THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham, 1918-1931, with special reference to the General Strike of 1926.

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CHAPTER I.

The Coal Industry and its problems 1880-1926

Coal was the basic power of the industrial revolution in Britain. It was the first raw material to be measured in millions of tons and provided the motive power for both the new machinery and the new transport[1] of industrialisation. By the beginning of the eighteenth century in the pre-industrial era, England was already Europe's largest coal consumer. According to the estimates of J.U. Nef, British coal production rose from an average total of 2,982,000 tons during the decade 1681-1690, to 10,295,000 in the years 1781-1790.[2] This growth of the coal-mining industry continued throughout the nineteenth century, the annual output rarely failing to show an advance on that of the previous year, save during one of the cyclical depressions. In 1855, 64,000,000 tons of coal were produced in Great Britain. Twenty years later, in 1875, coal output had risen to 133,000,000 tons. In 1880 the figure stood at 147,000,000 tons and this had been increased to 225,000,000 tons by 1900, reaching the peak of 287,000,000 tons in 1913, almost half

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1 For the early history of the British Coal Industry see Ashton, T.S. and Sykes, J., The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century (Manchester, 1929); Galloway, R.L., Annals of Coal-Mining, 2 vols., (1907); Jevons, H.S., The British Coal Trade (1915); Nef, J.U., The Rise of the British Coal Industry, 2 vols., (1932); Sweezy, P.M., Monopoly and Competition in the British Coal Trade (Harvard, 1938). Except where noted, the place of publication is in all cases London.

2 Quoted by Arnot, R.P., The Miners, A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain 1889-1910, vol. I, (1949), p. 22.

of the total European output. Thus, during the period 1875-1913, British coal output doubled, and more than doubled in the newer districts of Yorkshire, South Wales, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.[1] This expansion of the British coal industry was stimulated not only by the growth of the domestic market, but also by the industrialisation of Europe and the resulting increased demand for coal. For many years before 1913, world coal consumption has been estimated to have risen by about 4 per cent per year. Export sales of British coal in 1855 amounted to about 5,000,000 tons, some 7.7 per cent of the total produced. In 1913 this figure had risen to over 97,000,000 tons, 34 per cent of the total output. During the same period, 1855-1913, the value of coal as a percentage of total exports rose by almost 8 per cent from 2.5 per cent to 10.4 per cent.

COAL OUTPUT AND EXPORT (MILLIONS OF TONS)[2]

YEAR	OUTPUT	EXPORTS	FOREIGN BUNKERS
1875	133.3	14.0	3.3
1880	147.0	17.9	4.9
1890	181.6	28.7	8.0
1900	225.2	44.1	11.7
1910	264.4	62.1	19.5

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1 Production in Yorkshire had risen from 15.8 million tons in 1875 to 38 million tons in 1910, in South Wales from 14.1 million tons to 48 million tons, and in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire from 11.6 million tons to 31 million tons. Arnot, R.P., The Miners, A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain 1889-1910, vol. I, (1949), p. 57.

2 Data in the Table from: Jevons, H.S., The British Coal Trade (1915), p. 676; Court, W.B., Coal-History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series (1951), p. 7; Arnot, R.P., Ibid.

The higher profits and royalties which were obtained during those years undoubtedly became associated with 'normalcy' in the eyes of many colliery company managements and their shareholders. Great Britain dominated the world's seaborne coal trade and to many of those engaged in the industry there must have seemed little reason why she should not continue to do so. The increased output, large scale exports, and high profits however, were only a single side of the coin, masking a reverse side of increasing costs, declining productivity and stiffer foreign competition.

The basic problem of the coal industry in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was that of steadily rising costs. All extractive industries have a long run tendency towards diminishing returns. The most easily obtainable coal is taken first, and then deeper shafts become necessary, seams often get proportionately thinner, (at least in Britain) and these factors combine to make mining increasingly difficult. Moreover, the British coal industry suffered from the fact that it was the first to develop, and was therefore moving towards this difficult period earlier than its younger foreign rivals. It has been estimated that the end of the nineteenth century saw Britain's coal resources being exhausted twenty times more quickly than in 1800.[1] Furthermore, as the workings became larger and more complex, more men had to be employed on maintenance work underground, and problems of pumping, ventilation, timbering and roadway repairs, became more acute as well as more expensive. In

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[1] Taylor, A.J., 'Labour Productivity and Technological Innovation in the British Coal Industry 1850-1914', Economic History Review, 2nd Series, vol. XIV, No. 1. (August 1961), p. 50: Svennilson, I., Growth and Stagnation in the European Economy, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 1954), p. 108.

addition, the number of surface workers also rose in response to the demands made by the introduction or expansion of coal screening and washing facilities. The 133,000,000 tons of coal mined in 1875 was produced with a labour force of 513,700. By 1910, output had doubled to over 264,000,000 tons, but so had the number of men employed in the industry, to 1,027,539. Even in the relatively short but prosperous period from 1904-1914, an increase in the annual output of 62,000,000 tons was achieved only with the assistance of 346,000 additional labourers. The problem of rising costs was thus bound up inextricably with that of declining productivity.[1]

From the 1880's until 1914, the tendency towards falling productivity was most marked. In 1881, 382,000 miners had produced an average output of 403 tons per man, and up to that date productivity had been

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1 Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., p. 56; Lubin, I. and Everett, H., The British Coal Dilemma (New York, 1927), pp. 129-132. In the period 1883-1913, employment in the British Coal-Mining Industry increased 125 per cent, while the total working population rose by less than 40 per cent. Taylor, A.J., op. cit., p. 62.

The figures for Northumberland and Durham are especially interesting.

YEARS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF THOUSANDS OF TONS RAISED PER YEAR		AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED	
	Northumberland	Durham	Northumberland	Durham
1878-1884	6,689	27,483	22,900	72,500
1888-1894	9,108	29,608	30,400	94,400
1898-1904	11,491	35,028	39,900	113,400
1908-1914	13,756	39,929	56,400	154,000
1918-1924	11,606	31,681	59,300	163,500

Mess, H.A., Industrial Tyneside (1928), p. 68

increasing. In 1901 however, although the labour force had been increased to 64,000, the annual average output per man was down to 340 tons. By 1911, productivity had further declined, 877,000 men producing an average of only 309 tons per man. In simple terms, the decade 1901-1911 in the coal industry saw an overall increase of 19 per cent in the tonnage of coal raised but a 36 per cent increase in the number of mineworkers required to produce it.[1] This decline in productivity was especially noticeable in the older districts. In Durham for example, the annual production per worker underground between 1889 and 1907, two years in which the coal industry was working at almost full capacity, fell by nearly 89 tons. Over the same period the annual figures for Yorkshire, where new seams and new pits were more numerous, fell by only 24 tons per man. By 1913, Durham had had lost another 63 tons per man. Significant losses also occurred in Lancashire, Northumberland and Staffordshire.[2] Several factors have been underlined by historians as contributing to this decline. Prominent among these have been a slackening of effort on the part of the miners, attempts having been made to show a relationship between rising wages and increased absenteeism;[3] state intervention in the

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1 Clapham, J.H., An economic History of Modern Britain, vol. III (1937), p. 63.

2 Lubin, I. and Everett, H., op. cit.; Taylor, A.J., op. cit., p. 48.

3 Taylor, A.J., op. cit., pp. 53-54.

industry, culminating in the Eight Hours Act of 1908;[1] and the conservatism of both colliery employers and employees with regard to the introduction of mechanisation into the collieries.[2] A.J. Taylor in a close analysis of the problem has shown that the individualistic character of the industry, born of a pioneering spirit, together with its methods of obtaining capital, and a plentiful supply of cheap labour, all combined to obstruct technological innovation in the mines. By 1913 for example, only 8½ per cent of British coal mined was mechanically cut; the proportion mechanically conveyed was even smaller. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that only an all-embracing reorganisation of the industry, as has taken place since 1945, could have begun to deal with its problems.[3]

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1 Lubin, I. and Everett, H., op. cit.; Taylor, A.J., loc. cit. On the other hand, B. McCormick and J.E. Williams suggest that the overall effects of the Act 'appear to have been negligible.' McCormick, B. and Williams, J.E., 'The Miners and the Eight Hour Day 1863-1910', Economic History Review, 2nd Series, vol. XII, No. 2 (December 1959), pp. 222-238.

2 Court, W.B., op. cit., pp. 6-8. Lubin, I. and Everett, H., op. cit., pp. 152-159; Taylor, A.J., loc. cit.

3 Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal Mining (Cmd.6610, 1945). Known as the Reid Report after the name of its Chairman.; Court, W.B., op. cit., p. 8.; Taylor, A.J., op. cit., p. 58. An interesting and early plan, for the reorganisation of the coal industry is quoted by Clapham. It was the plan of Sir George Elliot, a one time coal miner who became a coal owner. He envisaged large scale amalgamations within the industry under the aegis of a semi-public giant coal company. The collieries would be divided into groups according to areas and qualities of coal. Good wages would be paid, the miners' welfare attended to, and excess profits divided between shareholders, miners and consumer under Board of Trade supervision. As Clapham points out, the British coal industry was not nearly ready enough for such a grand design in 1893. Clapham, J.H., vol. III op. cit., p. 220.

During the ten years before 1914 the British coal industry was working under less favourable conditions in another respect. After the period 1900-1904, the price of coal rose less steeply than the general level of prices. So that at a time when productivity in the industry was falling, the real value of what was produced was falling anyway. The customer was not meeting the increased costs of production. This was all in strong contrast to the years between 1880-1884 and 1900-1904, when the price of coal had risen more quickly than the general level of prices to an extent that more than compensated for the fall in output per head and that passed on the extra costs of production to the consumer.[1]

The increasingly severe foreign competition and the use of materials other than coal for power were beginning to exert pressure on the British coal industry by 1914, although the use of oil and electricity as sources of power and heat, together with a more scientific usage of coal itself, did not begin seriously to affect demand until after the war. Down to 1870, annual British coal output had exceeded the combined total of all other coal producing countries. In the period after 1870 and down to 1914, during which time British coal output doubled, output in France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, United States and Russia increased even more rapidly. The following table illustrates the changing pattern of production in the world's coal industries.

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[1] Allen, G.C., British Industries and their Organisation (1959 edition), pp. 51-52.

WORLD COAL and LIGNITE OUTPUT (in million metric tons).

COUNTRY	1875	1880	1890	1900	1910	1913
UNITED KINGDOM	135	149	184	229	269	292
U.S.A.	48	67	142	243	446	517
GERMANY	48	59	89	150	222	277
AUSTRIA/HUNGARY	13	15	26	39	38	54
FRANCE	17	19	26	33	39	41
RUSSIA	1	3	7	15	25	34
BELGIUM	15	17	20	23	23	23
JAPAN	-	-	5	7	15	22
INDIA	-	-	3	6	12	16
NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA	-	-	5	8	12	15
CHINA	-	-	-	-	14	14
[1] T O T A L	285	340	513	766	1148	1343

[1] Includes all other chief producing lands. The first figure for New Zealand and Australia, India and Japan under the year 1890 relates to 1895.[1]

By 1913, two-fifths of United States' coal production was mechanically cut, an amount nine times greater than that produced in Britain by coal cutting machinery. Great Britain's chief European competitor was Germany, and although productivity in British mines compared favourably with the output per man in German pits, Germany's coal production was increasing more rapidly than that of Great Britain in the years after 1870.

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1 Arnot, R.P., op. cit., p. 58

Whether these problems would have been solved if the war had not intervened is no more than an interesting hypothesis. In fact, the impact of the war upon the industry tended to delay the full appreciation of the industry's problems.

The immediate short-term effect of the outbreak of the war in August 1914, was to reduce the demand for British coal. War meant a sudden constriction of the coal export trade, and those districts like Northumberland and South Wales, which depended upon their overseas markets for a considerable portion of their total trade, were severely hit. With export markets thus restricted, competition for the domestic trade tended to stiffen. This contraction in the demand for coal, however, was only temporary, since the decrease in output caused by the draining off of large numbers of miners to the armed forces, together with the insatiable appetite for coal of the British Navy and the rapidly expanding munitions industry, swiftly restored the balance. In fact, the industry's major difficulty came in meeting the demands placed upon it, and the price of coal rose sharply. In order to improve the efficiency of the war effort, the Government found themselves increasingly compelled to intervene in, and finally to take over, control of the industry.

The first major problem with regard to the Coal Industry which exercised the mind of the Government in 1915 concerned the replacing of those mineworkers who had enlisted in the Army. A total of

191,170 miners, almost 19 per cent of the total employed in British coal mines, joined some branch of the Armed Services during the first seven months of the war. At the end of February 1915, the net reduction in the coal industry's labour force was 14 per cent as against a 13.5 per cent reduction in output during the same period.[1] On February 23rd, 1915, a Home Office Departmental Committee was set up 'to enquire into the conditions prevailing in the coal-mining industry with a view to promoting such organisation of work between employers and workmen as, having regard to the large number of miners who are enlisting for naval and military service, will secure the necessary production of coal during the war.[2]' The Committee consisted of three representatives of the owners and three of the men, under the Chairmanship of the Chief Inspector of Mines, and it functioned until the Government took over the industry in 1917. The Committee possessed no coercive power, merely being able to deal with the various problems which arose by means of investigation, report and finally, arbitration. It specifically aimed to prevent disputes, curb absenteeism among the workmen, stimulate increases in output, and act as a Recruiting Court for miners. In so far as the Committee was successful in stemming the flow of miners to the services, it was greatly aided by the Conscription Act of 1916 under which Coal Mining was declared to be a

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1 Redmayne, R.A.S., The British Coal-Mining Industry during the War (Oxford, 1923), pp. 12-15.

2 Report of the Departmental Committee [Home Office] to enquire into conditions prevailing in the Coal-Mining Industry due to the War, (Cmd. 7939, 1915), p. 4.

'protected' industry.[1]

As the demand for coal increased, so the price rose sharply, and early in 1915, yet another Board of Trade Committee was set up to enquire into the high coal prices which were being charged on the domestic market. The Committee's recommendations, published on March 24th, 1915, included the restriction of exports to neutral countries, and a warning that should prices not return to a reasonable level, 'the Government should consider a scheme for assuming control of the output of collieries during the continuance of the war'.[2] Four months later, in July 1915, the Price of Coal (Limitation) Act stipulated that the pithead price of coal was not to exceed, by more than 4/- per ton, the price of the same type of coal sold in similar quantities and under similar circumstances on the corresponding date in the year ending June 30th 1914. The Board of Trade had the power to increase the 4/- per ton in any area should the Board consider that the conditions warranted such action.[3] This Act did not apply to the export trade, but control of freight rates and a voluntary agreement between the owners prevented the price of coal exported to Britain's Allies in France and Italy from reaching an exhorbitant

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1 Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 12-15.
For a detailed account of the working of the British Coal Industry during the War see: Cole, G.D.H., Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry 1914-1921 (Oxford, 1923); Redmayne, R.A.S., The British Coal-Mining Industry during the War (Oxford, 1923); Arnot, R.P., The Miners: Years of Struggle, vol. 2, (1953).

2 Quoted in Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., p. 23.

3 Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 34-35.

level.[1]

The war was accompanied by shortages of vital working materials which served to accentuate further the pre-war trend of rising costs in the industry. Timber for pit props, three and a half million tons a year of which were used in peacetime, gunpowder and high explosives were all in short supply and expensive. The coal industry competed with the Army for items such as explosives and horse fodder and not unnaturally the Army usually obtained priority. The rising cost of living at home also had its effect on the production costs of the industry. The cost of living index, had risen to 123 by 1915 and 146 in 1916 (1914 = 100). In the same period the money rates of wages had moved from 100 in 1914 to only 120-5 in 1916.[2]

YEAR	COST OF LIVING	WAGES: MONEY RATES
1915	123	110-5
1916	146	120-5
1917	176	155-60
1918	203	195-200

This steep rise in the cost of living brought in its train dissatisfaction among the mineworkers with their wages, and a strike in the South Wales coalfield in 1915 initiated a chain of events which

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1 A Special Coal Exports Committee was established to deal with the exports problem. The Committee used a system of Licenses to control amounts of coal exported to neutrals. The Committee's main function was to prevent coal necessary for home consumption being exported while at the same time securing a sufficient supply for Britain's European Allies. For a fuller account of the Committee's work see Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 25-28.

