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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xiv
 Editor's Preface	
<i>Ron Martin and Bob Rowthorn</i>	xv
 1 De-industrialisation in Britain	
<i>Bob Rowthorn</i>	1
 2 The Legacy Lingers On: The Impact of Britain's International Role on its Internal Geography	
<i>Doreen Massey</i>	31
 3 The Restructuring of the Post-war British Space Economy	
<i>Mick Dunford and Diane Perrons</i>	53
 4 Women's Work, Technological Change and Shifts in the Employment Structure	
<i>Felicity Henwood and Sally Wyatt</i>	106
 5 Regional Dimensions of Industrial Decline	
<i>John Rhodes</i>	138
 6 Producing an Industrial Wasteland: Capital, Labour and the State in north-east England	
<i>Ray Hudson</i>	169
 7 The De-industrialisation of the City	
<i>Steve Fothergill, Graham Gudgin, Michael Kitson and Sarah Monk</i>	214
 8 Thatcherism and Britain's Industrial Landscape	
<i>Ron Martin</i>	238

vi *Contents*

9	Producer Services and the Post-industrial Space Economy <i>Peter Daniels</i>	291
10	Re-industrialisation in Peripheral Britain: State Policy, the Space Economy and Industrial Innovation <i>Kevin Morgan</i>	322
	<i>Index</i>	361

List of Figures

1.1 Employment in the UK by Sector, 1946–83 (millions)	3
1.2 Employment in the UK by Sector, 1946–83 (percentage shares)	4
1.3 Employment Structure and Economic Development	9
1.4 UK Balance of Trade, 1946–83 (as per cent of GDP)	16
1.5 GDP in the UK and OECD, 1960–83	21
1.6 Manufacturing Output in the UK and OECD, 1970–82	24
3.1 Output at Constant-factor Cost by UK Sector, 1950–80	55
3.2 Gross Domestic Product in the UK and the Rest of the World	59
3.3 Regional Specialisation in the UK: Employees in Employment by 1968 SIC Order and Region in 1952	64
3.4 Growth and Change in UK Regional Employment: The Rate of Growth of, and Changes in, Employees in Employment by 1968 SIC and Region, 1952–73	66
3.5 The Geography of De-industrialisation: The Rate of Growth of, and Changes in, Employees in Employment by 1968 SIC Order and Region, 1973–81	96
3.6 The Major Patterns of Change in Value Added and Employment by Manufacturing Sector and Country in the EEC, 1960–77	100
4.1 Women Employees as a Percentage of Total Employees, by Region, 1951–75	124
4.2 Insurance, Banking, Finance and Business Services: Women Employees as a Percentage of Total Employees, by Region, 1951–75	126

viii *List of Figures*

4.3 Textiles: Women Employees as a Percentage of Total Employees, by Region, 1951–75	129
4.4 Electrical Engineering: Women Employees as a Percentage of Total Employees, by Region, 1951–75	130
6.1 The North-East Region	170
6.2 Unemployment Rates in the Northern Region – May 1984 (by Travel-to-Work Areas)	204
7.1 Manufacturing Employees per 1000 sq. metres of Industrial Floorspace, England and Wales, 1964–82	224
7.2 Changes in Manufacturing Output per Employee and per Unit of Floorspace, England and Wales, 1965–83	225
7.3 The Stock of Industrial Floorspace in England and Wales, 1964–82	227
8.1 The Geography of the 1980s' Slump	241
8.2 Wages and Employment in UK Manufacturing, 1950–77	250
8.3 Profitability in Manufacturing: Some International Comparisons, 1955–82	251
8.4 The Thatcher Government's Rolling Back of the Map of Regional Aid	273
8.5 Employment, Output and Productivity in UK Manufacturing, 1969–84	279
8.6 Net Surplus of Business Starts over Stops, by Region, 1980–83	281
10.1 The (Selective) Face of the Future?	346

