected that this redefinition of bargaining is too wide, and includes processes that are too weak or peripheral to be considered genuine bargaining. There are two points to make in response to such objections. First, if the present definition is inadequate, then a better one is required. Yet the previous industrial relations literature contains no definition at all, while the present one has the benefit of being widely accepted in a related field (Section 2.4). Secondly, the current definition certainly does not automatically admit all-comers to the category of bargaining; quite the reverse. By establishing a conceptual framework for the investigation of bargaining, something lacking in previous accounts, the

present definition makes bargaining an empirical question and avoids the problem of *a priori* knowledge encountered by the current standard view. The present definition would, for instance, permit empirical investigations of stronger and weaker forms of bargaining. Of course, empirically, it may be that the stewards in the two case studies are entirely exceptional in the extent of their bargaining activity; however, it will be argued below that there are good grounds for thinking that such processes are more widespread (Section 7.4). The key point, though, is that the definition proposed here offers conceptual clarity for the empirical investigation of bargaining processes. This represents a clear advantage over the current standard view, which attempts to deal with such questions *a priori*, by definition.

The present findings also support the conception of bargaining as a continuum, as opposed to the hierarchy of distinct forms proposed by the current standard view (Section 2.2). Once it is recognised that bargaining is not limited to formal negotiating arrangements, theorisation must be capable of encompassing a range of forms, their variations and intermediations. Viewing bargaining in terms of a continuum is far better suited to this conceptual task than the current standard view's hierarchy. On the continuum, actual bargaining relations can be placed according to how much real bargaining content is present; construed as the extent to which outcomes are modified by the activity of, in this instance, shop stewards. Such a continuum could be used to chart variation in bargaining over time and across different workplaces, sectors of employment, unions, and so on.

While this approach stands in clear contrast to the current standard view, it is compatible older accounts. In particular, for Clegg (1972), a general notion of *bargaining* comprises a spectrum of practices, from formally constituted negotiation and consultation arrangements, through informal agreements and understandings, to habits and ways of working that arise undefined within the day-to-day to-and-fro of the workplace. The present definition can encompass Clegg's approach, with its overlapping processes, discontinuities between form and content, and blurred distinctions. Similarly, it is useful to recall and extend Kuhn's (1961) insight, that grievance procedures can, at times, entail genuine bargaining; though, as Kuhn also notes, the precise degree of bargaining in any grievance process cannot be ascertained outside of empirical investigation. Both these accounts are much better suited to understanding the complexities of workplace bargaining processes than the strict divisions of the current standard view. Moreover, both these accounts are clearly compatible with the present approach.

Furthermore, this research is also compatible with Brown's (1973) account of shop steward bargaining under piecework (Section 2.2). Brown (*ibid*.: 133) identifies 'four implicit principles of shop steward behaviour': 'the pursuit of unity' among members; the 'pursuit of … equity' among members; maintaining a good bargaining relationship with management'; and 'the reduction of uncertainty' in relations with management (*ibid*.: 132-6). Three of these 'implicit principles' figured prominently in the activity of shop stewards in both case studies. The 'pursuit of equity' and 'the reduction of uncertainty' were apparent in a range of steward activities, from the defence of members against disciplinary sanctions, to the rotation of jobs on an assembly line. Furthermore, stewards were almost unanimous in valuing 'good bargaining relations' with management. Even stewards with strongly left-wing politics, who were outspokenly critical of management in general, nevertheless valued having relations of trust with managers as individuals.

The only one of Brown's 'principles' that appeared significantly reduced in importance was the 'pursuit of unity' among constituents. Brown (1973: 133-4) clearly saw this dimension as linked to industrial action, so it seems likely that its reduced importance reflected the decline of such action in shop stewards' 'repertoires of collective action' (Tilly 1978: 151). Even so, some evidence of this principle was found among stewards at London Borough, who were concerned that the introduction of new contracts among a significant proportion of the workforce would divide union members in the event of future industrial action. It might be assumed, therefore, that this 'principle' would figure more prominently should industrial action again become common. Overall, though, this study shows the persistence of significant aspects of Brown's 'shop-stewardliness'. Furthermore, since Brown's account focussed on bargaining within piecework, his approach leaves open the question of how the 'four principles' might be pursued in other circumstances; whereby stewards might utilise a range of methods for achieving 'shop-stewardly' ends. Here, Brown's account is compatible with the notion of shifting bargaining opportunities and resources developed above (Section 3.1), and which is discussed further below (Section 7.4). First, though, discussion turns to the distinctive patterns of shop steward activity documented by the research.

Clusters of contestation

Having established the presence of shop steward bargaining, a further issue arises; namely, how to explain the patterns of bargaining identified in the fieldwork. As demonstrated in

Chapters 5 and 6, shop steward activity in challenging management was not evenly spread. Rather, while shop stewards actively challenged management across a range of issues, there were marked concentrations in particular areas. These concentrations of shop steward challenges to management will be referred to as *clusters of contestation*. On the definition in use here, contestation of management decision-making is necessary for shop steward bargaining, and therefore clusters of contestation indicate concentrations of shop steward bargaining activity. This is not to say that all shop steward contestation results in bargained outcomes; but without the former the latter is impossible. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of shop steward bargaining is tied to explaining the clusters of contestation.

Clusters of contestation were identified as follows. As expected, there was a concentration of challenges to management decision-making, in both case studies, centred around individual representation and casework; although this generally carried greater significance at London Borough than at Big Car. Another cluster of contestation was identified in shop steward activity around service reorganisation at London Borough. Finally, a cluster of contestation was apparent in shop steward activity around the CIP process at Big Car. Taken together, these clusters of contestation form a distinctive pattern of shop steward activity and efforts to influence management decisions. Having identified the clusters of contestation, the next question becomes how to explain them.

An important advantage of the two-case study design adopted for this research is that two cases can test theory in a way that a single case cannot (Reuschmeyer 2003: 324; Section 4.1). In particular, two cases enabled comparisons between groups of shop stewards from very different organisations and sectors. Although some of the issues they dealt with were similar, others were very different, and issues were often handled in different ways. The theoretical challenge was therefore to move from describing contrasting sets of findings, to providing a general account in terms of common causal influences, while remaining sensitive to specific mediating factors in each case study. Therefore, the clusters of contestation were treated as 'demi-regs' (Lawson 1998). It will be recalled that, for critical realism, demi-regs suggest the presence of underlying generative mechanisms; via the qualified inductivism employed for this research (Section 4.1). Hence, the identification of clusters of contestation opened the possibility of linking observed shop steward behaviour to underlying social dynamics, in causal explanations. Furthermore, if clusters of contestation could be used to identify causal mechanisms, then the way is open for

theoretical generalisation. That is, insofar as mechanisms shaping particular clusters of contestation could be shown to be general features of employment under capitalism, then it could be suggested that similar tendencies would be found elsewhere. It will be argued below (Section 7.4) that the clusters of contestation identified in this research are indeed explicable in terms of underlying dynamics, and that therefore such features are likely to occur elsewhere in employment.

This section has shown that the current standard view cannot offer an adequate explanation of the patterns of contestation and bargaining identified by this research. Furthermore, this section has examined features of shop steward activity identified in the case studies, and developed initial conceptual implications of those findings. The discussion has established that the conceptual critique of the current standard view developed in Chapter 2 was strongly supported by evidence from the research. Consequently, an alternative explanation for the findings was required; in particular, for the persistence of bargaining, and for its distinctive patterning. In Section 7.4, a framework will be presented that links shop steward contestation and bargaining to underlying dynamics within the employment relationship, and which is capable of providing adequate explanations for the patterns of shop steward contestation and bargaining observed in this research. First, the next section looks at other explanations for patterns of shop steward behaviour; in particular, the shop steward typologies derived from the classic accounts, which will be re-examined in the light of the research findings.

7.3 Shop steward typologies reviewed

As argued in Section 2.2, previous accounts of workplace union organisation have proposed typologies of shop steward behaviour. Difficulties within these typologies led to critiques that generated new variations. Nevertheless, problems remained, and evidence from this research permitted a re-evaluation of these contributions. This section discusses two typologies in detail, before drawing more general conclusions. Although it will be argued that the typological approach poses considerable difficulties, the importance of typologies in industrial relations scholarship means that a full discussion is warranted.

Once more on leaders and populists

The best known typology is Batstone *et al.*'s (1977) 'leaders' and 'populists'. As was argued in Section 2.2, the 'union principles' dimension, which is fundamental to this typology, appears problematic; in part, due to the difficulty of distinguishing which principles should be identified with 'union ideology'. Furthermore, the empirical findings of a number of their critics showed that in practice shop stewards shifted their arguments depending on the issue and circumstances they were dealing with (Broad 1983; Partridge 1978; Pedler 1973; Willman 1980). Not surprisingly, then, 'union principles' proved the least helpful dimension in understanding shop steward activity in the present study. Some arguments identified by Batstone *et al.* (1977: 11) as expressing 'union principles' (e.g. 'ideas of fairness and justice') were almost ubiquitous among shop stewards in both case studies. Others, though, (e.g. 'maintenance of the collectivity', 'unity' against sectional demands; *ibid*.: 11) were almost uniformly absent. At the same time, arguments rated by Batstone *et al.* as low on union principles ('standing up to management', 'giving a voice'; *ibid*.: 24-29) were significant components of stewards' outlooks across the sample, and came out strongly in interview accounts of why they took up the role. This pronounced mixing together of arguments that Batstone *et al.* saw as aspects of opposed shop steward types supports previous critiques of the 'union principles' dimension of the typology as too fixed (Marchington and Armstrong 1983; Willman 1980). Certainly, a fixed notion of union principles does not fit the findings of the present study; moreover, this view may never have been an adequate characterisation of shop steward activity.

By contrast, the representative—delegate dimension of the typology seems more serviceable, although difficulties remain. Almost all of the stewards in this research expressed a positive attitude towards a central element of the representative approach; namely, a selective approach to the issues they raised with management. Now, on Batstone *et al.*'s typology, a strongly 'representative' steward with the low attachment to 'union principles' (as identified in the previous paragraph) is termed a 'cowboy' (Batstone *et al.* 1977: 34). However, this characterisation could scarcely be less appropriate for the stewards in this study; indeed, this category seems entirely unhelpful (*cf.* Marchington and Armstrong 1983). A small number of stewards were closer to the delegate type, but these mapped poorly onto the overall typology. At Big Car, two stewards in particular were more willing to take up and press strongly issues simply on the basis that they had been raised by members in their section. Yet, contrary to Batstone *et al.*'s assumptions, these stewards did not

secure strong support among their constituency. In fact, these stewards were most frequently subject to electoral challenges within their section. Rather than securing a populist base of support, their pursuit of the demands of some members had the effect of aggravating others, leading to friction within the section. Thus, although the delegate—representative variable was in evidence, it did not map easily onto 'leader—populist'. Consequently, categories on this dimension appear mixed in unexpected ways, which undermines the overall typology.

Stewards in this study were nearly unanimous in stating a commitment to filtering issues; a characteristic of 'leader' stewards, according to the typology. For instance, stewards at London Borough identified the proposed new contracts as a priority organising issue. In practice, though, these stewards found it difficult to convert their understanding into a mobilisation of members. Rather, steward activity was significantly driven by the demanding timetable of service reorganisations; a process which impacted strongly upon union members. Thus, stewards who appeared as 'leaders/representatives' in their committee meetings took on the aspect of 'populist/delegate' in their workplace activity. Again, this admixture of opposed elements of the leader—populist typology undermines the overall conception.

Evidence from this study, then, broadly supports accounts which, in critiques of Batstone *et al.*, emphasise the ability of shop stewards to select different approaches for different issues, and to act strategically (Broad 1983; Marchington and Armstrong 1983; Partridge 1978; Pedler 1973; Willman 1980). Moreover, the evidence here is not simply that stewards shifted between various of the Batstone *et al.* types; rather, the activity of shop stewards was varied in more complex ways than can be encompassed on a simple four-part typology with two dimensions. Consequently, these findings pose equal difficulties for other two-dimensional typologies (e.g. Marchington and Armstong 1983). Therefore, discussion turns now to multi-dimensional approaches.

The multi-dimensional approach
In developing a critique of Batstone *et al.*, Darlington (1994) proposed a multi-dimensional model, which offers greater flexibility, permitting analysis of the social relations entered into by shop stewards along three dimensions (Section 2.2). These dimensions are: resistance—accommodation in relation to management; dependence—independence in

relation to full-time officers (FTOs); and, democracy—bureaucracy in relaton to union members. Furthermore, for Darlington, these dimensions also indicate the strength and effectiveness of workplace union organisation; thus, Darlington explicitly endorses union organisation characterised by resistance not accommodation, independence not dependence, and democracy not bureaucracy. Again, the present research produced abundant evidence that could be used to test this framework.

On the resistance—accommodation dimension, the research found clear evidence of contradictory pressures. Shop stewards at Big Car often expressed tensions and dilemmas in this area, especially over concessions made to the company in return for continued production, even though most stewards broadly agreed with the approach adopted by the convenors and national union officers. However, while this aspect could be characterised as accommodation, other areas exhibited very significant levels of resistance. Unlike many plants where concessions have been made, it was clear that shop stewards at Big Car had not 'surrendered' the shopfloor (Moody 2007: 106-114; Section 4.5). The simultaneous presence, in this case study, of both accommodation *and* resistance, but in differing areas of workplace relations, suggests a greater complexity than can be easily represented on a single dimension (*cf*. Edwards 1989). At London Borough, the picture was different but no less complex. Here, stewards almost universally favoured resistance to management yet, in practice, were significantly less able to challenge management than their counterparts at Big Car. Thus, stewards at London Borough appeared very high on resistance in terms of consciousness, while simultaneously making many accommodations in practice. Perhaps these stewards could be characterised as *reluctant accommodators*. The main conceptual point, though, is that in both case studies the single resistance—accommodation dimension appears insufficient for grasping the complexity in the evidence.

The dependence—independence dimension, concerning the relationship of stewards to full time officers (FTOs), also encountered difficulties in mapping complex evidence from the case studies. At Big Car, the involvement of convenors in official union bodies and broad left (leading stewards were enthusiastic supporters of Unite general secretary, Len McCluskey), entailed significant contact with FTOs, indicating a clear congruence of political and ideological outlooks. However, while this relationship could not be characterised as 'independence', neither could it straightforwardly be construed as 'dependence'. On a day-to-day basis, the shop steward organisation at the plant was highly independent of FTOs,

relying strongly on its own bargaining resources. Of course, daily shop steward activity took place within a framework of bargaining relations shaped by collective agreements drawn up with input from the national union; although the convenors saw themselves, not the FTOs, as the initiators of those agreements. By contrast, London Borough stewards frequently expressed strong commitment to independence from union officials. Unlike at Big Car, stewards regularly criticised the national union leadership for being excessively timid and unreliable, while regional FTOs were seen as an active barrier to local industrial action, and therefore to determined resistance to management. In part, these opinions reflected the influence of left politics within the branch (*cf.* Darlington 2009a; 2009b). On this evidence, London Borough stewards showed considerable independence from FTOs. However, on day-to-day workplace issues, senior stewards at London Borough had significantly greater contact with FTOs than did their counterparts at Big Car; for instance, concerning legal advice over casework, contractual matters, or TUPE cases. Sometimes, FTO influence was central to the outcome of bargaining, as when regional FTOs were instrumental in gaining assurances from elected Labour council chiefs over the honouring of national pay awards. A common feature of these contacts with FTOs was that they took place when stewards' own bargaining resources had proved insufficient, and stewards turned to FTOs for assistance despite their professed unwillingness. Thus, shop stewards at London Borough might be characterised as *reluctant dependents*: politically and ideologically strongly independent of the national union, yet at key points reliant upon FTOs to progress issues. By contrast, stewards at Big Car were, in ideological and political terms, notably more closely aligned with national union leadership, yet were highly independent in day-to-day activity. Overall, then, evidence from the case studies showed greater complexity in relations between shop stewards and FTOs than could be mapped onto a single dependence–independence dimension.

The democracy—bureaucracy dimension experienced similar difficulties with complex findings. Darlington (1994: 28-31) is concerned that workplace union organisation should facilitate workers' demands against the employer, rather than act as a restraint. Consequently, this dimension maps the extent to which stewards progress issues raised by their members ('democracy'), or alternatively squash those demands, in favour of maintaining good relations with management ('bureaucracy'). The significant weakening of workplace union organisation since the 1970s and 1980s (the period Darlington focuses on) meant that stewards in this research seldom faced strong sectional demands, and

consequently experienced fewer dilemmas on this dimension. Nevertheless, at London Borough stewards were certainly more active on the relatively sectional issue of service reorganisation, a priority pressed by union members, in contrast to their lower level of activity on the wider issue of new contracts, which the stewards themselves had identified as a priority. Yet, it is difficult to see this as evidence of greater democracy, rather than simply an inability to mobilise workers over the contracts issue. A commitment to democracy certainly was evident at London Borough in the conduct of internal branch organisation, with relatively frequent meetings of steward committees, featuring lengthy and open discussion. By contrast, at Big Car there was a high degree of central control within the shop steward body, with little scope for intra-organisational discussion (at least, in the formal meetings). Thus, shop steward organisation at London Borough was closer to the 'democracy' end of the spectrum than was the Big Car organisation. On Darlington's typology, this difference should have given London Borough distinct advantages in terms of the ability of workers to challenge management. In reality, though, stewards at Big Car enjoyed significantly greater influence on management decisions and actions than did their counterparts at London Borough. Consequently, this finding runs counter to Darlington's framework, which sees democracy as a key component of workplace union strength, and top-down control as detrimental. Of course, the relative strength of workplace union organisation is affected by many other factors. Notably, union organisation on a car production line might be expected to be more powerful than in local government. But, if technology is the main determinant, then any typology focused on shop steward orientation is undermined. Moreover, a focus on technology cannot adequately explain the difference in the *character* of shop steward organisation in the two case studies: the less democratic organisation was the most combative in terms of day-to-day challenges to managerial prerogatives. Overall, then, the evidence again showed greater complexity than the typology could encompass.

In summary, then, while Darlington's multi-dimensional typology could map some aspects of the evidence, other areas remained problematic. More generally, the difficulties encountered by two key typologies of shop steward behaviour pose questions about the suitability of this approach for dealing with the complexities of workplace relations. This section therefore concludes with a discussion of some of those problems.

The trouble with typologies

The problem with the typologies discussed above is that the evidence from both case studies shows significantly greater variation than any of the models can encompass. It is not simply a matter of variation between different dimensions: the real difficulty is that considerable variation was found *within* individual dimensions. That is, for a given shop steward activity, some aspects appeared at one point on the dimension, while other aspects of the same activity appeared elsewhere on the same dimension. Consequently, it was not possible to place shop steward activity on any dimension with any certainty. One response to this type of difficulty would be to introduce further dimensions, covering more aspects of variation in steward behaviour. The problem with such a response, however, is not only that multiple dimensions greatly complicate the typology but, more importantly, it reduces the typology to a series of ad hoc responses to empirical variety, shifting it increasingly towards a purely descriptive function, and undermining explanation and theorisation.

