

**“WE JUST DON’T WANT TO FRIGHTEN THE HORSES”:
THE 1975 STABLE LADS’ STRIKE**

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Introduction

The TGWU first organised the Newmarket stable lads in 1935 moving on to other racing centres such as Lambourn, which had been the “starting point for the stable lads’ strike of 1938” in support of higher wages (Racing Post 2001). Ultimately, TGWU organisation was turned to the disadvantage of stable lads, then as now still enduring a largely feudal employment relationship, rooted in the class structure of a bygone era. For these reasons, the 1975 strike looms large in the industry’s folklore - “There was one event in 1975 which towers above all others in the context of racing history, and that was the stable lads’ strike.” (Wilson 1998:232). The strike had quite unintended and certainly unexpected consequences for the future of industrial relations in the industry. However, the development of national collective bargaining amongst a group of small firms, its retention in the face of more recent trends to decentralise, and its outcomes for workers remain unexplored.

This paper considers evidence drawn from a wider case study of the racing labour process and the social relations which surround it. The evidence is drawn from a number of sources, primarily historical sources in order to establish the context of collective bargaining and the 1975 strike and then data from semi-structured interviews with current workers, which were conducted from October 2003 to June 2004. The historical data were collected from the TGWU archive at the Modern Records Centre, the British Library Newspaper Library and a variety of social histories. The contemporary interviews with racing staff were conducted at 20 race meetings. This was found to be a successful method, since race courses were able to provide access to the staff canteen, allowing the author to talk with staff when they away from their temporary workplace, the racecourse stables. The current research also builds on two studies conducted by the author with employers in 2000 (Winters 2000; LPC 2001).

The history of industrial relations in horse racing was originally an issue for the author when engaged by the British Horseracing Board in 2000 to study working practices in Flat racing (Winters 2000). The mention of the words “industrial relations” provoked the universal response from employer respondents that industrial relations equated to the 1975 stable lads’ strike and “the day when Lester Piggott was pulled from his horse” which he was due to ride in the 1000 Guineas race at Newmarket. A small amount of research revealed a number of things about this statement. Firstly, it was Willie Carson who was unseated by striking stable lads, and he went on to incite race goers to take action against the strikers (Racing Post 2.5.75). Lester Piggott and two other jockeys then led a mounted charge against the strikers (ibid), an action for which they narrowly avoided police prosecution. None of this is mentioned when the story is told; it may not even be known by the narrator. This leads to the second point - that events in history become distorted as they are retold in the intervening years. In any event, this brief

anecdote shows that memories fade, raising questions over the validity of interviewing those who were involved at the time, supposing that they are willing to talk – for example, attempts by the author to interview leading protagonists in the creation of the Stable Lads' Association were either ignored or met with downright rejection. Nevertheless, an appreciation of industrial relations history is an important prerequisite for a fuller understanding of the present since events become part of industrial folklore and have an important effect in the future – this is certainly the case for racing's industrial relations traditions and practices. As Edwards states (1990:126) "Workplaces have histories".

A discussion of history also allows for the presentation of the broad development of racing, from its original sporting and aristocratic roots in to the modern industry which it claims to be today. That there have been many changes should not be surprising for, as Rose points out (1994:27), ".....change in industrial relations reflects wider economic, political and social changes.....". What is perhaps more surprising is the degree of continuity in some aspects of racing, for as Munting tells us (1987:121) "The detailed work of training horses has changed hardly at all." This is supported by Herbert (1974:14-15) who records that "Life in a racing stable, as we approach the last quarter of the twentieth century, remains basically feudal.....the ways of a racing stable have changed hardly more in the last convulsive century than have the saddles and bridles and the shoes on the horses' hooves". This can be confirmed at the start of the 21st century also, since working routines, lack of technological input coupled with a labour intensive labour process are all recorded by Winters (2000). While neither Munting nor Herbert was addressing industrial relations issues, these are still telling factors in seeking an explanation of the reasons for the current state of affairs between trainers and their workers, taking Thompson's position (1990) that the nature of work is itself a significant feature in reaching an understanding of industrial relations, but one which is largely overlooked in the labour process literature, for example.