List of Tables

1.1	Comparative Employment Structure in the West's most Industrialised Economies	5
1.2	Manufacturing Employment in the Advanced Capitalist Countries	6
1.3	Share of Manufacturing in Civil Employment, 1950–81	7
1.4	Employment Structure and Stage of Development	12
1.5	Summary of Employment Changes, 1955–81	14
1.6	GDP per Head in Selected Countries	22
1.7	Unemployment Rates in Selected OECD Countries	23
3.1	Output at Constant-factor Cost by UK Sector, 1950–81	56
3.2	Some Indicators of the Average Annual Long-run Rate of Growth of the Economies of France, the FRG and the UK	74
3.3	A Decomposition of Trends in the Profitability of Manufacturing Industry	94
4.1	Investment and Employment Growth Rates, Manufacturing Industry, 1960–75	113
4.2	Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Workers in Britain by Industrial Groups, 1841–1971	116
4.3	Broad Occupational–Industrial Distribution of Employment, UK	119
4.4	Occupational Distributions within Industrial Sectors, UK	120
4.5	Principal Occupations of the Female Work Force in England and Wales, 1911–71	123
4.6	Industrial Composition of Women's Employment, by Region, 1951 and 1975	127
5.1	Annual Growth Rates in GDP, by Region, 1966–81	142

x *List of Tables*

5.2	Sectoral Composition of Output in the UK and the Regions, 1981	144
5.3	The Impact of Sectoral Composition on Regional Growth in GDP, 1974–81	145
5.4	Regional Balances of Payments Relative to UK Average	147
5.5	Manufacturing Output Expressed as a Percentage of GDP, by Region, 1974–81	149
5.6	Changes in Manufacturing Employment, by Regional Groupings, 1966–83	150
5.7	Manufacturing Employment Change 1968–75 in the East Midlands by Size of Plant and Age of Firm	152
5.8	Manufacturing Employment Change in Groups of Regions Categorised by Urban/Rural Structure, 1966–83	155
5.9	Proportion of the Male Labour Force in Selected Occupational Groups, 1981	157
5.10	Percentage Change in Male Labour Force by Occupational Group, 1971–81	158
5.11	Changes in Competitive Performance of British Industry in Home and Overseas Markets, 1978–82	162
6.1	Unemployment (Annual Averages), 1951–83	172
6.2	Employees in Employment (000s) in the Northern Region, 1956–82	174
6.3	Notified Redundancies, Northern Region, 1978–83	176
6.4	Net Migration from the Northern Region, 1966–81	178
6.5	Confirmed Redundancies per 1000 Employees, South-East and Northern Regions, 1977–82	180
6.6	Number of Collieries, Manpower and Saleable Output in the North-East Coalfield, 1947–82	185
6.7	Profits and Losses by Individual Colliery in the North-East, 1981–82	187
6.8	Capacity Closures by British Shipbuilders in the North-East, 1977–83	191
6.9	Redundancies in the Northern Region: the ‘Thatcher Effect’	199
7.1	Manufacturing Employment by Type of Area, 1960–81	217

7.2	Manufacturing Employment Change in London and the Conurbations, 1952–81	219
7.3	Room for Expansion of Existing Factories by Type of Area	228
7.4	Available Industrial Land by Type of Area, 1982	229
7.5	Manufacturing Employment Change, 1960–78 and 1978–81, by Type of Area	231
8.1	Slim-down and Shake-out in British Manufacturing	259
8.2	Labour Shedding by Major British Companies	261
8.3	The Unequal Geography of Output Decline in Manufacturing During the Recession	262
8.4	The Unequal Geography of Labour Shake-out in Manufacturing During the Recession	263
8.5	Employment Change in Some Major West Midlands Companies, 1978–82	266
8.6	Employment Change in Some Major North-West Companies, 1975–83	267
8.7	Expenditure on Regional Industrial Assistance 1977–8 to 1984–5	272
8.8	Regional Job Growth, March 1983–June 1985	283
8.9	Regional Gross Domestic Product Per Head, as a Percentage of the UK Average	285
9.1	Estimated Distribution of Producer and Consumer Employment within the Service Sector, by Industry, Great Britain, 1981	296
9.2	Change in Employees in Employment in Services, by Region, Great Britain, 1978–81	301
9.3	Convergence Indices for Producer-Service Employment, by Industry Class and Region, Great Britain, 1981	303
9.4	Estimated Share of Producer-Service Employment in Greater London Relative to the South-East and Great Britain, by Industry Class, 1981	305
9.5	OSIS Assistance, by Type of Area, 1972–83	315
10.1	Regional Analysis of Payments Under Parts I, II and III of the Industrial Development Act 1982 and Parts I and II of the Industry Act 1972, to 31 March 1983	331
10.2	UK Government Assistance to Industry – Summary	332