Consequently, the problem is not simply a matter of insufficiently supple or detailed typology construction. Rather, the problem lies in the method of attempting to understand the social world through the construction of models and ideal types. Although this approach is an advance on narrow empiricism, and attempts to develop explanations beyond simple empirical description (Bhaskar 2008: 27), significant difficulties arise when 'the objects of scientific knowledge are models, ideals of natural order ... objects [that] are artificial constructs' (*ibid*.: 25). Although, in this case, models and typologies are ideals of *social* order, the problem is the same. For Bhaskar, the objects of science are real generative mechanisms, not artificial constructs, and consequently the construction of models and typologies is symptomatic of 'the incompleteness of science' (*ibid*.: 157). Indeed, since the typological approach replaces the study of real generative mechanisms with the study of ideal types, Bhaskar (*ibid*.: 25) terms this approach 'transcendental idealism'. Bhaskar's characterisation of typologies and models as 'conceptual crutches for the tender-minded and ... heuristic devices for the young' (*ibid*.: 156) seems harsh; after all, the models and typologies discussed here have contributed genuine insights. Nevertheless, the preference for description and mid-range theory has been a pervasive problem in industrial relations research, and a barrier to the development of more sophisticated theory (Kelly 1998: 18-21). Consequently, this account will not attempt to construct further (artificial) models or ideal types. Rather, it will seek to identify underlying generative mechanisms, to trace the 'inner connection' (Marx, cited in Callinicos 2014: 73) between causal mechanisms and

observed shop steward activity, and then to reconstruct them in theory (Sayer 1998). Of course, the results still might show symptoms of 'the incompleteness of science'; but it is hoped that sufficient progress will be apparent to vindicate the overall approach.

The foregoing discussion has shown that although typologies can provide some insights into patterns of issue-handling, the observed activity of shop stewards in this study was more complex than these models allow, and varied in ways that did not easily fit their dimensions. Consequently, none could encompass the variety or unexpected combinations found by the present research. Moreover, as essentially heuristic devices, these models cannot offer causal explanations for patterns of steward activity, the determinations of which lie outside the models themselves (Section 2.2). Consequently, the typological approach was not adopted for explaining patterns of bargaining activity in the present research. Instead, explanation was sought in the wider dynamics of the workplace in which steward activity is situated. The final section of this chapter outlines the main components of this approach.

7.4 Shop steward bargaining: dynamics, opportunities and resources

This section returns to an issue left over from the earlier critique of the current standard view of shop stewards. That is, if shop stewards have not shifted their activity in the way that the current standard view claims, what *are* they doing? Shop steward activity has obviously changed significantly since the classic studies, but how can the new patterns of activity be explained? Two things are clear from the preceding discussion. First, shop stewards in this research continued to be significantly involved in efforts to influence management decisions and to restrain managerial prerogatives, in processes that entailed significant bargaining content, in practice if not in formal designation. Second, previous accounts of shop stewards cannot adequately explain the particular patterns of activity found here. Consequently, this section proposes an alternative framework. Discussion starts from the clusters of contestation identified in Section 7.1, and traces the 'inner connections' between those clusters and underlying dynamics of workplace relations. This discussion revisits theoretical issues addressed in Chapter 3; in particular, the structure and dynamics of the employment relationship under capitalism, the effort bargain, and the frontier of control. The section then discusses bargaining opportunities, and bargaining resources,

considered as mediating factors in the expression of underlying dynamics.

Structure, dynamics and interests

This study represents a shift in focus. As noted in Section 3.2, previous accounts of shop steward activity have usually emphasised agency and subjective factors such as 'trade union principles' (Batstone 1977), political commitment (Darlington 2009a; 2009b), workplace traditions (Terry and Edwards 1988), or 'militancy' (Gall 2003a). By contrast, this account emphasises the importance of the structure and dynamics of social relations in the workplace for understanding the activity of shop stewards. Moreover, structure is seen here not simply as limiting or restricting, but crucially as *enabling* (Callinicos 2009). This focus on the structured dynamics of the workplace can offer explanations for findings that were unexpected or even counter-intuitive, such as clusters of contestation around CIPs at Big Car, and variance between stewards' expressed priorities and their observed activity at London Borough. Why would shop stewards at Big Car chose to concentrate their activity around what has been identified as the most unfavourable aspect of lean production? Why were stewards at London Borough so active around service reorganisations, when their expressed priority was the issue of new contracts? Neither of these clusters of contestation seem amenable to explanation purely in terms of agency. By contrast, the approach adopted here can offer explanations that do not rely only on subjective factors.

In this research, clusters of contestation were identified in both case studies around individual representation and casework. Moreover, it is clear from the evidence that the pursuit of individual casework by stewards had important effects in limiting managerial prerogatives to discipline and dismiss workers, and could be used by stewards in efforts to enforce the terms of existing collective agreements and procedures. According to Goodrich's (1975: 20) definition, 'issues of discipline and management' are central to the frontier of control, as are 'the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not to be controlled at all, and the demand to take a hand in controlling' (*ibid*.: 43). Plainly, these were central concerns for shop stewards in their pursuit of individual casework. Therefore, individual representation and casework should be considered an aspect of the frontier of control. That is, far from being a move away from dealing with collective issues, individual casework is often an important part of contemporary shop stewards' efforts to influence collective relations in the workplace. The identification of frontier of control issues in individual casework further undermines accounts that see shop stewards' efforts in this area

as a move away from dealing with collective issues (for instance Charlwood and Forth 2008; Dickens 2012; Dickens and Hall 2003; Kersley *et al.* 2006; McKay and Moore 2007; van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013).

Further clusters of contestation were found around service reorganisations at London Borough, and around CIPs at Big Car. As the empirical evidence showed clearly, both these processes involved management attempts to reorganise work, usually with the intention of intensifying labour. Therefore, both these clusters of contestation should be seen in terms of the effort bargain and attempts by shop stewards to influence its terms. Despite the changed institutional forms in which these processes were situated, the identification of these clusters of contestation as forms of effort bargaining emphasises continuity with shop steward practices dating back through McCarthy (1966), Lupton (1963) and Roy (1952). The effort bargain is a central feature of collective workplace relations (Edwards 1986: 236-246). This evidence therefore further undermines claims that the decline of formal negotiating arrangements means that shop stewards no longer bargain over collective issues (for instance, Brown 2010; Brown and Nash 2008; Charlwood and Angrave 2014; Charlwood and Forth 2009; Heery *et al.* 2004; McIlroy and Daniels 2009; Millward *et al.* 2000, 2006; Terry 2004; van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013).

Establishing that the clusters of shop steward contestation identified by this study centred around the frontier of control and effort bargain is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that these issues remain central features of shop steward activity despite many changes in workplace relations since the period of the classic studies. Secondly, as discussed in Section 7.2, clusters of contestation were treated as demi-regs, which, according to the qualified inductivism adopted here (Section 4.1), indicate the influence of underlying generative mechanisms. As demonstrated in Section 3.1, the effort bargain and frontier of control are consequences of the dynamic of exploitation that runs through the employment relationship. Therefore, the location of clusters of contestation around the effort bargain and frontier of control indicate the influence of the dynamic of exploitation, as an underlying generative mechanism shaping patterns of shop steward activity.

On one level, evidence from this study supports accounts such as Hyman (1975a: 27), which see workplace relations as 'necessarily conflictual'; a view which is common to many radical pluralist and Marxist accounts (for instance, Edwards 1986; 2014; Gall and Hebdon 2008;

Kelly 1998). At the same time, though, the argument presented here builds upon and develops this analysis, by applying it closely and specifically the activity of shop stewards. Rather than, as in most treatments, regarding conflict simply as a general feature of relations between 'employers and employees' (Hyman 1975a: 27), here the argument is not only that workplace relations are inherently (though not solely) conflictual, but that this conflictual character *is reflected in the activity of shop stewards*. This generalisation should be understood in tendential terms, rather than as a prediction of invariate empirical regularity (or constant conjunction; *cf*. Bhaskar 2008). That is, the underlying dynamic of exploitation drives a tendency towards shop steward contestation and bargaining, especially around the effort bargain and frontier of control, which is likely (though not certain) to emerge and re-emerge in actual workplace practices. Since it is not possible to do away with this dynamic under capitalist relations of production, shop steward contestation and bargaining are likely to cluster around the frontier of control and effort bargain, no matter how seemingly unfavourable the management system (Big Car), and even contrary to shop stewards' expressed priorities (London Borough).

The crucial linkage between the structure and dynamics of workplace relations and the agency of shop stewards is provided by the concept of *interests* (Section 3.2). Interests are inscribed into the relationship between capital and labour, managers and workers, in both the definition of bargaining developed in Section 3.2, and as 'structural capacities' (Callinicos 2009: 85-102, 146) consequent upon the exploitative nature of the employment relationship under capitalism. Seen in this way, interests continue to shape the options available to both parties of the employment relationship; moreover, these structural capacities persist despite real and important changes in workforce composition. While subjective factors influence the responses of social actors in relation to structural capacities, agency cannot do away with them. The argument here is that it is through *interests* that structural aspects of the employment relationship have a continuing influence on patterns of shop stewards activity, and on patterns of contestation and bargaining. The defence of a notion of interests presented in Section 3.2 is therefore an important part of the overall argument of this thesis. Moreover, the evidence from the case studies tends to support that account. Structural capacities significantly influenced observed patterns of shop steward activity; for instance, the structural capacities of employers and managers in seeking to increase the intensity of labour and to enforce labour discipline, and the structural capacities of shop stewards to influence the frontier of control and effort bargain by taking

advantage of available bargaining opportunities and resources (see below). By contrast, the 'social construction' approach to interests (Blyton *et al.* 2011; Heery 2011b; Simms and Charlwood 2010; Simms *et al.* 2013) is undermined by the present research; plainly, shop steward activity was enabled by their structural capacities around the frontier of control and effort bargain, rather than restricted by difficulties of interest construction.

So far, the discussion in this section has shown that the clusters of contestation can be explained by the influence of a generative mechanism rooted in the structure of workplace relations; namely, the exploitative employment relationship under capitalism. Exploitation is the common dynamic underlying patterns of shop steward activity in both case studies, and the concept of interests provides the link between this dynamic and the agency of shop stewards in its varied forms. However, the fact that clusters of contestation were different in each case indicates that this explanation requires additional mediating factors. Consequently, the discussion turns next to *bargaining opportunities* and *bargaining resources*. It will be argued that bargaining opportunities and resources are key mediating factors in the development of particular patterns of shop steward contestation and bargaining. Furthermore, different management methods and practices significantly influence the patterns of bargaining opportunities and resources that are available.

Bargaining opportunities

In order for underlying dynamics towards conflict to be expressed in actual episodes of contestation, there must be opportunities for this to occur. The argument here is that contestation tends to cluster in particular areas due to the availability of such opportunities. In relation to the effort bargain, two clusters of contestation stand out, both of which saw significant and unexpected concentrations of shop steward activity; namely, service reorganisations at London Borough, and CIPs at Big Car. In terms of bargaining opportunities, the feature shared by these clusters was that they centred on discontinuities in the production process (Section 3.1). In both cases, discontinuities of production occurred as management attempted to reorganise work, usually (but not necessarily) with the intention of increasing the intensity of labour. That is, as work was reorganised, an old way of working paused, and a new one was instituted. From the point of view of effort, the terms on which the new work organisation was brought in (re)set the effort bargain for a number of workers for the period after the reorganisation; whether the work was assembly tasks on a production line, or administrative procedures in a council office. Consequently,

these discontinuities in production offered opportunities to shop stewards to influence the (re)setting of the effort bargain for a (larger or smaller) group of workers. Therefore, although steward activity around the effort bargain could be observed elsewhere, bargaining over effort clustered significantly around these discontinuities.

This pattern clearly fits the analysis of Lerner and Marquand (1962), who identified discontinuities in production as sites where re-negotiation of the effort bargain took place. Although Lerner and Marquand (*ibid.*) do not use the term effort bargain, the analyses are clearly compatible. That is, not only was effort bargaining clearly present in the two case studies, but a feature of shop steward bargaining identified during the heyday of workplace bargaining could still be identified in the activity of contemporary shop stewards, more than 50 years later. This finding therefore indicates further important continuities with the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards, as opposed to the sharp discontinuity claimed by the current standard view (Section 2.1).

The contention here is that this insight can be generalised. Shop steward contestation and bargaining over effort will show a tendency to cluster around discontinuities in production, because of the opportunities they present for re-setting the effort bargain. Furthermore, the distribution of discontinuities in production will be influenced by particular management practices, which, in turn, will shape the way the tendency is manifested. Consequently, variation in management methods over time and across different industries and workplaces will influence the specific patterns of contestation and bargaining that emerge.

Other bargaining opportunities were identified in relation to the frontier of control. As will be recalled, the frontier of control concerns, for workers, 'the demand not to be controlled disagreeably, the demand not to be controlled at all, and the demand to take a hand in controlling' (Goodrich 1975: 37). The present research confirmed the continuing importance of these issues for contemporary shop stewards. Stewards' workload of individual representation and casework involved a mixture of cases, some of which were narrowly individual and carried no wider implications, but others of which carried consequences (sometimes significant) for wider relations between managers and workforce. Thus, individual representation, under grievance, disciplinary and other procedures, presented shop stewards with opportunities to challenge and restrict managerial prerogatives around issues of labour discipline. These procedures should therefore be considered as bargaining

opportunities over the frontier of control.

Again, this analysis can be generalised. Grievance and disciplinary procedures offer opportunities for shop stewards to contest management decisions around the frontier of control. Consequently, shop steward activity will tend to cluster in this area. As with effort bargaining, particular patterns of bargaining opportunities will reflect management methods and practices, and these will be an important source of variation across employment. In workplaces with a 'centralised' HRM approach (Saundry and Wibberley 2014: 5), as at London Borough, the outcomes of individual cases are more likely to form a more or less secure framework of precedents, with a certain standardisation of rule-making and interpretation. By contrast, where individual casework is left in the hands of local and line management, as at Big Car, there is potentially greater scope for flexible interpretation and discretion (though this scope is likely to vary, dependent upon other workplace conditions and practices – see below). Thus, while the tendency towards bargaining over the frontier of control is common across employment, management practices shape the configuration of bargaining opportunities in any particular workplace, and thereby influence actual patterns of contestation. This is not to say that the availability of bargaining opportunities is the only influence on patterns of shop steward bargaining activity. Nevertheless, available bargaining opportunities form a basic framework within which bargaining processes develop, and their mark is left on the patterns that emerge.

Patterns of bargaining around the frontier of control are also influenced by wider bargaining practices, through their effects on bargaining opportunities. Where, as at Big Car, individual casework is linked through shop steward bargaining to the organisation of work and the effort bargain, or where local management operates any element of 'indulgency pattern' (Gouldner 1954), other opportunities for bargaining over the frontier of control may become available to shop stewards; and, consequently, the relative importance of individual representation may be reduced. By contrast, where, as at London Borough, the scope for effort bargaining is more restricted and frontier of control issues more free-standing relative to the effort bargain, then individual casework is likely to carry greater significance as an opportunity for bargaining over the frontier of control; and, consequently, the importance of individual representation may be heightened, for shop stewards and managers alike. The more that individual procedures are entrenched in a management regime, the greater the prioritisation of individual representation by shop stewards is likely to be. By contrast,

where HR management is less centralised, and where shop stewards are able to maintain a relatively strong framework of established rules, then it may even be possible for individual workers to negotiate for themselves a relaxation of work discipline and intensity (even if this is on a questionable basis, as in some cases at Big Car). Consequently, specific patterns of bargaining opportunities must be understood in the wider context of workplace relations. In particular, shop steward orientation towards particular bargaining opportunities is likely to be influenced by the availability of bargaining resources; to which discussion now turns.

Bargaining resources

The notion of bargaining resources developed from the discussion of sanctions (Sections 2.1 and 3.1). Given the decline of strikes since the era of the classic studies, it was expected that they would figure only slightly, if at all, in the case studies. In fact, work stoppages were not entirely absent: there were a few small-scale examples at Big Car, and the fieldwork at London Borough took place in the context of a national pay campaign that saw strike action. Nevertheless, the overall picture was as expected and, therefore, shop stewards had to rely on other means for pressuring management if they were to achieve bargained outcomes. Consequently, one influence on patterns of shop steward activity was the availability of bargaining resources for contesting management decisions and actions.

The mobilisation of union members can obviously be an important bargaining resource for shop stewards, even when it does not involve strike action. This research underlined that, even when they identify an issue as important, stewards can face serious difficulties in mobilising union members. The campaign by London Borough stewards in opposition to the introduction of new contracts was unable to mobilise members in sufficient numbers to exert enough bargaining leverage to force management to back down over key issues. Drawing firm conclusions about why the stewards were unable to mobilise union members is difficult, because the research focussed on shop steward activity, rather than workers' overall consciousness and organisation. Nevertheless, Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory suggests that an important issue was a lack of perceived *injustice* (*ibid*.: 27-30). Signing the new contracts was voluntary, so workers who saw detriment in the revised terms and conditions generally did not sign up. Those who did sign received a £1000 payment. Either way, a strong feeling of injustice was unlikely to result, and the fundamental starting point of Kelly's model was therefore missing. Subsequently, after the main period of fieldwork had ended, stewards reported a rising level of grievance among workers on the new

contracts, due to widely perceived iniquities in the operation of the PRP component, and the branch initiated a campaign over the appraisal procedure. Thus, the emergence of perceived injustice opened possibilities for mobilisation that were not previously available. This evidence supports Kelly's model. It is notable that the stewards at London Borough did not give up on the issue of new contracts, even though they could not mobilise union members to take collective action. Instead, they made the best use they could of alternative bargaining resources. Even though these were less powerful than, say, a strike might have been, the steward organisation was still able to extract some concessions.

Despite difficulties with mobilisation, and very limited use of work stoppages, this research nevertheless found shop stewards using a wide range of bargaining resources. These resources can be looked at in various ways. Some were familiar from the classic workplace studies; for instance, withdrawal of cooperation, interruptions of production, restriction of output, short-circuiting of management structures, coordinated use of grievance procedures, 'nagging and sulkiness' (Section 3.1). Others were clearly of more recent origin or even entirely unexpected; for instance, expertise in job-timings, expertise in employment rights, sophisticated knowledge of employer policies and procedures, 'deals' over disciplinary outcomes, or coordinated task avoidance of the 'body swerve' variety. Bargaining resources also varied in the degree to which they involved collective organisation and activity by workers. Collective resources included refusing to work faster than a commonly accepted norm, non-cooperation with management requests or initiatives, boycotts of inadequate facilities and management meetings, and the 'body-swerve'. The number and variety of bargaining resources available to stewards, and used by them, significantly undermines the narrow definition of sanctions as 'muscle' (Terry 2010: 281) offered by the current standard view.

As with bargaining opportunities, the specific assemblages of bargaining resources available to stewards reflected management methods. Stewards had developed considerable expertise in the operation of job-timing systems, and/or were adept in the use of grievance, disciplinary and other procedures; and these resources were used by shop stewards in efforts to influence management decisions. Casework expertise appeared higher where such procedures were more thoroughly embedded in management practices (London Borough). Thus, shop stewards had developed effective bargaining resources from aspects of the management systems they faced, and bargaining resources tended to track

management methods.

Once more, this account can be generalised. Underlying dynamics of employment drive contestation around the effort bargain and frontier of control. Bargaining opportunities are significantly patterned by varied management regimes. This process encourages and facilitates the development of bargaining resources appropriate to those opportunities. That is, structured dynamics of workplace relations, mediated by different management systems, continually pose the issue of bargaining resources, and there is therefore a tendency for shop stewards to develop new forms as management methods change.