A further important aspect of an historical analysis of UK racing is to uncover the class structure and attitudes which have permeated the industry since it was established, relics of which are still influential today. Hobsbawm (1997:24) poses the question "What can history tell us about contemporary society?" and goes on to say that "the relations between past, present and future are not only matters of vital interest to all: they are quite indispensable" (ibid). It was the opinion of one respondent, a member of the Jockey Club security staff¹, based on many years' involvement in the industry, that racing was a last bastion of class relations, with stable staff forever cast in the role of servant or at the very least expected to adopt servile attitudes in their relations with their employer and racehorse owners. It was also the observation of the author, drawn from attending many race meetings in the course of the field work, that the last person to be included in any inquest into poor performance tended to be the stable lad or girl who otherwise had complete daily responsibility for the care and welfare of a substantial investment on the part of the unsuccessful owner. It will thus be apparent that the 1975 strike thrust an invisible workforce into unexpected prominence in an industry which is daily dominated by the recorded image, either in the sporting pages or in televised races. This touches on

¹ Interviewed at Chepstow racecourse, ... January 2004

the important aspect of the way in which racing conducts its affairs, especially industrial relations, with a degree of secrecy and a shunning of those who are viewed as unwelcome outsiders, with little or no knowledge of the mysteries of race horse training; for example, Fox (2002) has likened trainers to the tribal shaman while as Bernard (1997:67) puts it “Trainers move in mysterious ways”. During the 1975 strike the TGWU’s Regional Officer, Sam Horncastle, was vilified in the press for his background as a convenor of shop stewards in the Liverpool docks, supposedly rendering him incapable of distinguishing one end of a horse from another. In any event, this entirely misses the point since it was his skills as a negotiator, his ability to represent the interests of his stable lad members within the context of the capitalist employment relationship which were important. Still, for some these counted for nothing against the fact that he was an outsider. This is an attitude which still prevails, reflected in subsequent studies of racing where the fact that each author could claim horse(wo)manship was a key to gaining access and trust (Cassidy 2002; Filby 1983; Fox 2002; Winters 2000), not only with employers but with workers also.

The strike

The title of this paper is paraphrased from a statement made in 1975 by John Winter, then chair of the Newmarket Trainers’ Federation (the employers’ association). He was referring to possible disruption of the 1000 Guineas race, a Classic Flat race run at Newmarket at the beginning of May each year, commanding high levels of prize money, betting revenue and attendance money from race goers who, in the main, came from the upper echelons of UK society, since Flat racing is strongly rooted in the UK’s class structure, originally developed in the 18th century by the ruling elite of aristocrats and strongly supported by the monarchy. The strike lasted from April to July 1975.

Eaton (1976) argues that the Newmarket lads struck because of a feeling of relative deprivation; the basic wage in Newmarket in 1974/75 was £23.50 per week (Sporting Life 1975) at a time when manufacturing wages were in the region of £50 per week. This paper argues that it is the nature of the industry and employment within it which led inexorably to the strike; in Hyman’s terms there is a need “to distinguish manifest from latent issues” (1989:126). Chief among the latent issues were long and unsocial working hours; working outdoors in all weathers; physically hard and often dangerous work; staff regarded as unskilled labour, cheap to pay and easy to replace; job insecurity as, at the end of each racing season, yards would typically shed staff as work declined; autocratic employers. However, the self-same bargaining issues remain unresolved nearly thirty years later, despite the existence of national collective bargaining machinery. The nature of the industry and employment within it now seem to have led inexorably to fragmentation, rather than collective action by workers.

The National Joint Council for Stable Staffs (NJCSS), the National Trainers’ Federation (NTF) and Stable Lads’ Association (SLA) were established in 1975, all as a direct result of the 1975 strike. The evidence shows that the then Chairman of the Levy Board, Desmond Plummer, insisted that an extra £1 million of investment in the industry would not be granted unless the trainers agreed to the establishment of national collective

bargaining and unless all issues regarding the operation of this machinery were resolved by the end of 1975 (Hill 1988). However, the NJC has not developed beyond operation as a minimum level agreement, since it was paralleled by the derecognition of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) in 1976 and the creation of a weak alternative staff association. The SLA was quietly supported by the employers, was run initially by volunteers and then on a shoestring fashioned from 50p per week subscriptions and rather more substantial employer/industry donations from the late 1970s until 2001 when the industry decided to fund the SLA direct from prize money.