2 Cole, G.D.H., British Trade and Industry, Past and Future (1932), p. 124.; Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 42-44.

culminated in the Government's decision to take over the industry in the interests of the war effort.

Unlike most of the leading trade unions, the M.F.G.B. had not accepted the proposals, put forward in March 1915 by the Government Committee on Production, that the trade unions should submit to both compulsory arbitration and a suspension of trade union rights and practices for the duration of the war. In July 1915, the negotiations for a new wages agreement in the South Wales coalfield finally collapsed, and in defiance of the Munitions of War Act which had listed penalties for such action, a strike began. The Government rapidly conceded the mens' claims, for it could not afford to impede the supply of steam coal to H.M. ships. In response to further rumblings of unrest throughout 1916 as the miners of South Wales demanded further wage increases the Board of Trade several times intervened; and in the hope of preventing further stoppages, the Government used the Defence of the Realm Acts to take over the South Wales coalfield from the first day of December 1916. The President of the Board of Trade appointed an inter-departmental committee representing the Board, the Home Office, and the Admiralty to advise upon the administration of the coalfield, although in fact it seldom met. This decision prepared the ground for the Government takeover of the whole industry in the following year.[1]

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1 Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 164-170; Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., pp. 42-55; Cole, G.D.H., A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789-1947 (1948 edition), pp. 354-5.; Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 57-64.

The idea of bringing the coal industry under Government control had been discussed as early as 1915, but nothing was then done. The advantages of Government control of key industries in a major war are, after a second world war, obvious enough, but it was not until Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister at the end of 1916, determined on a more vigorous prosecution of the war, that the decision to control Coal, Food and Shipping was taken. Government control came into effect in February 1917. The coal industry was placed under a new Department of the Board of Trade. A controller of Mines, Mr Guy Calthrop, General Manager of the London and North Western Railway, was appointed with a technical adviser, Sir Richard Redmayne. To assist the Controller in his task of maintaining the efficiency of the industry, an Advisory Board was created consisting of an equal number of representatives from the two sides of the industry, at first five but later increased to seven. By the terms of the agreement, given effect by the Coal Mines' Control Agreement (Confirmation) Act of 1918, the owners were assured of their pre-1914 profits. Any profits over and above this guaranteed profit were to be divided between the Inland Revenue, the Coal Controller, and the owners as excess profit in the ratio 80:15:5. The 15 per cent above the standard profits retained by the Coal Controller was to constitute a pool from which amounts might be taken in order to meet the guaranteed pre-war profits of the less successful concerns.[1] The question of the continuation of the

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[1] Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 88-99; Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., p. 51.; Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 170-173.

pool was to figure prominently in the 1921 dispute. In spite of Government control, continually rising costs led to successive modifications of the permitted maximum prices of coal and the yearly average selling value per ton at the pit head had risen from 9/11 in 1914 to 20/6 in 1918.[1]

More significantly for the future, the year 1917 saw the first national wages agreement in the British coal industry. It was negotiated by the M.F.G.B., representing the men, and the Coal Controller, representing the Government, and provided for a flat rate increase for all grades in all districts, of 1/6 per day for those workers aged sixteen and above, and 9d. for those under sixteen years of age. The method of a flat rate instead of the more usual percentage increase was decided upon as being a more equitable way of

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[1] Gibson, F.A., A Compilation of Statistics of the Coalmining Industry of the United Kingdom (Cardiff, 1922) p. 157. It is interest- to compare the rise in the Total Profits, excluding Royalties, with the decreasing output over this period.

	OUTPUT (Million Tons)	Total Profits (Excluding Royalties, millions)
1914	265	15.5 [i]
1915	253	21.4 [i]
1916	256	37.8 [i]
1917	248	27.7 [i]
1918	227	29.5 [ii]

[i] Figures submitted to the Coal Commission (1919) by the Mines Department.

[ii] Figures given by Mr Finlay Gibson in his work quoted above with a deduction of £6,000,000 for Royalties.

Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., Appendix A, p. 245.

obtaining a wage increase commensurate with the rise in the cost of living. A further similar increase was obtained in June 1918.[1] The determination on the part of the mineworkers to keep the principle of a national wages agreement, and the equally obstinate intention of the owners to revert to pre-war practices was to be one of the chief matters of contention in the period after 1918.

The end of the war ushered in a short-lived period of booming trading conditions in which the coal industry appeared to be taking up where it left off in 1913. Men came flooding back into the mines,[2] and there was a heavy demand for coal, especially in those European countries whose mines had suffered damage during the war and which were temporarily out of production. High prices were paid for the limited quantities of British coal available for export, more than compensating for the artificially low levels at which the Government fixed the price of coal on the home market. Even during this time of prosperity the industry was not without its problems. The M.F.G.B. wanted to maintain and enlarge upon their new deal of the war period, and in January 1919 they submitted a claim for a wage

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1 Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 151-158: Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 172-173: Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., pp. 60-63.

2 At the beginning of 1919, 961,000 men were at work in the mines of the United Kingdom. By April 30th,1919, this figure had increased to 1,124,670 and by November 8th,1919 to 1,163,497. Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., p. 222.

increase of 30 per cent on total earnings, excluding the war wage additions, together with a working day of six hours. In addition they demanded the nationalisation of the mines for which purpose a Bill was being prepared.[1] A ballot vote of the membership provided a large majority in favour of strike action should the Government, still in control of the industry, refuse these demands. After extended negotiations between representatives of both the Government and the Miners' Federation in the early months of 1919 the strike was called off in return for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the future of the industry. The miners hoped that this Commission would support their claims, but in fact, the Commission was so constituted, capital and labour virtually having six representatives each upon it, that a unanimous report was, to say the least, extremely unlikely. As the publicity surrounding the sittings of the Commission waned, and the industrial and political unrest of the first half of 1919 eased, the Government were able to impose a settlement on the industry which, while granting the mineworkers a shift of seven hours instead of the eight of the 1908 Act, together with a further flat rate wage increase of 2/- per shift for adults and 1/- for those under sixteen, refused the claim for nationalisation. The dashed hopes of the miners, together with the shabby methods which they considered had been employed by the Government to deprive them of the public ownership of the coal

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[1] The full text of the Bill is given in Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., Appendix B, pp. 246-257.

industry, inaugurated a period of bitterness which was to lead directly to the widespread dispute of 1926.[1]

A further attempt to appease the mineworkers without granting the public ownership of the industry was made in the following year through the medium of the Mining Industry Act. This Act established a separate Mines Department under the Board of Trade and provided that a levy of a penny per ton on coal output was to be set aside to form a miners' Welfare Fund, to be administered by a Welfare Commission to pay for amenities such as pithead baths, sporting facilities, scholarships and miners' clubs. The Act also proposed that joint owner/miner committees should be set up, at pit and district levels, together with Area and National Boards, in order to deal with disputes arising out of questions concerning wages and general conditions. The proposed bodies never functioned, however, as neither the owners nor the men could agree and the idea was dropped in 1922.[2]

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1 See the Reports of the Coal Industry Commission, (Cmd. 359-361, 3 Vols. 1919). The best accounts of these events will be found by consulting the following publications:-
Arnot, R.P., Vol. II, op. cit.; Cole, G.D.H., op. cit.; Gleason, A.H., What the Workers Want (New York, 1920); Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit. See also Chapter III, below, for a more detailed account of the Sankey Commission.

2 The Miners at first rejected the Area Boards part of the scheme because they wished to maintain the national wages agreement, but after the dispute of 1921, they changed their minds. The owners had at first apparently agreed to all the Act's provisions, but they also reversed this decision after the 1921 dispute, and refused to elect representatives to the suggested Committees and Boards. The Government therefore decided, after some little annoyance, to allow the idea to fade.
Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 337-338.
The Mining Industry Act of 1920 is given in full in Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., Appendix XIII, pp. 326-341.

The price of coal and the cost of living continued their upward spiral in 1920, and in April, 1920 the miners asked for, and obtained a further wage increase. In August, the M.F.G.B. demanded that the Government reduce the price of household coal, while at the same time they asked for a further flat rate increase of 2/- per shift. The Government initially refused to entertain either claim. The miners, however, persisted in their wage demand, while dropping that concerning the price of household coal. Negotiations involving representatives of the miners, owners, and Government broke down over the details of how increases in wages might be tied to advances in production. The strike which resulted lasted from October 16th until November 4th, 1920 by which time the Government had agreed that a further flat rate increase of 2/- should be paid, at least until the end of December, 1920. Further additions to wages were set out in the form of a scale, and were to be paid as and when output increased. This scheme was to operate only until a National Wages Board had been formed, the owners and men being bound to inform the Government that such a scheme had

been started by the close of March 1921.[1]

By that date, however, the economic position had seriously deteriorated,[2] and the coal industry felt the icy blast of the new depresssion almost at once. The export trade signposted the new situation. The gradual re-opening of the coalmines of France and Belgium, together with the deliveries of reparations coal by Germany, brought about a drastic reduction in export coal prices. In 1920, British coal for export had been fetching 120/- per ton at the South Wales ports, and 150/- per ton at Newcastle. Even by December 1920, the price of South Wales steam coal had fallen to 75/- per ton, and

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1 Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 240-243.
The following table shows the increases of wages payable under the 1920 scheme.

Million Tons Yearly Output	Increased Values per week	Wage Increases per day
		s. d.
238-242	ZERO	1 0
242-246	288,000	1 6
246-250	576,000	2 0
250-254	864,000	2 6
254-258	1,152,000	3 0
258-262	1,440,000	3 6
262-266	1,728,000	4 0

Source, Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 270-275. The impact of the Triple Alliance upon their settlement is dealt with in Chapter III, below.

2 691,103 insured workpeople were unemployed in December 1920, the last time between the wars that the figure was under one million. By March 1921 the number unemployed had risen to 1,355,206 and reached a peak for the year of 2,171,288 in June.

in February 1921 it was 57/6 per ton.[1] In January 1921 the total loss on the working of the mines of Britain was £4,889,331, and in February £4,536,396.[2] In these circumstances, the Government decided to bring forward, by six months to March 31st, the date originally scheduled for August 1921, on which they were to hand the control of the coal industry back to its former owners. The miners' representatives, anxious to preserve the wartime gains of the national pool and the national wages agreement, strenuously opposed this decision, as indeed did the owners, who realised that the odious task of lowering the workmens' wages in the changed economic climate was about to fall on them. The Government, however, would not be moved from their decision, and during March 1921, notices were posted throughout the coalfields intimating that all existing contracts of employment would end on March 31st, and listing the new wages which would be paid from that date. The new wage rates varied from District to District, but had one common factor; they all showed decreases on the previous rates. Thus the miners were faced with a complete return to the pre-1914 situation. With the bitterness of the Royal Commission but little abated, a special conference of the M.F.G.B., meeting on March 8th, 1921, refused to consider even a temporary abandonment of the idea of a National Wages Board and a national pool,[3] in favour of district agreements,

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1 Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., p.245.

2 Ibid., pp. 248-249.

3 For an account of the importance of the national pool, see Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., pp. 183-225.

while the depression lasted. This was an open challenge to both Government and owners: the lock out began on April 1st, 1921.

The three months stoppage of over one million mineworkers which followed fell into two quite distinct periods. During the first fortnight it appeared that the dispute might be extended to involve the other members of the Triple Alliance, but the possibility of a more widespread strike ended on April 15th with 'Black Friday'.[1] The remaining ten weeks which the dispute lasted saw the miners fighting alone in a war of attrition which they were bound to lose. The new agreement, finally signed on July 1st, 1921, provided for the setting up of a National Board for the industry, on which representatives of both sides would sit with an independent chairman. The Board, however, had little real authority. Wage rates were to be drawn up at the district level although based upon a fresh standard. This new standard was compiled by adding the district basic rates existing on March 21st, 1921 to the district percentages payable in July 1914. Nowhere were wages to be lower than the 1914 standard plus 20 per cent. The owners' standard profit was to be 17 per cent of the sum payable as standard wages, and any surplus occurring after all these charges and costs had been met was to be divided between the owners and the men in the proportions 17 per cent and 83 per cent respectively. Finally, the Government agreed to give a subsidy of not more than £10,000,000 in order to alleviate the effects of the inevitable wage reduction by spreading them over a period.[2]

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[1] See Chapter III, below.

[2] Redmayne, R.A.S., op. cit., pp. 247-256.; Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., pp. 234-237; Arnot, R.P., vol. II., op. cit., pp. 300-331.

The position of the British coal industry showed signs of improvement in 1922 and 1923. The backlog of orders which remained to be met once work was resumed in the summer of 1921, together with strikes in the coalfields of the United States in 1922, and the cessation of production in the mines of the Ruhr during the French occupation of 1923, gave to the coal industry in Britain another ephemeral renewal of prosperity. Wages, already falling in other industries as the depression persisted, rose in 1923 and 1924 and the labour force was considerably expanded.[1] But by 1924, the normal sources of world supply had already been restored as the American and German mines resumed production; and the eighteen months before the long stoppage of 1926, was a period of falling sales, especially abroad, trading losses, wage reductions, and ever increasing unemployment.

The problems facing the industry at this time were not by any means all peculiar to Britain. A lessening in the rate of growth in demand for coal was being felt throughout the world. The pattern of world coal consumption had been changing since before the war, and the war had accelerated the change. Before 1914, total world coal

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[1] The average number of wage-earners employed in the industry in these years was as follows:

1922	1,094,000
1923	1,160,000
1924	1,172,000

Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., Appendix I p. 546.

Miners' earnings in these years also increased:

	s.	d.	
1922	9	11½	Average for all districts and classes of work per man/shift worked.
1923	10	1	
1924	10	7¾	

Annual Reports of H. M. Inspector of Mines 1922-1924.

consumption was increasing annually at a rate of around 4 per cent. In the years 1924-1926, world coal consumption was lower than in 1913, and by 1928 was only 4 per cent above the total for 1913.[1] There were several reasons for this decline. The increasing introduction of alternative sources of power, notably electricity, oil and water power, was beginning seriously to affect the demand for coal. The internal combustion engine, combined with reductions in the price of oil, was inexorably bringing about a transport revolution.[2] Although imports are by no means a complete guide, the rising quantities of fuel oil imported into Britain tell a significant story. In 1908, 15,000,000 gallons of fuel oil were imported, the highest quantity up to that date; in the period 1909-1913, the average annual amount imported was 48,000,000 gallons; in 1914 it was 228,000,000 gallons and by 1924 this quantity had been increased to 383,000,000 gallons.[3] The railways were beginning to lose traffic in competition with road transport in several countries, including Britain, and railways were one of the traditionally large consumers of coal. Ships began to be oil - instead of coal - fired: in 1914 only 3.4 per cent of the world's mercantile tonnage was dependent on oil, but by 1932, this figure had risen to 40 per cent an increase which was not balanced by the increase

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1 Court, W.B., op. cit., pp. 14-17; Allen G.C., op. cit., p. 53.

2 For a different view see Neuman, A.M., Economic Organisation of the British Coal Industry (1934), p. 4.

3 Clapham, J.H., vol. III, op. cit., p. 161.

in total tonnage during the same period.[1] The production of lignite had rapidly expanded, especially in Germany. The difference between the 1913 output of lignite in Germany and that of 1929 was equivalent to 19,000,000 tons of coal. Moreover coal itself was being utilised in more scientific and less wasteful ways.[2]

At the same time as the world demand for coal was slowing down, the world capacity of the industry had greatly increased. This was a consequence partly of high coal prices in the period 1914-1920 which not only stimulated the search for substitutes, but together with the strategic questions underlined by the war, encouraged countries which had previously been content to rely on imports of coal, to expand or develop their own coal production. The development of these resources together with the very slow growth in demand, resulted in a surplus of capacity in the industry. A pertinent illustration of this is the relatively small effect upon world output which the removal of two of the major producing areas, the Ruhr and Great Britain, had in 1923 and 1926 respectively. The British coal industry was one of the more chronic suffers in the twenties of an illness from which none of

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1 Allen, G.C., op. cit., pp. 53-54; Lubin, I. and Everett, H., op. cit., p. 57. According to Lubin and Everett, 69 per cent of all ocean tonnage was oil-fired in 1924.

