THE PARTICIPANT OBSERVER AND GROUPS IN CONFLICT:

A CASE STUDY FROM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Between 1969 and 1971, I undertook a participant obser-
vation study of a firm in the South of England. During
this time, data were collected on relationships between
trade union and management parties from the point of
view of inter-group conflict and resolution.   Of
particular note during this period were events leading
up to a strike, and the aftermath of this strike.

In 1976, I contacted the firm again, and was given
permission to conduct a brief follow-up study consisting
mainly of interviews with those who in 1970, and/or in
1976, held positions central to industrial relations at
the firm.   The findings from these two studies comprise
the empirical content of Parts I and II, contained in
Volume I of this thesis.

The chapters comprising Part III of the thesis, contained
in Volume II, explore some of the theoretical, method-
ological, and value issues which arise from the empirical
study.

CONTENTS

PART I (VOLUME I)

PART II (VOLUME I)

Chapter 5. Continued...

PART III (VOLUME II)

VOLUME I

PART I

Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

This study has three major aims. The first is to describe a series of events which took place in a Factory over a period of 18 months. The second aim is to provide adequate explanation for the events described in terms of theory which is available. The third aim is to critically examine the main research method employed and in particular, to analyse my role as an observer of events. Emphasis shifts between these three aims throughout the study. The main reason for this is the difficulty of assessing the research method of participant observation independently of the data which it generates. Therefore, only through an inspection of the findings can it be seen what the method has to offer.

It is important to be able to see both the advantages and limitations of this type of research, that is, to acknowledge what it can, and what it cannot achieve. Like any research, it is bounded by its methodology, and the researcher can only build upon the data he collects. Many factors influence relationships in an organization, particularly one where actors spend less than one third of their everyday lives. A further aim of the study therefore is to attempt to identify factors within the structure of the organization that appear to offer some explanation for the patterns of events described. External factors, which inevitably affect circumstances, are deliberately not investigated and only cursory reference is made to such factors.

Thus, no attempt is made to relate conflict in this organization to conflict in the wider society. This is not an objective of the study, and the researcher is not competent to employ techniques required to undertake such an analysis. The type of analysis used may be described as 'micro-pluralist', and is defined by the boundaries of the organization studied. In this context, I adopt what may be described as a 'radical pluralist' perspective in reporting and analysing the data. This perspective could be held to represent a view which maintains that: "many different parties make up a modern industrial organization. While some groups are obviously and consistently more powerful than others, there are many factors and alliances criss-crossing the main authority structure".

It is important to define the limits to analysis early in the study. Thus, I shall be concerned principally with the behaviour and inter-relations of groups and their representatives within an organization. The study is not concerned with individual behaviour as such, although the importance of roles that individuals play is frequently acknowledged. Thus, a dozen or so pseudonyms for key respondents in the study have been created. The intention in this regard has been to keep identification of individuals to the minimum necessary to make sense of the data obtained.

A number of ways of defining the general role and involvement of the field researcher in the study of group conflict, social research in organizations, or industrial relations, have been suggested. These often take the form of tri-partite classifications. For example, Janis and Katz (1959) suggest three stages in examining methods for reducing inter-group hostility and enhancing mutual adherence to shared ethical norms: i) case studies and comparative work, ii) field studies, and iii) field and laboratory experiments. Elements of the first two of these stages are involved in the methodology of this study. Another 3-fold classification is provided by Klein (1976), who cites a Dutch study of 120 pieces of social research. These are divided into: input (descriptive), throughput (action research), and output (evaluation). This study would be included under the first of these headings, with perhaps elements of the third type embedded in it.

A supplementary aim of the approach adopted here, is to indicate where such research can lead in terms of advantages of a case study approach to industrial relations. Nicholson and Wall (1976) identify three main areas of involvement for researchers in industrial relations: negotiation and bargaining; attitudes and roles; and joint decision-making and communication. In this research I was particularly concerned with issues under the second and third of these headings. The same authors also describe three distinctive functions which the psychologist may fulfill in industrial relations.

Firstly, as an impartial third party - a specialist
in inter-personal relations;   second, as a source of
methods and techniques that can be used to aid problem
diagnosis and changes;   and third, as able to put a
different perspective on situations and issues.   It
is under the last of these headings that the object-
ives of this study may be largely subsumed.   However,
as far as methods of study are concerned, the first is
also important.

As a case study, the research findings may or may not
be capable of generalization.   Intimate investigation
of a research field does however reveal an abundance
of data which could not be obtained by any other single
method.   There are no independent criteria for unambig-
uously assessing the relative values of these factors.
Increasing availability of well documented case studies
should serve to enhance theories of human behaviour.
For this reason, a unique example of behaviour in a
natural setting should be capable of adding to, as
well as confirming or challenging existing knowledge
of behaviour.[1]   Case studies taken in conjunction
with other types of data such as surveys, can help to
increase understanding of such complex forms of
behaviour as strikes and industrial conflict.

(1)   Lipset et al. (1956) make the point that the case study
      approach is exploratory, not confirmatory in nature.

Another area in which important contributions can be made by the extended case study is that of research methodology. In this study, details and explanatory notes on methodology are provided. The main method employed in the research was participant observation. Other methods used were: interviewing, and examination of documents. These are described in Chapter 2.

Almost inevitably, because of the large amount obtained, data for inclusion in the study had to be selected from field notes and other sources. It is difficult to define the criteria for this selection, which has resulted in only a fraction of the data collected being presented. Initial selection of material may have been based largely upon criteria of face validity. However, subsequent feedback from key respondents in the study, as well as many helpful suggestions from colleagues as a result of conference and seminar papers, have exerted considerable influence upon the inclusion or non-inclusion of material.

As an empirical study employing participant observation, this research carries interpretive elements along with description of method and findings. The intertwining of 'facts' and 'values' in this way may appear to be in evidence more than is considered desirable in 'scientific' work. Because of the importance of these issues, in Chapter 9, and to a lesser extent, in Chapters 7 and 8, an attempt is made to discuss these issues apart from, but with reference to, the data comprising this study.

The study is concerned with a Firm which was going through a critical period in its industrial relations history. At the apparent core of conflict was the job evaluation system, which underwent significant changes during the research period. A 'closed shop' had been operating for many years and three trade union parties within the Firm each had their own agreements and disputes procedures with Management. Members of the Personnel Department had been attempting to bring together the trade union factions within the Firm into a single negotiating body.

The strike which developed after I had been researching in the Factory for six months involved each union party in different courses of action. A period of intense bitterness followed the strike. The union groups subsequently co-operated with each other and there was a 'resolution' to the conflict.

Of particular note in the conflict sequence are: the parties to the conflict, their perceptions of events, communications within and between parties, polarization at the time of open conflict, and positive-sum bargaining at the resolution stage. The study has implications for the practical side of industrial relations in that it provides an example of how relations between groups within a factory can deteriorate. The research further demonstrates how the experience of conflict may benefit the parties in the long-term.

That management may be reluctant to grant access to
outsiders to study its affairs has been found by some
researchers.[1]   On this evidence, the Company
representatives who permitted their premises and
personnel to be the subjects of this study may be
seen to have been secure in allowing the research to
take place at all.   One researcher suggests that the
granting of permission for his research project may
have been part of a new management style (Beynon, 1973).
From the viewpoint of this research, it is almost certain
that the advent of open conflict was not foreseen by
Management respresentatives when their permission was
obtained to enter the Firm.   I therefore had the
opportunity to familiarize myself with the Factory
environment before open conflict arose, as well as
being able to study the subsequent resolution process.
There are few similar opportunities to study industrial
conflict in this way which have been available to
researchers.[2]

Gardner and Whyte (1946) explain that companies are
often unwilling to risk the possibility that research
on their premises might uncover conflict which, from
a management viewpoint, would be best hidden from out-
siders.   They suggest that the purpose of the study
must therefore make sense to management who need to be
able to see possible future benefits accruing from the

(1)   Examples include: Gardner & Whyte (1946) and Cotgrove
      & Box (1970).
(2)   Among the exceptions are: Gouldner (1954), Clack (1971)
      and Beynon (1973).

research, as well as being assured that the research will not disrupt the conduct of its business and that any data collected will be confidential. Trade unions could be expected to have similar reservations about research into their affairs.

Gusfield (1955) on the other hand, suggests reasons why an organization might choose to co-operate in research originating from outside, these being: a need to communicate a favourable image to the researcher who is an important member of its public, the status-conferring function of being studied, and the rewarding experience of conversing with an informed and understanding outsider. These two aspects of the 'co-operative contract' between researcher and respondents suggest that feelings of ambivalence on the part of potential respondents may exist. In this research, I stressed at the start that I would not be performing a consultancy role for any party, nor would I be intervening in the affairs of the Company or its employees. Management and trade union representatives within this Firm went to considerable lengths to help me with my work, although conditions which were agreed upon for undertaking the research preclude mention of their identities.

Throughout the study, issues are raised which are not necessarily central to the subjects under invest-igation. To aid the reader's progress through the substantive part of the fieldwork, such issues, part-icularly on matters relating to theoretical or

methodological analysis of the research are dealt with in the Appendix notes in Volume II. These Appendix notes, which are referred to and footnoted in the text, may be omitted by the reader, although their inclusion is intended to give due consideration to a number of possible questions which arise regarding research procedures. Alternatively, they may be read separately from the main body of the study. Separation of substantive content from the methodology employed in its collection is a course of action which has been favoured by some researchers.[1]

Alternatively, a major advantage of communicating research ideas and method together with the content is that the researcher can explore both his biases and motivation insofar as these are relevant to the study. Coleman (1964) refers to difficulties in communicating linkages between research ideas, and Becker (1970) asserts that bias in research will never be eliminated by methodological rigor alone. Hammond (1964) makes the point that few social scientific reports on method contain the 'method' by which they came about, while Wright-Mills (1959), in a personal statement on intellectual craftsmanship, explores in some detail the mind of the researcher. On motivation, Rex (1961) considers that problems investigated by sociologists (other social scientists may be included) often arise through struggle for social reform.

(1) For example: Strauss (1952), Sayles & Strauss (1953); Dalton (1959)(1964); Becker et al. (1961), Geer (1964); Turner et al. (1967), Clack (1967).

The resultant value-commitments of social scientists
who follow the line of such authors as these will be
explored with reference to this study.   They are
aptly summarized in a consideration of detachment
and objectivity in research by Gouldner (1970).

The period of the first field study extended from
early 1969 to late 1971.   The fieldwork was conduct-
ed over an 18-month period, and I had been a partic-
ipant observer in the Factory for 7 months before
the strike occurred.   I was a graduate student at
the London School of Economics, working at the Conflict
Research Unit,[1] under whose auspices the research was
conducted.

During the original 18 months of fieldwork, I made
over eighty visits to the Factory, as well as visit-
ing the local offices of the Majority Union on two
occasions.   Although I did not keep an accurate tally
of the time I spent in the environment under study,
the total number of hours spent in the field must have
been between 250 and 300.   The follow-up study was
conducted over four days intensive interviewing in
February 1976, plus one day's interviewing for feed-
back later that year.   At that time, I was a research
fellow at The University of Aston in Birmingham.

(1)   Details of the Conflict Research Unit are given in Appendix
       note 1.

The layout of the study has been dictated to a large extent by the chronology of events as they were observed in the field. The chapters comprising the study reflect these considerations. The thesis is organized in three parts, which are in two volumes. Part I (in Volume I) deals with the initial fieldwork, including description and analysis of events observed during this period. Material in the chapters comprising Part I formed the basis of the first report to the Firm in 1971. Part II (in Volume I) consists of one chapter, which is concerned with the re-study of the Firm, six years after the initial fieldwork had been completed. This chapter (Chapter 5) comprises the substance of the second report to the Firm in 1976. The essence of the empirical study, comprising description and analysis of the fieldwork, is contained within Volume I.

Part III (in Volume II) is composed of four chapters, dealing with theoretical and methodological issues raised through the empirical study. These chapters relate to the empirical work in various ways. For example, Chapter 6, dealing with conflict, is not intended to be a thorough review of the field. Its main function is to highlight some of the writings on conflict to add perspectives and insights to the foregoing analysis. In Chapter 8, a quote from the study is used as a starting point for a discussion on research, management, and trade unions.

The empirical content of Part III however is minimal. Chapter 9, on politics and values, raises some issues which might not appear central to the study, but which nevertheless play an important part in influencing observation, description, and analysis of the subject matter.

A final 'chapter' takes the form of Appendix notes (in Volume II), which are referred to throughout the earlier chapters. The reason that these notes are not appendixed to individual chapters is that some are referred to in more than one chapter. Methodological explanations in the form of Appendix notes, footnotes and small sections in the text are intended to be as unobtrusive as possible so as to facilitate appreciation of the substantive findings. Nevertheless, the way in which research is undertaken is important and therefore it is essential to include as thorough an explanation of methodology as possible in such a work.

A three-part bibliography (in Volume II) comprising sections on: books, articles, and other works referenced in the study, concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRM AS RESPONDENT ORGANIZATION

This chapter describes some of the major constituent parties within the Firm, as well as providing some background information about the Firm. There is an outline of the approach, introduction and preliminary acceptance of the researcher into the Firm. Finally, there is discussion in the form of a summary of what was learnt from early contacts with the parties.

The Firm which provided the subject-matter for this research was situated in the South of England and was a subsidiary of a larger holding Company. This particular Factory was responsible for the manufacture and distribution of a consumer product on a continuous-flow production process (Woodward, 1965). The Firm employed a manual workforce in this Factory of about 1,100 men and women, who were supervised by over 70 foremen and represented on the shop floor by about 40 shop stewards. The Company had a reputation for being generous to its employees at all levels, if somewhat paternalistic in its behaviour towards them. Labour turnover was very low at less than 0.3% per month for males. [1]

(1) Labour turnover for *all* manufacturing industry at that time was around 2.6% per month, for males. For the industry *group* (standard industrial classification 1958) in which this Firm was included, labour turnover was around 3.3% for males, and for the *industry*, the equivalent figure was between 1.8% and 2.4% per month for males at that time. Figures from: *Employment and Productivity Gazette*, Labour turnover: manufacturing industries: period ended 16th November 1968, January 1969, p49 and: Labour turnover: manufacturing industries: four weeks ended 15th November 1969, January 1970 p33.

The Company group was diversified, but this individual subsidiary produced a single product with a few variations.[1] At the time at which this study was undertaken, production was at full stretch. This resulted in constant pressure to maintain output to meet a rising demand for the product. The financial position of the Company was healthy, and this played a large part in its being able to meet wage claims, and also meant that short stoppages in production could be accommodated.

The Management of this Firm fitted a 'progressive' image. They were aware and actively involved with such issues as safety, sickness and absenteeism. There were a variety of training schemes operating within the Firm, and a number of full-time staff to run them. Research was being undertaken on Management by Objectives with a view to it being introduced.[2] An important issue for Management was the 'togetherness' of personnel within the Firm, particularly the unionised workforce. Management were concerned with being fair to all, and were not happy with the existence of different arrangements which operated for different union groups. Management perceived an important outcome of this state of affairs to be 'leap-frogging'.

(1)   There were approximately 300 separate companies registered under the name of the parent company, this Firm being one of the largest in the group. Plans to build another Factory at an existing distribution point for the product in the north-west were being considered, but were eventually shelved by the Board of Directors in 1975.

(2)   Management by Objectives system involves staff being responsible to a particular manager and having objectives to work to. Attention is focussed upon important areas, and problems associated with these are given priority over other areas.

This involved claims from the various union groups in succession; a continuous process which was self-generating in terms of wage increases. As well as government pressure against this practice,[1] it was unpopular with management and costly in time spent negotiating increases with the separate groups. There was also pressure from directors to eliminate leap-frogging claims on the grounds that they eroded profits which were necessary to enable the Firm to fulfil its various commitments.

The Personnel Department was a strong element within the Firm, its influence being proportionately greater than its size alone would have suggested. The Personnel Manager had a correspondingly powerful role, and the Department was capable of presenting a united front against outside pressure.

The Road Transport Department was responsible for a major part of the distribution of the product, a small amount also left the Factory by rail. Fifteen years earlier, this Department had been a separate company, and until three years before had been a subsidiary of the present Company. It had merged with the Company two years before this study began. In spite of the merger, this Department was separated from the main body of the Firm, both in physical distance, and also in terms of its employees' attitudes. To some extent, these attitudes were paralleled by those of personnel within

(1)   For details of incomes policy in operation at the time of the study, see: *Prices and Incomes Act 1966*, London HMSO 1966; and *Productivity and Incomes Policy in 1968 and 1969*, Government White Paper, HMSO, London, Cmnd. 3590, pp8-9.

the rest of the Firm, who often behaved as if the Road Transport Department was still a separate firm. This isolation had important consequences from the point of view of industrial relations in the Firm, particularly those aspects relating to wage claims, the job evaluation system, and inter-union rivalry. As a separate company in the past, there had been reputedly poor relations between management and employees, but since it had been incorporated into the main body of the Firm, there had been a great improvement in the way in which the work-force of this Department had been treated.

A large section of the unionised workforce in the Firm belonged to one union, which will be referred to as the Majority Union. A more appropriate distinction should be made between the 800 or so employees who belonged to the Inside Branch, and the remaining 160 who belonged to the Road Branch. These two separate branches of the same Trade Union in the same Firm resulted from the merger described above.

Members of the larger Branch worked inside the Factory itself, and were unskilled and semi-skilled process operatives on the shop floor. Those who performed various services and ancilliary functions about the Factory belonged to this Branch, and a few skilled workers were also be found among its ranks. This Branch had the most frequent communication of any of the union groups with management. The Personnel Department maintained regular informal contact with the shop stewards of this Branch, particularly with

the Senior Shop Steward who was seen by many as a strong leader.

Compared with the Inside Branch, the Road Branch had less frequent contact with management and its leadership was less experienced and more prone to change. The Branch was composed of skilled and semi-skilled workers who were concerned with the distribution of the Firm's product by road and the maintenance of vehicles. The drivers were the 'élite' of this Branch. That this Branch was a relative newcomer to the industrial relations scene in the Firm was partly responsible for the members feeling out on a limb, and having their own camaraderie.[1]

In the past, they had reputedly considered themselves to be superior to the Inside Branch members, but more recently had begun to see themselves in competition with the Inside Branch. The Road Branch thought that they were becoming increasingly disadvantaged in comparison with the other union groups, particularly the Inside Branch whose position they regarded as too close to management. The Road Branch Committee, largely because of the nature of its members' work, was not able to meet with great regularity or frequency. They had recently elected a new Chairman and a new Secretary.

(1) The drivers tended to see themselves as a separate group, even with respect to their colleagues in the Road Branch who were skilled workers in the garages.

The six unions which represented the remaining 130 manual employees could be regarded as a single group, because although each had its own problems and grievances, for most intents and purposes they acted together.   This group was composed of a smaller number of union members in the Firm, so they are referred to as the Minority Unions.   The Shop Stewards' Committee of the Minority Unions elected a Convenor to act as Chairman and spokes-man for them and also a Deputy Convenor to support him and act in his absence.   Like that of the Road Branch, their leadership was not given to great stability, much to the chagrin of management with whom they did not have close or harmonious links.   Their membership was com-posed entirely of skilled workers, and their jobs were more varied than those of workers in other groups. Like the Road Branch, the Minority Unions felt themselves to be very much under the shadow of the Inside Branch.

Figure 1, shows the parties to industrial relations within the Firm.

FIGURE 1.1

PARTIES TO INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

- bracketed figures indicate approximate numbers in each party

- lines indicate links between parties


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                         ┌─────────────────┐
                         │DIRECTORS (10)   │
                         └─────────────────┘

┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│WHITE-COLLAR      │   │MANAGEMENT:       │   │PERSONNEL         │
│STAFF (900 in     │   │                  │   │DEPARTMENT (10)   │
│Association)      │   │PRODUCTION,       │   └──────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘   │MAINTENANCE,      │
                       │ETC.     (50)     │
                       └──────────────────┘

                       ┌──────────────────┐
                       │FOREMEN (70 in    │
                       │Foremans' Assoc-  │
                       │iation)           │
                       └──────────────────┘
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MAJORITY UNION: SHOP STEWARDS (40)

   INSIDE BRANCH (800)─────────────────BENNY[*], RON, ETC.

   ROAD BRANCH (160)──────────────────JOHN, ERNIE, ETC.

MINORITY UNIONS:

   SIX CRAFT UNIONS (120)─────────────────HAROLD, DAVID, ETC.
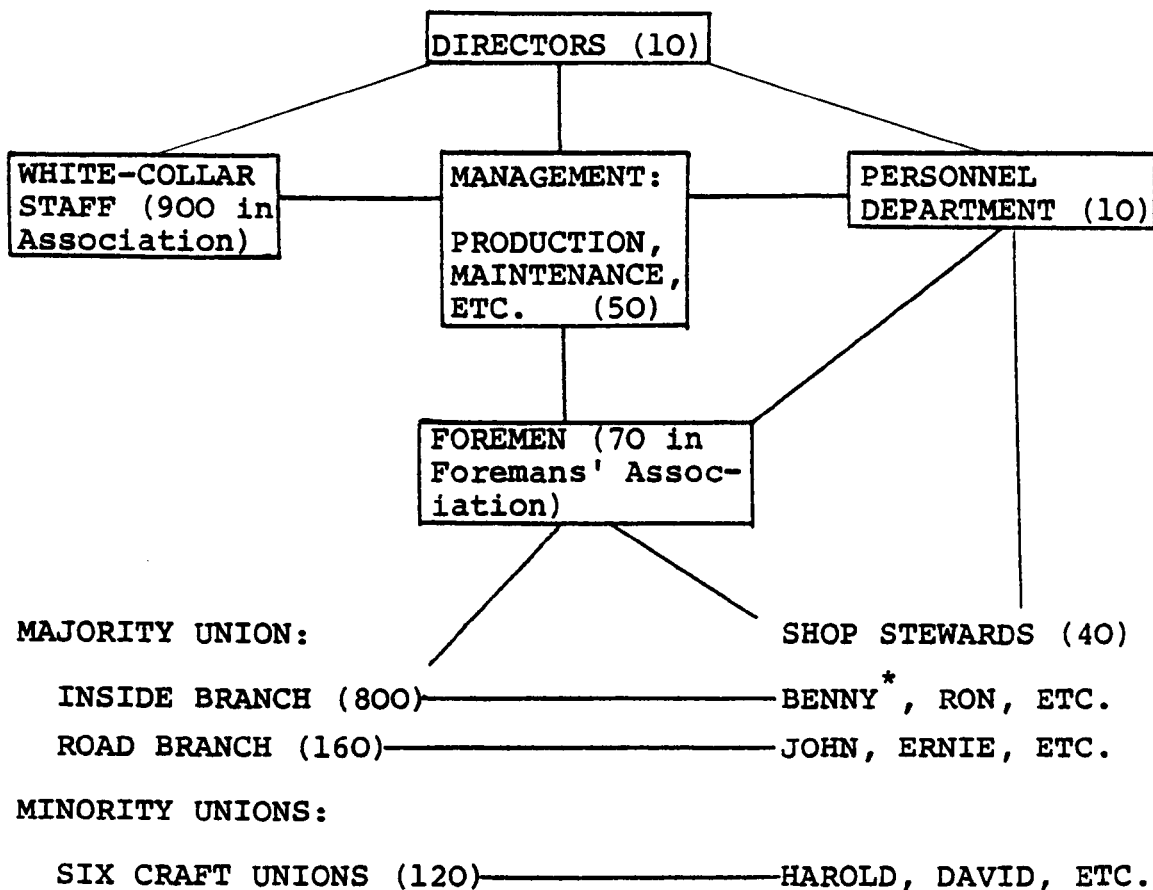
[*] All names used are entirely fictitious, although the individuals are real.

Inter-union relations within the Firm left much to be desired. There was enmity between the Inside and Road branches of the Majority Union, expressed most forcefully between their senior representatives. There was friction between the Inside Branch and the Minority Unions, exhibiting itself in much the same way. There was little contact between the Minority Unions and the Road Branch, although there was no apparent hostility between these parties.

Shop steward elections were held at regular intervals, some stewards being almost permanent representatives for their work-groups, while other groups made decisions that resulted in a more rapid turnover of shop stewards. Shop stewards performed their regular jobs as employees of the Firm, receiving time off to attend to union business or meetings. They were generally highly sensitised to their position and the problems which it brought, such as that of becoming isolated from the men they represented. One steward expressed this problem: "...you find that most of the blokes are just as suspicious of shop stewards as they are of Management...".

The Senior Shop Steward of the Inside Branch was the most controversial individual in the Factory. He was greatly admired by his own members, evidenced by the fact that he had held his present position for nearly ten years, almost since his arrival at the Firm. He also commanded respect from Management who had provided him with office facilities to conduct his union business. Although nominally an employee of the Firm, the Company had waived his duties in this respect and he was left free to engage in full-time union work.

Benny [1] was therefore a key figure, and from a research
point of view one without whose full co-operation no study
such as this could be maintained. For this reason, as
much effort as necessary was put into persuading Benny to
accept the research into the Factory. [2]

Harold was the Convenor of the Minority Unions. He had
been newly elected to his position from among the ranks of
the Minority Unions' shop stewards. His deputy was David.
Between them, Harold and David represented a sizeable pro-
portion of the Minority Unions' members directly as their
shop stewards, and as such were eager to ensure that the
voices of their respective union groups would be heard.
Their positions were a good deal less secure than Benny's,
and they were under pressure from their members to prove
themselves worthy of their status.

Reception

The details which have been given above explain the relations
between Management and trade union groups in the Firm at the
start of the research project. Many aspects of these
relationships did not manifest themselves until some time
after the preliminary encounters described immediately below.
With information conferred by hindsight however, it is possible
to see how reception of the research project was coloured by
the prevailing state of affairs.

(1)   This name, like all others used, is entirely fictitious.

(2)   A number of writers stress the importance of gaining support from
      such key respondents (e.g. Whyte, 1955).

In March 1969, the first approach was made to the Firm by
telephone.   Members of the Conflict Research Unit met soon
after with the Personnel Manager to discuss the project in
general terms.   In June, one of the directors informed
the Research Unit that because productivity negotiations were
in progress, an outside presence at that time was not desir-
able for Management.   Occasional contact was maintained with
the Personnel Department of the Firm over the next few months.
The trade unions in the Factory had been informed of our
general intentions and their reaction was reported to be
favourable to such a study.   After two meetings had been
postponed, we finally met with representatives of the trade
unions in December.

The atmosphere at this first meeting with the union represen-
tatives was tense.   Three members of the Conflict Research
Unit, including myself, confronted five shop stewards of
high status within the Firm.   At first the shop stewards
were very apprehensive, and pressed us to explain exactly
what we hoped to get out of our research.   We were very
willing to answer questions, and whenever possible drew upon
our limited experiences elsewhere for comparison purposes.
We stressed the respect which would be given to confidences,
and emphasised that we were unable to name the Firm which
had been the subject of a previous study, which proved
effective in bringing home this point.[1]

(1)   Advantages of giving evidence of professional identity to
       respondents have been noted by Blau (1964).

The Senior Shop Steward of the Road Branch was absent on this visit to the Firm, and a new Senior Steward was elected in his place shortly afterwards. Sam, the Secretary of the Road Branch remained almost completely silent throughout this meeting, while the other shop stewards were eager to pump us with questions. We surmised that Sam was not happy with the prospect of such research being conducted at the Factory, but as he expressed none of his fears to us, their nature could only be guessed at.

Some mutual trust together with a certain amount of apprehension which seemed to characterise our first meeting with the union representatives,was not evenly distributed. We were subject to differential accept-ance with respect to the three union groups. That Benny appeared satisfied after his questions about the conditions for our research, did not predispose Sam to think likewise. Harold and David, representing the Minority Unions were less committal, but seemed to be favourable towards the idea of our presence. Harold asked what would happen if one group decided to oppose our presence, while the others accepted the research. David though that while on the whole we would be accep-ted, there would be some people who would always be hostile to the likes of us!

First contact with the Trade Unions could have been
better handled.   The Personnel Department were well
aware of the differences which existed between the union
groups in the Factory, yet they scheduled our first
meeting with representatives from all three groups
simultaneously.   We were thus obliged to 'negotiate'
from a most bizarre position, for it was Personnel
Department policy to talk with each group separately, in
recognition of their different interests.   It would
have been preferable for us to have spoken with each
group independently, even at the risk of arousing sus-
picions over our relations with other groups.   Unfort-
unately, our lack of awareness of the existing conflict
put these preliminary negotiations on a weak footing. [1]

The following day, a colleague and I met the Minority
Unions' Shop Stewards' Committee.   There was some sus-
picion at the start, and it was to our advantage that
Harold and David whom we had met before, were present.
Harold seemed stressed, even in this relatively informal
setting, and the fact that the Convenor role of which
he was the present incumbent changed hands frequently,
together with his relative lack of experience and the
problem of negotiating an 'obscure' research project
into the Firm, probably contributed to his state.

(1)   From a practical viewpoint, a researcher would be advised
       to discover as much as possible about relations between
       respondents before deciding how to meet them. Advice on
       the importance of obtaining information on what to expect
       prior to field entry is given by a number of writers, (e.g.
       Whyte, 1955; Sullivan et al., 1958; Berk & Adams, 1970).
       There may remain the problem of who to approach initially
       among parties in conflict.

The Minority Unions' shop stewards asked direct and
pertinent questions regarding the nature of the research,
but were not hostile.   The best answers were those which
were honest and relevant.[1]   After a few minutes in
this question and answer session, we left the shop stewards
to discuss their feelings and arrive at a policy decision.
They agreed in favour of the principle of the research
project, but explained that they would have to put the matter
to their respective shop meetings.   After this visit, I
always went to the Factory alone.

Michael, an Assistant Personnel Manager, acted as my liaison
with Management, and particularly with the Personnel Department,
during the early stages of the research.   Another Assistant
Personnel Manager put me through an induction course similar
to those which were run for new staff employees.   Through
this exercise I learned relevant information about the Firm
in a shorter time than would otherwise have been possible.
The formal introductions which came in this way were useful
from the point of view of meeting necessary people, and
enabling me to become more familiar with the environment in
general.[2]

(1)   Advice given by Blau (1964) to be open, and of Berk & Adams (1970)
       always to be honest, in dealings with respondents is very sound.

(2)   See Appendix note 2 on methodological considerations of performance
       of the participant observer in the early stages of fieldwork.

In mid-January of 1970, Benny informed me that new Road Branch officers had been elected. I did not think that this would present any problem, and hoped that they would be more forthcoming than Sam had been. I decided to let them adjust to their new roles before making any direct approach. There remained problems of acceptance elsewhere, as Michael informed me that all but one of the Minority Unions had accepted the presence of a researcher into the Factory. The dissenting group was frequently at varience with the Personnel Department, who viewed it as 'troublesome', but their acceptance would have to be obtained. Their objections were that: i) the researchers were from management and out to spy on them, and that ii) at some later date in their careers the researchers might become personnel managers themselves and thereby be in a position to use the information and experience gained from studying them against shop stewards or workers elsewhere.[1]

The Inside Branch had referred the decision back to their own shop stewards, who had agreed to our study. Benny introduced me to the newly elected Road Branch Secretary, who agreed to raise the research as an item at a forthcoming meeting. Ernie, the new Road Branch Secretary appeared to be a competent and friendly man, who seemed to be much easier to deal with than Sam.

(1)   See Appendix note 3 on how this problem might have been avoided. A corresponding thought was never articulated to my hearing by any members of management, i.e. that I might in the future become a trade union official and thereby be in a position to use information against managers elsewhere.

David was a member of the Shop Committee of the Minority Union which had voted against our research. I explained at a meeting with this Committee the purpose of the research, while they explained how the item had come at the end of a heavy agenda and there had been little interest amongst their members in discussing it. The Shop Committee members were not hostile, and seemed to seek more information. They were willing to help, and it was evident that I would have to make some new initiative. They did not agree to my suggestion that I should speak to a meeting of the shop, presumably seeing this function to be their preserve. The solution of preparing an information sheet to explain the research project was agreed upon.

The information sheet I prepared stressed my neutrality and concern for keeping confidences, and the need to obtain co-operation, trust and goodwill from others. I sent spare copies of the sheet to the Road Branch, although I was not in direct contact with them.[1] A telephone message confirmed that the Road Branch had agreed to the research. The Minority Unions appeared to be responding to my efforts at building rapport with them. Rapport with management and the Inside Branch was also improving and I maintained constant contact with them.[2] David informed me that the final voting of his members had produced a narrow margin in favour of the research.

(1) Schatzman and Strauss (1973) reveal that they overcame communication problems with a standarized handout.

(2) See Appendix note 4 on the relationship of the participant observer with different social groups.

Michael warned me that to one or two of the directors, the word 'conflict' was anathema. At a meeting of all senior managers, I gave information on the Research Unit and how its members conducted research. Management concern focussed upon confidentiality and anonymity, along with uncertainty as to what exactly it was I would find. Not unreasonably, they did not want the image and name of the Firm to suffer as a result of the research. The directors were concerned that they should have a say in my interpretation of any conflicts which existed within the Firm; a concern which I shared. The directors may have seen advantages in the research, and 'links between university and industry' was a phrase which found frequent expression in this context. I pointed out that information obtained could be of service to other firms. It was agreed that the Unit should be referred to by the more innocuous title of 'The Industrial Relations Research Team'. The general reaction of the managers was very favourable. Formal management acceptance of the research was thereby obtained almost a year after the initial contact had been made with the Firm.

Summary

What are the important points to emerge about industrial relations in the Factory, from examining the research experience of the participant observer during the first two months of fieldwork?

1. The Personnel Department was able to 'induce'
    the researcher into the Firm successfully.
    This indicated that the Personnel Department
    had considerable influence upon industrial
    relations in the Factory.

2. The relationship of the researcher with each
    of the major trade union groups in the Factory
    was different. This arose, at least partly
    through the different treatment accorded to
    each of these groups by the Personnel Department
    and the corresponding manner in which the
    researcher was introduced. The Inside Branch
    had frequent contact with this Department, the
    Minority Unions less so, while the Road Branch
    had very little contact with the Personnel
    Department.

3. The researcher experienced difficulty when
    meeting with representatives from more than one
    trade union group simultaneously. This sugges-
    ted that the trade union groups did not have
    harmonious relationships with each other, and
    that this could affect their respective
    relations with other parties.

The time from the researcher being a regular visitor to
the Factory, to the point of formal acceptance by
representatives of all those who would be part of the
study, was two months. At this stage, particular areas
for fruitful examination appeared to fall under two rela-
ted headings. The first of these concerned aspects of
industrial relations as they existed in the Firm between
all groups of personnel. In particular, the history of
relations between management and workforce, the job
evaluation system, and potential sources of conflict.

The second major area for further investigation was the pattern of communications within the Firm, including formal and informal interaction between individuals and groups, and the various perceptions which they had of each other.

No formal hypotheses were formulated at this point, although it could be suggested from the data gathered so far that:

1.   Relations which existed between the Personnel Department and the different union groups, in terms of communications, mutual perceptions and formal aspects of industrial relations in the Firm[1] were a source of conflict between parties.

2.   Relations which existed between the different trade union groups in the Firm in terms of past and present pay differentials, communications and mutual perceptions, were a potential source of conflict between these parties.

(1)   For example, the job evaluation system and different grievance procedures.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORATIONS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes in greater detail the methods used at this stage of the research. The methodology employed complements rapport-building within the organization, and integration of the researcher into the Firm is considered in terms of its importance for data gathering.

Methods

The techniques employed were:

1. Examination of relevant documents kept by the Personnel Department.
2. Attending meetings as a silent observer.
3. Informal interviewing, initiating and maintaining contacts throughout the Firm.
4. Recording all observations made during fieldwork.

These techniques are described in the pages which follow.

1. Examination of relevant documents [1]

Studying minutes from past meetings within the Firm was necessary in gathering knowledge required for further investigation. I was given access to files which were marked 'confidential', including that on Industrial Relations. I did not regard such access to be a reliable indicator of Management's trust in me because of the time periods involved in the release of 'confidential' material. Management may have wished to demonstrate that they trusted me, yet have remained unwilling to release into my hands material of importance to them. [2]

(1) One advantage of this technique is that it is a form of data collection which is not subject to interference from an observer studying it (Webb et al., 1966). A major disadvantage of using such documents however is that they are compiled for purposes other than those relating to research needs (Melbin, 1960), and are products of others' interpretation processes (Cicourel, 1964).

(2) Dalton (1959) suggests that researchers may have been 'led' by managers wishing to safeguard secrets. See Appendix note 5 on mutual obligations of researcher and respondents.

2. Attending meetings as a silent observer [1]

The comparatively small effort of such observation, the uniformity of data collected, and the low involvement of the observer, all help in the use of this technique. There are however a number of problems which can arise for the observer at formal meetings, both of a general nature, and of the kind which might occur in situations where participants have different perceptions of the observer, as was the case in this study. Some of these problems are exemplified in the passages which follow.

An astute observer recognizes that there is nearly always some element of performance which is put on for him at meetings. It may prove difficult to devise reliable measures which accurately reflect the extent of this type of 'Hawthorne effect' in field observation. Performance at meetings where an observer is visible could be compared in various ways with those where the participants are unaware of an observer. [2] It may take some time for the field observer to be completely accepted, and there may always be the vestige of an idea among participants that they are staging a performance. That meetings are considered to be performances by the participants was volunteered to me by a manager who explained how the "real issues where thrashed out in small rooms behind the scenes". At the first top management meeting I observed, the Managing Director said: "O.K?" to me as he left, as if to reinforce or acknowledge a belief that the assembled company had been staging a performance which was worthy of study.

(1) Gans (1968) notes that observing meetings is the easiest aspect of the participant observer's role to play.

(2) For a summary of some experimental evidence on this issue, see Turner (1975).

At the first Management/Union meeting I attended, I was introduced to those present. I explained the nature of the research and sat down, believing the 'active' part of my role performance to be completed. Benny, who attended nearly all Management/Union meetings, began to challenge me strongly on the research and stated aims for being in the Factory. He said that as far as the Unions were concerned, I had come to study conflict, and this was the basis upon which I had been accepted by them. I was made rudely aware of the differences in perceptions which existed between Unions and top Management, and was forced to compromise hastily on the spot, much to the surprise of most of those present, who appeared to be unsure as to what the difference in understanding was about. After a short duologue with Benny, I retrieved a tricky situation. I felt wronged by Benny for putting me into such an awkward position, but soon came to realize that as a key respondent, he had been perfectly in order to cross-examine me.

I was involved in another conversation on conflict at a managers' meeting the following day. After I had been introduced, the Personnel Manager, who was chairing the meeting said that 'conflict' was not a word to be used. The Manager who had chaired the earlier meeting asked why this was so, citing the previous day's exchange. His question was referred to the Director who had specifically objected to the work 'conflict'. The Director[1] was not present at this meeting and I remained silent throughout the above exchange.

(1) See Appendix note 6 for an account of my first interview with this Director.

The general reaction seemed to be one of puzzlement as to why this particular word could not be used. This experience indicates that if one key respondent commanding an influential position in the organization objects to some research terminology, then the negotiation of a research programme may be made difficult even in the relatively straightforward context of observing formal meetings.

In complete contrast to the meetings described above, I ventured along to a meeting of the Minority Union whose initial reaction had been opposed to the research project. The Foreman who indicated the way was most surprised that I had been allowed to attend, and would go no further than the door. The meeting was volatile, and my impression was one of militancy which seemed to hang in the oily atmosphere of the shop. I was introduced by a heavily-spoken man as: "someone they all knew about", and the meeting went ahead. Suspicious glances were cast at me, and I felt conspicuous in the overall-clad setting. I did not take notes, being more interested in the effect of my presence on the proceedings. I was soon to all intents and purposes ignored, although there was much heated discussion at the meeting. The final decision taken was unanimous in spite of differences of opinion during the debate, and I left with the impression of a group who stuck together. I became a frequent observer at Minority Unions' Shop Stewards' Committee meetings, although I attended no further Shop Meetings. This was because they were generally impromtu meetings, and I had difficulty in finding out about them in time, or would often find that I had an obligation to attend elsewhere.

When attending a shop stewards' meeting, I first noted that
the smaller is the meeting being attended, the harder it
is for the observer to perform his role satisfactorily.[1]
The observer being more in evidence at a small meeting,
his behaviour influences the proceedings to a greater
extent than at a larger gathering.   This indicates that
a longer initial acceptance period may be required for
the observation of small groups.   Among the reactions
of participants of small meetings which I noted, is that
when I was present, the volume of conversation diminished
over the observation period.   This may have been an indic-
ation that they were aware of the presence of an outsider,
rather than that they were consciously trying to prevent me
from hearing what they were saying.   I learnt to balance
my activity in such situations and remained at a distance
at which the participants felt comfortable as shown by
their positions and other behaviour.

The issue of 'role playing' at meetings was a recurrent theme
in the feedback comments which I received.   After one
meeting, I was informed by one of the participants that
a shop steward had been 'piling it on a bit' for my benefit.
Such behaviour may be a problem for validity.   Participants
may be eager to provide the observer with the type of mat-
erial which they perceive he has come to get.[2]

(1)   One extreme instance of this effect has been noted by Vidich
      (1956) in the observation of husband/wife interaction.
(2)   This phenomenon may be compared with the 'social desirability'
      responses noted in other research settings.   Schwartz and
      Schwartz (1955) warn of the likelihood of the 'production'
      of data for the researcher.

In this instance, there had been an attack upon a manager by a shop steward over an apparently trivial issue. From my other knowledge of this shop steward, it did not appear to be in his nature to launch such an attack. Both my informal conversations with the shop steward and the remarks of the informant after the meeting, acted as checks upon possible misinterpretation of the event witnessed.

Besides the more interesting aspects of observing, I sat through many boring meetings.[1] Sometimes I avoided these, although they could also serve as useful occasions at which to consider my role. Whenever there was discussion of petty issues, or of technical matters which were outside my scope of knowledge, I began to question the usefulness of the data being obtained. Often however, exchanges were going on at more than one level, and if the interaction could be separated from the content, then useful information about respondents' relationships for example, could be obtained.

The foregoing comments are intended to put the technique of observing meetings into a perspective of caution. A number of issues arise when meetings of different types are being observed. The size and consistency of the meeting affect the behaviour of participants in the presence of an observer, as does their previous experience and expectations of the observer's behaviour.

(1) Problems of boredom and fatigue in observing meetings are discussed elsewhere. See for example: Wiener (1971)

Joint Management/Union meetings were, with few exceptions, rarely knock-about exchanges. Generally, these meetings were split in traditional fashion. This was manifested in the seating pattern which usually found the two parties on opposite sides of a table. There was often joking among participants about where to sit, and if for example a shop steward arrived late and took the only available seat which happened to be on the management side of the table, this was an occasion for a dig by his colleagues. I learned considerably more about perceptions and attitudes towards other parties by attending homogeneous meetings than by attending joint meetings. I continued to attend the latter in order to keep up appearances as an observer of 'industrial relations'.[1]

Respondents who were among the more garrulous in informal settings, tended to speak a lot in meetings, while those who said little in informal conversation tended to say even less in the formal environment of a meeting. Meetings to some extent seemed to polarize conversation levels of participants. In addition to this, in homogeneous meetings, there was less opportunity for role playing, and there tended to be greater equity in the distribution of conversation among participants. Attending such meetings was therefore valuable for gaining a more accurate interpretation of parties' perceptions of events in the Factory.

(1) The observer must be seen by the participants to be carrying out his previously stated functions of observing, talking, etc. for otherwise his credibility will diminish and this is likely to affect the reliability of the research.

At meetings where larger status differences existed between participants there were often discrepancies between what was reported in the minutes, and the behaviour which I observed. Joint meetings seemed to 'neutralize' the feelings of the participants, and the data gathered tended to be less valuable in diagnosing group sentiments.

I was readily accepted at most meetings. Acceptance was often easiest at regular joint Management/Union meetings where a fair spectrum of roles was already present. As an observer at such gatherings I added less to the 'role mix', than at an otherwise homogeneous meeting where only the members of one particular party were represented. At union meetings, anyone present was able to voice an objection to my presence. Management participants were seemingly obliged to accept my presence at meetings, without a chance of veto.

I was told by the Personnel Manager that I could come and go as I pleased to and from meetings. I very rarely left meetings which had already begun, but where I wished to attend overlapping functions, I indicated beforehand that I might be leaving before the end. I never entered a meeting that had already begun, and always tried to arrive first in an attempt to minimise the effect of my presence. I often tried to write up notes while waiting for a meeting to begin although my avid scribbling caused amusement on more than one occasion, and one remark made was: "...I wonder what he finds to write about this situation?"