Bain et al (1973:199) regard staff associations as part of the development of white collar unionisation, observing that ““One factor that seems to be relevant [to their development] was the closed culture of the building societies’ world”. Although not white collar workers, stable staff and the SLA certainly operate within the closed culture of the racing industry. A further point which resonates with the racing industry culture which is that “Most employees tend to be inward looking, perhaps building society employees were more so than many, in a field where trade unionism was regarded with suspicion, if not hostility” (ibid:199). The response from racing employees in 2000 was that unions are “not appropriate because they go on strike”² which would harm the horses entrusted to the care of stable workers.

The 1975 strike

This section revisits the 1975 stable lads’ strike, a subject which has received very little attention apart from an article written by Jack Eaton (1976) in the immediate aftermath of the dispute. He predicted (correctly) that the TGWU could have difficulties in maintaining its organisation of this group of workers, which had commenced in 1935 and had involved strike action in 1938, 1953 and 1960 (Filby 1987). He also observed that one immediate outcome of the strike was the establishment of the stable lads association (SLA) in September 1975 but could not be in a position to give a detailed account of events thereafter, the nature of the SLA or its ability to represent its members. This paper examines the state of industrial relations in the industry in the 1970s and identifies the wider ramifications of the strike for the future of industrial relations for the racehorse training sector. The data is drawn primarily from secondary sources, augmented by recollections of the strike gathered by the author in interviews with stable lads and the SLA between 2000-2002. An attempt was made to interview the main protagonists in the creation of the SLA but all three declined to participate.

A small-scale strike, by a workforce normally invisible to the race going public, assumed immense proportions for the industry and had a major, unintended and lasting impact on the future conduct of industrial relations. According to Wilson, it was the “one event in 1975 which tower[ed] above all others in the context of racing history” (1998:233). It prompted questions in Parliament, a spirited debate in the racing press on the exploitation of workers and was represented by some as the work of political agitators. It was a Webbsian “trial of strength” (1897) which resulted in a 19% pay increase. However, the

² Interviews at Newmarket June 2000

employers went on to win the war for the hearts and minds of their labour force, at least as far as continuing support for the TGWU was concerned.

The strike commenced on 30 April 1975, when 189 T&G members came out in Newmarket and stayed out until 28 July 1975 (TGWU 1975b and 1975c). It was in support of a demand for an increase £4.47 per week and coincided with the top races of the Flat racing season – a tactical advantage for the strikers. The majority of yards continued to work normally but a number of actions had a major impact on the employers – a sit in on Newmarket racecourse on 1 May and sabotage of the Rowley Mile course on 3 May being two of the most prominent. Sympathy action by the ACTT and the ABS ensured TV racing coverage was blacked in May and brewery drivers refused to cross picket lines at Ascot for the June meeting.

The strike also short in duration and small in terms of the numbers of workers involved nevertheless assumed enormous significance in the industry narrative of industrial relations, even to the point that it is regularly revisited and kept alive by the industry newspaper, the *Racing Post*, (Ashforth 2000; *Racing Post* 2002). The Glasgow University Media Group observed at the time that the strike was “a novel form of action” (1976:156) in an industry not known for its militancy but nevertheless in an industry which was - and remains - highly visible on television and in other media outlets. There is an intense folk memory of the strike, which was often raised with the author by trainers when labour relations issues were discussed – the prime example being “the day Lester Piggott was pulled from his horse” at the Guineas meeting at Newmarket. As Wilson has observed “There is one event in 1975 which towers above all others in the context of racing history, and that was the stable lads’ strike.” (1998:232). The strike has almost invariably been depicted as the work of “agitators”, with the TGWU roundly condemned as being out of touch with their members. This was to play in to the hands of the employers in the aftermath of the strike and against the backdrop of the growing campaign to create a “union for stableworkers” which stemmed from the 1974 Blackwell report (discussed below). Wilson, amongst others, records that “The activists who caused chaos and divided racing at the Guineas meeting were flying pickets who had arrived in coaches from the docks and elsewhere. Their union spokesman, Sam Hardcastle, was a passenger on a wave of cynical violence.” (1998:234)