However, the pattern of bargaining resources in use is less structurally determined than is the pattern of bargaining opportunities; that is, shop stewards agency in relation to new management practices is an important influence on the development and deployment of new bargaining resources. In part, this reflects the distinction between workers' 'structural power' and 'associational power' (Silver 2003; Wright 2000; Section 3.1). Plainly, associational power relies more heavily upon subjective factors than does structural power, even though the latter cannot be utilised without some degree of subjective activity. In developing and deploying bargaining resources, a number of associational factors come into play. For instance, level of trade union experience (Marchington and Armstrong 1983), political orientation (Darlington 2009a; 2009b), and internal organisation of the shop steward body (Brown *et al.* 1978), are all likely to influence the collective learning processes that permit the development and use of new bargaining resources in the repertoire of contestation. Wider union policies can play a role in either encouraging or inhibiting stewards attempts to develop bargaining resources and strategies (Carter and Kline 2015). Not all bargaining resources are novel. Any particular assemblage of bargaining resources may include older forms, such as withdrawal of cooperation or political exchange. Continued use of older forms may reflect continuing features of an industry or workplace, such as differences between car manufacture and local government, but will also reflect subjective factors, such as the long-term strength and continuity of shop steward organisation, and workplace traditions (Terry and Edwards 1988). Bargaining resources may also originate outside the workplace; for instance, in the legal employment rights and quasi-legal regulations that stewards in this study had certainly integrated into their bargaining activity, supporting Heery (2011a). Nevertheless, despite these other influences, evolving management methods shape the options available to shop stewards to a considerable

extent, and encourage the development and use of certain bargaining resources rather than others.

Finally, shop stewards can also make use of a feature of workplace relations that is less obviously a resource for bargaining and contestation; namely, *cooperation*. Cooperation with management over short-term alterations to work organisation were used to secure management indulgence over matters of work discipline. Stewards attempted to influence management decisions by emphasising issues of product quality, and used arguments about standards of public services in efforts to bargain with managers over issues as diverse as outsourcing, workload, work organisation, and grading disputes. Of course, such examples may also reflect traditional craft or occupational pride in manufacturing, or the public service ethos of local government workers and unions (Carter and Kline 2015). Yet, the prevalence of this approach across both case studies suggests stewards were able to gain bargaining leverage by such methods. While many accounts, especially from a radical perspective, see cooperation with management in terms of consent or compromise (Bélanger and Edwards 2007; Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1989), this study supports Marx's insight that cooperation is far more integral to the production process (Section 3.2). This adds a dimension of complexity to workplace relations which is largely unexplored in previous research, and which may well reward further investigation. Certainly, Atzeni's (2010: 27) attempt to link Marx's analysis of cooperation only to worker solidarity is overly simplistic. Rather, shop stewards are able to take advantage of management's dual role, as both controlling labour and coordinating production, to gain concessions on the former by means of pressure on the latter (Section 3.2). Thus, counter-intuitively, elements of cooperation may contribute to the bargaining resources available to shop stewards in dealing with management. This is not to say that cooperation always signifies bargaining. Rather, it is to recognise the complex reality of workplace relations and the unexpected forms that bargaining resources can and do take.

This section has argued that clusters of contestation can be explained as resulting from the combination of two sets of influences. First, the continuing dynamic of exploitation within capitalist relations of employment drives an underlying tendency towards conflict and contestation around the effort bargain and the frontier of control. Shop steward contestation therefore tends to emerge in these areas. Second, management methods

provide a framework of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources, within which contestation can develop, giving rise to particular patterns of activity and clusters of contestation. As management systems change over time and vary across different industries and workplaces, patterns of bargaining opportunities and resources also shift. As a consequence, patterns of shop steward activity change and evolve as contestation and bargaining cluster around available opportunities and resources.

Conclusion

This chapter has considerably advanced the argument of the thesis. First, empirical answers were provided for the study's research questions. Strengths and limitations of the research were discussed and a basis established for generalisation. It was then shown that the research findings strongly supported the critique, developed in Chapter 2, of the current standard view; a view which must therefore be considered significantly undermined. Contrary to that view, this research found considerable evidence of the persistence of shop stewards bargaining, patterned around distinctive clusters of contestation. Next, previous shop steward typologies were re-examined using findings from this research. A number of problems were identified in applying particular typologies to the research findings, and the typological approach in general was found to be problematic. Finally, the chapter developed an alternative framework for interpreting the findings, which returned to themes from the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3; in particular, the structured dynamics of workplace relations, and patterns of bargaining opportunities and resources. This framework built on previous radical and Marxist sociologies of workplace relations, but developed a more detailed analysis of shop steward activity. The benefits of the lengthy detour in Chapter 3, to explore structural aspects of the employment relationship, can now be seen. While this study is based firmly in a significant effort of empirical research, it has also placed considerable emphasis on developing and clarifying conceptual and theoretical issues. A clarified conceptual framework, including defensible concepts of exploitation, conflict and cooperation, interests, effort bargain, and frontier of control, has provided the basis for generalisation from the present findings.

The present account differs from previous analyses in its focus on structural aspects of the employment relationship. Whereas recent accounts have tended to treat conflict (where

they have not ignored it completely) as a general contextual feature or product of agency, this study has traced through the dynamics of conflict to provide an explanation of the detail of observed workplace bargaining processes and the role of shop stewards. Starting from the nature of conflict under capitalist relations of production, as driven by the dynamic of exploitation, this account has been able to provide an explanation of patterns of shop steward bargaining that were not only contrary to the current standard view, but that also ran counter to the expectations of the research and even to the priorities of shop stewards themselves. This underlines the importance, especially, of the notion of interests; the key conceptual link between structure and agency, which permits the construction of non-deterministic explanations linking the structure of workplace relations to patterns of contestation and bargaining among shop stewards. These findings are generaliseable not in the sense of claiming to present a description of what all shop stewards do. Rather, this research has developed a general conceptual framework which can be used to explain the activity of shop stewards observed in this research, and which, because it is based in the underlying dynamics of workplace relations, suggests that similar processes and activities are likely to be found elsewhere, driven by those same underlying dynamics of exploitation within the employment relationship.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This research set out to answer a basic question: What do shop stewards do? Answering this question required new empirical evidence, but it was also necessary to address conceptual and theoretical problems in previous accounts, because explanation in social science requires not just evidence but also the ordering and interpretation of evidence. Consequently, this research started from a critique of what has been termed the current standard view of shop stewards. Fresh research was then designed and carried out, which generated considerable empirical evidence and insights into the activity of contemporary shop stewards. The findings of this research strongly supported the conceptual and methodological critique of the current standard view presented in Section 2.1. Therefore, an alternative conceptual framework was developed, building upon Marxist-influenced sociologies of workplace relations. Now, a number of conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions will be set out over the remaining pages, and can be considered the main contributions to knowledge of the present research.

In summary, the main contributions of this thesis are: a vindication of detailed case study research for understanding workplace relations; a demonstration of the problematic nature of the current standard view of shop stewards; a conceptually clarified definition of bargaining; a framework for understanding patterns of bargaining through the assessment of bargaining opportunities and resources; an outline proposal for further research; and a theoretical framework for understanding shop stewards that links workplace bargaining to underlying workplace dynamics more securely than has been done previously. The remainder of the chapter will follow this structure, outlining these contributions in turn. Since this chapter contains a summary of the main arguments put forward in the thesis, there is no need to repeat all the references already provided; therefore, apart from a few specific points, previous discussions will be indicated by referring to earlier sections of this dissertation.

The research methods and design adopted for this study were modelled on workplace studies of the classic period of industrial relations research (Sections 2.2 and 4.3), in the belief that such an approach could again produce a depth and richness of evidence that is

not available through other means. This belief proved well founded. Lengthy and intimate acquaintance with the daily activities of shop stewards generated evidence that revealed far greater variety and complexity than can be captured by large-scale surveys, or even by qualitative research based on interview methods. What the case study design lacked in statistical representativeness was more than made up for by the detailed exploration of shop steward activity. Overall, this study demonstrates that ethnography remains a powerful tool for industrial relations research, if an under-used one, and strongly endorses Tope *et al.*'s (2005) advocacy of 'the benefits of being there'. Furthermore, the diary-based methods developed for this research also proved highly beneficial, giving access to areas of shop steward activity that would otherwise have remained hidden due to problems of access and the limitations of single-researcher fieldwork (Section 4.3). Although diary-based research presents challenges for both researchers and participants, it offers considerable advantages for carrying out detailed workplace research in an era when access is often difficult to secure. The revival of detailed workplace study and development of diary-based methods therefore represent genuine methodological contributions from this research.

This research also underlines the benefits of small-N case studies (Section 4.2). The utility of findings from the present research for supporting conceptual critique shows that such studies are fully capable of generating theoretically significant findings. Narrowly empiricist critiques of small-N studies, like McGovern's (2014b), jeopardise such theoretical development through adherence to a misplaced notion of scientific rigour (Bhaskar 2008; Section 4.1). At the same time, though, this research certainly benefitted from the selection of two contrasting case studies; for instance, through the identification of similar patterns of shop steward activity in very different surroundings (supporting the arguments of Rueschemeyer 2003). Overall, then, while the problems of generalising from small-N studies should not be underestimated, neither should the theoretical benefits of in-depth encounters with workplace activity.

Empirically, this study found considerable evidence of shop stewards bargaining with managers, and dealing with collective issues. To recap, the current standard view claims that shop steward activity has shifted from negotiation (seen as joint regulation) to consultation (seen as a form of unilateral management decision making), and from dealing with collective issues to individual casework (Section 2.1). Yet, not only has this thesis identified the presence of important bargaining processes within arrangements formally

designated as 'consultation', it also found bargaining in workplace processes that are usually seen as entirely separate from collective arrangements; for instance, in grievance and disciplinary procedures, and even in the CIP processes at the heart of lean production. Consequently, evidence from this study significantly undermines the claims and conceptual framework of the current standard view of shop stewards.

Rather than a clear distinction between negotiation and consultation, this research found considerable overlap. Far from being a site of unilateral management decision-making, consultation frequently resulted in outcomes that were modified as a result of shop steward activity. Instead of a clear separation between collective issues and individual representation, the research found complex inter-weaving. Stewards pursued individual cases using collective means, and collective issues through individual casework. By demonstrating that formally designated 'consultation' processes and individual casework, in practice, often entail genuine bargaining, these findings contribute important new insights into the activities of shop stewards, with implications for wider research. In particular, the findings of this study present a considerable challenge to the WERS framework, which features a strong assumption that negotiation and consultation are distinct forms. Consequently, given the wide currency of the WERS account, the findings of this study have potentially significant implications for wider industrial relations research.

By contrast, elements of the workplace bargainer view of shop stewards (Section 2.2) proved more robust. While the classic studies no longer provide an accurate account of current shop steward activity, insights from those studies remain useful for understanding important aspects of workplace contestation and bargaining. In particular, issues around the effort bargain and frontier of control continue to be central concerns of shop stewards, despite significant changes in the context in which stewards operate. Moreover, a number of commentators have suspected that shop stewards might have responded to changing circumstances by developing new ways of contesting management decisions (e.g. Edwards 2010; Edwards et al. 1995; Hyman 1997). The findings of this study support these intuitions. Detailed evidence about the day-to-day activity of contemporary shop stewards has indeed permitted the identification of ways in which shop stewards have adapted, and new forms of contestation and bargaining that stewards have developed. However, the identification of these new forms also required the development of a conceptual framework for understanding these new practices; to which discussion turns next.

Central to the conceptual framework of this research is the introduction of a clear definition of bargaining to the study of workplace relations, something missing in previous accounts (Section 3.2). This definition proved extremely useful. By conceptualising bargaining in terms of outcomes influenced by both parties, it became possible to identify bargaining content within a variety of workplace processes, whether formally designated as negotiation or consultation (or neither), whether collective or individual, formal or informal, open or hidden. This definition also provided a conceptual basis for rejecting the hierarchy of bargaining forms proposed by the current standard view (Section 2.1). In one sense, this research supports the argument of Hyman (1997: 316) that the distinction between negotiation and consultation has become 'blurred'. However, the conclusions of this research go further, and cast doubt on whether negotiation and consultation were ever in reality sharply separated. Instead, this research proposed a continuum view of workplace bargaining, based on variation in the degree to which management decisions and outcomes are influenced by, or modified as a result of, the activities of shop stewards. An important advantage of this definition is that whereas the current standard view treats bargaining content on the basis of *a priori* definitions, the approach adopted here treats the extent of bargaining (if any) as an empirical matter.

By the same token, the new definition also sets out the conditions under which it can be determined that *no* bargaining is present; that is, where outcomes result from the actions of only one party. Thus, this definition is not a catch-all that sees bargaining in every workplace interaction. By making the attribution of bargaining content a matter for empirical investigation, with variation along a continuum, the definition offers a framework for comparing bargaining forms and bargaining content over time, and across different sectors of employment and workplaces. The definition of bargaining developed in this thesis is therefore potentially applicable across a range of research settings, including non-union contexts, further underlining the benefits of situating analysis in terms of social dynamics rather than institutional forms.

This thesis also developed a framework for grasping patterns of workplace contestation and bargaining, based on the dual categories of bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources. While both these terms have been used before (Section 3.1), this research has developed and clarified previous analysis. It was shown that the clusters of contestation

identified by the fieldwork were significantly shaped by the availability to shop stewards of bargaining opportunities and resources. Whereas shop stewards in the classic studies had the strike weapon at their disposal, this research has demonstrated the capacity of stewards to develop alternative bargaining resources from materials found in contemporary workplace relations and management practices. The range of bargaining resources deployed by shop stewards, and their success in using them to secure modifications to management decisions, demonstrate that the use of traditional economic sanctions in the form of work stoppages – Terry's 'muscle' – cannot be taken as the *sine qua non* of workplace bargaining. Whereas the current standard view uses the absence of shop steward-led strikes to deny the presence of negotiation *by definition* (Section 2.1), this research has shown that bargaining can and does take place utilising a considerable variety of bargaining resources. Furthermore, the research identified a tendency for contestation and bargaining to cluster where bargaining resources were available.

Similar considerations were also applied to bargaining opportunities. This research identified a tendency for shop steward contestation to cluster where opportunities were available to challenge management decision-making. In relation to the effort bargain, contestation tended to cluster around discontinuities in production, which presented opportunities to reset the effort bargain; a pattern first noted by Lerner and Marquand (1962) more than 50 years ago. Discontinuities of production will be found across employment, and therefore it is likely that similar clusters will be found elsewhere. Other bargaining opportunities are of more recent origin. For instance, formal management procedures for enforcing labour discipline are now commonplace, and therefore figure prominently in shop steward contestation through individual representation. Moreover, the importance of individual representation for shop stewards is likely to be heightened where management adopt 'centralised' HRM practices (Saundry and Wibberley 2014: 5). By contrast, the importance of formal casework can be reduced where stewards have other means for influencing managers; for instance, where bargaining over work organisation provides stewards with additional resources for dealing with individual representation (Section 6.3). The general conclusion, here, is that as management methods change, so too do the assemblages of bargaining opportunities and resources available to shop stewards, leading to shifting patterns of contestation and bargaining.

This approach to mapping patterns of shop steward activity contrasts with the approach of

classic studies such as Batstone *et al.* (1977, 1978). Rather than focussing on features of the stewards themselves – often subjective ones, such as attachment to 'union principles' (Section 2.2) – this research starts from an examination of actual bargaining processes, analysed in terms of opportunities and resources. Thus, in the relation to the two groups of shop stewards investigated by Batstone *et al.* (1977), it is plausible that the bargaining opportunities and resources available to stewards among newly organised white collar workers were different from those available to stewards among strongly organised shopfloor production workers, and that these differences might go some way to explaining the different approaches of stewards in each area. Thus, the distinction between bargaining opportunities and resources offers a potentially useful framework for conceptualising variation in bargaining forms and practices.

In considering bargaining opportunities and bargaining resources, useful distinctions can be made between collective and individual on two levels: the *nature of the issue*, and the *means by which it is pursued*. That is, individual issues may be pursued by individual means (as expected from recent literature; Section 2.1); or, alternatively, individual issues may be pursued by collective means (as noted by Kelly 1998: 136). Likewise, collective issues may be pursued by collective means (as long established; Section 2.2), or by individual means (through the use of grievance and disciplinary procedures). The identification by this study of this fourth configuration – collective issues pursued by individual means – completes the permutations of collective and individual, and represents a further contribution of the present research.

The framework outlined so far provides conceptual bases both for identifying workplace bargaining processes and for grasping variation in their forms. However, given the wide variation of employment and the inevitable limitations of case study research, the account presented here must be considered incomplete until further research has been conducted. Future research might usefully develop in three directions. First, more case studies, of a broadly similar type to those conducted here, could be used to assess the framework developed above, and to identify aspects that might benefit from further exploration and development. For instance, a wider variety of workplaces might be investigated to assess the presence (or otherwise) of the types of bargaining processes identified here, and/or to examine variation in bargaining opportunities and resources. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the findings of this research indicate a need for quantitative research designed

to investigate the extent to which the types of bargaining practices identified here can be found more widely across employment. While the present research provides theoretical grounds for expecting forms of shop steward bargaining to occur more widely, only empirical investigation can confirm or refute such claims.

A third potential direction for future research is more methodological in nature; namely, the further rehabilitation of detailed workplace studies. If nothing else, this research has shown that these methods have an enormous and currently largely untapped potential for investigating workplace relations and processes. Industrial relations and related research would undoubtedly benefit from the wider deployment of such methods. Furthermore, this thesis has mounted a robust defence of small-N studies (Section 4.2). This is not to conclude, though, that any and all case studies are capable of generating theoretically significant results. The present research combined detailed empirical investigation within a small-N case study design, together with conceptual critique and clarification, and made significant use of theoretically 'foreshadowed problems' (Section 4.1). The success of this study therefore underlines the importance of *theoretically informed* research, and supports arguments made above for the rejection of grounded theory (Section 4.1). This research endorses both O'Reilly's (2012: 29) 'iterative-inductive' approach, and Bhaskar's (2008: 214-228) more philosophical treatment of induction. Thus, while this research strongly vindicates the renewal of detailed workplace study, at the same time it encourages a greater attention to theoretical clarification than is often the case in industrial relations.

Theoretically, this research started from the centrality of the employment relationship, *contra* recent critiques (e.g. Ackers 2014; Section 3.1). Like much recent industrial relations scholarship, the account presented here views the employment relationship as a continuing source of conflict and contestation workplace relations. However, while an appreciation of the conflictual nature employment is common to many accounts of industrial relations (Section 3.2), it is usually treated as a contextual feature, the backdrop against which the action of workplace relations takes place. This study goes further, tracing the 'inner connection[s]' (Marx, cited in Callinicos 2014: 73) that link the underlying dynamic of exploitation, through a number of intermediate determinations, to particular patterns of day-to-day shop steward contestation and bargaining. That is, in this account, exploitation and conflict are not present simply as poorly defined and 'ahistorical' (Howell 2005: 12) background. Rather, the theoretical framework presented in this thesis offers a way to link

underlying dynamics to specific patterns and forms of contestation, in a non-deterministic way that is sensitive to historical and contextual variation.

Thus, key drivers of workplace conflict and contestation remain rooted in the exploitation of labour in capitalist employment, while the forms in which they find expression have altered considerably. Returning to the metaphor used in the conclusion of Chapter 1, shop stewards no longer have in their hands the big stick of the strike weapon when dealing with management. Instead, they have looked around for alternative weapons in the new terrain of workplace relations, and have found small rocks which they can pick up and throw from a safe distance. This metaphor encapsulates the shift in bargaining resources that has taken place over the last 30 years or so – a shift which has important implications for bargaining outcomes. The relative weakness of contemporary shop steward bargaining resources, compared with the sectional strikes of previous eras, means that while stewards are able to restrict managerial prerogatives and impede management initiatives, they are rarely able to stop them in their tracks. As a result, managers have been able gradually to encroach on the effort bargain and the frontier of control, even in relatively strongly unionised workplaces such as the ones investigated here. Unless or until shop stewards (re)gain access to more effective bargaining resources, this trend is likely to continue.