On the other hand, some respondents may have expectations of the researcher which include copious note-taking, and may be concerned if they do not observe this activity. At meetings, I sought to minimise interaction between myself and participants. Avoidance of eye-contact and conveying an air of detachment were among the techniques I used which were intended to put participants at ease. I could still explain my genuine interest in the proceedings if challenged by participants. I tried to maintain a balance between leaving the environment unaltered, and retaining interest and co-operation from respondents.

I was rarely invited to attend meetings. This may not have been encouraging from the point of view of acceptance, but had the advantage of my not having to refuse an invitation at the risk of upsetting respondents. It also meant that I could organise my time as I thought fit and could come and go as I pleased.[1] Sometimes I would ask in advance if I could attend a meeting, while at other times I would turn up and then either ask permission at the start of the meeting, or merely sit there and say nothing. Often, I asked permission on the first occasion I attended a part-icular meeting and then simply appeared on subsequent occasions. I soon learned what was appropriate behaviour for any given meeting.

(1)   The freedom thereby gained gave me a sense of objectivity in the research, although this could have been misplaced.

Participants at meetings occasionally explained to me points which arose, but generally my presence as a silent recorder of events seemed to be fully accepted. At meetings, I was occasionally invited to sit at the table with other participants. Although ambivalent about accepting such invitations, a silent 'member' of a meeting could appear less conspicuous than an observer set apart. I found that a subtle distinction between the roles of observer and silent participant could be maintained in terms of physical distance from the focus of the discussion. I placed myself so as to maximise the comfort of participants, and if they desired me to sit at the table alongside them, then sitting apart appeared to confer no extra advantages.[1]

I generally asked not to be entered in the minutes of a meeting when given an opportunity to voice my feelings on this issue. Such minutes often had wide circulation and I did not think it appropriate to broadcast my presence in this manner.[2] One indication that I was moving more into the background occurred when a past meeting was being discussed with a respondent who could not remember whether or not I had been present at the meeting.[3] This happened during a conversation with a manager, and I could not myself remember if I had been present at the meeting referred to.

(1) Sudnow (1967) notes the importance of helping respondents to feel that their behaviour was less distantly observed. On the views of other writers on levels of rapport and detachment, see Appendix note 7.

(2) For occasions when disclosure of such information to respondents could be functional for me, see Appendix note 8.

(3) I had been alerted to this phenomenon by a colleague, and was pleased to have replicated his experience in this way.

That I was obliged to consult my notes to confirm that I had been present served to demonstrate the importance of keeping an accurate record of events for ready reference. Events which were not of immediate importance could then be 'forgotten'.

3. **Informal interviewing, initiating and maintaining personal contacts throughout the organization.**

Seeking to internalize the norms and values of various aspects of the organization, I continually built upon my store of relationships, acquiring information by listening, remembering and comparing, as well as by asking questions. [1] I had to become sensitized to interaction among others; a facility which was not readily acquired. [2]

One concern in my behaviour with Management was to minimise detrimental effects ensuing from their perception of my junior status. I took any opportunity available to enhance my status in their eyes. Shop stewards and other shop floor workers generally perceived me to be of higher status than themselves.

(1) See Appendix note 9 for the views of other authors on active and passive modes of questionning for the participant observer.

(2) It may be likened to learning a foreign language. In the early stages a stranger can understand very little. Later on, he is able to communicate directly with others, speaking to them and understanding them when they speak to him. The final test of comprehension is when he can understand conversation amongst others while not being a party to it. The importance of learning the language of those one is studying is a point which merits emphasis from a number of writers on participant observation. See Appendix note 10 for a review of some issues.

To outward appearances, Management accepted my role more readily, whereas Union representatives perceived that they had little or nothing to gain and much to lose by accepting my role completely. Perceived threats from myself as an outsider could have been confounded by social class barriers.[1] Little could be done for example about one important indicator of social class; accent. I did not have the aplomb to cultivate an ingenuine working class accent for the purpose of improving rapport in the research. Effects upon rapport with Management of a researcher with a working class accent would have had to have been considered.[2]

(1) For the field researcher there may be no escape from the problems arising through social class differences between him and his respondents. Various problems of a middle class researcher in a working class environment have been encountered by participant observers for many years (e.g. Jahoda, 1941; Bain, 1950; Whyte, 1955; Gans, 1968). Strauss and Schatzman (1955) give some clues as to how to overcome some of the interaction problems arising in such situations, and Deutscher (1955) argues that there is insufficient consideration given to class discrepancies in interviewing and other research methods. Problems of a middle class individual seeking to establish rapport in a predominantly working class environment may be common to other professions such as social workers, teachers and doctors. None of my respondents enquired after my origins, and the extent to which any efforts on my part to conceal them were successful, remains indeterminate.

(2) In every-day speech, unintentional variations arise for some people whose environment changes, and intentional ambiguity may be introduced by an adroit researcher to produce a 'neutral' accent which belies the precise nature of his origins. Erikson (1967) expresses doubts about the possibility of fooling respondents over accent changes. It may be a mistake for a researcher in such a role as I was playing to become over-concerned with accent, although in other circumstances such as a participant observer working on the shop floor, the perceived background of the researcher could be of greater importance. In his study of Glasgow gangs, Patrick (1973) found it necessary to explain his accent to respondents.

Apart from accent, I could manipulate other aspects of conversation to advantage. During interviewing for instance I could appear to 'agree' with respondents by not disagreeing. I used reinforcing cues to indicate to a respondent that he should continue. Permissiveness during questionning was not always the most appropriate mode to adopt. Suspicious or agressive respondents for example often expected me to state my opinion on the issue to which I was seeking their point of view. Individuals who invoked the 'reciprocity norm' often found my role difficult to accept.[1]

In psychological terms, the closer a person is perceived to be to oneself in terms of features such as attitudes and background, the better is communication with that person likely to be. With shop floor workers therefore, I was concerned with lessening my status in their eyes. Whenever an opportunity arose to play down my 'academic' attributes, I would try and take it. On the other hand, I was conscious of the need to balance many factors. I did not wish to deflate my status too much, for as a lowly qualified individual I might have presented a less credible role preformance and thereby have found it more difficult to hold rapport and co-operation.[2]

(1) For the views of other authors on the issue of neutrality during interviewing, see Appendix note 11.

(2) See Appendix note 12 for further discussion of the status of the researcher.

"...I wish I had your job for a couple of weeks..." was a remark ventured by one shop steward. This revelation served both as an indication that my role was becoming accepted to an extent that I would have liked, and that I was seen at least by some respondents to be in a powerful position from the point of view of collecting relevant data.[1]

Acceptance of my role was a key hurdle to be negotiated, and in my relationship with some respondents it was never satisfactorily achieved. Trust developed in the first instance as a product of social interaction, greater contact improving the likelihood that trust would be built up. To be seen about in the environment under study also helped this process, and I did not feel that I was wasting my time merely walking about to be seen to be performing my role. Besides respondents' specific perceptions of me as a participant observer, I might have acquired a general image or images among those who made up the environment I was studying.

"...I see we've still got 'peace and strife' with us...", was the remark made by a junior manager to the assembled company at the start of one meeting I was observing.[2]

(1) Daniels (1967) refers to the issue of 'lower status' respondents seeing the observer's position as enviable, while Scott (1963) notes that envy of the observer is only a problem if it inhibits confidence in him.

(2) Outwardly I was obliged to share in the joke, although inwardly I was wincing at its implications. For contributions of other authors on the subject of the researcher's image, see Appendix note 13.

After numerous visits to the Firm, I began collecting data on personal opinions from individuals who were aware that I interacted with parties about whom an opinion was being given. The confidence with which I treated such information was tighter than usual regarding source and content. Such confidences gave some indication of the extent to which respondents had accepted my role. This could be treated as a crucial test, for from the point of view of any given respondent, one of the most difficult aspects of the researcher's role to accept is that he may have intimate relationships with other respondents.[1]

I was probably more observed than observing, and often felt that my every behaviour was open to scrutiny.[2] Because of the peculiar nature of the participant observer role, I was in a state of heightened awareness for most, if not all of my time spent in fieldwork. It was therefore difficult to relax while I was playing this role, and I considered it important that the tension which I inevitably experienced was not conveyed to any significant extent to my respondents. Had this occurred, resultant loss of role poise might have made the research less credible. From my point of view, this was a major problem, for my anxieties in such an

(1) See Appendix note 14 for further elaboration of this point.

(2) Berks & Adams (1970) state that this is an aspect of respondents' behaviour that the observer should always be alive to. Polsky (1967) also notes that the participant observer should be aware that he is being observed, although not to the extent of making it too obvious that he is putting on a performance for the benefit of his respondents.

unusual environment for interaction, were a factor which
could have had considerable effects upon the validity of
the research.   Anxieties reciprocated by respondents
might then have served to exaggerate an already difficult
situation.[1]   Under such circumstances, it was gratify-
ing to be rewarded by the apparent trust of many respon-
dents, which I regarded as being in return for the
exercise of discretion and confidentiality on my part.

The continual problem of presenting an acceptable image
of my role was a real issue only with those respondents
with whom I wished to interact to obtain information.
There may however have been secondary effects, for
example, I could have acquired an unfavourable reput-
ation among some potential respondents, and I tried to
remain receptive for hints of this having occurred.
A general problem from my point of view was motivating
subjects to perform their respondent roles adequately.
I tried to make respondents feel that they were contri-
buting something valuable, and attempted to stimulate
their interest in their own work environment in order to
achieve this.[2]

(1)   It has been suggested by Argyris (1958) that subjects tend
       to be more at home with tension and conflict than does the
       researcher.

(2)   Motives for respondents' co-operation in interactive research
       have received frequent mention, among these are: interest in
       the research aims, interest in the interview, and respondents'
       ulterior motives, (see, for example: Vidich and Bensman,
       1954; Back, 1956). Other authors have seen such factors
       differently, as clouding data gathered by interviews, acting
       for instance as: bars to spontaneity, ulterior motives,
       desires to please and 'idiosyncratic factors', (see, for
       example: Dean and Whyte, 1958; Whyte, 1960; Bruyn, 1966;
       McCall, 1969).

The problem of motivating respondents to give information
was less acute when I was interacting with an already
established group.   In such a social context, respon-
dents were generally less inhibited than on occasions
when I spoke to any individual alone.   In a previously
established group, respondents would tend to reinforce
each other, and express more pertinent points amongst
themselves about the environment than I was able to do.
Therefore whenever I had an opportunity to get others
to engage in conversation without involving myself to a
great extent, I would take it up, with myself perhaps
acting as an informal 'chairman' for the discussion.

I might ask for views and opinions from those present,
note any discrepancies, and proceed to set up an impro-
mptu forum.   These were useful exercises, for although
I was generally not in a position to take notes in such
situations, I could usually remember the main points
which emerged and the stances taken up by respondents.
It was during such exchanges that I often became aware
of being observed myself.   Another individual present
might see through my strategy, indicating this by various
social cues such as a slight smile and withdrawal from
the conversation.   In such a situation, I might be
obliged to exchange knowing glances with the person
concerned.   Later I would try to take that respondent
aside and often persuaded him to give his interpreta-
tion of the interaction which we had both witnessed.

Apart from deliberate attempts on my part to elicit
data in the manner just described, I occasionally
experienced the feeling that arguments were begun for
my benefit as an observer in the context of both formal
and informal gatherings.[1]   While some conversations
I witnessed frequently seemed almost too stereotyped
to be 'genuine', I was nevertheless grateful for them.
Even if an original intention of one or more respond-
ents was to begin an argument or discussion for my
benefit, by way of providing the kind of information
they thought I would like, the trend of conversation
in such role-playing encounters soon veered towards
'real' issues.   Participants often became heated,
and seemed earnest enough for me to consider them
completely genuine in their standpoints.[2]

Of importance in the establishment of a network of
useful contacts throughout an organization being studied
were: my introduction as a researcher to various rel-
evant parties, and existing communication patterns
within the organization.   My initial introduction
could be crucial for future interaction, and it occ-
asionally proved awkward for me when an incorrect or
inadequate description of my role was given on my behalf.

(1)   Dalton (1959) employed the technique of using 'intimates'
       to get a discussion topic going, although I never had
       occasion to 'manufacture' conversations in this way.

(2)   See Appendix note 15 for further analysis of the role of
       the participant observer in such social situations.

Sometimes erroneous impressions could be corrected immediately if I was present and had an opportunity to put the record straight. However, if I was not present when I was being 'symbolically introduced' among respondents, then incorrect opinions about what I was doing could have been held as a result.

I had been informed that some communication channels in the Firm were not good. Nevertheless, my role as an observer was bound to be affected by the extensive informal network of communications which did exist throughout the Firm. A number of these unofficial channels were points out to me.[1] Respondents 'in the know' often appeared eager to increase their status in my eyes by telling me about informal communication channels, and I heard about some of these many times! Nevertheless, it took some considerable time for my presence in the Firm to be widely known. Thus, because individuals or departments had not heard of my existence, on numerous occasions I was obliged to explain who I was and what I was doing.

(1) An experience noted also by Dalton (1959). Scott (1963) also points out that the binding network of relations in an organization is a sustaining factor which facilitates observation.

It might have been management policy to let me do my own explaining, or it might rather have been as a result of an absence of management policy. Michael did insert a passage about the research in one Company newsletter. The possible disadvantage that my different explanations enabled respondents to discover discrepancies, was balanced by the advantage that I could tailor my approach to the context I was in at any given time.[1]

In order to expand my understanding of the Factory environment I deliberately sought out a number of individuals and groups who could be considered marginal.[2] There are likely to be found a number of marginal groups and individuals in any organisation. The traditional 'Marginal Men' of industry are the foremen.[3] The shop steward role may also be regarded as exhibiting certain properties of marginality.[4]

(1) Examples of various ways in which I was introduced are given in Appendix note 16, along with some of the ways in which my role was misperceived.

(2) For a discussion of the concept of marginality and the participant observer, see Appendix note 17.

(3) See for example: Roethlisberger (1945); Wray, (1949); Simmons (1968). For a summary of much of the literature on the foreman role, see Dunkerley (1975). Dunkerley re-analyses strain and other aspects of the foreman's role in terms of organizational, group and individual sub-systems. He revises the 'Marginal Man' thesis as it applies to foremen in the light of empirical findings, suggesting that it applies to 'working class' foremen, but much less so to 'middle class' foremen. Fletcher (1969), in a reformulation of the 'Man in the Middle' thesis, claims that the evidence is supportive of this view. His analysis is in terms of stratification, differentiation and conflict, and he distinguishes between three foremen types: 'conservatives', 'radicals' and 'revolutionaries'. In Fletcher's analysis, a tendency to greater conflict is related to proximity to management. He notes that 'radical' foremen could be uneasy about the job, 'revolutionaries' could be at odds with it, while 'conservatives' tended to see 'worker demands' rather than 'management wishes' at the root of their problems. Child (1975) follows Fletcher's analysis and considers whether foremen are management or not. He also notes that there are different types of supervisor with different outlooks and he distinguishes between four types: 'time server', 'supercrafts-man', 'frustrated achiever' and 'cadet'.

(4) See for example, Zweig (1957).

In this Factory, there was another group who were considered marginal by a number of my respondents, Production Under Managers. My relations with some of the marginal status groups and individuals will now be considered.

I concentrated on establishing and maintaining rapport with the Foremen because they: a) were the largest of the marginal groups I identified, b) between them had access to a large part of the Factory, and c) were among the more readily available - though not necessarily more willing - of my respondents. Production Under Managers were useful for information on Management, but I acquired much of this from Foremen. The Foremen had the additional advantage for me of having worked on the shop floor, many having been shop stewards. In the sense of sampling both sides of the traditional divide in industry, Foremen had the widest range of experience of any group in the Factory. Thus for example, Foremen were able to supply me with useful information on the Unions, whereas Production Under Managers' views of the Unions tended to be somewhat stereotyped, although still relevant for that.

The Chairman of the Foreman's Association established a close basis for interaction by introducing himself as 'Bill' explaining how he preferred to use first name terms.[1]

(1)   I found Bill sensitive, friendly, outgoing and intelligent, and not at all as he had been described to me by a member of the Personnel Department as, 'a bit thick'.

Almost without exception, the Foremen were friendly and willing to talk at all times - often too much! Before long, more than with any other group in the Factory, I felt at ease in their company. They were among my most fruitful sources of information at the Factory; and I frequently ate in their dining room.

One 'super-marginal' individual with whom I established a particularly useful relationship was Fred, one of the Foremen. This man took what I regarded to be a more detached view of the Firm than his fellow foremen, and he was even more willing than most to speak with me on any topic I cared to raise. Despite a very meagre education he was able and intelligent, and on more than one occasion asked my advice on his application to the Open University to study social psychology. I was happy to advise him on a few points, even though this involved me stepping outside my research role. The possible dangers in this course of action were in my mind insufficient to counterbalance the loss of rapport and information which could have resulted from a refusal to help this man. [1]

Foremen in the Factory perceived themselves to have problems peculiar to their group. One foreman described the hierarchical position and his fellow foremen thus: "...We're not part of Management; we're part of the management structure..." This statement was indicative of their concern over status within the Factory. The foremen were also concerned with their position in communication hierarchies and they perceived that they were denied access to information available to others.

(1) For a detailed discussion of the researcher's dilemma arising from such situations, see Appendix note 18.

"...we don't even know the questions...", was the way in which one foreman described their frustrating dilemma of ignorance. Foremen could also experience a type of 'double bind' situation. For example, one manager explained that when walking round the Factory he saw men sitting around reading the paper, smoking and talking. He felt that the men did not consider any intervention by him to be legitimate, being dubbed as 'snooping', but he felt that it was legitimate for foremen to apprehend workers engaging in such behaviour. It is possible that it was partly as a result of the 'paternalistic' attitudes of the Company that the Foremen were under conflicting and ambivalent pressures from shop floor and Management, acting as a buffer for the latter against the former. Alternatively, this may be one general aspect of the foreman role.

The Foremen were insistent in priming me for my views on a variety of social issues. I did not express opinions which I considered too liberal, being aware that the average political position of these men was probably well to the right of mine. Neither could I be too defensive, for such a posture could serve as a cue for them to heighten their attacks. I found that the best strategy was to talk straight, but remain non-committal. Even this stance did not always work, for one foreman asked of me: "what was the point of seeing all sides if one could not then arrive at any point of view?" [1]

(1) It seems on occasions such as this that a participant observer may be caught in a 'approach-avoidance' conflict with his respondents. Bain (1950) points out that the imputed motives of the researcher are hard to sort out. While a maxim of Gold (1958) is that role-demands over-ride self-demands, Berreman (1962) stresses the importance of impression management and the presentation of self for the participant observer.

The foremen were the keenest of any group of respondents that I should be aware of their views, and to insist that the 'truth' as they saw it be known.   Of all groups, they appeared least concerned about hiding information from me, and did not wish me to 'pull any punches' in my final report. They were also the only major group with whom I experienced no loss of rapport during my fieldwork.   With most other parties, I experienced some upset in relationships, even if this was minor or temporary.   With the Foremen, I never had any cause to doubt that my rapport was first rate.   At one Foreman's Association Committee meeting, Dennis the Secretary said as the foremen were assembling;   "...well six is a quorum".   Bill did a quick recount and realizing what had been said albeit in jest, retorted;   "...you can't count Ian!"   I decided that there was a possibility of 'over-rapport' developing and did not attend any more of their meetings after this incident.

Another group who were inclined to probe me for information were the Production Under Managers.   I probably had more in common with them than with my other respondents, being of a similar age and degree status.   Being under considerable work pressure and relatively junior in the Firm, they did not make ideal respondents however.   They were not readily available to me, and I could only interact with them for fairly short periods of time. [1]

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(1)   I took care not to disturb the normal running of the Firm by not taking individuals from their jobs and risking possible antagonism from members of management.

The Production Under Managers had grievances which could be associated with their marginal status. At times they had considerable responsibility for running the Factory, especially at night. They were also required to have a thorough working knowledge of the entire Factory and ancilliary plant. They were however given little authority for independent decision-taking or initiative, and felt bounded by this position. They could also be subject to status inconsistencies in the Factory hierarchies. In one way they might have been useful as an information source for the research. Alternatively, they gave me the impression of being too concerned with their own problems to have been predisposed to forming and presenting objective views on relationships in the Factory which did not involve themselves as a party. I was interested in finding respondents who could supply such a viewpoint.

One such individual was the Medical Officer,[1] with whom I had one of the most personally satisfying relationships during my research at the Factory. He perceived himself to be an outsider regarding the life of the Factory, and yet he had access to information denied to others. His approach to his work could broadly be described as 'academic', and although quite near to retirement, he retained clarity of thought and an ability to perceive the Firm from the point of view of an 'inside outsider'. Like myself, he was part-time and marginal in the Factory environment.[2]

(1) An example of a 'competent' referred to by Scott (1963).

(2) For an example of the way in which such respondents can provide insights for the participant observer, see Appendix note 19.

The Secretary of the Foreman's Association, was a chauffeur in his regular job with the Company, and was helpful in obtaining historical information from his complete records. In this Firm (and possibly in many others), chauffeurs often obtained information soon after directors.[1]   I often sought to establish rapport with secretaries, gatekeepers and porters, for such roles, while relatively minor in organizational hierarchies, are special in that their incumbents may have direct access to higher echelons, and be in a position to perform valuable favours.[2]

One method of making contacts which I used was 'chain-sampling', whereby respondents were asked who they considered could be usefully contacted for further research information.   Respondents' competence in providing access to new sources of material could give some indication of their understanding of the research objectives, (or alternatively, how well I had conveyed research objectives to respondents), as well as being some measure of their willingness to help with the research.   Their potential access to other individuals within the organisation would also have been a determining factor.   Respondents may well have had other motives for providing me or not providing me with additional data sources. Some may have been willing so as to gain prestige through contact with an outsider who could seemingly go anywhere and meet anyone, while others may have had less charitable perceptions of what I was attempting to achieve.

(1)   To obtain such fresh information proved difficult, for the chauffeurs were very discreet.   Winkler (1974) notes that directors in his study used 'atypical' workers such as chauffeurs as sources of information on workforce attitudes.

(2)   For an example of what may happen if such individuals feel no obligation to the participant observer, see Appendix note 20.

Benny, always among the most helpful of my respondents, introduced me to shop stewards from his own Branch. All were friendly towards me, including one whom Benny had said was slightly hostile to the research at first. This shop steward became quite obliging once I had taken the trouble to explain to him personally the nature of my research, where-upon he announced his embarrassment about being singled out as one who had previously raised objections. This example, from among a number of similar encounters, highlights the importance of direct interaction for gaining co-operation and trust from respondents. Similarly, Bill provided me with access to many of the foremen.

White-collar staff who worked in the Firm were not unionised, but many belonged to the Staff Association. They were friendly and helpful on the whole, and I had a number of opportunities to discuss issues with their Committee. On the first occasion, I fell foul of the fault of over-zealously questionning a member of the Staff Association Committee, who began by being rather suspicious of me. However, sub-sequent to this initial exchange, he became a willing respon-dent and was the man I generally approached for information on the Staff point of view. Contact with Staff was useful in supplementing my knowledge about the different departments in the Firm, and I became fairly conversant with the social topography.

It seemed that individuals who considered that they had little
or nothing to contribute to my research revealed this by saying
correspondingly small. amounts to me, and they were also often
those who were unsure of my role and how to approach it.
This could have been due to a concern by them not to 'waste
my time', or it could have been as a result of selective bias
in my initiation of relationships in seeking out those whom
I considered would be most useful to me.[1]

Remembering names and faces of many different respondents
was one among my early difficulties.   Problems could arise
at the embarrassment or even offence caused if I forgot that
I had met a person before, or exactly who he was or did. [what he]   I
was sometimes caught off my guard by people coming up to me
to say something and not being able to remember where or when
I had met them before or who they were.[2]   I found it help-
ful to associate a name and a face with a particular part of
the Factory in which that person worked.   This was partially
successful, and the problem diminished over time as I famil-
iarized myself with the environment, and became acquainted
with many individuals.[3]

(1)   For an extended exploration of selective bias through this method
      of contacting respondents, see Appendix note 21.

(2)   There is less of a problem for respondents, who have only to remember
      one observer playing a role which is unfamiliar to them.

(3)   One way of assisting the familiarization process is for the observer
      to attend social functions.   See Appendix note 22 for a discussion
      of this.

Terms of address between and among respondents and myself varied. Determinants of how individuals were referred to in conversation appeared to include: whether or not the person referred to was present, my relationships with the relevant respondents, the extent to which my relationships were known by the respondent speaking, and the relative statuses of the 'symbolically interacting' individuals concerned. Thus, in speaking with me, respondents sometimes referred to others using terms of address other than those which they would use in different social circumstances. For example, Bill referred to Benny by the latter's surname when speaking to me about him on some occasions, but was on first name terms whenever they met in my presence. I always reciprocated and used first name terms when conversing with Foremen and Shop Stewards at the Factory. Michael referred to other members of the Personnel Department by their first names in my presence, but I did not interpret this as an unambiguous cue that I was at liberty to address them in this fashion, particularly those most senior. I did not often use explicit terms of address when speaking with managers unless cues were unambiguous, preferring to use the indeterminate 'you' when conversing with them. When speaking about a third party who was not present, a form of address which I often found useful, and which avoided ambiguity, was to use a person's complete name as a referent.[1] Some managers were often referred to by their initials by other managers not in their presence.

(1) Terms of address may be one of the ways in which status barriers can be delineated. See Appendix note 23 for further discussion of this point.

4.   <u>Recording all my observations carefully by taking</u>
      <u>notes as events occurred where possible, or as</u>
      <u>soon after where this was not possible.</u>

My usual method of keeping a record of events was on 3" x 5"
index cards which fitted into my pocket easily and could be
brought out and used quickly for making notes before being
returned rapidly out of sight if necessary.   Taking notes
as a respondent spoke had various effects, depending upon
the subject under discussion and the status of the respondent.
Generally, the higher the respondent's status, the more at
ease was he with notes being taken as he spoke.   Trade
unionists were evidently unused to having things they said
taken down in an otherwise informal situation.   Thus, while
note-taking for minutes was regular practice at formal
meetings, suspicion could be generated by this behaviour
outside meetings.   Of the trade unionists, only Benny app-
eared at ease with my writing as he spoke, and for most union
men, it acted as an effective closure device.[1]   For some
managers, particularly directors, it could act as encourage-
ment to produce more information and served the function of a
selective reinforcing device similar to verbal reinforcement
in conversation.   If I scribbled avidly, managers gave more
information, whereas if I looked disinterested, this could be
an effective cue that what was being said was of little or no
interest to me.

(1)   This highlights a dilemma for the participant observer - see
       Appendix note 24 for a brief discussion.

I had occasion to regret not using a tape-recorder while
interviewing, for respondents would often 'spout' unexpect-
edly while I could only listen.   Generally the notes I took
after such exchanges, relying on memory alone were palpably
short of a full transcription of what had been elicited
during the interview.   Such sequences could occur at any
time without warning.   I could not predict whom among my
many respondents might be in the 'mood' for talking to me
on any particular day.   From hindsight, the information
foregone may not have been so great as I imagined at the time,
for my inability to recall material for the purpose of note-
taking did not mean that the information was completely
forgotten.   If pressed for time, I occasionally found a
secluded place to write down or record events onto a tape
recorder before they escaped from memory.[1]

Besides the research methods outlined above, I had frequent
discussions at the Conflict Research Unit on findings in the
field.   Colleagues at the Unit would often be able to see
things that were not readily apparent to myself, handicapped
through proximity to the situations I was studying, and some-
times the possessor of too many details to see a whole picture.
Contact with social scientists not directly involved with the
Factory, I found to be important in interpreting data.[2]

(1) See Appendix note 25 for a fuller discussion on the use of a tape
     recorder during fieldwork.
(2) Relationships with others outside the observed environemnt may be
     crucial for maintaining the field role intact (Gold, 1958). Sullivan
     et al. (1958) note the importance of the research team to the
     participant observer for keeping the purpose of the study in sight
     and to maintain 'observer objectivity'. Gans (1968) stresses the
     importance of external people to relate to, while Scott (1963) points
     out that the significant role-set for the participant observer are
     his colleagues with whom norms are shared, and not his respondents.
     Gouldner (1955) records a state of high morale in his research team,
     sustained through weekly meetings.

Early Findings

The second section of this chapter deals with some of the issues which arose out of the methodology described in the first section, and a number of the findings which emerged.

I did not achieve complete success in contacting respondents during the first six months of fieldwork. The number and variety of respondents involved meant that I did not develop rapport with some individuals whose co-operation I might require in order to perform my observer role adequately. I had built up a state of 'differential rapport', so that observing the behaviour of some groups or individuals occupied more of my time than others. One important effect of this was the operation of perceptions and attitudes of groups which were 'relatively deprived' in terms of time which I devoted to them. Differential rapport could occur when one party perceived me to have a closer relationship with another party than with themselves, or when a group or individual perceived there to be closer social distance between myself and another party than they considered desirable.[1]

A further concern was the perceptions of equilibrium regarding my observation time which were held by various parties. A group such as the Minority Union which had been initially hostile towards admitting an observer might have come to resent the fact that I was paying little attention to them compared with time spent with other groups.

(1)   This aspect of the fieldwork was investigated further in the follow-up study (see Chapter 5.)

This might have served to enhance their hostility and confirmed possible suspicions. The Minority Unions' shop stewards at one point informed me however that they felt they were meriting too much attention from me and expressed fears that another party, in this case Management, was not fulfilling its co-operative bargain with me.

I was sometimes in a situation of gaining from an atmosphere in which parties might 'compete' to give me information. One way in which I did this was to subtly infer that I had already heard a particular piece of information from another source, taking care never to reveal such 'sources'.[1] Later in the fieldwork, after less frequent visits to the Factory, the reverse situation occurred and I found that respondents would assume that I knew more than I did, and I would be obliged to ask for a fuller account of events than would otherwise have been given.[2]

From interacting with various groups within the Firm, I observed differences in perceptions between them of the 'same' event. Those who interacted frequently, even if on different 'sides' for example Michael and Benny, would often give a markedly similar picture of an event. Those who interacted infrequently or unsuccessfully tended to present much less congruent accounts of ostensibly the 'same' event.

(1) Elmer (1951) notes the phenomenon of competitive groups out-doing one another in attempts to co-operate with the researcher. In the Hawthorn studies, wiremen 'competed' for the length of time they spent with the interviewer (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939).

(2) The phenomenon of knowledge not being given through respondents' assumptions that the researcher is already aware of it is noted by Vidich and Bensman (1954).

For instance, I was given different versions of an agreement made in one meeting between members of the Personnel Department and shop stewards from the Minority Unions. I noted that there could be closer agreement between leaders or representatives of parties than between leaders and followers within a party.

I knew that I was aligned with more than one group in the eyes of different parties, and this could have created problems of research reliability. For example, I could be identified by the Road Branch with either Management or with the Inside Branch, depending upon the social context. Such complications meant that I experienced a certain amount of role confusion, being unsure of which 'face' to put on in a given situation. In the eyes of my various respondents, I had not only to try to be fair with my time and observation, but more importantly be seen to be fair by all parties. This was almost impossible, for perceptions of equity varied from time to time within a party as well as between parties. I tried to remain sensitive to changes taking place within the Factory and to keep abreast of events accordingly. One ploy which I used during certain Management meetings was to sit by a window where I could be seen by shop stewards and other workers who happened to pass by and with whom I could exchange glances if appropriate. On the other hand, I was once or twice embarrassed to be in the privacy of a manager's office when a shop steward or foreman entered, because of the possible interpretations which could have been put on such an interaction, especially by already suspicious respondents or by those who might enhance others' suspicions through imparting this information.

From the point of view of perceived neutrality, it was important that I was not aligned with one party in the eyes of any other, particularly if the two had disagreements.   I had therefore to be aware of anything which could serve to associate me with any particular group.[1]

Joint Consultative Committees

The techniques described in the methodology section enabled me to investigate various aspects of the Firm's structure.   One important area of study was the pattern of communications within the Firm.   Poor communication in terms of infrequent contact between parties or inadequate information flow can seldom be pinpointed as a prime cause of conflict, although it may claim importance as an aggravating factor during a time of conflict.   This suggests that communication which is effective and unambiguous in terms of its content and direction may be helpful in minimising conflict.   Like any organization, this Firm exhibited both formal and informal patterns of communication.

A simplified representation of formal communications within the Firm is given in Figure 2.1.

(1)   See Appendix note 26 for the views of some other writers on this point, and for an example from this research.

FIGURE 2.1

SIMPLIFIED REPRESENTATION OF FORMAL COMMUNICATION
STRUCTURE WITHIN THE FIRM
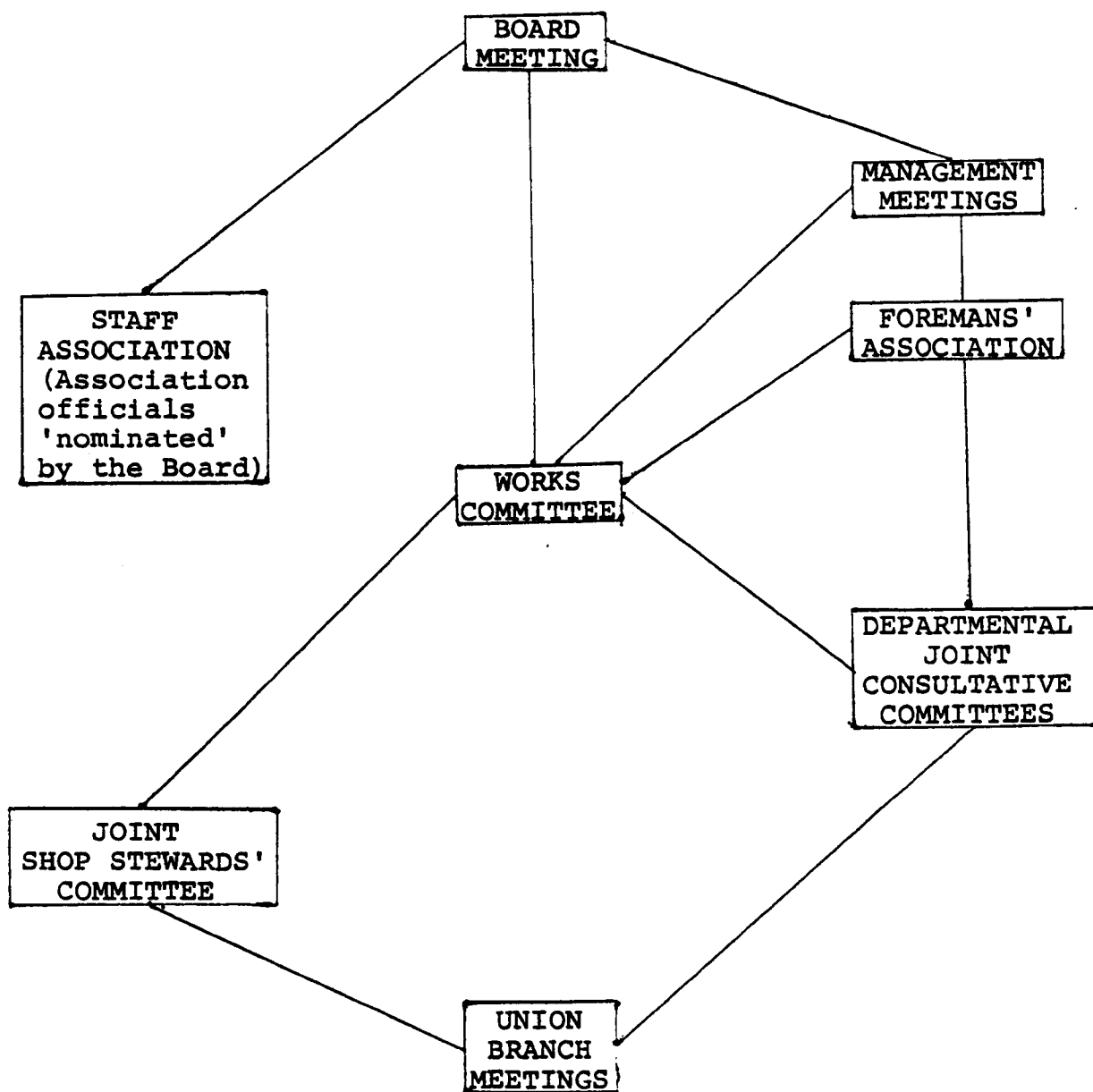
By way of formal communication between Management and Unions, Joint Consultative Committee meetings (JCC's) were held monthly in all departments. The only exception was the Road Transport Department in which they were held less frequently, owing to the difficulty of convening meetings at times when all members could attend. The intended function of JCC's was to act as occasions when representatives of all levels within departments could discuss matters of mutual interest. They were meant to be the channel through which management and worker representatives met to discuss problems and to try and agree on the nature and direction of future change at departmental level. They were not intended to act as places where grievances were aired, for this was the function of the formally constituted negotiating machinery, and all negotiations went through the Personnel Department. From the point of view of making JCC's totally credible exercises, this may have been an unfortunate state of affairs, for with few exceptions, these meetings produced apathy among attenders.[1] One reason for this could have been the apparent reluctance of Management to allow foremen and shop stewards to significantly modify their (management's) pre-formulated policy.

(1) One manager asked me what was 'wrong' with his departmental JCC. I was obliged to explain that I was precluded from discussion of such topics while the fieldwork was continuing, but that when the final research report was produced, there would be a section on JCC's. This was an extreme example of a problem associated with acceptance of my observer role at meetings.

In one sense therefore, JCC's were 'window dressing', for
they did not successfully fulfil their intended function,
and Management's mode of introducing change was still largely
unilateral.   Management viewed JCC's as useful occasions when
information could be passed to shop stewards and foremen
simultaneously, and they had developed into briefing sessions.
This suggests that they did have an important role to play in
communication, and for this reason Management may have per-
ceived these formal meetings to be a valuable adjunct to the
control of conflict within the Firm.   That conflict was
contained within institutional channels might be deduced from
the observation that JCC's were occasions when role-playing
often occurred.   Shop stewards would play out their role of
being aggressive towards managers, while the latter would
play out their appeasement role with replies offering greater
participation in departmental decision-making.[1]   The manner
in which individuals perceived the way in which they should
play out their roles seemed to be important from the point
of view of behaviour in these formal settings.   Exchanges
could in this way be controlled and the positions of parties
made clear.

Informal Communication Structure

The informal communication system within the Firm was used
to support and sometimes supplement formal meetings.   The
Company Clubhouse, of which all employees were members, was
known to be a valuable location for the exchange of information.

(1)   As distinct from decision-*taking*.

This meant that otherwise isolated individuals could keep up to date with events. False rumours as well as genuine information was spread through this channel. Information quickly spread laterally through the informal network which comprised many small groups within the Firm, for example: shop stewards from one branch, staff within one department, or foremen.

Information appeared to filter upwards more quickly than it did downwards.[1] A combination of factors probably accounted for this. The pyramidal structure of the organization facilitated greater upward mobility of information by virtue of the number of individuals through which each message had to pass. Another factor was that lower status individuals perceived that they could increase their status through an exchange of information upwards. Management also made conscious efforts to tap information channels as part of a policy of keeping themselves abreast of events. That everyone was aware of the manner in which information could spread could be functional for some parties. For example, shop stewards would 'pass' information to their managers in this way in the knowledge that it would reach its intended destination.

(1)   In terms of Burns and Stalker (1961), this indicated that the
      Firm was towards the 'organic' end of their organic/mechanistic
      continuum.

In releasing information, the higher was the status of an
individual in the organization, the greater was the risk
that he could afford to take.[1]   This has been recognised
for a long time by shop stewards in industry who often go direct
to their manager for an immediate decision on some issue
rather than to their foreman where delay is more likely;
a phenomenon known as 'by-passing'.   A secretary might play
safe by saying 'no' to a request to which she knows no
definite answer from her manager.   Further up an hierarchy
where roles carry more authority, I was more likely to find
someone who was able to take a risk for a particular course
of action, for example divulging certain information known
also to lower status individuals.   Sometimes, I had to obtain
information from higher status persons, because at the time of
seeking it they were the only ones who possessed certain facts.
Thus, directors for example had authority to give me certain
information, which other individuals (with the same information)
might have felt they did not have the authority to divulge.
Another consideration might have been that 'risk-taking' as
one aspect of entrepreneurial activity was a value that
higher status managers, particularly directors had internalized,
and that this had become generalized even to the extent of
divulging information to an outsider.

(1)   This observation is paralleled by studies of conformity behaviour,
       where both high and low status individuals in a group perceive a
       lower obligation to conform to group norms than do middle status
       members.   The participant observer in an organization may need
       to take advantage of such knowledge.

Communication downwards was less efficient, and groups such as the Minority Unions were often left short of information.[1] Foremen and shop stewards complained of bad communication at times, although managers would often use shop stewards as communication channels to shop floor workers, who managers claimed would rather receive information from their shop steward than from their foreman. In response to a time when they had found themselves deprived of information, the Foreman had evolved their own communication channels and ways of acquiring information. One particularly important piece of information which had been rumoured for some time, I first heard as news from the Foremen. Although complaining of being left in the dark about developments, this group were more in the know on this occasion than were many other sections of the Factory. [2]

Wages and Job Evaluation

The Firm's wages structure was complicated. The payroll was being computerised to facilitate the complex method of calculating wages and salaries. Frequent grouses about incorrect amounts in pay packets were voiced before the change-over, and the need for a more efficient method of payment was generally accepted. The new system involved all employees being put on monthly in place of weekly payment.

(1)　When conflict between parties is mutually perceived, a communications block may be a weapon used by one side or the other to strengthen their relative position by keeping the other party in the dark.

(2)　For details of this information, see Appendix note 27.

This was introduced through the shop stewards, almost all of whom agreed to Management's request to put them on monthly payment first.   The rest of the manual workforce followed their lead, providing one example of the handling of industrial relations at the Factory, and the manner in which change was effected.[1]

Employees compared their wages with those of workers in the other major Factory in the Company.   In the past, these had compared favourably, but there were indications that this advantage was being eroded to the point where the other Factory's workforce was now the pace-maker in wage increases. Negotiations for increases on basic rates were standardised, but a more contentious issue was the manner in which differentials between groups of workers were maintained.

Members of a job evaluation panel awarded points to jobs which determined payment made over basic rates.   The present system had operated for many years in evaluating the Inside Branch members' jobs.   For the Minority Unions' members' jobs it was relatively recent.   The Road Branch negotiated drivers' wage increases on an independent basis, while the remainder of their membership came under the job evaluation system.

(1)   Some years later, most employees had come off the monthly payment scheme.   However, the main aim of computerising the payroll was to remove causes of grievances arising from incorrect payments, not to get all employees onto monthly payment.

Worries over job evaluation were generally restricted to the Minority Unions, who would have preferred to have had observers with a training and background in their skills to assess their job performance, or better still to have had no job evaluation at all. Management saw that there was less scope for evaluating the Minority Unions' members jobs than they did themselves. One example of this difference in perception centred on the introduction of new machinery. The workers concerned, maintained that this increased the responsibility of their jobs, which should be upgraded accordingly. The Management viewpoint was that, despite new machinery, the job was essentially the same and did not merit such a large points increase.[1]

Considerable effort was expended in striving towards 'fair' job evaluation.[2] It was common practice for the Job Evaluation Committee to bring in a manager as an adviser from the department which was the location for the job being evaluated. When a Panel was set up to re-evaluate the jobs of one of the Minority Unions' members, the Panel worked in conjunction with the Minority Union Shop Committee. While this arrangement functioned to the satisfaction of the parties, consultation with those whose jobs were being evaluated was not regular practice.

(1)   This is a common type of disagreement. For an example of a dispute over differentials on a larger scale, see: Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, *Court of Inquiry into a dispute between the National Union of Blast furnacemen and the British Steel Corporation,* December, 1975.

(2)   Despite the objective impossibility of achieving this, it was still seen as a worthwhile goal by those involved in the job evaluation system.