However, this was not the first piece of industrial action in Newmarket in 1975. In January action was taken against John Oxley, one of the Newmarket trainers, over a breach of the redundancy agreement, which had been concluded in 1974 to deal with the declining fortunes of Newmarket trainers. The dispute was ultimately referred to arbitration, with ACAS finding in favour of the redundant workers who had been reinstated pending the outcome (Filby 1983) least because events were largely overtaken by the action over pay. The union had been bargaining over the annual wage increase since March but talks ended in deadlock on 17 April when the Newmarket Trainers’ Federation refused to go to arbitration over the TGWU claim of £4.47 per week, with a reduction to a 40 hour working week (*Sporting Life* h). The Federation claimed that they could only afford £3, citing familiar arguments that any increase in advance of this would be won at the cost of jobs. They made these arguments against the backdrop of a decline

of horses in training in Newmarket (Filby 1987; Thompson 2000) and the precarious economics of training racehorses overall (The Economist 1989).

What this argument ignores is the fact that wages for these workers were depressed mainly because the employer would not set a minimum training fee for racehorse owners, which reflected the true cost of training a racehorse. This was a perennial issue and had been tackled by the Racing Industry Committee of Inquiry (the Benson report) in 1968 and the Committee of Inquiry into manpower (the Blackwell report) in 1974. Savings had to be found and they generally were found by cutting labour costs, in this case by perpetuating a system of low pay and long hours. As Jack Logan comments "...the stark fact remains that militancy at Newmarket, for which some trainers and their patrons have sat up and begged reflects the underpayment of lads in less successful yards all over the country." (Sporting Life 1975i:3).

On 26 April the employers emphatically repeated their refusal to increase their pay offer (Sporting Life 26.4.75), warning that increased wages would accelerate the industry's decline in the town. The Federation Chairman, John Winter went a stage further declaring that a strike would be tragic and would price trainers out of the market (Sporting Life 29.4.75).

The start of the strike was set to coincide with the first Classic races of the 1975 Flat racing season – the Guineas weekend in Newmarket at the beginning of May – which would be well attended, with famous jockeys such as Lester Piggott likely to bring in the crowds. More than that, influential owners of racehorses would be in attendance to see their animals compete and finally there would be widespread media coverage. The lads were now making two demands – first that there should be an inquiry into the industry and second that their case for a pay increase be referred to arbitration, a proposal stoutly refused by the Newmarket employers. Filby (1983: 387) remarks that the employers' ideology was one of a "fear and reluctance to use arbitration machinery." and it is possible that their attitude was hardened by what was seen as a defeat for John Oxley over the earlier issue of breaches of the redundancy procedure. All the indications were that other unions would support the lads, most notably horsebox drivers and broadcasting staff and catering staff. As a mark of solidarity, the Morning Star refused to publish racing selections or the Newmarket card on 1 May. Action was set to commence after evening stables on 30 April.

The 1 May, the first raceday, witnessed pickets at every stable in Newmarket as well as at the racecourse itself. Nothing would be done to adversely affect the welfare of horses. Almost immediately, tempers flared when it was suggested that one trainer, Bruce Hobbs (coincidentally the trainer of Julian Wilson's racehorse), had tried to evict striking lads from their hostel. The lads refused to move, with the TGWU denying that there was a sit in. Sam Horncastle, the District Officer, is reported as saying that the lads were merely remaining in their accommodation and taking it in turns to go out in twos and threes for supplies – in other words a sit in.

The employers found various ways of circumventing the initial action during the morning exercise routine, with scab labour provided by non-union lads and by jockeys. The Trainers' Federation met to decide how to transport horses to the race meeting without the need to run the gauntlet of picket lines. Catering services were not disrupted as supplies were brought in over the July racecourse, thus avoiding an encounter with any picket; the use of non-union drivers obviously helped. However, race goers were likely to have a dry day as brewery drivers refused to cross the picket lines. They certainly had an unexpected walk to the turnstile as coach drivers who were members of the TGWU refused to drive the last half mile to the Grandstand area.