The theoretically robust account developed in Chapter 3 rooted the dynamics of workplace relations in the underlying dynamics of the employment relationship, to provide analytical grounds for generalising from the present research. A crucial part of that account was the notion of interests; a concept that has for too long been marginalised in industrial relations research (Section 3.2). The problem with accounts that dispense with a notion of interests, or that reduce interests to a more or less contingent product of indeterminate social construction (e.g. Blyton *et al.* 2011; Heery 2011b; Simms and Charlwood 2010; Simms *et al.* 2013), is that explanations for the behaviour of social actors in any particular case are limited to that specific context, and cannot be generalised across other cases and contexts by reference to social structure. That is, without interests consequent upon social structure, each case must be explained in its own terms; a stance which is corrosive of any overall project of social scientific explanation. The importance of reinstating a concept of interests, especially when seen as *structural capacities*, is that it provides a non-deterministic link between social structure and agency, which therefore permits the connection of individual cases into general theoretical accounts.

Consequently, while agency is essential to the development of any particular bargaining practices, this account gives a central explanatory role to *structure* in driving the dynamic towards conflict and contestation that is crucial for understanding workplace relations, bargaining processes, and the role of shop stewards. That is, the nature of the employment relationship is central to understanding the structured dynamics of workplace relations. Although the present study has argued for restoring cooperation as an aspect of workplace relations, exploitation in capitalist employment drives a powerful dynamic towards conflict at work. Therefore, inasmuch as this relationship is found throughout employment in capitalism, then similar dynamics will be present across workplaces far beyond the ones investigated here.

In general terms, the argument presented here builds on accounts that stress conflict within employment relations, but has extended that analysis theoretically and empirically to look in detail at the role of contemporary shop stewards. This research has shown that the underlying dynamic of exploitation within the employment relationship continues to influence the activity of shop stewards, leading to clear elements of continuity with earlier periods; in particular, the centrality of the effort bargain and frontier of control to shop steward contestation and bargaining. Thus, exploitation continues to be the centre of gravity around which the role of the shop steward orbits. The transformation of the context in which shop stewards operate has not done away with this underlying reality. At the same time, as the methods by which managers attempt to influence the effort bargain and the frontier of control change and develop, so the patterns of available bargaining opportunities and resources shift, in turn shaping actual shop steward activity in particular observable ways. This re-theorisation of links between the dynamics of workplace relations and actual patterns of shop steward activity, via the mediation of specific combinations of bargaining opportunities and resources, constitutes the main theoretical contribution of the present research.

In practice, actual relations within any workplace comprise a mix of conflict, contestation, cooperation, resistance, endurance, coping – and bargaining. Since capitalist employment cannot do away with the dynamic of exploitation, it is likely that shop stewards will continue to be implicated in conflict, contestation, and bargaining between labour and capital, workers and management, within workplace relations; even though the forms in which

these are played out have changed significantly, and will continue to do so. It was assumed in Chapter 1 that shop stewards remain 'intelligent trade unionists' (Hyman 1997: 318), and that the experience of capitalist employment continues to be a 'life-long wrestling match with the experience of wage-labour' (Connell 1983: 31). This research has strongly vindicated those assumptions, and the activities of shop stewards documented here bear the mark of both. Shop stewards continue to be involved in attempts to influence management decisions, in the interests of the workers they represent, using whatever means are available, and as such can still be said to be significantly engaged in workplace bargaining. That, at least as far as this research is concerned, is what shop stewards do.

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Appendix 1: Doing fieldwork – a personal account

From the outset, an important intention of this research project was to reinstate the voices of shop stewards into academic debates about workplace union organisation; very much as a response to their effective sidelining in research based on management surveys. It was therefore a priority of the fieldwork to spend a good deal of time with stewards, getting to know them, the issues they were dealing with, their successes, setbacks, hopes, plans and frustrations. One of the advantages I had in establishing good field relations was my own previous experience as a workplace union rep (in the newspaper printing industry), and as a tutor in trade union education – running courses for shop stewards and safety reps. This background meant that I had a good deal of empathy with the stewards, and usually at least some understanding the issues they were dealing with. Most participants in the study got to know about my background, and this generally gave them a degree of confidence that I would understand both their aspirations and their difficulties; which indeed I did. In turn, confidence that they were talking to a sympathetic listener meant that stewards opened up about what they were doing to an extent that might well not have been possible with a younger and less TU-experienced researcher. As one of the convenors at Big Car put it when introducing me to a group of stewards, 'He's one of us.' Clearly, my relative 'insider' status assisted the research significantly in gaining the confidence of the stewards, thereby enhancing the depth and richness of the data gathered (for a discussion of insider/outsider status issues, see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 86-89).

Of course, my previous experience as a workplace union rep, and my basic sympathy with what the stewards were trying to do, meant that I had to guard against bias; both in what I recorded and how I interpreted it. Since I was acutely aware of this danger, I adopted three main strategies to guard against it. First, I continually reminded myself of the prominent warnings in the ethnographic literature. I was aware that the experience of ethnographic fieldwork can lead to researchers, especially new researchers, feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data that presents itself before them; the head-spinning shock of total immersion into a new social environment. Necessarily, choices must be made about what to record, and the researcher making those choices may well be disorientated, bemused, or just plain scared. It is not difficult to imagine that in such circumstances a new researcher might fall back on habitual or common sense interpretations, and fit observations into a pre-existing framework, rather than develop fresh insights. That is, disorientation could easily

open the door to bias. Therefore the first strategy I adopted to avoid this difficulty was to carry with me at all times a copy of the research questions, and to read them often, especially in moments of uncertainty, doubt, or confusion. This simple technique contributed significantly to steadying my view of the field, reinforcing the explicit framework of the study, and reducing implicit assumptions in my recording of events.

Second, I had to deal with the process of writing up full fieldnotes from brief jottings made in the field; a well known feature of ethnographic practice. At the end of each day, I would sit in my room (or on a train heading home) and go over what notes I had, expanding them into a fuller account. Often, parts of the notes would already be quite complete: during quiet periods in the union office I would take the opportunity to expand my notes on the day's events. Usually, though, much of the day's notes would be in the form of brief sketches and comments, even single words or short phrases from shop stewards' speech (I tried especially hard to record the latter, leaving contextual details to be filled in later). Of course, in reconstructing the events of the day, it was possible that bias might creep in as I wrote about the stewards who I generally liked a great deal and sympathised with to a considerable extent. Here, I adopted a simple strategy to avoid bias. I imagined as I wrote that someone was sitting behind me, looking over my shoulder and reading the account as I worked. I asked myself: Would this anonymous observer recognise my description? Would they agree that it was a fair account? Would they think I had left some things out, or embellished others? The effect of this strategy was to promote balance in my fieldnotes. Where my own personal or intellectual inclinations might have highlighted a particular aspect of a certain event – say, the success of a steward in defeating a manager's plan – the figure behind me made sure that my record did not omit other features – perhaps, the disappointment of the steward that greater progress had not been made, the wistful comment that this was the first success this year, or the concessions made on another issue. The introduction of this third party, the sceptical observer, was a deliberate strategy designed to keep my account honest, and looking back, I am confident that they would endorse my efforts at avoiding bias.

Third, I recognised from the outset that I would need to guard against becoming too much 'at home' in the fieldwork setting (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 90). Certainly, there were times when this danger appeared. In particular, since I was a very experienced former union rep, there were occasions when stewards facing difficulties asked for my opinion or

advice. However, I was keen not to influence stewards' actions, since the aim of the research was to investigate what stewards *were* doing, not what they *might* do. Therefore, my standard response to such enquiries was to adopt a thoughtful countenance and comment sympathetically, 'Hmmm, that's a tricky one', or something similarly non-committal. While other researchers might legitimately adopt other strategies, it was crucially important for this research that I observed stewards' own decision-making processes. For the same reason, on a few occasions when stewards adopted an approach to a problem that seemed to me a poor option or tactical mistake, it was important that I said nothing, passed no comment, but rather observed and recorded, and explored with the steward their reasons and motivation for doing what they did. In this way, I was able to maintain focus on what stewards were doing, and how they understood their actions, adding further richness to the data by ensuring the inclusion of the full range of steward activities; even ones I personally disagreed with. Overall, the range of findings, and the depth and richness of data from the fieldwork, suggest that the strategies adopted to avoid bias were effective.

Ethnographic field work, though, combines intellectual challenges with numerous others; not least the physical and logistical difficulties of being in the field for extended periods, and potential barriers to becoming acquainted with the stewards and their work. During the first period of fieldwork, at London Borough, getting to know the stewards was made difficult because of council management's decision to ban me from all their premises except the union office. Here, contact with the stewards was limited to attendance at stewards' committee meetings, shadowing convenors during their facility time in the office, and brief meetings with stewards for diary-interviews, which usually took place during lunch breaks or immediately after work. Stewards' committee meetings were long and tiring for this observer. Although I had participated in many meetings of this type during my time as a union activist, I was surprised how much more concentration was needed to make fieldnotes for two or three hours. Nevertheless, the process was easy to organise. Stewards would gather – between five and twenty in number – and I would sit at the back, tapping quietly on my iPad. Usually, by the end of the meeting I was too tired to engage in much discussion with stewards, and after an exchange of pleasantries, or making arrangements for further meetings, I would head home to write up my notes.

Days (or half-days) spent shadowing convenors were generally easier work. I would arrive at

the office at the agreed time and usually sit with the union rep as they worked at their desk. We would chat about what they were doing. I would listen to phone-calls, or sit in on discussions with visiting union members. Sometimes convenors would go through their email inbox, explaining the issues they were currently dealing with. Most were happy to do this, but some were more reluctant. One, in particular, said he was keen to participate in the research, but proved impossible to pin down to a definite time and date. Ha asked me what other convenors were doing and telling me, so I gave a few examples; phone calls, talking over issues, looking at emails, etc.. A few days later, this convenor approached me enthusiastically, saying that he would like to fix a date for us to meet, adding that he had tidied up his email inbox in preparation. My heart sank. This rep had re-constructed an important part of the evidence to comply with some implicit understanding of what he *ought* to be doing, rather than letting me see what he was *actually* doing. Fortunately, by this time I had secured enough participation from other convenors that I could manage without this offer. I thanked him and explained that I already had enough participants. Ethnographers understand the problem of research subjects changing their behaviour due to the presence of an observer, and my prior reading had alerted me to these difficulties; yet, this significant early example underlined the importance of checking as far as I could for other instances. Fortunately, this problem arose only rarely during the study, and generally in much smaller examples.

The lack of access for workplace observation at London Borough significantly increased the importance of the diary:diary-interview component of the research design. This aspect also turned out to be by far the most demanding, physically and logistically, intellectually and emotionally. Workplaces were scattered around the borough, which meant a good deal of travelling was required to meet up with stewards for diary-interviews. A lot of time and money was spent on London transport, going back and forth from my home, and travelling around within the borough. Much time was spent sitting with stewards in coffee shops, sandwich bars, cafes, pubs, public squares, parks, libraries, or just walking the streets. One steward insisted that I sat with her over lunch in the Town Hall staff canteen, even though I was banned from the premises: fortunately, no one spotted me. The other major difficulty with diary-interviews at London Borough was simply making arrangements to meet the stewards. The main form of communication between myself and the stewards was email. Needless to say, for me, emails requesting updates and asking for a time to meet were among the most important I had ever sent. Maintaining contact with stewards was of the

highest priority for the success of my PhD. Of course, for the stewards, my emails were just one more among the tidal wave of electronic communications that make up a large part of the working day of most local government workers. Why should my email be a priority? During the fieldwork at London Borough, I would often spend days in anguish, waiting for a reply from one steward or another. It was excruciating. A typical week might involve one or two committee meetings, half a day with a convenor, a couple of diary-interviews, the necessary travelling, and lots of worrying about the stewards I had not heard from for days or weeks. This continually broken pattern of contact with stewards made it very difficult to establish a routine, which in turn led to delays in other parts of the PhD process; reading slowed and drafting thesis chapters proved impossible. Nevertheless, as the fieldwork progressed, I was increasingly sure that my efforts were worth it.

Despite the frustrations of access, and difficulties maintaining the diary:diary-interview process, I finished the first period of fieldwork feeling that I had succeeded in gaining a good deal of genuine close insight into the day-to-day activities of the shop stewards at London Borough. At Big Car, though, the intimacy of my contact with shop stewards was at an altogether higher level. Once access was agreed, plant management were helpful and cooperative on the occasions when I needed to approach them, and by and large I was simply left to get on with it. As a result, the data gathered was even more rich and detailed than the already impressive results from London Borough.

Within a few days of arriving at Big Car, it was obvious to me that this fieldwork would be rather different from London Borough. Since I had been granted access to the workplace, I planned to spend whole days on site. The Big Car plant is located too far from where I live for reasonable daily commuting, so I had to spend time each week away from home. I travelled out from London on Monday evenings and, having found cheap digs a couple of miles from the plant, arrived at the factory on Tuesday morning. To start with, I was on site Tuesday and Wednesday and travelled back home on Wednesday evening. Quite soon, however, I decided to stay for Thursday as well. Partly, this was because I discovered that meetings between shop stewards and production managers often took place on Thursdays. More significantly, though, the generous access which had been granted provided an opportunity to really immerse myself in the life of the stewards' organisation within the factory. It seemed too good to miss, and I decided not to miss it. Vicki Smith (2014) has emphasised the importance of opportunism in the conduct of qualitative research, in the

sense of researchers having an awareness that unexpected opportunities might arise during the course of fieldwork, and of nurturing a willingness to adjust the research design should an opportunity arise. This describes very well the situation which greeted me at Big Car, and within a month of arriving I had moved to spending three days a week on site.

At the time of the research, the plant was in operation four days each week, the union having agreed to a reorganisation of working hours the previous year. Consequently, attendance at the site for three days at a time gave me access to the bulk of the working week during the research period. The plant shut down for one week at spring bank holiday, and for three weeks in August. I also missed one week for personal reasons. The rest of the time I was on site, except for Mondays and occasional days off to attend research seminars and similar. Spending three full days a week at the plant inevitably meant that I would accumulate significantly more research data from Big Car than I had collected from London Borough, thereby introducing an imbalance between the two case studies (Section 4.4). Nevertheless, I decided this would not overly skew the project, because I was confident I had gathered enough data from London Borough to enable proper analysis and conclusions.

One obvious difference from the fieldwork at London Borough was the level of cooperation received from managers at Big Car. Thankfully, the fact that my initial access to the plant had been through the support of senior union reps did not seem a barrier to my establishing good relations with managers. Although there were a few raised eyebrows to start with, and some caution, these managers were used to dealing with union people, and held no great fear when encountering a new variety: the union researcher. Furthermore, when introduced to managers, I made sure to emphasise that I was from a Business School, not a union, and that the research was not policy-based but academic: 'I'm just here to find out what shop stewards do these days', was my general approach. I also emphasised the importance of trust and confidentiality in the research, and reassured them that nothing they said to me would be passed to the union – or vice versa. I also emphasised that this applied to everyone taking part, including between the unions reps themselves. 'For instance', I would say, 'There might be differences of opinion on some issues between different stewards or between stewards and convenors…', and I was duty-bound not to repeat those comments, either. Interestingly, this last argument always seemed to have a reassuring effect on managers. It was not possible to tell if this was because they were aware themselves of differences between various union reps, or because they simply understood from their

experience as managers that differences of opinion within an organisation are commonplace. But whatever the reason, the managers I dealt with quickly accepted my presence, and were generally forthcoming about their work and their dealings with stewards. One final strategy for building good field relations with managers at Big Car was to ask about the factory and the organisation of production – a prodigious feat of coordination, which managers were justifiably proud of and which they liked to talk about. Altogether, the combination of enthusiasm from union reps, and acceptance from managers, meant that I quickly settled in to the second period of fieldwork.

My daily routine at Big Car varied little. I would arrive at the main reception of the very large site around 8.15am, having sent a text message to one of the senior stewards a few minutes earlier. I would sign the visitor's book and sit and wait for the steward to come and pick me up; as a visitor, plant safety rules prevented me from walking around the site unaccompanied. Sitting in reception every morning, I watched the looped safety video many times. When the senior steward arrived, we would then set off back to the main union office. This involved leaving the reception block and walking a considerable distance, first across a large open space, before climbing a long flight of industrial stairs, entering a huge shed, and walking for another five minutes through the main stores, to arrive at the union office some ten minutes or so after leaving reception. The day shift started work at 7am, so by the time I got there, the senior stewards had a good idea about overnight events, latest developments of any ongoing issues, and their schedule for the rest of day. Thus, the morning walk to the union office became one of my main sources of general information and background; a kind of orientation and update session. Furthermore, as I got to know the senior stewards, the morning walk gave them a chance to talk outside of the union office, giving me insights into their own personal views and thoughts.

Once in the union office, I would take out my iPad and put on my safety boots, say hello to whichever union reps were around, sort out cups of tea and coffee, and then settle down to see what the day would bring. The main union office was situated within a huge stores area, but immediately adjacent to General Assembly and the main production area. The office was of fairly basic construction – similar to a portakabin unit – and perched up another flight of industrial stairs, on top of a toilet block. There was a lesser-used office, nick-named 'the boardroom', where a long table was available for meetings in a room adorned with union banners, posters, photographs and other union memorabilia. Most of the diary-interviews

were conducted in here. The main union office was next door. A door opened into an office area of the type commonly found in industrial settings: worn carpet, two or three battered desks, filing cabinets that had seen better days, and computers in a similar condition. This first area was used by senior shop stewards and saw a lot of traffic, with members, stewards, and sometimes managers coming and going frequently. Further inside, doors led to two more offices; one with desks for the deputy convenors, and beyond that the convenor's office. These offices had windows all round, so the convenors could be seen from without, but this arrangement gave them some seclusion from the often noisy comings and goings in the senior stewards' area. Senior stewards in other production areas had their own offices, but the presence of the convenors meant that this office saw interactions over plant-wide as well as local issues. As a site for gaining insight into the overall range of steward activity, it could hardly have been better.

During the fieldwork I spent a lot of time sitting in the senior stewards' area, observing the comings and goings, and chatting with whoever was around. This space was an important point of contact for stewards coming up from the GA assembly line with problems that required advice or the intervention of a senior steward. Stewards would also come up from time to time for a general chat; for instance, if there was a delay in production. Even stewards who had not been seen all week would come up to the office every Thursday to drop off money from the weekly lottery competition – run by the union to raise funds, provide entertainment for members, and to give the union a profile as a social organisation rather than just a narrow work-related one. Consequently, I had opportunities to chat with GA stewards – most of whom were keeping diaries – on at least a weekly basis, and often much more frequently, especially if they were dealing with a difficult issue.

Despite initial concern on my part that the view from the senior stewards' office might give a distorted picture of the activities of the shopfloor stewards, it actually turned out to be a good place from which to gain a wider view of the activities of the stewards. The restrictions on my movements due to my visitor status would have made it quite difficult for me to spend time on the shopfloor with the working stewards, besides which, stewards on the line were pretty much tied to their work station as a result of work intensification over recent years, making it much harder for them to come and go. Given these constraints, shadowing senior stewards meant that I saw the issues that stewards brought 'upstairs', and I could accompany the senior stewards around the shopfloor as they did their daily rounds, visiting

stewards, members and managers around the plant. Combining this approach with the stewards' diaries and diary-interviews gave me good insight into the general activities of ordinary stewards on the line. I also had access to meetings of shop committees, the plant shop stewards' committee, and meetings between stewards and managers of various types. Of course, this level of access to the work of shop stewards and their organisation, and to union-management relations was a genuine contrast to the fieldwork at London Borough, and produced some highly valuable findings.