Decisions of the Job Evaluation Committee were communicated
through shop stewards to the shop floor. The shop stewards
were thereby obliged to act as spokesmen for 'management'
decisions to their members. Problems of being identified with
these decisions in the eyes of their members might have been
avoided if foremen had been employed in this function. On
the other hand, circumstances suggested that in the delicate
area of job evaluation, an approach by a shop steward to his
members would provoke less animosity than an approach by a
foreman with the same information.[1] The shop stewards,
with regard to the distance that this function might put
between them and their members, were unwilling to take upon
themselves any aspects of the supervisory role, wishing to
maintain functional boundaries between themselves and fore-
men. The absence of shop stewards from the decision-making
process of job evaluation was symbolic of this differentiation.

(1) In Wright Mills' terms, shop stewards were being employed by
Management in this case as 'managers of discontent'.

Relations between Parties

Relations between foremen and shop stewards and the role that
each had to play in the Factory were among the topics
discussed at Joint Consultative Committees.   At a personal
level, I found little or no evidence of enmity between them.
Each related to the shop floor workers in different ways:
the Foremen had formal authority via the management structure,
while the shop stewards' functions derived from their role as
elected representatives.   In nearly all instances which I
observed, there appeared to be adequate communication between
foremen and shop stewards.   Although the relationship between
them was at the 'interface' of industrial relations, one
'representing' Management and the other the Trade Union side,
there appeared to be mutual recognition and acceptance of the
role of the other.   A number of factors probably accounted
for this symbiosis.

Frequent contact between them outside the immediate work
environment such as at JCC's, ensured that foremen and shop
stewards maintained a continual awareness of their respective
role functions.   Not only were the JCC's instrumental in
achieving a state of healthy communications between these
two important groups, but these were further helped by virtue
of the long-standing tradition of trade unionism within the
Firm.   Past disputes had helped to resolve the positions of
the parties to the point where little or no ambiguity remained.

As noted already, all foremen had experience of the shop floor and many had been shop stewards. It was not uncommon to see a shop steward be promoted from the shop floor to charge-hand and then foreman, this being an upgrading which was considered more acceptable to shop floor workers than in the past. Nothing in my observations suggested that the authority of foremen for the work process was being undermined by shop stewards, but rather indicated that the environment of this Firm was such as to minimise endemic conflict between the roles.

In conducting industrial relations in the Factory, Management (generally the Personnel Department), preferred to take the initiative, rather than act as a 'punch-bag' for the union parties. This initiative varied according to Management's experience of the three union groups. Close communicative ties between Management and the Inside Branch meant that representatives of the latter were frequently used informally as a 'sounding board' for new Management ideas. When dealing with the Inside Branch, Management considered that they were establishing rapport with authoritative leaders who represented some unity amongst their members' attitudes. There was trust between Management and the Inside Branch with a number of attitudes being shared between them. An example of the ties which existed was a visit abroad to observe industrial relations by two members of the Personnel Department, together with the Senior Shop Steward from the Inside Branch. That no representative from the other union groups participated in this venture was not without significance.

Relations between the Personnel Department and the Road
Branch were more ambivalent than were those they had with
the Inside Branch.   There was less contact with the Road
Branch although the Personnel Department perceived that closer
contact was within reach.   Representatives of the Road Branch
were more suspicious of Management generally than were the
Inside Branch officials.

The greatest rift in Union/Management communications occurred
between Management and the Minority Unions.   Frequent mis-
understandings existed between these two parties, such as are
generated by misperceptions and mutual distrust of the actions
of the other.   Management frequently perceived that the
Minority Unions were split amongst themselves and had no
confidence in their representatives.   One manager remarked;
"...It's not us they distrust, it's one another...".   Evidence
cited for these supposed splits included that of Minority
Unions' representatives always coming in pairs to see Manage-
ment.   The Minority Unions had a major problem of presenting
a united front, while at the same time attempting to secure
their own positions within the Firm.   It was their policy
always to approach Management ensuring that a fair spectrum
of their different views were represented in the negotiating
arena.

What Management perceived to be 'leap-frogging' wage increases
among the Minority Unions, the latter saw as attempts by
Management to play one group off against another to precipi-
tate the splits which Management perceived to exist between them.

Expectations for the stance of another party could assume considerable importance in determining inter-relationships. One accusation made by Management in the past, partly accounting for a dearth of communication between the parties, was that the Minority Unions would change the rules to suit themselves. This was seen to be partly a result of frequent leadership changes. The Minority Unions perceived that they had been forced into a position from which they derived little or no bargaining strength.[1]

Management, generally represented by the Personnel Department, were resolved to accepting three separate union groups within the Firm, and by and large they dealt with each group separately. During the negotiation of productivity agreements, Management wanted a single agreement covering the whole workforce, but eventually had to negotiate separate agreements with both the Majority and Minority Unions. In introducing any kind of organizational change affecting the Unions, Management saw their best way forward as looking after the interests of each union group separately. Whatever the intention of any party, the Firm's workforce was divided, and Management via the Personnel Department, ruled.[2]

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(1)   That misperceptions occur between management and trade unions has been known for some time (e.g. Stagner, 1956) and that those in any particular factory should be an exception would be surprising.

(2)   A policy which, deliberate or not, can cause problems for any management.

During disputes,[1] communication increased, and when

meetings occurred, conversation between parties could be

at varience. Management often talked in terms of ideas,

with the long-term in mind, while the Unions, being more

concerned with short-term problems, talked in terms of

what was practicable. Both required settlement, and

discussions were often concerned with establishing common

ground. In negotiations, union representatives preferred

to deal with higher Management, seeing too great a dis-

crepancy of power and status between themselves and

lower or middle Management.[2]

Inter-union relations were central to industrial relations

at the Factory. Before the Road Transport Department

became part of the Firm, the Minority Unions had dominated

the Inside Branch in terms of negotiating strength. One

vital clue to the prevailing situation was the advent of

the present Senior Shop Steward of the Inside Branch.

Benny, being a capable leader and negotiator, had been

able to use the essential functions and greater numbers

of the Inside Branch members to their advantage in secur-

ing pay claims and improved conditions.

(1)   I observed a number of disputes, most of which were settled in the early stages.

(2)   'By passing' occurred at all levels. One Departmental Head's view of the flow of information was that it was transmitted from the Personnel Department to the Senior Shop Stewards and from them to the other shop stewards and thence to the Branch members. The members told the Foremen who passed information to their managers who then told their Heads of Departments. The example above on negotiating preference highlights a dilemma of authority experienced by lower management. They had responsibility through direct supervision, yet the authority derived from their position was limited by their relationships with other parties.

Thus, despite the low status of the jobs held by Inside Branch members, they considered themselves to be adequately catered for. A prominent concern of the Minority Unions meanwhile was the whittling away of pay differentials between themselves and the Inside Branch. Relations between these two groups fluctuated. In one past strike, the bond of trade unionism gained salience over their differences, and the Minority Unions had given active support to the Inside Branch. At other times, the two union groups saw their paths as leading in different directions. The Inside Branch officials saw the way ahead for their own members, while the Minority Unions' members were afraid of getting left behind. Their feelings were crystallized in their attitude to Benny who commanded a mixture of fear, respect and dislike.

At the time of the research, relations between the Minority Unions and the Inside Branch were improving from a time when members of the groups would not speak to each other. Co-operation between them was developing, and whenever possible Management would assist this process, but recognized that impetus towards convergence would need to come from the Unions' representatives. The Minority Unions realised that whatever their differences, their joint cause would best be served by working together. As with their relations with the Inside Branch, it was often a question of how to achieve the desired improvement.

There were no strong historical links in relations between the Minority Unions and the Road Branch. Both were minority groups within the Firm and had similar relationships both to the Personnel Department and to the Inside Branch. There were ties relating to the nature of the work of some members of the two groups, which was of a similar kind. A very small number of Road Branch members were also members of one of the Minority Unions. The Road Transport Department and the shops of the Minority Unions were situated almost next door to one another, and both were outside the Factory gates.

Relations between the Inside and Road Branches of the Majority Union were bad. There was little communication between the two groups and the formal liaison committee consisting of senior representatives from each branch did not meet frequently or regularly.

There were frequent disagreements between representatives of the branches, whose only official contact was on the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee and the Works Committee. Different interests of the two groups, reflected in the behaviour of their senior representatives, were magnified through infrequent contact and many misperceptions of intent. These differences crystallized into a degree of negative feeling which precluded rational discussion or agreement on almost any issue.

A Research Upset

The event which caused the greatest research problem of
the whole project highlighted the scant attention which
I had paid both to the Road Branch and to the Road Trans-
port Department.   It was symbolic of the separateness
of the Road Transport Department that I had only briefly
been introduced to one of the managers there, and my few
visits to that Department had been fruitless in terms of
contacting respondents.   The Manager of the Road Trans-
port Department rang Michael at a time when I happened
to be with him, to report on a recent Road Branch Meeting
which had passed a motion to the effect that they wanted
no more to do with the research project.

The Secretary of the Road Branch, the only man I knew from
that group, was apologetic over what had happened, but
added that there was little he could do about it.   Ernie
disclosed that it was Sam, the former Branch Secretary
who had initiated opposition to the research.   Sam had
reportedly said that I had some 'ulterior motive' for the
research and had persuaded the Branch to vote according
to his views.   My worst suspicions about Sam's feelings
were confirmed.   One specific issue had been the printed
sheets which I had passed on to the Road Branch.   That
these were not signed had seemed to hinder acceptance by
the Road Branch.   Thus, the problem of inadequate infor-
mation which had hampered my approach to the Minority
Unions, seemed quite different from the political object-
ions now raised by the Road Branch.

I decided to let the matter rest for a while and try to maintain such contact as I had with Ernie. The withdrawal of co-operation from the Road Branch resulted from the largest tactical error which I made during the fieldwork.[1]

Benny had not heard the substance of the Road Branch motion until I broke the news to him. I realised that not only was communication between branches poor, but also that the presence of a researcher in the Factory was not of great importance to employees, and I told no-one else of this development. The Road Branch rejection did not acquire great significance in the Firm as a whole, although I was probably to some extent being used as a 'political football' between the two branches of the Majority Union. I may also have been acting as a scapegoat for the general insecurity of the Road Branch at that time.

This series of happenings demonstrates that it may be important to devote time and energy into gaining the co-operation of initially recalcitrant groups. The Road Branch, now officially hostile to the research, was a potentially rich source of information which was effectively closed to me for the time being. A more proficient observer might have recognised initial hostility as an indication that there was a potential wealth of material for research files.

(1) When reporting research, it is important to record mistakes for as Bruyn (1966) points out, they can be of assistance in understanding both the ongoing research and as lessons for the future. Aversion to recording 'failures' should be overcome, for it is more 'scientific' to report exactly *what* happened than what ideally *would* have happened. The rigorous practice of recording all relevant events, even if these are seen at the time as failures is an approach which seems to sport few adherents. For an exception, see Roy (1965).

A beneficial effect of my new relationship with the Road Branch was that I was made more aware of conflict within the Firm, especially that between the two branches of the Majority Union.   This perspective was valuable from the standpoint of my involvement with the subject-matter of the research.   It was unfortunate that the Road Branch associated me with the Inside Branch, and one problem was to maintain the necessary detachment to continue the research.   I found it useful to try and see possible advantages of ostensibly adverse situations.[1]   I had to try and collect data reflecting intensity as well as of direction of behaviour.

The most difficult encounter during my research at the Factory occurred soon after the Road Branch rejection, and represented a watershed in my fieldwork.   I was attending a meeting of shop steward representatives from the three union groups, who formed the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee.   Its membership comprised Benny and his vice-chairman Ron, Harold and David, and John and Ernie from the Road Branch.   The Road Branch officials arrived first, and I persuaded them to let me attend meetings at which other groups were represented. (I did not discover the precise wording of the motion which excluded me from Road Branch activities).   On this occasion they were content to let me stay, Ernie being quite accom-modating even if John had reservations.   Their dilemma was that they were tied by their Branch motion, and could not officially discuss anything with me, including any re-estab-lishment of official contact.   A 'Catch 22' situation prevailed.

(1)   In participant observation, all behaviour represents valid data in its context.   Dalton (1959) maintains that the researcher should not reciprocate rejection by respondents, as this may add new insights and be a key to other aspects of the environment.

At this meeting I wished to discuss structured interviews
I intended to conduct on shop stewards who were willing
to act as respondents in this way, and this was theoret-
ically the best place in which to raise the issue, when
all the shop steward representatives were together.   I
had however chosen perhaps the worst possible time.   I
had mistakenly opted to negotiate through conflict, invol-
ving simultaneous discussion with representatives from
the three union groups, showing that I had not learnt the
lesson noted when contact with the trade union representa-
tives was made at the start of the research.

The first revelation at this Meeting was that the original
research proposal had never been put to a meeting of the
Road Branch.   Sam had 'forgotten' about it, later choos-
ing to bring a motion against the research after being
removed from office.   I had therefore received incorrect
information at an earlier stage on being told that the
Road Branch had accepted the research.

I outlined my proposed research interviews to the shop
stewards, who did not appear impressed.   Benny led the
attack on me, while the others remained mostly silent.
I did not worry about this as I thought anything which
associated me less with Benny in the eyes of the other
shop stewards would be to my advantage in gaining accept-
ability with them.   I was probably quite wrong in this
assumption, for the shop stewards were potentially more
collectively hostile towards me, even than towards each
other.   They wanted time to consider my new research
proposals.

This particular Meeting was held the day after the 1970
General Election at which the former Labour Government had been
ousted against opinion poll predictions.   The mood of the
shop stewards was not congenial on account of this.   That I
had had no sleep the night before having stayed up to watch
the results, did not predispose me to give a totally adequate
rendering of my proposed interviews.   I left this meeting
with a distinct feeling that I was not progressing well with
the research.[1]

I felt that there would have been a chance to restart negot-
iating acceptance of the research by the Road Branch if John
had been more secure in his position of Senior Shop Steward
and less suspicious as a result.   However, through mis-
handling my research observations so far, I was too much
aligned with Benny to stand any chance of gaining the co-oper-
ation and trust of the Road Branch officers in the immediate
future.   I was now experiencing personally some of the emotion
which existed between the two branches.   I had become entang-
led in the internal politics of a local union, and for a time
was unsure as to how to extricate myself, and at the same time
continue to perform my research role.   Benny and Ron were not
helpful over my predicament, merely saying that it was typical
of the way in which the Road Branch officials behaved (as was
the case as far as they were concerned).   While sympathising,
they were in no position to act on my behalf.

(1)   This example demonstrates the problems of detrimental influences
       upon field research.   From my point of view, this was the low
       point of the research period.   See Appendix note 28 on strain
       experienced by the participant observer.

I decided to wait and see what events would offer me in the way of opportunity.   I continued to question both the utility of the research and its future validity.   If I was denied access to a crucial aspect of the conflict which existed in the Factory, how fair a representation of the positions of all parties could I hope to give?[1]

The following constituted the major factors determining whether or not I continued with the research project:-

Against continuing:-

1.   I would have gained from experiences in the Factory and could use this knowledge to pursue research in other directions.

2.   Cutting losses now might be preferable to continuing with ever-diminishing co-operation from all parties. For example, an immediate problem would be to ensure that the prevailing stance of the Road Branch did not spread, particularly to the Minority Unions for my relations with them were not particularly good at this point.

3.   There would be no grant forthcoming for a larger project, at least in the foreseeable future.[2]

4.   There would be a reason for leaving which made sense to respondents, i.e. the non-co-operation of the Road Branch.

(1)   Other writers have commented upon the type of problem which I was obliged to deal with.   For a summary of some of their views, see Appendix note 29.

(2)   See Appendix note 30, for a brief account of the attempt at fund-raising for the research.

<u>In favour of continuing</u>:-

1.   There were obligations to those who had co-operated
     in the research that they should see something positive
     in return for their help.

2.   After six months of study much groundwork had been
     completed, and I was thoroughly familiar with much
     of the Firm and its personnel.

3.   By persevering, a worthwhile body of data might still
     be collected.

4.   Using the non-co-operation of the Road Branch as a
     reason for leaving the Factory raised the ethical
     issue of the research possibly aggravating conflicts
     within the firm: i.e. the issue of my departure could
     be used as a weapon against the Road Branch at a future
     time.

The points for and against my leaving the Firm were so
finely balanced that but for the events described in the
next chapter, my decision to stay and continue with the
research would not have been an easy one to make.

<u>Summary and Concluding Comment</u>

What are the major points to be carried forward from this
chapter, which has been concerned with methods and techniques
used within the organisation to perform research effectively?
These can be examined under three headings: 1)   Acceptance
by the various parties of the participant observer and what
can be established through this; 2)   Using the experience
of the participant observer to assess conflicts between the
parties within the Firm; and 3)   Combining 1) and 2) to make
predictions and hypothesize about future events in the Firm.

1) Acceptance of myself as a participant observer in the
    Firm revealed much about internal communication.
    Acceptance could be regarded as taking place at formal
    and informal levels. At a formal level, for example
    as an observer at meetings, I was accepted most readily
    by Management. No vote was ever taken and no oppor-
    tunity for veto was ever given as far as I know as to
    whether or not I should be allowed to attend any
    Management meeting. This could have indicated that
    Management assumed that the outcome of the research
    would be useful to them and that they would gain by
    co-operating in this way. It could also be a reflec-
    tion of the length of time in which Management had to
    prepare themselves for the incoming research project.
    It further indicated that communication between
    different sectors of Management was such as to ensure
    that I had an'easy passage'through the network of
    exclusively Management meetings.

    This ostensibly high degree of acceptance was, if
    anything, greater in my observation of Foreman's meet-
    ings. The Foremen were a relatively tightly-knit
    group and as I took my place at one of their meetings,
    I was described as: "one of the family..." Such a
    high degree of acceptance should not be confused with
    'over-rapport' sometimes warned of in the literature,
    for the Foremen were fully aware that I interacted with
    many other groups within the Firm. The Road Transport
    Department operated without foremen, two line managers
    performing equivalent functions.

In the case of attending union meetings, a vote was sometimes taken on the first occasion as to whether or not I should be allowed to attend. This was in addition to the formal agreement of the union groups to the research. It seemed that not only was it necessary to negotiate separate entry to the shop floor, it was also frequently necessary to regard each union meeting as a unique event, sometimes requiring individual negotiation of entry. Acceptance by one union group did not necessarily confer acceptance by any other union group, even where membership of formal gatherings over-lapped. This suggested that a state of poor communication existed between union factions within the Firm, and that issues which arose had to be considered independently by different groups. Decisions were not consistent over time.[1]

My acceptance as an observer at joint Management/Union meetings paralleled that at exclusively Management meetings. This suggested that communication between Management and Unions, for example at the Works Committee meeting, or at the level of JCC's within departments, was better than that between union groups. There remained the possibility that I could be excluded from joint meetings where the Road Branch had vetoed my observation of their activities.

(1) Of Sayles' (1958) classification of apathetic, conservative, erratic and strategic work groups, Marchington (1975a) notes that a work group might change from one type to another. Thus, the Minority Unions might be seen as an "erratic" group, the Inside Branch as a "strategic" group, and the Road Branch as varying between an "erratic" and a "strategic" group. However, the groups considered in this study are larger than, and therefore not strictly comparable with *work* groups considered by Sayles. Thus Sayles' analysis, or subsequent work on his analysis would not be appropriate as a basis for investigating events in this Firm with the methodology adopted in this case.

Informally, my acceptance was less clearly delineated. In face to face interaction as an 'interviewer' with a single respondent, I relied upon my repertoire of social skills. Similarly, as a participant during informal group discussions, I had the benefit of a basic training in psychology and group processes to alert my senses to the behaviour I was observing. Apart from my direct personal experience, it was almost impossible for me to know what perceptions of me were held by the Firm's personnel as a result of their varied observations of 'an outsider'.

As an observer of social interaction, I could summarize the following important points about communication within the Firm:

i)   The Personnel Department held the key to formal communication at Factory level between Management and the Trade Unions.

ii) Informally, the Foremen had considerable scope for collating information from all parts of the Factory with the possible exception of the Road Transport Department. As a group, however, they were not able to exert a significant amount of influence upon the course of events because of their marginal status.

iii) The trade union groups did not communicate adequately amongst themselves despite the existence of formal machinery for this purpose. Their representatives had minimal informal interaction outside their own group.

iv) Although Joint Consultative Committees were not seen to be important by many of those who attended them, they were part of a formal communication structure within which attempts were made by higher Management to distribute information to all parties.

However, informal communication networks were so
pervasive that much important information was
passed through contact outside formal meetings.
This was true of information passed between, as
well as within, parties.

2) A researcher undertaking fieldwork is to a large extent
controlled by circumstances in the environment he studies.
A researcher who refuses to accept these circumstances
threatens to change the environment he seeks to study
(this may or may not be a research aim). This research
was specifically aimed not to be of the 'action research'
variety. However, in accepting the nature of the social
environment as inviolate, a fieldworker may encounter
the type of problem experienced by the Participant
Observer and described in this chapter. Thus, use must
be made of the experience of such problems in respect
of using these to gather research data. To this extent,
the participant observer reflects aspects of social
relationships in the environment studied, and his relation-
ships with respondents are dependent upon and therefore
partly indicative of prevailing relationships among
respondents. Accounts of field research should in turn
seek to reflect accurately the patterns of events and
relationships, through the experiences of the fieldworker.

Conflicts which existed between parties within the Firm
could be identified by examining their perceptions of
the Participant Observer, and by noting the relative
levels of rapport built up with each. My rapport with
Management was such that I could move freely through
their territory.

My relations with the Inside Branch representatives were adequate for obtaining access to all the data I wanted from this source.   Largely on account of these relations I enjoyed with Management and the Inside Branch, I had not established satisfactory rapport with the Road Branch.   This indicated a state of antipathy between the Road Branch and these other two parties. My relations with the Minority Unions' representatives were variable, sometimes being satisfactory, at other times rather uncertain.   From this, it appeared that the Minority Unions were unsure as to what stance they should adopt towards each of the other three parties.

From my position as participant observer, there appeared to be evidence to suggest that not only was communication between the trade union parties diminishing, but that there was a corresponding increase in tension between them.   The formal liaison channel which existed between the two branches of the Majority Union had become moribund, indicating that these two parties had arrived at a state of mutual antagonism, and could now meet only in the presence of at least one other party, for example the Minority Unions at Joint Shop Stewards' Committee meetings.   Besides my personal experience of the conflict, two further facts pointed to a build up of tension between the trade union parties.   The Road Branch had not committed themselves to a decision on the research project at first, indicating a stance of 'neutrality' towards it.   As the fate of the project was largely in the hands of one man in the Road Branch, this may be an unsubstantiated conclusion.

However, that the Road Branch after several months had declared themselves in total opposition to the research project suggested that they perceived conflict between their own objectives and those of anyone they saw to be aligned with some other party.   Which other party this might be did not become clear to me until the end of the fieldwork a year later.[1]

The second piece of evidence for an increase in tension was the reaction of the representatives from the three parties to my research proposals on formally inter- viewing shop stewards in the Factory.   On this issue, the stance of the Road Branch was pre-determined by their motion against co-operation with the research, and was therefore part of a blanket of opposition.   The stance of the Minority Unions was indeterminate, because at this stage they did not declare their view of this aspect of the research.   They later expressed their willingness to help with the interviewing, indicating that they did not view this extra intrusion as a threat. The Inside Branch however did declare immediate opposi- tion to my request, indicating that this party felt more threatened than at an earlier stage of the research when they had been more co-operative.   It appeared therefore that they saw their current position to be correspondingly less secure.

(1)   In retrospect, my supposition at the time that it could have been my alignment with the Inside Branch as perceived by the Road Branch which resulted in their veto of the research, was naive and possibly resulted from my proximity to events concerning conflict between the branches.   Whatever their differences, Management was still seen to be the main 'enemy', and it was to this party, that the Road Branch perceived I was aligned.

From these observations, it seemed that tension and conflict between the parties was increasing in the manner indicated. The two Majority Union branches were unwilling to commit themselves to obligations which could harm their positions. Observing their behaviour and noting changes over time, the position and experience of the participant observer could be used to predict further tension and an increase in conflict between the parties.

3) It could be hypothesised at this point that some issue in the near future could act as a 'spark' to trigger more overtly hostile behaviour between the union parties. Because underlying conflicts of interest between parties were already seen to be of prime importance however, it could not be predicted what form the sparking mechanism might take. It could be postulated however, that because of the frequency of disputes about payment, and because of the different systems of payment operating for the three groups, a payment issue was a likely candidate for the onset of escalated hostility. It could also be predicted at this stage, that because of their central and powerful position in respect of other parties, both Management and Trade Unions, the Personnel Department was likely to play an important role in any dispute involving one or more of the union parties.

It could be argued that a fieldworker should be on the lookout for 'traps' in relationships with different parties among his respondent population. However outcomes of becoming embroiled in conflicts which at first sight might appear dysfunctional for the research, may be productive in terms of research data. In this case, the Participant Observer adopted a perspective held by members of the Personnel Department in seeing factions within the Minority Unions as the greatest threat to 'successful' research, to the extent of ignoring the relatively isolated Road Branch. On the basis of the decision by the Road Branch to formally exclude the Participant Observer from their activities, it could be predicted that they were about to enter into a period of increased conflict with respect to one or more other parties.

To summarize these findings, it could be predicted that:

1. hostility between union parties would increase,

2. a dispute involving pay was likely in the near future,

3. the Road Branch would be an important party in such a dispute, and

4. the Personnel Department would be likely to play a key role in a dispute involving one or more trade union parties.

CHAPTER 3

OVERT CONFLICT IN THE ORGANIZATION

This chapter contains details of the major upheaval I observed during my fieldwork. Description is limited as far as possible to the most important events which occurred in the final twelve months spent observing the parties. Occasionally, specific episodes are reviewed in order to make particular points about the study. Wherever possible, explanations and plausible interpretations of events are given in an attempt to aid understanding. Before the development and passage of the Strike is considered, the Firm's strike history and disputes procedures are briefly outlined.

Strikes and Disputes Procedures

Inspection of the documented history of industrial relations at the Factory showed that a number of disputes had been entered into, and that three of these had resulted in strikes. Time intervals between these strikes successively decreased; the gap between the first and the second being six years, while four years separated the second and third. The third strike occurred less than four years before this study was begun.[1]

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(1) The strike pattern in this Firm relfected the national trend towards increasing numbers of strikes recorded at that time. See for example: J.W. Durcan and W.E.J. McCarthy, "What is happening to strikes?" *New Society*, 2.11.72, 267-9. One criteria of managerial success might be seen as the strike trend of their enterprise, although this cannot be taken as an unambiguous clue even to the 'success' of procedure agreements on disputes. The strike trend may or may not be a sensitive indicator of employee dissatisfaction, but cannot be seen as the only criterion of the state of industrial relationships.

The first strike resulted from a recognition dispute, and concerned the establishment of a 100% 'Union shop' within the Firm. This was introduced as a consequence of the strike. The focus of conflict on the second occasion had been foreman/shop floor worker relations. Foremen had emerged badly from this strike, having lost face, yet perceiving themselves to have been scapegoats for a general malaise characterizing the Firm's industrial relations. The third strike involved the Inside Branch and resulted from disagreements over wages and productivity. Foremen and Staff helped to run the Factory during the week-long strike, which was the longest of the three.

Subsequent to the last strike at the Factory, disputes procedures which could be initiated by managers, foremen or shop stewards, had been officially adopted. The procedures gave due recognition to the essential role of communication to achieving agreement between parties to an industrial dispute. The procedures, while not pre-cluding informal communication, provided a framework in which formal negotiations could take place.

Three separate disputes procedures existed for the three union groups, and at no stage was any of the groups invol-ved in another's dispute. In the case of the Majority Union, a full-time official who serviced both branches was involved at one stage. If the dispute was with only one of the branches, there would be obligations upon the full-time official to represent only that branch. It was thereby recognized by all parties that the union groups were three separate parties, each with their own interests.

The respective procedures for the three groups were comparable insofar as they each followed the same general pattern. Small differences between the procedures resulted from the peculiar positions of the groups within the Firm and their relation to local union offices.

Since the introduction of the current procedures, a number of disputes had been registered, all having been settled within the stipulated 21-day period. Only once had one of these disputes reached director level, and never had one gone outside the Firm to the final stage of third-party intervention. On exhaustion of the disputes procedure, the party in dispute would be free to take constitutional industrial action,[1] although the procedure could be extended by mutual consent of the parties and discussion continued for as long as the parties wished. Allowance was made for briefing within each party at every stage, and one clause maintained the status quo existing at the start of the dispute. The procedures attempted to institutionalize conflict and its resolution or settlement,[2] recognising the necessity for full discussion between, and communication within, parties.

(1)   i.e. action taken by a party after it has adhered to the agreed procedure, and this has been exhausted.

(2)   'Resolution' and 'settlement' refer to two ways of dealing with conflict. The former implies an integrative long-term solution to conflict, while the former may be imposed by a third party, be short-term and seen as a compromise by the parties.

Pre-Strike Activity

A view given to me by a shop steward of the pattern of events which characterised industrial relations at the Factory, was that the organization moved successively through periods of calm and periods of disruption. The pace of events over the months leading to the situation to be described had been slackening, and many had the feeling that this could have been the 'calm before the storm'. One dispute over a minor issue was being waged between the Minority Unions and the Personnel Department with a remarkable absence of enthusiasm, and was drifting towards settlement by default as much as by negotiation.

There were a few stirrings among and between members of the Inside Branch and the Minority Unions over job evaluation, and at the same time the Road Branch were conducting negotiations with the Personnel Department for increases in their own wage rates. It was a time of low seasonal market demand for the Firm's product. This affected all sections of the Factory, but none to the extent of the Road Branch members, who had more time on their hands than usual.

The Road Branch eventually went into dispute with the Company over their wage claim, having failed to reach satisfaction in negotiations. The dispute was withdrawn however at the stage when their local full-time official became involved, and negotiations with the Personnel Department continued. As the amount of work at the Factory continued to decline, industrial relations became more strained.

Relations between the union groups continued to worsen as each continued to negotiate increases for their own members. The Personnel Department were becoming frustrated under cross pressures from the other parties. The Road Branch Shop Stewards were under extra pressure to gain maximum advantage from negotiations. They were up against the greater expertise and experience of the Personnel Department members who, as their role demanded, were trying to obtain as low a settlement as possible. The pressure from the Road Branch membership upon their officials was stronger and more immediate however, and the Road Branch went back into dispute with the Company.

At the same time, the Minority Unions indicated that they no longer wished to remain in the job evaluation system. The role of the Road Branch in initiating this demand from them through their negotiations outside the job evaluation system, was probably significant. Inside Branch representation was currently weakened by the absence of Benny, who was on leave. Minority Unions' shop stewards were in contact with their outside officials over job evaluation, and had their own experts at work in the field. A subsequent wage increase granted to one of the Minority Unions served to increase the differential between them and the other union groups. Company Staff had also recently received a pay increase.

Subsequent to the expiry of the disputes procedure, and
before the Road Branch had decided upon what action, if
any, they would take, further negotiations took place
between directors of the Firm and full-time officials of
the Majority Union.   These were not part of formal nego-
tiating procedure, but represented attempts to shift the
focus of conflict away from its source, defuse it, and try
for settlement at an higher level.   These attempts were
unsuccessful, for the 'abstraction' of the dispute in
this way could not significantly alter its practical impli-
cations for those directly involved.   Talks at higher
levels may sometimes achieve what cannot be achieved at
lower levels through greater freedom of movement of the
participants.   In this case, however, there were more
than two parties to consider and the exclusion of other
interested parties jeopardised the success of these
negotiations.

When the disputes procedure had passed through all its
stages, the Road Branch were free to take constitutional
industrial action.   Third party intervention had failed
to resolve the dispute, as had many hours of negotiations
by representatives at all levels from the two sides.   What
were the positions of the various parties at this stage?

The Road Branch negotiators were prepared to compromise
with the Company on their claim, and had come down from their
original figure.   They had reservations about joining a
job evaluation scheme unless it could be shown to be in
their members' interests.   They maintained that their
present claim should have no reference to any other party
within the Firm as traditionally they had always negotiated

independently.   They did not therefore wish to enter
into negotiations alongside any other party and renege
on assurances to their members that they would speak only
for them.   The claim was not for a flat-rate increase,
but affected members of the Road Branch differentially
depending on their jobs.   This claim was for drivers
only.   The earlier claim which had been withdrawn from
dispute had been for the whole Branch membership.

The Personnel Department was also in a dilemma.   Their
main concern was the positions of the other parties, and
their possible reactions to a large pay settlement with
the Road Branch.   The amount which they were willing to
concede to the Road Branch was limited because of this.
They would have liked the Road Branch to join in negotia-
tions with the other groups, but this they would not do.
The other union groups were in any case in no position to
enter into joint negotiations at that time.   The Person-
nel Department and Directors were attempting to shift the
onus of decision-making onto the representatives of both
the Majority Union branches, i.e. the full-time officials.

The full-time officials were aware of Management's position,
and had no desire to be caught in the same dilemma, being
aware of their position as representatives of groups whose
interests could conflict.   As far as they were concerned,
the Company was in dispute only with the Road Branch, and
it was this party they were representing.   While apprec-
iating their long-term position, they saw the immediate
issue as a settlement on behalf of the Road Branch, and in
an attempt to achieve this, they effectively severed
communication with the Inside Branch.   Had Benny not been

on leave at this time, the full-time officials might have found this a more difficult course of action.

A date was set for further talks between the Personnel Department and the Road Branch very soon after the expiry of the disputes procedure, indicating that both sides desired to reach agreement before more serious consequences resulted. The difference between the claim of the Road Branch and the Management offer had narrowed considerably, but as the two figures converged, so the debate got keener and respective positions became more entrenched. The issues which were covered, apart from restatement of positions by the parties were: skills required of Road Branch members, comparisons with other groups of workers within the Firm, and with workers in other Firms, national standards required of the workers with particular reference to the Heavy Goods Vehicle Regulations (1969), and alternative ways of paying increases.

The three days which elapsed before the Road Branch met to decide what tactics to adopt were significant, for they provided all parties with an opportunity to assess their positions in the light of events, and develop their perceptions and attitudes towards the present state of conflict.

The exhaustion of the Road Branch disputes procedure, occurring at a time when I had been observing the Factory for over six months, marked the start of a significant phase in my research. By this time, I had access to nearly all parts of the Factory, with the notable exception of the one in which the dispute was centred. It was obvious to me that I would now need to make concerted efforts to approach

the Road Transport Department if I was to have any hope of obtaining a complete picture of events. I collected such information as I could from minutes, and began working intensively, interviewing almost everyone I could get hold of who seemed to have anything to do with the dispute.[1]

I met managers from the Road Transport Department for the first time. One or two were slightly suspicious, probably because they had not met me before, but they soon became helpful and co-operative. As I became more involved as a close observer of events, I found it more difficult to be objective about the lives and feelings of the people in the Factory. Although I was not implicated in the same way as the individuals in the Firm, as a researcher I was a participant in an important part of their lives.

Although I developed more frequent contact with some sections of the Firm at this stage, as the parties began to polarize, my role became more marginal. Key respondents became harder to contact. This was especially true of the Personnel Officers, whose secretaries became more proficient in their buffer roles. On the other hand, individuals who were removed from the focus of the conflict tended to be more ready to avail themselves for interviewing, often because I knew more about events than they did. This behaviour could be interpreted as a desire to hear the latest news.

(1) The technique of interviewing respondents formally in the course of the participant observation is frequently employed by field-workers. The research team from the University of Liverpool who observed two dock strikes combined interviews with participant observation.

Frequently, by being in the right place at the right time, I would have access to information before it reached a group for which it was important. One clue on how central a role a person had in the conflict could be the difficulty which I encountered in contacting him. It was generally more difficult to gain the confidence of a large number of respondents, and I was obliged to reduce the number of individuals with whom I interacted.

Another major problem for me at this stage was recording. Because there was more information potentially available than normal, even working 'full-time' I was stretched to record even the events I considered important. I managed as a minimum to record the main events of the day. I noticed a distinct change in nearly all my respondents. They appeared more sensitised, and aware that something was approaching, although they were unsure as to what exactly it was. This feeling was particularly apparent among shop stewards.

John, the Chairman of the Road Branch, intimated that there might be a chance of my being accepted by the Branch after the dispute was over, but was unwilling to raise the issue for the present. He appeared to be enjoying the central role in which the dispute had placed him, a feeling probably reinforced by Benny's continued absence. This fact probably also contributed to the extra trust which Harold and David of the Minority Unions now displayed towards me. They explained how they thought I had been spending too much time with Benny and the Inside Branch. I considered this to be an important revelation, for they were correct

in saying that I had spent a proportionately greater amount of time with this other group.[1]

On my proposed shop steward interviews, Harold and David had said nothing at the ill-fated Joint Shop Stewards' Meeting. They were more co-operative than Benny had been, perhaps as a result of the stance he had adopted. They stressed that his word would determine the response I could expect from the Inside Branch shop stewards, and they suggested that I went ahead with the interviews. Harold and David, especially the latter, with whom I had particularly good rapport, appeared to be the most concerned among the shop stewards that the research should be successful. They indicated that they would back my attempts to complete it. I interpreted the different stances of the representatives of the trade union parties towards me at this time as further evidence that each would adopt a different position in the event of an escalation of conflict. It seemed that historical relationships would form the basis for any polarization that would occur between union parties, rather than the trade union to which they happened to belong.

Pre-strike positions of the parties

From my interviews with individuals concerned with the conflict, and my continued observations, the following were among the reactions of the parties at this stage. The Road Branch were in the position of having to make the next move, and wished to optimise their bargaining position by choosing the strategy which would best advance this.

[1] Like the proverbial customer, the respondent in field research is always right. His perceptions are valid within their context, and it is such aspects of his role-behaviour that the research must attempt to reflect.

There were differences of opinion as to the most appropriate course of action, but as they were expected to do something, their immediate choice was between a strike and some less extreme form of industrial action.[1] If they chose to withdraw their labour, then their action would have immediate and wide-ranging effects upon the other parties. They would also suffer most themselves through loss of earnings and through the possibility of antagonising other parties by escalating the conflict.

Management did not think that the Road Branch would decide upon strike action. They perceived the Branch to be split between 'moderates' and 'militants'.[2] Many Managers were hopeful that if large numbers of Road Branch members attended the meeting, there would be a decision against a strike, and for some lesser form of industrial action. They perceived that polarization would occur within the Road Branch, and were hopeful for an outcome favourable to them. It is not difficult to account for the development of such an attitude by Management. Under 'normal' circumstances, they had seen the 'leadership' of the Road Branch change hands and knew that there was constant pressure on the 'leadership' from those who had been 'leaders' in the past. They assumed that this 'split' would result in the formation of two distinct parties within the Road Branch.

(1)   A strike is a relatively extreme form of conflict behaviour which may be seen as a manifestation of conflict. Less extreme forms which also come under the heading of "industrial action" are; 'work to rule', 'go-slow' and 'overtime ban'.

(2)   This dichotomy is frequently noted in conflict where a decision by one group will play a decisive part in the future direction of events. A spectrum of views is seen to polarize in the face of few available options for action.

Managers thought that pressure upon present Branch Officials
would be to the effect that aspiring leaders would be able
to call the tune.   If there were a settlement in the Branch's
favour then this aspiring group could say that it was as a
result of their pressure, and if the outcome were not favour-
able to the Branch, then the present Branch Officials were
failing in their obligations.   Management perceptions of the
likelihood of a'no-strike'decision by the Road Branch seemed
to be based more upon their hopes than their fears.   It may
have been significant that since the Road Transport Department
had become a part of the Firm, there had been no strikes
recorded.   Neither was there a comparable set of events from
the past on which to base a judgement.   Management's view-
point could be interpreted as a 'wait and see' collective
attitude.   Their direct influence upon the decision of the
Road Branch was by now slight, for negotiations had effectively
ceased.

Despite their stated optimism, Management were making prepar-
ations for the possibility of a strike, though not to the extent
of making these too obvious and thereby helping to precipitate
the situation they most wanted to avoid.   Strike action would
bring production to a standstill in a short while.   There would
be no immediate danger of laying men off, but being in a com-
petitive market, trade would be lost and then be difficult to
recover.   With trade at the seasonal low point however, from
the Management point of view, if a stoppage was unavoidable
then this would be the best time for it.   For this reason,
many members of Management not directly involved with the
conflict thought that their representatives should 'take a
stand' and not 'capitulate' to the demands of the Road Branch.

Management representatives seemed to have acquired a reputation amongst staff for 'giving in' to the demands of the Unions in the past without a customary struggle.

Perceptions tended to simplify events which were taking place near the focus of the conflict. Many shop stewards and managers saw a 'win-lose' situation from which one party would emerge victorious over the other.[1] I noticed a paucity of relevant information held by those removed from the focus of the conflict. This as much as any factor, could account for misperceptions of the conflict as well as polarization of attitudes.

Among the effects of this polarization I noted was the apportionment of blame to one or both major parties to the dispute. Management for example were 'blamed' for not keeping control of the Road Branch at an earlier stage, while the Road Branch were 'blamed' for being greedy, etc. These perceptions were largely irrelevant to the passage of the conflict unless they were held by key participants. They were not useful in attempts to achieve a successful settlement. The wording of the Road Traffic Regulations (1969) emerged as an item for blame, as did the apathy of the Road Branch and their refusal to join a job evaluation scheme. The Personnel Department were blamed for lacking a sense of urgency and practicality through having no everyday experience with the workforce. Bad communication between the Road Transport Department and the rest of the firm was also forwarded as an explanation.

(1)   This is a common perception of those who observe a conflict from a distance, and may be noted in the employment of such terms in the press as; 'give way', 'climb down', 'capitulate', and 'sell out'.

Those who were removed from the focus of conflict tended to look for causes of the dispute rather than suggest solutions. They were polarizing behind the protagonists who were themselves at the stage of seeking a joint solution. A tendency of those who were not near the centre of the conflict to seek scapegoats might be seen as a reflection of their frustration at not being able to influence events, as well as a strong desire to participate vicariously. Their willingness to express views on the conflict to an observer reinforces this interpretation of the general position of such parties.

A majority of shop stewards from the other parties thought that the Road Branch Meeting would decide upon strike action. The Minority Unions stated their intention of 'going out' also in the event of any strike being made official. Minority Unions' representatives perceived the central issue to be the job evaluation system. One shop steward expressed it succinctly: "...if they (The Road Branch) accept evaluation, they can have their rise...". In other words, it was perceived to be a 'trade off' situation. The special relationship which existed between the Personnel Department and the Inside Branch, the other union parties saw as being generally damaging to industrial relations within the Firm as they were thereby excluded from important negotiations and informal consultations. An important factor in the general perception among shop stewards, even those not from the Road Branch, that the Road Branch would decide upon strike action was their involvement in shop floor industrial relations. They knew from direct experience in a way that managers could not, the strength of feeling among the membership of the trade union parties.

If the Road Branch did decide upon strike action, this would support the value of proximity to events and equivalence of experience as factors tending to improve accuracy of prediction of events.

The Inside Branch were not officially committed, but were aware that any action taken by the Road Branch would precipitate their involvement. They were in the difficult position of having little or no access to information. Communication between them and the Road Branch was non-existent by this time, the Minority Unions were not very approachable, the Personnel Department was fully occupied with the Road Branch, while the full-time officials were not keen to involve the Inside Branch at this stage. Their efforts to obtain information were therefore frustrated. At this stage in the conflict, the Inside Branch were to most intents and purposes, at the mercy of deliberations by other parties. However, by virtue of their otherwise central position in industrial relations, it could be predicted that the Inside Branch would have an important role to play in the event of conflict escalating, and that at some future time they could be expected to react in some way as a result of their effective exclusion by other parties at this stage in the conflict.

The Personnel Department remained saddled with the problem of being seen to be fair in any settlement with the Road Branch to the extent that there would be no claims from the other union parties as a result. They saw the long-term solution to be to bring the three union parties together under one job evaluation scheme.

Managers who were not directly involved with the conflict
tended to see the issue as being simply one of 'money',
while those more in tune with the situation saw it in terms
of differentials between groups of workers.   It may be seen
from these observations that views of various management
parties are likely to reflect their involvement in the con-
flict.   The Personnel Department members, being the managers
who were most involved, had a sophisticated long-term view of
events in which desirable outcomes could be specified by them.
Foremen and line managers who had direct responsibility for
a section of the workforce, perceived the differentials issue,
but were often unable to express views on a long-term solution.
Managers and staff who had little or no direct contact with the
manual workforce tended to misperceive the nature of issues
central to the conflict, and were therefore generally unable
to suggest long-term solutions.   Thus, it may be hypothesised
that effective social distance from members of parties in
conflict influences accuracy of perception of the nature of
issues in dispute, and also influences ability to propose long-
term solutions to conflict issues.