2 Allen, G.C., op. cit., p. 53; Jones J.H., Gúenault, P.A., Cartwright, G., The Coal-Mining Industry (1939), p. 22.

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the world's coal industries entirely escaped.[1]

The major losses of the British coal industry in this period were made in the export markets. Between 1913 and 1925 British coal exports declined by about 22 per cent. The best year for exports in the twenties was 1929, and even then, Britain's coal exports were only 84 per cent of what they had been in 1913. In this latter year, the United States, Germany, and Great Britain, had been responsible for nearly all the world's export trade in coal, and the approximate British share of the total exports of the three nations was two-thirds.[2] Her most important foreign markets were those easily reached by sea: the rapidly expanding industrial nations of Europe. To these, Britain sent four-fifths of the total British coal exports. Most of the remainder went to South America. The changed conditions of the world's coal trade, which became increasingly evident after the war, seriously affected the British industry. The heaviest export losses occurred in the Baltic markets, where the Russian trade was lost, and German and Polish competition undermined British trade with Scandinavia.

The following table shows the loss of markets in countries which

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1 While the producing capacity of the British Coal Industry increased after 1913 by over 10 per cent, the equivalent of an output of about 330,000,000 tons per annum, the actual output fell to approximately 250,000,000 tons per annum due mainly to the fall in exports: Jones, J.H. op. cit., pp. 46-47; Allen, G.C., op. cit., p. 54.

2 Allen, G.C., op. cit., pp. 56-57; Jones, J.H., op. cit., pp. 21-2, 48, 61, 370; Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal Mining (1945) op. cit., p. 29; Svennilson, I., op. cit., p. 108.

were Britain's principal customers before the war.[1]

Country	British Exports in 1909-13 (Annual Averages)	Difference 1924	in 1925
France	10,836,700	+3,890,000	- 411,100
Scandinavia & Denmark	9,917,900	+1,672,800	-1,111,600
Italy	9,483,400	-2,409,000	-2,244,600
Germany	9,039,400	-1,864,500	-4,815,800
South America	6,751,000	-2,127,800	-2,217,100
Russia	4,110,500	-2,767,000	-3,184,200
Egypt	2,952,100	-1,088,700	- 952,400
Spain	2,527,400	- 817,300	- 550,200
Netherlands	2,186,100	+ 608,800	- 638,100
Belgium	1,707,000	+1,719,400	+ 917,500
Net Loss on above markets		-3,185,300	-15,207,600

Moreover the losses were not merely due to the expansion of domestic production in the importer nations, nor to the existence of foreign competitors. After all, these latter had existed in some measure, certainly by 1913. The relationship between Britain and her competitors began shifting in favour of the competitors as the gap between their costs of production and those of Britain widened. This gap was increased by the policy of the 1925 Conservative Government which placed Britain back on the gold standard at the pre-war

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1 R.C. on the Coal Industry, Report, Vol. 1., (Cmd. 2600, 1925), p.5.

parity of the pound with the dollar, thus increasing the price of British exports.[1] Competition was also stiffened by the protection which, in various forms, foreign governments gave to their own coal industries.

The period after 1920 therefore, saw the British coal industry continually hampered in competition with the industries of other nations, by falling productivity and rising costs. Before 1914, output per man shift in Britain had compared favourably with most of the major coal producing countries save the United States. However, the reorganisation of the German and Polish mines in the 1920's, and the increased production of the smaller Dutch coalfield, led to a substantial increase in productivity in these areas, while at the same time, things were becoming more difficult for the British industry. In 1925, output per man shift in Britain's coalfields was only 88.7 per cent of the pre-war figure, although of course the number of hours worked had been reduced.[2]

Mechanisation is one of the chief means by which productivity can be increased, and in Britain the progress of mechanisation was very slow. Mechanisation in the coal industry meant the use of coal cutters, power operated conveyors, and more advanced underground transport. In 1913 only 8 per cent of the total British output of coal was mechancially cut, and this figure had risen to no more than 19 per cent

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1 Keynes, J.M., The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill (1925), p.6; See Chapter III, below.

2 Allen, G.C., op. cit., pp.70-71; see Table on p. 28a.

OUTPUT OF COAL PER PERSON EMPLOYED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES (TONS)

PERIOD	BRITAIN	FRANCE[1]	BELGIUM[2]	GERMANY[3]	UNITED STATES[4]		
					Bituminous	Anthracite	Total
Yearly Av.							
1874-78	270	154	135	209	341	323	327
1879-83	319	187	163	257	505	374	427
1884-88	319	196	173	269	449	340	398
1889-93	282	201	168	257	503	349	444
1894-98	287	208	174	262	511	336	447
1899-03	289	198	169	247	616	370	542
1904-08	283	194	162	251	617	423	568
1909-13	257	195	159	256	698	449	636
1914-18	252	152	125	286	782	498	710
1919-23	195	132	135	163	656	481	623
Year Provisional							
1924	220	149*	136*	[209]	697	491	655
1925	217	152	141	[234]	NOT AVAILABLE		

[1] Includes Alsace-Lorraine from 1919, but excludes the Saar throughout. The first figure relates to three years 1876-78 only, and the next to 1882-83.

[2] Includes Limburg from 1917. The Belgian figures throughout, like the German ones from 1914-18 onwards, are based on an assumed number of 'full workers' i.e. the number of persons required to produce the recorded output if both mines and men had worked continuously without unemployment or absence.

[3] Excludes ceded territories (Alsace-Lorraine from 1918; Saar and Hultschin from 1920 and Upper Silesia from June, 1922). The German figures, as usually published from 1909 onwards and as given above from 1914-18 are calculated on a different basis from the earlier ones. The figure of 256 given above for 1909-13 is a corrected one comparable with the earlier ones, but not with the later ones. The uncorrected figure for 1909-13 would be 265. The bracketed German figures for 1924 and 1925 are doubtful; the true figures would not be less than those printed.

[4] The American figures in 1874-78 represent only one fifth of the industry and in 1879-83 only 54 per cent.

* Provisional figure and subject to revision.

R.C. on the Coal Industry, Vol. I., (Cmd. 2600, 1925), p. 127.

by 1924. Similarly in 1920, there were about 800 conveyors in use in the various coalfields of Britain, and in 1925, the number had been increased only by 713. By contrast, mechanical mining had made giant strides in foreign coalfields, and in 1928, 85 per cent of the coal taken from the Ruhr pits was cut by machinery. Yet even during the thirties, when the difference in the degree of mechanisation between the British coal industry and those abroad was declining, the output per man shift abroad continued to increase at a higher rate than that in Britain.[1]

The Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal-Mining (known as the Reid Report after the name of its chairman) in 1945, indicated several factors which the members of the Committee felt had contributed to the industry's difficulties in the period after 1914. First, the industry had always suffered from a lack of adequate financial resources, and this, coupled with the possibility of public ownership, a factor of some prominence after 1918, had not encouraged investment in long term improvements which were essential if productivity was to grow. Second, the private ownership of the mineral itself frequently led to very small, or awkwardly shaped leaseholds. Unlike the rest of Europe, ownership of the land was accompanied in Britain by ownership of the mineral underneath. It followed from this that

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[1] Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal-Mining (1945) op. cit., pp.4-6, 29; Svennilson, I., op. cit., p.110.

many mines were too small to be fully competitive.[1] Third, the Report underlined the advantages which had been gained by certain foreign producers by grouping several undertakings under the same ownership. This had facilitated the merging or closing down of uneconomic pits. In Britain, widely dispersed ownership was undoubtedly a barrier to greater efficiency. Technically, the Reid Report considered that British mines lagged farthest behind their overseas counterparts in underground transport. In continental mines, for example, straight, level roads were driven through the strata, providing not only a swifter transport system, but also a firm basis for any reorganisation of production. In Britain roadways were often 'undulating and circuitous'. Moreover the level roads which were a feature of continental mines enabled locomotive haulage to be used instead of the more traditional but much less efficient British systems. The British industry was also backward in preparing training schemes for workers entering the mines. Finally both the owners and the men were criticised for their attitudes which had hindered the industry's efficiency in a period when factors outside its control were creating sufficiently complex problems. The employers would not accept the logical consequences of their traditional individualism, which was the survival

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[1] In 1924, 2,481 mines were in the hands of 1,400 different companies, but in the previous year, 323 companies had been responsible for 84 per cent of the total British coal output. Between 1913 and 1924 there was a reduction in the number of working mines in Britain, from 3,121 to 2,718. R.C. on the Coal Industry, Vol. 1., (Cmd. 2600, 1925), pp.46, 240-241; Court, W.B., op. cit., p.8.

of the fittest. British Mining engineers, while handicapped by employers whose motto was 'sufficient unto the day', failed to appreciate the extent of the reorganisation required. Mistrust and a complete lack of co-operation epitomised the relationship between the employers and the men. The miners on the other hand, were themselves usually slow to accept machines, and the Report concluded that output per man shift would have been higher if a more co-operative spirit had pervaded the industry.[1] All these factors accentuated the difficulties of the British coal industry, especially in foreign markets. Many of them were not easily seen at the time; nevertheless only a radical reorganisation could have improved the situation and rendered unnecessary the successive wage cuts and hours increases with which the industry traditionally faced its problems. The rapid growth of trade unionism among the miners in the period between 1860-1918 meant that not only the spirit to resist any attempts to lower the miners' standard of life existed, but also the organisation by which such resistance could be implemented.

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[1] Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Coal-Mining (1945) op. cit., Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations, Chapter XXIV, pp. 128-137.

CHAPTER II.

The Development of Trade Unionism in the Coal Industry 1870-1914.

The attempts to organise the miners of Britain into trade unions met with varying success throughout the nineteenth century. Only in the closing decade did stable unionism on anything approaching a national scale establish itself. Most of the early efforts were very short lived. In 1844 for example, the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland grew up out of the great strike of that year, but by 1848 it had foundered.[1] The industrial boom of the early 1870's stimulated the growth of two miners' organisations both aiming to function on a national scale. The National Miners' Association, formed in 1863, included among its members the County unions of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Scotland, and parts of the Midlands and claimed an affiliated membership of 123,406 in 1873. In the same year, the Amalgamated Association of Miners, formed in 1869, boasted 99,145 members drawn from Lancashire, South Wales, and the West Midlands.[2] If these figures are accurate it suggests that over 200,000 miners were organised in trade unions in 1873, yet by 1880, most of the constituent unions had disappeared or suffered such losses in membership as to make them impotent.

There were several factors which combined to make the organisation of

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1 Webb, S. and Webb, B., History of Trade Unionism (1920 edition) pp. 181-182; Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 41-43.

2 Cole, G.D.H., Some notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, in International Review for Social History, vol. II, (Leyden, 1937) p. 12.

viable trade unions among the country's mineworkers especially difficult. Wages formed such a large portion of total costs in the coal industry that a fall in the price of coal was automatically followed by a fall in wages. In a boom of course, the position was reversed. Although agricultural labourers could usually be recruited easily enough in times of good trade, in the very short term they could not be trained as skilled face workers. Combinations of mineworkers were usually flourishing in good times, but when wages began to fall, men were less easily persuaded of the value of organisation, and strikes against reduction in wages, which the union had not the funds to support, were often the harbingers of union collapse. The continual up and down movement of wages and prices, however, did lead to frequent haggling over wages between the mineworker and the management. This was particularly true of the hewers who actually cut the coal. This fact goes some way to explain the predominance of hewers in the leadership of miners' trade unions as they developed throughout the nineteenth century. As the hewers were the workmen most often affected by changing wage rates, and as they realised the necessity of combination to strengthen their bargaining position, they naturally wanted other hewers to represent them. Moreover the hewers, apart from the deputies, were the most highly paid and highly skilled workers in the pit, the aristocrats of the mine. It would have been surprising if the hewers had not become the leaders of the miners' unions.

The geographical isolation of the mining areas was at first another barrier to the growth of stable trade unionism. Collieries were more often than not located in rural areas and housing, together with amenities such as schools, churches, chapels and institutes, were built by the colliery company

for the workmen. These 'tied cottages', like their agricultural counterparts, went with the job, and should the miner incur the displeasure of his employer, by joining a union for example, or more certainly, by engaging in a strike, he was likely to lose his home. The hardness of the hearts of some coal owners, many of whom were great landowners also, was almost proverbial. Most owners were bitterly opposed to unionism and were prepared to attack it wherever it appeared. Moreover, if for any reason, a miner did lose his job, there was rarely any alternative employment for him in the mining villages. This monolithic nature of the mining communities was to prove an assistance however, once a virile trade union had been formed. New collieries frequently drew their labour from the ranks of the local agricultural labourers whose own condition and remuneration was so bad that coal mining seemed attractive by comparison. Such men, who had been brought up in a conservative environment in which their place was fixed for all time were unlikely to exert any influence upon the growth of trade unionism save a retarding one, although the sense of belonging to a collective community, in contrast with the isolated life of the agricultural labourer, would seem to have developed quite rapidly. Migrants to old mining villages and to long established pits no doubt found their adaptation to their new life a good deal easier, and more rapid, then those who went to pits newly sunk. All these factors provided both the opportunities as well as the difficulties for the growth of mining trade unionism, but what is indisputable is the presence of a deep-rooted class consciousness within the miners' communities; and it was upon this bedrock of community bonds that mining unionism built itself.

The 'new Unionism' among the miners in the 1870's was defeated in strikes

called to resist wage cuts imposed by the employers when coal prices fell in 1874.[1] In the following year, the Amalgamated Association of Miners was dissolved the residual membership being advised to join the National Association, which was renamed the Miners' National Union.[2] Only in Northumberland and Durham did trade unionism among the miners remain a live force. 1864 had seen the formation of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confidence Association, and 1869, that of its Durham counterpart, and by 1875 their combined membership totalled 50,000 and thereafter was never to fall below 40,000. The two north eastern unions survived largely due to the restrained policy of the leadership. Men like Thomas Burt[3] and William Crawford[4] believed that their members must accept wage cuts if the price of coal fell. In effect this was accepting the philosophy behind the sliding scale agreements which coal owners throughout the country

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1 Clegg, H.A., Fox, A. and Thompson, A.F., A History of British Trades Unions since 1889 (Oxford, 1964), pp. 18-20. The account which follows leans heavily on Clegg and the first two volumes of Arnot.

2 Webb, S. and Webb, B., op. cit., pp. 301-303; Arnot, R.P., op. cit., p. 61; Clegg, H.A., Ibid.

3 Burt, Thomas, P.C., (1837-1922). General Secretary, Northumberland Miners' Association, 1865-1913; M.P. for Morpeth, 1874-1918; Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1892-1895; Member of the Royal Commission on Labour, 1891-1894.

4 Crawford, William (1833-1890). Secretary Northumberland Miners' Association 1863-1865; Agent, Durham Miners' Association 1870; General Secretary, Durham Miners' Association, 1871-1890; Parliamentary Committee, T.U.C., 1878-1881, 1882-1890; M.P. for Mid-Durham 1885-1890.

were establishing in the 1870's.[1] The miners' leaders in Northumberland and Durham were generally opposed to strikes, especially when the demand for coal was falling off. Being primarily an export area, especially in Northumberland, orders tended not to pile up during a stoppage, but to be lost to other British or foreign competitors. For the same reasons the North Eastern leadership opposed 'ca' canny', the deliberate restriction of output in an attempt to force up the price of coal, and so wages, by shortening supply. However, not even generous friendly society benefits could always persuade the membership that the moderate course was the wisest, and opposition to it increased as the twentieth century approached.