xii *List of Tables*

10.3	Department of Trade and Industry Assistance to Industry – Summary	333
10.4	Sectoral Development and Structural Adjustment	334
10.5	Jobless Growth in the Electronics Industry in Britain, 1975–81	336
10.6	The South-East Share of the Electronics Industry in Britain, 1981	338
10.7	Potential Areas of UK Growth and of Stability or Decline	354

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Editors' Preface

This volume of essays is concerned with the geography of industrial decline in post-war Britain, with the regional anatomy and implications of 'de-industrialisation'. Since it first 'gate-crashed' the economic literature at the end of the 1970s (Blackaby, 1981) the term 'de-industrialisation' has been used in various ways, both descriptively and analytically, to refer to the most dramatic indicator of Britain's ailing economic performance, the rapid decline in the country's manufacturing base. Whether this decline is measured in terms of the fall in industrial employment (Thirlwall, 1982), as the progressive deterioration in the balance of manufacturing trade (Singh, 1977) or as the chronic and cumulative elements of a relative and absolute decline in the contribution of manufacturing output, investment, exports and jobs to the national economy (Sheriff, 1979; Hughes, 1981), the conclusion is the same: that since the late 1960s, and especially since the early 1970s, British manufacturing has become caught in a process of progressive and accelerating contraction. Moreover, while there is evidence to suggest that the 'British disease' has recently spread to a number of other advanced industrial economies, such as the USA, Canada, France and Germany, in no other country has de-industrialisation been so intense. Why the process should have afflicted Britain so acutely is not altogether clear, although there is a growing body of opinion that it may be the manifestation of a longer-term, deep-seated systemic problem of structural weakness and relative economic decline that is rooted in the country's earlier industrial history and its traditional role in world capitalist development (Gamble, 1981; Smith, 1984). In the same way that Britain was the first country to industrialise, so it has been the first to de-industrialise.

Undoubtedly the most visible evidence of industrial decline in Britain has been the collapse of manufacturing employment. The

number of workers engaged in manufacturing activity has fallen by more than 35 per cent since 1966. In that year employment in the manufacturing sector stood at its historical peak of 8.4 million; by the end of 1984 it had fallen to 5.4 million, and half of this drop occurred in the last five years of the period, between 1979 and 1984. The scale of this contraction is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Of itself, a fall in manufacturing employment, even of this magnitude, need not be problematic. After all, according to 'post-industrial' theorists, a decline in the significance of manufacturing was to be expected as one of the long-term consequences of post-war socio-economic change in advanced industrial societies (Bell, 1974; for a review see Gershuny, 1978). Just as the industrial revolution involved a massive shift of workers out of the primary sector of the economy into a rapidly expanding industrial base, so in the second half of the twentieth century there would be a subsequent movement of labour out of industry into the new leading growth sectors of services and tertiary activity.

This predicted transformation from an industrial society to a service-based 'post-industrial' one is assumed to be an inevitable consequence of rising income levels which generate increasing demands for and consumption of services, and of rising productivity levels in industry itself, made possible by technological advance, which permit workers to be released into service jobs. While the affluent decades of the 1950s and 1960s may have provided some measure of empirical justification for this prognosis of a 'post-industrial' trajectory to economic development, the realities of the 1970s and 1980s have been quite different. The long economic boom of 1945–72 has since been replaced by an extended period of relative economic stagnation and recession in the major capitalist countries, and particularly in Britain. Under these conditions of slow economic growth the job losses in British manufacturing over the past two decades have been associated not so much with rising productivity due to technological progress as with almost static productivity levels and falling output in manufacturing. Nor has the labour expelled from industry been reabsorbed by the service sector; and this, in combination with the growth of the population of working age, has resulted in the emergence of record levels of mass unemployment. The shift in the employment structure towards services has, therefore, taken place in a somewhat different context: post-industrialisation has been overshadowed by de-industrialisation.