Matters became more fraught on 2 May, and this is the incident which sticks in the memory of current day racing industry figures and is kept alive by the Racing Post (2002). The lads' actions - a sit-down protest of around 200 on the race course - were represented as the worst aspects of trade unionism but the actions of all protagonists must be examined to find the truth of these assertions. There is ample contemporary evidence that race goers behaved like a mob, incited by the actions of and exhortations of jockeys such as Willie Carson and Lester Piggott, Piggott in particular leading a jockeys' charge on horseback against the lads, an action for which he narrowly avoided police prosecution. The Daily Telegraph reports that stewards, trainers and owners "led 300 angry punters into battle against the 100 pickets.....One Jockey Club steward was seen waving his heavy binoculars in the air as he charged among the stable lads.....Several stable lads were....thrown over the rails...while others were chased across the heath by spectators in a running battle lasting several minutes." (1975a:2). Lads were accused of violence and 20 were arrested and charged with breaching the peace, taken to court and fined £20 each (Racing Post 1975k). No legal action was taken against those members of the racing public who had apparently acted spontaneously - because "the lads were trespassing on private land" according to a former senior steward of the Jockey Club - and punters were thus justified in their actions (ibid).

The strike continued through May, June and July, with the Royal meeting at Ascot being picketed by lads and blacked by brewery drivers and by broadcasting staff but there was no repetition of the struggle on 2 May at Newmarket. Throughout that time the TGWU continued to try to press the Trainers Federation to go to arbitration to no avail. Questions were also raised in the House of Commons about ways to bring about an early end to the dispute and the cost of policing (Hansard 1975a-f) but bodies such as the Jockey Club seemed to be content to sit on the sidelines. For this they were condemned by Jack Logan in the Sporting Life (4.7.75) as were the Levy Board. Logan believed that the Club should use its regulatory powers to enforce a minimum wage as part of its licensing authority over trainers which is a significant power, since the Jockey Club has sole ability to grant or revoke a trainer's licence under the Rules of Racing, a fact which is treated seriously by all.

At the beginning of July, talks resumed between the TGWU and the Federation, under the auspices of ACAS, but despite a six hour meeting the two sides failed to reach a settlement. A further long meeting on 13 July resulted in a basis for agreement which the TGWU recommended to its members, not least because it came very close to meeting

their original claim. The formula was to include a minimum consolidated wage; maintenance of differentials; reinstatement of sacked strikers; a return to work on 18 July.

Throughout the strike, employers and their influential allies in the racing press, played hard for the hearts and minds of their employees. There is no doubt that the strike was not strongly supported numerically, even within Newmarket, where TGWU records show that 189 lads were out on strike (TGWU 1975b), although it did attract sympathy action from lorry drivers and broadcasting staff. Employers regularly claimed that the strike would be a disaster for Newmarket, effectively pricing trainers out of the market, thus conflating the immediate effects of the strike with a possible outcome of increased wages. John Oaksey, writing in the *Telegraph* and in the *Horse and Hound*, is recorded as denigrating strikers and praising unions members who remained at work during the January 1975 action (Jack Logan 24.1.75). Oaksey was shortly to become a founder of the Stable Lads' Association and remains a trustee of that organisation to this day, together with Jimmy Hill, also a prime mover in creating the Association.

The strike ended after the intervention of a number of industry bodies, most notably the Horserace Betting Levy Board (Filby 1987; Hansard 1975) which offered the substantial inducement of new investment in the industry if the employers would take action to reach agreement and end the strike. Agreement, which met the original wage claim, included the establishment of the National Joint Council for Stable Staffs (NJCSS) which now forms part of the Rules of Racing (NTF 2000; Filby 1983; Jockey Club 2002) with the force of disciplinary sanctions if breached.

The Blackwell report

The 1975 strike was judged by Eaton (1976) as a classic example of relative deprivation. There is no doubt that the lads' claim involved comparability and the "going rate". However, a primary discovery from contemporary records is that arguments against an independent trade union to represent stable workers were already gaining strength, even before the strike was mooted. In 1974 the publication of the Blackwell report on manpower in the horse racing industry (Joint Racing Board 1974) laid the foundations on which the settlement of a local pay dispute was able to put an end to 40 years of union recognition and collective bargaining. The report was prepared under the leadership of Tom Blackwell, then Senior Steward of the Jockey Club, the highest office it is possible to hold in the Club. It did not only examine the employment of stable lads but considered the wide variety of occupations which exist throughout the industry. Significantly, Blackwell pronounced on industrial relations within the industry and formed an important backdrop to the events which unfolded as the strike drew to a close, most notably the establishment of a staff association in direct challenge to the TGWU. The *Sporting Life* reports in February (1975:3) that "The Blackwell Committee's recommendations on a body to represent stable staff did not go down well with the Transport and General Workers' Union." It goes on to report Moss Evans' rebuke that "To do the job correctly you must have a bona fide trade union organisation with all the facilities to provide an adequate service to stable staff." (ibid)

The employers' response at that stage was that it was for the lads to decide who should represent them but their representative did go on to remark that the TGWU was possibly too large and remote from stable lads who were more akin to agricultural workers, themes which were to be used against the TGWU as the 1975 strike unfolded. A revealing statement from a related group of workers, stud workers, over their own association was that "We are not a union. In my opinion stud workers do not need one; animals and unions to not mix." (ibid). Again, sentiments which were adroitly used once the employers decided that the TGWU were no longer welcome.