The other striking difference with the experience of fieldwork at London Borough was the relative ease with which the diary:diary-interview method could be put into operation. In contrast to London Borough, there was little difficulty keeping in contact with the stewards who had diaries; whereas, at London borough, stewards were an email away, here, they were on the premises. I regularly saw stewards around the plant, and was able to have numerous conversations apart from the slightly more formal diary-interview meetings. One consequence of this was that the drop-out rate of diarists at Big Car was much lower than it had been at London Borough; a feature that might be born in mind by other researchers considering such methods. In this case study, the 'benefits of being there' (Tope *et al*. 2005) included not only the advantages of direct observation, but also improvements in the performance of non-observational methods. Indeed, my experience at Big Car makes it difficult to think of any significant disadvantages of this type of research for investigating workplace relations – apart from the unavoidable demands on researchers' time and effort.

At the end of each period of fieldwork, I had to negotiate the final obstacle that all ethnographers face: leaving (see discussion in Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 94-96). In each case study, some contact was maintained for a time after the main fieldwork, to clarify particular points and follow up on certain issues. But the end of the fieldwork meant taking leave of stewards who I had developed a working relationship with, often a close one, and whose lives I had got to know a lot about. I knew about their kids, their partners, their holidays, their hobbies, their football teams, their first jobs, their Mums and Dads, their plans for retirement. And I knew a lot about their efforts to defend or improve the working lives of their members, their union careers, their hopes and fears, their greatest victories and their bitterest defeats. All this was left behind when the fieldwork was over. In order to maintain anonymity, agreements were made to forego Facebook friendship. When I left, that was it. Once again, I was very glad that the books had warned me about this. But in

each case study, at the end of each period of fieldwork, and each immersion into other peoples' lives, I realised I was putting off leaving. But for that, each case study would have been at least two weeks shorter. Still, at least I can say that my efforts to make the fieldwork a success paid off. I did get a great wealth of richly detailed data. I can now reintroduce the voice of shop stewards into the academic debate. And, despite all its many challenges, the experience of fieldwork powerfully reinforced my belief in the importance of this type of research. I am glad I took on the challenges, even though I needed a long rest afterwards.

Appendix 2: Diary procedure

Shop stewards were invited to participate in the diary research at initial briefing sessions. The aims and nature of the research were discussed. Stewards were told that the aim of the research was to get the voice of shop stewards back into the academic debate, and that the focus was on 'what shop stewards do'. Stewards who agreed to participate were given a Participant Information Sheet and, after due discussion, signed an Informed Consent form (Appendix 3). Participating stewards were given a notebook and a 'Diary Instructions' sheet (Appendix 3), which gave guidance about what to record and how. Participants were asked to make a diary entry whenever they undertook some activity in their role as steward; for instance, answering questions from a member, taking up an issue with a manager, or representing a member at a disciplinary or grievance hearing. Participants were asked to record who they were dealing with, what the issue was, and how they handled it. Since the research was qualitative and exploratory, diary instructions were deliberately left slightly open-ended, so that participants could select aspects of their activity according to their own frames of reference and meaning, rather than according to an imposed framework. On average, participants kept up their diary-entries for around two months – although some managed up to six months, while others did much less. As noted in Section 4.3, diary-based research requires a significant effort on the part of participants, so it is not surprising that most stewards could not keep entries going throughout the six months of the case study. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that what they did manage contributed significantly to the richness and detail of the research findings.

The recruitment of diarists was different in some respects at the two case studies. At London Borough stewards were usually approached in groups towards the end of stewards' committee meetings. This resulted in high numbers of initial take-up of the diaries. However, some stewards who agreed participate did not respond to subsequent approaches regarding their progress. It is possible that they made some diary entries, but if so these were never returned to the research. As a result, from a total of 36 stewards who agreed to participate in the diary part of the research at London Borough, 22 actually returned dairies with entries (61 per cent). By contrast, at Big Car, due to time constraints on stewards' meetings (Section 6.1), stewards were approached individually about participating in the research, which permitted a fuller discussion of the research and what it entailed. Furthermore, it was easier to maintain contact with stewards at Big Car, because

the researcher was present in the workplace much of the week. Consequently, a lower proportion of shop stewards dropped out of the diary-based part of the research at Big Car than was the case at London Borough; of 22 stewards who agreed to take diaries, 18 made entries and returned diaries for inclusion in the study (82 per cent). It is likely that the differences in recruitment of participants, and in the ease and regularity of contact during the study, were the main explanations for differences in drop-out rates. It should be borne in mind, though, that differences in the number and detail of diary-entries within each sample make strict numerical comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, future researchers might benefit from appreciating differences in recruitment and retention of participants across the two case studies.

It is not clear what impact the differential drop-out rates made to the diary-based findings at the two case studies. It should be born in mind, though, that stewards who dropped out of diary-based activity, or who did not agree to participate in that aspect of the research, usually continued to participate in other ways; for instance, through attendance at stewards' committees, or observed conversations with other stewards, or in direct discussions with the researcher. Furthermore, this research was inherently qualitative in nature, and sought to investigate what types of activity stewards were engaged in, rather than to apply numerical values to that activity. What emerged from the fieldwork was an overall picture of the range of shop steward activities, and the broad patterns and variation across the two samples did not appear to be significantly different for stewards who took diaries and those who did not. Triangulation with other stewards suggested broadly similar activities were undertaken across the steward body on each case study. Consequently, the effect of drop-out diarists was probably relatively minor.
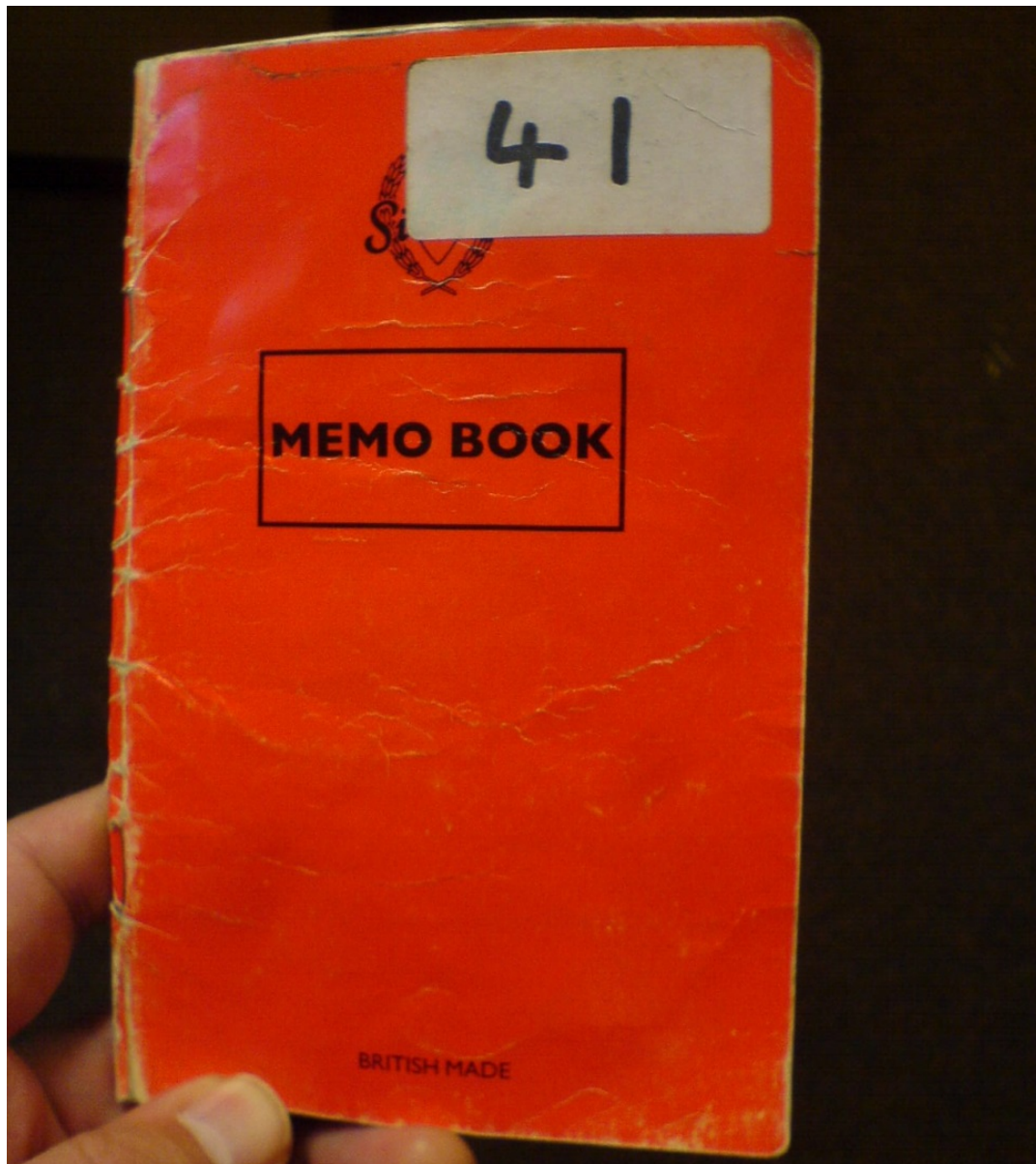
The second component of the diary-based research also contributed a great deal to the findings; namely, the diary-interviews. Though often frustratingly difficult to organise (see Appendix 1) the diary-interviews allowed stewards to expand on diary entries, and gave the researcher important opportunities to probe for additional layers of meaning and commentary from participants. In this research, diary entries were used as guides for these informal interviews, disclosing activity to the researcher that would otherwise have remained hidden, and acting as an *aide memoire* for the stewards. No audio recording was used at the diary-interviews. Partly, this was because the places where they took place, such as coffee shops and other public spaces, were usually not suitable due to background noise.

Instead, notes were taken (with consent) while the stewards talked about their diary entries and what they had been doing. Quite often, especially near the start of their participation, stewards would discuss issues that were not mentioned in the diary; usually, they decided that in future they would record such events. Thus, the diary-interviews contributed significantly to improving the performance of the diary component of the research. A further valuable contribution of the diary-interviews resulted from the decision not to record them, which led to gaps in the conversation – sometimes lengthy ones – while a researcher without shorthand or typing skills tapped away on an iPad keyboard. An unplanned benefit of these pauses was that stewards often filled the gap by speaking at greater length, expanding on their previous statements, adding thoughtful commentary, and further enriching the data gathered.
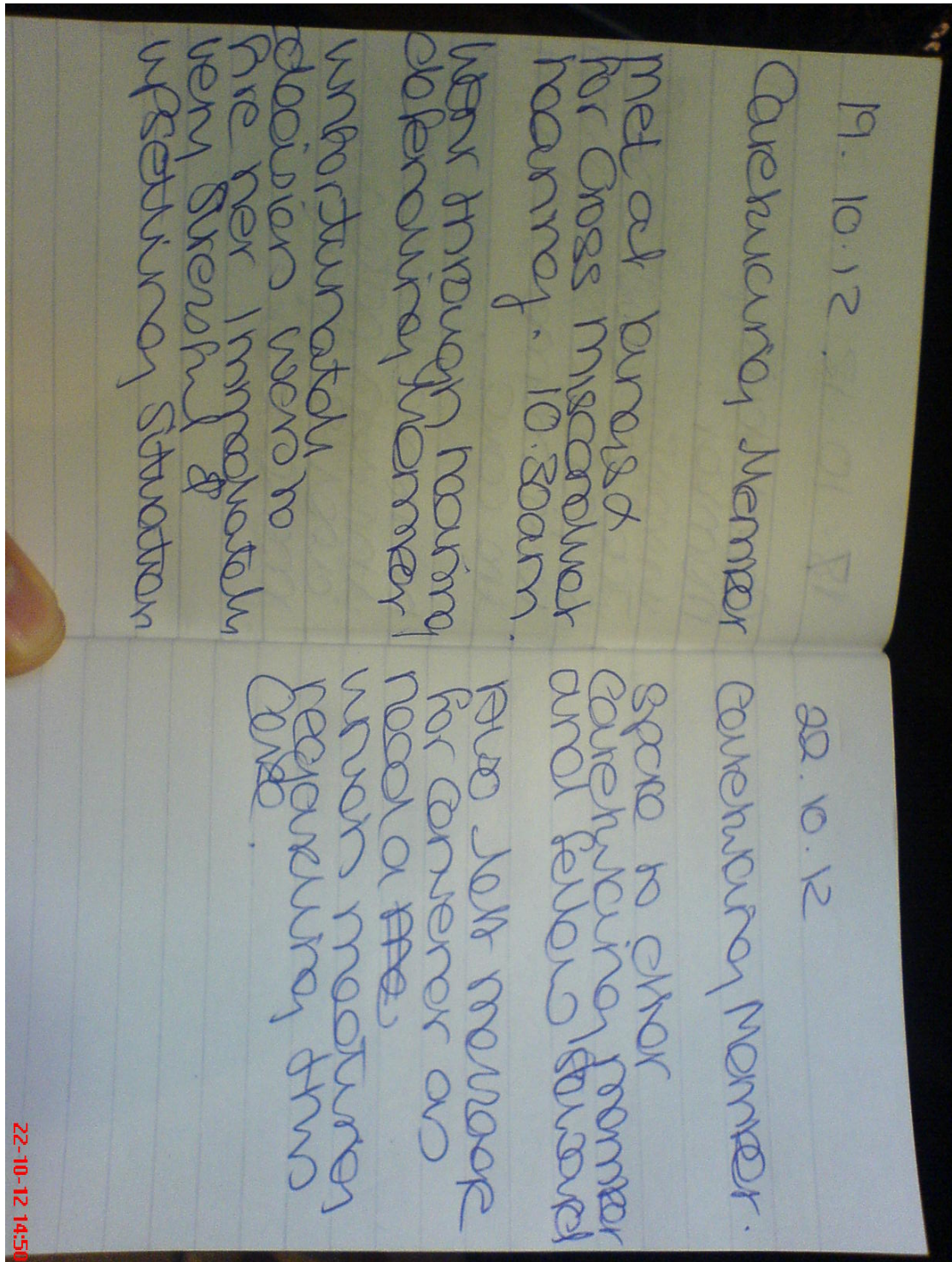
Appendix 3: Diary excerpts

This Appendix contains sample pages from shop steward diaries, as recorded in digital photos taken during diary-interviews. Examples have been chosen to give some idea of the spread of entries made by stewards, from lengthy and detailed to brief and summary. The selection of examples was severely constrained as a result of guarantees to participants of anonymity and confidentiality: many pages mention individuals or the employer by name, and these had to be excluded.

Example 1: Big Car. This diary had clearly been kept in an overall pocket.

Example 2: London Borough. Diary entries by the steward who represented the dismissed caretaker.

19.10.12

Caretaking Member.

Met at lunch for Cross miscondut hearing. 10.30am.

Went through having defending Member!

Unfortunately evidence were to be her immediate very friendly & upsetting situation

22.10.12

Caretaking Member.

Spoke to choir Caretaking member and fellow steward.

Also Jeff Melrose for convener as need a the union matters regarding this case.

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Example 3: London Borough. Some stewards provided a lot of detail.

that I wouldn't/couldn't win but that the internal appeal to councillors had some likelihood of a good outcome.

29/11/12. Spoke to managers about adjusted time delay on kitchen/staff room door. The manager had been told it had been adjusted to a 6 second delay – but when we tested it, it was 8-10 seconds! As the wheelchair user is now on holiday until close to Xmas, it was agreed to turn it off.

Example 4: London Borough. The same steward continues...

29/11/12. Spoke to manager about cold temperatures in back office and no heater (blow heater) working as it had been moved to front (near automatic door). Matter about the JCC minutes - she asked me to forward them to her - which led to automatic doors being closed off. It was agreed that these low temperatures affected both staff and public.

29/11/12 Followed up with Head of Care Review who didn't get back to me until as she had

Example 5: London Borough. First mention of 'body swerve'.

Starting in music his is a classic management wind up + ve can do body swerve

agree continue as we are.

20/11/12
Long discussion with member about performance related pay + why union saying NO to it.

Circulating info on subject generally to all members + already had a

union meeting to discuss! but need to gauge mood make sure some are under pressure financially to go for it

20/11/12
Good discussion initiated by member re PRP — Someone I was anxious might go for it but in fact v agst. Her sorry is if she goes for a secondment + then chance at permanent more valid she have to choose btw new job with P.RP + old one without. This if

Example 6: Big Car. Shop steward dealing with collective welfare issue.
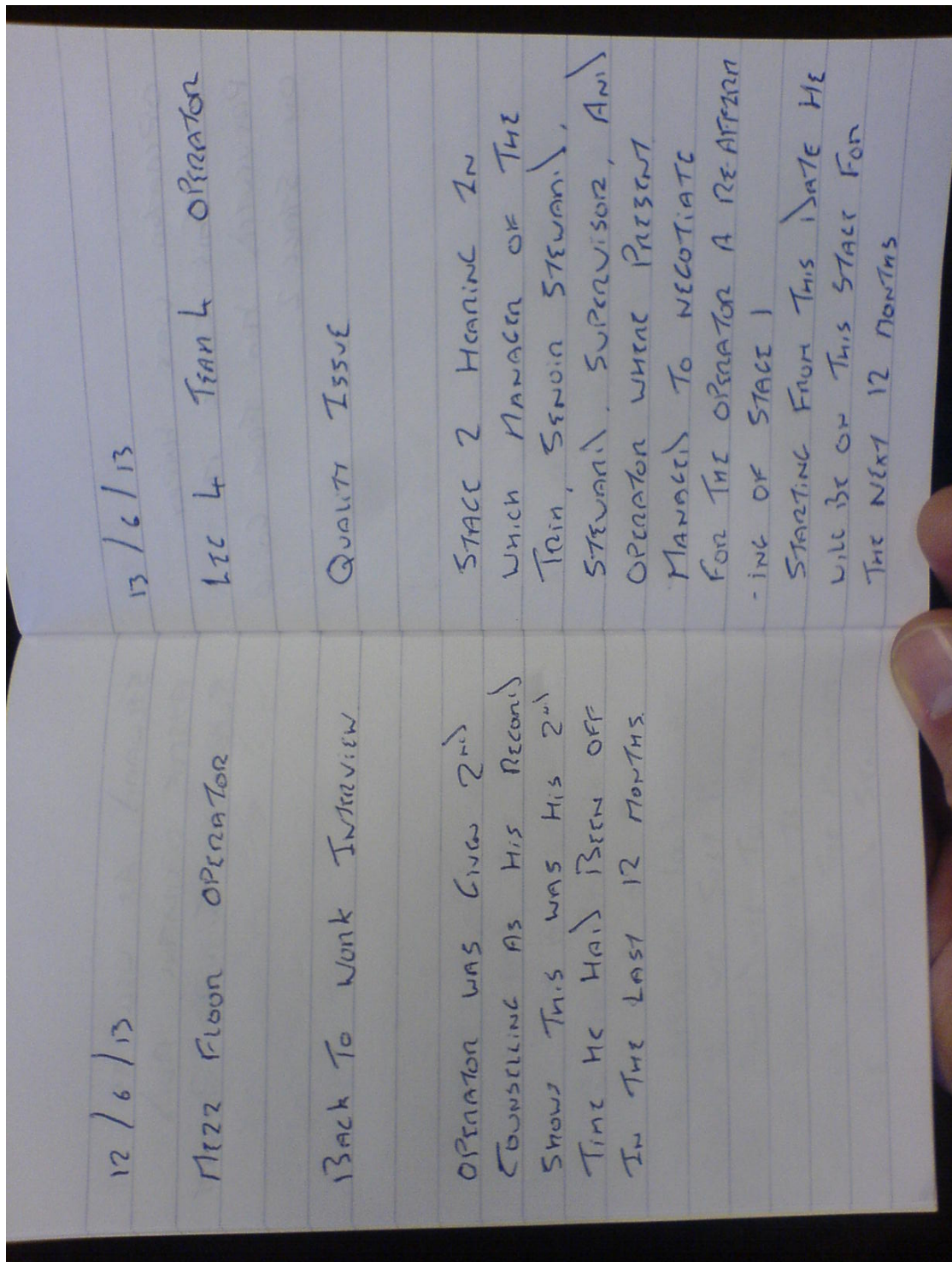
22/5/13

THE LADS

LINE IS BEING SHORTENED
BY HALF MEANING THE EATING
AREA WILL GO.