To date the analysis of Britain's industrial crisis has been dominated by aggregate economic inquiry. Yet the phenomenon of de-industrialisation manifestly has not occurred in a social or spatial vacuum. It is not a single or mono-causal economic mechanism with undifferentiated social and geographical consequences, but rather a diverse set of complex processes affecting different social groups and different localities in different ways. For example, in social terms the contraction of manufacturing has imposed a particularly severe burden on manual and unskilled workers, who have borne the brunt of the 3 million job losses and among whom there is now a serious problem of long-term structural unemployment; it has entailed a widening segmentation of the workforce between falling numbers of traditionally skilled production workers on the one hand and an increasingly important core of stably employed technical, supervisory and managerial staff on the other; and it has weakened the relative socio-economic status and comparative wage position of workers in what were, until the early 1970s, leading industries in the economy. The impact of these and similar aspects of industrial decline on the social class incidence of unemployment, de-skilling, living standards and poverty, has only just begun to be studied (e.g. Urry, 1983; Murgatroyd and Urry, 1984; Rose *et al.*, 1984). It is already clear, however, that de-industrialisation is restructuring the social fabric of Britain in significant and selective directions.

Likewise, as the contributions to this book demonstrate, while few major areas of the country have remained unscathed by industrial decline, none the less de-industrialisation has had a distinct and progressive geographical pattern. Over the past two decades three sorts of locality have fallen victim to the contraction and retrenchment of manufacturing industry and the loss of manufacturing employment. The problem first became evident in the old geographical bases of nineteenth-century industrialisation and labour organisation. It began in the 1960s (if not earlier) in the cities, especially London, but including all the major conurbations. The dramatic erosion of jobs in these centres is at the heart of present-day urban decline and the 'inner-city problem'. As the pace of de-industrialisation quickened in the 1970s, so industrial rationalisation and job loss spread more widely to affect most of the traditional industrial Development Areas, those districts which first experienced structural economic decline in the inter-war

period and which have remained relatively depressed ever since. And then, more recently, from the late 1970s onwards, de-industrialisation has undermined the employment base of large parts of Britain's core manufacturing belt, notably the West Midlands and the North-West, areas with economies built around the growth industries (such as vehicles and engineering) of the 1950s and 1960s. Within the last fifteen years the West Midlands, Britain's 'workshop region', has fallen from being the country's leading manufacturing area, at the top of the industrial wage hierarchy, to a depressed region with a shattered economic base and the lowest manufacturing wages in the country. By contrast, the south and east of Britain, with the important exception of London, have experienced a much less intense and considerably less disruptive pace of industrial decline. Thus what two decades of accelerating de-industrialisation have done is to create a new map of unemployment. To the established post-war pattern of high unemployment in the industrial periphery of Britain, a geography inherited from the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, have been added both the major cities and conurbations, and the previously prosperous manufacturing heartland of the nation. De-industrialisation has sharpened the socio-economic divides between the south and the rest of Britain, and between the heavily urbanised and more rural parts of the country.

It is only over the past few years that British economic geographers and regional analysts have seriously started to explore and explain post-war regional trends in employment change and industrial reorganisation (for example, Fothergill and Gudgin, 1982; Goddard and Champion, 1983; Massey and Meegan, 1982; Massey, 1984). It is fair to say, however, that none of these studies has been explicitly concerned with the geography of de-industrialisation. In fact, one may suggest that in general, regional and economic geographical research in Britain has been somewhat slow to react, in terms of theoretical and empirical work, to the condition of a shrinking manufacturing base in a slow-growing economy. As a result, industrial geographers have as yet contributed little to our understanding of de-industrialisation; instead the tendency has been to shift research effort, much of it conducted within a largely unaltered methodological orthodoxy, to the study of the 'locational behaviour' of small firms and high-technology business, the sectors believed to hold some prospect of growth and