Jack Logan, a champion of the stable lads' cause in the *Sporting Life* (1975:5), commented in January that Jockey Club officials might be contemplating their own union and that the "...Blackwell wing would have been happier if this 'union' had been formed out of the Head Lads' Association on the *lines thought fit for stablemen, in preference to the TGWU*." (emphasis added) The evidence suggests that there were already moves afoot to destabilise existing industrial relations arrangements. The significance of this report is borne out by the fact that there was the first ever conference of all interest groups, including the T&G, in February 1975 to discuss the Blackwell report, including the management of labour (*Sporting Life* 1975 c?).

The influence of industry commentators cannot be accurately estimated but the role of number of influential figures cannot be discounted. For example, John Oaksey – a prominent racing journalist writing for the *Telegraph* – was one of the leading figures promoting the SLA; he was a former amateur National Hunt jockey and owner and breeder of racehorses, thus very well known at many levels in the industry (Oaksey 2003). On the one hand, he is recorded as supporting the need for more prize money to reach the pockets of stable lads – not, it must be noted higher wages but variable pay dependent on the number of winners at any given stables – (*Sporting Life* 1975). On the other hand, writing in the pages of the *Horse and Hound* he roundly condemns the notion of industrial democracy represented by a suggestion that the lads' union should have an equal voice to that of the Jockey Club at industry meetings.

The propaganda war

As Beynon states (1975:243 "The modern epics are written in newsprint". This is no less true for stable lads than for Ford workers and, while it is difficult to estimate at a distance of nearly thirty years, the exact impact of media reporting, it is fair to say, based on the author's more recent research (Winters 2000) that stableworkers are avid readers of the industry paper, now the *Racing Post* since the demise of the *Sporting Life*, and of the racing press more generally. In 1975 the *Sporting Life* was still running a weekly commentary on racing issues, authored by Jack Logan who demonstrated his support for the lads throughout the strike. Logan was deeply critical of the employers' stance on the TGWU wage claim and on their failure to modernise their attitudes to the reality of 1970s labour relations. He also called the Jockey Club to account for failing to shoulder their responsibility for the poor state of industrial relations in the industry, pointing out that the strike was not just about wages but "... the unfairness of a situation in which the rulers of the Turf [the Jockey Club] pass the main buck of welfare and wages to individual trainers....It is about the Turf's failure to treat labour as an estate of its realm (1975?:3).

In so commenting, Logan brings home the underlying issues which have dogged industrial relations in this industry and which make it a metaphor for class relations in the United Kingdom.

Once the strike got under way, it became front page news in the *Sporting Life* and also received prominent coverage in the national press but the commentary here was less than supportive of the workers' case, most notably in the *Times* and the *Telegraph*. As the dispute continued, John Oaksey (Baronet) writing a weekly column in the *Telegraph* lost no opportunity to denigrate the strikers [date] and to praise those "loyal workers" who did not strike or who returned to work [date]. He then turned his attention to the labour relations proposals in the Blackwell report, particularly the theme of a union for stable lads which would truly represent "the interests of all British stable employees and give them an audible voice in the difficult years ahead" (Oaksey 1975?:25).

Logan continued to oppose the formation of such an association, pointing out that an association of stable lads, once mooted by Jimmy Hill (ex-president of the Professional Footballers' Association and one-time strike leader), Richard Pitman (ex-jockey, now trainer and racing journalist) and Brough Scott (former amateur jockey turned racing journalists) "would have little or no experience in negotiating stablemen's wages and none of the back services which negotiators need (1975?:2).