SPOKE TO KIAZAN AND
SUPERVISOR TO SORT OUT A
NEW EATING AREA.

Example 7: Big Car. This steward followed the requested format. The second entry records an example of a 'deal' resulting in leniency for a member under the disciplinary procedure for errors in production.

12/6/13

Mezz Floor Operator

Back To Work Interview

Operator was Given 2nd Counselling As His Record Shows This was His 2nd Time He Had Been off In The Last 12 Months.

13/6/13

Lic 4 Frank Operator

Quality Issue

Stage 2 Hearing In Which Manager Of The Train, Senior Steward\), Train, Senior Steward\), Steward\), Supervisor, And Operator Where Present. Manage\) To Negotiate For The Operator A Re-Affirr-ing Of Stage 1 Starting From This Date He Will Be On This Stage For The Next 12 Months

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Example 8: Big Car. Although these entries are very brief, ethnographic immersion in the setting, and discussion at the diary-interview, meant that the meaning was clear to the researcher. In this case, the steward had represented two members at disciplinary appeal hearings. The use of 'won' and 'lost' indicates the adversarial way in which this steward viewed the procedure.
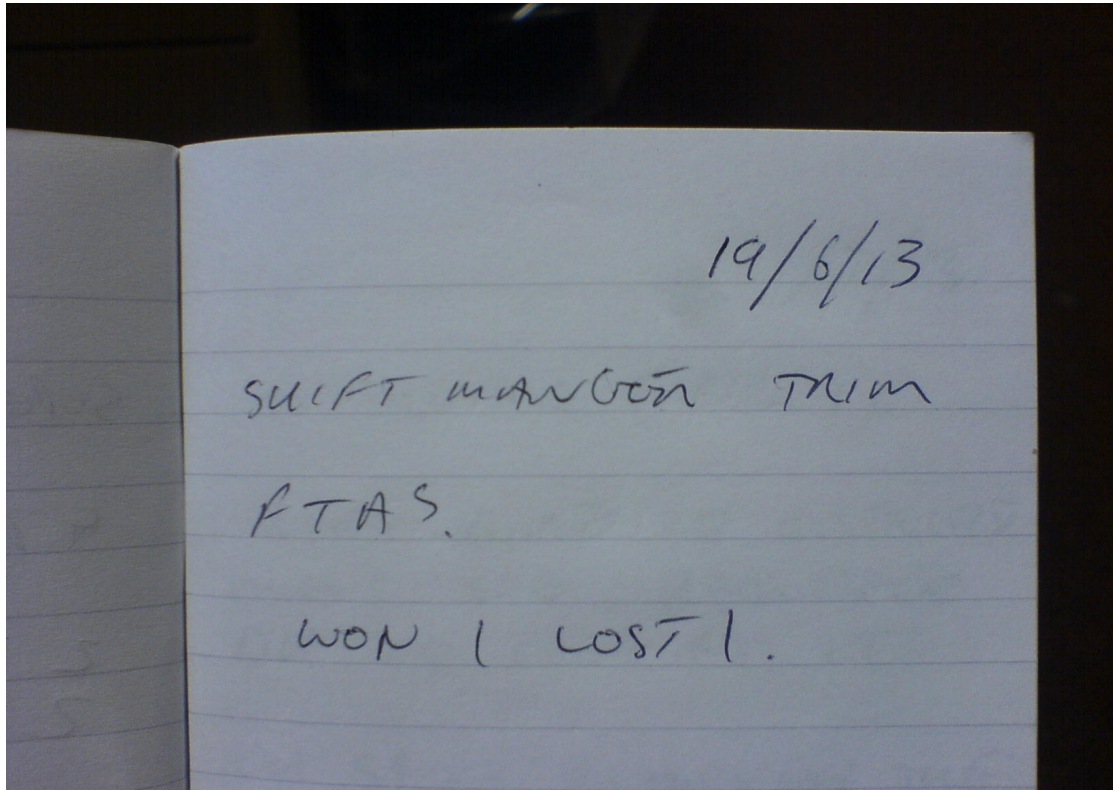
Example 9: Big Car. These entries record a steward dealing with work organisation and intensity issues over a period of five days. The name of a senior steward has been redacted.

4/7/13
Came in to operations complaining about Vamp and that A Shift had 2 ops on a job and they were core shift so we wanted 2 ops on job. Spoke with s/visor + shift manager caged for 2 men till Monday

4/7/13
After a lot of days due to x thread tank Straps s/visor tried to stop people having built relief also relief for a dictate to check blocks. I went and looked at problem and advised s/visor he would not be stopping relief and pointed out that the Tank

straps were faulty so to change them. This solved problem.

8/7/13
Still keeping 2 men on temp job till I can get off my job to try different method

9/7/13
Operator has been restricted saying we need to rotate unfortunately skills side in the area are poor so have escalated to request training.

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Appendix 4: Fieldnote excerpts

This Appendix contains excerpts from fieldnotes made during the study. These followed a standard format, kept as a file on my iPad, and copied each time a new sheet was required. Brief notes were made in the field and written up later. The excerpts reproduced below are in the original format but have been edited to remove names and identifying information. Typographical errors have not been corrected.

Blank fieldnote sheet

Date:

Time:

Location:

Who

What happened

Thoughts

Date: 6/11/12

Time: 14.00-16.30

Location: Branch Office

Who

HASC stewards Committee.

{Convenor}
{Steward 1}
{Steward 2}
{Steward 3}
{Steward 4}

{Steward 5}
{Steward 6}
2 Library stewards
{Steward 7}

Late arrivals:
{Steward 8}
{Steward 9}
{Steward 10}
{Steward 11}
{Steward 12}
{Steward 13}

What happened

Start delayed due to insufficient numbers....
General sound of warm and lively chat.

Start at 2.15
{Convenor} welcomes library stewards - will hear them first, then back to normal agenda....

Library steward:
- There's two main issues .... We're concerned that some of the accommodation is completely substandard - Heating; Insufficient space; Use of staff rooms for confidential phone conversations. ... We've raised it with our

mgmt, they've said they'll look at space, but don't see staff using rest rooms for work space as a problem. Whole accommodation thing....
- Also, a number of duties that used to be done by housing staff [customer service type], will now be done by library staff - on lower pay grade, and doing work of people who have been made redundant
- And we've had redundancies, too

- The work they're expecting us to do.... Check in forms, ID for parking permits, helping people go on computers to do fill in online forms, etc.,...
- {Customer Services} send people through to us all the time. It can take 3/4 hour to do one form... Just can't do it.
- It was done by people on scale 6, and we're on scale 4
- They never said this would be happening...
- And it's not our work.
- Slippery slope to us doing more and more housing work.
- They're talking about turning libraries into 'one stop shops'.

{Steward 11} arrives

{Convenor} - 'the document that came to us really downplayed this' ... 'It just said "support and signposting"' [as expected library staff duties].
- We know it takes a lot of work if people aren't very computer literate - and not literate' ...
- 'To help people, you need to know quite a lot of stuff' [about housing]. Document verification - like for parking permits - 'people get quite irrational....' ... 'They can be completely insistent and quite bonkers'
- Will need to make an issue of it...
- Suggest keeping a log... Tick list, perhaps?
- And, make an issue of the grading issue....

Library steward - 'Mgmt are saying, it wasn't really a big part of the job' [i.e. what they are asking us to do was not previously a big part of housing reception job, and therefore doesn't represent a significant shift of duties from housing workers to library workers.]

{Convenor} - The danger is, the more library wkrs are forced to take on that kind of work, they get used to it, and in the future more comes in - unless people dig heels in and say something.

Library steward - I went on the training to see what was involved....

[Unknown] - {Convenor 2, not present} said why not just let them [tenants] use the photocopier [in the library] and let them use internal mail? [to reduce workload on library staff]
{Convenor} - doesn't get round verification

{Steward 3} - [key] fobs will be a big issue. When {tenants} are desperate for a fob, on benefits ... when people find out they go to the library, there'll be

tenants straight there. If they get on to the call centre, but don't get a fob, who are they going to come back to?
- in [named library}, the library users group has been great....
- ... 'there will be offs'
Library steward - 'we've already had them'
{Steward 3} - what about safety and security? Are there panic buttons?
{Steward 2} - 'It gets worse than that - in {second named library} housing workers have been told that library workers *are* the security'. ... 'The room was a cupboard - it's still got the electricity meter.' ... 'There's only one computer - only one person can work in there' ... 'If you use the panic button, who will respond?' ... We were told, 'Library staff'
Library steward - 'Have they done a risk assessment' ... [to {Steward 2}] 'I'll be in touch'.

{Steward 8} arrives

{Steward 2} - we've agreed to hold a joint staff mtg at {third named library} - [of housing and library staff].

{Convenor} - We should think about getting a joint letter out from HASC and library stewards about the situation [to staff/members].

{Steward 9} arrives

General discussion:
What libraries are affected?
It's not all the libraries.....

{Convenor}, as chair - 3 action points proposed
- joint letter to library staff - [to include] 'highlight the grading issue'
- contact readers grps
- {tenants organisation} reps

Library steward - Issues with {Customer Services} - how much scanning and verifying, etc, do they do?

{Steward 2} - what about joint shop mtgs?

{Convenor} - 'The way to get them [management] moving is to have a bit of a profile and start things moving, so they notice we're taking it up'.
- 'do a draft letter of what's happened, and we'll send it out to {tenants organisation} chairs - there's only five'
- we can point out the changes make services worse - 'it's not a proper library service, and it's not a proper housing service'.

{Steward 4} - 'if it's forced on you to do that, couldn't you send it all to the wrong departments and cause chaos? When that gets out.... There'll be uproar... Mgmt will have to go back to old ways.'

- could get disciplined
{Convenor} - confidentiality
{Steward 13} - Data protection, ... With hot desking, not allowed to leave anything on desktop with a tenants name on...

{Steward 2} - what about keeping a log of how much time is taken up with housing duties?
- it's not flat fobs, it's shed fobs, etc. still needs security, etc....

Training
{Convenor} - do it now, or leave it til next time?
See what we've got left at the end...
Ok

Minutes
{Convenor} - I'd lost them til just now, so still in very short form
Goes through minutes
Building mtgs on pay modernisation
- we've had quite a lot of queries
- some posters up in {named office} 4th floor. Rest coming out... going out....
{Convenor} - take what we've got here...
- we need to be setting up mtgs ... Check someone can do the meeting - get on to me, {Convenor 2} and {Branch secretary}.

{London Borough tenant's federation - "Fed"} - campaign to save it
{Steward 3} - I thought {Convenor 2, not present} would sort this out....
{Steward 2} - mtg on 8th (Thurs)
{Convenor} - they're trying to tender out tenants voice part of it.
-> Fed could find itself in a matter of months, being without any ability to be a campaigning voice. They employ 1.5 people to do that now, 'it's about effectively taking away, destroying that'.
{Steward 3} - propose motion to support Fed to continue with independent voice...
Unanimous.
[Lengthy and detailed discussion about the Fed and TRAs.]

Reorganisations report back

{Steward 12} - waiting period
{Steward 1} - coming soon - not a lot of uptake on unmatched jobs - said at last mtg.
- this is round 1
{Steward 2} - looks like 2-3 weeks for expressions of interest.

{Convenor} - they would normally go through tiers ... Need to make sure that happens ... All internal opportunities, before it goes external.
- Should know by end of wk.

{Convenor} - other reorgs?

[I can't tell WTF is going on! Confused discussion, mix of reports and moaning, {Convenor} supplying info on correct procedures,]
- open to agency staff at Round 3, before external advertise
{Convenor} - need to watch that

{Convenor} - reorg in residential care homes
- mtgs w GMB at 2 home
- GMB bullshit, etc - telling people they don't need to know about TUPE
- 'I set people straight...'
- have had 4 people come over from GMB because GMB has been so poor.
- 'trying to do some of the preparatory work beforehand, so we're not hoodwinked'
 - have got some gains, 'they didn't do their homework properly'
- company trying to buy out terms... We opposed ... then GMB, too.
- looks like after TUPE, they'll do ETR and everybody will take redundancy....

[{Convenor} does long explanation of {outsourcing} of care homes. Have lost a really good steward - {named steward}.]

Update on {nearby outsourced workers'} dispute
{Convenor} - it's me again, sorry'
- summarises events in dispute....
- re-ballot, big majorities, etc.
- region gets involved, warns out of legal protection, etc....
- region have decided need to re-ballot again, 2 weeks after ballot
- region sent out ballot paper with covering letter - full of warnings, negotiations behind {members'} backs, lied about {branch} officers involvement.....
- people are really pissed of
- raised it through EC members - can't make complaint: 'it gets complicated'
- tone of letter has really put people's back up
- 'we've had to distance ourselves'

Ballot result expected at end of this week.

{London Borough} applied and are accredited as Living Wage employer - but seems no outsourced contracts are actually paid living wage....
{Convenor} and {Branch secretary} are putting together a letter to Ob
- will circulate to stewards

{Convenor} - effect of letter {from Unison regional officers} has been to undermine

{Convenor} - accusation from members is that there has been collusion between the union leadership locally and the employer - so we've had to distance ourselves.

{Convenor}- 'Really abusive mgmt. really horrible. They'll come out and threaten you on the picket line.'

{Steward 2} - we did a collection round the building - it was really good

{Steward 9} - it was

{Steward 1} - I got sarcastic comments....

{Building maintenance} and pay for manual wkrs

{Steward 4} - don't know where to start

- restructure
- mgrs getting upgrade through reorg and regrade => pay rise!
- members really pissed off....
- mgmt say they are getting more responsibilities
- they ignore our extra responsibilities - {new work arrangements} means our job changes - we have to do estimates before the job, assessment of time and materials, etc....

{Steward 8} - it shouldn't be the tradesman's responsibility.

{Steward 12} - you should have more responsibility, but should get paid more

{Steward 4} - I'm being told off the record, when there's nobody around, 'this is what you do, if you don't like it, go and work somewhere else.'

- supervisors used to be on £30 a week more than me, but now on £20k a year more than me. But {new work arrangements} will get the workers to do their job.
- 'they've talked about new staff - but the money they're paying is so low, now they're looking for improvers and semi-retired.'
- 'it's about time the union did something about it - the hierarchy of the union - otherwise everybody might just as well leave the union.'

{Steward 10} arrives

{Convenor} - you need to organise a meeting, work out your demands, get together with {Convenor 2}

- It's not the hierarchy, the union is you and the members

{Steward 4} - I'm being told [by the managers] you have to have a valid reason to go for a pay rise... You can't just say, they're getting one so we want one.

{Steward 8} - there's lots of other questions to be asked about {new work arrangements} - e.g. risk assessments, paint appropriate for the work site - these need addressing by repairs staff and mgmt before the job [not left to the tradesmen to do it before they start work].

{Steward 5} - you telling me something I don't know? They don't listen to you.

{Steward 2} - 'you have to think what will make them listen'

{Steward 3} - 'you need to make a list as long as the number of grievances for the mass meeting.'
- you say 'we want to deal with everything that pisses you off', and then go from there
{Steward 4} - 'people are asking when we're going out on strike'
{Steward 8} - 'an argument needs to be had, that it's the managers who need to be deciding the job and materials beforehand' ... 'what happens if something goes wrong?'

{Convenor} - 'if people are talking about strike action, you need to be ready, and need your demands'
{Steward 1} - you mean, get 'formal agreement' from a meeting?
Yes
{Steward 4} - 'I'm calling a meeting [about a H&S issue] - I'll have the whole workforce there, then I can raise it'
{Convenor} - 'No. You need to be focused on what you want to come out of the meeting. Get it agreed unanimously. Then take it to management - give them time limits. If they say no, then it's a dispute...'
{Steward 1} - to {Steward 4} - 'you're leery of calling a shop meeting', because mgmt will take against it. There's been an issue about lone working at night - discussed at H&S mtg w mgmt, reps have [agreed?] '...having a meeting to pass this on.....'
[This looks like the issue {Steward 1} told me about last week....]
{Convenor} - 'you can't just add this on to a meeting over a health and safety issue'
Agree to take this up w {Convenor 2}.

Sacking of caretaker
{Steward 6} - verbal abuse, but mitigation - long running dispute because caretaker had given evidence against the shopkeeper in a case
- didn't expect that 'It was a shock'
- eight years good service, the tenants love her.....
{Steward 3} - we had five tenants reps doing supportive statements, petition
{Steward 1} - why do you think they went down that route? Not usual
{Steward 3} - I think there's something going on here.... Just sacked another steward. HR seem to have made a change - if you swear.... if you lose your temper ... They're saying if you are a front line worker, you cannot be w human being or make a mistake.
{Steward 2} - we know people bear grudges against caretakers who are witnesses in asb cases, so can say to council that this will undermine asb cases and policies
{Convenor} - can bring in other examples

Seems to be they're sacking people for altercations
{Convenor} - to {Steward 6} - grab someone who's done this type of case....
{Steward 3} - were going to have a shop mtg...
{Steward 6} - well, hmmmm..... [sounds doubtful....]

{Steward 1} - is this some no in hr who's decided to say, we can do you whenever we want to...
General - yes, it looks like it. It's a general push....

{Steward 7} - lone working training - we need to put up the sort of posters they have on the tube, etc. we put up with all sorts of crap'. If posters up, then can cut short the interview, point to the sign. No posters on estates.
{Convenor} - it's up in soc serv offices, why is it not up in hosing?
- can say, where is the protection for this caretaker?
{Steward 3} - {Steward 7}s point is a good one, ... We need a really big campaign..... If people are abused or sworn at, we need to use 6655
{Steward 6} - she had reported abuse, but nothing done about it.

Retired Resident caretakers staying in {tied} home
{Convenor} - we've won an important case.
{Steward 7} - I've got a similar one..... Tenant has a letter.... former caretaker. They saying, no, have to serve a notice.
{Convenor} - I'll let you know when I get the advice.

UAF Waltham Forest
{Convenor} - good turn out
- EDL banned
- 'bedraggled and humiliated'

Oct 20 demo
{Steward 3} - it was good, it was big.
{Steward 4} - what was response from Unison leader? They've accepted on pensions....
{Convenor} - this one was on cuts, more. Bigger discussion to be had on what's coming next....

{Convenor} - leads well on to next stewards Cttee - will look at planning Branch Development day in Jan....

Shop reports:
EO {Estate Officer} issue to be discussed amongst EO reps

{Steward 10} - Issue w H&S - hot desking at {named office} - need for special designated desk procedure for people statemented on designated desk equipment.
{Convenor} - this is a reasonable adjustment [explains....]
- we can arrange to write letter to person putting pressure on to move desk....

Second issue - AMHPs - reorg of patches, causing uproar w {neighbouring borough} staff.
Some discussion
{Convenor} - knock on effect is that housing staff are going to be dealing with cases and issues that we never have done before
{Steward 7} - new procedures and thresholds and cuts are pushing duties out to Taff who are not trained....

{Steward 8} - H&S issue with cleaning phones.... How often?
- Nobody can remember....
{Convenor} - need to look into it - maybe raise at h&s
- have found at [named office}, cleaning the beams is not in the contract, so {London Borough} are paying extra as a variation to get beams cleaned.

{Steward 6} - customer serve are another directorate - we've been told it's a mgmt instruction
{Steward 3} - were getting told lots of diff things...
- we're going to dig our heels in... See what happens....