The economic revival of the early 1880's provided the opportunity for a revival of old, and the establishing of new organisations.[2] In 1881, the Yorkshire Miners' Association was formed from the remains of two previous unions, and in the same year, a Lancashire Association was formed by the federation of several independent organisations. New unions were also formed in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The depression of 1885-7, once more curtailed the expansion of these new bodies. When prices began to rise again in the last years of the '80's, union growth was rejuvenated, and

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1 The sliding scale was a method of adjusting wage rates to the vicissitudes of the selling price of coal. As the price rose, so wages would rise with it and similarly would fall as the price of coal declined.

2 There are now several histories of the County Associations of which the following are the most useful; Fynes, R., The Miners of Northumberland and Durham (Sunderland, 1873); Edwards, N., A History of the South Wales Miners (1926); Welbourne, E., The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham (Cambridge, 1923); Arnot, R.P., A History of the Scottish Miners from the Earliest Times (1955); Griffin, A.R., The Miners of Nottingham-shire (Nottingham, 1956); Machin, F., The Yorkshire Miners (Barnsley, 1958); Evans, E., The Miners of South Wales (Cardiff, 1961); Williams, J.E., The Derbyshire Miners (1962).

by the end of 1889, about 20 per cent of all those employed in mining and quarrying in the United Kingdom were members of trade unions. In Northumberland and Durham, over 50 per cent of those employed at the collieries were trade union members, a higher proportion than in any other coalfield. The renewed impetus given to mining trade unionism by the improved trading conditions after 1887 manifested itself in the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1889.

This organisation was set up after a series of meetings between coalfield delegates from the central English coalfields whose aim was to co-ordinate and synchronise their claims for wage increases. These meetings took place late in 1888 and throughout 1889. Finally, in November of that year, a conference held at Newport, Monmouthshire, agreed to establish a permanent organisation.[1] The Yorkshire and Lancashire representatives were particularly active in the pursuit of this end, having co-operated with each other since the early 80's. In fact, the Yorkshire and Lancashire Associations were the only members of the 'big five' to join the M.F.G.B. initially. The new organisation began with something over 75,000 affiliated members. The most notable absentees were Northumberland and Durham. Northumberland remained wedded to the idea of a sliding scale for prices and wages: Durham had just rejected a renewal of their own sliding scale but shared with the men north of the Tyne an objection to one of the major aims of the M.F.G.B.; the Eight Hour Day for all underground workers.[2] By 1892, the whole coal-mining industry contained

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[1] Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 95-109; Clegg, H.A., op. cit., pp. 98-99.

[2] Williams, J.E., and McCormick, B., op. cit., pp. 222-238; Welbourne, E., op. cit., pp. 243-245; see also page 6.

about 200,000 trade unionists of which over half were members of the M.F.G.B.

The cement which bound the separate parts of the M.F.G.B. together was provided by its wages and hours policy. It aimed to negotiate a substanial wage increase, to be won, if necessary, by strikes, and also to secure, preferably by Parliamentary legislation, a working shift of eight hours in length from bank to bank for underground workers. An opportunity to pursue the first part of this policy soon presented itself. By February 1890, the average pit head price of coal had risen by 71 per cent since 1887.[1] An M.F.G.B. Special Conference in February 1890 demanded a wage increase of 10 per cent. The famous Rule Twenty, concerning strike action was to be invoked should the employers refuse the mens' request.[2] As a reply to the formation of the M.F.G.B., the employers in the Federated Districts had formed their own Association, and they felt strong enough to refuse the wage demand. A strike, lasting a week, took place, at the end of which the owners agreed to pay a 5 per cent increase immediately and a further similar increase in August 1890. This was an important victory for the young M.F.G.B. It secured the principle of joint negotiation on wages for the whole of the Federated area. Perhaps more important than dynamic leadership in this success, were the favourable economic conditions, plus the fact that the M.F.G.B. was made up of areas

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[1] Clegg, H.A., op. cit., p. 101.

[2] Rule 20 stipulated 'That whenever any County, Federation or District is attacked on the wage question or any action taken by a General Conference, all members connected with the Society shall tender a notice to terminate their contracts — if approved of by a Conference called to consider the advisability of such joint action being taken.'

which produced mainly for the home market and thus experienced smaller price changes than in the export areas. The major exporting areas of Northumberland, Durham and South Wales continued to remain outside the Federation.

Following the great Durham dispute of 1892,[1] both the Durham and Northumberland Miners' Associations joined the M.F.G.B. The M.F.G.B. had made handsome contributions to the Durham strike fund, but a more significant change had been the abandonment of the sliding scale there in 1889, as we have previously noted. By 1893, Northumberland had given up their sliding scale also. However, the two North Eastern unions remained opposed to the second pillar of Federation policy, the eight hour day. The hewers in Northumberland and Durham had worked in two seven hour shifts per day from the 1830's. These shifts had been served by one long shift of the less skilled men and boys of between ten and eleven hours. These 'off-hand' workers were engaged in the transport of the coal from the face to the surface. If an Eight Hour Bill was passed, it would prove disadvantageous to the hewers in one of three ways. It might result in one eight hour shift of putters, which would mean that less coal would be removed from the face, and the jobs of some hewers might be endangered. Secondly, it might lead to an increase in hewers' hours from seven to eight, and finally, a three shift system for the hewers might be introduced with all its unpleasant social, and especially domestic, implications.[2] The North Eastern hewers were opposed to all these possible alterations in their conditions of work, and it was they who, as we

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1 The Durham coal owners asked for a 10 per cent reduction in wages at the beginning of 1892. The men refused, against the advice of the leadership, and a lock-out lasting for three months, ensued. It was only terminated on the intervention of Bishop Westcott of Durham; the reduction being accepted.

2 Based on Williams, J.E., and McCormick, B., op. cit., pp. 225-226.

have seen, dominated the miners' unions. In this situation it was no surprise when both the D.M.A. and the N.M.A. left the Federation in 1893, barely twelve months after first joining it. The occasion of their defection was the lock out of 1893.

In the spring of 1892, with coal prices falling again, the M.F.G.B. had organised a 'stop week,' in which all the affiliated membership took an unofficial weeks holiday. The effect on coal prices was probably minimal but it demonstrated the unions' rapidly developing organisation, and the solidarity of the membership. As prices continued to decline during 1893, the owners began demanding local wage reductions in the smaller and therefore weaker districts of the Federation. In June 1893 however, at a joint conference between representatives of the owners and the M.F.G.B., the former demanded an overall 25 per cent reduction in wages. This proposal was rejected by all the constituent members of the Federation save Northumberland and Durham, who both opposed the idea of a strike, Durham having not yet shaken off the effects of their long drawn out dispute of 1892. The Durham leadership favoured arbitration. The M.F.G.B. conference which met to consider the situation replied to the owners' request for a reduction with one of their own for an advance in wages for all those areas which had suffered reductions during the period 1891-1893. The owners, as expected, refused and in July, the lock-out began. In August, Durham and Northumberland left the Federation.

The lock-out of 1893,was, up to that time, the largest industrial dispute which had occurred in Britain. It lasted for sixteen weeks, involving 300,000 miners and it set a pattern for the future. Sympathy was aroused over the privations of the miners' families and there were several violent

incidents, the most notorious being the shootings at Featherstone in Yorkshire.[1] By the late autumn, with the coal shortage becoming even more acute, the Government decided to intervene, and after the President of the Board of Trade had failed to arrange a settlement, a joint conference of both sides in the dispute, under the chairmanship of Lord Rosebery, reached agreement on November 17th. The agreement established a conciliation board for the Federated area which would be presided over by an independent chairman who would have a deciding vote. The board was initially to have a life of twelve months and to have power to regulate wages from February 1894, until which date miners' wages were to remain unaltered. The importance of the dispute in the long term was the fact of Government intervention bringing about a settlement. This was the first time that the Government had interfered in an industrial dispute in the coal industry and the precedent thereby created was a somewhat uneasy one. Government intervention was a last resort, turned to when the effect of the dispute on other industries was becoming increasingly grave.[2] Nevertheless, however reluctant the Government was to interfere, the fact that it had done so, and successfully, was to be used in the future to stimulate similar Government action.

The victory, if such it was for the M.F.G.B., was only briefly celebrated. The price of coal following such a long stoppage, was at first high, and the owners were, not unnaturally, keen to take advantage of it. But in the summer of 1894, prices were falling again and Federation members had to

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1 For a more detailed account of the 1893 dispute see Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 227-249; Clegg, H.A., op. cit., pp. 106-108; Williams, J.E., op. cit., pp. 314-341; Dennis, N., Henriques, F., and Slaughter, C., Coal is Our Life (1956), pp. 82-83.

2 Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 249-258.

stomach a 10 per cent wage cut negotiated by the new Conciliation board. The Federation however, had come through its first serious conflict with the owners with remarkably few casualties. It was probably fortunate in that although coal prices were falling throughout the years 1894-1896, they remained at a level 20 per cent above that of 1887. The Federation continued to grow in strength and its achievements at the national level gave additional impetus to its attempts via the county unions to gain control of local mining communities in the Federated areas. The industry was becoming blackleg proof for the first time and this, coupled with the buoyancy of the coal market prevented the severe falls in membership of earlier days.[1]

The end of the century saw the M.F.G.B. having further increased its membership and thereby its strength.[2] Scotland had joined in 1894, and in 1898, the South Wales Miners' Federation was formed, following the lock-out of that year, being admitted to membership of the Federation in January 1899. Although the sliding seale system of wage regulation was still operative in South Wales, the South Wales men had promised to end it when the present contracts ran out, hence their acceptance into the Federation. By 1901, the South Wales and Monmouth Federation, with over 124,000 members, made up over one third of the total membership of the National Federation. The total membership of the M.F.G.B. was 344,412 out of 751,763 miners employed in Great Britain. Such an increase in strength undoubtedly aided the M.F.G.B. in their successful resistance, without a strike, of a claim by the owners for a wage reduction in 1896.

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1 See Clegg, H.A., op. cit., pp. 110-111.

2 Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Membership Figures 1894-1901

YEAR	MEMBERS
1894	185,126
1895	161,971
1896	155,436
1897	148,562
1898	159,360
1899	238,300
1900	363,335
1901	344,412

In 1898, a new conciliation board was set up with a wage which was not to fall below 30 per cent nor rise more than 45 per cent above the 'standard'. However, by 1900, a series of wage increases had brought the rates up to the maximum, and from the first day of 1901, a new maximum limit of 60 per cent above the 'standard' was introduced in an agreement which for the first time, included surface workers.[1]

The growing strength of mining trade unionism found expression in other ways. Before 1902, the miners were the one trade union group able to obtain direct parliamentary representation, mainly through their own power. The initial breakthrough had come in 1874, with the return to Parliament of Alexander MacDonald,[2] President of the Miners' National Association, for Stafford, and Thomas Burt, Secretary of the Northumberland Miners, for Morpeth. By 1884 a further Parliamentary Reform Act had extended the franchise to the areas outside the towns and the electoral areas had been reorganised in 1885. In the general election of that year, six 'Lib.-Lab.' miners' candidates, all supporting the Liberal Party in Parliament, were returned. The six were Charles Fenwick,[3] a miner, for Wansbeck, William Crawford, Secretary of the D.M.A., for Mid-Durham, John Wilson,[4] Financial Secretary of the D.M.A., for

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[1] Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 308-310.

[2] MacDonald, Alexander (1821-1881). President of Miners' National Union 1863-1881; First Chairman of the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee, 1871; M.P. for Stafford, 1874-1881.

[3] Fenwick, Charles (1850-1918). A working miner until becoming M.P. for Wansbeck, 1885-1918; Trustee of Northumberland Miners' Association; Member of the Parliamentary Coal Dust Commission, 1891; Member of Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1894; Secretary, Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., 1890-1894; Privy Councillor, 1911.

[4] Wilson, John (1837-1915). Agent and Treasurer, Durham Miners' Association, 1882-1890; Financial Secretary, 1890-1896; General Secretary, 1896-1915; M.P. for Houghton-le-Spring, 1885-1886; M.P. for Mid-Durham, 1890-1915; Member, Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., 1890-1893.

Houghton-le-Spring, Ben Pickard[1], Secretary of the Yorkshire Miners, for Normanton, and William Abraham,[2] the recognised leader of the South Wales miners, for the Rhondda. The election of 1886 saw only Wilson defeated, but in 1890, on the death of Crawford, Wilson was elected for Mid-Durham. The 1892 General Election saw all the miners' candidates re-elected, together with one other, Sam Woods, the Vice-President of the M.F.G.B., who was returned for Ince, Lancashire. In the 1895 contest however, Woods was the one mining M.P. to be defeated.[3]

Outside the House of Commons, but inside the portals of the M.F.G.B., the growth of Socialist ideas began to manifest themselves in the later '90's. Their major protagonist was Keir Hardie,[4] who had come to prominence in the Lanarkshire miners' union in the 1880's and who had been one of the prime movers in the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893. The activities of this party caused considerable resentment among the old leadership who were still anxious to work within the confines of the Liberal

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1 Pickard, Benjamin (1842-1904). Assistant Secretary, West Yorkshire Miners' Association, 1873-1876; Secretary, 1876-1881; General Secretary, Yorkshire Miners' Association, 1881-1904; President, M.F.G.B., 1889-1904; Member, Parliamentary Committee, T.U.C., 1890-1891; M.P. for Normanton, 1885-1904.

2 Abraham, William (1842-1922). Agent, South Wales Miners, 1871-1898; President, South Wales Miners' Federation, 1898-1911; Treasurer, M.F.G.B., 1904-1918; M.P. for the Rhondda, 1885-1920; Member of the Royal Commission on Labour, 1891-1894.

3 Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op.cit., pp. 289-296.

4 Hardie, J. Keir (1856-1915). Agent, Lanarkshire Miners', 1879-1881; Secretary, Ayrshire Miners' Union, 1886-1890; Secretary, Scottish Miners' Federation, 1886-1887; Chairman, Scottish Labour Party, 1888-1893; Chairman, Independent Labour Party, 1893-1900, 1913-1915; Executive Committee, Labour Party, 1900-1915; M.P. for West Ham South, 1892-1895, and for Merthyr, 1900-1915; Founder and Editor, Labour Leader, 1894-1904.

Party.[1] At the M.F.G.B. annual conference of 1897 Robert Smillie,[2] of the Scottish Miners' Federation, moved a resolution proposing complete public ownership of industry, which was heavily defeated. Nevertheless, a second resolution, sponsored by Lancashire and proposing the nationalisation of all land, mines, and railways, was carried by a large majority.[3] The political 'Lib-Labism' of the older leader persisted, and they remained powerful men in the councils of the T.U.C. At the Trade Union Congress of 1899, the miners' representatives voted against the famous resolution calling for a special conference of representatives of Co-operative, Socialist, Trade Union and other working class organisations in order to formulate ways of returning more 'Labour Members' to Parliament. Their opposition however, did not prevent the success of the resolution, nor the formation, in 1900, of the Labour Representation Committee, but the miners' unions did not affiliate to the body and in 1901, when the M.F.G.B. decided to build up a common political fund for the promotion of miners' candidates, it was stipulated that any candidate sponsored in this way would be free to run under whatever party

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1 Arnot, R.P., vol. I, op. cit., pp. 294-296 and 300-302; Clegg, H.A., op. cit., pp. 298-304; Wilson, J., op. cit., pp. 298-304.

2 Smillie, Robert (1857-1940). President, Scottish Miners' Federation, 1894-1918; Vice-President, M.F.G.B., 1909-1912; President, M.F.G.B., 1912-1921; Member, Parliamentary Committee T.U.C., 1918-1919; General Council, T.U.C., 1921-1927; M.P. for Morpeth, 1923-1929; Member of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 1919.