job generation. Important though these 'growth sectors' may be, the de-industrialisation issue remains of paramount significance: on account of the magnitude of the job losses involved, because these have far outweighed the impact of new small firms and high-technology activity, and crucially because de-industrialisation is central to understanding the current regional restructuring process. In Britain the spatial patterns of capital disinvestment, industrial reorganisation and job loss are not well synchronised with those of new investment and new jobs in the small firm and scientific, advanced technology sectors: the primary locations attracting the development of these new 'sunrise' industries are precisely those that have suffered least from de-industrialisation. This serves to point up the economic, social and political significance of the spatiality of de-industrialisation: it takes on meaning because of its differential impact on and consequences for the absorptive capacities of different regions. It is this dimension of the phenomenon, the problem of the re-absorption of unemployed economic resources, that has stimulated the strong spatial emphasis of recent American studies of de-industrialisation in the United States (Bluestone and Harrison, 1980, 1982; Bluestone, Harrison and Baker, 1981; Bluestone, 1984; Gordus, Jarley and Ferman, 1981; McKenzie, 1984). The aim of the present book is to introduce a similar geographical perspective into the discussion of British de-industrialisation.

The book begins with a paper by **Bob Rowthorn** which describes in some detail the extent of industrial decline in Britain in relation to the post-war experience of other capitalist nations, and suggests three broad hypotheses which in combination might help to account for the severity of the British case. This discussion provides a contextual background for the remaining chapters, which fall into three main groups. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 focus attention on the different ways in which de-industrialisation has restructured the social and spatial division of labour within Britain. In Chapter 2, **Doreen Massey** argues that a major factor shaping the internal geography of production and jobs has been – and continues to be – the UK's changing role in the international division of labour, in conjunction with the enduring international orientation of British industrial and finance capital. The successive changes in the spatial division of labour are examined in Chapter 3 by **Mick Dunford** and **Diane Perrons**, who use a mode of regulation/regimes of accumulation

approach to highlight the regional consequences of the growing crisis of intensive and monopolistic production. Then, in Chapter 4, **Felicity Henwood** and **Sally Wyatt** reveal how the changing structure of industry and the impact of new technology have affected women's jobs within manufacturing and service industries across the regions of Britain.

The subsequent three essays report on some of the specific regional and urban features of the decline of manufacturing. **John Rhodes**, in Chapter 5, draws out the structural and policy bases of differential regional industrial decline over the period since the mid-1960s, while in the following chapter **Ray Hudson** demonstrates, in the context of the north-east region, how post-war state policies on nationalised industries have contributed to the de-industrialisation process. The pattern and problem of urban industrial decline make up the theme of Chapter 7, where **Steve Fothergill**, **Graham Gudgin** and their co-workers argue that the demise of the city as the centre of manufacturing production and employment is an almost inevitable consequence of the process of change under advanced capitalism, particularly as this has affected the nature of capital-employment-output relationships within the firm.

The final three contributions explore certain facets of the 'economic regeneration' issue. **Ron Martin** in Chapter 8 critically assesses the New Conservative response to and policy prescription for the de-industrialisation problem and argues that the Thatcher government's pursuance of monetarist-based neo-market policies aimed at 'recapitalising' Britain have in fact played a major part in accelerating the pace of industrial contraction since 1979. In his view the continuance of such policies is likely to exacerbate the growing economic gaps between the regions. As **Peter Daniels** and **Kevin Morgan** then show – in Chapters 9 and 10 – neither service industry nor high technology activity can be relied upon to generate compensating job growth or re-industrialisation in the country's depressed areas. According to Peter Daniels, producer and business services, the fastest-growing branches of the service sector, are concentrating increasingly in the more prosperous south of Britain, and are themselves beginning to experience their own 'de-industrialisation' because of the application of new technologies to labour-intensive functions. And as far as high technology and innovative industry is concerned, Kevin Morgan shows that

not only is Britain's international performance weak in this sphere, but also that there are strong forces in operation, backed up by government policies, which imply that a major focus on the so-called 'sunrise' industries as a vehicle for economic regeneration is almost certain to have profound uneven social and spatial consequences.

In commissioning these contributions no attempt was made to force authors' views and approaches into a single, rigid methodological mould. Instead, the reader will be aware of significant differences in conceptual orientation. The content of individual chapters remains the personal responsibility of the author(s) concerned; but the collection in total is offered as a comprehensive commentary on the evolving geography of British de-industrialisation. We hope that the book will be of interest and value not only to geographers and economists, but to all those concerned with the industrial problems and policy issues of regional Britain.

RON MARTIN
BOB ROWTHORN

Bibliography for the Preface is overleaf

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