{Steward 3} - parking charges???
{Convenor} - not coming in yet
{Steward 7} - there's going to be consultation.....
{Convenor} - temporary passes at the moment. {London Borough} has a green policy, people shouldn't be driving in to work. They should be trying to discourage people from using their cars. That's fair enough.

{Steward 4} - Good news here. I've been going on for months about the vehicles... finally, They've agreed that all the vehicles will be tracked.

Meeting finishes after 4pm

I go round and talk to the new folk who I don't know.

{Steward 10} social worker steward {contact details}
{Steward 11} {contact details}

Mutual Exchange Visits
What is the new procedure?
{Steward 2} - we never got any guidance...
{Convenor} - if you see anything dodgy, flag it up.
{Steward 2} - guidance doesn't agree w form...
{Convenor} -

{Steward 2} - how do we know about unauthorised repairs? What about e.g. rewires? Might not be obvious?

{Steward 6}, {Convenor} - it's just the obvious .....

{Steward 3} - could put , I didn't see any, but I'm not a surveyor

{Steward 2} - someone said, I don't know, and mgr ' was on it like a rat up a fucking drainpipe'

Issue is not trained surveyors doing it....

{Steward 3} - need a checklist....

{Convenor} - don't want to be too specific

{Steward 3} - most obvious one is people take fire doors off

{Steward 2} - concerned that untrained EOs

Thoughts

I'm fucked! That was hard work. Chaotic at times. Slight signs of grumpiness from {Steward 3} and {Steward 2}, at different times. I'm sure it's frustrating, but little sign that more experienced reps are taking responsibility for sorting it out. in absence of {Convenor 2}, everything falls to {Convenor} - she chairs, and takes minutes, and introduces most of the items. Two thoughts on this....

First, she doesn't control the meeting very well - not that surprising, really; most people show no discipline whatsoever and interrupt continually - must get rather resigned to letting them all get on with it. In kitchen afterwards, making a cup of tea, {Convenor} says, with a sigh, 'badly behaved people....'. I'm very surprised nobody offered to help her out - but, will they moan about it too.

Second thing is, on several of the agenda items, I realise that I know more about the issue than the stewards, and indeed more than {Convenor} tells them - no conspiracy, though, time wouldn't allow more detail. But it suggests that the stewards don't talk to each other very much between committee meetings. Things like, developments in the {contractor} dispute; behaviour of FTOs; even ballot result; are not known to the other stewards - especially clear that less experienced stewards don't know this stuff' but still seems that e.g. {Steward 3} and {Steward 2} don't know it all. Does this mean there is no QE? Or is the QE just branch officers? Is there a 'bureaucracy' of reps with a lot of facility time? But, surely there must be other lines of communication.... Don't these people talk outside of office hours?

Excerpt 2: Fieldnotes from Big Car

Date: 1/5/13

Time: 8.05-16.15

Location: TU office

Who

{Senior steward 1}
{Safety rep}
{Convenor 1}

What happened

I arrive at the office. Various reps...

{Safety rep} is working on a procedure for emptying LPG from cars before the paint oven.

{Senior steward 1} says he's got something 'a bit tasty'
A steward came in just before I arrived, to say management want to run a CIP today, by taking men off the job
{Senior steward 1} - it's the line where the try-and-test should have happened yesterday, but didn't...

But this is outside the procedure for a CIP.
{Senior steward 1} - If they want to do a CIP, get both shifts in, and the *Kaizen* men, and the stewards, and we'll say if it works or not...
- if they do it like this, just moving work about, that takes the shop steward out of it, and we won't have that...
- the shift manager said to the steward, we'll get men off the teams, and the steward said what do you mean, and the manager said, 'it's a new procedure'...
- well it's not a procedure we know about - and I'll ask {Convenor 1}, and he won't have heard of it either...
[{Convenor 1} walks through to the office.]
{Senior steward 1} - {Convenor 1}, can I have a word?
[They go off into {Convenor 1}'s office]
{Senior steward 1} comes back.
{Senior steward 1} - [to me, thoughtfully] - it's been forty minutes now, and the steward hasn't come back, so the manager might have backed off...
- I don't really want people to have to come in on a down day, but if a CIP needs doing, it's a job for a down day...

What about the try-and-tests on a working day?
{Senior steward 1} - well, *then* - they get all the work organised, get everything in place, then run it...
- not moving work around in bits and pieces...
'It's going to look like the steward is moving men around to fit work in, and we don't do that'

I ask {Senior steward 1} to explain how they do try-and-tests vs. CIPs. He says CIPs are done when the track isn't moving, so only on a down day. On a try-and-test, that's when they set up the new job as part of the production line, and run it on production for a shift, to see how it works.

[From what I can see, this is different from other some departments. I've seen two CIPs on the door rubbers, and one in the body shop, all on production days. But the door rubbers one was Supply Chain, so it's easier to get men off to attend the CIP, I guess - and it doesn't need a moving line. On the conveyor, this can't be done so readily, so CIPs have to be done on a down day.]

{Safety rep} goes off to deal with the LPG issue.

{Senior steward 2} arrives, and I ask him about the meeting yesterday - looking at the CIP.
{Senior steward 2} - {named manager} is a liar - he said no decisions would be made without input and agreement of senior union reps... then he went over and got OH to do an assessment on the job... I can't stand people telling me lies
- I've just been to see her {OH nurse} - she said she did a job assessment... {named manager} asked her to...
[i.e. {Senior steward 2} has been to see the nurse in OH.]
{Senior steward 2} - I'm going to go and see him now ... tell him he's lied to us... I won't do it in front of other people...
[There's a meeting tomorrow about this CIP, so {Senior steward 2} could say his piece there, with others present - but he's chosen an alternative approach.]
{Senior steward 2} - the problem is, he's taken over managing the restricted workers - it's a protected working environment - and he hates it and wants to get shot of it...
- those jobs are value added - if they weren't doing those jobs, they'd be over with her on a [some sort of procedural term] ... and they'd be getting them out on a capability...

I ask {Senior steward 2} about the previous CIP in LFE jobs - cockpits and steering columns - the one that I had heard described in relation to, they got a driver to do it...

{Senior steward 2} explains, there was a job where the worker had to walk about ten yards to get the part, so they moved that job right up the other end of the line, round the other side
{Senior steward 2} - well, that might save, say, two seconds on the walk, but adds, say, eight seconds to the drive...
- and that's the bigger picture that he doesn't understand...
[Again, the problem is identified as the manager from production, who doesn't understand supply chain.]

More generally, {Senior steward 2} says there's one guy who's job has been done away with four times - every time by {named manager}.

{Senior steward 1} answers the phone - it's a manager.
{Senior steward 1} - ... from what I hear, it's not a try-and-test - you want them to do a CIP while they're working...
- ok... Bye....
What's he saying?
{Senior steward 1} - meeting at 10
'I'll get you down there'

Phone rings, {Senior steward 1} answers, brief call.
{Senior steward 1} - [to {Senior steward 2}] - {HR} block at half ten over these smoking shelters...

Then {Steward 1} arrives from the area where the CIP is planned. {Senior steward 1} and the steward and I set off to see the manager. When we arrive, {manager} seems quite relaxed to have me sitting in, and also perfectly relaxed about being in a meeting with two stewards and no other managers [that would never have happened at {my former workplace}].

{Steward 1} kicks it off:
{Steward 1} - they're looking at ways of eliminating a man
- it was tried yesterday, but there's more to it than moving a bit of work...
- it needs a CIP
- I looked at a couple of things yesterday, but it didn't work... it involved at least three other jobs... we need to get the other shift on it... [as well]
Manager - was it post-marriage?
{Steward 1} - yes
Manager - Ok, the amount of content were looking at, it should be a CIP
- ... not sure when we'll do it...
- I want everyone to buy in - but I'm not sure the team leaders are buying in...
We need to be proactive... a try-and-test needs input
- it can border on a CIP...
- we can't say, it's a bit involved, this isn't a try-and-test...
{Senior steward 1} - but, {Steward 1} tried this last week...

- I spoke to {Convenor 1} ... we think it was an underhand CIP getting done on here last week...
{Steward 1} - it was 25 seconds of work - that's a big reorganisation...
- he shouldn't be left with it all on him...
[i.e. on the worker where the job was being put.]
Manager - who said that?
[i.e. who said it was to be done like that?]
{Senior steward 1} - that's just the way it ended up
- why was there no *Kaizen* involved?
Manager - they've been cut, too... now, it's more and more, the Team Leaders are going to be involved in getting the ideas together... they used to...
[i.e. TLs used to perform this function.]
Manager - now, we just rely on the *Kaizen*....
{Senior steward 1} - is this a new procedure...?
Manager - no... going back years, the team leaders used to do this...
{Senior steward 1} - and we do, but yesterday...
Manager - I've seen notes saying the try-and-test was cancelled because it was a disaster... but, no, that's not the case - there was big down time and we needed the end of month production... that's the only reason...
[i.e. problems elsewhere]
{Senior steward 1} - we were told it was a disaster...
Manager - there's a problem of communication...
{Senior steward 1} - well... {Steward 1} thought it wasn't working....
{Steward 1} - it wasn't....
Manager - if there's problems, we'll look at it...
- we did with that one the other week... and then continue with the alterations...
- we've got to give the other shift an opportunity
[i.e. to get involved]
{Senior steward 1} - the procedure is to run it on both shifts...
- that's not what happened today
{Steward 1} - it didn't work yesterday - the time sheets don't work...
Manager - there are no times?
{Steward 1} - I couldn't understand them - nor could [other employees]...
- I've not been on the course
Manager - in a nutshell...
- the try-and-test today, we can shelve
- if your saying {Steward 1} won't look at it...
{Senior steward 1} - we *can* do it...
{Steward 1} - we've got enough to look at it...
[i.e. enough labour]
- but it wasn't working yesterday

{Senior steward 1} - I've got a way out of it...
Manager - what?
{Senior steward 1} - it's a CIP...
- a try-and-test won't work on the third or fourth reorganisation...
- do a CIP on Thursday...

Manager - I'll talk to Dave...
{Senior steward 1} - you'll get both shifts in...
{Steward 1} - yes...
Manager - if I'm going to get a shift in, I want some ideas to take in to them...
{Steward 1} - we've got some ideas....
Manager - the issues are, what we need to move around, post-marriage...
{Senior steward 1} - {Steward 1} has ideas, but he's going to need input from a team leader and a *Kaizen* man...
Manager - can I suggest... maybe not [named Team Leader X]... talk to [other named Team Leader Y] - he's got a good knowledge of the job...
- he's been vociferous against what I want to do, but he's good and he'll be objective...
{Senior steward 1} - I've come in here to try and solve the problem, give you a way out...
Manager - my Mrs says that when I give her a credit card...
- finally, other compression work... another try-and-test...
{Steward 1} - we've done it on nights... And A shift didn't follow it...
{Senior steward 1} - are we doing the work again?
Manager - it's good to be part of the lead shift...
[i.e. this shift - B shift - are the lead shift]
Manager - the cowl move will need a try-and-test...
{Steward 1} - I didn't know about that...
Manager - it's part of the try-and-test process...
{Senior steward 1} - I don't know why it wasn't done in a CIP...
Manager - we can do in the try-and-test...
{Senior steward 1} - put all in one...
{Senior steward 1}, {Steward 1} and the manager then make an arrangements to do the CIP next week. The CIP will be done on days, but B shift will be back on nights, so {Steward 1} will need to be released to com in on days. Then the meeting ends.

When we get outside, {Senior steward 1} and {Steward 1} are pleased - especially {Steward 1}, as he will now only be working one night next week!

{Steward 1} goes back to work, and {Senior steward 1} and I walk off to see some other stewards.
{Senior steward 1} - [smiling] - we got what we wanted - that's what I've been suggesting for a month...
- the only problem is, they might not agree the nights off
I say to {Senior steward 1}, where's the manager coming from - is he just under pressure?
{Senior steward 1} - that's it exactly - he's under pressure to get the man out...
- a CIP can take a month or even two to organise - but they might get three try-and-tests out of that, and everyone's agreed...
- 25 seconds is a lot of work to get moved...

{Senior steward 1} then gives his view of the general approach on this issue - job reorganisation.

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{Senior steward 1} - it's about co-operating, but making sure we get something out of it
- if they do it that way, the manager can't say we were just saying no...

We go outside for a few minutes, into bright spring sunshine, so {Senior steward 1} can have a cig. He says this manager is one of the better ones to deal with.
{Senior steward 1} - you can talk to him and he's open to suggestions. With some of the others, it would have been more of an argument.
I ask about the man who is taken out, if the CIP works.
{Senior steward 1} - he won't lose his job, he'll be moved...
- that team will be over numbers, so they'll look for a team that's short...
- A shift is short - they've got a team leader permanently on the line - they've cut down on team leaders...
[Look into the situation with team leaders - on the lean production tin, it says how important team leaders are - have Big Car, in practice, cut some of this out?]

We head back in to see some stewards - part of {Senior steward 1}'s regular walk round. I say it was interesting to see how they put it to the manager.
{Senior steward 1} says that's how they do it.
{Senior steward 1} - ... leave them for a while, thinking were going to say no, then say we've got a solution...
- when I first became a steward, {Convenor 1} was my senior steward, and I learned a lot off him...
'He uses a lot of big words... I tend to swear'

When we get to the lines, everything has stopped for a team briefing session, so {Senior steward 1} decides against interrupting the stewards - he'll come back later. From what I can see, there's not a lot of briefing going on. {Senior steward 1} says, this is the usual thing -
'people having sarnies and a sit down'
... unless the TL has something in particular to say.
[Again, is this, in practice, a watering down of lean production methods?]
[To what extent, if any, has *kaizen* simply become about reducing labour?]

Back in the office, {Senior steward 1} gets a text.
{Senior steward 1} - nights off agreed - that's a steward and a team leader made up!

Later, {Production Worker} comes in. He's not a steward, but used to be. Now he's attached to a *Kaizen* team (I think) but co-operates with the stewards on issues identified by the stewards. He's complaining about the treatment of a member by the 'company doctor'.
[I think this is actually the physio].

But, then, {Safety rep} starts to tell me about {Production Worker}. {Safety rep} says {Production Worker} has been here 28 years and has never been sacked, despite doing various crazy things. He used to work in the paint shop, but he didn't like his supervisor. {Safety rep} says on one occasion, he locked himself in the supervisor's office and ate his sarnies.
{Production Worker} -
'The best bit was when I drank his Coke. Psssht!' [mimes opening coke can]
{Production Worker} - I can still see his face - outside the office, screaming, Get out my fucking office!
{Safety rep} - and he took the brake pads off his bike...
{Production Worker} - and another time, I threw a bin through his window
- and another time... [in response to something the supervisor did]... I took the doors off his office and turned them round, and put a floor cleaner in there with the water running. It was this deep in suds... [indicates knee deep]
{Senior steward 1} - how did you get away with it? Why didn't they sack you?
{Production Worker} - oh, it was in the 80s or 90s...
Someone - they had a sense of humour back then...
{Production Worker} - yeah - before this shit we've got now - where, fart and you're out...

Later, I talk to {Convenor 2}.
I ask if, after the Mrs T conversation, did he ring HR and say, don't be shouting at her?
{Convenor 2} is a bit reluctant to come clean, so I say I'm interested in the relationships that stewards have with managers... [which I am]
{Convenor 2} says he did ring {HR manager}. He says she would never shout at someone in a case meeting, but when he's in there and the doors are shut, 'anything can happen'.
- the same with {Convenor 1} and {Convenor 3} [i.e. she will shout at them, too].
'Recently, I said she'd got a personality disorder. She went loopy.'

{Convenor 2} asks if I've been getting anything useful. I say, yes, lots of useful stuff - especially yesterday.
[i.e. at the CIP meeting by the disco balls.]
In particular, I say, it was interesting to see the issue of bargaining over the time sheets for jobs - making sure that all the job elements are on the sheet, etc.. I said that one of the things that gets said about lean production is that it's all tied down so tight there's no room any more for resistance. But from what I've seen, there's plenty of evidence. {Convenor 2} nods as I'm speaking. I say there's books going back to the 1940s about shop stewards bargaining over time in manufacturing, so it's really interesting to come into a factory and see it's still going on.

Then I say, I'd spoken to {Senior steward 2} earlier, about the door rubber issue. {Convenor 2} knew that {Senior steward 2} had been to see {named manager}, to tell him he'd lied.

{Convenor 2} says:

'It's all blown up today.'

The reconvened meeting tomorrow might be off.

[In fact, it was called off.]

{Convenor 2} said {named manager} had clearly agreed that a senior steward would be involved when the OH evaluation was done, but had then gone ahead anyway. {Convenor 2} had tipped off OH, and {Senior steward 2} had spoken to OH later on, too, and found out what the manager had done. While {Senior steward 2} had gone and spoken to the manager, {Convenor 2} and gone down to speak to HR to say that if this carried on they'd 'pull the plug'. So, the CIP meeting tomorrow might not even take place.

{Senior steward 1}'s walk round. {Senior steward 1} sets off for one of his regular walks round GA to see the stewards - he usually does this twice each day, morning and afternoon. Various issues come up:

Lieu days on the door line - {Senior steward 1} has a list of requested days off from members in GA, and goes to see the senior overseer, who keeps the log. He's known as 'the Marine' [ex-Royal Marine] - {Senior steward 1} and the other stewards agree he is a good guy. The Marine sits at his computer, behind a low partition, a short distance from the door line. {Senior steward 1} looks over his shoulder at the floating vac spreadsheet.

{Senior steward 1} :

'{Named worker}, leg one, 20th of May.'

The supervisor looks it up, and OKs it, and enters the name on the spread sheet. There are two more like this in May, both agreed.

{Senior steward 1} - the rest are in, like, end of June, July - we'll leave them for a bit, eh?

Supervisor agrees. They look at next week - the bank holiday and CIP:

{Senior steward 1} - so, four off - you've still got your spare, yeh?

It's all resolved amicably. As we walk off, I ask {Senior steward 1} why he held back some of the requests until later. As I expected, he says it's to even out the lieu days amongst the sections - there's a big backlog of lieu days at the moment, so he wants other sections to book some, before he puts in all the other requests from this one section.

Then we start the walk round proper. {Senior steward 1} stops to talk to all the stewards, and some of the workers. Most of this is just chat, arranging out of work activities, etc., and {Senior steward 1} reports back on booked lieu days to the guys who have put in requests.

There are a couple of ongoing issues to discuss, though...

{Steward 2}, on engine dress - reports the {parts} boxes are looking good... now fifty-odd new ones in the system. Damaged ones are being taken out and seem to be staying out.

The supervisor of the section is on the phone, talking loudly and striding about in an agitated fashion:

'You've been sending me shite all week, so pull your finger out. [Pause and smile] I say that in a teamly way...'
The supervisor comes over to speak to {Steward 2} while {Senior steward 1}'s there - there's a try-and-test tomorrow... {Steward 2} will be taken off the line for that.
As we walk away, {Senior steward 1} says this is a proper try-and-test, not a smuggled-in CIP, like the one that was put off this morning.
{Senior steward 1} - by stopping {Steward 1}'s one today, we've put the stop on a try-and-test over here today...
This is because some of the 25 seconds of work was coming over here, to engine dressing. So, {Senior steward 1} is pleased that they reinforced the process of proper planning and consultation on job re-organisation.

As we walk back to the union office, I ask {Senior steward 1} if the *Kaizen* still makes economic sense, because they seem to spend an awful lot of time and money on it, for the amount of useful change they seem to get. {Senior steward 1} says, in here, all they look at is the times... to reduce labour.
{Senior steward 1} - they've got a set plan for taking out so many heads a month...
- that's what {Steward 1}'s was this morning...
- that manager's got to get that man out this month...
So that's why the manager's under pressure?
{Senior steward 1} - Yeh...
[Today is 1 May, so I guess he over-ran.]
They've got a set plan? How did you get to see that?
{Senior steward 1} - I've seen the plans... they had a presentation about a month ago - 22 men by the end of the year...
- I said that's not feasible - they said, we like to aim high... I said it doesn't matter where you aim, that's not feasible...