3 Arnot, R.P., vol. I, Ibid. The resolution of the Scottish Miners, moved by Smillie, was 'That to secure the best conditions of industrial and social life it is absolutely necessary that the land, minerals, railways, and instruments of wealth production should be owned and controlled by the State for the people.' For the history of the miners' attitude to nationalisation see Barry, E.E., Nationalisation in British Politics (1965).

heading he wished. It was not indeed until 1909 that the miners finally decided to support what was now the Labour Party.[1]

From 1901 to 1905 the familiar pattern of falling coal prices was repeated. Wages also fell, the new rates being the responsibility of the Conciliation Boards. The miners accepted these alterations in their remuneration with unwonted acquiescence. It is difficult to explain why this was so: it was partly due to the Taff Vale decision,[2] and perhaps also to a half conscious concentration by the miners' unions upon increasing their Parliamentary representation. However this may be, the years following on the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 were remarkable for a rising discontent among the workers in British industry, a discontent especially virulent on the coalfields.[3]

The first serious problems arose out of the implementation of the Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Act, which had finally become law in 1908. Although the overall effect of the Act remains a subject of some controversy,[4] there is little doubt that local adjustments of prices and piece rates following the

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1 For the beginnings of the Labour Representation Committee and the early years of the Labour Party see Pelling, H., The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900 (1954); and Cole, G.D.H., British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914 (1944).

2 Saville, J., 'Trade Unions and Free Labour: The background to the Taff Vale Decision,' in Essays in Labour History Ed. by Briggs, A., and Saville, J. (1960), pp. 317-350; Bealey, F., and Pelling, H., Labour and Politics, 1900-1906 (1958).

3 For an account of the industrial and political unrest of this period see Dangerfield, G., The Strange Death of Liberal England (1936); Askwith, G.R., Industrial Problems and Disputes (1920); Masterman, C.G., The Condition of England (1909).

4 See Williams, J.E., and McCormick, B., loc. cit., and Taylor, A.J., loc. cit.

passage of the Act did cause friction in several districts, notably in Yorkshire, the North East, and South Wales, and a series of strikes resulted. Meanwhile, with the decline of prices and wages unabated, the M.F.G.B. began to look around for a method of stabilising the miners' wages at a level below which they should not fall --- the individual minimum wage. This question was brought to a head by the increasing discontent generated by the abnormal places issue. Abnormal places were those positions at the coal face where a hewer was unable to achieve his normal level of output due to adverse physical conditions. Allowance was usually made by managements for this in the miners' wage, but declining productivity[1] and the falling price of coal, led to attempts by managements to economise by reducing such allowances or abolishing them all together. The problem was especially serious in South Wales, where the rapid expansion of the coalfield in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, coupled with the difficulties of attracting labour had stimulated fairly generous allowances and now economies were to be made it was those allowances which suffered. A strike over this issue at the pits of the Cambrian Combine Coal Company in South Wales lasted for almost twelve months in 1910 and 1911 before the men were defeated. It was at this point that the M.F.G.B. decided to press their claim for an individual minimum wage.[2] The M.F.G.B. had continued to increase its strength since the turn of the century. In 1907, Northumberland rejoined the Federation and early in 1908, Durham did likewise. By 1911, the total

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[1] On this question of declining productivity see Chapter I above, pp. 3 - 6.

[2] Arnot, R.P., The Miners -- Years of Struggle vol. II, (1953), pp. 81-86.

membership affiliated to the M.F.G.B. was 588,000, an increase of almost 100,000 in five years.[1] And the Federation felt strong. Attempts had been made in the past, notably on the urging of Yorkshire and Scotland, that all the areas within the Federation should arrange their agreements with the respective colliery owners to be terminated at the same time. This would enable a joint struggle to begin for a national minimum wage. After a series of fruitless discussions with representatives of the owners on the abnormal places question, the annual conference of the M.F.G.B. meeting at Southport in October 1911, resolved to take immediate steps to obtain an individual district minimum wage for all men and boys irrespective of the nature of their working place. Strike action was to be recommended to the membership if the employers refused. District negotiations were begun, but only in those parts of the old English Federated area would the owners' consent to the miners' demand. The M.F.G.B. decided to continue negotiations on a national instead of a district basis, and to that end the Executive Committee was to formulate a claim for each district, and meet the owners' representatives for discussions.

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[1] Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Membership Figures, 1902-1914.

YEAR	MEMBERSHIP
1902	343,200
1903	339,624
1904	326,618
1905	323,799
1906	332,576
1907	458,300
1908	590,235
1909	603,134
1910	597,154
1911	588,000
1912	586,500
1913	645,900
1914	761,184

In fact, no national meeting with the coal owners took place. When the special M.F.G.B. conference met on December 20th, 1911, the reports from the various districts were ample illustration of the determination of the owners to resist the claim for an individual minimum. The conference thereupon resolved to take a ballot vote of the membership in order to decide whether to resort to strike action — in deference to the rules of the D.M.A. it was agreed that the result of the ballot would have to show a two thirds majority in favour of strike action — and should such a result be forthcoming, notices would be given in every district announcing a stoppage of work from March 1st, 1912. The ballot vote provided a majority of almost four to one in favour of a strike. At this juncture the coal owners agreed to meet the miners' representatives but no agreement was reached after such a meeting had been held on February 7th.

The country was therefore faced with a stoppage in the coal industry of a size and extent never seen before. Following the precedent of 1893, the Government intervened. The Prime Minister, Mr. H.H. Asquith, invited both sides to meet him. After several meetings he drew up a list of proposals which he hoped would prevent the threatened strike. In these proposals he accepted that there were cases in which underground workers could not earn a reasonable minimum wage, and that 'the power to earn such a wage should be secured by arrangements suitable to the special circumstances of each district.' District conferences between the two sides were suggested, and should agreement still elude the negotiations, the Government would arbitrate. The Miners' Federation replied that they would only take part in talks with the owners on the condition that the minimum rates for hewers

should be those which the M.F.G.B. special conference of February had adopted, namely, not less than 5/- per shift in any district. The owners meanwhile were left divided by the Government proposals. The majority were in favour of acceptance. Those from Northumberland, Scotland, and South Wales were opposed. Deadlock was thus reached and the strike began on St. David's Day 1912.[1] About one million men, working in or above the mines, were affected. The Government once again intervened after the strike had been in progress for a week, and after other industries, notably the railways, were beginning to suffer from the coal shortage. The miners were determined to obtain the specific 5/- minimum however, and as the owners were equally obstinate in their resolve not to concede it, the new series of discussions failed to fructify. By the middle of the month, the Government had decided that legislation must be introduced recognising the principle of the individual minimum wage, and establishing district machinery for giving effect to it, although not incorporating the actual amounts which the M.F.G.B. claimed. In spite of the opposition of the Labour Party, who attempted to get the 5/- minimum included in the Bill, the Bill, unamended, became law as the Coal Mines Minimum Wage Act on March 29th, 1912. The coal owners accepted the Act, and the miners' representatives decided upon a ballot vote of the membership to determine whether the strike should be continued in the face of the new situation which the Act had initiated. A majority of 40,000 in a poll of over 446,000 was in favour of continuing the strike, but after a

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[1] For a detailed account of the dispute see Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 90-110.

long discussion the M.F.G.B. Executive Committee decided that as the ballot had failed to produce a two thirds majority, work would be resumed. A special conference, meeting on April 6th, confirmed this decision.

The immediate outcome of the new Act was the sprouting of Minimum Wage Boards, with independent chairmen, in all the coalfields. These Boards had no power to fix wages; all they were able to do was to set down as a minimum for each individual miner, a wage based on the 'standard' wage arrived at by district bargaining between the respective owners' and miners' associations. Consequently when wage reduction occurred the individual minimum of the Boards also fell. Although the Act tended to be an insurance policy for those miners working in abnormal places, it was not the Governments intention that it should be used as a regulator of miners' wage rates.

The strike of 1912 was not simply the largest industrial dispute which had ever occurred in Great Britain, but more significantly it was the first strike in which all the coalfields were simultaneously involved. Although concerned with the problem of the individual minimum wage, underlying the whole dispute was the question of whether the M.F.G.B. should be recognised as the representative negotiating body for the employees side in the British coal industry. This claim for a national system of wage negotiations had always been resolutely opposed by the coal owners who refused to delegate anything approaching plenary powers to their own national Mining Association.

The stoppage of 1912 was also evidence of a new determination within the ranks of the miners' unions and manifesting itself in the forward policy of the M.F.G.B., to raise the miners' standard of life. The older, moderate leaders were gradually being replaced by men of more militant temper,

especially in South Wales and Scotland. Syndicalist theories, which found expression in the Miners Next Step,[1] largely written by Noah Ablett of the South Wales miners, and the Unofficial Reform movement in that coalfield, began to spread their influence. Without actually gaining control of the Federation, the new ideas certainly encouraged a more aggressive approach to the problems with which Federation officials had to deal. A practical example of this new aggression was the formation of the Triple Industrial Alliance. The transport strikes of 1911 had brought short-time working to many miners, while the coal stoppage of the following year contributed to redundancies on the railways. The value of co-operation was obvious, and following the formation in 1913, of the National Union of Railwaymen out of an amalgamation of three separate societies,[2] discussions for common action between the transport workers and the miners were initiated by the M.F.G.B. These bodies took part and eventually ratified an agreement in 1915. The M.F.G.B., the N.U.R., and the Transport Workers' Federation united together in the Triple Alliance in order to strengthen their bargaining power with their respective employers by simultaneously terminating agreements and submitting new claims. The outbreak of war in 1914 postponed any attempt to implement this policy, but the formation of the Alliance was

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1 The Miners' Next Step, published in 1912 by the Unofficial Reform Committee, set out a new policy for the miners, based upon syndicalist militancy, the prime objective being to 'build up an organisation that will ultimately take over the mining industry, and carry it on in the interests of the workers.'

2 The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants; The General Railway Workers' Union; and the United Signalmen and Pointsmen's Society. For an account of the activities of the Triple Alliance after the war see Chapter III below.

considered to be a substantial success for the Syndicalist element in the British Labour movement. The contradictions within the Alliance, however, were to be brutally exposed in the first three post war years.

As we have already seen, the number of miners joining the Army during the first months of the War in 1914 and 1915 was so great as seriously to endanger the maintenance of the nation's coal supplies.[1] The Government urged the co-operation of both sides in the industry in order to increase output, but by the summer of 1915, the shortage amounted to 3,000,000 tons a month, and it was clear that the suspension of the Eight Hours Act could not be far off. Meanwhile, the rise in the cost of living had been accelerated by the war, and with food prices up by 24 per cent by March 1915, a special M.F.G.B. Conference demanded a national advance in wages of 20 per cent on earnings to help meet the increase in the cost of living. The owners' once again refused a national conference on the wages issue, although the Government did bring the two sides together, at the same time making it clear that such a meeting did not constitute a precedent for the future. The owners and the miners failed to agree on both the amount of the increase and the way in which it was to be compiled. The owners rejected the claim for a 20 per cent increase on earnings, offering 10 per cent which would be supplemented by further gains, negotiated at district level. On the miners' refusal of this offer, the arbitration of the Prime Minister was sought and resulted in immediate wage increases, varying district by district. No area

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[1] See Chapter I, above.

obtained the full 20 per cent. Yet again the policy of the M.F.G.B. to make itself the body which would conduct national negotiations with the coal employers had received a setback, in the face of the latters' determined opposition. Yet it was the local negotiations for a new Conciliation Board agreement of 1915 which initiated the series of events which culminated in the first national wages agreement in the history of the British coal industry,[1]

At the 1913 M.F.G.B. annual conference it had been resolved that all new Conciliation Board agreements should be terminated on the same date, and that a new standard rate of wages should be negotiated to replace the old ones of 1877, 1879 and 1888. An attempt was also to be made to gain an individual minimum of not less than 5/- per day for all adult surface workers. In February 1915, the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. resolved that in furtherance of these claims, no district agreement would be considered finalised until confirmed by the M.F.G.B. The new agreements were signed with the minimum of friction in most of the coalfields, but in South Wales, deadlock was reached when the men refused the owners' suggestion to continue working under the old agreement for the duration of the war. The necessary three months notice was given by the South Wales miners' Federation but no further meetings between the owners' and the men took place. Government intervention was again necessary, 'in the national interest,' to settle the quarrels of the coal industry. The Government was by now an all party

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1 For a fuller account of the miners during the war see Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 153-181; and Cole, G.D.H., Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry, op. cit., passim.

coalition, under Asquith, with Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions. In June of 1915, he had piloted through the Commons the Munitions of War Act, which included provisions for compulsory arbitration together with the suspension of trade union customs in those industries vital to the war effort, for the length of the hostilities. It also contained sections covering the limitation of profits in the munitions industries. The M.F.G.B. were opposed to compulsory arbitration and had not taken part in the discussions which the new Ministry had held with several trade unions. Neither had they been a party to the earlier Treasury Agreements of March 1915, to which the Munitions Act gave legal form. In spite of the penalties which could be imposed on workers who infringed the new regulations, it was at this juncture that the possibility of a strike in the South Wales coalfield appeared. In an effort to prevent it the Government intervened in the person of the President of the Board of Trade, Mr. (later Sir) Walter Runciman. He was only able to obtain from the workmen's representatives a postponement of the commencement of the stoppage which began in July. The Government immediately 'proclaimed' the South Wales coalfield under the Munitions of War Act, but this had no effect, the 200,000 strikers remaining away from their work. With the acute labour shortage prevailing in the industry, there was little which the Government could do save persuade the owners to make concessions, and after five days the miners achieved the bulk of their demands, and work was resumed. A month later, the Government reversed an interpretation of the agreement which had excluded enginemen, pumpmen, and stokers, when the miners'union threatened another strike. The new Conciliation Board agreement of 1915 was then signed, but it did not end the conflict between the two sides in the coal industry in

South Wales. This continued throughout 1916. As prices increased, so demands were made for appropriate changes in remuneration.[1] The Conciliation Board did not function well, and indeed had three separate independent chairmen in a short space of time. Two wage claims, both for increases of 15 per cent, were only granted after further Government intervention. The possibility of further strikes was never far away. Finally, on November 29th, 1916, the Defence of the Realm Act was used to bring under State control the South Wales Coalfield. In December 1916, Asquith was replaced as Prime Minister by LLoyd George, and thereafter the state control of industry was rapidly expanded and extended. In February 1917, the whole of the British coal industry was brought under state control.

There is little doubt that both miners and owners benefitted from the change. The owners were assured of pre-war profits and should excess profits be realised, these were to be divided in the ratio 80 per cent to the Inland Revenue as duty, 15 per cent to be retained in a pool from which to meet the guarantee of pre-war profits to those collieries which were doing less well than before 1914, and 5 per cent to be paid directly to the Companies. The miners welcomed the establishment of the national pool. Not only did this

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1 By 1916, the mean percentage increase in the retail price of food since July 1914, in the United Kingdom was 60 per cent; the retail price of clothing had increased by 57½ per cent; and the retail price of fuel and light had risen by 34 per cent. The items included in these groups are as follows:

Food: Beef and mutton (British and imported), bacon, fish, flour, bread, tea, sugar, milk, butter, cheese, margarine, eggs and potatoes;

Clothing: Men's suits and overcoats, underclothing and hosiery, textile materials and boots;

Fuel and Light: Coal, gas, oil, candles, matches. Nineteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics, Cmd. 3140 (1928), pp. 133-134.

prove to them, beyond any doubt, that national wage agreements in the industry were possible, but as the nationally rising cost of living was the major factor influencing wage claims in all districts, a national settlement was the only equitable solution.[1] The new principle of flat rate additions to existing wages instead of the previous percentage increase was adopted in the negotiation between the miners and the Government which regulated wage rates under State control. But perhaps the most significant result of the State control of the Coal industry was its effect upon the thinking of the miners and their leaders. Surely state control, even in wartime, was but one step away from public ownership of the mines? What could be done in a time of national emergency could also be achieved in time of peace. A strong feeling existed within the ranks against returning to a 'normalcy' which meant the continued private control over the coal industry.

At the Southport conference of the M.F.G.B. in January 1919, a definite programme was proclaimed, including higher wages and shorter hours, but based on nationalisation of the mines, together with a system of workers' control of the industry.[2] It was foreseen that in order to attain these aims, strike action might have to be employed. The miners also expected, and not without reason, that they would receive the support of other powerful trade union

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1 Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., pp. 170-173; Cole, G.D.H., op. cit., pp. 42-48.