A common perception among all managers was that shop stewards
were 'leaders' of opinion rather than representatives of their
members.   As a result of this view, managers tended to see
shop stewards as having more coercive power or influence over
their members'views and actions than was often the case. Such
influence as the Road Branch shop stewards in particular did
have was decreased through diminished contact with their
members, and comparatively little information being available
to the rank and file.

I noted a communication pattern which became caricatured during overt conflict, where social distance between representatives and 'followers' was frequently greater than that between negotiating representatives from two different parties. Although I was not able to test this hypothesis by interviewing from within the ranks of the Road Branch, it seems likely that views within the party were a 'mirror image' of these detected amongst members of Management. Thus, the negotiating representatives, as noted, expressed views on the nature of issues in conflict which were not dissimilar from those with whom they negotiated, i.e. the Personnel Department. Among other Road Branch shop stewards and members however, it is highly likely that there was a spectrum of views which ranged from understanding of the differentials problem, to simple desires for payment increments. Events described later in this chapter tend to support this interpretation of views within the Road Branch.

The relationships within the Road Branch were complicated by the existence of different interest groups within this party. One section of the membership had been included in the original wage claim which had gone to dispute to be later withdrawn. This group were now excluded from the present claim, as they were part of the job evaluation system operating in the Firm. It was not possible to examine the extent of any possible rift between sections of the Road Branch membership at this stage. However, the presence of different interest groups within the Road Branch would be expected to make decision-making more difficult for this party. This interpretation of one of

the difficulties for the Road Branch was eventually supported during the course of the follow-up interviews discussed in Chapter 5.

Besides the various stated positions of the parties, there were other behavioural characteristics at this stage of the conflict.   A general atmosphere of tension prevailed in interaction, particularly when this was across party boundaries.   Individuals were more suspicious than usual, and there was considerable small-group discussion of the conflict.   In negotiations, small issues were picked on, and misunderstandings or miscommunications were used as examples of lack of trust and confidence by the other side. Rumours were common-place.   Positions were being established and consolidated in the event of an escalation, although no-one suggested that it would be a long drawn out affair. The issues became concentrated and simplified, short-term ones coming to the fore, and long-term ones tending to fade away.   Some form of compromise between the parties was being set as the immediate target, while at the same time this was recognized as being a short-term solution.   The negotiators themselves were fatigued, and while they, as interacting representatives of the two sides remained on friendly terms, their performance towards accomplishing a satisfactory settlement was impaired by some of the factors mentioned.   Such behavioural characteristics tended to sharpen social interaction and create expectations among the parties for some precipitate change.   These were among the ways in which the conflict was symbolically represented, and to some extent influenced the Road Branch Meeting which was to decide the next stage of the conflict.

The Strike

The decision of the Road Branch on Friday evening to withdraw their labour intensified the conflict. Strategies were worked out over the weekend, and by Monday morning, pickets from the Road Branch were effectively persuading incoming vehicles to turn around without conducting business at the Factory. A Strike Committee was being formed, and application had been made to the Union for plenary powers to make the Strike official. A large attendance at the Branch Meeting had voted almost unanimously in favour of the action now being taken. Perceived threats from outside the Branch had been sufficient to unite the internal factions and the complete Branch membership was now on strike.

The most difficult aspects of fieldwork became: i) keeping up with the increasing pace of events, and ii) getting used to deteriorating interpersonal relationships. My main aim now was to follow the course of events as best I could by spending time with the various parties. It was generally a case of being in the right place at the right time to hear the latest developments. Benny could hardly have picked a more appropriate day to return from leave.[1] I ventured a greeting to John at the picket line and received a dirty look from another Road Branch member. I interpreted this as continued hostility towards my ambiguous status, probably seen by most Road Branch members as an 'opposition status'.

(1) Benny's absence had made me aware of an error in my research technique. See Appendix note 31 for an explanation of this.

My general plan at this stage was to stay with the Minority Unions' Shop Stewards as much as possible. This was for two main reasons: i) my observations of their behaviour led me to believe that they would be involving themselves in the conflict, and ii) for the same reason , that they would probably align themselves to some extent with the Road Branch, whose grievances were similar to their own. I deduced that it could do no harm, and could help my efforts to establishing rapport with Road Branch members, for them to see me with the Minority Unions' Shop Stewards.

Other reasons for closely observing the Minority Unions were that: their problems were in some ways the most acute, their stance the most ambiguous, and their resultant position the most interesting to study. With the possible exception of the Personnel Department, they had more alternatives to consider than did any other party before making a move. Immediate reaction from the Minority Unions was to begin some form of supportive action. A crucial factor at this stage from the Minority Unions' viewpoint was whether or not the Strike would be made official. The perception of a 'win-lose' situation prevailed, and the Minority Unions thought that if the Road Branch 'won', then it would be the end of the job evaluation system as it was presently operated in the Firm. Their stance could therefore be interpreted as being sympto-matic of their desire to support the Road Branch in their own interests in the longer term.

The Minority Unions were in an ambiguous position insofar
as they were not officially approached by the Road Branch
with any request to support them.   An important issue for
the Minority Unions was whether or not the Inside Branch
would give support for the Strike, and they thought that the
Inside Branch would not do so.   Problems of disunity among
the Minority Unions were put aside for the time being,
although there were fears among the shop stewards that the
issue might split their ranks.[1]   If they too decided upon
industrial action without first going through the three-week
disputes procedure with the Company, their members stood to
lose a great deal more than the Road Branch, because any action
on their part would be unconstitutional.

Despite the nature of their predicament, the peculiar position
of the Minority Unions in the conflict seemed to have been
at least partly responsible for generating a heightened
awareness among their shop stewards on the nature of the
conflict.   Their predictions of the moves of the other
parties were generally accurate.   They were also ready to
express their attitudes and thoughts on the conflict to an
outsider.   These observations might be taken as an indication
that a combination of detachment and involvement in conflict,
perhaps resulting in a type of marginal status, can give a
party to conflict insights into the conflict which are less
readily available to other parties who are either more or less
deeply involved in that conflict.   Thus it seems that this
is a case where social position is to a large degree respon-
sible for attitudes and perceptions held by a party.

(1)   Flanders (1964), in a classic study on productivity bargaining,
      notes that differences between craft shop stewards were less
      important than their common aims.

An important issue was the authority of Benny and the Inside Branch, with respect to the other union parties. The Minority Unions were enjoying the vicarious challenge to the Inside Branch even though they were not in dispute. One symbolic note was sounded on a low beam spanning a passage running under a part of the Factory. On the beam was chalked a message in capitals inviting Benny to mind his head! The position of the Inside Branch was that officially they had little information, although their representatives were aware of the course of events. If the Road Branch asked for support, they would have to put the request to an Inside Branch Meeting, which would take some days to organize. Inside Branch representatives were prepared to fight any attempt to make the Strike official, as this would have the effect of forcing their members to take supportive action because of their membership of the same Union. The position of the Inside Branch could be interpreted as reflecting their desire not to compromise their position as a result of the conflict. Having spent years negotiating improved pay and conditions for the membership, their representatives were not willing to see other union parties achieving similar advances through industrial action.

The most adventurous meeting I attended during my fieldwork took place on the first day of the Strike. The Joint Shop Stewards' Committee met on a hot afternoon. As we trecked through the Clubhouse, there were comments about the 'corridors of power' from workers waiting for developments. I felt that I was at the centre of events. This meeting, which amplified the atmosphere at the Factory, was tense and upsetting for me to witness, as well as being more evidently upsetting for the shop stewards.

I had begun to get involved with these men and their problems, which to some extent was necessary if I was to gauge accurately their respective positions.[1]

I could see the different sides to the triangular situation which had arisen between the union groups, and despite my inadequate contact with the Road Branch Officials, could picture the turbulent Branch which they were obliged to represent with its internal frictions and pressures. My involvement was once again giving me first hand experience of the intensity of feeling of the conflict. By this time, I had the advantage that I was not perceived to be a threat to any party's position, at least by the representatives at this meeting. Ernie showed me a copy of the motion which had been passed by the Road Branch to withdraw their labour, and neither he nor John appeared to object to my presence at this meeting. It seemed that I had become more acceptable to them, perhaps because they wished to let an outsider see their point of view. This change in attitude, particularly by the Road Branch Chairman, could be seen therefore as a response to the feeling among Road Branch representatives that they were becoming increasing isolated from their fellow trade unionists in the Factory.

(1)   The participant observer should be prepared to become involved
       in such a way. Schwartz and Schwartz (1956), comment upon
       affective participation in emotional situations.

The Joint Shop Stewards' meeting which was called did not last long. The parties knew well enough their positions and those of the others. There were muted attempts to use 'The Company' as a scapegoat, but these were to no avail, and the meeting broke up with very bad feelings all round. One shop steward remarked, "...I suppose this is the end of the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee then?" Another confirmed that this was the case.

John and Ernie walked out. I remained with Benny, Ron, Harold and David. Over a drink, we tried to discuss any-thing but the events of the recent meeting which had produced some bitter exchanges. I felt most uncomfortable for a while, but was fortunate insofar as the shop stewards appear-ed to sense the awkwardness of my position and did not seek to exploit it in any way. It seemed that they were to some extent concerned with the maintenance of my role performance, as though it was I that was being brought through a traumatic experience from which they wished to ensure that I survived to tell the tale.

The break-up of this Committee demonstrated two important things. The first was the positive value of continued communication between parties with different interests. Official communication between the groups had been at a standstill over the weeks leading up to the present situation. This had resulted in a hardening of attitudes within the separate camps. The frustration and hostility which had built up during that time proved dysfunctional for the parties when their representatives eventually came face to face.

A second major lesson to be learned from this experience concerns the problems which are part of being a shop steward. The shop steward in many cases is by the nature of his role, at the focus of conflict. In order to cope adequately, the shop steward must become skilled in conflict management. The shop stewards representing the Road Branch had been under continuous and conflicting pressures for some time, and one was now in poor physical health. The full-time union officials, their own branch members, and Management, each required them to act in incompatible ways if the expectations of these parties were to be fulfilled. They were in the position of having to go to their fellow shop stewards in the Inside Branch to ask for support in their struggle, and were not hopeful of receiving it. Their task was not enviable.

Among the reasons for the difficulties faced by the Road Branch representatives at the start of the strike were: the history of separate development of the Road Transport Department, the physical distance of this Department from the Factory, lack of opportunity to meet with shop stewards within the Factory, the continued existence of separate interests within the Road Branch, and frequent changes in elected Branch officials. Such factors as these served to militate against regular and frequent meetings, as well as informal contact between representatives of the Road Branch and other parties, however much these representatives would have wished to establish and maintain effective contact.

The position of the Inside Branch shop stewards in the short-run was uncomfortable, but in the long-run it was perhaps even less enviable than that of the Road Branch stewards. The Inside Branch representatives ran the risk of being accused of selling short the principles of trade unionism by not offering support to the Road Branch. Like all shop stewards, their prime consideration was the interests of their members, for their elected mandate was to serve them to the best of their ability. To have followed the Road Branch out on strike would have been unconstitutional action for the Inside Branch who, like the Minority Unions, were not in dispute with the Company. The Inside Branch members would therefore have lost pay by striking, as well as losing much goodwill which they had built up with Management. The Inside Branch officials saw two courses of action open to them: to support the Road Branch and ask for the same increases as they were demanding, or not support the Road Branch at all. No other alternatives were voiced at this stage. Did this indicate that 'tunnel vision'; the narrowing down of alternatives for action, was a feature of decision-making in this conflict? It may have indicated that events at this stage of the conflict brought issues into sharper focus. Events were also now obliging parties to make decisions, when at an earlier stage no commitment to a course of action would have been necessary. These two components appeared together to produce a 'tunnel vision' phenomenon. The long-term solution seen by the Inside Branch officials was for all groups to enter the same job evaluation scheme. To this extent, they shared a long-term perspective with members of the Personnel Department.

It is interesting to note that although many different
categories of worker were represented within the Inside
Branch, this party did not experience the type of internal
rifts characteristic of either the Minority Unions or the
Road Branch.   Among the factors which probably accounted
for this relatively greater unity were: the unskilled
nature of many of the jobs undertaken by these members and
a correspondingly lower level of demand for payment based
upon skill factors, the degree of representation of their
interests within the job evaluation and appeal systems,
continued satisfaction with their elected representatives,
and the tendency to re-elect their shop stewards and
Branch officials already in post.   The relatively stable
development of the Inside Branch had helped to lead to a
relationship with Management, and particularly with the
Personnel Department which did not extend to the other
trade union parties.   These factors probably helped to
establish behaviour patterns among Inside Branch represen-
tatives which did not predispose them to consider a wide
variety of options when faced with a potential threat
from other parties.   They were probably seeking to 'ride
out the storm' with the intention of re-establishing their
position subsequently.

All those who attended, were upset about the demise of the
Joint Shop Stewards' Committee.   In retrospect, no other
outcome would have been possible in these circumstances.
Because each set of officials put the interests of their
own members first, then any situation requiring them to act
in ways contrary to this prime consideration, could produce
conflict for them as individuals.   It was however, a 'con-
flict of roles', and not a 'clash of personalities'.

To establish reasons for the collapse of this Committee, a causal chain may be traced back.   That there existed disputes procedures operating for each union party independently of the other two, meant that unless all three entered into dispute with the Company simultaneously, a situation could arise when one party would pass through their procedure without the other two.   This was the first time that this had happened in the history of the present procedure, and thus the disputes which had been settled under it had not drawn attention to this possible effect.   Action taken by the party that had passed through their procedure would be constitutional, whereas in the event of any other party taking supportive action, this would be unconstitutional action.   This would in turn affect the likelihood of the action being made official by the members' trade union, and receipt of strike pay.   The parties' representatives would therefore be obliged to adopt different courses of action in the best interests of their own members.   That such a disputes procedure pattern existed, resulted from historical factors already considered.

During the Strike, I became closer to some individuals at the centre of the conflict than at any time during my research at the Firm.   Harold for example released more information concerning my past relationship with him.   He recalled an incident which I had totally forgotten.   He revealed that he had never forgiven me for taking a cigarette from him at the first meeting with the union representatives when I and two research colleagues had come to explain the research project.

I had completely given up smoking shortly after starting
the fieldwork, and thus had never had an opportunity to
return this gesture.   The significance of this exchange I
perceived to be that Harold had seen fit to tell me of this
attitude towards me which he had held for over six months!
It served as a warning that the smallest events may influence
research relationships if, as in this case, respondents see
them as violations of their norms of social exchange.   All
my interaction with Harold until this time could have been
affected by this seemingly trivial past event.   That it was
not trivial to Harold was evident from the fact that he had
seen fit to raise it as a factor in our relationship.[1]

My rapport with Harold, David and the other Minority Unions'
Shop Stewards was improving.[2]   This was partly due to their
present status being more marginal than usual as a result of
their ambiguous stance with respect to the conflict.   A
related factor might have been that because polarization
was taking place, anyone who was indeterminate in commit-
ment was sought out by those needing support.

(1)   Other writers note the possible importance of a single remark,
      e.g. Vidich and Bensman (1954).   If a participant observer becomes
      preoccupied with such phenomena however, he may acquire a perspective
      on his research which is dysfunctional for his data collection.

(2)   The Minority Unions' Shop Stewards offered me the use of their
      meeting room for writing up my notes, and although I had no need
      to take up this offer, I considered this symbol of co-operation
      to be another indication that I had gained their trust.   Later
      during the Strike, Harold spoke to me at length about the state of
      affairs at the Factory.   I had not grasped the accuracy of his
      perceptions and knowledge before because he had not chosen to
      release such information to me.   Not for the first time did I
      regret the absence of a tape-recorder.   I felt that my rapport with
      Harold was at a peak as we chatted in the informal setting of a
      workers' toilet!

At present, the group most in need of support were the Minority Unions. I saw my chief problem at this time to be achieving contact with the pickets at the Factory gate. On every occasion available I would pass through the picket line with someone from the Minority Unions, or alone and heading to or from the Minority Unions' shops.[1] I never went through with anyone from Management or from the Inside Branch, whose members were continuing to work in the Factory. I reasoned that for the pickets to see me about frequently would atune them to my presence, and facilitate subsequent attempts at serious communication with them. I thought that those on the picket line would be more willing to talk with me after a few more days. Generally only one or two pickets were on the gate at any one time, and among the factors which were likely to lower their morale were: i) as long as they remained on strike they were not earning money, ii) individuals occasionally did not turn up for their shifts on picket duty, iii) the effect of seeing members of their own union still working in the Factory would be demoralising,[2] iv) no apparent progress was being made in the negotiations although unusually, these continued, v) the weather was uncomfortably hot during parts of the day. I though that individuals would be more willing to voice grievances to a sympathetic listener after being under such mental and physical discomfort for a while.

(1) Shop stewards from the Minority Unions did pass through the picket lines by arrangement with the Road Branch, but not to work in the Factory.

(2) Karsh (1958) notes the importance of the social cohesion function for pickets.

There were frequent jokes about my having picked a 'good time' to study the Factory. It was now widely seen that I was performing my role of observing conflict, which no one now disputed did exist. Thus, from one point of view my role became easier to play. Another humorous line which found favour was a proposal that I must have had 'inside information' on the state of industrial relations at the Factory. Fred, my foreman friend told me that he had heard a rumour to the effect that I had started it all, presumably for the purpose of obtaining data.

I was keen not to overdo my questionning in the early stages of the Strike. I knew by now where to go for information, and saw no advantage in antagonising people by interfering too much and making myself unpopular. I did not completely suceeed in this aim. Information at this time was plentiful as meetings were held at frequent intervals, and often I was obliged to opt for one or another meeting when times clashed. One obvious characteristic of the conflict was that the volume of communication was much greater than usual for all parties.

I discovered that walking about the Factory was often an effective way of acquiring information. Like most of my potential respondents, I was now highly sensitized to the prevailing situation, and having access to more information than most employees of the Firm, I could easily fit my observations together.

For example, snatches of conversation could be slotted into a general picture of what was happening.[1] The Strike seemed to be the only topic of conversation. Staff for example, seemed to be generally antagonistic towards the strikers, although without having any apparent grasp of the details comprising the conflict. One memorable piece of information which I acquired in this way occurred on one hot day during the Strike when I took off my jacket and tie while walking around the Factory grounds one lunchtime. This was partly by way of an experiment to see if there would be any response to this behaviour, in the basically conservative establishment. To my surprise, I overheard the following snippet of conversation from a small group of white-collar employees who walked past me: "...is he Management or Union?" asked one man, while a colleague replied: "...Management... I suppose". The important point to note was not their perceptions of my role, which were not relevant insofar as these individuals were not focal to the conflict, but that their attitudes had polarized to the extent that they thought in terms of everyone in the Factory being either 'Management' or 'Union'. On this evidence, they did not appear to differentiate between the various union factions, or perceive anything more than a straight conflict of interest along traditional Management/Union lines.[2] This provides an example of how sensitised a researcher can become in acquiring information.

(1) That a researcher can go from group to group absorbing information during a strike, is also noted by Clack (1967).
(2) Hartman (1974), in a study of managerial staff employees notes: "Managerial employees in our sample do not subscribe...to conventional notions of conflict in industrial relations; they shy away from open conflict and display a penchant for 'discussive confrontation'". (p270). White-collar staff in this Firm were likely to identify with managerial norms and display typically unsophisticated views about the nature of conflict.

Talks between the Personnel Department and the Road Branch
continued for most of the first day of the Strike, indicat-
ing desire on both sides to reach an early settlement. The
Road Branch were represented by the full-time official who
normally acted on behalf of the Inside Branch, their regular
representative having gone on leave over the weekend. The
dilemma of the full-time officials could not be delayed
indefinitely, as both Management and Inside Branch represent-
atives were trying to shift the burden of their respective
responsibilities onto the full-time officials.

On the second day of the Strike, the Minority Unions were
preparing to make their stand in relation to the conflict.
News had filtered through that the Strike was now official.[1]
The Minority Unions' reaction was that they would not cross
picket lines.[2]   The pickets therefore attained significance
as a demarcation boundary, with the Road Branch and the Minor-
ity Unions on one side, and Management and the Inside Branch
on the other.   This was the polarization which occurred.
The ambiguity of the Minority Unions' position was revealed
when each Minority Union shop decided almost unanimously
not to strike.   One of the Minority Unions' shop stewards
remarked to another: "...as you can see, we're all novices
at this".   The amount of work their members could do outside
the Factory was limited, and one shop steward described their
position as: "...embarrassing...".   Their action did not
endear them to Management, from whom a typical reaction was:
"...an independence of spirit, more like bloody-mindedness".

(1)   This was an issue which was in doubt throughout the Strike.

(2)   In any official strike, one would not expect to find trade unionists
      crossing picket lines.

The action taken by the Minority Unions reflected their position with respect to the conflict.   They had interests in common with the Road Branch within the bond of trade union membership.   They had their own interests to consider insofar as they had a history of grievances relating to the way in which their jobs were evaluated.   Their decision not to strike however was made because of the implications a strike decision would have had on their future relations with Management, and probably also because they were mindful of not receiving support from their own full-time officials in the event of strike action by them.   Their position was thus to some extent a compromise by which they hoped to gain Management attention to their grievances and also establish a basis for positive relationships with the Road Branch whose support they might require at some future date.

Figure 3.1 shows the layout of the Factory and its environs in diagrammatic form, and helps to explain the physical location of the parties.

FIGURE 3.1

DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE LAYOUT OF THE FACTORY

WAY IN FOR MANAGERS,
STAFF, FOREMEN AND
INSIDE BRANCH MEMBERS

FACTORY:

Offices,
Production Plant,
Loading Bays.

PICKETS
HERE

MINORITY
UNIONS' SHOPS

WAY
IN
FOR
HEAVY
GOODS
VEHICLES

ROAD TRANSPORT
DEPARTMENT:

Garages

ROADWAY
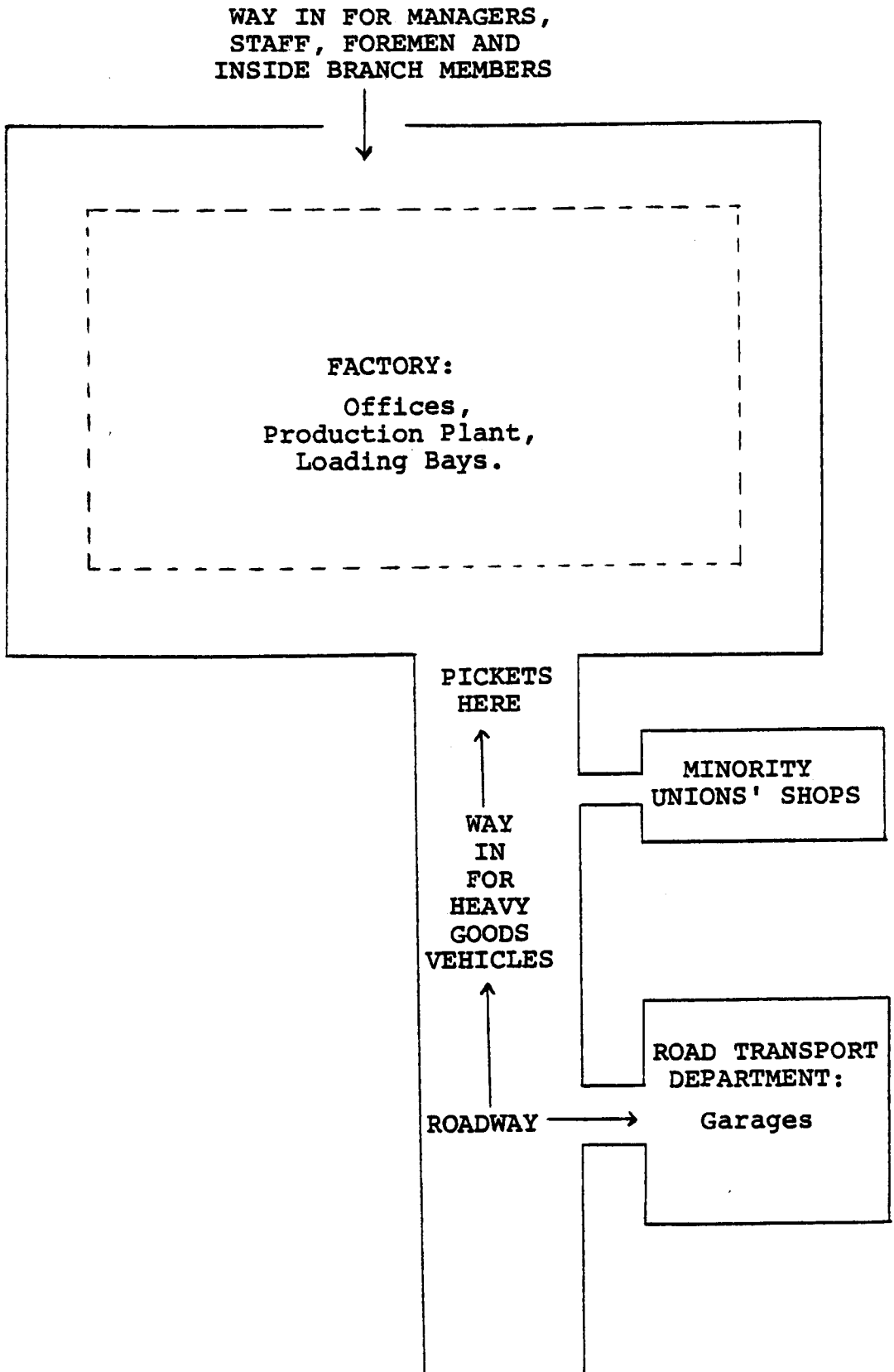
Recognizing the danger of losing rapport with the Inside Branch, Management opted to keep them fully in the picture. However, communication through this relatively large Branch was slow, and this proved a little frustrating for the shop stewards, one of whom said: "...the members ask us what's going on, and we feel right idiots because we don't know...my manager knew (the Strike was official) before I did". The Inside Branch shop stewards did not wish to act on inadequate information, and a Branch meeting was not due to be held for another two days. They argued that for a strike to be made official, a meeting of the Union Executive had to be convened to ratify the use of plenary powers. They maintained that application by the Road Branch had been made too late for the Strike yet to be official.

The attitude of the Inside Branch representatives could be interpreted as one of wishing to 'reserve their position'. Of apparent concern for them was the issue of matters being processed through formal channels. To some extent this could be seen as a tactical manoeuvre, designed to delay the necessity to make any formal decision for as long as possible. However, this stance effectively meant that they had committed their membership to a course of action which did not endear them to the Road Branch and therefore was a decision made consciously by them. Although as an observer, I was not able to investigate the content of communication between the Personnel Department and Inside Branch representatives at this time, it is probable that members of the Personnel Department encouraged the tactics adopted by the Inside Branch.

On the second day of the Strike, one incident brought home to me that during a time of obvious conflict, individuals are tense and suspicious of anyone whose position seems ambiguous to them. For those unacquainted with my role, such as the staff members in a previous examples, I was an unknown factor.[1] Before the Strike, I had interviewed a number of managers. On this occasion, I wished to interview a Manager who had dealings with the Minority Unions' members. They were at this time in the process of establishing their position, and I wished to obtain some idea of this Manager's perception of them and their possible future behaviour. [2] He was not sure what would happen and could not tell me much. The Manager, after one or two sterile lines of questionning from myself, ceased to provide any information. He then asked me what 'they were doing up in the Factory', referring to the Inside Branch. I had just come from an Inside Branch Shop Stewards' meeting, and the Manager's request made me acutely aware of my potential as a source of news and information. I fell into the trap of over-reacting, and said to him: "I have to be very careful of what I say you know". He became annoyed at this violation of the rules of normal exchange and retorted: "Well so do I then". I had lost rapport, and this was not a good opportunity to explain the participant observer's role to an irate Manager about to embark upon a series of troubles with his workforce.

(1) Vidich (1955), notes that the position of the participant observer is ambiguous at the best of times.

(2) I was frequently aware that I was in a better position to say exactly what might happen than many of my respondents. One purpose of the research however was to determine respondents' perceptions and their origins, even if these were 'inaccurate'.

I saw my best course of action to phase out the interview quickly. He soon became less agitated, and I had the impression that he regretted his earlier response. I did not wish to risk repercussions so I departed as soon as possible. "I think they're mad", he volunteered, referring perhaps to the Minority Unions, and I realized that he was preoccupied with this problem.[1]

Lessons may be learned from such interviews. When next a manager asked me for information soon after this incident, I had a more appropriate response: "I really couldn't tell you"; true, although ambiguous.[2] Information gathered from minor personal confrontations can be as valid as that obtained from 'properly conducted' interviews. I might have had no real idea of the emotional tension existing for all parties at the time of the conflict if I had not interviewed until after the Strike was over. To have left interviewing until after the period of overt conflict would have risked invoking retrospective distortions of what occurred at this time. Thus, while I might have been upsetting some respondents slightly, I was also getting a blow by blow picture of the ongoing state of events.[3]

(1) Argryris (1952) points out that the observer can be a nuisance at a bad time.

(2) Gullahorn and Strauss (1954) note that some groups try to use observers as information sources, so confidences must be respected. See Appendix note 32 for a brief discussion of this issue.

(3) Apart from the ethical issue of aggravating emotion in individuals who might prefer to be left alone, there can be problems for an observer in re-establishing rapport. His job may be harder, for ambiguities associated with his role remain, and it may be too costly for respondents to re-enter their previous level of social contact with the participant observer. See Appendix note 33 on the dilemma of such effects.

I found that the number of people who would volunteer information to me at this stage was fewer than during 'normal' times. Those who would provide information were often representatives or leaders of groups. This could have been due to a feeling among 'followers' that they had even less than usual to contribute to my research. Events were moving faster, and a number of respondents had to be encouraged to speak and their contributions reinforced so that they should see them as valuable.

During the Strike, I always ate in the Workers' Canteen so that I could have closer informal contact with the non-striking workforce and to gauge their attitudes towards the Strike. A number were puzzled that they were not already supporting the Road Branch, others thought they would be doing so soon, and others were content to leave Benny to 'manage things'. From my observations in this setting, it was clear that many of the Inside Branch members were unaware of the issues involved in the dispute and did not appreciate the tactics which were being adopted by the various parties. The extent of their knowledge about the Strike and the stance adopted by their own representatives helped to bring home to me the problems involved in communicating within a party when events are moving quickly during a time of conflict.

By the evening of the second day of the Strike, I began making myself known to the pickets at the gate, most of whom did not seem averse to talking with me.

The conversation was about one topic only, so there was
no problem in maintaining a task-related interview. How-
ever, by the Thursday of the Strike, I noted that the pick-
ets were becoming sullen, resentful and suspicious. I
found myself talking to Ernie through a barrage of remarks
such as: "don't let him pump you Ernie...", and from John:
"...shouldn't talk to him...going against Branch resolution
...". John's position on accepting my presence seemed to
be ambivalent. At the picket line, with the prospect of
immediate sanction from his members, he was obliged to adopt
a rejecting stance. This was much less evident when I
confronted him alone, or with Ernie the only other present.
It was evident that I was not popular at the picket line,
but at least I was there.[1]

The hot weather and strain of the conflict were telling upon
a number of individuals near the focus of the conflict.
Ernie introduced me to the full-time union official who was
negotiating on their behalf. He seemed aimiably enough
disposed towards me, although Ernie himself was not in good
health, having aggravated a chronic medical condition. In
terms of negotiating experience, he had by far the greatest
amount among the Road Branch lay representatives. However,
unlike most of the Road Branch members, he had not been
with the Firm for long, and like his fellow shop stewards,
was subject to heavy pressure from his rank and file.

(1)   While it may not be generally accepted that a participant
      observer should be 'aggressive' in approaching potential
      respondents, under some circumstances, it might be the
      only course of action which will secure certain information.

Although I was not able to observe negotiations directly, I could observe the effects of these upon the participants, and question them about their attitudes and tactics. It was a management tactic to alternate the role of chief negotiator amongst various members of the Personnel Department, while the Road Branch representatives remained in negotiations together.[1]

Thursday was a tensely quiet day. Positions had been established and the frantic activity of the first two days of the Strike contrasted strongly with the present period characterised by waiting and anticipation. The Minority Unions were supporting the Road Branch by not crossing the picket lines, although they continued to do what little work they could in their own shops. The Inside Branch came in for much antagonistic comment from Road Branch members for not supporting the Strike. The Road Branch were eager to sieze upon any chance to do them down, and at one point Ernie invoked my role as a witness at the break-up of the Joint Shop Stewards' Meeting earlier in the week to make a point to other Road Branch members. I was careful to give a non-commital answer.

(1) Nicholson (1976), in an empirical study of skills and relationships in a negotiating committee, explains the 'rotation strategy' employed by the management side, while the union side tended to look towards one strong leader and a stable negotiating team. Nicholson notes that the bulk of negotiating fell on a "small cohesive elite of negotiators", and investigates advantages and disadvantages of this.

When the Strike was six days old, it seemed that a settlement had been reached. After many hours of negotiating between the Road Branch representatives and the Personnel Department, a figure had been agreed upon for the pay increases. This was the short-term compromise that had been sought. There were two conditions attached to this offier. The first was that there should be no 'differentials' claims from groups within the Road Branch not covered by the offer, and the second was that there should be an inquiry by the Majority Union into the causes of the Strike. Management had wanted to bring in a third party to investigate the dispute, but this was unacceptable to the Union, who took the responsibility upon themselves.[1]

The Road Branch lay negotiators took the offer to the Strike Meeting. However, frustrated by the events of the week, and buoyed up by their pay from the week before which they had just received, the Road Branch were in no mood to accept this compromise, and rejected the offer. The Road Branch representatives, exhausted by their efforts, had lost the initiative, demonstrating the effect of close interaction with another party in terms of the distance which developed between them and their members in the space of a few days.

(1)   The then Government Conciliation Service of the Department of
       Employment had attempted to help the parties reach a settlement
       at the end of the disputes procedure, although they were not
       subsequently involved in the dispute.

The mood in the Factory over the next day was more unpleasant than before. The Road Branch were becoming more dispirited, and Management were becoming frustrated. The Inside Branch had postponed their meeting until the following week, thereby further delaying a decision on supporting the Road Branch action. Doubts remained as to whether the Strike was official or not. Majority Union officials, who were anxious to achieve a lasting settlement, at this stage stepped in with an initiative. A Strike Meeting was called for the following day, to be addressed by the full-time union officials who put the original settlement offer to the Road Branch. By this time, the Road Branch were becoming more aware of the disadvantageous aspects of their position, and were more ready to consider a return to work. The vote for ending the Strike was almost unanimous.

While it was not possible for me to observe either of the Strike Meetings of the Road Branch, from reconstructing accounts provided afterwards, it seemed that some of the members had generated hostility towards a settlement which was less than the figure demanded by the Branch. The negotiating team, because of the intensity of negotiations with Management, had not been able to communicate adequately with their members and were unable to persuade them to accept the negotiated settlement. The full-time officials had discussions with a few directors of the Firm before addressing the second Strike Meeting. Their greater authority and expertise enabled them to do what the lay representatives had not achieved, and the earlier decision was reversed.

The Strike ended on Saturday morning, and by the following
Monday, production had restarted and work was rapidly return-
ing to normal.   The stoppage had been the longest in the
history of the Firm.   While it lasted, the Strike had caused
much disruption, although there was only a temporary effect
upon production.

Post-Strike Issues

The problem of finding a long-term solution to the conflict
remained.   Antagonism was more bitter than before the Strike.
Recriminations abounded between the parties.   The Road Branch
were hostile towards the Inside Branch for not giving support
which they considered to have been a legitimate request.
The Inside Branch blamed the Road Branch for going about things
the wrong way, particularly for not communicating with them
adequately.   One shop steward claimed that: "...there's
enough friction between the unions (branches) that if you
put a gun in their hands, there'd be warfare...".   Another
steward though that: "...the Company must be sitting back
loving this...".

Management were distressed at the severity of the intensified
splits among the workforce.   They saw the Union Inquiry to
be important for future resolution.   This was not due for
some months however.   Perceptions of the causes of the Strike
by the parties bore great similarity, each seeing in slightly
different terms, the issue of differentials between groups of
workers as the main problem.   The intense acrimony which foll-
owed the Strike however, meant that no matter how clearly the
rational issues stood out, the problems to be tackled in the

short-run were concerned with the establishment of trust in which all parties could work towards a solution.

In the short-term, the Road Branch members had lost money as well as support, but now their position had improved.[1] The consequent sufferers were the Inside Branch. A 'zero-sum game' was in operation, where the gain of one party corresponded to the loss of another. This was manifested as a general loss of face for the Inside Branch, particularly their representatives,[2] and a diminution of rapport with Management relative to that now enjoyed by the Road Branch, whose contact with Management had improved considerably. That the Strike had been constitutional was important in bringing Management and Road Branch representatives together after the expiry of the disputes procedure. Traditionally, Management and Unions would not talk so readily in such a situation, but Management's agreement to the Unions' request for talks during the Strike was important in securing the settlement.

(1)   My liaison with the Road Branch continued to improve. Ernie's sickness meant that he was now unable to perform all his functions as Secretary of the Road Branch, and I was obliged to liaise more with John. John agreed to arrange for me to see shop stewards from the Road Branch.

(2)   This was only *my* view of events, and one not shared by all others involved. Some managers for example thought highly of the 'stand' taken by the Inside Branch.

Immediately after the Strike, I interviewed respondents who had been central to the conflict, much as I had done two weeks earlier. On this occasion, I had the benefit from hindsight of knowing who was involved in the conflict and in what capacity. Before the Strike, my interviewing had been rather haphazard with respect to the lines of questionning that I had pursued, and for the second set of interviews I drew up a tighter list of questions to put to my respondents. Individuals at this time tended to be touchy about certain areas and I had to be prepared to be a little unpopular at times.[1] One example of 'touchiness' resulting in a temporary loss of rapport occurred when I was interviewing the new Personnel Manager, Mr. Duncan. He became a little agitated at my questionning and called it 'time consuming'. I had by this time completed the interview, although I somehow felt that there was more that he could have told me. His mind was evidently on the pile of work on his desk however, so I thanked him customarily and departed.[2]

Research of this type depends to some extent upon most people wishing to have their views and opinions listened to and taken note of. However, sooner or later respondents tended to seek reciprocation in social exchanges and they sought my views on various issues. The tendency to seek my opinions was particularly acute after the upheaval of the Strike, for respondents were aware that I had been closely involved with events.

(1) See Appendix note 34 for further discussion of this dilemma.
(2) See Appendix note 35 for further analysis of this situation.

I was often obliged to resort to the deferrment of an
answer when questionned in this way, indicating to probing
respondents that information from myself would be available
at the end of the fieldwork.[1]   This was an effective
stalling procedure.

During the Strike, there had been more information avail-
able than at other times and I carried a clip-board around
with me so that I could take substantial notes.   It was at
this time, as I was hoping the clip-board would become
accepted by respondents, that I was mistaken by a member
of the staff for 'someone from work study'.[2]   I realised
that such an image would not be to my advantage especially
among trade unionists, and when the Strike was over I
reverted to my less obtrusive card system.

Apart from Ernie's introduction to the junior full-time
official, I had had no contact with the Majority Union hier-
archy.   Benny explained that while he was willing to tell
me things about the Firm, this being within my study as
far as his Branch was concerned, there were things about
the Union about which he felt obliged to remain silent.
A couple of weeks before the Union Inquiry was due to take
evidence on the background to the Strike, I made repeated
attempts to contact the senior official of the Majority
Union who had had most to do with the Strike.

(1)   Glazer (1972),and Beynon (1973) note the phenomenon of respondents
       wanting to see returns for co-operation in research.

(2)   That an observer with a clip-board may be mistaken for a manage-
       ment rate-setter was noted by Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939).
       For an interesting analysis of the symbolic authority of one who
       carries a clip-board, see Reyner Banham, "Power Plank", *New
       Society* 26.6.73.   For an appraisal of my role after the Strike,
       see Appendix note 36.

In response to a message from myself that I intended to visit him to talk about the Strike, he indicated that he was unhappy with this approach and had not heard of the research. Once I had spoken personally to him over the telephone, the meeting went ahead.

At our meeting, the full-time official explained his fears in greater detail. He gave two examples from his experience of 'researchers' who had been given information on request and had turned out to be newspaper reporters. They had put the information to use which discredited the Union. I cursed such reportes for making the job of the bona fide researcher more difficult than it already was.[1] The policy of the Union was to suspect people calling themselves 'researchers'. I regretted the missed opportunity offered to me months earlier by Benny, of attending the annual Union party when I could have been introduced to this man in an informal setting.[2] I spent some time putting his mind at rest on points he raised, offering him examples of work done by the Research Unit, and explaing my project in more detail.

He soon became friendly and co-operative and I took notes while he spoke for over an hour and a half on issues relevant to my research. There were things that I knew he knew but did not tell me at this, our first meeting, but he offered his services to me in the future. This interview was invaluable in increasing the scope and thoroughness of the research, as the Union Official could fill in many details which I had missed during my observations at the Factory.

(1)   See Appendix note 37 for other authors' experiences of a similar nature and other examples.

(2)   Polsky (1967) remarks that play acceptance is better than work acceptance.

For example, the issue of whether or not the Strike was made
official, never clarified during the Strike, related to the
dilemma of the full-time union officials.   They were negotiat-
ing on behalf of the Road Branch, yet their historical links
were with the Inside Branch, and they were therefore aware of
the mutual distrust which existed between the branches for which
they carried some responsibility.   The 'leadership' of the
Inside Branch was seen by the full-time officials to be a
crucial factor, for had it been less strong, the 'cleft stick'
which both Management and union officials found themselves
in at various stages, would have been less of a problem for
these parties.   The Strike was called official by the Road
Branch in anticipation of future action by the Union Executive.
This body gave the Strike official status in retrospect,[1]
the Road Branch members receiving strike pay soon afterwards.
To have hastened the procedure; i.e. to have made the Strike
official while it continued, would have obliged the union
officials to ask for support from the Inside Branch.   This
provides an example of 'suction' effects which may be generated
by conflict, a phenomenon similar to polarization already
described.   Union officials were as keen, if for different
reasons, as Management to achieve a quick settlement and then
find a long-term solution.   Directors and union officials
achieved some mutual understanding of each others' position,
and an important stimulus for a settlement had come from 'higher'
echelons of the respective organisations.

(1)   Many strikes are made official retrospectively because of the
       procedural time lags involved.   This fact means that many official
       strikes are recorded as being unofficial on the grounds that this
       is their status when they are declared.

That the Personnel Department had retained the initative
throughout most of the period of overt conflict was important.
It had been Management policy to keep the dispute out of the
press, which at the time was preoccupied with industrial action
and conflict elsewhere.   Management at no stage over-reacted,
and their position did not undergo any major changes during
the dispute.   These were important factors in re-affirming
their credibility with other parties.   There were also expec-
tations from other parties, that because of their central role,
the Personnel Department should make the next move.   One
problem to be overcome was ensuring minimum loss of face for
the parties, and the role which Management first adopted was
that of mediator.   This involved separate discussions between
the Personnel Department and the three union groups in turn.

All parties recognized that there was much to be done if the
differences between them were to be reconciled, and the mood
as this venture was embarked upon was not optimistic.
Management brought in a team of specialists in job evaluation
to help with the proposed introduction of a new system.   This
was done at a time when the Road Branch were unconvinced that
any new system would work, and were hostile towards Management.

Management had some difficutly, as did all parties, in revising
their attitudes.   They continued to perceive other parties
in much the same way as they had done previously.   For example,
the Personnel Department thought that the 'leadership' of the
Road Branch would change again within the near future.
Therefore, a significant event in the establishemnt of improved
relations between the Personnel Department and the Road Branch
was the granting of facilities to their Chairman.

With his own Branch Office and more time for union work, these began to approach those which had been allocated for many years to the Inside Branch Chairman. This was one of the changes recommended by the Union Inquiry. The Road Branch for a time enjoyed the independence which they had previously wanted. That their hostility was directed towards the Inside Branch seemed to act as a unifying factor, and may have been important in establishing consensus among the members regarding the competence and ability of their representatives. Thus, Road Branch representatives received from both Management and from their members, a new confidence to negotiate which went a considerable way towards removing ambiguity and insecurity which previously tainted their roles. Relations between Management and the Road Branch continued to improve, and the suspicion which had characterised their earlier relationships gave way to increased co-operation and a desire to become involved in a new job evaluation system. Road Branch shop stewards began to perceive that there were benefits which could accrue to their members through such a system, if this was agreed jointly.