{Senior steward 1} sits at his desk and checks his emails. There's the new letter from the company about the electric cigs - he's not happy.
{Senior steward 1} - [reading] - that's a lie...
The letter says, the electric cigarettes contain tobacco, which they don't.
There's no more senior reps about, so {Senior steward 1} phones someone to tell them the letter is wrong.
{Senior steward 1} - they've got it wrong... it just makes them look like they don't know what they're talking about...

{Senior steward 2} comes in.
{Senior steward 2} - I went to see {named manager}... big argument...
- {named manager} said, you can't accuse me of lying.
{Senior steward 2} - I said, I can and I've got proof... I've been to speak to OH...
- Unit management have got wind of it...

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Then {Convenor 2} comes in. {Senior steward 2} tells the story again.
{Convenor 2} says, Unit management have called a meeting for tomorrow.
[I won't be here!]
Later, {Convenor 2} calls this meeting:
'a straightener'.

{Senior steward 2} continues his account of the meeting with {named manager}. {Senior steward 2} said all his TU colleagues were in agreement with his view of the undertakings the manager made during the meeting, and he had checked with OH exactly what the manager had asked her to do - which was a job assessment on the LFE worker on the adjacent job. {Senior steward 2} said to the manager, there wasn't even a long gap between the meeting and the OH assessment - so the manager knew he had deliberately misled them. The manager, according to {Senior steward 2}, said, you can't say that, I'm not a liar. {Senior steward 2} said, you can call it a lie or you can call it misled, but the point is, how can I trust you ever again? {Senior steward 2} says, in muffled tones, 'he went mad'.

Shortly afterwards, when I go to say goodbye, the discussion has started again in the deputy convenors' office.
{Senior steward 2} - how can I trust him again?
{Convenor 2} - you don't have to trust him, I'll tell them we're not working with him any more...

As I leave, I say, tell me about this next week. {Convenor 2} smiles broadly.
{Convenor 1} says, brightly, See you on Tuesday!

Thoughts

Lots going on here. Some classic bargaining from {Senior steward 1} and {Steward 1}.

Appendix 5: Information sheets and consent form

This Appendix contains copies of paperwork relating to approved ethical procedures.

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: Shop stewards in action

My name is Simon Joyce and I am a researcher studying for a PhD at the University of Hertfordshire Business School. This research project will examine the contemporary role of shop stewards in the workplace. In particular, I want to look at the types of issues that stewards deal with and how those issues are handled. This will provide an understanding of patterns of union representation and bargaining.

The research will include me observing shop stewards in various settings, such as the union office, as well as interviews and small surveys. Some shop stewards will be asked to keep a diary with brief entries about their union duties and activities. I also hope to conduct interviews and/or surveys with a sample of managers, union members, and union officers, and I will be reviewing relevant documents. The research will last up to six months.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for my records. Please note that you will remain free to withdraw from the research at any time, without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

I can assure you that any information gathered during the research will be treated anonymously and in strict confidence. This can be guaranteed by ensuring that neither your details nor the identity of your employer is included in the dissertation or any reports that result from the research. Furthermore, any information you disclose will not be revealed to any other person participating in this research.

During the research I will record information by taking notes and/or using digital recording equipment. All data collected during this research will be kept securely. Some data may be retained by myself for use in the future.

On completion of the research, a PhD dissertation will be submitted to the University. It is also likely that some of the results will be published elsewhere - for instance, in academic journals.

If you have any questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact me, here:

Address: Flat 1
22 Primrose Gardens
London NW3 4TN
Email: s.c.joyce@herts.ac.uk
Telephone: Home – 020 7586 4516
Mobile - 07811144890

The research will be supervised by Dr David Allsop and two other members of staff at the University of Hertfordshire. If you have any concerns about the research project and the way it is being conducted, you can contact my supervisor, here:

Address: Dr David Allsop
Learning and Teaching Fellow
Business School Campus Manager
University of Hertfordshire
Hatfield AL102AB
Email: d.allsop@herts.ac.uk

Non-participant Information Sheet

This sheet was prepared in case of requests for information from non-participants in the research setting. In fact, very few of these were requested during the fieldwork.

Information Sheet

Research Title: Shop stewards in action

My name is Simon Joyce and I am a researcher studying for a PhD at the University of Hertfordshire Business School. This research project will examine the contemporary role of shop stewards in the workplace. In particular, I want to look at the types of issues that stewards deal with and how those issues are handled. This will provide an understanding of patterns of union representation and bargaining.

The research will include me observing shop stewards in various settings, such as the union office, as well as interviews and small surveys. Some shop stewards will be asked to keep a diary with brief entries about their union duties and activities. I also hope to conduct interviews and/or surveys with a sample of managers, union members, and union officers, and I will be reviewing relevant documents. The research will last up to six months.

I can assure you that any information gathered during the research will be treated anonymously and in strict confidence. This can be guaranteed by ensuring that neither your details nor the identity of your employer is included in the dissertation or any reports that result from the research. Furthermore, any information you disclose will not be revealed to any other person participating in this research.

If you do not wish your encounter with a shop steward to be observed, please let me know, and I will exclude it from the research.

All data collected during this research will be kept securely. During the research I will record information by taking notes and/or using digital recording equipment. Some data may be retained by myself for use in the future.

On completion of the research, a PhD dissertation will be submitted to the University. It is also likely that some of the results will be published elsewhere - for instance, in academic journals.

If you have any questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact me, here:

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The research will be supervised by Dr David Allsop and two other members of staff at the University of Hertfordshire. If you have any concerns about the research project and the way it is being conducted, you can contact my supervisor, here:

Address: Dr David Allsop
              Learning and Teaching Fellow
              Business School Campus Manager
              University of Hertfordshire
              Hatfield AL102AB
Email: d.allsop@herts.ac.uk

Statement of Informed Consent

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

Statement of Informed Consent

Research Title: Shop stewards in action

1. This part should be completed prior to conducting the research (Please tick boxes as appropriate)

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without disadvantage or having to give a reason. ☐

I am willing to participate in this study. ☐

I agree to the researcher taking notes and/or using digital recording equipment. ☐

I wish to keep my personal details and those of my employer anonymous. ☐

I understand that any information I disclose to the researcher will be treated in strict confidence, and will not be revealed to any other person participating in this research. ☐

Name (please print): _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____

2. This part should be completed after the research has been completed

I am satisfied with the way the research was conducted and I am prepared to allow the information disclosed during the research to be used by the researcher when reporting the findings, subject to the guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality.

Name (please print): _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____

</div>

Appendix 6: Interview schedules

This Appendix contains schedules used for in-depth interviews. Schedules for interviewing shop stewards were identical in each case study, apart from one specific question about a potentially controversial issue, which was included to assess intra-organisational bargaining arrangements. These questions appear under the heading 'Specific questions'. Other topics were introduced as areas for discussion – sometimes with an initial question – and stewards were given time and space to comment on each area of investigation at length if they wanted to. Bullet points underneath each question or topic were reminders to the interviewer for areas that might arise, rather than a series of scheduled prompts. Since interviewees were encouraged to respond widely and freely, interviews often moved across topics such that the interview did not follow the set order of the schedule; in which case, the interview was concluded when all areas had been discussed. In the second case study managers were also interviewed, and a modified form of the same schedule was used. The interview with the head of HR in this case study also included questions taken directly from WERS 2004 and 2011 questionnaires (see Section 4.3), and these are also reproduced below.

Shop steward interview schedule
Below is the schedule that was used for in-depth interviews with shop stewards. The layout has been edited slightly to fit the current format.

Shop steward interview schedule

Reminder to self: 'Conversation with a purpose' 'We want their words - the world according to them' 'The point of in depth interviewing is to get *really really* rich material'

Introduction
- aims of the study
- anonymity, confidentiality and recording

Warm up
- name
- job title
- nature of work

- working hours

- how long a steward
- how many members
- any other TU role
- TU training

The shop steward role
Why did you become a steward?
- motivation - what are you tying to achieve?
   [- in relation to members]
   [- in relation to management]

The role of a shop steward
- what do you think makes a good shop steward?

What sort of relationship with members?
For instance:
- take up all the issues members bring to you, whatever they are
- try to lead their members, because some issues are more important than others

What sort of relationship with management?
For instance:
- confrontation
- partnership
- good bargaining relationship

Do you have any frustrations about your role as a steward?
For instance:
- members
- management
- union
- other

Individual representation
Do you do individual representation?
- if not, why not?
- if you do, how much?

Do you think individual cases matter - or not?
- why
- how much

How does individual casework fit into the wider picture?

Do you have any alternative informal means for taking up issues with management?

Collective issues

Do you take up collective issues?
- when
- where
- how
    - any examples
- if not, why not?
    - any examples
- formal/informal?
    - when
    - where
    - how

Do collective issues come up in individual cases?
- when
- where
- how
- if not, why not?

Shop meetings
- do you hold them
- if not, why not?
- what are they like
    - when
    - where
    - how
- what do they achieve

Dealing with management / management decisions

Do you think the union in here has any influence over management decisions?

Formal meetings with management
    - how often?
    - what level?
- tell me about those
- progress or pointless?

Informal contacts with management
    - how often?
    - what level?
- tell me about those
- progress or pointless?

Methods of pressuring management / leverage
- do you use any?
- tell me about those

- when
- where
- how
- if not, tell me about that

Specific questions
London Borough: New Contracts
Do you think the new contracts could have been stopped?
Big Car: Concessions
You sometimes hear the opinion that the union has given away too much.
Would you agree with that?

Shop steward organisation
Committees - steward committees / branch committees
- tell me about those
- how do you find them?
e.g.
[Reminders, not prompts]
   - open/closed
   - useful/not useful
   - good points/problems
   - bureaucratised
   - democratic
   - intra-organisational bargaining
   - participant vs. representative

Discussions with other shop stewards or branch officers?
   - if not, why not?
- who you have discussions with
- tell me about those discussions
For instance:
   - open?
   - useful?
   - problems?
- what kind of issues do you discuss
   - current issues
   - wider union issues
   - social and political issues

Conclusion
Thank you for taking part in this research - your input has been important and appreciated.

Below is the schedule used for interviewing managers. Note, the research only had access

for interviewing managers at the Big Car case study, and the schedule reflects that.

Manager interview schedule

Reminder to self: 'Conversation with a purpose' 'We want their words - the world according to them' 'The point of in-depth interviewing is to get *really really* rich material'

Introduction
- aims of the study - shop steward issues-handling
- anonymity, confidentiality and recording

Warm up
- name
- job title
- nature of work
- working hours

- how long a manager
    - come up through Vauxhall?
- how many people do you manage

Dealing with union representatives
I'm interested in what kinds of dealings you have with shop stewards and other union representatives.

Generally, how would you characterise your relationship with stewards / union reps?
e.g. - confrontation?
    - cooperation?
    - partnership?
    - good bargaining relationship?

Formal meetings with union reps - are you involved?
- tell me about those
    - how often?
    - what level?
    - progress or pointless?

Informal contacts with union reps - do you have any?
- tell me about those
    - how often?
    - what level?

- progress or pointless?
- do they come to you, or do you go to them?

What kinds of issues?
- individual
- collective

Individual case meetings
- do they take up a lot of your time?
I was wondering what your thoughts are about those individual cases.
- how do you see them fitting into your role as a manager?
- how do the individual cases fit into the wider picture?

The role of a shop steward - I'm interested in how you see it
- what makes a good shop steward?
- what's your general opinion of the stewards you deal with?
- do you get on better with some reps more than others?
- tell me some more about that

The CIP process - I've found that very interesting
- how do you see the role of shop stewards in the CIP process?

Facilitate or obstruct?
In the academic circles I have contact with, you tend to hear two basic views about shop stewards / union reps - one is that they are facilitators, and the other is that they are an obstruction to management.
- what would your thoughts be on this?
- how do you see it?

Frustrations or problems?
- in dealing with stewards / union reps

WERS questions included in HR manager interview

From WERS 2011 Management Questionnaire

p.40

Are there any committees of managers and employees at this workplace, primarily concerned with consultation, rather than negotiation? These committees may be called joint consultative committees, works councils or representative forums.

Looking at the following list, which issues are discussed by the committees? PROBE: Which others? UNTIL 'None'.

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1. Production issues (e.g. level of production or sales, quality of product or service)
2. Employment issues (e.g. avoiding redundancies, reducing labour turnover)
3. Financial issues (e. g. financial performance, budgets or budgetary cuts)
4. Future plans (e.g. changes in goods produced or services offered, company expansion or contraction)
5. Pay issues (e.g. wage or salary reviews, bonuses, regarding, job evaluation)
6. Leave and flexible working arrangements, including working time
7. Welfare services and facilities (e.g. child care, rest rooms, car parking, canteens, recreation)
8. Government regulations (e.g. EU Directives, Local Authority regulations)
9. Work organisation (e.g. changes to working methods, allocation of work between employees, multi-skilling)
10. Health and safety
11. Equal opportunities and diversity
12. Training
13. Other (please specify)

p.42

Which of the following best describes managers' usual approach when consulting members of the committee?

14. Seek solutions to problems
15. Seek feedback on a range of options put forward by management
16. Seek feedback on a preferred option put forward by management

p.52

[Thinking first of the unions that represent employees at this workplace, for / For] each of these issues I'd like to know whether management normally negotiates, consults, informs, or does not involve unions at all over these matters. INTERVIEWER: If any of these issues are dealt with at a higher level in the organisation or through an employers' association, please record what happens at that level.

From WERS 2004 Management Questionnaire:

Rates of pay:

Hours of work:

Holiday entitlements:

Pension entitlements:

Recruitment or selection of employees:

Training of employees:

Grievance procedures:

Disciplinary procedures:

Staffing plans:

Equal opportunities:

Health and safety:

Performance appraisals:

Work organisation:

Appendix 7: Nodes and themes

This Appendix contains lists of the analytical nodes from thematic data analysis conducted using NViVo software. First, the list is presented alphabetically, which shows how some themes grew and differentiated during the analysis (see Section 4.4). Next, the same list is presented in order of the number of references for each node. While software inflexibilities and the need to protect anonymity and confidentiality limit the data that can easily be included in this view, this second view indicates the types of issues that came up most frequently in the data (though, it should be remembered that this frequency does not represent a properly quantitative measure). Both lists have been edited to remove the names of individual stewards and managers, along with any potentially identifying terms.

As discussed in Section 4.4, analytical themes coalesced around a mix of 'foreshadowed problems' and scrutiny of the data. Nodes were grouped variously at different points in the analysis, and the main themes utilised can be seen in the structure of Chapters 5-8.

Nodes listed alphabetically

98ers

Absenteeism

Advice role

Agency workers

Agreements

Attitudinal structuring

Austerity & Budget cuts

Bargaining relations

Bluff

Body shop

Boots

Branch Development Day

Breaks

C&E

Capability & performance

Car scheme

GA

Management system audit

Good place to work

Grading

Grievance - individual

H&S

HASC

HASC Stewards Committee

Hidden practice

Holidays

HR

IER

Individual bargaining

Individual bargaining - LFE

Individual representation (steward)

Individualism (of members)

Informal deal

Insecurity

Inter-plant relations

Intra-organisational bargaining

JIT

JNC

Job element sheets

Job knowledge as bargaining resource

Job move

Job rotation

Kaizen

Labour mobility

Labour Party

Labour reductions

Labour shortage

Lean production

Legal resources

LFE & Restricted

Pay - individual

Pay - PRP

Pensions

Performance

Persistence

Personal injury

Political issues

Precedent

Privatisation

Procedures used as resource

Production issues

Providing service

Quality - disciplinary issue

Quality - production issue

Recruit - to union

Redundancy - collective

Redundancy - individual

Reorganisation

Rota

Rumours

Saving the plant

Senior steward role

Sequencing

Service - seniority

Sexual harassment

Shifts

Sickness

Sickness absence

Social workers

Socialism

Steward committee

Steward elections

Steward leadership

Steward role

Steward training

Stewards

Stoppage

Stress

Strikes

Suggestions

Supply Chain

TAKT time

Team brief

Team Working

Thatcher's death

Theft

Toilets

Track speed

Training

Try and Test

TUPE

UAW

Unison national

Unison region

Unit consultation

Unite - branch

Unite - HQ

Unite - political school

Unite - region

United Left

Users (services) & tenants

VBA

Big Car - correspondence

Welfare issues

Work equipment

Work intensity

Work organisation

Working conditions

Working week

Xmas rota

Young worker

Nodes listed by number of references (highest to lowest)

Bargaining relations

My thoughts

Management - motive attribution

Individual representation (steward)

CIP

Steward role

Intra-organisational bargaining

Work organisation

Management - stewards challenge

HASC Stewards Committee

Field Relations

Supply Chain

Reorganisation

H&S

Collective issue

Work intensity

Disciplinary

Quality - production issue

Management - arguments used

Labour reductions

Labour shortage

Steward training

Management - accused of lying

LFE & Restricted

Senior steward role

Procedures used as resource

Management - steward helping

Job element sheets

Quality - disciplinary issue

HR

Collective bargaining

Job knowledge as bargaining resource

Consultation

Management system audit

Collectivism - of members

Managers don't know the job

Steward leadership

Floating vacation & lieu days

Pay - PRP

Kaizen

Dismissal

Attitudinal structuring

Providing service

Sickness absence

Paint shop

OH

Members moaning about stewards or union

Collective action

Sequencing

Suggestions

Management - seen as helpful

Facility time

Sickness

Body shop

Agreements

Legal resources

Branch Development Day

Other issues & Non-union issues

Down-time

United Left

Company - meetings with

Hidden practice

Saving the plant

340

Try and Test

Stoppage

Discrimination

Privatisation

Down Days

GA

Contractors

Unit consultation

Track speed

Non-cooperation

Working conditions

Individual bargaining

Pay - individual

Job rotation

Work equipment

Labour mobility

Corridor

Direct Labour

Councillors

Advice role

Training

Steward elections

Outsourcing

Redundancy - individual

Members lying to stewards

Team Working

Agency workers

Grievance - individual

Users (service) & tenants

Members - inactive

Management - shifted

Council policy

Members - demanding

Lucky Lotto

Unite - HQ

VBA

Grading

Redundancy - collective

Lean production

Options (production model)

HASC

Inter-plant relations

Steward committee

Strikes

Informal deal

Pay - collective

Recruit - to union

Door line

Breaks

Labour Party

Young worker

Rumours

Individualism (of members)

Mental Health Teams

Social workers

Unison national

C&E

Political issues

EEF

TAKT time

Job move

Absenteeism

Ergonomic assessment

Socialism

Overtime

Production issues

Welfare issues

Precedent

Performance

Non-members

Fairness

Unison region

FTO

Management - double standards

Unite - political school

Big Car - correspondence

On the track

98ers

Good place to work

Shifts

Lying to management

Flexible working

Living Wage

Members - to blame

CSF

Austerity & Budget cuts

Down Days - working

Pensions

TUPE

Unite - region

Working week

Holidays

Team brief

Car scheme

Embarrassment factor

Rota

Stress

Management - renege

Capability & performance

Manager (un-named)

Manager - piss-taking

Morning Star

Thatcher's death

Individual bargaining - LFE

Service - seniority

JIT

Concessions

Bluff

Insecurity

UAW

JNC

IER

Unite - branch

Compassionate leave

Toilets

Personal injury

Theft

Charity fund

Boots

Doing deals - with manager

Sexual harassment

Maternity

ET

Persistence

LGBT

Xmas rota

Stewards