2 Workers' control was a new demand and in a sense reflected an apprehension within the labour movement that State ownership might be merely replacing one capitalist boss with another. Workers' control meant that the organisation of the industry and its management would be controlled by the representatives of the workmen. It was one of the basic ideas of the syndicalists, and was perhaps stated most clearly, at least as far as the miners were concerned, in The Miners' Next Step in 1912.

groups in an industrial grand alliance. The final weapon of such an alliance would be a general strike.

CHAPTER III

Background to the General Strike

The idea of a General Strike of all workers was not an original one, and had in various forms been advocated in the nineteenth century by men like John Doherty and William Benbow.[1] It took on a new significance however when it became the central platform of the Syndicalists in the first decade of the twentieth century. The General Strike was the final weapon in the armoury of those who believed in Direct Action. Its purpose was to paralyse capitalist society by the concerted action of the workers in the major industries, thus precipitating the revolution by which capitalism would be destroyed. The Syndicalists opposed the bourgeois state and the parliamentary socialist parties that functioned within it. Their task was to stimulate militant trades union activity, and pursue a policy of industrial unionism, whereby the many existing unions were absorbed into large units, each representing a single industry. In a syndicalist state, the industrial unions would form the basis of Government.[2] In the years of industrial disturbance which immediately preceded 1914 the depression of real wages and

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1 Grand National Holiday (1832) written by William Benbow, advocated a national stoppage of work in order to remedy certain industrial and political grievences. John Doherty, with Robert Owen and John Fielden, suggested the use of the general strike in order to obtain an eight hour working day, as part of the programme of the National Regeneration Society.

2 British syndicalism was a curious amalgam of the industrial unionism of Daniel De Leon, Eugene Debs, and the American Socialist Labour Party, together with the ideas of the French direct actionists. For a lucid analysis of the distinctions between the two, see Pribicevic,B., The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922 (1958) pp. 11-21.

the apparent inability of the leaders of the official Labour movement to check the ensuing decline in the workers' standards of life, formed a basis for what success the syndicalists had in this country. Union amalgamation was embraced by the T.U.C., and the National Union of Railwaymen, and the Transport Workers' Federation were both products of the years 1908-1911. The increased militancy among trades unionists manifested itself in the form of strikes in the textile, building, engineering, railway and coal industries. Both railway and coal strikes were ended only after intervention by the Government.[1] Government intervention was to become an increasingly important factor in large scale industrial disputes. Trades union leaders realised that the larger the strike, the more likely were the Government to intervene and a compromise be secured which would provide them with at least a portion of their claims.

The railway and coal strikes of this time had another important consequence. The railways not only burned coal as fuel, but much of their freight trade consisted of train loads of coal. During the stoppage of the coal industry in 1912, over 200,000 railwaymen became unemployed and the N.U.R. paid out nearly £100,000 in benefits to out-of-work members. At the same time many members of the N.U.R. who were in sympathy with the miners' cause voted in branch meetings in favour of

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[1] For the period of unrest before 1914 see Dangerfield, R.F., The Strange Death of Liberal England (New York, 1935); and Masterman, C.F.G., The Condition of England (1909)

boycotting the carriage of blacklegs, troops and coal during the dispute.[1] This community of interests led to a meeting in April 1914 between the Executive Committees of the M.F.G.B., N.U.R., and T.W.F. and the subsequent foundation of the so-called 'Triple Alliance'. The basis of this association was that each union should draw up a set of demands, and that all should be submitted to the respective employers at the same time. If the demands were not granted, a simultaneous withdrawal of labour was to take place. In fact, the Triple Alliance never functioned in this way, but the threat of joint action by a powerful section of the organised labour movement remained the backcloth on the industrial stage until 1926.

Experience during the Great War strengthened the belief of the leaders of the trades union movement in state ownership of industry. The miners and the engineers were not parties to the agreement which most of the leading trades unions had signed with the Government in 1915 which included, inter alia, the abandonment of the right to strike until after the war. The necessity of maintaining supplies, allowing wages to keep abreast of the rising cost of living, and thus of avoiding labour troubles, persuaded the Government to assume control of the coal industry, following unrest in South Wales, in 1917. The miners saw this as the first step in the direction of the public ownership of the mines. The railways were likewise taken under Government control, and

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1 Bagwell, P.S., The Railwaymen (1963) p. 454

the positive evidence that public ownership could be made to work stiffened the will of trades union leaders to oppose the return to 'normalcy' and the private control of industry which was expected to return with the ending of the fighting.

The end of the war saw the Labour movement much stronger than in 1914. Trades Union membership had doubled, and the Labour Party, with its new constitution, seemed to know where it was going if a little uncertain of the route. The movement had received great inspiration from the Revolution in Russia.[1] Above all, there existed a feeling, shared even by many outside the movement, that the old order of things should not be re-established; a better world must take its place.[2] Yet in spite of this apparent strength the Labour movement was unable to press home its nationalisation and socialistic schemes. Divisions within the various sections of the movement, lack of detailed plans, together with the success of the Coalition Government in persuading the leaders of the Trades Unions to discuss their demands rather than resort to direct action were responsible for this failure. The National Industrial Conference and the Sankey Commission on the Coal Industry, both of which allowed time for a cooling off of the enthusiasms and

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1 See Graubard, S.R., British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917-24 (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

2 Mowat, C.L., Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940 (1955) pp. 17-18. The following account is largely based on Mowat together with Crook, W.H., The General Strike (North Carolina, 1931), and Bullock, A., The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. I., 1889-1940 (1960). In spite of the publication of the final volume of the Oxford History of England, Taylor, A.J.P., England 1914-1945 (Oxford, 1966), Mowat remains the best account of the inter-war years.

vigour of the Labour movement without necessitating serious Government concessions, illustrated the success of the Government's tactics. The M.F.G.B. Conference which met at Southport in January 1919 put forward three main demands; a working day of six hours; an increase in earnings of 30 per cent; and the nationalisation of all mines and minerals. The Government control of the industry, which in 1919 was in its second year, encouraged the miners to believe that the Government might, as they did, see nationalisation as the answer to the problems of the coal industry.[1] The Government, however, rejected the claims of the M.F.G.B. and the latter voted in favour of a strike. This was averted when the miners agreed to a proposal by Mr. D. Lloyd George to take part in a commission which would investigate all the problems of the industry including the question of public ownership. An interim report was promised by March 20th, 1919. The Coal Industry Commission was not so much a creature of the Government as future bodies set up to examine the coal industry were to be. It was created by Act of Parliament in order that it might enforce the production of documents and the attendance of witnesses. Half of its twelve members represented the Labour view, including three miners' leaders, Robert Smillie, President of the M.F.G.B., Frank Hodges, Secretary of the M.F.G.B., and Herbert Smith, President of the Yorkshire Miners' Association. The others who sat in the labour interest were Sir Leo Chiozza Money, R.H. Tawney, and

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1 For a discussion of the whole question of nationalisation see Barry, E.E., Nationalisation in British Politics (1965); See also Chapter II, above.

Mr Sidney Webb.[1] It proved to be a relatively painless way of treating

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[1] For biographical details on Robert Smillie see Chapter II, above, note 2, p45. Hodges, Frank (1887-1947) Educated at Ruskin and the Labour College, Oxford 1909-1910; Miners' Agent, South Wales 1912; General Secretary, M.F.G.B., 1918-1924; Labour M.P. for Lichfield Division of Staffordshire, 1923-1924; Civil Lord of the Admiralty 1924; Secretary, International Miners' Federation, 1925-1927; Member of the Central Electricity Board. Smith, Herbert (1862-1938). President, Yorkshire Miners' Association, 1905-1938; Member Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1911-1916, 1918, 1920, 1921, 1934-1937; Vice-President, M.F.G.B., 1917-1922; President, 1922-1929. Money, Sir Leo Chiozza (1870-1944) Liberal M.P. for North Paddington, 1906-1910; and for East Northants, 1910-1918; Defeated Labour candidate at South Tottenham, 1918; Knighted 1915; Economist; Writings included Riches and Poverty (1905); The Nation's Wealth (1914); The Triumph of Nationalisation (1920); Editor of the Economic, Financial, Industrial, Engineering and Sociological sections of the fourteenth edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica (1929). Tawney, R.H. (1880-1962) Educated Rugby and Balliol; Member of Executive of Workers' Educational Association, 1905-1922; Served in the ranks during the war 1914-1918; Reader in Economic History, University of London; Publications included Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (1938); The Acquisitive Society (1921); The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century (1912); Equality (1931). Webb, Sidney James (1859-1947) Civil Servant; War Office, Inland Revenue, Colonial Office, all by open competition; Resigned in order to take a seat on the London County Council, 1891; Prominent member of the Fabian Society; Labour M.P. for Seaham Division of Durham, 1922-1929; President of the Board of Trade, 1924; Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 1929-1930, and for the Colonies, 1929-1931; O.M. 1944; Author of many books and pamphlets; created first Baron Passfield, 1929. See R.C. on the Coal Industry, vols. I, II, III., (Cmd. 359, 360, 361, 1919). By far the most important contemporary accounts of these events are contained in Gleason, A.H., What the Workers Want (New York, 1920); Cole, G.D.H., Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry, 1914-1921 (Oxford, 1923).

the malady of labour unrest. From the start the sittings developed into vilifications of the activities of private enterprise in the industry. The publicity which the Commission received was considerable, and Mr Smillie, who was particularly prominent during the examination of witnesses, became something of a national figure.

The interim report of March 20th turned out to be a confusing trinity. The Labour representatives recommended that all the miners' claims should be met. The three coal owners advocated a smaller increase in wages than the miners had asked for, and a seven hour working day. The Chairman, together with the three industrialists, suggested a wage increase of 2/- per day, and a levy of 1d. per ton to improve housing and amenities in mining districts, in addition to a seven hour working day to be reduced to six in 1921 if the economic position of the industry could support it. The more significant Recommendations appeared to be numbers nine and fifteen. The former condemned the present system of ownership and working in the industry and suggested that either a method of unification by national purchase, joint control, or nationalisation, should replace it. Recommendation fifteen suggested that the miners should in future have a voice in the way in which the mines were run. Both miners and Government accepted the Report, and in the House of Commons on March 20th, 1919, Mr Bonar Law, on behalf of the Government, said that they were prepared to adopt

the Report in the spirit as well as the letter.[1] They would take all the necessary steps to carry out its recommendations without delay.

The second Report of the Commission, dealing specifically with nationalisation, appeared on June 20th. There were four different reports. All were agreed that there should be improvements in coal

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1 113. H.C. Deb. 5s 2346-47

> ' . . . In regard to this whole Report we have had it discussed at the Cabinet this afternoon, and I say now on behalf of the Government that we are prepared to adopt the Report in the spirit as well as in the letter, and to take all the necessary steps to carry out its recommendations without delay.'

But he was only referring to the interim report of March 20th, and not to the question of nationalisation which was to be the subject of a separate report to be published in May. Perhaps he did not make this sufficiently clear; he did, however, issue a warning about nationalisation.

> 'I am sure there is no-one in the House, and I feel certain the miners leaders themselves will recognise it, who could maintain that such a subject as this, which does not affect a particular trade alone but which affects the whole life of the nation, is a subject which can never be decided by any section, however important it may be, but must be decided by the Parliament which represents the community.'

Did this mean that Parliament would decide whatever verdict was given by the Royal Commission? It is clear that Bonar Law did not consider himself pledged to adopt a policy of nationalisation. See Blake, R., The Unknown Prime Minister (1955) p. 413. WAR CABINET 551 Minutes, March 25th, 1919. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that the miners' leaders believed that the Government would implement a scheme of nationalisation should the Royal Commission favour it. Seven out of the thirteen members did. Lloyd George manipulated the figures. He claimed that six out of the seven members of the Commission who favoured nationalisation were not 'objective'. Of the four 'independent' members on the Commission, the three industrialists were against nationalisation and only Sir John Sankey in favour, an adverse majority of three to one! See the verbatim report of the deputation from the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee and the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain which saw the Prime Minister on October 9th, 1919. It was printed in British Trade Union Review No. 3, October 1919.

distribution, that there should be a Minister of Mines, and that royalties should be nationalised. The Chairman's Report recommended state ownership, criticising the inefficiency of the industry and the bad industrial relations. The six Labour representatives more or less agreed with the Chairman, though they also advocated workers' control of the industry. The three coal owners and two of the three industrialists condemned nationalisation, and suggested the setting up of employers/employees bodies at various levels within the industry in order to discuss the industry's problems - but not conditions of employment. The fourth Report was that of Sir Arthur Duckham, the third industrialist, and this followed the evidence given to the Commission by Sir Richard Redmayne, the Chief Inspector of Mines. The essence of this scheme was colliery amalgamation under District Boards, with a limitation on profits. Seven of the thirteen members of the Commission had opted in favour of nationalisation but the fact that there was no clear cut majority report enabled the Government to reject the idea of state ownership and substitute what was, in effect, the idea of the Chief Inspector of Mines. The prolonged sittings of the Commission had gradually receded from the headlines, as other major issues such as the Peace Conference, replaced them. Public interest fell away, and the situation was further complicated by a strike in Yorkshire during July and August over the implementation of the interim report of March 20th.[1]

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[1] The most comprehensive account of the Yorkshire strike is that in Cole, G.D.H., Labour in the Coal Mining Industry 1914-1921 pp. 105-111.

The miners had hoped for everything from the Sankey Commission, and they were bitterly disappointed when they received the Government's refusal to accept the suggestions of the majority of the Commission on nationalisation. The owners had also been aroused by what they considered unnecessary external interference with their industry; once decontrol arrived they were determined to run the industry as they thought fit. Both these attitudes made significant contributions to the events which culminated in 1926. Herbert Smith, for example, never lost that distrust of Government and coal owners which throve upon the disappointments of Sankey. The District scheme which embodied in the Mining Industry Act of 1920 proved abortive, only serving to underline the suspicions of the M.F.G.B., that it was a recondite attempt to weaken the trade union organisation. The idea of the nationalisation of royalties was significantly forgotten though the Government had promised to introduce a bill for the purpose. When the miners asked the T.U.C. to help them, a deputation was sent to the Prime Minister, and in December 1919, a 'Mines for the Nation' campaign was initiated, all to no avail. The end came at the special Trades Union Congress on March 11, 1920, when a resolution advocating trade union action in the form of a general strike to compel the Government to nationalise the mines was defeated by 3,870,000 to 1,050,000 on a card vote. The momentum of the first half of 1919 never returned to the Labour movement in the years that followed.

In the meantime the fear of a General Strike was maintained in the minds of members of the Government, not only by the widespread unrest of the first full year of peace, but by two particular events; a

conference of the Triple Alliance which met in April 1919, and the Railway strike of September. The purpose of the conference had been 'to compel the Government to comply' with a series of demands which included the withdrawal of the Bill aimed at prolonging conscription, and the withdrawal of all British troops from Russia. The conference also insisted that all conscientious objectors should be released from prison, blockades against enemy countries should be lifted, and the contents of the Secret Military Circular should be repudiated.[1] The conference urged the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. to summon a special conference of Trades Union Executives in order to decide how the compliance of the Government could best be achieved. These were all political, as opposed to economic demands, and the secret circular emphasised the Government's concern that a general strike might be used in an attempt to enforce similar claims. Protests by the T.U.C. were met with assurances from the Government that no attempt would be made to interfere in normal capital-labour relations, but Mr Churchill, in a speech on May 29th, 1919, underlined the Government's determination to oppose a general strike. 'Light, water, electric power, transport, the distribution of food, all these are indispensable to the existence

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1 The circular was not made public until after the Triple Alliance meeting but was immediately added to the demands as soon as it was known. It was sent from the War Office to the Commanding Officers of troops stationed in Britain, requesting weekly reports on the state of morale of the men. The War Office wished to know, inter alia, if troops would assist in strike breaking, whether there were trades unionist influences amongst them, whether any soldiers' Councils had been formed, would troops oppose being sent to Russia etc. The text of the circular was published in the Daily Herald on May 13th. Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 241-242.

of these mighty cities which cover our land. If any of these commodities or facilities are suddenly cut off, the State must intervene and come to the rescue of the population . . . by every means in its power, including the use of military and naval forces, so as to avoid a general catastrophe.' [1]

The warning went unheeded for the moment. At the Labour Party Conference in June 1919, a card vote showed a majority in favour of direct action if the intervention in Russia did not cease, in spite of a number of speeches condemning the idea of a general strike, including one by J.R. Clynes.[2] The next month saw a further meeting of the Triple Alliance at which a vote of censure was passed upon the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. for ignoring the April programme of the Alliance. A strike ballot of its two million members was proposed. The critical situation which appeared to be developing was mitigated by a Government announcement that all British forces would be withdrawn from Russia by the end of the summer, and that conscription would be terminated not later than the following Spring. The Triple Alliance thereupon cancelled the strike ballot.