The Inside Branch were in danger of losing much of what they had fought for over the years, and were not contemplating a period of inactivity in response to moves by other parties. They had given notice to Management that they intended to withdraw from the job evaluation system which had served them well enough in the past. This was the nature of the action taken by the Inside Branch in response to their effective exclusion from negotiations during the Road Branch dispute.

An important effect of this action was to introduce a new
factor of time pressure into the arena.   If no agreement
was reached during the time in which the Inside Branch could
leave the old system and pass through their disputes procedure,
then Management would be faced with a similar situation from
which which it was in the process of effecting a recovery, only
this time action would come from the Inside Branch.

The Minority Unions were not emerging well from the period of
conflict.   They were upset that their problems were now being
pushed aside, maintaining that their grievances were of longer
standing than those of other groups.   That the Road Branch
were now making considerable advances in their position, did
not further the relative position of the Minority Unions.   As
far as Management were concerned, the Minority Unions now
reverted to their former status as the major 'irritant', and
disputes between these two parties were entered into and
settled with great rapidity.   The Minority Unions saw that
their stance had been vindicated by the new position which
was being taken by the other parties, one of their shop stewards
saying: "...it's nice to see our ideas over the last few years
have been confirmed by another group".   Management wished to
bring the Minority Unions' members into any new scheme, but
saw their task as being made difficult by the actions of the
Minority Unions.   Their members wanted all their outstanding
claims settled within the old system before embarking upon
discussions for a new one.   Management's problem, holding a
system which had a great backlog of jobs to deal with, was to
persuade those whose jobs were outstanding and due for evaluation,
that they would get a fair deal under a new system.

Despite a number of respondents advising me to 'stick around' for some months to see how things worked out, it became progressively more difficult for me to maintain a credible role performance. One reason for this might have been that the ostensible rationale for my presence had been to study conflict which was now 'gone'. Apart from my observation that conflict was more intense than before or during the Strike, it was difficult to persuade respondents that I had as much of an interest in studying the resolution process as I had in the Strike. This problem I encountered had implications for the stated aims of the research. Although 'conflict' was generally avoided as a referent term at higher management level, to most respondents this was accepted as being my subject of study. The director who had objected most strongly to the use of the word 'conflict' was no longer focal to industrial relations, and respondents were content to admit, even if tacitly, that 'conflict' now existed. Events had highlighted the impossibility at the start of the study of being able to state exactly what would be the subjects for observation. The course of events could not have been predicted at the start of the field-work.[1]

In the weeks following the Strike, I continued to lose rapport with my respondents. Having spent so much time at the Factory during the Strike, I had got behind with writing up and coding my notes, and therefore, had less time available for active fieldwork. I made unplanned visits to the Factory when I found time, rather than when it would have been best for contacting respondents or attending meetings.

(1) This relates to the problem of saying in advance for how long one wishes to study an environment. See Appendix note 38 on this point.

Each visit involved a round trip of two hours duration, and
these attempts to maintain rapport were of dubious utility.
I once recorded that a visit had been wasted, as I had not
found one respondent.[1]

For a while after the Strike, as far as Road Branch represen-
tatives were concerned, I was part of the polarization
existing in the Factory.   I did not think that I would have
much chance of establishing rapport with this group until the
bad relations between parties within the Firm improved.   In
early September, Ernie the Road Branch Secretary, left the
Firm to go abroad.   I subsequently found it more difficult
to contact John, the Road Branch Chairman.   However, towards
the end of September, when the Union Inquiry had collected
its evidence, a different set of circumstances existed.
Because John had now got his own room, I began to make progress
in establishing rapport with him.   He was more confident and
at ease than at any time since I had known him.   He told me
of an unfortunate experience on the first Friday of the Strike
which had not been of his doing, but had resulted in him
losing his driving licence for the first time in his life.
Being a driver, this had been a blow to him, and had intensif-
ied the stress which he had been under during the Strike.

John kept apologising for asking my opinion on things, which
indicated to me that he was seeing the intended nature of my
role.   He invited me to a meeting the following day when all
the Road Branch Shop Stewards would meet with Michael over a
new job evaluation scheme.

(1)   Other writers record similar experiences.   See: Appendix note 39.

At the meeting, I seemed to be reasonably well accepted by
the Road Branch Shop Stewards, although one asked if I had
not come to the wrong meeting.   To all appearances, John
had now accepted me, and was emerging as a strong leader
after the Strike.   He promised to introduce me to the new
Road Branch Secretary who would 'look after me' from then on.
It seemed reasonable to interpret the change in behaviour of
the Road Branch represnetatives towards me as evidence of
feelings of greater security, both within their own membership,
and in relation to other parties.

Towards Resolution

There were two major problems to be overcome in laying the
foundations for a new inclusive job evaluation system within
the Firm, which Management saw as the only acceptable long-
term solution.   The first was for Personnel Department members
to establish themselves as fair and competent in the eyes of
all union parties in order that they should be accepted as
agents of change.   The second issue was the tempestuous state
of inter-union relations.

Management's abandonment of a unilateral approach to intro-
ducing change was essential to resolution.   There had to be
a willingness on their part to retreat from their established
position by admitting mistakes.   That all parties would
participate in the formulation of a new job evaluation scheme
was emphasised continually.

The importance of communication was shown, when things which before had been left unsaid, and therefore open to misinterpretation, were put forward as items for legitimate discussion among parties. The essence of the successful bringing together of the union groups would be that under a new system, they would help to make the rules.

With considerable effort, suspicion and mistrust gave way to a desire for mutual co-operation between the Minority Unions and Management. A major concern of the Minority Unions was that they should not lose out, and the open way in which negotiations for the new system were introduced played an important part in securing this new trust. Assurances had to be given which showed how positive benefits could be gained by employees, and the advantages of the new system over the old, which was frequently cast in a scapegoat role, found constant expression.

I was continually aware of ways in which situations in which parties found themselves could influence rapport between them and myself. By mid-November, Management were well disposed towards me as they could now see a long-term solution to the conflict. The union groups on the other hand were under pressure to make a new job evaluation system work, and were less co-operative towards me. Benny explained on one occasion that he would prefer me not to attend a meeting of Inside Branch Shop Stewards. I realised that I was steadily losing rapport with this group, and that the level which existed at the time of the Strike might never be regained.

That my visits to the Factory were becoming less frequent may have contributed to declining rapport with respondents. Relationships between parties were at a delicate stage,where a solution to long-standing problems in the Factory was just around the corner if everything went well, but could be as distant as ever if negotiations were to go amiss. Under such circumstances, my presence was not welcome and I decided that a low profile period would be appropriate.

The effect of events on my involvement prompted some observations upon the state of the parties. My experience indicated that during the 'life cycle' of this conflict, it was the 'resolution' stage at which the parties were most sensitive to the presence of an outsider. They were more amenable to observation during the 'build up', when they may have been seeking notice or tacit support for their positions. During the formulative stages of overt conflict, my presence was of less consequence than during the delicate resolution stage. I was therefore careful not to impose my role on the course of events.

I found that events characteristing the resolution stage of conflict were more difficult to observe than those occuring during the period of conflict escalation. Reactions of parties' representatives to myself after the Strike have been noted already. Some aspects of respondents' behaviour might be interpreted as reflecting feelings of discomfort that they had been observed as participants in conflict and that they wished their efforts at resolution to be less 'public'.

Another point to note in interpreting post-strike behaviour of the parties is the greater time required to effect behaviour designed to de-escalate conflict than for that which can escalate conflict. Both temporal and emotional differences could therefore be identified as characterising parties' behaviour during the stages of conflict denoted as 'escalation' and 'resolution'.

Because the union groups were co-operating among themselves to a greater extent than at any time in the past, this was a period of significant change in the Factory's history, and one which despite observational difficulties, I appreciated the opportunity to witness. A watershed in the conflict-resolution sequence occurred at a meeting of the shop steward representatives from the three union parties, who thrashed out issues which had been blighting their past relationships. The subsequent insights into the conflict related by the shop stewards, as evidenced by the following quotes, are intended to provide an adequate description of the way in which an integrated problem-solving approach provided a satisfactory solution to conflict.

> "...two days of just insults..."
>
> "...which I think really was the way to do it..."
>
> "...then we got everything off our chest...then we were working from clear ground..."
>
> "...it was like opening a safety-valve..."
>
> "...it was a fairly rough two days. Nevertheless there were people who stayed rational...though they had...violent criticisms at times...that was part of it...there also had to be some formula for the future...I think that meeting, although intense and bitter at times, certainly proved that basically people are reasonably intelligent..."

"...one of the big things we all learnt was not only
what we felt about one another, but we realized what
other people felt about us...not only did we pull each
other to pieces, but other people pulled us to pieces
and...you saw all your mistakes in the right light..."

"...what came out of it was seeing the stands that each
one had taken up...and then when you hear their side of the
story...you know they've got their reasons..."

"...you still might not agree with what they've done, but
you can accept their point of view..."

"...we had to swallow pride...to do a lot of things that
men don't like doing...but when you can see that the end
product was going to be the right one, it was worth doing
all those things...and we hope that's what its worth now..."

"...I think most of the conflict...was purely on hearsay..."

While my rapport with respondents was generally lower than
before the Strike, it remained on a level where I could
successfully interact and keep abreast of events.   Rapport
at this time was also spread more evenly among the various
parties.   I gave copies of previous research to all parties
in accordance with the policy of maintaining interest in the
fieldwork.[1]   I intended that this would sustain respondents
until they could read the paper to be written on the research
in which they were respondents.   I began to plan my Factory
visits and meetings more selectively in order to maintain
contact with key respondents.   One particular incident brought
home to me the ever present issue of servicing rapport.[2]

(1)   Argyris (1958)   suggests that the researcher should communicate
      competence from time to time.

(2)   See Appendix note 40 for an account of this incident and the
      factors which could have been responsible for it.

I continued to meet new shop stewards as elections brought
changes. David left the Factory for another job, and I
regretted his departure as I had that of Ernie. I still
wished to determine more on the position of the Majority
Union full-time officials on the conflict, and Benny usefully
suggested whom I might contact with a view to discovering
something on the findings of the Union Inquiry which had
investigated it. Union rapport at the Firm remained fairly
low for a while, although I kept in touch by telephone as
best I could when visits were not possible. Managers were
easy to contact in this way, while unfortunately trade union
representatives were not.

The union parties were moving towards one another when the
Union Inquiry came out with its major recommendation that
there should be a liaison committee between the three union
parties, with an independent chairman. This proposal,
which went some way towards what Management had been hoping
for, was ratified by the unions, excluding the provision for
an independent chairman. The Inquiry's recommendations
provided an incentive for the union parties to get together
to find a formal solution to problems of their working relations
A new Joint Union Liaison Committee was established. The
important functional difference between the new Committee and
the old Shop Stewards' Committee, was that whereas the old
Committee had a consultative function with respect to Manage-
ment, the new Joint Committee would be the sole joint negot-
iating body for the unions.

The new bargaining structure centred upon the three senior union representatives, who now formed a Liaison Committee for the purpose of formal communication between Management and those they represented. All three had emerged as more able representatives as a result of their involvement in conflict. Benny, after experiencing a relative decrease in status in the short run; as a consequence of his experience and knowledge, was now the task leader by consensus of his peers. His stature had increased as a result of his willingness to enter into joint negotiations with the other union parties. John and Harold improved the security of their respective positions as a result of representing parties through the period of conflict. Their statuses improved through their experiences. Another factor which might have helped John and Harold to their positions of greater prestige, was that shortly after the Strike, each had lost the services of competent deputies, who had both left the Firm. This meant that they were obliged to take on extra responsibility, both before new deputies were elected, and for a while afterwards acting as teachers, as the new men familiarized themselves with their roles.

The newly constituted joint negotiating machinery could be seen as the major formal representation of the coming together of the trade union parties. It was symptomatic of a radical change in industrial relations procedures within the Firm both between the trade union parties and between them and Management. It also created expectations among all parties for a long-term solution to inter-party conflict.

The change which the new method of negotiating brought over the Factory was profound. There was a general improvement in the communications structure. An important aspect of this was the greater involvement of shop stewards so as to bring policy-making closer to the shop floor. Management, and the Personnel Department in particular, were content insofar as they perceived that they were now dealing with a group which had a more consistent and representative membership than at any time in the past. Management went to some lengths to ensure that arrangements for the Joint Union Liaison Committee would succeed. Enmity between the union representatives was dissipated through the efforts of re-organization, although the memory of it remained. A testing time for the new Committee was during negotiations for a new wages scheme. Job evaluation was rapidly becoming an out of date term, and the concept of job assessment was being forwarded by Management and their team of outside consultants.[1] This was a move towards the job assessment system operating for Staff, considered by both them and Management to be effective and fair.

Having settled their major differences, the union groups were in a position to face Management as a single force to negotiate terms for a new wages structure for their members. There remained a good deal of suspicion to be allayed, but now that co-operation and communication had been established, expectations of all parties continued to change towards anticipation of a solution, and this played an important part in providing for agreement on a new job assessment structure.

(1)   Flanders (1964) considers the consultants' role as catalysts during a time of change.

The Assessment Panel which was set up to tackle the prob-
lems, was comprised of the original chairman of the Job
Evaluation Panel, plus two other managers with experience
of job assessment.   There was a representative from each
of the three union parties.

The Panel members worked hard to achieve their target of a
new grading structure for all jobs in the Firm.   Their
level of involvement and motivation was high.   Status
barriers were broken down to some extent, and the Panel
members became used to first-name terms, which was a
precedent in a Firm where the practice hitherto had been
for managers to address shop stewards by their first names,
but for this not to be reciprocated by the stewards.[1]
Retrospective comments from the shop stewards serve to
highlight the significance of this venture.

> "...I think the best thing that happened was that
> we immediately had to sit down and work out a list
> of gradings, and if you could do that, you could do
> practically anything...and that wasn't easy..."

> "...I think we learnt a hell of a lot from a) that
> (shop stewards') meeting, and b) from following on
> the exercise with job assessment gradings...we began
> to make political decisions...we had to...we knew
> the scheme had to get off the ground...we were more
> confident...we could do most things..."

The apparent optimism displayed by the parties at this stage
in the resolution sequence had behavioural and anticipatory
elements.   Evidence for the viability of the new negotia-
ting structure was obtained through the experience of those

(1)   Warr (1973) notes from an empirical study involving observation
      of management/union relations that during negotiations for a
      new job evaluation system there was a tendency to use first-
      name terms interchangeably among shop stewards and managers who
      were working together.

involved with the new grading negotiations being trans-
mitted to the parties. These experiences then served to
reinforce expectations for future unity that had been
generated as the trade union parties established formal
liaison and procedures for continued communication. That
a long-term solution was now in sight was incentive for
all parties to work towards it, and the outside consultant
remarked upon the high degree of co-operation which existed
among the groups, adding that he had never seen a better
atmosphere between unions and management anywhere!

An important innovation in the new system was the greater
involvement of shop stewards in job assessment. In assess-
ing a job, the Panel would consult with the shop steward
whose membership performed the job. This helped to spread
the decision-making process, and acted as a check that
decisions were not made in a vacuum. Shop stewards were
thereby given greater responsibility, and began to apprec-
iate the increased importance of their role, both as rep-
resentatives of their members, and as partners in a scheme
involving the whole of the unionised labour force in the
Factory.

After some months of concentrated effort, the Panel reached
its goal, and a full ranking of all jobs within the Firm
was drawn up to the satisfaction of all parties. The
scene was then set for the introduction of a new wages
structure, and this was the subject of considerable
negotiation between Unions and Management. Negotiations
for the new wages structure were conducted between Manage-
ment and the three-man Union Committee. This latter body
acted as an integrating and co-ordinating body for the

Unions.   Shop stewards put proposals for the new structure
up for discussion at their respective union meetings.
Interest and involvement were high, and the union represen-
tatives were quick to grasp the significance of the new
approach.   All the union groups accepted proposals for a
new wages structure based upon the newly devised gradings,
together with the introduction of job assessment.   The
work of the Job Assessment Panel came temporarily to an
end, and the new structure was installed throughout the
Firm.

A new joint agreement for the settlement of disputes was
drawn up for the three union parties together.   The pro-
cedure differed slightly for each, but the contract was
designed as a whole, and set out clearly conditions of
employment along with the disputes procedure for the first
time.   An important difference between the old and new
procedures, was the involvement in the latter of the
Joint Union Liaison Committee at an early stage.   Thus,
no matter in which group any dispute might begin, if no
settlement was reached within that group, the other groups
would soon be involved in a formal capacity.   This marked
a significant step forward, and was intended to ensure
that a series of events such as that described could not
recur.   All parties were confident that they would be
able to work out remaining problems together.

Throughout January 1971, I continued to re-establish rapport,
although it never returned to its former peak.   Despite
the improvement in relations between parties within the
Firm, my role was made no easier.   At one meeting I
attended at which Benny, John, Harold and Mr. Duncan were

present, the latter began to laugh, saying as I began to take notes that I would get nothing out of that particular meeting, which was fairly short. He was quite wrong, for such a meeting could never have taken place six months previously with the same individuals participating. The atmosphere was relaxed and the issue for debate was quickly settled, and so contrary to the Personnel Manager's stated opinion, I got a great deal out of it. Mr. Duncan's remark demonstrated however how I had come to be associated with conflict, and not with the 'normal' functioning of the Firm. I had been so much in evidence during the time of the Strike, and had subsequently appeared less and less on the scene that it was not difficult to see how my behaviour had influenced this image. Many of my respondents could have assumed a predisposition to align my role with the presence of overt conflict. My behaviour could also help to account for the falling away of rapport in the months following the Strike. As far as most respondents were probably concerned, they had 'performed' for me, and now their expectations were that I should go and write up a report of my observations. I could not forestall the pressure of such expectations indefinitely, and in preparation during the early months of that year, I talked more and more about the report that I would soon be writing.

Summary and Overview of the Conflict Sequence

In terms of incidents described, this chapter marks the most eventful part of the fieldwork, and raises a number of issues worthy of further development. Some of these will be dealt with under the points listed below, while others will form part of the subject matter of subsequent chapters.

In respect of events which have been transposed into this chapter, individual meetings and interviews have not usually been discussed except in cases where these typify situations. Where a research interviewer might give 'typical' or particularly articulate quotes to exemplify his findings in terms of respondents' attitudes or feelings, a fieldworker should present sequences of social behaviour in order to set a context for reported speech and other observations.

The fieldwork period described in this chapter marked the 'blooding' of the participant observer. Role credibility and involvement in events in the Factory both increased. Although the task became more difficult in terms of limitations upon what could be recorded, the role was made easier by the legitimacy accorded to it by respondents, who appeared to view the events in which they participated as worthy of study. This was particularly true for the time of escalation of conflict. It was perhaps ironical that my rapport with some trade union respondents in particular was generally better during the Strike than either before or after it. This observation lends support to the contention that an outsider may be seen as an ally during troubled times, even when previous reactions to his presence have been hostile.

Although I distributed copies of a paper on interview work that I had completed with shop stewards outside the Firm, this did not seem to have been well received by the senior stewards in this Factory. Due largely to the fall-off in rapport experienced, I was unable to do further detailed interviews on shop stewards in order to explore the operation of their role more systematically. The interview schedule had been piloted and prepared, but could not be used due to inadequate opportunity, and the occurrence of events described.

My original focus of interest had been the study of various aspects of role strain among shop stewards. I had undertaken pilot interviews with shop stewards outside the Firm, the analysis of which formed the basis of a paper on this topic.[1] I was eventually obliged to abandon my intention to formally interview shop stewards at the Firm about their roles, mainly for reasons of time and access. But for the conflict which occurred, I would probably have been able to conduct the interviews. However, from a research point of view, it seemed to be more important to seize the opportunity to study the events which I observed, for rarely is a researcher in such an advantageous position. Apart from teaching me much about factory life, the conflict threw into sharp relief, many of the problems experienced by shop stewards as well as those of other parties in industry. I may even have learnt more about the strains of the shop steward role through observing the somewhat extreme situations described here

(1) The paper was given to the Social Psychology Section Conference of the British Psychological Society, held at Durham University in September, 1971. An abstract of the paper appeared under the heading of: "Strain in the Shop Steward Role", *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*, 25, 88, 238-9, July 1972.

than through conducting a series of interviews with shop stewards and others in the Firm.[1] Formally conducted interviews might well have produced quantifiable data, but data which was devoid of the meaning or relevance of the qualitative data eventually obtained.

For me, the easiest party to interview were the Directors. They seemed to know what information they would give me and what they would withhold. From my point of view it was almost refreshing to know exactly where I stood in relation to a respondent being interviewed. The Directors were obliged to be competent and articulate in order to perform their roles. They were also the group which I found most courteous towards me. This assisted relations with them, and I returned their courtesy. Directors usually set aside a period of time to speak with me, which although in quantity was not as long as that spent with many other respondents, was rich in quality of material collected. The demands on their time required that they be better organized than their subordinates. They made time to think over beforehand what they would say to me, and I was hardly ever able to catch them unawares. I was generally obliged to make appointments to see them. This may have been partly due to my expectations of the manner in which I should approach them, for one director had told me that I could come and see him at any time. Being used to dictating, directors spoke clearly, at a reasonable speed, and were at ease with me taking rapid notes as they spoke.

(1) Although I did not seek to collect information on this topic, a senior steward at one point volunteered information on role conflict when he explained that his wife would not be pleased that he would have to spend time over the weekend at the Factory. Gouldner (1954) notes the same contextual dilemma.

They would frequently anticipate my lines of questionning
and give me a reasoned account of events from their stand-
point.   Often, my questions to directors were prefixed by
the phrase: "Well, you've partly answered this already...",
so thorough were their replies to previous questions compared
with those of other respondents.

Studies of directors as a party to industrial relations are
rare.   Winkler (1974) however, through an empirical study,
seeks to remedy this dearth of knowledge.   He notes that:
"...In industrial relations one cannot treat directors as part
of a homogeneous 'management'".   Evidence from this study
supports Winkler's position that directors should be regarded
as a separate party.   Winkler discusses observed aspects of
directors' behaviour such as their expectations for order and
their perception of workers as a cost.   Winkler notes that:
"Directors literally do not want to know about industrial
relations".   Evidence from this study lent some support to
this view of directors, but only in respect of those directors
who were not in 'direct line' from the personnel function.
This Firm may have been atypical from the point of view of
having a strong personnel function, for a few directors
were involved in discussions with full-time union officials
at the time of the dispute.

Of directors' behaviour during such episodes, Winkler writes:

> "...Boardrooms in the midst of a strike retained an unexpected
> placidity, a matter-of-fact atmosphere that ranged from manifest
> unconcern in one company to fatalistic doom-watching in another.

> For most of the directors, the strike or negotiation was an
> outside event, beyond their control or participation, roughly
> analagous to a revolution in a country which supplied their raw
> material. Having constructed an isolated social world, their
> own employees became psychologically part of the external
> environment". (p 196)

Although I did not attend a board meeting during the Strike
at this Firm (there may not even have been one), I knew that
the directors were involved in respect of being kept informed
of events by the Personnel Department, and perhaps also in
the role of advisors to that Department. This suggests a
higher level of involvement than that forwarded by Winkler
as typical of director behaviour during a dispute.

Winkler also suggests that directors' views are strongly
influenced by the media rather than their immediate surroundings.
He considers that directors typically adopt a 'consumerist'
view of conflict in which they are principal actors. From
my interviews with directors in this Firm, I found no evidence
to support the position that such views were held by directors
who were concerned with the personnel function. My obser-
vations of directors who were not involved with the personnel
function were too scanty for me to be able to state what their
views might have been in this regard. It is probably true
however that the role of directors in any capacity requires
the incumbent to adopt a more externally oriented perspective
than those of lower levels of management. Study of the
director role is ripe for further research to help explain
further the nature of their role.

One error in my research technique, documented in Appendix note 31, reflected a practice of the Personnel Department in their contact with the labour force. Personnel Department members relied heavily on contact with 'top' union represent-atives, and appeared less interested in dealing with other shop stewards, and even less directly concerned with the rank and file. This reflects one aspect of the representative function of shop stewards.[1] However, this pattern of communicating could have opened up a 'credibility gap' between the Personnel Department and 'second line' lay representatives, who negotiated with managers in their own departments. This could also have left open the possibility of a gap opening up between senior and other shop stewards. Such a situation has been noted in industrial disputes, where for example a convenor 'sides' with Management and becomes distant from his own members.[2] This discussion may be referred back to a point noted in Chapter 2, in that representatives of two parties might see events more congrously than do representatives and those they represent. One lesson here for a participant observer is to try to spend time with different individuals within what is ostensibly 'one' party, as well as between parties.

(1) That is of their members' views to management. On other occasions they are obliged to represent their members' views to other parties such as full-time officials or representatives from other trade unions. They are also liable to be required to represent 'official' union views, management views, or positions of other parties to their own members.

(2) An example of this phenomenon was noted in a television reconstruction of a clothing workers' strike which took place in February 1970 ('Leeds United', BBC TV, 1974). This strike is also referred to by Hyman (1975, p.165). The film was shown again on BBC TV on 12th August 1976, and was the subject of a Conference seminar held under the auspices of the Society of Industrial Tutors, 6-8th January, 1977, University of Leeds. Another example is given in: *Trade union studies: a course for active trade unionists*, BBC Publications, 1975.

Shop stewards were more accurate in their predictions of the expected course of events leading up to the Strike than were managers. This was true for shop stewards who were not representing Road Branch members, yet who were willing to express the view to me that the Road Branch would take strike action. Thus, it could be hypothesised firstly, that the closer a party is to another party in terms of social distance, the more accurate is it's prediction of the other party's behaviour likely to be. Secondly, the more similar the experiences of two parties, the more accurate are the predictions of one for the behaviour of the other likely to be. These hypothesised relationships would be independent of the state of conflict between two parties.

Managers either believed that the Road Branch would not strike immediately, or else were unwilling to express a belief to me that the Road Branch would strike. One shortcoming of participant observation is that it is not empirically possible with the data available to determine which or both of these hypotheses is correct, although there is no reason to suppose that managers were not revealing their true opinions to me.

The Strike itself did not precipitate additional elements of conflict into the arena, although its passage did intensify antagonism between parties in the short-run. The ingredients of conflict existed before the Strike, and persisted after it, making it one stage in the conflict sequence. For this reason, the space devoted to it as an event is not great in terms of written research evidence, reflecting the time taken up by the Strike, rather than it's key role as a behavioural element of the conflict.

Its significance as a turning point in the long-run course of events should not however be underestimated, for it provided a memory which was uncomfortable to the parties involved. The benefits of seeing how the structure of procedural and substantive agreements could operate to the disadvantage of both Unions and Management were such as to provide an incentive to co-operative action that would ensure a similar sequence of events could not be repeated.

I was obliged to accept the value-perspective of the parties whilst in the field, particularly at times when contact was greatest and rapport at its height. Respondents, particularly employees' representatives, felt that the conflict they experienced was unpleasant and dysfunctional to them for their inter-communication and general occupational well-being. They saw conflict as harmful to their relationship and also as undesirable. The period of overt conflict generated affective disclosure about other parties of an intensity that rendered it impossible for relations between individuals to revert to a pre-existing state. There had to be progress along a different path, and the change which occurred brought the union parties closer together.

Increasing amalgamation between trade unions is frequently held to be a desired trend from the viewpoint of union members.[1] Among the things shown by this dispute, one is that amalgamation of branches and groups of workers into one national trade union does not of itself guarantee that existing difficulties will be overcome.

(1) For example, Alan Fisher, General Secretary of the National Union of Public Employees, made such a point in a lecture at Aston University, 17.11.75. 'A Labour View of Industrial Relations'. See also: Trades Union Congress, *A guide to the avoidance of disputes between unions and the settlement of disputes with employers,* TUC, 1971

These still have to be worked through at local level.   This is neither an argument for or against amalgamation.   If conflicts are transposed within a trade union as occurred in this example however, then that body has greater autonomy of action from an employer or any other party, to solve problems amongst its membership.   For this reason, amalgamation of trade unions might make conflicts between groups of employees easier to solve.[1]   In this case, the Majority Union took responsibility for an Inquiry into the causes of the Strike, indicating its desire to see an end to conflict between branches it represented.   It's findings were not profound, but its action and intent were seen to be important by the parties within the Firm whose behaviour led towards a longer-term solution.

The issue of mergers or increased interaction between trade union parties cannot be seen as separate from the growth of industry.   In the case study described, the merger of the Road Transport Department with the Firm was a necessary precondition for the conflict sequence which occurred.   Increased proximity of parties however tends to facilitate a greater range of comparisons between pay and conditions as well as between relationships with other parties and facilities provided for shop stewards.   These and other issues may therefore be expected to enter the bargaining arena and increase the number and complexity of matters for discussion.   The way in which management representatives deal with the problems and implications of a new party or parties to industrial relations for existing relationships, may be seen by those they represent as a measure of their success.   In this study, the Personnel Department were obliged to take on a series of tasks relating to the integration of new parties within the Firm.

(1)   Hyman and Fryer (1975), note that inter-union conflict is in any case comparatively rare.

The key role played by the Personnel Department in industrial relations at the Factory, noted in Chapter 2, was emphasised during the Strike and subsequent events.   Members of the Personnel Department represented the 'management viewpoint' in negotiations with union representatives.   They also acted as mediators and conciliators between the trade union parties, and they were responsible to the Company Board.   In the course of follow-up study feedback interviews, a senior member of the personnel function within the Firm indicated that the Personnel Department had felt it necessary to 'prove' to other managers that they were capable of handling industrial relations within the Firm.   The process had in this respondent's view, taken many years to achieve, but that through their handling of such issues as the strike described here, they had earned greater respect from managers in other departments. This view of 'motivation' of Personnel Department members had not been obvious to me during my observations of their inter- actions with other managers.   Perhaps Personnel Department members were not conscious of this feeling of having to 'prove' themselves to other managers, or they may not have shared the views of the respondent who mentioned this point.   Their characteristic behaviour of presenting a strong and united front to other parties including managers from other depart- ments, might however be interpreted as representing a desire to inspire confidence among other managers to the effect that they were capable of performing their function adequately. The strength which they therefore apparently exhibited could have been derived over the years from continued activity in opposition to what they viewed as potential or actual negative sentiments from other managers.

The resolution process proved to be the most difficult part of the conflict sequence to describe adequately.[1] The pattern of development of the conflict was more apparent, its signs more manifest and its symptoms more obvious than the pattern of resolution which followed. Resolution of this conflict seemed to hinge upon tactics and words used by individuals who represented others, both between parties, and within their own party. Resolution of conflict where the parties involved have to work towards a solution may often be a delicate process. In the course of events, not even a familiar participant observer is welcome to view. The question of what type of key events characterize a resolution process is an important one, although is frequently hidden from view. For example, in industrial or other disputes, media representatives are often excluded, both by the desire of the parties and by the media's frequent implicit insistence that problem-solving is not 'news', while conflict is newsworthy. The Advisory, Consiliation and Arbitration Service thus pursues a low-key policy in relation to the advice it gives to industrial parties, or to the disputes it is called upon to conciliate or arbitrate.

Difficulties of portraying the nature of the resolution process were brought out when one shop steward remarked of the draft report I had compiled:

> "...I think...somebody reading this from outside,
> and didn't know all of us personally; they'd find
> this a document where we've solved all our problems
> easily, whereas in actual fact, although they look
> easy reading it there, I don't think we did solve them
> that easy. There was a lot of work went in on all sides
> to make it work...the way we hope it's going to keep
> working like it is now...us personally who were involved;
> we realize how much was involved in it..."

(1) Nader (1968) makes the point that conflict is more readily observable than integration.

The importance of shared viewpoints in resolution was seen in the working of the new Job Assessment Panel, where such viewpoints were exemplified by greater status levelling and a tendency towards greater equality of contribution from the parties to the task than in the old Job Evaluation Panel. This observation suggests that resolution in terms of one definition had occurred. Loomis [1] defines conflict resolution as the: "...process by which mutual dependence and/or collaboration of actors, is in their own thinking, increased." However, this definition is not adequate to describe in full the resolution observed in the conflict sequence in this study. 'Mutual dependence' of parties could be seen to be a characteristic of other stages in the conflict, albeit in a different form. Nevertheless, an attempted definition of conflict resolution can help in the understanding of the processes involved.

In seeking improved understanding of the resolution process, it may be helpful to attempt to identify some of the factors involved, even if their importance or influence cannot be precisely identified or measured. A precondition for resolution in this study was that given the structure of the organization there was no means whereby the parties could avoid future inter-relationships. If this had been the case, then one or more parties could have withdrawn from the social field and resolution might have been postponed, or even have been unnecessary in the sense of being a sequence of integrating behaviours by parties involved.

(1) Loomis (1967: 878). Important in this author's terms for conflict and its resolution, are the factors of 'systemic linkage' and 'boundary maintenance'. Examination of these factors may help to describe and account for the separateness and/or potential togetherness of parties to conflict.

A second factor which seemed to be important in resolution
of this conflict was the existence of potential sanctions for
failure to effect a resolution.   No party stood to gain in
the long-run from continued conflict of the form experienced.
All parties experienced disruption of their working lives as
a result of the conflict and therefore could have been in this
sense 'motivated' to seek a solution.

A third factor noted in the resolution sequence in this study
was the hard work, communication and involvement of represent-
atives of parties to the conflict.   This observed behaviour
could have been as a result of the first and second factors
above.   The third factor seemed to operate concurrently with
a fourth factor, that of increasing desire for resolving con-
flict by the parties.   This increased desire might be seen
as being generated by greater commitment by the parties to a
new set of relationships.   These two factors may therefore
be seen as elements of a 'virtuous circle' and as forming much
of the behavioural substance of resolution.

A fifth factor in the resolution sequence may be identified
as the formalization of procedures governing future behaviour.
This is to set the seal upon negotiated agreements, and repre-
sents the efforts of the parties who have worked towards the
solution.   In this case, new procedures for disputes, negot-
iations and pay determination were radical departures from
the equivalent mechanisms which operated before the conflict.
The new procedures were thus important for setting the scene
for improved relations between parties, and in this sense
were an important step in the resolution process.

Finally, a sixth factor may be identified as important to conflict resolution and this is the passage of time. In this study, the time taken to effect resolution was many times longer than that during which conflict was observed to escalate. Time was important in allowing emotions to cool and for a rational sequence of resolution behaviours to be worked out.

The six factors identified as being of importance to the resolution of conflict observed in this study are summarised in figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

Simplified diagram showing factors involved in
the resolution of conflict between parties in the Firm

Parties to
Conflict

PRE CONDITIONS

[1]No means to avoid
future interaction

[2]Sanctions incurred for
continuing conflict

BEHAVIOURAL
MANIFESTATIONS

[3]Hard work,
increased
communication
and involve-
ment of party
representatives

[4]Increasing desire
for harmony

Agreement in
Principle

FORMAL END TO
RESOLUTION

[5]Formalization
of agreement

Greater har-
mony in
inter-party
relations

[6]Time period for
resolution

One factor identified as important to conflict resolution was the passage of time. This factor also seemed to be important in acceptance of the participant observer. The conflict sequence, in terms of affective responses of the parties involved, may be likened to a skewed distribution, as shown in figure 3.3. Acceptance of the participant observer followed a roughly bi-modal path.

Figure 3.3

<u>Diagrammatic representation of:</u>
<u>a) level of conflict within the Firm, and</u>
<u>b) subjective rapport of the participant observer</u>
<u>with key respondents, over time.</u>
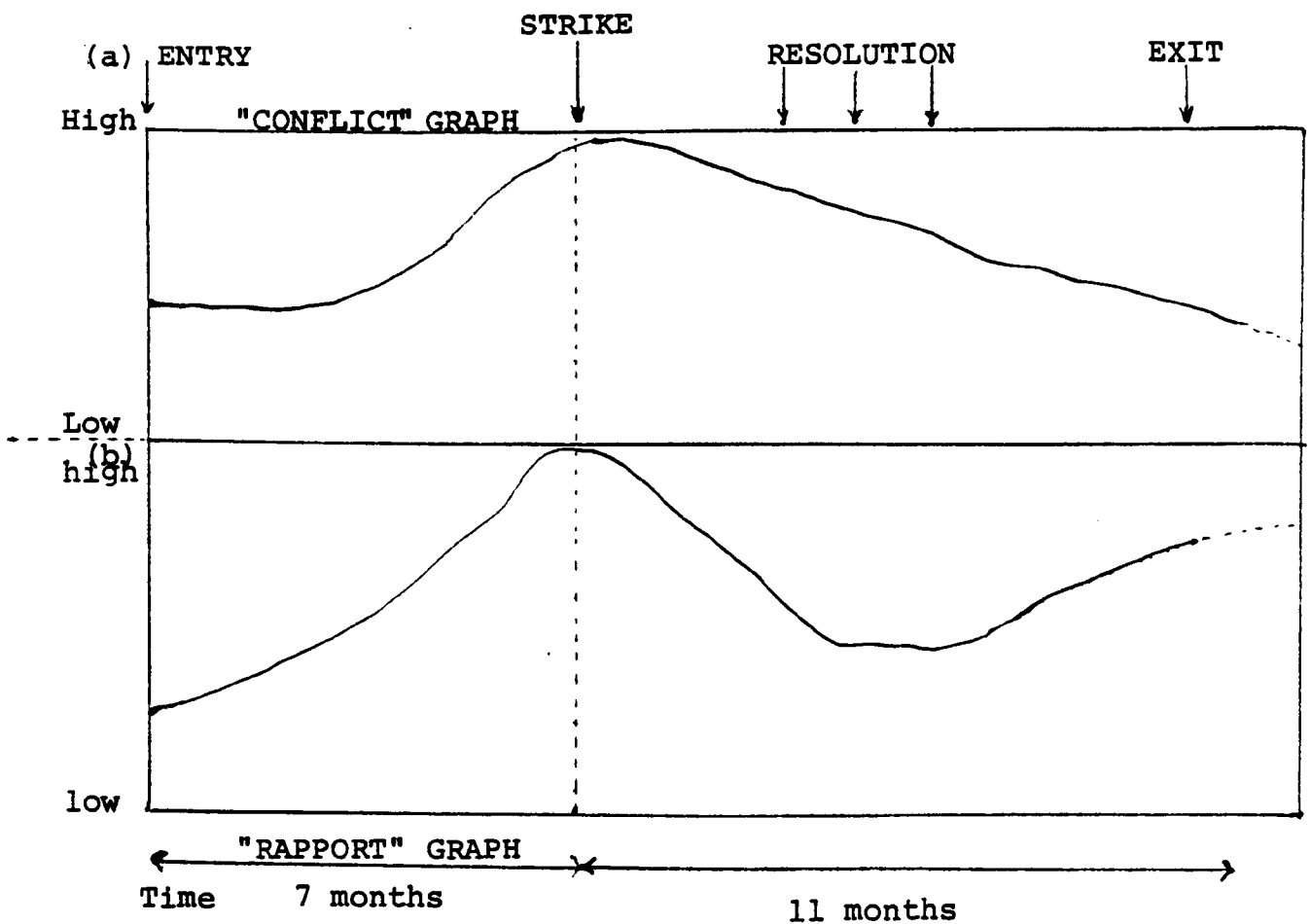
(a) overall level of conflict within the Firm.
(b) overall level of rapport with key respondents.

However, the crude 'Rapport' graph shown in Figure 3.3 is only an amalgam of 'total' rapport for the observer within the Firm. Figure 3.4 gives a breakdown of rapport levels for the participant observer with each of six parties identified in the study. The levels of rapport suggested are inevitably subjective, but they provide a useful summary of relationships between participant observer and key respondents over the period of fieldwork described.

Figure 3.4

Diagrammatic representation of rapport subjectively experienced by the participant observer with six parties during 18 months fieldwork

FIELDWORK PERIOD

ENTRY.INDUCTION. STRIKE.RESOLUTION SEQUENCE.EXIT.
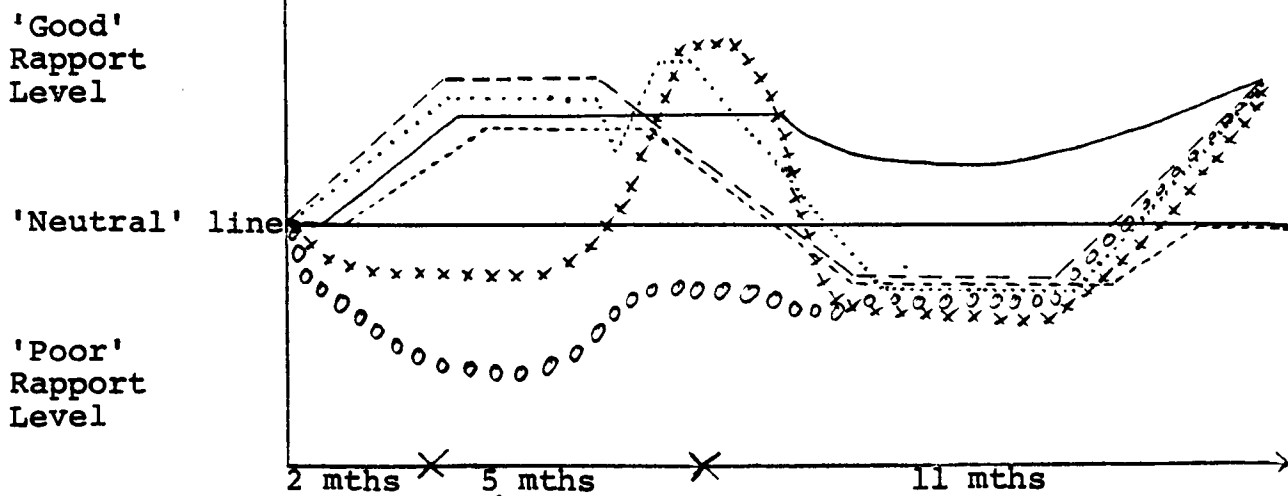
Key to parties: _____Foremen   ......Inside Branch

                   __ __ _Personnel Dept   xxxxxxMinority Unions

                   -------Other managers, oooooo Road Branch
                          staff, directors
                          etc.

Figure 3.4 shows how rapport between the participant observer and different parties changed over time and also how rapport with the parties changed in relation to that with other parties over time. It may be seen how rapport levels with different parties with whom contact is maintained merge towards the end of the fieldwork period. This period is described in Chapter 4. Rapport is partly an artifact of contact between the participant observer and a given party and this is allowed for in Figure 3.4. The Figure also shows how rapport levels of the participant observer with the trade union parties bore a relation to the degree of harmony between their representatives at different times during the fieldwork.

In this chapter, discussion has focussed upon important elements observed in the conflict-resolution sequence within the Firm. From a theoretical viewpoint, the necessity to examine a total complex of parties' interests and relationships as well as the history of issues leading to conflict, in order to understand behaviour during conflict has been established. It has been shown that conflict behaviour is likely to be dependent upon such factors as these, and that descriptive notions such as 'moderates' and 'militants' are inadequate as explanatory or predictive guides to conflict behaviour. From a methodological standpoint, it has been shown that in order to be in a position to understand behaviour, an observer needs to be stationed close to events, and that detachment is of very limited use for this purpose. Theoretical views of conflict are discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4

THE END OF FIELDWORK

This brief chapter, which concludes Part I of the thesis, is concerned mainly with events and observations relating to the final stages of the main period of fieldwork. It deals essentially with important observations during a feedback session with representatives from a number of the parties, and the implications of these for the research. The chapter ends with a consideration of some ways in which research technique could be improved in pursuing studies of this type.

Final contacts

As the fieldwork period came to an end, I began to restrict my contacts to respondents who were of most service at this stage of the research. I knew by now the richest sources of information, and my most willing respondents. One group on which I relied heavily at this stage for information, were the shop stewards. Another respondent whom I approached at this time was the Medical Officer, who was interested in discussing research issues.[1]

It was in a way fortunate that before I attended what was to be my final meeting of the Works Committee as an observer, I chanced upon the Personnel Director. He proved to be somewhat upset that he had not been informed that I was to attend the meeting which he now chaired. His response intrigued me in the light of what he had said a year earlier as Personnel Manager. I had then received the

(1) When the Medical Officer left the Firm at the end of February, he invited me to correspond further with him on the subject of my research, which offer I subsequently took up. His successor unfortunately appeared to me to be less sympathetic to a 'sociological' approach to industrial relations.

impression from him that I was welcome to come and go as I pleased from meetings.[1] This apparent change in his attitude may have been in part a function of his upward change in status, but it also suggested a diminution of rapport between us. Increased absence from the Firm on my part may have contributed to this.