The outcome

The strike had a number of important outcomes, some on an individual level and others affecting the future of collective representation and collective bargaining. In the immediate aftermath the employers were in the ascendancy – the "no victimisation" clause was ignored; striking workers were sacked; unfair dismissal actions were largely unsuccessful and strikers were blacked (Filby 1983). No action was taken by the TGWU in support of these workers. However, the National Joint Council for Stable Staffs (NJCSS) was established in 1975 as a direct result of the 1975 strike. As Bain has observed (1999:22), "Industrial relations in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s was characterised by the collective power of the trade unions" which offers an explanation of the employers' willingness to accept the NJCSS and SLA in face of express power of TGWU.

There were therefore important external influences on the creation of and immediate maintenance of the bargaining machinery. However, there is a gap in our understanding of the development of the national bargaining machinery and the reasons why the NTF as retained the machinery, despite showing some inclination to scrap the collective agreement and return to the pre-1975 situation. After all, the national agreement serves as a minimum agreement and research conducted by Winters in 2000 (LPC 2001) revealed that many trainers pay above the minimum, some significantly so, in order to respond to labour market pressures. Moreover, there is an equivalent gap in our understanding of the development and operation of the Stable Lads' Association, although the *Racing Post* has recently turned its attention to the SLA in the light of

dissension amongst Newmarket members about the seeming lack of activity on the part of its National Secretary (sources). The next sections considers the establishment of the SLA, then the NTF, moving on to present the activities of the NJCSS since 1975.

The Stable Lads' Association

The Blackwell report was undoubtedly influential in the creation of the SLA but other events along the way, including the strike, made their contribution. On 14 March 1975 the Sporting Life reported that a Stable Lads' Action group had been established, whose aim was to act as a pressure group to bring more investment into racing, holding an inaugural meeting in March 1975, attended by 100 lads and three trainers' representatives, which agreed to send 50 strong delegation to Doncaster to demonstrate on the first day of the Flat racing season.

The creation of the SLA was in effect the accomplishment of a breakaway union. This area of academic debate was found to be the most sparsely covered, with Lerner (1961) leading the field. Lerner examines the reasons why breakaway unions are formed and points to a number of factors which are relevant to examination of a small specialist union. In particular, she points to a loss of confidence in the union on the part of some groups within a union and the vulnerability of larger unions to splits (ibid:187). In her view, breakaways occur because skilled workers "... believe that their interests had been subverted by the majority of unskilled workers" (ibid:198). Neill (1979:31-40) continues on the same theme in his coverage of periodic attempts by professional groups to break away from NALGO. Lockwood (1958:191-192) refers to the danger of chief officers breaking away over TUC affiliation. While no attempt appears to have been made to survey breakaway unions in the forty years since Lerner's work was completed, evidence tends to suggest that the conjunction of three aspects are influential in decisions to break away – a cultivation of the "special/different" nature of the work being undertaken by the proposed breakaway group; an issue which becomes an issue of "principle" which justifies the breakaway; finally, management support and encouragement.

With regard to staff associations, here more evidence has been gathered, especially as part of the large volume of industrial relations research undertaken throughout the 1970s. Attention was particularly paid to the finance and building society sector where high levels of membership density were recorded by Swabe et al (198?), for example 57% for the West Bromwich Staff Association and 86% for the Halifax. Of these two, the WBSA had no certificate of independence as a trade union while the Halifax was registered as an independent trade union, had five full time staff and a General Secretary who was a "former trade union official" who "combined trade union negotiating skills and expertise with administration" (ibid:196). Bain (1983:199) regards staff associations as part of the development of white collar unionisation, observing that "One factor that seems to be relevant was the closed culture of the building societies' world". Although not white collar workers, stable staff and the SLA certainly operate within the closed culture of the racing industry. Bain makes a further point which resonates with the racing industry culture which is that "Most employees tend to be inward looking, perhaps building society employees were more so than many, in a field where trade unionism was regarded

with suspicion, if not hostility” (ibid:199). However, he does record a signal difference between the two sectors with building societies containing well paid staff with benevolent and paternalist employers, with employers preferring a staff association as “this was a preferable solution to independent representation from an outside union” (ibid).