At the September conference of the T.U.C., the General Secretary of the N.U.R., Mr J.H. Thomas, praised the miners for requesting the

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1 Quoted in Crook, W.H., op. cit., p. 243.

2 Clynes, Rt. Hon. John Robert (1869-1949) Labour M.P. for Manchester (Platting) 1906-1931 and 1935-1945; Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Food 1917-1918; Food Controller, 1918-1919; Chairman, Parliamentary Labour Party, 1921-1922; Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, 1924; Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 1929-1931; President of N.U.G. and M.W.

help of Congress in their efforts to persuade the Government to implement the majority recommendations of the Sankey Report. Mr Thomas indicated that had the miners acted alone, he would have condemned them. This speech was delivered less than a month before the national railway strike began. Mr Thomas was not afraid to act alone. Indeed acting in concert with other unions was no part of his policy, save in so far as it enabled him, and others of similar views, to restrain the more extremist elements.

The railways, like the coal mines, were still Government controlled, and wage negotiations had been in progress for some time between the Government and the railway unions. In August, the Government had concluded an agreement with the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, (A.S.L.E.F.). The terms of this agreement meant that war-time bonuses were retained. The N.U.R. hoped to obtain a similar concession. The 'definitive' terms, however, which were offered to them by Sir Auckland Geddes, President of the Board of Trade, appeared to mean reductions in wages for many grades. Other members of the trades union movement saw this attack upon the railwaymen's standard of living as the first in a series of attacks upon the standards of the workers generally. Mr Lloyd George had said that the Government had to be realistic about any agreement with the railwaymen, as workers in other industries might enter claims for wage increases if a generous agreement with the N.U.R. was signed. It seemed that the earlier settlement with the A.S.L.E.F. had been designed merely to split the ranks. There is something of a parallel between this situation,

and the one in 1926 when the miners appeared to be the first victims of a general attack on wages and conditions. In 1926 it was the famous remark attributed to Mr Baldwin which helped to buttress this belief in trades union circles.[1] In an interview which appeared in the national press on September 24th, 1919, Mr Thomas intimated that the negotiations had reached a crisis and that a breakdown was imminent. Two days later, the strike had started. The Government were afraid that the stoppage might lead to a general strike, but they were well prepared. Control of food distribution remained in Government hands, and stocks of it had been built up. 'Volunteers' to man the emergency organisation were plentiful as many men in the services were still awaiting demobilisation. Similarly army vehicles and drivers could be used. Moreover the Defence of the Realm Act was still in force. All the Food Controller needed to do to switch on this machinery was to declare a state of emergency. The Government appealed to the community to fight what Mr Lloyd George called 'this anarchist conspiracy.'[2] In spite of an hysterically pro-Government popular press, however, propaganda was not confined to one side in the dispute. The N.U.R. also used the mass media of press and cinema to advertise their cause.[3] The turning point of the dispute came on September 30th,

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1 See note 1 , below, p. 94.

2 Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 250-253.

3 The N.U.R.'s own propaganda campaign was entrusted to the Labour Research Department who envisaged its role not merely to 'explain things away but to defeat the enemy.' £2,000 a day was spent on advertising in the Press, and articles, cartoons, and the cinema newsreel were used to place the railwaymen's case before the nation. Hutt, Allen, The Post-War History of the British Working Class (1937), pp. 28-29; Bullock, A., op. cit., pp. 107-110.

when Mr Thomas said that he would not now oppose sympathetic action by other trades unions. A deputation from a conference of trades unionists likely to be involved if the strike spread went to see Mr Lloyd George. At first, the position of the Government appeared unalterable. A conference of trades union executives was convened for October 7th to consider the situation. This was interpreted by the press as the precursor of a general strike, and the Government began organising a Citizen's Guard. In fact, the committee from the delegate conference of interested unions was intent on finding a settlement, and did so on October 5th. Wages were to remain at the existing rates for the next twelve months. This was an undoubted triumph for the Labour movement in general, but for the moderate leaders of the N.U.R. in particular.

The two most significant results of the Railway Strike, however, were more serious so far as the aspirations of the Labour movement were concerned. The Government organisation had functioned efficiently during the short period in which the strike lasted, and illustrated that for a short time at least, essential services could be maintained with the assistance of relatively small numbers of skilled personnel and larger numbers of unskilled volunteers. This organisation was the basis of the Emergency services which were employed in 1926. Secondly, it was a victory for the moderate, right of centre, trades unionist policies of Mr J.H. Thomas, and those other influential leaders within the movement who subscribed to similar views. Swept along by the radical tide that ushered in the first months of peace, they were now

more able to assess the trend of events, and the possibilities for the future. The possibility of a revolutionary outbreak in England in 1919 was remote. The majority of those who comprised the leadership of the Trades Union movement wished to prevent any revolutionary attempt to overthrow the established Government, believing that such an attempt would be bound to end in defeat, and lead to the destruction of all which they themselves had helped to build. This explains the refusal of Mr Thomas to support the miners by direct action after the Government's rejection of the idea of nationalisation for the coal industry. It also explains his reluctance to ask for the support of the Triple Alliance in the N.U.R.'s dispute with the Government in the autumn of 1919. Such support, had it been forthcoming at once, might have led to a general strike and triggered off the rising which so many feared. The logic of such policies led to 'Black Friday', in 1921. Before that, however, the threat of direct action was to obtain a final political success, after which the collapse of the boom, the return of the trades unions to economic considerations, and the persistance of the depression in the basic heavy industries, altered the emphasis and scope of trades union activity. Attempts to raise permanently the standards of the working class were replaced by a defence of the already existing wages and conditions. It was in this context that the coal industry became the epitome of the struggle between capital and labour.

There were two special conferences sponsored by the T.U.C. during

1920, at both of which a general strike was proposed. The first in July, called for a cessation of hostilities in Ireland and demanded that the production of munitions to be used both in Ireland and Russia should stop. A general strike was resolved upon should the Government refuse these demands by 2,760,000 to 1,636,000 votes.[1] The second conference was called in August 1920, when it appeared that the first Socialist State was about to be violated by several aggressors of which Britain was one. The situation became critical when it appeared that the Russians were about to inflict a military defeat on the Poles. The British Government seemed to be on the point of intervening on the side of Poland. On August 4th, 1920, the Labour Party Secretary, Mr Arthur Henderson, sent telegrams to all organisations within the movement urging anti-war demonstrations for the following Sunday. The response to his appeal was remarkable, numerous large meetings being held all over the country. On August 9th, following the local gatherings, a meeting took place between representatives of the three branches of organised Labour, the T.U.C., the National Executive of the Labour Party, and the Parliamentary Labour Party. A resolution was adopted in which the idea of a war against Russia over Poland was declared to be a 'crime against humanity.' It went on to warn the Government that 'the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war.'

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1 Crook, W.H., op. cit., p. 263. As early as June 1919 the Labour Party Conference had recommended direct action to end British intervention in Russia, but the only result of this had been the formation of a 'Hands off Russia Committee' in November.

Executive Committees of affiliated organisations were told to prepare for a national conference at which strike action might be recommended. The most significant portion of the resolution proposed that a Council of Action should be at once established in order to carry the other decisions into effect. The Council of Action was made up of twenty-four members, five each from the T.U.C., National Labour Party and the Parliamentary Party, together with nine other co-opted members. Other Councils of Action were organised throughout the country and four days later on August 13th, a joint Labour Party and Trades Union conference met in London. The conference endorsed the action taken, and evinced remarkable unanimity between the representatives of all shades of opinion within the movement. Mr Thomas for example, agreed that he would oppose direct action when more democratic methods could be used to achieve the same ends, but that on this occasion, only 'desperate and dangerous' measures could prevent a war. A resolution was adopted pledging the conference to resist all forms of military intervention against the Soviet Union. The Council of Action was to remain in existence until the Government had acted upon its demands. Should the Government fail to act, then it was proposed to organise a total withdrawal of labour. On August 16th, Mr Lloyd George said in the House of Commons that the policies of the Government and the Labour conference were identical. There was to be no war. Once this became clear, the Council of Action apparently folded up.[1]

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[1] For an interesting comment upon the influence of the Irish General Strike, which lasted two days in April 1920, upon the British Labour Movement see Barry, E.E., op. cit., p. 229. The best account of the events surrounding the setting up of the Council of Action is in Bullock, A., op. cit., pp. 133-140.

The significance of the Council of Action in 1920 lay in the fact that it was the one occasion in Britain when the threat of a general strike was successfully employed in order to influence a major political issue. The unity of the Labour movement, together with national revulsion against another war so soon after the war to end all wars, persuaded the Government to abandon any idea of intervention in the Soviet Union. On industrial issues, however, the solidarity of labour remained something of a chimera, and a further example of the disunity which was eventually to destroy the Triple Alliance, occurred before the end of the year.

In order to meet the increased cost of living, the miners had negotiated a further wage increase in March 1920. As the cost of living continued to rise, they asked for another increase in June. Wages at uneconomic pits were being subsidised out of the high prices being obtained for coal in the export markets and the miners were aware that decontrol would mean wage reductions in most districts. The M.F.G.B. still hoped that they might prevent the reversion of the industry to private ownership, and coupled their wage demand with a request that the price of coal should be reduced. A return to the inter-district competition of the pre-war period was anathema to the M.F.G.B. On the refusal of the Government to agree to their request, a large majority of the Miners' Federation voted in favour of a stoppage. The strike was fixed for September 25th, 1920. The Triple Alliance had intimated at the end of August that they considered the miners' claims to be fair, and a sub-committee had been appointed in order to keep in

touch with the situation. However, with the strike only four days away, a special executive meeting of the N.U.R. heard Mr J.H. Thomas and Mr C.T. Cramp oppose the idea of direct action in support of the miners. Mr Thomas pointed out that the stoppage might be a long one, and N.U.R. funds were not by any means inexhaustible. He implied that the response to a sympathetic strike on the part of railwaymen might well be poor. In order to get the best of both worlds, he also warned the delegates of the revolutionary dangers of a sympathetic strike. It was also argued at the meeting that many miners were already better paid than many railwaymen. Mr Thomas persuaded the delegates to postpone their decision until after he had spoken to a meeting of the Triple Alliance scheduled for September 22nd. At that meeting he spoke of removing control of policy from the miners, should a sympathetic strike be called. Mr Thomas also prevailed upon the miners and transport workers to continue with attempts to obtain a settlement without recourse to industrial action. On the same day he attempted, without avail, to persuade the Government, in the person of the Prime Minister, to concede the miners' claims. On September 23rd, with the Government still obdurate, Mr Thomas again pleaded with the Executive of his union that a strike would be suicidal and might facilitate the break up of society. Meantime the special conference of the M.F.G.B. had rejected any suggestion of arbitration. In spite of, or perhaps as a consequence of, Mr Thomas's lugubrious prognostications, a motion in favour of striking with the miners was only defeated by one vote at the meeting of the N.U.R. executive.[1] The miners would therefore have to strike alone.

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[1] Bagwell, P.S., op. cit., pp. 455-457.

On September 24th, however, the strike was postponed for a week, on the suggestion of the Prime Minister, in order that further negotiations might be undertaken. Nevertheless, deadlock persisted, and on October 1st, the Special Conference of the M.F.G.B. referred the owners' proposals to the men, the strike notices being suspended a second time, until October 16th. By a large majority, the men voted against the owners' proposals and the strike began on October 16th, 1920. Four days later, on October 20th, another special general meeting of the N.U.R. executive was convened. A resolution was passed, instructing the General Secretary to inform the Prime Minister that unless negotiations were resumed by October 23rd, the railwaymen would strike in support of the miners. The forebodings of Mr Thomas were ignored. During a coal strike many railwaymen would suffer losses in earnings or even unemployment: they had little to lose and probably everything to gain by loyalty to the Triple Alliance. The news of this decision naturally alarmed the Government. On October 22nd, 1920, the Emergency Powers Bill was introduced into the Commons and by October 27th, it had received the Royal Assent. Meanwhile the Prime Minister made more determined efforts to obtain a settlement. Negotiations began again on October 25th. At a meeting of executives the previous day, the N.U.R. had agreed to delay the strike until the results of the new negotiations became known. On October 28th after the strike in the coalfields had been in progress for twelve days, the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. recommended a ballot vote of members on the latest Government proposals, and although the ballot showed

a small majority against the proposals, the necessary two thirds majority in favour of continuing the strike was not attained, and the men were ordered to resume work, which they did on November 4th. So ended the so-called Datum Line strike.[1]

The failure of the Triple Alliance in 1920 was not quite so abject as hindsight and the débâcle of 1921 have led historians to suppose. The miners obtained an increase in wages, though not as much as they had demanded initially, and the threat of a railway strike by the N.U.R. undoubtedly assisted in softening the Government's attitude. However, the original idea behind the construction of the Alliance, namely, that each member union should formulate demands and simultaneously submit them to their respective employers, had once again not been applied in practice. Several factors rendered such application difficult. A strike of transport workers, in order to succeed, had to be solid and surprising. Transport strikes could be broken by the use of the military and civilian volunteers. A strike on the railways, for example, was likely to be strongest in the first few days, after which an increasing number of trains would be run.[2] Although there

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[1] The Datum Line was an output figure from which increases in output could be calculated. The owners tied their offer of higher wages to increased output in this way. Owners and miners differed as to what figure should constitute the Datum Line.

[2] Not all the leaders of transport unions accepted this analysis. Bevin told Citrine that 'in transport strikes it had always been his policy not to throw the whole of the union's fighting strength into the first week. If they were all brought in at the same time it meant reaching the maximum of strength too quickly and the men would begin to drift away afterwards. On the other hand, by bringing up reserves and adding additional men after the first week, it always supported the strike and guaranteed the men being out a second week. It was something to look forward to.' Quoted in Citrine, Lord, Men and Work (1964), p. 179.

would be a limit to the number of trains which could be run, the effect on the morale of the strikers of any transport moving was likely to be damaging. The miners on the other hand, were blackleg proof, as the leaders of the transport workers were not slow to remind their counterparts in the M.F.G.B. If the transport workers required the support of the miners, that support, to be effective, would have to be brought into play immediately. The M.F.G.B., however, could not order such a strike without the sanction of a two thirds majority of a ballot vote of the men. Such a delay could be crucial. The problem of who was to exercise control over a sympathetic strike was never realistically faced. None of the unions wished to surrender any of their independence. Similarly, the problem of how a settlement should eventually be negotiated was left undecided; no machinery was constructed, nor plan evolved to meet these eventualities. Individual unions welcomed help, on their own terms, not interference. Yet none of these obstacles, serious though they were, were insurmountable as such. The will to solve these problems was lacking. A majority of the most prominent Trades Union leaders were determined to avoid sympathetic strikes, whose control, especially in the event of active Government opposition, they might not be able to retain. The mutual mistrust within the Triple Alliance waxed fat on the view that, far from being a mutual insurance society, the Alliance was the handmaiden of the M.F.G.B. The vital factor in the collapse of the Triple Alliance was the determination on the part of a number of the transport workers' leaders, especially those of the N.U.R. to avoid all action which

might lead to the open confrontation between capital and labour which they feared could only mean the destruction of organised Labour in Britain.