A general feature of the end of the fieldwork period was that I became more relaxed and I reciprocated more information with my respondents than I would have considered desirable at an earlier stage.[2] Respondents also required confirmation of their belief that they had participated in a worthwhile venture. Some also needed to be sure that they had not given much away, to receive nothing in return, and some required reassurance that conditions of confidentiality and anonymity would be reaffirmed.

(1) Gouldner (1955) notes that a change in personnel manager in the plant studied by his team was associated with a change in the 'indulgency pattern' for conducting industrial relations. In this Firm, however the change of personnel manager was associated with no such identifiable change. Perhaps in an attempt to ensure continuity and a successful personnel function, it was indicated to me that personnel officers were 'groomed' and selected on the basis of the job aptitude over many years for the post of personnel manager.

(2) Blum (1952) notes that the researcher may 'open up', to give information about himself to respondents.

'Phasing out', was an important aspect of the research.[1]
During the phasing out period, I took up opportunities to
improve relationships with individual respondents.   I also
attempted to gauge once-held, or even currently-held
attitudes towards my role which could have influenced
observations which I had made.[2]

The phasing out process involved a conscious change in my
role, and was useful for acquiring information which probably
would not have been forthcoming from respondents when they
perceived my role to be more rigid than it presently appeared.
My new 'honesty', as I began to explain what I was 'really
up to' had a remarkable lubricating effect upon some respon-
dents, who favoured my imminent departure with many gems of
information which I had not acquired earlier in the field-
work.   The establishment of relationships under these con-
ditions seemed especially amenable to those respondents who
found it difficult to accept the participant observer role,
and who wished to interact on the level more akin to personal
friendship.[3]

(1)   Phasing out may begin at any time during the research.   The
      researcher may be under external constraints such as finance, or
      he may be fairly free to choose his own time for phasing out.
      To some extent this is determined by expectations of his respon-
      dents.   Statements made by a researcher about the length of time
      which he expects to remain in an environment, may be crucial
      determinants of later expectations by respondents.

(2)   Like the proverbial salesman whose final gambit is to ask his
      intended customer where he erred in failing to make a sale, a
      participant observer should not fail to enquire of his respondents
      where appropriate, as to ways in which he could have performed his
      role more adequately or convincingly.

(3)   See Appendix note 41 on relations between the participant observer,
      his respondents and their organization. See Appendix note 42 for
      an extended consideration of the role and personality of the
      participant observer.

I completed a draft research report by the Summer of 1971. I
was informed by a secretary that the Personnel Director wanted
the Personnel Manager to see my report before it went to any
other party. My interpretation of this alleged demand was that
it contravened an agreement made when I began the fieldwork,
namely that all parties would receive equal treatment from
myself at all times as far as possible. I suspected that the
Director's attitude could have been confounded by the spectre
of the secretary-as-buffer role re-emerging to mediate my
research.

I had already informed the shop stewards that my report was
nearing completion. The unions at the Factory were now
effectively one party, subsequent to new agreements which had
been negotiated. After a number of letters and telephone
calls to my key respondents, it was agreed that Benny and
Mr. Duncan the Personnel Manager, should first see the report
together, when it became available.

The feedback stage of the participant observation study was
important.[1] In the series of events which I had studied,
a number of my respondents' emotions had been exposed. I
had been witness to much inter-party and inter-personal (or at
least, inter-role) conflicts, resulting in considerable personal
enmity on occasions. I possessed material which a number of
respondents would probably not wish me to reveal to any audience.
I therefore made the approach to request feedback on my draft
report with a number of considerations in mind.

(1)   This aspect of research has been discussed by a number of writers.
      See for example, Sayles and Strauss, (1953); Whyte, (1955).

The first of these was the time which had elapsed since the conflict had been at its peak, and whether this was now sufficiently distant to justify an approach with the draft report.   A second consideration was the order of individuals who would read the draft report, for I could not upset or disappoint anyone at this stage if I was to leave goodwill at the Firm after my departure.[1]   A third consideration was the progress of the research and its formal completion.[2]

Towards the middle of August, I met with Benny and Mr. Duncan and simultaneously handed to each of them equal numbers of copies of the draft report I had written.   It was agreed that each of them would read it, and implied in our discussion that they would then agree the subsequent pattern of distribution.   My original aim had been a distribution of the final report throughout the Firm, and I was intending to make alterations to the draft on the basis of points raised by key respondents prior to a general distribution.   However, I realised that on handing over copies to these key respondents, distribution of the report within the Firm was effectively out of my hands.

(1)   A dilemma for the participant observer may be identified as one of respondents wanting to see some return for their investment, yet not liking it when it appears (Beynon, 1973).   The researcher may find himself trapped by such conflicting sentiments of respondents and be obliged to seek dissonance reduction.   One way of achieving this might be to leave the field role altogether.

(2)   For discussion of writing up research such as this, see Appendix note 43.

After reading it, both Benny and Mr. Duncan congratulated
me on the report, indicating separately that some changes
would have to be made.   These two discussed the draft
before sending a copy to the Personnel Director, who was
also reportedly impressed with the document.   Harold and
John were next in the queue of readers.   Both Mr. Duncan
and Benny expressed some apprehension over these latters'
possible reactions to the report.

Although pleased with the progress of the draft report so
far, I was concerned about its speed of passage for my
time remaining was limited.   I would be taking up a new
job within a few weeks from which it would be impossible
to conduct further research at the Factory.   In the
middle of September, Mr. Duncan telephoned me to say that
Harold and John, apart from a few objections, and to the
surprise of Benny and himself, were generally happy with
the report.

The Feedback Session

After a few more calls, a meeting was arranged for the day
before I left for my new job.   Attending were: Mr.
Duncan, Harold, Benny, John, and Bill the Foreman's
Chairman.   Bill had received a copy of the report the
previous day.   The Personnel Director was unfortunately
unable to be present, although Mr. Duncan said he would
speak for him.

This visit to the Factory was valuable for the research. I regarded myself as priviledged in obtaining permission from all those present to tape-record the entire meeting, so that no verbal information would be lost. This meant that I could concentrate upon guiding the exchanges in the meeting to obtain maximum information and later thoroughly peruse the proceedings, both to correct the draft report, and to gather information on perceptions of my role from these five key respondents.[1]

I had been concerned about possible bias if comments were more forthcoming from managers, who would be more likely to accommodate similar papers in the course of their work, than from shop stewards who might find the language turgid. The shop stewards at this meeting did not appear to have lacked motivation to read the draft report, doubtless because the research concerned themselves. When one congratulated me on a: "very interesting novel", I hoped that he was referring to its length, and not to its position on a fact/fiction continuum!

The meeting began slowly, but after warming up, factual errors in the report emerged from the discussion. These were not numerous, and were mostly reported by the shop stewards. I began to appreciate that items which were not vital to the research report could be upsetting for respondents if they had no opportunity to correct them. Mr. Duncan was largely content to let the paper stand as it was, being happy to listen to the others' comments. He summed up his general feelings towards it when he said:

(1) A meeting such as this might have a number of functions. For discussion of the role of feedback, see Appendix note 44.

> "...this is your thing...we happen to think it's very
> good indeed...congratulations...that doesn't mean to
> say that we agree with everything you've said by quite
> a long way..."

Despite informing me earlier on the telephone that certain things in the draft would have to be changed, he did not favour contributing to alterations himself, perceiving that by doing so he would be sharing in responsibility for accuracy of the final report.   It was generally agreed by these key respondents that many of the errors in the draft report resulted from my not being in possession of necessary information. One respondent pointed out that some errors which I had inadvertantly introduced served to make the Firm less readily identifiable.   He termed the conflict a 'classic', adding that:

> "...if you could have thought of anything else that could
> go wrong, you really would have been hard pushed...if you'd
> sat down before you started...written a list of all the
> things you'd like to happen to make the situation worse..."

Another respondent agreed, noting to me:

> "...on your first visit to the Factory, it couldn't possibly
> ever have been envisaged that such a position would have
> developed..."

For myself as departing researcher however, this meeting was more an opportunity to explore possible reasons for 'non-response' in a way not generally available to researchers when employing other techniques.

After noting criticism on the factual content of the draft
report therefore, I probed respondents' perceptions of my
research role.   One shop steward termed it: "persistent".
Further probing with reference to the position adopted by
the Road Branch in respect of the research revealed that:

> "...some people would always object to such research...
> to some people...as far as they're concerned you're
> something new to them...research...you're just manage-
> ment in another form...".[1]

More specifically, Benny revealed that a number of Inside
Branch shop stewards had not been in favour of my research,
at least not at first, although Harold reported that I was
not resented by the Minority Unions' Shop Stewards' Committee.
The Road Branch position, which had been the most extreme in
terms of opposition to my research was explained by John who
said:

> "...he was certainly resented at our Branch...I did hear
> people say, 'lock the door and don't ever let him in'...".

I probed this point, making reference to original contact I
had made with the Road Branch, and the following information
emerged:

> "...you met the wrong man right from the start...you walked
> straight into the opposition...as soon as I said I thought
> it would be a good idea for this man to come in and do what
> he's doing, because obviously he's going to the Management
> side, and the Inside Branch, and the other Branch had no
> objections...straightaway the one man you spoke to stood up
> and accused you of being a communist, or goodness knows what

(1) The articulation of this viewpoint may be representative of the
     views of many trade unionists on 'research'. Implication of this
     viewpoint are important in considering the validity of participant
     observation, at least in an industrial environment, and will be
     considered in greater detail in Chapter 8.

you were...that was unfortunate for you...he put so
much poison into it...that even the Branch Committee
which I tried to bring round didn't want to know you
...Ernie and myself thought it wouldn't do any harm...
and of course you must remember that we'd not long been
elected...as far as our Branch was concerned, all he was
going to do was sit at our meetings and come and tell
you (indicating Mr. Duncan) everything that went on...
this was the feeling that was put over to the men..".[1]

Harold added that he thought this feeling was general!
John's own words provide a more adequate exposition of
his predicament regarding introduction of the research
project into his Branch than I could achieve.[2]   I only
began to appreciate at this time both the full extent of
the difficulties he faced, and my own shortcomings in not
making greater efforts to develop closer liaison with the
Road Branch at an earlier stage.[3]

Resentment towards my research role was not confined to
the trade unionists as I discovered when Mr. Duncan explained:

(1) That a researcher may be stereotyped as a 'commie' is noted by
     Argyris (1952), while Vidich and Bensman (1954) explain that
     the fieldworker may be: "...accorded the status of an FBI agent
     or communist infiltrator depending on his name, origin, dress or
     accent".   Glazer (1972), in an analysis of a number of partici-
     pant observation studies, notes that researchers may be condemned
     as spies, subversives and so forth, while Wax (1971) notes an
     example of 'hearing' what can happen if fieldworkers are suspected
     of political activity.

(2) John also indicated that he and Ernie would have been upset if
     I had gone directly to Sam after the Road Branch decision not to
     co-operate, again highlighting a dilemma for the participant
     observer.

(3) Given the strength of trade union attitudes against my role which
     were now emerging, it may be surprising that I did collect so
     much information from them in various ways.   This was supplement-
     ed by the material which I obtained from this meeting after my
     'formal' field role had been abandoned.   One respondent suggest-
     ed that it could have been my 'naiveté' which protected me and
     enabled the project to be completed.

"...well, we didn't mind you being here, but you
were a bloody nuisance...it was always something
else to think about...we'd forgotten to tell you
...we'd forgotten to invite you...it wasn't what
we said in front of you that worried us...it was
just another thing to worry about...and when we'd
got a full day's work and you were...yes, pestering
the secretary to come in and see us...But don't get
me wrong, I don't think this was a personal situation
...if it had been anybody...I don't know that you
could have handled it any better...and certainly your
report would have been much less complete if you had
...looked at the thing superficially. I don't
suppose any of us wanted to say 'no', having said 'yes'
in the first place...there was no feeling on our side
that you had made the position worse at all...you were
merely of nuisance value...".

These remarks from the Personnel Manager reveal much about

Management's ambivalence towards the research.   I suspected

that these comments referred almost exclusively to reactions

to my fieldwork during the few weeks of overt conflict,

demonstrating the increased difficulty I encountered when

respondents were preoccupied with problems of 'overload'

and emotional events characterizing that period.   Doubt-

less, greater difficulties would have been encountered if

the research had not had the benefit of an initiation period

during the months of relatively 'peaceful' factory life

prior to the intensified conflict.   In all probability

such research would not even have been allowed to begin

during a time of dispute.

The quote above also highlights an 'approach/avoidance' con-

flict which I experienced. Management had agreed to the res-

earch, perceiving originally that the probable role of the

observer would be of the 'fly on the wall' type, i.e.passive

rather than active, and did not subsequently wish to renege on their obligations. When the Personnel Department were experiencing their most intense conflict, the status of my research project became a low priority, and was not something to which its members wished to be heavily committed along with other demands upon their time during the conflict. From the remarks above, it may also be deduced that it was the participant observer role, rather than myself as incumbent which created interaction problems with Management respondents.[1]

The respondents who had come to this feedback session did not want a general circulation of the research report. I had no hesitation in agreeing with their wishes. It was pointed out that they themselves had benefitted from the experiences described in the paper, and were confident of their ability to sort out any problems which might arise in the future. Outside the Factory itself however, they considered that it was up to me as to what happened to the report. However much I would have liked them to, they did not see themselves as being in a position to challenge what were in the last analysis, my own views on what I had observed. Although I pressed them on this issue, the following excerpts from their replies reveal their attitudes:

(1)   Such problems as are revealed here raise questions regarding the role of a participant observer among parties in conflict. He may be rejected by all sides for different reasons and in different ways. The researcher must adapt to the strains which can result from playing this role in order to continue an adequate role performance. Continual awareness is required to maintain a consistent role performance which will be credible to respondents. It may only be because there had been a 'successful' resolution to conflict, as perceived by the parties to it, that I was accepted by all sides at this stage. Jokes were made about my 'foresight' in coming to study the Factory in the first instance, although it has only been through persevering with the research that any reward had come.

Shop Steward 1:

> "...I never said I agreed with your conclusions...or
> the conclusions you draw from the facts as you saw them
> ...that's irrelevant...it's your report, not mine...".

Shop Steward 2:

> "...the point of the matter is, it's you has come in as
> an outside observer and seen these things and thought
> these things were happening...and thought the reasons
> for them...Whether the reasons are right is immaterial...".

Personnel Manager:

> "...it's your opinion we'd be arguing with.   We're
> just the same as the boys.   There's many things we
> don't agree with, but it's only your opinion of them,
> and I think it would be a gross mistake on our part to
> try to change your opinion now.   I mean we're not in
> a position to change your opinion, or wanting to...".

Shop Steward 1:

> "...I think it's a worthwhile document.   If people are
> going to discuss it as you obviously hope and as I would
> hope...or otherwise it's pointless...if people are going
> to discuss it in various places other than here...I've
> no doubt *they'll* disagree with some of your conclusions...
> but overall...I think it's well presented and I think
> you've done an exceptionally good job on it...".

It was pointed out to me on a separate occasion that having
been in the role of participant observer for 18 months, wit-
nessing events in the field from the vantage point conferred
by this role, meant that my authority carried a good deal of
legitimacy in the eyes of respondents when commentating on
events from this perspective.

I was acting as teacher to the extent that I was attempting to inculcate an approach to relations in the Factory which had not hitherto been available to my respondents.[1]

At least one respondent at the feedback session thought that most people in the Factory would not be interested in reading the report. One shop steward blamed a lack of information which resulted in large numbers of foremen and managers in the Firm still not knowing the new negotiating and other arrangements for the union groups. In his words, they still had the "old perception" of events. There was nevertheless a continued possibility that some of the material could in the future be used against those who were central to the conflict, and who would therefore be identified from the research report. That such an occurrence could be: "...embarrassing..", "...a nuisance..." and "...an unnecessary risk...", were among the views expressed by these key respondents on this point.[2]

A final draft, subject to ratification by the Joint Union Committee and the Board of Directors, could be made available for anyone who wanted to see it at a later date. It was suggested that the report would 'find it's own level', and that sections of it could be 'dug up' and discussed in the future. The general feeling was that it was sufficiently anonymous for me to, 'take it away and do what I liked with it'.

(1) Implications of respondents' perceptions of a researcher in an 'expert' role have nowhere been adequately discussed. A number of writers have considered the researcher role in the broader context of society. See Appendix note 45 for a review of some of these.

(2) Daniels (1967) refers to the nuisance or danger value of research.

The congratulations I received at this session, laced as I
had wished them to be with much constructive comment and
criticism of my research, made the study academically worth-
while and personally rewarding.   I felt certain that none of
my respondents had learnt as much as I had done from the events
at the Factory we had all experienced.   Despite mistakes and
pitfalls which had been associated with the project, the sense
of achievement, enjoyment and recognition from respondents,
all ensure its status as a potent learning experience for me.

Lessons from the Fieldwork

What may be learned from the fieldwork experiences of an
observer of conflict at first hand in a factory?   Some of
the important methodological and other issues which arise are
listed and discussed briefly below.   Where more extended
treatment of a topic is given elsewhere in the thesis, this
is indicated.

1.   An important issue which arises in the context of the
     description of feedback from respondents, is that of
     the validity of the data collected.   A problem for a
     participant observer attempting to gather data from
     more than one party to a conflict is that the researcher
     cannot expect all parties to agree with his findings.
     Respondent parties in conflict who do not agree with
     each other on a number of issues are almost certain to
     hold different views on a researcher's interpretations
     of his observations of behaviour relating to these issues.

An example of this occurred during the feedback session when the Personnel Manager and one of the shop stewards adopted contrary positions on something I had written about the monetary claims of the Road Branch during the Strike. Attempts to access the relevant figures to settle the issue at the time were unsuccessful and my solution was to omit the offending passage from the next draft of the report.

A lesson which may be drawn from this example is the preference for direct observation over collating reports such as are obtained through interviewing. In this study, I was more concerned with monitoring positions of the various parties than to observe the content of negotiations, access to which in any case was denied to me. Researchers have on occasion been given access to observe negotiations, but a problem may arise over how to observe all parties without prejudicing relations with any of them. What happens for example when parties leave the negotiating table, each for their own discussions? Warr (1973), on encountering this problem adopted the suggestion from a manager that he break with the trade union side, and proceeded to help this party in negotiations. In order to continue to observe, a single researcher must break with one party or another and will need to judge the situation in order to decide upon which party to go with. Warr notes that his relationship with the management side was not prejudiced in this case as he could not know their view on important issues anyway. More general issues of validity in participant observation are discussed in Chapter 7.

2. A second issue which arises out of the feedback session described in this chapter is the influence of respondents' attitudes towards the observer upon his research. An observer should not expect to be liked by his respondents and may be able to collect data despite negative sentiments of respondents towards him. Issues of rapport are dealt with elsewhere in the thesis. In the course of fieldwork, where difficulties of access resulting from opposition by one party or another were encountered, I sought to explain such behaviour to interpret possible meanings. Difficulties encountered could then be treated as data alongside other observed features of the environment. These efforts represented an aspect of my attempt to adopt a 'professional' approach to my subject matter. Respondents' views on professional and other characteristics of a fieldworker are addressed in Chapter 5.

3. An issue which was touched upon in the feedback session described, was that of access to all parties prior to overt conflict. The opportunity to study conflict in this Firm resulted from a number of chance factors. Research entry was denied until a time 'suitable' to the parties in this Firm, and it is almost certain that entry would not have been gained once the conflict described was either at the stage of formal dispute, or seen to be imminent by any party. It is possible that the Road Branch were ambivalent about allowing the research to take place because some of their membership thought that conflict with other parties was imminent.

Thus, the initiation period, during which time conflict between parties was mostly latent or covert, was not only important for the research but essential to the collection of data of the type described. General issues of fieldwork access are discussed in the Appendix notes. However, this study has specifically demonstrated the importance of at least three aspects of access to an organization. Firstly, the need for early and thorough research prior to approaching an organization to request access has been shown. If this is done, then reasons for the approach and benefits for parties within the organization can be given at the time to facilitate access. Secondly, the desirability of approaching an organization through more than one party has been demonstrated. If the trade union parties within the Firm had been approached separately through their local offices, then co-operation from their representatives would probably have been greater than it was. Thirdly, as noted above, access to an organization in which a researcher wishes to study conflict should be affected at a time when relationships between parties are not characterised by overt conflict. Only if such prior access is obtained is a researcher likely to be able to adequately observe more than one party.

4. A list of case studies of strikes is given in Chapter 7. From an examination of these studies, it seems that only researchers who had prior access to the organization they studied were able to gain access to more than one party, unless the material collected was retrospective and a considerable time period had elapsed since the strike.

Although case studies of strikes are discussed briefly in Chapter 7, a topic for further research could be noted here. An analysis of existing studies perhaps on the basis of identifying key factors in strikes, and leading to a theoretical perspective on conflict behaviour at the time of a strike which would provide guidelines for future research of this type, would be valuable.

5. A related topic for further research would be to seek to identify conditions and behaviour which may or may not lead to conflict, from which a long period of resolution is necessary. Conflict behaviour need not take the form of a strike. However, it might be useful to seek to identify criteria which are or are not likely to lead to a strike. Batstone et al. (1977), in their study of a number of disputes refer to 'near strikes' as well as strikes. In a classic study of productivity bargaining by Flanders (1964), a number of features exhibited in this study are described. Some of these have already been noted, but others include: craft workers being asked to give up more than process workers, two branches of the same union recording contrary positions on acceptance of a negotiated agreement, intensification of rivalry between three union groups, disruption of joint consultation and shop stewards' suspicions of a management 'divide and rule' policy.

From analysis and comparison of industrial relations studies which do and do not consider strikes, it might be possible to identify features of industrial relations which are important in determining strike behaviour. Flanders (1964) records of his study, that there was no real threat of a strike despite tense negotiations. Questions which arise relate to parallels with this and other studies in industrial relations and the reasons for a strike occurring in one case but not in another.

Information such as that collected from comparative work on studies describing strike behaviour and studies of industrial relations which do not encompass strike behaviour could be useful to practitioners as well as to researchers of industrial relations.

6. An important methodological issue concerns the systematization of data collection during participant observation. There are several approaches possible and these include: interviewing respondents according to some specified sampling framework, use of self-completion diaries, standardizing observations and recording these rigorously by cross-referenced filing, and the systematic collection of data by non-obtrusive methods. An example of the last of these methods would be analysis of all written memoranda and/or telephone calls between parties over sampled time periods. Observation of meetings could be standarized according to a schedule for recording categories of verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

A sample of respondents could be persuaded to complete behaviour diaries over a certain period of time. Data from such sources would complement day-to-day observations and discussions conducted by a participant observer.

However, while it might be desirable to obtain data through different methods, in practice the limiting factor of resources will prevail. It was possible to interview systematically before and after the Strike to a limited extent and a considerable amount of information was obtained in this way. It was also possible to interview a sample of key respondents in the follow-up study considered in Chapter 5. It should also be remembered that the facility to collect data is highly dependent upon respondents' co-operation and that in this study, intended interviews with shop stewards had to be abandoned because of refusals among at least some of their representatives to grant 'secondary access' in this way. It was also indicated to me that Road Branch members instructed their shop stewards not to complete questionnaires sent to them during the follow-up study. Despite such difficulties however, it was possible to collect systematic data on feedback to the research on three separate occasions: after the fieldwork in the session described in this chapter, during the follow-up study dealt with in Chapter 5, and on the findings from the follow-up study. It was also possible to collect data from the Staff Evaluation Committee which operated within the Firm. This study led to a separate publication (Şemin and Glendon, 1973).

The research may be criticised on the grounds that data collection was not in all cases systematic. However, the approach adopted - combining wide coverage of the field with feedback from key respondents - ensured that a perspective on events was obtained which might not have been achieved solely by collecting data systematically. In considering whether or not data gathering was spread too 'thinly', it should also be remembered that a participant observer has only limited control of his methodology and that much depends upon changes in the environment he is studying. For example, at the time of the Strike, I was too pre-occupied with recording events and thoughts on a day-to-day basis to consider whether or not this was the optimum use of research time.

An obvious possible disadvantage of attempting to collect data on a wide front, is that the resear-cher may thereby analyse events superficially. However, an advantage of being able to collect data from a wide range of sources is that techni-ques can be varied to suit circumstances encount-ered. For example, for a researcher to observe events in as inconspicious a manner as possible in an attempt to record standardized observations is one approach to data collection.

However, it may only be by challenging or probing by interview the expressed norms and values of

respondents that deeper insights may be obtained
into the total environment under study.   One
important task for a participant observer there-
fore is to achieve an optimum combination of the
techniques at his disposal.

7.   Finally, the question should be asked, do the
findings from a single case study have any predic-
tive validity?   Is it possible to interpret and
extrapolate from the data presented so far, in
such a way as to be able to predict with any
degree of accuracy what major events are likely
to characterize relationships between the parties
in the years following the study described?
The next chapter, comprising Part II of the thesis,
considers these important questions.

PART II

CHAPTER 5

COEXISTENCE AND CHANGE:

THE FACTORY REVISITED

The Follow-up Study

There were three major reasons why I decided to proceed to undertake a follow-up study of industrial relations at the Firm. The first was to obtain material which would bring my account of events up to date and obtain any information which I had missed during the earlier study.

A second reason was to obtain data for comparative purposes which might be used towards developing theoretical aspects of changes in an organization over time. A third reason was to determine the extent to which it was possible to make predictions about future events on the basis of information collected during the earlier study, and test these predictions by further research.

Each of these will be developed in this chapter. In the first section, predictions made on the basis of findings from the earlier study are outlined, together with reasons for each and other comment where appropriate. The second section deals with approach and methodology of the follow-up study. In the third section, the data obtained from this study are displayed, and in the fourth section the predictions made in section one are considered in the light of the data. In further short sections, feedback from respondents to the follow-up study, and the role of prediction in social research are considered before a brief concluding comment.

1. Predictions

The predictions outlined in this section were made only on
the basis of data collected from the earlier study. No
interim contact was maintained with the Firm, and the pred-
ictions were all made prior to fieldwork in the follow-up
study.

(a)   The first prediction was that the unions would continue
to act in concert, and that the formal joint union machinery
would be intact after six years. This prediction could
only be made with knowledge gained during the earlier study.
That the unions would continue to act together for such a
period of time could not be supported by history alone for
there had been no earlier successful attempts.

The reasons for making this prediction therefore were:

> (i)   The considerable effort expended by the parties
> in working towards and achieving a viable form of
> liaison between the union parties following the
> Strike.

> (ii) Once the new liaison machinery had got 'off the
> ground', or passed a 'critical threshold', then
> the parties involved, whatever their differences,
> would see that their best interests would be served
> by continued liaison.   This would provide a crucial
> 'maintenance factor' for the new joint union machin-
> ery.

> (iii)A powerful management, particularly the Personnel
> Department, would continue to provide 'opposition'
> against which the union parties would see each other
> as more 'natural allies'.

(iv) The structure of the new negotiating and disputes procedures which involved the new union liaison body at an early stage, provided a formal reminder of the need for continued existence of the joint union body to its members.

(v) There might also have been a 'momentum' factor, whereby once the machinery was being used by those involved, it would be difficult to stop.[1]

(b)   The second prediction about the state of industrial relations at the Firm was that there would have been no strikes in the time since the last study, and that overt conflict would not be much in evidence.   Like the first, this prediction would not have been heralded by an examination of the strike statistics of the Firm alone, which as noted in an earlier chapter showed a trend towards more frequent longer strikes until the strike in 1970.

More specifically, reasons for predicting an absence of strike activity and low level of overt conflict were:

(i)   The high investment of effort and involvement expended by union and management representatives in the system of bargaining which followed the 1970 strike.

(ii) The increased institutionalization of conflict between parties within the agreed disputes procedures compared with the relative lack of involvement of union parties particularly in each others' disputes prior to 1971.

(1)   Stein (1976) notes that in ongoing groups, as opposed to newly-formed groups, individuals are much more likely to perceive one another as a source of support and security.

This 'no strike' prediction should be qualified by noting that basic conflict between management and unions remains. Management represent the controllers of the means of production. Unions help to regulate the jobs of their members as operators of the means of production. To institutionalize conflict into the workings of an organization is not to dispense with it. Rather the opposite, for the integration of conflict into bargaining mechanisms is to admit to its existence and attempt to exercise a more formal degree of control over its operation and possible effects.[1] Basic relations of power and authority between the parties are not therefore altered by such an institutionalization of conflict.

Further qualifications should be made to the 'no strike' prediction insofar as it may only hold as long as the individuals who created the new system remain as representatives of the parties. The strength of the system will be tested as individuals who engineered it, and therefore have a high degree of commitment to it, relinquish their roles. There is no way of predicting what will happen in the longer-term when many factors have had time to change. The influence of external economic or political events such as incomes policies, cannot be catered for within the scope of this prediction. Conflict may re-appear in another form and disputes entered into with as great a frequency as at any time in the past.

(1) See for example: Kornhauser et al. (1954).

(c)   A third prediction was that there would be no decentralization of responsibility for industrial relations from the Personnel Department to other departments.   This is to say that all major negotiations would continue to take place under the auspices of the Personnel Department.   The reasons for making this prediction were:

(i)   The Personnel Department members had dealt 'successfully' with the strike in 1970, and there would be no pressure upon them to relinquish any of their authority over industrial relations practice within the Firm.   Conversely, a poor record from management's viewpoint in industrial relations might have led to pressure from other departments for the Personnel Department to abrogate some of its control over, and responsibility for, industrial relations practice within the Firm.

(ii)   The Personnel Department existed in a Firm which placed a premium upon technical knowledge and skills relating to the production process.[1] In order to maintain their type of expertise in personnel matters, the Personnel Department would be prepared to resist any moves to take their role as guardians of industrial relations within the Firm away from them.[2]   Power or control is rarely relinquished easily.

(1)   Woodward (1965) notes that line managers are technical specialists in the production process.

(2)   Legge (1975) considers problems of authority, professionalism and credibility for personnel specialists as well as modes of adaption to their dilemmas.   One respondent in this study commented upon erosion of the line manager's role in the context of an advisory role for personnel staff.

(d)   A fourth prediction made was that moves towards independent organization in the form of trade unionism among: a) foremen, and b) white-collar employees would be further advanced than during the earlier study in 1970. The reasons for making such a prediction were:

> (i)   Accelerating growth of white-collar trade unions in Britain in the 1970's[1] in terms of size; increasing preparedness of these bodies to take industrial action[2] to achieve aims which receive national and often heavy media coverage to enhance the effects of such action; and moves towards affiliation of white-collar organizations to the Trade Union Congress.[3]

> (ii) The general high regard, or at least grudging respect, accorded by many managers and white-collar workers for the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, the union appropriate for many foremen, junior managers and scientists throughout the private sector of British industry who wish to become unionised. During the early 1970's, this trade union was expanding rapidly and achieving many advances for its membership.

> (iii) A reason peculiar to this Firm was that foremen and white-collar staff might feel themselves increasingly 'squeezed out' of decision-making processes as a result of increased effectiveness of management/trade union liaison. Hence the possibility of other groups wanting to work towards more effective representation of their interests through agencies autonomous from their employing organization.

(1)   For a review of some of the evidence for this growth, see for example, Bamber (1976).

(2)   See for example: Roberts et al. (1972).

(3)   For example: The National Union of Teachers in 1970: The Association of University Teachers in 1976.

(iv) Possible dissatisfaction by foremen and
white-collar staff with their degree of
dependence upon the Firm as their employer
and arbiter of salaries and working con-
ditions.

(v) The erosion of differentials between manual
and white-collar employees, if this occurred
in the Firm as it did on a national scale.[1]

(vi) Increased responsibility given to trade unions
and their representatives in the Firm at the
possible expense of responsibility being
given to foremen, and white-collar employees
through their representatives.

(vii) Absence of any improvement in Production
Under Managers' responsibility/authority ratio,
if none had taken place in the years since the
first study when dissatisfaction had been
expressed on this issue.

Some of the reasons outlined above for moves towards staff

unionisation would be dependent upon certain events during

the years between the two studies. For example, at the time

of the earlier study, the directors were providing increased

independence to the Firm's Staff Association by allowing

members to elect a number of their Committee, compared with

an earlier time when the Committee had been appointed by the

Board of Directors. The progress of policies such as this

would be expected to have some effect upon moves towards staff

unionisation on an independent basis. Other influencing

factors might be external to the Firm.

(1) See for example, *The Sunday Times*, 1st February 1976.

For example, if the Staff Association had registered under
the Industrial Relations Act of 1971,[1] this may have had
some temporary effect in forestalling possible moves towards
unionisation of staff employees.

These examples indicate only two of the possible influences,
one each from inside and outside the environment of the Firm,
which could operate to affect the prediction forwarded
concerning staff unionism.

(e)   The final prediction made before the start of the
follow-up study was that greater flexibility would be built
into the job evaluation system operated by the Firm.   One
of the reasons for this was the increased co-operation between
all parties already noted.   Two further reasons were:

> (i)   The inflationary pressures operating in the
> early 1970's.   These were such as to ensure
> that differentials between groups of employees
> would be on a continuously moving 'treadmill',
> meaning that probably all groups would increas-
> ingly be in positions when they could point to
> times when they were relatively better off.   It
> could be assumed that no employing organization
> would be exempt from experiencing effects of such
> pressures.
>
> (ii)   The system of jobs, work-loads and skills required
> of those employed within the Firm would be
> unlikely to remain static for an indefinite period.

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(1)   This would be unlikely unless the Staff Association could have
shown itself to be autonomous from its members' employing
organization.   The 1971 Act was repealed, and replaced by
the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act in 1974.

The five predictions made in this section would be subject
to testing in the follow-up study to be described in the
next sections of this chapter.   One element in the design
would if possible need to be controlled for, and that would
be the possible influence of the report written on the
earlier research, and distributed to representatives of
parties at the Firm.   There would perhaps remain the
possibility that separating out the course which would have
been taken by events without the report and feed-back session
with representatives of the parties, from that taken as a
result of the intervention of the report and feed-back session,
would be a task of theoretical desirability, although of
empirical impossibility.   Thus, anything contained in the
report which might have had significance for anyone in the
Firm who read it, cannot be discounted as a source of
influence upon events.   It is however unlikely that the
report would have been a major source of influence upon the
behaviour of participants in the study.   Events themselves
would be more likely to be a continuous source of behaviour
innervation, and in this context, the report would be seen
as one event among many.   Besides this, there were no
recommendations, predictions or suggestions for future action
specifically made in the report, for none of these constituted
any part of its function.

Although the earlier study had not in any way been action
research, there were passages in the report which could have
been construed as commentary or even criticism of certain
aspects of the working of the organization, and which could
on this basis have provided part of an actor's motivation to
seek change.

The ability of an outsider through research study to influence events in an organization, for example through 'self-fulfilling prophesies' should not be over-estimated, particularly when the intention is to influence the course of events to a minimum necessary to conduct the research. The possible role of the earlier research and report arising from it as agents of change were investigated in the follow-up study, the methodology of which is described in the next section.

2. Methodology

The first question which required answering was: would respondents from an earlier research project agree to take part in a follow-up study of the type envisaged? Following an approach to a senior director, parties agreed that a follow-up study could take place in the form of interviews with individuals who now played key roles in industrial relations and/or who played key roles during the 1970 strike.

Because of the different roles played by respondents, the same questions could not be asked of all those who were to be interviewed. Therefore, three interview schedules were devised which contained as many questions in common as possible. The interview schedules were addressed to three distinct groups:

1. Those who had arrived at the Firm within the previous six years (and who were therefore not present during the 1970 strike: called here Rl's).

2. Those who were at the Firm in 1970,
   but who were not closely involved with
   the earlier research study, or were not
   well-known to the researcher (R2's).

3. Those who were closely involved with
   the research undertaken in 1970 (R3's).

Of those questioned in 1976, three were interviewed according to the first schedule, thirteen according to the second schedule, and ten according to the third schedule, giving a total of twenty-six interviews. Many respondents held a similar position to that which they occupied in 1970, while others had relinquished their earlier roles for various reasons. Wherever possible, both past and present incumbents of roles which were important to industrial relations were interviewed. Altogether twelve members of staff or management were interviewed, nine past or present trade union representatives and five foremen (one ex-trade union representative had been promoted to foreman since the earlier study).

Because of the limited time available, it was not possible to interview all those who had played key roles in industrial relations in 1970. In order to attempt to sample from a wider range of views therefore, two questionnaire schedules were devised, shorter than, but based upon important questions from the interview schedules. These were designed specifically for distribution to: a) directors, and b) shop stewards. Questionnaire contents were agreed with appropriate representatives of management and trade unions and distributed via these parties.

Of five questionnaires sent to directors, three were returned completed. Of twenty-five distributed to shop stewards who were not interviewed, only one was returned. Because of the relatively small number of questionnaires returned, it was decided to analyse these along with the interview data.

Other sources of data used were:

(i)   Study of documents made available to the
      researcher, for example those containing
      detailed industrial relations procedures
      within the Firm, and a written summary
      of the earlier research report prepared
      by a manager.

(ii) Informal discussions with representatives
      of all parties on past and present events
      at the Firm.

3.   Data Analysis

Although the three interview schedules differed slightly for the three respondent 'types', whenever possible the same questions were asked of all those interviewed. The questions covered five areas:

(i)   views of research in general and of my
       previous research at the Firm in particular;
(ii)   knowledge of, and views about the research
       report written in 1971;
(iii) recall of events from six years previously;
(iv)   views of various aspects of industrial
       relations at the Firm;
(v)   miscellaneous questions.

For the purpose of this analysis, data on each of these sections will be dealt with in turn. No individual respondent's identity is revealed, and the status of any individual making a contribution which is referred to is only clarified where this is necessary to make sense of what is said.[1] Where questions asked of respondents are quoted in the analysis, details of the follow-up questions and probes are not given as these varied between different respondents, depending upon their replies.

3. 1   Views of Research

R1's were asked: (two shop stewards, one manager)

> "Did you know of the research project I was doing
> at...(the Firm) some five or six years ago?"

One (manager) had heard of the research and had read the summary report.   (See page 245 for details of this summary).

R2's were asked: (seven managers, four shop stewards, two foremen)

> "Did you know about the research project I was
> doing (five or six years ago)?"

> (if 'yes')   "How did you first hear about it?"

Two (managers) said that they did not know about the research project.   The rest said they had heard of the research project.

R3's were asked: (four managers, three shop stewards, three foremen (one ex-steward))

> "Can you remember how you first heard about the
> research project I was doing at that time?"

> (five or six years ago).

A similar question appeared on both questionnaires.

(1)   Quoted passages from interviews are intended to be representative of responses to the questions under discussion. In this chapter, words or sentences appearing in double quotation marks thus: " " are attributable to the spoken word.

Replies to this question indicated that the Personnel Department, or a member of that Department was the most frequent source of information about the research project (eight respondents indicated this source). This was followed by: union (or shop steward) (four), direct from the researcher (four), from the researcher sitting in on meetings (three), saw the original correspondence (two), foreman (two), Board Meeting, Works Committee, "grapevine" (one each). The diversity of information sources to some extent reflects the selection of respondents interviewed, although it does also indicate the variety of sources from which respondents heard of the research project. Some respondents gave two or three different sources.

No further questions on the earlier research were asked of R1's. Those R2's who had heard of the research were asked:

"What were your impressions of what I was doing?" R3's were asked a similar question, and the answers were analysed together. A variety of responses to this question were elicited, with some people again giving more than one answer. Five claimed that they could not recall their impressions at that time clearly, although nevertheless tried to assess what these were. Four mentioned aspects of industrial relations, one sitting in on meetings and three mentioned the report. Two thought it a student project, two to look at the dispute (accidentally), and there were a few 'non-specific' responses such as "having a job to do". Two thought I was getting an "outsider's view". There were three responses which suggested impressions that I was wasting my time at first, although an equal number indicated that the end result had been beneficial to those within the organization in some way.

R2's and R3's were asked as appropriate:

> "Are there any things in particular about my
> research which stand out at all in your memory?"

Replies to this question fell under two main headings excluding three respondents who considered that their recall was poor. It was difficult to code the variety of replies given to this question, but at least a third of those answering made some reference to my behaviour during the research. For example, one respondent noted the way in which I was able to go from one "beleaguered camp" to another during the dispute without creating apprehension among participants. Three others merely stated that it was a "good exercise", carried out in a "satisfactory way", and that it was "done properly", as a case study and not held up as a model for industry generally. Another remarked that I had become well accepted and another that this acceptance process took two months, noting that there had been suspicion at first.[1] One mentioned that I had been able to convince people that I would not pass on information, adding that he didn't think at first this would be possible (i.e. to convince people so). Another noted the slight embarrassment of having an outsider observe disagreements. A couple more simply remembered meeting me, one adding that he never saw the results.[2]

(1) This corresponds with the time period for acceptance as seen by the participant observer, and recorded in Chapter 1.

(2) i.e. the report presented to parties at the Firm in 1971. This is dealt with under 3. ii .

Mention of the report was the second main heading of replies
to this question.   Two more respondents indicated that they
had not seen the report, one saying that he had asked to see
it.   Four expressed positive views of the report as a "good
thing", "done very well", and "a fairly accurate picture of
what happened in the Factory".   One manager thought the
report lacked objectivity and was biased towards a view of
the organization held by the Personnel Department.   Another
thought the report interesting and amusing in places, knowing
the set-up and personalities involved.

R2's and R3's were asked, where appropriate:

    "Did you hear other people discussing the research
     I was doing at any time?"

Four respondents answered "no" to this question and two report-
ed that they could not remember clearly enough to say.   The
rest who answered this question all answered in the affirmative,
although a few by their replies were evidently referring to the
report I wrote rather than to the research fieldwork as such.
A few commented upon the small amount of publicity the report
had received.   Other responses indicated that people asked
who I was and what I was doing, that there were a handful of
objectors, and that as far as one group was concerned: "...you
were seen as a shrewd cookie!"

Respondents further indicated that the research had been dis-
cussed at managers', foremen and shop stewards' meetings.

Following this question, the same respondents were asked:

> "More specifically, did you at any time hear
> any rumours about me or about what I was doing
> which you later found to be incorrect?"

Fifteen of the twenty-two replying to this question did so
in the negative, although one of these indicated that there
were a few people who viewed my work with suspicion. Another
said that the sort of work I was doing was not unusual
around the Factory, but that mine was unique among "student
projects" because of it being done at a "troubled time".
One respondent could not remember hearing any rumours, while
the remaining five indicated that they had heard some form
of rumour as to the nature of my work. Two were not very
specific as to the content of such rumours, but the other
three indicated that there were people who suspected that
I was instrumental in carrying out, or collecting infor-
mation for, various aspects of management policy.[1]
There was no suggestion that such rumours had any degree
of permanence.

R3's were asked:

> "Were doubts ever expressed to your hearing that
> any of the information I collected was not being
> kept confidential?"

Nine of the ten respondents gave categorical "no" answers
to this direct question. One answered that he had heard
such doubts expressed. Probing revealed a context whereby
it was felt that I had not been doing the research "for fun",
but had been trying to "pick people's brains" for management.

_____

(1)   See Appendix note 37 for experiences of other fieldworkers of
      this problem.

A follow-up question was put to this respondent to ask how such doubts could have been refuted at the time, if at all. The reply was that they could not because they were peoples' ideas and such people would be hard to persuade otherwise.

R3's were asked two complementary questions concerning the division of my time during fieldwork:

"Do you think that I spent too much time with any group or individual during my research?"

and:

"Do you think that I spent too little time with any group or individual during my research?"

To the first question, four answered "no", and three replied that they did not know. One answered that he was not aware of how much time I spent with others anyway and another referred the question back to me, declining to answer it himself. One respondent said that up to a point I did spend too much time with others, but that this had not been entirely my fault. On being asked a supplementary question as to whether this could have biased the way in which I saw things, he replied that I could get the information required in any case.

A number of people replied to the second question in the same, or very similar fashion to the way they had answered the first, presumably seeing them as different aspects of the 'same' question. Thus, five answered "no", one using his own group as a reference point by indicating that he was satisfied with the amount of time I had spent with them, and that I could have spent more if I had wanted. Another used the written report as a reference point in reply to this question, indicating his opinion that there were no obvious omissions.

One respondent again replied that he did not know how I had allotted my time anyway, and another once more referred the question back to me as being the "best" judge of the issue. Two more did not know, and one replied "yes", referring back to his answer to the previous question.