The Association was originally funded by a small deduction from staff wages, plus the provision of a car and office equipment by the British Horseracing Board, very much reflecting Clegg’s finding that “The Certification Officer issued certificates to a number of ‘staff associations’ and other bodies which are in competition with affiliated unions.” (1979:386). The SLA was created in response to the 1975 strike by influential figures in racing as already set out above. It was argued that the TGWU “did not understand” the unique needs of workers in horseracing and that an industry association would be a more appropriate body to fulfil this role. As already stated above, this view was not unique to the employers and, combined with the sacking of a number of striking lads and their blacking for future employment in the industry, it is hardly surprising that the prospect of such an institution proved persuasive to many workers.

Sam Horncastle, the lads District Officer, stated in August 1975 (The Record?:16) that “our main objective in the future is to organise other racing areas in to the trade union movement and to resist any attempt of the setting up of an association which is not independent but financed by wealthy trainers and race horse owners.” However, the records of the TGWU do not reveal what, if any organising attempts were. In any event, by 1976 the employers had taken matters in to their own hands and surveyed staff attitudes to the union (source), claiming that the evidence they gathered indicated no support on the part of stable workers, entitling them to effectively derecognised the union in favour of the SLA.

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Bain (1983:199) “Presumably an informed employer by the latter 1970s realised that some form of collective bargaining was likely and to resist the home-grown variety was to invite the far more undesirable importation of strangers into the organisation”

Rose (1994:34) “Pluralists.....argue that instabilities which inevitably occur within a system can be dealt with via accommodatory mechanisms, and the reconciliation of countervailing interests by, for example, institutionalizing industrial conflicts.” Plummer was of that generation of pluralists, even if the majority of trainers were not.

Newby et al (1978:27) talking of farmers and landowners makes another telling point from within a similar employment sector, agriculture, to that of race horse training and this is that the employers “recognised that a labour force that identified with the system that subordinated it was in the long run more reliable and more efficient than a group of workers who gave their grudging consent under the threat of sanctions”. Thus, by relying on workers’ snobbery creation of the SLA ensured same result.

Interviews with representatives of the NTF³ have revealed that there is no archived material which records meetings of the NJC.

Conclusion

Eaton (1976) asserts that the TGWU would retain recognition for stable lads but fails to take account of the impact of the Blackwell report. This Committee of Inquiry recommended that more “appropriate” bodies be set up to represent the interests of workers. The report, doubting the heartfelt interest of the TGWU in representing all stable staff, recommended the establishment of a “well organised staff association which is able to negotiate nationally with the National Trainers’ Federation on pay and conditions....To this end, *every effort should be made and financial help given* to get this underway as soon as possible [emphasis added] (Joint Racing Board 1974:9). That this message was picked up and disseminated by influential racing figures is undoubted on the evidence presented in this paper. In part they were pandering to the notion of an elite workforce. However, there is equally little evidence to suggest that employment problems suffered by this group of workers, unique though their form of work undoubtedly is, were in any way different from more industrialised occupations.

The creation of the SLA was a reaction on the part of frightened employers who saw the association as a means of reasserting control. The first blow had already been struck when the Newmarket trainers sacked 70 lads - in breach of an express agreement not to victimise strikers. They went on to capitalise on the disinclination of the majority of the workforce to strike, or even to be union members, using the welfare of the horse as the rallying point. The establishment of national pay bargaining machinery in October 1975, albeit with the initial involvement of the T&G, also formed part of the employers’ strategic aim to regain and maintain control. Staff were balloted by the employer on union membership and the TGWU, a strong and militant union, with a left wing general secretary, was effectively derecognised.

For their part, the workforce accepted the SLA in the belief that they could not “win” against a strong and autocratic employer but that some form of representation was better than none. While the SLA launched with great enthusiasm, it had one full time official, no office, no regional structure, no workplace representation. By 2000 it commanded 16% support out of a potential 6000 members. As the current Secretary said in a recent interview “at the workplace level, it’s all still cloak and dagger.” (2002).

The strike was, nevertheless, part of the working class struggle which typified the 1970s (Lyddon 1998; Darlington & Lyddon 2001). The Newmarket lads had threatened action twice in 1974 – once over pay (Sporting Life 1974) and then over redundancy without union consultation (The Times 1975) – and the threats had been effective; the 1975 strike was a rational response to the refusal of the employers either to negotiate or to go to arbitration (Hyman 1989). It was also an unusual strike in that it took place in an industrial culture which, in the author’s experience, dominates the town. Workers drew strength from this but ultimately it proved a double edged sword.

³ Interviewed on 7 December 2003

