

## *Britain at Work 1945- 95 Oral History Programme*

### *What is Britain at Work 1945- 95?*

Britain at Work 1945- 95 is a nationwide oral history programme set up by historians, social scientists, community history groups and librarians of labour history collections. It aims to collect memories of the working lives of men and women 1945- 95. This includes accounts of their work and their trade union activities. It acts as an umbrella for an increasing number of local, regional or industry- based oral history projects.

### *Why Britain at Work?*

The inspiration for the programme was the Workers' War oral history project funded by the Big Lottery in 2004- 06. Over one hundred interviews with World War II civilian veterans were carried out under the auspices of the TUC and the National Pensioners Convention. The interviews were placed on the TUC Library Collections website: Workers' War: Home Front Revisited at [www.unionhistory.info/workerswar](http://www.unionhistory.info/workerswar)



### *The labour movement*

Britain at Work builds on the success of the Workers' War project. Interviews cover the period of post- war reconstruction, when there was growth in jobs, expanding trade union membership and a new democratic input by women and ethnic minority workers. This period of economic reconstruction was a watershed in the history of work and industrial relations. Traditional industries such as coal mining and shipbuilding co- existed with the expanding NHS, Post Office and telecoms. The construction industry grew with social housing and motorways whilst entertainment created jobs in television and film. In the sixties, the shop steward became a familiar figure in the press as governments were confronted by shop- floor militancy. From the late 1960s, industrial conflict began to intensify associated with changes in the labour process,

de- industrialisation, new union legislation and issues of racism and sex discrimination. The 1972 NUM strike, the UCATT national building industry strike, and the long- running strikes at Trico and Grunwick in west London were all key examples. There were also repeated government attempts to reform industrial relations, including the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and the 1974 Trade Union and Labour Relations Act.



## Work

Work itself has changed significantly since the 1950s. Whilst health and safety legislation has introduced positive changes, workplaces are often more alienating. Many older processes have been transformed with printing processes such as offset litho, for example, being replaced by computer-based technology and many jobs being lost to new technology. The intensity of work has grown whilst the 'culture' of work in many service industries is very different from that of the 1960s- for example in supermarkets, offices and call centres. The trade union movement has retained a significant foothold across workplaces but struggled within a hostile political climate for in the eighties and nineties.

## *What will Britain at Work do?*

Britain at Work aims to bring the voices of this generation back into the mainstream of contemporary Britain. Working from a number of different centres under a national steering committee, it aims to find people from a wide range of workplaces. Britain at Work provides a supportive and collegial framework for research into the period 1945- 1995. It aims to promote, collect and make accessible on- line oral history interviews and research. Interviews and other material collected by the various projects will be available in 2010 on the new website at [www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork](http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork) linked to 'The Union Makes Us Strong': TUC History Online.

## *Current projects:*

*Britain at Work* (west London, west & north- west Middx). Contact HISTORYtalk 0207 792 2282 [rjoebear@historytalk.org](mailto:rjoebear@historytalk.org)

*Constructing Post- war Britain: Building Workers' Stories 1950- 70*. Contact Chris Wall at University of Westminster 0207 911 5000 ext 3322 [c.wall@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:c.wall@westminster.ac.uk), Linda Clarke, [l.m.Clarke@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:l.m.Clarke@westminster.ac.uk) or [c.mcquire@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:c.mcquire@westminster.ac.uk)

## **Photos:**

**Aldenham Busworks**

**Grunwick strikers**

***Courtesy of TUC Library Collections***