R3's were asked:

> "Do you think I was ever aligned with any party
> (group or individual) by any other party in the
> Firm during my research here?"

To this question, seven respondents out of the ten answered "no" and one replied "don't know", adding that his group saw me as much as other groups. A few of those answering "no" did qualify their responses, one for example stating that his impression, rightly or wrongly, was that I was of left-wing persuasion because of my connection with the London School of Economics. One thought that while I had not been aligned with the Personnel Department, the members of this Department had influenced my view of events to a greater degree than other departments. Another thought that initially I had been aligned with management because of being introduced by them, implying that this perceived alignment had not persisted over time. He thought the effect would have been the same if I had been introduced via the unions.

R3's were next asked:

> "Do you think our relationship (between researcher
> and respondent) changed at all during the time I
> spent at the Firm?"

Most of the replies to this question were to the effect that the relationship between the researcher and the respondent in question had not changed (for the worse) or had improved through the research period. For example, some said that the relationship between themselves and the researcher: "got friendlier", and "became closer as (time) went on". One reported that he thought I had put him under increasing pressure, and two revealed that they had had some initial apprehension about the fieldwork, but that this was dissipated over time.

R3's were then asked:

> "Were there any aspects of my role or behaviour
> which you found particularly difficult to accept
> during my research?"

Eight of the ten respondents said "no", and another did not give a specific answer to this question. Of those saying "no", one pointed out that if there had been any aspect of my role which he found difficult to accept, he would have pointed this out at the time. Another said that he did not like some of the "criticisms" (in the report?) at first, but later saw the point of these.

The one respondent who replied "yes" to this question, said he felt a bit nervous with a stranger about at the time of the dispute because of the action that might be taken by various parties.

R3's were next asked:

> "Were there any personal attributes which I
> had at that time which you think could have
> affected the research I was doing?"

Six replied "no" to this question, perhaps interpreting it as
asking if there were any *negative* attributes I had.   Half the
respondents answering this question made some qualifying remarks.
Four indicated positive sentiments in respect of the manner in
which the fieldwork was conducted.   One pointed out that there
were things which I *could* have done to reduce my acceptability
such as being more than a passive observer or by carrying
messages.   Another noted that if I had been "pushy", co-oper-
ation would not have been given so readily, and it was said
that people were speaking freely in front of me and that I was
a "good listener" - the respondent adding that this was neces-
sary to get "the facts".   Three said that there were others
who at some time or another expressed negative sentiments about
my role, although one pointed out that these were held by people
who did not meet me, and another that these were nothing to do
with me as a person.   The negative sentiments expressed were:
upsetting members of another group, being seen as a nuisance,
and being seen as put there by the Company (management), to
further a particular aspect of unwanted policy.

The successor to this question to R3's was:

> "What personal characteristics do you think would
> be generally desirable for individuals doing this
> type of research, from the point of view of the
> people being studied?"

A large number of separately identifiable characteristics were given in reply to this question, each respondent answering it giving an average of over three 'characteristics'. These could be divided into four categories. The smallest of these was a 'negative' category containing responses indicating what a field-researcher should *not* be like. The remaining responses could be divided into three different types of skills required by the field-researcher: social, professional, and cognitive skills. In the analysis of responses, it was sometimes difficult to make a distinction between what were 'social' skills and what were 'professional' skills. However, examples from each of these categories of responses are given below:

<u>Negative</u> - what a field-researcher should not be:

> pushy (come back another day if necessary),
> bureaucratic, abrasive, over-opinionated,
> dogmatic.

<u>Social skills</u> required of a field-researcher:

> talk easily and freely to people,
> be someone to whom others will talk freely,
> be a good listener,
> put people at ease,
> be friendly,
> have a pleasant approach,
> have 'acceptable' personality that people will like in time,
> be 'presentable' (not have a beard, long hair, etc.) (1)
> conform to standards of group(s) studied.

<u>Professional skills</u> required of a field-researcher:

> be tactful and discrete,
> keep in the background,
> keep your own views out of the picture (or people consider you biased)

(1) These manifestations of 'presentability' were mentioned by one respondent.

> not be biased to one group,
>
> be someone in whom people have confidence,
>
> require industrial relations experience,
> i.e. be 'blooded' in some way,
>
> know your job,
>
> be very clear as to your objectives and
> how to achieve them,
>
> don't get upset.

<u>Cognitive skills</u> required of a field-researcher:

> understanding, strong-mindedness, patience,
> "really know people".

The above examples of the characteristics required of a field-researcher according to a number of respondents themselves the subject of study, represent the major part of the range of responses. A few respondents made (positive) allusions to the researcher in this study in connection with these characteristics, but otherwise all comment could be subsumed under one of the above headings.[1]

R3's were asked two similar questions:

> "Did you personally ever experience any embarrassment or discomfort as a result of my presence as a researcher?"

and:

> "Do you know or suspect if anyone else experienced embarrassment or discomfort as a result of my presence as a researcher?"

The answers to these questions by the ten respondents were almost unanimous, with nine answering "no" to the first question, and nine answering "no" or "don't know" to the second question.

(1) Response material analysed here might usefully be related to findings of Richardson (1965), on personality characteristics of fieldworkers. These are discussed in Appendix note 42.

One indicated that amongst members of his group there had
been some reluctance to talk as freely as they had done before
my arrival, at least in the early stages of the research.
The respondent answering in the affirmative to the second
question also indicated that he always felt members of this
same group showed embarrassment when in my presence.[1]

In an attempt to ensure that maximum information on respondents'
perceptions of the fieldwork had been elicited, a final question
on this was asked of R3's:

"Are there any other aspects of my research as such
that you feel are important that we have not covered?"

Half of those asked said they had no further comments on the
research. Three took this opportunity to mention the report,
pre-empting some of the questions in the next section. One
pointed out that I had missed out on the growth and nurturing
of the Joint Union Negotiating Committee (JUNC). Another
made reference to "class distinctions" within the Firm, explain-
ing that he would like to see research into this topic. He
specifically mentioned the continuation of eating arrangements
whereby employees still used four or five different dining
rooms, remarking upon the success of a six-month experiment
when senior staff and manual employees had eaten in the same
dining area.

Of the three respondents who made reference to the report, one
said that he did not know what happened afterwards, saying that
he expected it had been filed in a drawer and he wondered what
it was all about in the first place.

(1)   i.e. respondents from different parties identified the same party in
       this way.

Another indicated that he had been surprised at reading certain items contained in the report, and that these were things he had not realized until pointed out by a stranger. Another considered it "fascinating" from the point of view of the party of which he was a member to read my account of various other parties' views on their role.

The final question on research was a general one, and was asked in two parts to all interview and questionnaire respondents. This question was:

> "If a research team from a university requested access
>   to this, or another organization in which you were
>   working in the future, what would be your personal
>   reaction to such a request?"
>   and:
> "What safeguards would you insist upon?"

Replies of trade union and management/foremen respondents to this question were examined separately at first. There appeared to be no major differences between essential contents of their replies to this question, which generally prompted more comment than many of its predecessors. All the replies were therefore considered together. A range of views on the issue of reactions to an imaginary request to do research was evident, and around half those questioned made more than one point in reply to the first part of the question. The replies to this are considered first.

Ten respondents indicated that they would welcome a request for research access, adding comments such as:

> "so long as (we) had a report on the research";
>
> "provided (the researcher(s) had) industrial relations experience";
>
> "no harm from research at all";
>
> "consultants...much the same..got to do research before (giving) advice";
>
> "better to understand and talk about it".

A further thirteen respondents indicated general favourability towards the imaginery research request, but less strongly than those comprising the first group.   Examples of their comments were:

> "like to know what basis of research was, then open mind...no objection if for some purpose";
>
> "no objections...(it) can pay to have an outsider look at the organization";
>
> "subject to investigating the person doing the research and (the) subject to be researched... pre-disposed to saying 'yes'";
>
> "subject to rules of confidentiality, OK";
>
> "wouldn't resist it";
>
> "never be against research of any kind if unbiased";
>
> "wouldn't bother me";
>
> "if worth doing, then in favour";
>
> "if all sides happy, then can do nothing but good".

One respondent indicated that over the years a number of researchers had visited the Firm in some capacity or another.

The eight remaining replies to this question suggested a certain amount of apprehension about such a request, or indicated that certain conditions would have to be met prior to acceptance.   Some replies were:

"caution";

"reserved";

"depends what they wanted access to";

"consider the proposition seriously";

"would consider it only if industrial relations were in a reasonable state";

"want to know a lot about it...need to be reassured that it would have minimal impact on the workings of the organization...would judge each on its merits".

While no respondent said he would resist a request for access to do research, among the replies of all groups, there was much qualifying comment.   This included:

"first question would be, why?";

"if it was kept confidential with no report back, would say 'no'";

"look at circumstances...if busy, organizations's purpose comes first";

"want to know what it's in aid of and what it's intended to do";

"keep along guidelines";

"subject to terms of reference...not be disruptive of management/union relations...primary requirement (of firm is) to produce product";

"if reservations from any section, can cause problems".

The next question asked about what safeguards respondents would insist upon.   Once again, a wide range of responses was obtained, with nearly all respondents listing at least two conditions to be fulfilled before they would agree that research could take place.   Many of these mirrored replies to the first question.   Because of the amount of comment given in reply the question on safeguards, it was possible to code the material a little more systematically than in earlier questions.   Table 5.1 summarizes the important points made.

TABLE 5.1   Replies to question: "What safeguards would you
              insist upon?" (for university research access to
              your organization).   N = 30

Safeguard insisted upon	Number of times mentioned
1. Thorough briefing and prior agreement by all parties on contacts, purpose, methods and objectives of research	11
2. Security, confidentiality, discretion	11
3. Be able to vet report prior to publication	8
4. Wouldn't interfere with organization	4
5. Anonymity (in report)	4
6. Impartiality, no bias	3
7. Cover field thoroughly, wide terms of reference	2
8. Depends on circumstances	2
9. Ensure researcher has competence to do a good job	1
10. Word 'conflict' should not be in title	1
11. No safeguards in principle, assume all doors open	3
TOTAL	50

Table 5.1 indicates clearly the priorities for safeguards in research access as seen by these respondents, and could be used as guide to researchers intending to approach organizations.[1]   Besides the details given above, one respondent said that if they had "known" about the strike beforehand, they might not have said "yes" to the research, although he added that it had made no difference in the event.   Referring to the same research, another respondent said that: "once in a lifetime had been enough".

(1)   It is interesting to compare replies to this question on safeguards, with reasons given by firms for refusal to co-operate in a survey on Workplace Industrial Relations conducted by the Office of Population and Census Surveys in 1972.   These included: "re-organization of industrial relations procedures, too busy, fear of survey disrupting employee relations, recently participated in other surveys, and re-organizing the firm". (Op.cit. pA2).   It would seem from this evidence that reasons for refusal to co-operate in research may be based upon fear of disruption to the organization to a great extent, whereas once an organization has agreed to participate in research, its main concerns are likely to be with issues of what the research will entail, confidentiality of findings, and some control over dissemination of these.

Summary of responses to questions on research

Inevitably, most of the detailed questions about the research conducted six years previously were asked of those who were closely involved at that time (R3's).[1]   Responses to these questions provide valuable material because they relate much about respondents' views of research and researchers which is based upon their direct experience.   From replies of different respondents, it was apparent that researchers were often to be seen about the Factory and its environs.   Responses suggest that respondents' overall impressions of research were favourable, and while some had reservations about the conduct of research, these were clearly stated.

Inspection of replies to the questions on research did not reveal any obvious differences between responses given by different groups (managers, shop stewards, foremen), although in most cases sample sizes were too small for meaningful separate analysis.

A number of specific issues raised in the context of these responses are considered in other chapters.   The desirability of entry via trade unions as well as management was mentioned at the end of Chapter 4.

(1)   A few questions orginally drawn up were not asked of all respondents because they were unsatisfactory.   Some question responses were analysed but not written up because they provided little useful or interesting material.

There was also confirmation from one respondent for the view stated towards the end of the last chapter that access to the Firm might not have been granted if a strike or any similar action had been 'foreseen' by management. The question remains open regarding possible 'foresight' of the Road Branch and their refusal to co-operate fully with the research. There were a couple of suggestions that at least some respondents felt that the earlier report was biased towards a view of events held by members of the Personnel Department. Issues of bias in this, and other research are considered more extensively in Chapter 7.

3.. ii   The Research Report (1971)

A question put to all interview respondents and also appearing in the shop steward questionnaire was:

"Did you know that I had written a report about
the research I had done at the Firm?"

Table 5.2 shows the number from each group of respondents who knew about the report.

TABLE 5.2   Answers to question: "Did you know that I had
written a report about the research I had done
at the Firm?" (from three groups of respondents).
N   =   27.

Respondent Group	Know about report?		
	Yes	No	N
R1 (and one questionnaire)	1	3	4
R2	9*	4	13
R3	10	0	10

* one respondent said he assumed a report had
been the outcome of the research.

Table 5.2 shows that as would be expected all those who had been closely involved in the research knew of the existence of the report. Smaller proportions of the other groups knew of the report.

Those respondents who knew of the existence of the report were asked if they had read it and what their views were on it. Those who had not read the report were asked if they could have read it if they had wanted to.

Of the R3's interviewed, one had not read the report and did not think he could have read it. Six R2's had not read the report, three of whom said they could have read it if they had wanted to, two more did not know if they could have read it and another said that he could not have read it. An R1 who had not read the report said that he could have read it if he had wanted to. The shop steward who returned the questionnaire indicated that he could have read the report, but wasn't informed that it was available.

Of those who had read the report, most expressed positive sentiments towards it, such as that the report was: "good", "well written", "interesting", "covered everything", "accurate", "objective", and "refreshing". A few indic-ated that they were in broad agreement with what was contained in the report, or that they agreed to disagree with specific points made therein. One or two noted the particular usefulness of having an outsider look at the organization, saying: "...it put into words what we couldn't"; "...unusual to see a series of events in

working environment written in a report...".   A few
indicated that it was some time since they had last read
the report and that their memories of its contents were
correspondingly vague, although one considered the report:
"a little naive".   Others indicated that the report was
used on more than one occasion as a consultative document
and not merely shelved and forgotten.   More than one
respondent thought that there were lessons to be learned
from reading of the research.

One manager was detailed by a member of the Board to write
a summary of the report, a copy of which was made available
to the researcher.   The summary, dated September 1972, took
the title of the original report and was faithful in its
description of the findings, although in one place the
opposite of what was said in the original appeared through
what was probably a typographical error when the word 'not'
was omitted.   Some of the summary was in the form of
verbatim passages from the original, while other parts
were re-worded or condensed with much of the terminology
of social science (or 'jargon') eliminated.   One differ-
ence was that in the original report, names which might
identify the Firm were changed, while in the summary some,
but not all, were referred to by their correct names.
Very little additional material was introduced, the main
exception being a reference in the conclusions about
greater delegation of authority by departmental heads to
junior management.   The summary retained the essential
elements of the original report, while being designed for
a different purpose.   The summary report had a more limit-
ed circulation than the longer version, being restricted to

directors, Personnel Department members and a few other managers.

All interview respondents who indicated that they had read the report and could remember its contents were asked the following question:

"Did you learn anything at all from the research report?"

This question also appeared on the directors' questionnaire, and all responses are analysed together. Of sixteen responses to this question, eleven indicated that respondents had learned something from reading the report. Five were classified as 'don't know' replies (e.g. "hard to say", "possibly"). The R1 who had read the report indicated that he learned about the background to the strike. Another respondent said that all graduate trainees were given the report to read, presumably for the same purpose, and that the Padré had used it to help in writing a chapter on industrial conflict for a book.

Three respondents said they had learned something about themselves, the group they belonged to, or their behaviour, which would not otherwise have been brought to their attention. Two said that their views about groups' behaviour and sentiments had been confirmed through reading the report. Six remarked in some way or another on the general tenor of the report. For example:

"...an objective outside view of a situation in which one is involved is often salutory..."

"...interesting snapshot of behind the scenes... criticism of people, system...useful..."

"...fair criticism of ourselves at the time...
do things without thinking...could have done
differently..."

"...see others' point of view...see where
biased against others..."

"...learned unconsciously...reading things I
never thought were happening..."

"...nice to have position made more clear...
realised in words..."

One respondent commented that while the report had been
helpful in planning industrial relations into the current
situation, he was not saying they could not have done with-
out it.

All those who had read the report and could remember its
contents were asked:

"Did reading the report of the research change
any of your attitudes at all?"

Of the fifteen respondents to whom this question was put,
three answered to the effect that reading the research report
had changed their attitudes and three replied that they didn't
know if reading the report had changed their attitudes or
not.   Nine said that reading the report had not changed
their attitudes.   Of those who qualified their replies, a
couple mentioned that the time when the report appeared was
one of great change in the Factory anyway, and these changes
tended to overshadow the report.   A few indicated that read-
ing the report confirmed some of their views rather than
changed them, while of the three who said that reading the
report had changed their attitudes, none could state spec-
ifically in what ways this had occurred.

Interviewees only were asked:

> "Do you know of other people in the Firm who have read
> the report?"

Five of those to whom this question was put said "no", and
a couple more replied "yes" without naming others who they
thought had read the report.   Replies from the others indic-
ated that the report had been read by: all directors and
Personnel Department members, members of the Foreman's (now
Supervisors') Association Committee, managers in the Road
Transport Department, members of the Work Study Department and
senior trade union representatives.   One respondent said that
the report: "was widely read", while another described it as
having a "relatively restricted circulation".   One revealed
that copies of the report had been taken to the main sister
firm in the Company group.

Interviewees who indicated that they knew of others who had
read the report, were asked:

> "Do you know their views on the report?"

Three declined to say what they thought the views of others
might be on the report.   Three more indicated that others'
(some specified) views on the report reflected their own, and
six said that others (sometimes specified) had positive views
on the report.   One respondent thought that others liked the
parts they "came out well in", but not the parts that did not
put them in a good light.

All interviewees who knew of the existence of the report, and directors who received the questionnaire were asked:

"Do you know if the research report has
influenced anyone's behaviour in any way?"

Replies to this question, where they were given beyond a single word answer tended to be guarded, but interesting. Nine respondents said "no", and a further ten replied "don't know". Only two gave affirmative answers indicating that other parties' behaviour had been influenced by the contents of the report and one of these indicated that any such influence was "unconscious" and "in remote ways". One respondent said: "...don't think so...like to think it might have...". Another pointed out that the report made no recommendations, being in the form of an historical document. Three drew the important distinction between the report and the events which it described, indicating that important changes did take place at the time the report was written, but that the effect of the report on these changes was at the most, uncertain. One of these three thought that the report might have served the function of highlighting the changes.

Respondents to the previous question were then asked:

"Do you know if the research report, or any part
of it, has been the subject of any formal
discussions or meetings?"

Fourteen replied, "no" to this question, and a further six said, "don't know", with four replying "yes". Two of those saying, "yes" indicated that they had been involved in discussions of the report within the Firm, and two that discussions had taken place outside the Firm in similar workplaces. In one case a meeting took place with sister firm representatives. Those who indicated that the report had to their knowledge been the subject of formal discussions were either foremen or higher managers.

Interviewees were then asked:

> "Do you know if the research report or any part
> of it, has been discussed or talked about
> informally at any time?"

Like the previous one, this question did not produce an abundance of comment, although the pattern of replies was quite different. Ten respondents said that the report had been discussed informally to their knowledge, seven said that it had not, and five did not know. Among those who replied in the affirmative, the most frequently mentioned discussions took place among shop stewards and also among members of the Foremans' Association Committee.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the 'mirroring' of replies to these two questions concerning formal and informal discussion of the report.

FIGURE 5.1   <u>Summary graph of replies to two questions</u>
              <u>regarding formal and informal discussion</u>
              <u>of the research report</u>
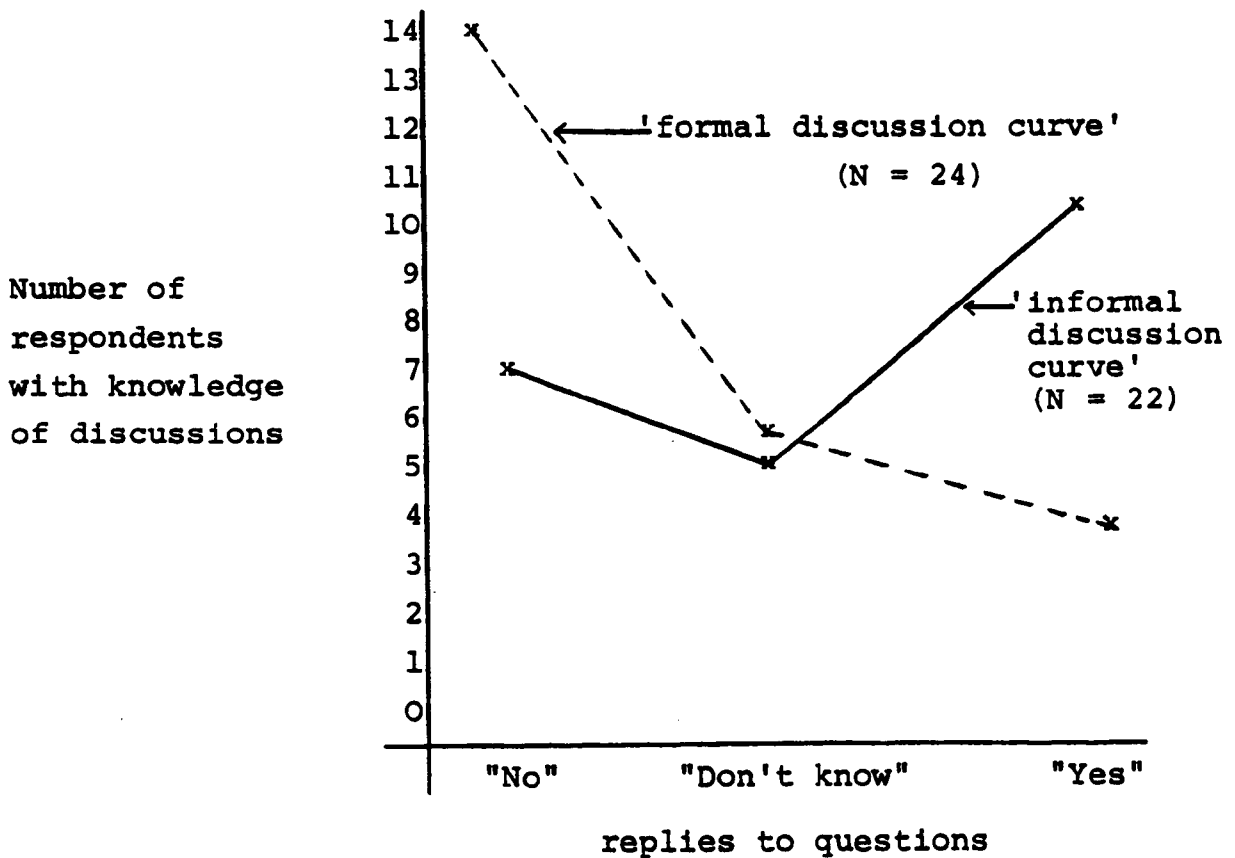
Summary of Replies to Questions on the Research Report
——

Knowledge of the existence of the research report was patchy.
This appeared to be partly dependent upon how closely involved
a particular respondent had been with the original research,
as well as on their current role.

A number of respondents had not read the report, and a few of
these felt that it would be unavailable to them.   Those who
had read the report mostly expressed broadly favourable senti-
ments towards it.

Some two-thirds of those who had read the report said that they had learnt something from it although the report was not a major vehicle for attitude change.

Members of at least eight identifiable parties within the Firm were said by others to have read the report, although by and large respondents felt unable to provide details of views or changes which the report might have instilled in others.

The report had apparently not been the subject of much formal discussion, although meetings of managers and of foremen had been held to consider its contents. A larger amount of informal discussion of the report had seemingly taken place, with shop stewards as well as foremen and managers being involved.

Advance news of the intended follow-up study may have prompted a few respondents to (re)read and discuss parts of the report, although there was little evidence that this had happened. Some respondents who had not read the report announced their intention of obtaining a copy.

3. iii   Recall of Events from Six Years Previously

A question asked of R3's and those replying to questionnaires was:

"What if anything, was important or significant about the time 1970-71, in the history of the Firm?"

Only ten answers to this question were obtained, but these
fell into two broad categories.   Trade unionists mentioned
the state of strained relations between the various groups
and the formation of the Joint Union Negotiating Committee.
Some managers and foremen also mentioned these events.   Other
managers referred to that time as being one of expansion and
relative prosperity (compared with 1976), while it was also
revealed that at that time the organization was:

> "...emerging from a period when management emphasis
> was on technical control, regardless of cost..."

and attempting to:

> "...introduce a more open style of management...".

R1's and R2's were asked 'lead-in' questions about the 1970
strike.   R1's were asked:

> "Do you know about the strike that happened here in
> 1970?"

and R2's were asked:

> "What can you remember about the strike that happened
> here in 1970?"

All the R1's knew about the strike, one from reading the
report.   Another said that it had to do with recognition of
HGV class 1 licences.   The third had heard general comment
from union colleagues.

The question put to R2's brought forth a variety of
comment. Most of these respondents gave short accounts
of their own experience of the strike, and the question
was therefore answered in quite different ways, depending
upon the party to which the respondent belonged. For
example, one manager remembered discussing the movement
of the product out from the Factory by rail with shop
stewards from the Road Branch, and another that members
of one of the Minority Unions would not cross the picket
lines to carry out repair work. Another manager thought
that the Minority Unions had crossed the picket lines (!).
A number of managers and foremen recalled that the union
groups had acted independently, for example that Inside
Branch members remained at work, their stance being
described by one manager as "sitting on the fence" (!).
A couple saw the drivers as a "rule unto themselves".
Another compared the dispute to a "domestic quarrel"
where damage to the other is not considered. He thought
it was:

> "...like walking wounded...in the right leg and
> the left leg getting pleasure in seeing the
> right leg bleed..."

One of the trade unionists considered that it was: "not
the best period in the Firm('s history)", being, "short
but difficult". The trade unionists gave brief resumés
of their positions at the time and each gave reasons for
the stances they had adopted.

One notable feature of this question was that through asking it, information was obtained which had not been available to the researcher during fieldwork at the time of the strike, and had therefore not appeared in the original report. This alone made these interviews particularly valuable. One fact which had not appeared in the report was the absence of the Road Transport Manager, who had gone on a course during the week of the strike and returned to find the strike "settled by the Personnel Department". The Manager of the Department in which the dispute was centred was told that there was no need to remain at work during the time of the strike. This point helps to reinforce the central role of the Personnel Department in handling industrial relations.

The other important aspect of the strike which had been over-looked in the earlier report concerned the involvement of the garage workshops section of the Road Branch. Some 25-strong at that time, they had argued that they too required an HGV licence to do their job and should therefore be included in the drivers' claim which was based largely upon the requirement of holding an HGV licence. The workshops had been included in the original claim which went to dispute to be withdrawn, before being excluded from the claim which resulted in the dispute leading to the strike. The garage workers were part of the Firm's job evaluation scheme at that time, and were bitter about getting nothing for their support of the drivers' claim by losing a weeks wages while on strike. Thus, there were sharp divisions of interest within the Road Branch, where a minority of its members felt they had lost out badly through the dispute, and this went unrecorded in the earlier report.

All interview and questionnaire respondents were asked the question:

"What do you think caused the strike?"

One respondent suggested I read my own report! Five (four R2's and one R3) said they did not know or could not remember. Most of those who suggested causes for the strike, gave a number of these. Because of the relatively large amount of information gathered in response to this question, much of it peculiar to single individuals, only those 'causes' which were mentioned by at least two respondents are considered. The most frequently mentioned 'cause' (given by eight respondents) made reference to union groups at odds with one another, followed by "leap-frogging" or "differentials" (six mentions). These were followed by: "poor communication" or "misrepresentation" and the "job evaluation system then operating" (four each), the"separateness of the Road Transport Department", and the "recognition of skills" (three each) with two mentions each for "weak management" and "one man's power". There did not appear to be a predisposition among any one group of respondents to refer to particular 'causes' of the strike, but then for purposes of analysis, numbers involved were small. Immediately following this question, all were asked:

"How was the strike settled in your view?"

A variety of views were elicited. Again there appeared to be no obvious distinction between answers of managers and those of trade unionists. Length of responses to this question varied from a single word to several hundred words, and as before, only those items which were mentioned twice or more by different respondents are considered here.

Some mentioned two or even more ways in which the strike was settled, and in more than one case, the first two categories were given together as the short- and long-term settlements respectively.   For the short-term, an answer given by seven respondents was that the, "Road Branch got what they asked for", or a monetary settlement was indicated.   The same number saw the dawn of a new system of advisory and negotiation machinery as being the longer-term settlement, with the three union groups being brought together.   Six said that settlement had occurred through "compromise" (in one case, "glorious compromise!") and six more did not know or could not remember how the settlement was arrived at.   Four respondents thought that some form of "give and take" was important in the settle-ment, three made reference to the union inquiry which was prompted by the strike, and two more mentioned the full-time trade union official who had come to speak to the strike meeting which voted on the Road Branch's eventual return to work.   "Trading arrangements" of various kinds between the Personnel Department and the other union groups were also mentioned.

Summary of Replies to Questions on the 1970 Strike

Answers to questions on events at the time of the 1970 strike, to a large extent reflected the subject-material of the earlier report of the fieldwork, although 'new' information was supp-lied by a few respondents.

There were small differences between managers and trade
unionists interviewed in their views of the general state
of affairs in the Firm in 1970. However, when individuals'
experiences during the strike were referred to, there was
as much variation in replies within both management and
trade union parties as between these two groups of respondents.
This reflected the diversity of roles and stances adopted by
the parties during the strike.

With regard to perceived 'causes' and 'settlements' of the
strike, there was much common ground between managers and
trade unionists, and no essential features appeared to separ-
ate their responses to these questions. Thus, the most
frequently mentioned of the 'causes' and 'settlements' showed
considerable correspondence between respondent groups, these
being: the state of relations between the union parties, and
the systems of payment and negotiation. These features of
industrial relations underwent radical change during 1970 and
1971.

3. iv   Industrial relations at the Firm in 1976

The series of questions under this heading were put to all
respondents with the exception of the directors who returned
questionnaires, and one manager who was no longer at the
Firm (i.e. twenty-six respondents). The first pair of
questions were:

"What is your view of job assessment procedures in
this Firm [1] at the present time?"

and:

(1)   The name of the Firm has been omitted from the question as asked.

"Have there been any important changes in job assess-
ment over the last five years?"

The first of these questions, asking about views of job
assessment procedures was complicated by there being three
separate systems operating respectively for: manual employees,
foremen, and staff.   A few respondents made this distinction
in their replies, and talked separately about the different
systems.   Thirteen were able to speak with considerable know-
ledge and personal experience of the various job assessment
schemes, for they were past or present members of job assess-
ment or appeals panels.   Thus, some answers to this question
were quite lengthy in comparison with responses to earlier
questions.   A preliminary analysis was performed on an
'overall' view which each respondent appeared to hold of job
assessment, and whether this was favourable, unfavourable or
expressed both favourable and unfavourable sentiments towards
it.   Table 5.3 summarizes the findings from this question.

TABLE 5.3   Overall Impressions of Job Assessment Procedures

	Shop Stewards	Foreman and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	3	2	8	13
Favourable and unfavourable comment	5	2	2	9
Overall unfavourable view	2	2	0	4

N = 26*

*   This figure excludes the three directors replying by
    questionnaire and one manager who had left the Firm in
    1972.

Although those interviewed were a small proportion of the total numbers in each group within the Firm, there is a distinct pattern to the replies given in Table 5.3. Managers express most approval of job assessment procedures, followed by shop stewards, and finally foremen. One might assume that foremen and shop stewards were mostly referring to the job assessment schemes operating for their respective groups. A response typical of those falling in the category expressing favourable and unfavourable sentiments on job assessment was: that the system had served various groups of employees well enough, but that like any system, there were flaws within it, which created some anomalies. Some said that the present system had a limited remaining life and might be due for a radical overhaul within a few years. Six made specific reference to a dispute arising from the job assessment procedure which involved the jobs of the members of one of the Minority Unions. By agreement this had gone to arbitration, and a report had been written by an independent assessor from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.[1]

Despite is alleged shortcomings, the job assessment procedure was frequently compared favourably with the old job evaluation system which it replaced in 1971/72. Among the other most frequently mentioned of its 'good' points was that the system stabilized wage rates and had reduced these from the number existing under the old job evaluation system. It was also pointed out that it was easier to administer than the old system, while other points which found mention in its favour were that it was participative and that the panel members gave it stability and continuity.

(1) This was not made available to the researcher.

With a job assessment scheme which is dependent upon some form
of comparison between jobs, it is perhaps inevitable, that
what some see as possible advantages of the system, others
could see as disadvantages. However, among the disadvantages
that were mentioned in the context of the job assessment system
currently in operation were: that it produced some injusticies,
it was not flexible enough to respond to (job) market conditions,
it was "slightly inflationary", it closed up differentials too
much, people could "add on" more work to their jobs to increase
their rate of pay, it didn't recognize the value of work, it
didn't recognize loyalty to department and the "ceiling" created
"bottlenecks" in the system where there was little or no room
for groups or individuals to progress their earnings, with
movement particularly restricted in the middle and upper ranges.

In reply to the second question on job assessment, eleven
respondents said that there had been no important changes in the
system since it was introduced, although some of these went on
to indicate that there had been some minor changes to the
system. A number of respondents made reference to reviews
conducted annually on job assessment, and one of an inquiry into
its workings.[1]   Overall however, there appeared to have been
no significant changes in the job assessment system since it
was introduced.

The next questions asked were:

> "What is your view of joint consultation in the Firm
>   at the present time?"
>
> "What of J.C.C.'s[2] in particular?"

(1)   Interviewed a little while after the other respondents.

(2)   Joint Consultative Committees

and:

"Have there been any important changes in joint
consultation over the last five years?"

As in previous cases, the volume of response to these questions
made it expedient to present some of the answers in tabular
form.   Thus, the favourable and unfavourable nature of replies
towards joint consultation in general, and in cases where this
was specifically asked, towards Joint Consultation Committees
(J.C.C.'s) in particular, are given in Tables 5.4 and 5.5.

TABLE 5.4   Overall Impressions of Joint Consultation

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	7	O	5	12
Favourable and unfavourable comment	3	3	5	11
Overall unfavourable view	O	3	O	3

N = 26

TABLE 5.5   Overall Impressions of J.C.C.'s

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	1	O	O	1
Favourable and unfavourable comment	3	2	4	9
Overall unfavourable view	3	1	1	5

N = 15*

* This question was not asked of those who did not participate
  in J.C.C.'s.

Although numbers are small, clear patterns emerge from Tables 5.4 and 5.5. Joint consultation at the Firm on this evidence seems to appeal to managers and shop stewards far more than it does to foremen. On J.C.C.'s, favourable comment from those involved is invariably given together with qualified unfavourable comment, and the balance is towards negative sentiments towards J.C.C.'s by all parties.

There is room to give only a few representative comments. In statements favourable to consultation at the Firm, there was mention among other items of: the joint union advisory and negotiating machinery, the Works Committee, the social and welfare committee with representatives from all parties on it, the importance of participation and consultation being ahead of legislation and internal pressure for these, and talks by senior managers to staff and foremen being well received. Among items referred to unfavourably in respect of consultation were: lack of action following some joint discussions, preference for negotiation over consultation, the low manoeuvrability of the Joint Union Negotiating Committee, lack of contact with shop floor workers due to shop stewards' role, and foremen and staff being squeezed out by the consultation structure because of their predominantly non-union status.

There were relatively few statements expressing approval of J.C.C.'s, but those that were given included: they were a useful "safety valve", they kept foremen on their toes, men got a chance to air grievances, and in smaller departments where all could attend they helped to foster a team spirit.

Comment against J.C.C.'s included suggestions that they were:
"not very important", "behind the times", "toothless", or
"...in theory excellent, in practice...don't always achieve
what they should achieve...". They were also criticised on
the grounds that: foremen and managers did not take them
seriously, their effectiveness depended upon the individuals
involved in them, shop stewards used them for bringing up
complaints and that much of the material raised there could
be dealt with at shop floor level. It appeared that one aspect
of joint consultation might emerge for either favourable or
unfavourable comment, depending upon an individual's view of
the practice concerned.

In reply to the question on changes in joint consultation over
the last five years, nearly all respondents indicated that there
had been some changes, even if these were seen as minor.
The range of changes mentioned was quite considerable, and
reflected the variety of roles which those questioned had
within the Firm. Together, they indicated that there had been
considerable changes in joint consultation over recent years,
and almost without exception these changes appeared to be seen
in a favourable light by those who made reference to them.
A few lamented that the changes had not yet proceeded far
enough, and a couple remarked that J.C.C.'s had not progressed
over the last five years. One respondent pointed out that
J.C.C.'s were now getting onto a regular footing in one depart-
ment which previously held only infrequent meetings. Another
noted that the unions decided some five years ago that their
representatives on J.C.C.'s should always be shop stewards.

One pointed to closer relations between unions and staff and unions and foremen, although one foreman was unhappy that this group were still not able to discuss a range of issues with trade union representatives. Improved relations between foremen and staff were mentioned, as was the strengthening of the Staff Association, whose executive was now fully elected, but retaining frequent and direct access to the Board. The format of the Managing Director's talks to various groups had reputedly come to be based more upon events within the Firm than upon Company-wide happenings.

A number of respondents made reference to the new joint union advisory and negotiating structures and the various benefits that this had brought, such as the reduction of "leap-frogging" claims, the inclusion of a representative from a sister plant in the North-West, and the holding of regular meetings with the Personnel Department to forestall problems. One respondent made reference to the extended role of the Personnel Department. For other departments, effectiveness of particular committees or increased frequency of meetings to deal with issues concerning employees, perhaps leading to more local agreements, leaving larger agreements to be dealt with by the Personnel Department and joint union machinery, were pointed out. Some thought that in a few areas, management was exposed to a greater degree than previously, and that there had been an extension in the range of items for discussion between Company and employee representatives. These included: pensions, appraisal, sickness, budgets, welfare, future plans, and procedures for new working methods or practices.

There were some indications that such a list would be extended
in due course.   Most respondents reported that there had been
changes in consultation over the last five years and that
these had generally operated to the benefit of parties within
the organization.

The next question asked was:

"What is your view of the negotiating machinery
in the Firm at the present time?"

Table 5.6 indicates that although there was unfavourable comment
on negotiating arrangements,the overall balance was favourable.

TABLE 5.6   Overall Impressions of Negotiating Machinery

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	6	2	4	12
Favourable and unfavourable comment	4	2	5	11
Overall unfavourable view	O	2	1	3

N = 26

The major disadvantage of the negotiating arrangements seen by
those who expressed reservations, was that it concentrated
decision-making into the hands of a few individuals on both
sides of the negotiating table.   This view was variously
expressed by respondents from parties at all levels within the
organization.   There were other adverse comments on existing
negotiating machinery, such as that foremen had a poor deal,but
'negative' remarks were peripheral to, or supportive of,
the major criticism of 'concentration' noted above.

Most comments were favourable.   A few simply said that
negotiating arrangements were: "very good" etc. and a few
more compared the negotiating structure favourably with that
seen to be operating in other firms.   Another comparison made
was with the previous set-up, one respondent expressing it:
"...out of the heat of the strike, JUNC was welded...".   The
bulk of the favourable comments were directed at the operation
of the Joint Union Negotiating (and Advisory) Committees.
Shop stewards and managers in particular, noted advantages for
their own position as well as seeing advantages to the other
side through this system.   Among those noted were: credibility
of representation, status, unity, strength, authority, recog-
nition, and respect for trade unions.   Advantages for
management included: dealing with one representative body,
consistency, efficiency in dealing with issues, given a breath-
ing space, only seeing outside union officials socially, and
maintaining good relations (all parties).   A few managers
pointed to the two-tier negotiating structure whereby important
issues such as pay negotiations were conducted at senior level
involving JUNC and the Personnel Department, and each depart-
ment was left free to settle its own problems and difficulties,
for instance at 'man/foreman' level.   One manager thought the
arrangements took the onus of causing a strike from managers
or supervisors.   These views contrast interestingly with the
comment noted in the paragraph above concerning alleged dis-
satisfaction in some quarters about centralisation of decision-
making.   Different parties expressed varying viewpoints about
the 'same' aspects of the negotiating machinery.

Comments on the operation of negotiating machinery for staff
and foremen, who were frequently involved jointly in negotiations
were also favourable on balance.   One point of view was that the
Staff Association had strength, sophistication and efficiency
in its operation.

The following question asked:

> "Have there been any important changes in the
> negotiating machinery over the last five years?"

A few respondents thought there had been no important changes.
Most however, mentioned at least one change.   The joint union
negotiating and advisory arrangements were again mentioned in
the context of change as were achievements which had followed
from their institution.   These included: overall recognition
and acceptance of the scheme (among shop floor workers?) and
what one respondent referred to as "subtle changes" involving
the lessening of distrust between unions and management leading
to more positive results and less "beating about the bush" than
previously.   Within the Firm, the most recent change in
personnel on the JUNC had been two years previously when a
new Road Branch Chairman had been elected to represent that
party.   On the JUAC, a representative from the North-West
Plant had been attending for the last five years.   This repres-
entative had changed two years previously.   He also attended
JUNC meetings when wages and other important issues were the
subject of discussion.   There had also been agreement to extend
the disputes procedure to include access to the Advisory, Con-
ciliation and Arbitration Service if required.   Two disputes
had recently led to this extension, one in the Road Transport
Department and the other involving work of one of the Minority
Unions' members.

Changes in the Staff Association were also remarked upon.
It was noted for example, that through constitutional
changes they now had full rights on negotiating all their
conditions of employment, as well as a large say in pensions
and other issues.   They were involved in new areas and their
Association had developed, especially under talks about staff
effectiveness.   This latter item was also held to be respon-
sible for a change in the supervisor's role.   One respondent
explained that foremen were now more tied to their desks and
perhaps working longer hours.   Another indicated that foremen
were concerned with obtaining further changes to improve their
position under statutory certification arrangements.   One
remarked upon a change in productivity bargaining whereby pay
was given for productivity achieved rather than anticipated.
Finally, one manager noted that in his department, there had
been an increase in credibility of line management who it was
explained now "won 50% of their battles", when before they won
none.   A more formalized structure had come about, resulting
in management taking a more dominant role and being more ready
to deal with their own problems.

The next pair of questions enquired more specifically:

> "What is your view of the grievance and disputes
> machinery in the Firm at the present time?"

and:

> "Have there been any important changes in the
> grievance or disputes machinery over the last
> five years?"

Table 5.7 gives some idea of respondents' general feelings about grievance and disputes machinery.

TABLE 5.7   Overall Impressions of Grievance and Disputes' Machinery

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	7	4	6	17
Favourable and unfavourable comment	3	1	4	8
Overall unfavourable view	O	1	O	1

N = 26

Findings summarized in Table 5.7 show that to an even greater extent than was the case with negotiating machinery in general, respondents reported favourable reactions to the grievance and disputes machinery.   There was less additional comment in response to this question.   A few outlined the procedures operating, some described its operation in particular past disputes and in such cases it was compared favourably with that operating in other places.   Among other advantages noted were that it: was clearly laid out, allowed room for manoeuvre, centralized management and union decision-making structures, kept people talking, was well understood, disputes were settled, and it allowed for extension of the 21-day limit.

Unfavourable comment in respect of the grievance and disputes machinery indicated that improvements could be made in the system for it did not operate equally well in all areas, access to management in the later stages was not always adequate, there was insufficient understanding of the procedures by some people, and a shop steward initiating a dispute could lose touch with its progress. One respondent saw the need to go outside to A.C.A.S. on two occasions as an indication that the procedure was not as good as it should have been, and another thought that the system didn't achieve the objective of avoiding disputes, but allowed them to be created, although he had no complaints about the operation of the machinery. A general feeling was that the system had proved to be effective for the shop floor, and that if invoked for staff, disputes procedure would be similarly effective. The system allegedly worked adequately for foremen, who were hoping to extend their procedure to include an appeals system.

Little additional comment was forthcoming in reply to the question on changes in the grievance and disputes machinery. Nine respondents said that there had been no important changes since the new arrangements had been in operation. Some commented upon particular aspects of the functioning of these. For example, one gave details of the loss of bonus for a group as a result of a dispute. Others mentioned that: there had been steady improvements since 1970, the system was more formalized and widely known after 1971, members had become more aware of it through "hard practical experience", there were fewer disputes since JUNC had been established, and that there was now a preference for exhausting all the available machinery before taking a grievance to JUNC.

It was also noted that knowing he could turn to JUNC for expertise on a problem gave a shop steward more confidence to deal with problems up to that level, although it was also remarked upon that some disputes could have been avoided if shop stewards had been better trained. A few respondents noted the role that A.C.A.S.[1] now played as a final stage in the procedure.

The next question asked:

> "What is your view of communications generally in the Firm at the present time?"

and:

> "Have there been any important changes in communications patterns over the last five years?"

A summary of respondents' overall feelings on communications in the Firm is given in Table 5.8.

TABLE 5.8   Overall Impressions of Communications

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	4	1	5	10
Favourable and unfavourable comment	5	4	4	13
Overall unfavourable view	1	1	1	3

N = 26

(1)   Established in September 1974 as the Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the 'Advisory' function was prefixed in January 1975. In January 1976, A.C.A.S. became a statutory body under the terms of the Employment Protection Act 1975.

There was more ambivalence among respondents on the subject of
communication than with other topics, although the balance
remains in the direction of favourability.   On the favourable
side, the number of meetings, memos, talks by the Managing
Director, house journals, newspapers, noticeboards, networks
and grapevines were mentioned.   One person exclaimed that
there was too much communication!

One of those interviewed remarked that what was communicated
was important.   He added that people didn't need to be in
touch every minute and a system which could summarize infor-
mation was required.   A couple said that there was always room
for improvement, and a number pointed to examples of where
communication had not been adequate with respect to their
position.   It was also noted that: it only required one indiv-
idual to break a chain of communication, information often
"gets lost" somewhere along the line, or people might "forget"
to tell others about something - a meeting or an appointment
for example.   One person thought that the issue might be
exaggerated by people remembering they weren't asked (on one
occasion) and generalizing this experience.   Specific examples
of where communication was poor were given.   Thus, there was:
"not enough on what happens at lower levels", "big lack between
junior and senior management", "good at top, not sure if good
all the way down", "lacking in some departments due to foremen
not insisting they know (not company policy to withhold infor-
mation from them)", "managers and foremen afraid to give direct
orders on plant changes".   One respondent pointed out that peo-
ple have got to *want* to be communicated with, highlighting the
two-sided nature of any communication flow.

A few pointed to some of the difficulties of communicating within an industrial organization. For example, one view was that the process was lengthy, and became unwieldy because of the number of parties involved. People hearing communications from other than 'official' sources was mentioned as a problem, and even if the communicating party "did all the right things" this could happen. For example, if managers from one department were having talks on productivity with members of the Personnel Department, negotiations with union representatives from that department would follow, and the stewards would put any agreement reached between themselves and the Personnel Department to the union members concerned for acceptance or otherwise. Foremen then complained that they heard of the agreement from the men, not from their managers. It was pointed out that the length of the chain was often important in such instances and that there were fewer "links" in the chain between workers and foremen than between foremen and higher management. It was apparently not untypical to find five levels of management in a department. One respondent talked about the need to get away from remoteness and the need not to by-pass foremen by routing information from higher management direct to the shop floor or to union representatives on JUNC. The importance of team-work between all parties within a department was noted in the context of information flow.

As regards changes in communication, only two respondents said that there had been no changes over the last five years. All the others replied to the effect that there had been one or more important changes in recent years. The vast bulk of comment made in response to this question indicated that there had been improvements in communication.

Only five respondents passed adverse comment on communication. One, a shop steward, gave a specific example from his own department of a worsening of communication which he attributed to a particular foreman. The other four people were themselves foremen. One thought that *effective* communication was limited and that only union representatives and management communicated. Another thought that there was insufficient training for men who became supervisors (and that presumably communication suffered as a result). A third claimed he became confused with too many meetings, and another thought that communication continually fell down in the absence of efforts to support it and that there had been no overall improvement. These examples are attributed to members of a particular group because they were unique among respondents in finding fault with communication. Some foremen also noted features of communication which had shown improvements over the years.

Among the most frequently mentioned advances in communications were the talks given to various groups (staff, foremen, union representatives, managers) giving more information than before about the organization, its past and intended future. One shop steward attributed the "vast improvement" in communication in large measure to the joint union structure, and another said that whereas before he had to go and ask for information, it was now given as a matter of course. Another steward noted the role of the joint union machinery for disseminating information to the union groups, although said that he found it hard to get a majority view from his own members due to poor attendance at Branch Meetings.[1]
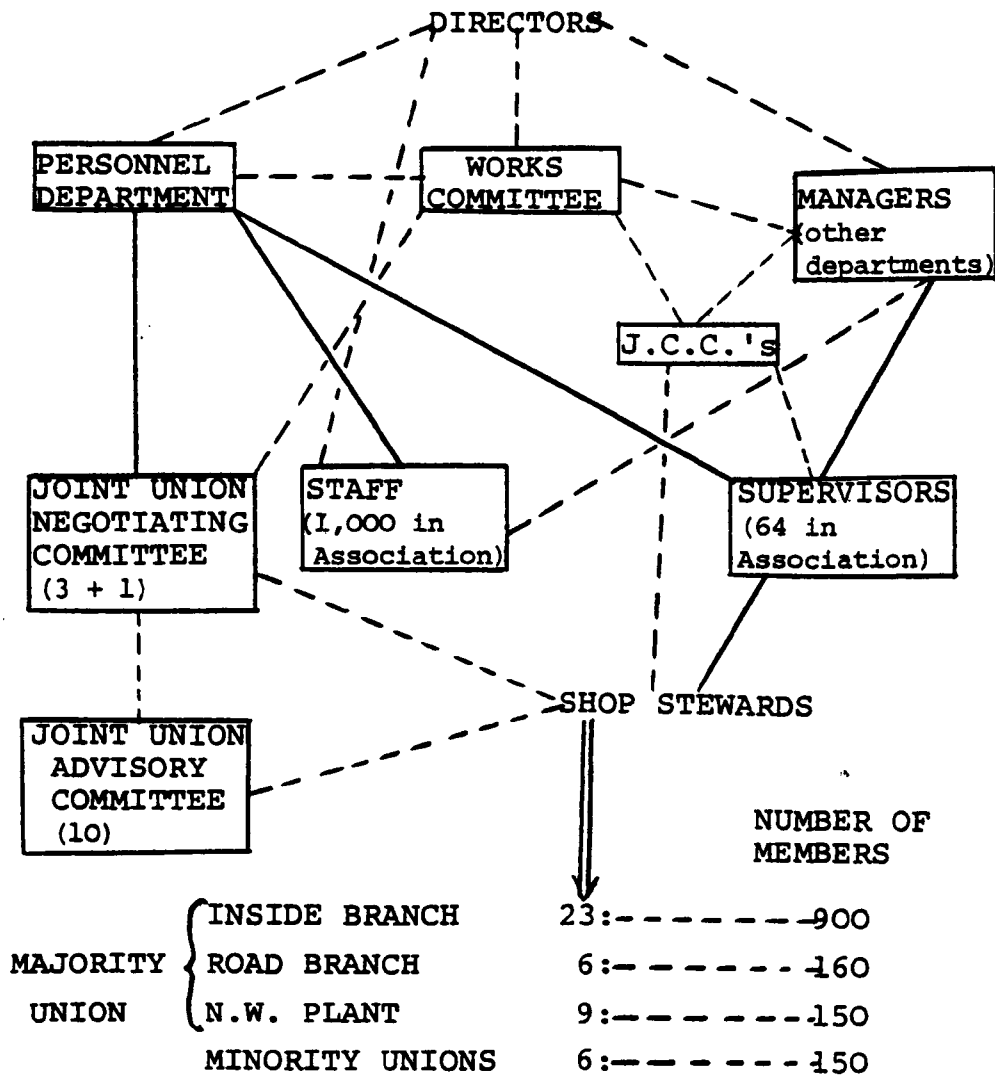
(1) This is characteristic of nearly all trade unions. See for example: Workplace Industrial Relations, SS402, HMSO, 1968.

One respondent noted a need to look at the structure more to determine what was the best way of getting information across. Others mentioned: "a greater awareness of the need to communicate", "more responsibility", "a larger say", "an increase in the subjects of communication", (increased)"accessibility of management", and a "general move towards more participative management...newer, younger...now more willing to consult, involve..."

One person made reference to a new planning department and its communication improvement function, noting that giving details of advance planning is important communication. Telling people what they want (and need) to know was considered important. Another mentioned the establishment of new committees to deal with various problems in one section of the Factory. A couple raised the issue of confidentiality. One noted the function of the news bulletin for dissemination of non-confidential information, while another remarked upon the difficulty of passing on confidential information to people who did not continue to treat it as such. Figure 5.2 summarizes some of the principle patterns of communication and negotiation.

FIGURE 5.2

Patterns of communication and negotiation in 1976

		NUMBER OF MEMBERS
MAJORITY UNION	INSIDE BRANCH	23:— — — — — — 900
	ROAD BRANCH	6:— — — — — — 160
	N.W. PLANT	9:— — — — — 150
	MINORITY UNIONS	6:— — — — — 150

——————— indicates negotiating relationship

———————— indicates consultation/communication
relationship

The final questions in this series were:

"What is your view of industrial relations
generally in the Firm at the present time?"

and:

"Have there been any important changes in
industrial relations over the last five years?"

The general nature of replies to this question are summarized
in Table 5.9.

TABLE 5.9   Overall Impressions of Industrial Relations

	Shop Stewards	Foremen and Staff	Managers	Total
Overall favourable view	8	5	7	20
Favourable and unfavourable comment	1	1	3	5
Overall unfavourable view	1	0	0	1

N = 26

More than is the case in any of the earlier tables, the findings
summarized in Table 5.9 show a clear pattern.   The over-
whelming body of comment given in response to this question
indicated that nearly all respondents had a favourable image
of industrial relations in the Firm.

A number expressed the view that industrial relations in the
Firm were, "good" or "reasonable" or indicated that these
were generally favourable in value terms.   Most expanded upon
such statements, and thus it was possible to examine what
meanings were probably attached to their views in this respect.

For a few managers, "good industrial relations" meant that there were few strikes. For a few other respondents, it appeared to mean that the general state of relationships compared well with those thought to exist in other companies. Some praised individuals or groups of managers, union representatives and others for their "reasonableness" and ability to avoid "problems" and disputes. In other words, "good industrial relations" appeared to mean 'good working relationships between parties'. A couple of respondents made reference to the particular "problem" of reducing staff numbers and of taking decisions which would be unpalatable to employees without any "industrial unrest". The "management of change" was a theme which figured in a number of other answers. Some of these referred to factors affecting industrial relations, origins of which were external to the Firm. Among those referred to were: government legislation, worker participation and the Bullock Committee,[1] pay policy, and the U.K. economic climate and its possible effect on sales of the Firm's product. A general impression was that industrial relations would survive in a 'healthy' state despite external influences which might operate to their possible deterioration.

Among the small amount of adverse comment, one respondent thought that there was: "plenty of room for improvement". Others made similar points in less strident tones, saying for example that the system could not be made perfect, that there would always be "ups and downs", or that problems would arise against a background of overall improvement.

(1) Department of Trade. Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy, Cmnd. 6706, HMSO, 1977.

One person's opinion was that management had shown itself to be slightly "weak" in dealing with the unions on some occasions. Another remarked on continued management paternalism, and yet another thought that the Sickness Committee was not operating completely effectively. One thought that foremen would be under increasing strain as the nature of their work changed, and another thought that foremen needed more education and that the Staff Association required strengthening for the benefit of its members. One respondent thought that until recently, staff and employees had an image of the Company as the "Great Provider", a view which was currently being questioned.

There was favourable comment on the state of relations between management and trade union representatives, and between union representatives on JUNC. Among the positive aspects of such relationships noted were: "a greater confidence as people find out more about policy", "knowing what is being achieved on people's behalf", "trying to see others' viewpoint", "consciousness of the position of the other party". One respondent thought that because the Company was such a good employer and kept the "shop floor happy", there was a danger of complacency, and another considered it necessary to work hard at times so that stagnation did not occur. He pointed out that it was necessary to have a "finger on the pulse" of social change. The general view of "good relations" between parties might be aptly summarized by the respondent who said that: "any injustices arose through accident rather than design".

Four people said that there had been no important changes within the last five years. Aside from these, comment often extended answers to the previous question. Nearly half of those who said that there had been important changes in industrial relations mentioned JUNC (and JUAC), and others again made reference to influences acting upon industrial relations from outside the Firm, with government legislation, incomes policy and the collection of evidence by the Bullock Committee being mentioned. One person noted apprehension at the possibility of parties who were not representated by "management" or "union" being disenfranchised under certain forms of "industrial democracy", while another thought this Committee might usefully draw upon experiences within the Firm.[1] Most of the comment on JUNC was favourable and included: "helped communications, industrial relations and the Personnel Department", "more thorough consultations in appointments", "greater togetherness", "machinery for taking the heat out of situations", "more information given", and "helps to cut out rumours". One respondent thought JUNC "acted as a check on one or two sections", while another believed it centralized control too much and could lead to upsets within departments if managers' running of them were interfered with too much.

While one respondent said there was always room for improvement, referring to a stoppage of work in September 1975, as a "flexing of muscles", others saw gradual improvement and development of industrial relations.

(1)   The Management of the Firm did make a submission to the Bullock Committee.

Among the developments remarked upon were: "increased partic-
ipation", "complete acceptance by the Company for increased
involvement and consultation in certain areas", "bigger expos-
ure at all levels with people being known rather than sitting
in ivory towers", "productivity deals at all levels", "knowing
what other groups are thinking", and "shop floor more prepared
to make a contribution to the Company[1] (in a'sticky patch')".
Regular meetings of stewards and the advent of mass meetings
(two had been held) amongst the workforce were also mentioned.
One respondent compared the current overall situation with that
existing five years ago, which he termed "expansionist" when
there had been "no worries" on staffing or salary levels with
good prospects for all. Now, he commented, some jobs had
been eliminated and there was a feeling of a certain loss of
security (for example retirement age had been reduced from 65
to 62 and might go lower), although he said that this had not
affected morale.

Summary of replies to questions on industrial relations since 1970

General approval was expressed for the job assessment scheme,
with most favourable comment coming from managers and least
from foremen. There had been few changes to the system since
its inception, although some thought it would be due for some
form of major modification within a few years. While the
existing system generated some adverse comment, it was more
highly thought of than the job evaluation system operating
previously.

(1) Members of the staff had allegedly been prepared to forego a
pay rise the previous year.

While respondents from all parties were favourably disposed towards consultation in general, there was much less enthusiasm for Joint Consultative Committees. Favourable comment on consultation was particularly forthcoming from managers and shop stewards, while comment from foremen tended towards disfavour. Other adverse comment tended to be reserved for J.C.C.'s, with one implication being that these bodies might not be an effective method of consultation in their existing form. Otherwise, changes in consultation appeared to have been made in directions favourable to those interviewed, who indicated that these were continuing along favourable lines.

Foremen were divided in their approval of negotiating machinery, while managers and shop stewards expressed general approval of this aspect of the Firm's operation. The major criticism voiced was that it centralized important decision-making, one implication being that this was detrimental to the interests of parties who were not represented in the central arena. There was much favourable comment upon the operation of JUNC and JUAC and related features of the system, in which respondents reported only minor changes in recent years. There was particular approval for grievance and disputes machinery among all parties, which had also changed little in recent years, perhaps being responsible for small changes in parties' behaviour within the Firm.

There was greater ambivalence about communication than any other subject raised in this section, although the balance was towards favourable comment.

With the notable exception of foremen, most respondents saw communication as having improved over recent years. Problems which were mentioned in connection with communication, sometimes involved foremen.

Of the issues raised in this section there was the greatest amount of overall approval for industrial relations generally at the Firm. One implication of this finding is that whatever their dissatisfaction with particular aspects of this, people were still generally contented. Different meanings for "good industrial relations" emerged, and the importance of JUNC was again stressed, particularly in the context of change for the better. Threats to "good industrial relations" were more liable to be seen as emanating from outside than inside the Firm.

3. v   Miscellaneous questions

The first of the few questions appearing under this heading has figured in the interview schedules of a number of researchers in industrial relations.[1]   The question asked of all respondents was:

> "Some people say that a firm is like a football team, because everyone in it strives towards a common goal. Others say it is not, because there are different interests within it.   What is your view of the firm (any firm)?"

(1)   Some of these are considered in Chapter 6.

This question, being less specific than most of the others comprising the interview, gave rise to a considerable amount of comment which was more difficult to code in tabular or descriptive form than question responses analysed earlier. Inspection of replies however suggested that a number of different themes ran through these, and eight themes were separately identified. Occasionally, only one theme would appear in a response to this question, while more frequently, because of the length of replies, two or more themes could be separately identified from one answer. Each of the themes is considered in turn in order of frequency of occurrence in the replies. The number of responses in which the theme occurred (for all respondents) is given in parentheses in each case, and a summary is given in Table 5.10.

The theme manifested most frequently was that groups within an organization do and always will have conflicting interests (14 responses). Among those specifically noted were: the profit interest and conflict between owners of the enterprise and those working within it. Half the managers (including directors) and half the shop stewards made some form of reference to this theme. This was followed by a theme whose adherents suggested that a common goal within an organization was a nice idea and that people *ought* or *should* be striving towards the same goal in theory (10). Just under a third of the shop stewards, and about the same proportion of managers made remarks contributing to this theme.

A third theme found support among half the managers and a couple of shop stewards. These respondents maintained that interests do conflict but these can be co-ordinated to the benefit of all as an ideal (9). This is akin to a combination of the first two themes and is very similar to the fourth theme whose adherents maintained that people *were* striving towards a common goal and that through discussion and involvement, a team could be welded (9). This has obvious similarities with the second theme, the important difference being that it refers to what people *are* doing, rather than what they *ought* (in the opinion of respondents) to be doing. This theme received support from four shop stewards, and five managers.

The theme that *this* Firm was better than most other firms (8), found support mainly among managers. Respondents contributing to a sixth theme maintained that *individuals* pursued their own interests, were out for themselves, or put personal ambition before organization goals (6). This theme also found most of its support from managers. That a firm was like a football team (4) was a theme which gained small support from the whole spectrum of groups, while proponents of a final, and perhaps related theme, suggested that groups were pro the Firm *outside* its environs, even if their interests were at varience *within* the working enviroment (2).

The above analysis may not have done full justice to the diversity of responses given to the 'football team' question, but a number of main strands of thought have emerged. Foremens' responses were too few to accumulate under particular themes, being spread among a number of these.

TABLE 5.10   Views of the firm: team or otherwise?

Overall rank order	Description of theme	N = 20 *Managers staff, foremen agreeing	N = 10 Shop stewards agreeing
1	Groups do and will always have conflicting interests	9	5
2	In theory - as an ideal, people ought to strive to same goal	7	3
3	Interests do conflict, but can be co-ordinated to benefit all	7	2
3	People are striving towards a common goal	5	4
5	This firm is better than most	7	1
6	Individuals are out for themselves	5	1
7	A firm is like a football team	3	1
8	Employees are pro this Firm in public	2	0
	TOTALS	45	17

*   These groups' responses are included together for
    the table only, not for the text describing the
    answers.

From the totals given at the foot of the columns and the numbers
in each respondent category, it will be seen that managers
made reference to an average of just over two themes per respon-
dent, while shop steward responses produced an average of just
under two themes per respondent.

This question appeared to give respondents more opportunity to express an answer in a personal style than did many of the more structured questions in the interview schedule. In order to give some idea of the range of responses, a few examples are given below.

Some respondents extended the football team analogy in their replies. One thought the Firm was like a team "divided into two five-a-sides", but that one might find an "old family firm" which was like a football team. Another thought that "every team had its Stan Bowles' or George Bests[1]". Others extended the idea to produce their own analogies. One, for example thought that while "different groups had different interests", all wished to benefit to the maximum but generally not at the expense of others or not to the extent that they would "kill the goose". Another compared the situation to a: "group of cooks baking a cake that we're later going to eat slices of", pointing out that arguments were not over the ingredients, but how they were to be mixed. Another thought similarly that the "proof of the pudding was in the eating", except that he was referring to the low labour turn-over within the Firm, and was using this as an example of employees' positive sentiments towards the organization. One manager temporarily adopting the language of social science, confessed himself a "pluralist". In more practical but sophisticated vein, another thought that there was a greater possibility of unity of purpose between management and unions than between owners of the Firm and unions.

(1) Two contemporary footballing gentlemen combining colourful skills with flamboyant temperament.

Managers in such a context might be seen primarily as employees rather than as agents of the employer.[1]

The final questions which were asked of all respondents were:

> "Have there been any other important changes at
> the Firm over the last five years apart from
> those we have already mentioned?"

and :

> "Is there anything else at all that you would
> like to tell me?"

Interviewees were also invited to ask any questions of the researcher if they wished.   A few availed themselves of this opportunity, one asking what was the point of the research. This most pertinent enquiry is answered in detail in the next section.   The other two questions produced a barrage of response, on which it would have been extremely difficult to perform any meaningful form of systematic analysis.

Some of this additional comment raised issues which had been covered in earlier questions.   Therefore, from this material, topics have been selected which are not discussed at length earlier in the chapter.   Also included, are items which seem particularly relevant or significant for the study.   Because of the nature of this approach to analysis, it is inevitable that a greater interpretive element exists in the presentation of respondents' final comments than was the case with earlier questions.

(1)   As were those managers prosecuted in the Houghton Main hearing under S7 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974

One issue which arose was the position of staff.   The Staff
Association had been recognised by the Firm as the sole
bargaining agent for staff and had been negotiating with
Company representatives over staff effectiveness, an exercise
which both sides considered to have been successfully executed.
The agreement allowed for increased cost effectiveness of staff
over a four year period, and the Staff Association also negot-
iated on such items as appraisal and merit-rating schemes.
An issue of importance to staff was the independence of their
Association.   In 1972, a vote amongst their membership had
revealed over 90% against membership of a trade union, although
it was claimed that there was now greater "union-mindedness"
among the staff.[1]   There were fears that their non-union
status would not give the staff an effective voice in the runn-
ing of the enterprise, and a major dilemma for this group were
the antipathic attitudes which many of them held towards 'union
activity' on the one hand, and their need for effective repre-
sentation on the other.   There were moves to obtain certifi-
cation of independence for this body under recent legislative
provisions.[2]

(1)   Interviewing 305 West German executive grade employees, Hartman (1974)
      found that: 51% thought they represented their own party, 28% saw
      common interests with employers, and 6% aligned themselves with
      employees.

(2)   viz. Trade Union and Labour Relations Act, 1974, S8; and The
      Employment Protection Act, 1975, S7. One of the tests the Certification
      Officer has to apply when a 'union' seeks a certificate is that it is
      not exposed, for financial or other reasons, to the risk of employer
      interference or domination.

Like the Staff Association, the Foremans' Association, which was now known as the Supervisors' Association, had a declining membership. There was a degree of common interest between members of these two groups, and there were regular meetings between their respective committees, who sometimes went together into negotiations with Company representatives. There had been talk of amalgamation between these two bodies. The Supervisors' Association had radically revised its rules in order to register under the Industrial Relations Act (1971) and was currently investigating the possibility of becoming a certificated body in its own right in the same way as the Staff Association. There was talk of trade unionism amongst supervisors in the event of certification not taking place, and around a third of supervisors currently held union cards.[1] There were feelings amongst supervisors that their Association was in a phase of transition and that their role was changing. The role of Production Under Manager had ceased to exist and their functions were now undertaken by shift supervisors.[2]

There had been manning reductions[3] among the manual labour force, although overall the Firm was still seen as a 'good payer' and a progressive employer. There were suggestions that some managers had been slow to accept the role of shop stewards, perhaps resulting from a "class consciousness"

(1) The Supervisor who had been a shop steward during the earlier fieldwork had wanted the Supervisors' Association to have a voice on the joint union bodies.

(2) In the North-West Plant, established in 1970, there were no supervisors or foremen among the 150 employees.

(3) Not redundancies.

emanating from the top. There was comment upon the
'good' and 'bad' points of the erosion of differentials
between managers and manual workers, and upon the increa-
sed efforts made by senior managers to communicate with
all groups by addressing employees on policy matters.
Employee representatives had addressed other groups in
like fashion to give their viewpoint. These, and other
moves, contributed towards genuine attempts to achieve
greater trust between management and unions, although
this was more notable at the level of the Personnel Depart-
ment and the joint union bodies than at the level of indiv-
idual departments, where there was a wider gulf in many
cases. Some people felt that attitudes in this area were
changing however, and among the items for forthcoming
discussions was 'industrial democracy' and how it would
affect parties within the Firm.

Integration of constituent parties in an organization of
the size and diversity of operation as this one, could not
be without its difficulties. Apparent isolation of depart-
ments from each other was mentioned, as were feelings of
separateness amongst the workforce at the North-West Plant.
Issues mentioned which might unite or divide members of a
department were safety, and criteria for work measurement.
Over the years, there had been increasing integration of the
Road Transport Department within the Firm, which was now
part of the Distribution Department. An important change
which seemed to have taken place since 1971 was increasing
concern by all parties for the economic environment external
to the Firm. Five years earlier, appearances indicated
that while not ignoring external factors operating upon the
Firm, concern for its functioning had been essentially alig-
ned with influences within the organization.

Relatively greater concern for effects upon the Firm from outside its immediate environment appeared from the present study to be focussed upon such influences as: effects of inflation upon sales of the product, a slower growth rate for the enterprise, and reaching an asymptote for saturation on product distribution. The economic climate in which the Firm now had to operate was very different from that existing in 1971. At that time, the Firm's sales were growing within a 'healthy' climate. Plans to expand the production capacity of the North-West Plant were held in abeyance and eventually shelved indefinitely in 1975. Economic recession had obliged management to reduce labour and other costs. An internal climate of concern for the future was alledgedly changing attitudes towards the Firm as the 'eternal provider'. Although there was no suggestion of the Firm being in any 'real difficulty' - resulting in large scale redundancies or closures for example, threats seen from outside may have been in some measure responsible for observed behaviour directed towards greater integration between constituent parties.[1]

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(1) It has been argued that a pluralistic analysis is no longer adequate or appropriate in a climate of economic recession. Such a case for example was propounded by Hyman in: 'Marxism and Pluralism in Industrial Relations: The Great Debate', Hugh Clegg and Richard Hyman, University of Warwick, 25th February 1977. While it may be true that analysis of respondents' views cannot of itself produce a complete explanation of events, the object of this analysis is to provide a perspective for behaviour at the micro-level within the organization. Responses noted above, suggest that a number of respondents felt there to be increasing influence upon their behaviour from outside the Firm.

3. vi <u>Why interviews?</u>

The reasons given at the start of this chapter for re-entering
the Firm where I had originally done eighteen months fieldwork
may now be discussed further.   The first outcome of that res-
earch had been a report, which after feedback on a draft by key
participants in the study, was handed over to those participants
in the form of a 'final' draft.   Most of those respondents in
the follow-up study who had read the report in this form made
favourable comment.   I had no prima facie reason to doubt that
this was genuine.   In retrospect however, I am inclined to
align my views with that of the respondent who considered the
report, "a little naive", and in general, I would have welcomed
more criticism of its content from respondents.[1]

Among the few specific 'criticisms' received was that I had
tended to view events from the perspective of the Personnel
Department.   I am in general sympathy with this criticism and
think it might be explained by: a) my mode of entry and
introduction into the Firm, and b) the influence of the
Personnel Department on the Firm in the area in which my studies
were concentrated.   One problem encountered by a fieldworker
is that of using - and interpreting - things which are told to
him in confidence.   He may not be able to use such information
directly for fear of revealing his source and/or upsetting other
people, but his knowledge of the information might help him to
complete the overall picture which he eventually forms and des-
cribes, and which is credible to his respondents.

(1)   It may be that people who are the subjects of research and unused
      to the often rigorous criticism of an academic environment, do
      not wish to offend researchers out of politeness.

Besides this, there are limits to what will be revealed to an outsider, and perhaps many respondents felt they had revealed quite enough.

Another way in which the report of the earlier research may itself be used as data, is its distribution pattern. Within an organization, a number of hierarchies exist, that of formal status being one example. There might also be a less formal 'information hierarchy', where representatives and members of some groups receive information in due course, while those who belong to other groups may only discover certain information by accident, if at all. The distribution of the report over a number of years related something about communication within the Firm, in that numbers of managers, staff, foremen and shop stewards had not heard of the report, let alone read it. This raises the issue of the responsibility that a researcher has for feedback of information to various parties. One problem with information flow is that of 'overload', where people have such a volume of material to read (and perhaps be expected to act upon some of it) that it is impossible to assimilate or even read all of it. One general issue is therefore *what* information to distribute, in what form, and by whom, to others within an organization.[1]

(1) I expressed a preference in the draft of this chapter, copies of which were sent to representatives of unions and management, that all those who had been interviewed in the course of the follow-up study should have an opportunity to pass comment on what I had written. It was clear from subsequent discussions that only a few people had been allowed access to the draft.

The follow-up study differs from the earlier analysis in a number of ways. The participant observation study of 1970/71 made extensive use of data collected over eighteen months or so. Although many individuals were consulted in various ways over that time, a large proportion of the material used came from perhaps a dozen or so respondents. It is impossible to estimate accurately what proportion of material came from what number of people because of duplication of information. In the follow-up study, more intensive use was made of data collected over a very short period of time from an identifiable number of people, and the format of presentation of material is therefore quite different from that of earlier chapters. In earlier chapters, it was possible to construct a pattern of events and fit them into a recognizable chronological sequence, so that the method of data collection, while important, did not appear to intrude unduly in reporting and interpreting these events. In this chapter on the other hand, the method of data collection, i.e. interviewing, is central to the reporting of findings because of the temporal constraints upon data-gathering.

One distinguishing feature of this chapter therefore is that it is more systematic in its presentation of data. It is possible to be precise in identifying material source and more explicit in stating objectives and analysing predictions (dealt with in the next section). It is however not a complete study in itself in so far as it relies upon the earlier research or at least upon some knowledge of past events on the part of the reader, by way of an historical introduction to it.

Like the earlier study, it also has shortcomings, and one of these is that it is based upon data obtained from no more than thirty individuals. Limited resources precluded access to a larger sample, and so it is hoped that those from whom information was obtained are representative in some way of the views of others. This is paradoxical in a way, because their selection for interview was made on the basis of their central roles in industrial relations at the Firm. Their positions might therefore be expected to predispose them to give an atypical picture, being more highly-informed and better motivated to put their efforts in a good light, for example compared with others less centrally placed in this regard.

To state more specifically what the follow-up study has achieved:

i) It has been valuable as a learning experience for myself as a researcher, particularly in terms of obtaining a new perspective on past events and also finding out about reactions of respondents from a previously researched environment to a study involving re-entry.

ii) It is the second part of a comparative study over time, extending the research from a case study undertaken at only one period in time.

iii) It has provided data on some reported effects of research upon respondents. In the provision of such material, as well as through its empirical content, the study might be expected to contribute to the store of knowledge and be useful to other researchers.

iv) It may also be useful reading for parties involved in industrial relations as a practical or day to day concern. It may similarly find interested readers among any practitioners who deal with some form of social conflict and who may be able to draw parallels from it to match situations they encounter.

v) Through the re-study, information was obtained which although available, was not obtained in the earlier study despite extensive fieldwork.

vi) Research of this type can have information and interest value to those participating in it. An outsider's comments may relate new material to them, or it may confirm what they already know (or suspect) about their own views and the views and stances of other parties. Provision of such information however has been seen to be independent of whether respondents want the material to be made available to themselves or others, and whether they have access to the material or not.

vii) Feedback on a draft of the research report, as in the earlier study can help to clarify meanings, correct mistakes, and provide additional data for the study, as well as confirm that what the researcher has completed does have some validity in the eyes of respondents. Few researchers who study organizations report on the results of feedback with participants of their research, and it may be that this procedure is often foregone. One exception is Abell (1975), who writes of the feedback upon research conducted by his team in a colliery:

"...both sides regarded the report as an accurate picture of management-union interactions...and felt that the exercise had been worthwhile. This was important from a methodological point of view in that the end result corresponded with the perceptions of both management and unions, thus providing some validation of the...procedures employed...it demonstrates the feasibility of research at the management-union interface in that it was possible to carry out research and produce a report that is seen to be fair by both sides...the discussion generated by the report enabled the researcher to clarify the process underlying certain of the results: in this respect the feedback sessions were a source of additional data".

(op.cit.p70)

Doubtless, other effects of re-studying an environment could be listed, but these seven seem important to me.

As far as writing this chapter is concerned, one aim has been to present data 'factually', and as accurately as possible. Although it is clear that interview data must be organized in some way, I have tried to give the 'flavour' of responses as well as provide 'straight' comment, for example as in the tabular analyses on respondents' views on various aspects of industrial relations at the Firm at the time of interviewing. While I have attempted to let the data 'speak for themselves', there is bound to be some selection of what is noted during an interview,[1] as well as what is later made salient in written form.

In the foregoing sections of this chapter, my intention has been to keep my interpretation of responses to a minimum and to decide on the most appropriate style of analysis and presentation on the basis of the material obtained. Thus, I did not impose any framework upon the analysis except that of analysing the data question by question. Thus with some questions all responses were analysed together (as in the 'final comments' questions), sometimes responses were considered according to the respondents' role in the original research (as in R3's views of the researcher's role), and in other cases responses were analysed according to the group to which respondents belonged (for example, as in the analysis of questions on the current industrial relations scene by shop stewards, managers, and foremen).

(1) Even in cases where interviews are tape-recorded, selection of material must take place.

4.   Re-appraisal of predictions

The first prediction, that union parties would continue to act in concert and that the formal joint union machinery would remain intact after six years, was confirmed.   No data obtained from the follow-up interviews or questionnaires suggested that any of the original reasons given for this prediction were unfounded.   Material collected from the interviews suggested that two of the reasons given were particularly strong in the 1976 context.   These were: the felt need of the union parties to act from a position of unity, and the increased strength of the Personnel function within the Firm.

The second prediction of 'no strikes' in the 1970-1976 period, held for five years, since when there had been one short 'stoppage of work' lasting less than a full working day.   Thus, while the 'spirit' of the prediction might have held true, the letter did not.   One qualification of the prediction was that representatives of the parties involved in the joint union machinery should not change, and the prediction held true for as long as this condition was maintained.   Both the original reasons given for making this prediction appeared to have been of some importance, particularly that relating to the effort of those involved to 'make the system work'.

The third prediction relating to the continued central role of the Personnel Department as the major management representative in substantive industrial relations issues, was upheld.   If anything, as noted already, this Department had increased its influence in many matters relating to industrial relations in the years between the two studies.

Nothing from the interview data in the second study appeared to indicate that either of the reasons for making this prediction was incorrect.

The fourth prediction, concerning advancement towards trade union status among white-collar staff and foremen was to some extent corroborated. Although there had been no formal or concerted efforts to organize staff and supervisors into T.U.C. affiliated unions, there were indications of concern among members of these groups for the future of their effective representation. There was no suggestion from the data obtained in the follow-up study that any of the reasons given for this prediction were untenable, although some may have been more important than others. Of particular potency appeared to be that of the possibility of staff and supervisors being effectivly 'squeezed out' of important decision-making processes. Allied with this was the relative increase in responsibility accorded to existing trade union bodies. Qualifications made to this prediction require some comment. The role of Production Under Managers having been dispensed with made one less reason for the prediction. Staff now elected their Association Committee members in toto, indicating that they had achieved an increase in their autonomy within the existing framework of the Firm. Both of these qualifications might have been expected to act as a break upon pressure for trade union status amongst white-collar staff. What could not have been foreseen was the influence of legislation upon the granting of independent status to many bodies, including this Firm's Supervisors' Association, which would not otherwise have sought or obtained 'trade union' status outside the T.U.C.

The final prediction, of greater flexibility being built into
the job assessment scheme was not supported.   There appeared
to have been no major changes in the scheme since its intro-
duction, although there were a few indications that the
scheme was not to the liking of at least some groups of employ-
ees who saw it as too rigid, and that consequent pressure
might lead to changes within a few more years.   The first
reason given for this prediction, namely inflationary pressure
had not had the effect suggested partly perhaps because this
Firm was already high on the 'league-table' of employers as far
as payment was concerned.   There was some indication that
any 'flexibility' had been to the extent of this employer
dropping down the league-table slightly perhaps from the "top
10%", but remaining in the "top 25%".   Other factors remaining
the same, pressure from the workforce would be expected over
the payment system if the Firm's 'league-table' position
continued to fall in similar fashion.[1]   The second reason
given for the final prediction, concerned the changing nature
of the work process.   This was made on the basis that the
Firm would maintain the rate of production output at the time
of the earlier study.   As already noted, economic considera-
tions had obliged the Firm's management to forego expansion
plans and output had been static or falling over the years
between the two studies.   With few exceptions therefore, there
had been very little increase in production and this reason
also proved not to be relevant.

(1)   One manager suggested that such pressure might be over the base
      rate for payment rather than the system of job assessment.

Feedback on the follow-up study

In order to obtain feedback on the follow-up study, seven respondents were separately interviewed towards the end of November, 1976. These seven were: the senior representatives of the Joint Union Negotiating Committee, the Supervisors' Association and the Staff Association, plus the Assistant Personnel Manager, Personnel Manager, Personnel Director and Managing Director.[1] These interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, although that with the Supervisors' representative who had been elected recently was a little longer. Two other respondents had been promoted since the interviews nine months earlier, although all except the new Supervisors' Association Secretary had been respondents in the follow-up study.

Those interviewed reported that they had found the follow-up study interesting but not surprising in its findings. One factual error was corrected, but relatively little comment, adverse or otherwise, was forthcoming from these interviewees. Since the earlier interviews, the Supervisors' Association like the Staff Association, had obtained a certificate of independence. There was a joint negotiating team for these two bodies, although each saw its problems as being sufficiently different from the other for a merger to be unlikely. Supervisors in particular, it was reported, were afraid of being 'swallowed up' in any merger and wished to strengthen their own Association in order to get to grips with their own problems.

(1) It was during the course of these interviews that I was able to confirm that none of these respondents objected to the use of material I had collected in the course of my research at the Firm for my thesis.

One interviewee astutely pointed out that the follow-up study was influenced by the asking of questions, and that the situation was 'unreal' in the sense that people had to produce data on things they might not otherwise have thought about. Some implications of this perceptive comment are considered at greater length in Chapter 7.

This study has made possible a limited comparison of the techniques of participant observation and interviewing. Thus the 'hard' data analysed in this chapter may be compared with the 'soft' data dealt with in earlier chapters. The former permits a more systematic but perhaps less sympathetic approach to material. The latter provides more 'depth' and feel for its subject matter, although also makes for difficult structuring and organization of data. Material generated by each method can however usefully contribute to a total study, and data from both is used in the models outlined in the next chapter.

Comments made by respondents in these feedback interviews which have not been incorporated elsewhere in this chapter, are considered in the next section, which briefly examines the role of prediction in social research.

The role of prediction

Predicting future events, even on a limited scale in social research is subject to a number of influences. It may for example be possible that predictions made by a researcher are seen by people who are able to exert an influence upon the events about which predictions have been made. As a result of seeing the predictions, those involved might then consciously or unconsciously attempt to influence the course of the predicted events, either in accordance with, or in contradiction to predictions made. Thus, it is important not only for a researcher to make predictions 'blind', but also for these not to be available to participants until such time as they have been confirmed or disconfirmed. Support for predictions made on the basis of data collected during the earlier study suggests that it was possible in this case to obtain a degree of accuracy in predicting events on the basis of field research.

However, comments made by a couple of respondents during feedback interviews suggest that the formulating and testing of predictions in such a fashion may be less straightfoward than has been indicated so far. One considered the 'no strike' prediction "very bold", while another thought the prediction that union parties would continue to act in concert "lucky".[1]

(1)   Wax (1971) notes that the fieldworker requires luck during his research!

This interviewee was of the opinion that despite the fact that the Firm had never had a poor "track record" in industrial relations, the joint union structure could be "blown apart". Three groups of trade unionists represented within this structure were mentioned as possible candidates for exhibiting feelings of sufficient strength for them to leave the joint union set-up. These comments, together with the non-fulfillment of the final prediction, raise important problems in making predictions in social scientific research.

On one hand it may be asked: is it the task of social research merely to describe and explain observed events, or should attempts at prediction be made? On the other hand, a dilemma central to prediction is that by its nature it may influence events upon which pronouncements are made. Even a researcher who had not articulated his predictions may by his expectations affect the course of events.[1]

A number of writers have expressed views on the subject of prediction in social research. Deutscher (1966) for example, points out that prediction should proceed warily on the grounds that simple extrapolations may be made on the erroneous assumption that behaviour conforms to a straight line function. Merton (1968) provides a detailed exposition of evils of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Rosenthal (1967) considers self-fulfilling prophesies in behavioural research and everyday life.

(1) Broader issues relating to expectation and influence of researchers upon research are dealt with in detail in a number of publications. For reference to some of these, see Chapter 7 and Appendix note 23.

Easlea (1973) attempts to distinguish between natural and social science in noting that social scientists unlike their colleagues in natural science are able to affect their subject matter, thus making prediction of events difficult.[1] Galtung (1967) makes a related point when he notes that: "The moment the social scientist turns from explanation to prediction, he passes judgement on what the future is going to look like" (p.487). Vickers (1970) notes that the views of such writers as Marx and Bentham affect the outcome of events they are supposed to explain. Angell (1965) asks whether or not Marx was too polemical to be called a social scientist because he wished to hasten his own predictions. Angell poses the question: "Can anyone who is so ardent a champion of a cause possibly explore the complexities of social organization objectively?" Such a question begs a number of other questions. For example, is 'objectivity' the be-all and end-all of research? and: who passes judgement upon criteria for objectivity and whether or not these have been met by any particular researcher? These and other issues are given greater consideration in Chapter 9. For the present it may be sufficient to note that there are in the view of some, values and attributes which are superordinate to objectivity or commitment. For future scholars and researchers, it may be far more important that a particular writer has been thorough in his approach to a subject, has shown insights in dealing with it, and has formulated predictions or hypotheses capable of rigorous testing, than whether or not his work accords with their definition of 'objectivity'.

(1) The assumptions upon which this distinction is based are open to question. Natural scientists may also affect their subject matter, albeit, in different ways to social scientists. Issues of value-neutrality raised by this point are discussed at greater length in Chapter 9.

Concluding comment

This chapter remained substantially unaltered as a result of respondents' comments during the feedback interviews. This contrasts with material from the earlier study, which was re-arranged and altered a number of times. These observations suggest that participant observation as a data collection method imposes much less of a structure than does interviewing. Experience of the researcher indicates that it is more difficult to compile data from participant observation. However, the methods may usefully be combined to provide comparative data in a study such as this. Responses from interview and questionnaire schedules used in the follow-up study suggest that the earlier report presented to parties at the Firm in 1971 had minimal effects upon the course of events after this time.

Notwithstanding the caveats registered in the last section, data collected during the two studies suggest that a participant observer is able to get close enough to a series of events within a framework of industrial relations to make testable predictions of future events. This finding provides some support for an hypotheses outlined in Chapter 3 that closeness of a party to events can improve accuracy of prediction.

The prediction for no industrial action was counter to the strike trend within the organization. There had been

disputes during the years between the two studies, but no 'major' industrial action.[1]

Findings from the two studies have suggested some reasons why the strike trend in one firm has shifted from exhibiting more frequent and lengthier strikes to a point where strike activity is almost unknown. The follow-up study itself did not give rise to further predictions about events at the Firm[2] because on this occasion, the organization was not investigated in sufficient depth. It seems doubtful whether interview or survey methods alone can produce data upon which such predictions as , emerged from the participant observation study could be made.

During the follow-up study, the Firm, like most others at that time in the U.K., was operating in a different financial climate to that existing in 1970-71. This factor seems to have affected the parties. For example, greater threats to the Firm's existence were seen by many of those interviewed to originate from outside rather than from within the organization when compared with perceptions recorded during the earlier study. Because of the scanty data on this issue however, no attempt has been made to assess possible implications of this observation for theoretical perspectives on the nature of change in industrial relations.

(1)   No reference has been made to U.K. strike trends during the the years 1971-76, although these suggested a diminution of strike activity generally.

(2)   One of the last respondents to be interviewed asked the researcher what predictions he would make for the future.