The Government had been prepared for trouble in 1920, but had wriggled out of the worst of their difficulties by granting a wage increase to the miners for a limited period while a more permanent National Wages Board was established. Owners and workmen were to report back to the Government at the end of March 1921 on their efforts to set up a National Wages Board. In the intervening period, the boom in the coal export market rapidly declined. The slump in trade was reflected in the lower output, which in turn led to a wage reduction of 2/- per shift in February 1921. The profits which had been accruing to the Treasury were now turned into deficits.[1] In January 1921 therefore, the Government relinquished their control over the price and distribution of coal, and on February 23rd they announced that the coal trade would revert to private ownership on March 31st, 1921, instead of August 31st, as at first planned. To the M.F.G.B. this was a direct threat to all the gains which they had made since 1914. National agreements, numerous wage increases, the national pool, not to mention the still cherished hopes of nationalisation, seemed about to be swept away at a single blow. The Government's decision to decontrol the industry also removed what chance there had been of the owners and the workmen agreeing on a new wages scheme for the industry. The owners

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[1] See Chapter I, above.

pointed out that decontrol would make it impossible for some collieries to carry on working. They refused to accept the establishment of either a National Wages Board or the continuation of a profits pool. District Boards, with wages based on the capacity of each district to pay, was the owners' solution to the problem.

On March 24th, 1921, the Coal Mines (Decontrol) Act received the Royal Assent, and in the districts the coal owners published notices announcing the termination of all existing contracts on March 31st. With a depressed state of trade, and both Government and owners seemingly convinced of the efficacy of their policies the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. decided to ask the districts if they would abandon, temporarily, the policy of a national wages board and substitute for it that of district agreements. On March 24th, the districts rejected the Executive's proposal. The stoppage began on April 1st.

The miners had asked the Triple Alliance for assistance on March 21st, and this was the first time on which one of the partners had specifically requested help. A special general meeting of the Executive Committee of the N.U.R. held on April 6th, 7th and 8th, passed a compromise resolution promising support for the miners provided that the T.W.F. did the same. A joint meeting of the two bodies on April 8th, resolved to strike from midnight on the 12th, if negotiations in the coal dispute had not been resumed. The Government had already declared a state of emergency on March 31st, and the threat of industrial action by the Triple Alliance stimulated them into further activity. The Armed Forces were mobilised by Royal Proclamation and appeals made

for volunteers to form a special defence force. However, negotiations were also restarted in the coal dispute, and the Government offered a short term subsidy in order to ameliorate the effect of the wage cuts, spreading the reductions over a period. While these discussions went on, the transport workers in the Triple Alliance postponed their strike for three days until April 15th, but the insistence of the miners that any agreement reached should be a national one, together with the determination on the owners' part that it should not, led to a further breakdown of the negotiations. It appeared that the myth of the General Strike was about to become reality.

On the evening of April 14th, in the House of Commons, a group of M.P.s were being addressed by the Secretary of the M.F.G.B., Mr Frank Hodges. Although no verbatim record of the meeting exists, Hodges was alleged to have said, in reply to a question, that the miners were prepared to consider a temporary district settlement, provided that the National Wages Board and the national profits pool might be reconsidered at a later date. After being told of Hodges' remarks, Mr Lloyd George wrote to the M.F.G.B, on April 15th, proposing a resumption of negotiations, the object being a temporary settlement. The Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. rejected the Prime Minister's offer, and the stoppage continued. Mr Hodges offered his resignation, which was not accepted.[1]

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[1] Hodges, F., My Adventures as a Labour Leader (1924), pp. 131-141. Mr. Hodges claimed later that the M.P.s felt that the wages pool was a political rather than an industrial demand, and that had he not agreed to a temporary district settlement, their suspicions would have been confirmed. He also pointed out that two of his colleagues on the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. were present and did not intervene.

It was now that the Triple Alliance proved to be a paper tiger liable to manipulation by a small number of moderate trades union leaders. Representatives of the Alliance were meeting at the N.U.R. headquarters in London, and when they heard of the happenings of the previous twenty-four hours they urged the miners to think again about meeting the Prime Minister and recommencing negotiations. The miners refused. Mr Thomas said that their refusal nullified all hope of a settlement. A majority of the Executives of both the N.U.R. and the T.W.F. were persuaded to call off their projected sympathetic strike, at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 15th, thenceforward 'Black Friday', a notorious date in the history of the British Labour Movement. 'Black Friday' became a symbol. It did not mean simply that there would be no general strike, that the Triple Alliance was destroyed, and that the miners would be defeated, though it did mean all these things. More than this, however, it signified the collapse of working class solidarity, as the depression set in, in face of the expected attack on wages and conditions. Half hearted leadership, coupled with organisational defects, the most important of which was the independence of action retained by individual members of the Alliance, largely contributed to its defeat in 1921. Coupled with the Government's determination not to yield to threats, these factors undermined the Triple Alliance.[1]

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[1] The dispute was not settled until July 1st, when an agreement was reached establishing a National Wages Board which would interpret district decisions. The reductions in wages were to be made gradual by a Government subsidy of £10 millions. Wage rates were to be based upon a new standard which was to be made up of the pre-war standard plus twenty per cent of the sum payable as standard wages; any proceeds after all other costs had been met would be divided between owners and men in the ratio seventeen per cent to eighty three per cent.

The collapse of 'Black Friday' did not of itself discredit the idea of direct action because, in the phrase of the President of the M.F.G.B., the workers had never 'got on't t'field'.[1] However, the failure to co-operate successfully during an industrial dispute, together with the trade depression, which by 1921 had gripped all the old staple trades, caused the trades unions to revert to an individual defence of the existing standards of their own members. The depression sapped the bargaining strength of the trades union movement. As unemployment rose rapidly to almost 2,000,000 in December 1921, so trades union membership fell and funds were exhausted by payments of unemployment benefit. The situation improved slightly during 1923 and 1924, although the numbers of unemployed exceeded one million.[2] The assumption

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[1] Quoted in Lawson, J.J., The Man in the Cap. The Life of Herbert Smith (1941), p. 145.

[2] The average annual percentages of insured persons unemployed in Great Britain and Northern Ireland since the extension of the scheme of Unemployment Insurance in 1920.

1921	17 per cent	(not including workmen engaged in the coal dispute).
1922	14.3	
1923	11.7	
1924	10.3	
1925	11.3	
1926	12.5	(not including workmen engaged in the coal dispute).
1927	9.7	
1928	10.8	
1929	10.4	
1930	16.1	
1931	21.3	

'In view of the fact that the pre-war maximum rate over a period of 60 years or more had been 11 per cent and the average $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent (and that the insurance scheme had been built on the actuarial assumption of such a rate), this high level of unemployment was confidently expected to be temporary only.' Pollard, S., The Development of the British Economy 1914-1950 (1962), pp. 242-243.

of office by the Labour Party in 1924 raised the hopes of all elements within the movement, and consequently the disillusionment was all the greater when defeat followed victory with indecent haste. The trend of the Labour movement to move in a right wing direction was exemplified in the activities of the Labour Party in power in 1924, but this only served to stimulate a revival of socialist enthusiasms and militancy in the trades union section of the movement.[1] This was also partly due to the mutual suspicion with which the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Trades Unions were wont to regard each other, and to the unions' mistrust of the leadership of MacDonald. Even while the Labour Party held office, delegates at the 1924 T.U.C. at Hull, were drawing up their own industrial programme and placing more power in the hands of the General Council, including permission to organise material assistance in the event of industrial disputes involving large numbers of workmen. At this congress, and throughout the country, Communist and Minority Movement propaganda urging a more active policy was widely circulated, a factor facilitated at the congress by the absence on the Labour Party Front Bench of men like Clynes and Thomas, who would have advocated more moderate counsels. The left wing section was again vocal at the Scarborough T.U.C. in 1925, but by then Thomas, Bevin and Clynes were back on the General Council. By the end of the year, the more cautious Citrine had become General Secretary and as the moderates re-established themselves once more, a projected industrial alliance

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[1] For a detailed account of the activities of the first Labour Government, see Lyman, R.W., The First Labour Government 1924 (1957); and Milliband, R., Parliamentary Socialism (1961), Chapter IV.

significantly foundered upon the rock of trades union sectionalism. Nevertheless democratic methods had not alleviated either the social conditions or the economic pressures which continued to threaten the working class in the middle twenties. Direct action might yet halt the fall in wages and the rise in unemployment. If something of a truce had existed between capital and labour since 1921, a further deterioration in working class standards was likely to terminate it. The trades unions believed themselves still powerful enough to resist further encroachments on their conditions. With no immediate prospect of another Labour Government, direct action might be their only alternative to capitulation. Direct action might also wipe out the memories of 'Black Friday'. A fresh crisis in the coal industry in 1925 initiated the sequence of events which led to the last great manifestation of unrest in Britain in the inter-war period, the General Strike.

The settlement of 1921 in the coal industry lasted until 1924. The industry received artificial stimulants in the years 1922 and 1923 due to a backlog of orders following the 1921 stoppage, a strike in the United States in 1922, and the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. Exports particularly benefitted from these last two contingencies.[1] The workmen, however, did not share in this prosperity to the extent which they considered just, due to vagaries of the 1921 agreement, and

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[1] For the economic problems of the Coal Industry, see Chapter I, above.

a wage increase was negotiated during the Spring of 1924. Unfortunately the boom in the industry did not last and during the first six months of 1925, exports and profits fell abruptly. The situation was aggravated by the Government's decision in April 1925 to return to the Gold Standard at the pre-war parity of the pound to the dollar. The pound was over valued by about ten per cent and the move aroused bitter criticism from liberals and socialists alike.[1] The immediate effect

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[1] 'The policy of improving the foreign exchange value of sterling up to its pre-war value in gold from being about 10 per cent below it, means that, whenever we sell anything abroad, either the foreign buyer has to pay 10 per cent more in his money, or we have to accept 10 per cent less in our money. That is to say, we have to reduce our sterling prices, for coal or iron or shipping freights or whatever it may be, by 10 per cent in order to be on a competitive level, unless prices rise elsewhere. Thus the policy of improving the exchange by 10 per cent involves a reduction of 10 per cent in the sterling receipts of our export industries.

Now, if these industries found that their expenses for wages and for transport and for rates and for everything else were falling 10 per cent at the same time, they could afford to cut their prices and would be no worse off than before. But, of course, this does not happen. Since they use, and their employees consume, all kinds of articles produced at home, it is impossible for them to cut their prices 10 per cent unless wages and expenses in home industries generally have fallen 10 per cent. Meanwhile the weaker export industries are reduced to a bankrupt condition. Failing a fall in the value of gold itself, nothing can retrieve their position except a general fall of all internal prices and wages. Thus Mr Churchill's policy of improving the exchange by 10 per cent was sooner or later, a policy of reducing everyone's wages by 2s. in the £.'

Keynes, J.M., The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill (1925), p.6. For another view of the 'Return to Gold' see Sayers, R.S., The Return to Gold, 1925 in Studies in the Industrial Revolution - Essays Presented to T.S. Ashton (1960), pp. 313-327.

of the Government's policy was to increase the price of British exports. In order to remain competitive, the trades thus affected had to reduce costs, which invariably meant lowering wages. If the workmen resisted the reductions and export prices remained unaltered then foreign markets would be lost and unemployment increased. The Government left employers and employed to fight it out. The coal industry was one of the hardest hit by the return to gold.

On June 30th, 1925, two months after the Gold Standard had been restored, the coal owners submitted notices terminating the 1924 agreement, on July 31st, 1925. The national minimum percentage addition to standard wages was to be abolished although the ratio of proceeds distribution was to remain 87 : 13 wages to profits after the costs of the industry had been met. The owners pointed out that if the miners would agree to work on eight hour shift, more advantageous terms might be arranged. The miners refused to accept the reductions in wages which had been proposed, and determined on resistance to what they considered to be inhuman demands. The miners' position at this time was not a happy one. In spite of the militant activities of the M.F.G.B. Secretary, Mr A.J. Cook, and members of the Minority Movement, the Federation was ill-prepared for a long dispute. The trade slump had brought unemployment to many miners, and the financial resources of the County Associations had only partially recovered from the effects of the dispute of 1921.[1] Nevertheless, the miners refused to participate in yet another Government inquiry, chaired by H.P. MacMillan, whose report generally supported the workmens' claim that a reduction in wages would seriously

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[1] See Chapter IV and V, below

lower their standard of living.[1] The M.F.G.B. mistrusted the Conservative Government, believing that the Sankey Commission had successfully analysed the contradictions within the industry, and that no further inquiry was necessary. The miners' leaders also hoped that if it did come to a fight, they would have the assistance of other trades unionists. Despite the failure of the Triple Alliance in 1921, there were grounds for thinking that such help might be forthcoming.

The miners could and did argue, and with some truth, that if they were compelled to accept the owners' terms, then employers in other industries which were also suffering during the depression might similarly attempt to reduce costs by attacking the wages of their employees. Although this argument had not prevented the collapse in 1921, the wish to avoid another Black Friday was strong among leaders of the trades union movement. Moreover, the disappointments of the Labour Government

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1 This Government inquiry was in the form of a Court of Inquiry set up under the Industrial Courts Act of 1919. The Chairman was the Rt.Hon. H.P. MacMillan K.C. and the other members were Mr W. Sherwood of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, and Sir Josiah Stamp. Once the miners had refused to have anything to do with it, the Court of Inquiry was helpless. In a letter to the Minister of Labour informing him of their decision not to participate in the inquiry the Secretary of the M.F.G.B. pointed out that 'a Royal Commission made an exhaustive inquiry into all phases of the coal-mining industry in 1919, but the majority findings of the Commission were not given effect to by the Government of the day.' Once again, the Sankey Commission and its disappointments was being resurrected. The attitude of the miners in this period, their stubborness and intractability cannot be understood without an appreciation of the bitterness and mistrust which the Government's action, in not implementing the majority proposals of Sankey engendered.

of 1924, and the near certainty of a Tory administration until 1929 convinced trades unionists that immediate action in defence of existing standards was essential. None of the moderates, who dominated the British Trades Union movement, envisaged industrial action as a preliminary to the overthrow of the established order. They saw it as a defensive measure, designed to show both the employers and the Government that the unions would not humbly accept any conditions which their betters had decreed were essential for the maintenance of economic stability. The revolutionary implications of such action were never really faced by the Trades Union movement, because the large majority of its members did not think in such terms. Only when the Government chose to see in the General Strike an attempt to subvert the constitution was the Labour movement faced with the full implications of direct action. There was never any real doubt how this dilemma would be resolved. In the summer of 1925, the attitude of the Government facilitated, rather than frustrated, the success of the policy of direct action.

As early as March 1925, the M.F.G.B. had sounded out a number of other unions with a view to establishing another industrial alliance, and following a meeting on April 3rd, at which the M.F.G.B., Transport and General Workers' Union, N.U.R., A.S.L.E.F., Railway Clerks Association, Federation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, and the Amalgamated Engineering Union were represented, a sub-committee was given the task of formulating a constitution.[1] In an attempt to circumvent the

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[1] The idea of an industrial alliance had first been proposed by the A.E.U. in May 1924, but the M.F.G.B. did not immediately adopt the idea. Arnot, R.P., The General Strike (1926), pp. 73-86.

individual autonomy of the unions, the general conference of the Alliance was to empower the Executive to act, and once this was done, the Executive was to control the conduct of any dispute in which the Alliance became involved. Clause nine appears tinged with irony in view of what was to happen in 1926; 'the conditions of membership of this Alliance shall involve other Allied organisations in definitely undertaking, notwithstanding anything in their agreements or constitutions to the contray, to act as directed by the General Conference of this Alliance . . .'[1] With the coal owners' notices due to expire on July 31st, the industrial alliance could not be ready before the crisis in the coal industry occurred. The M.F.G.B. however were able to make use of the additional power granted to the T.U.C. at the 1924 meeting of Congress, whereby the T.U.C. was to be kept informed about industrial disputes and might intervene if large numbers of workers were involved. On July 10th, the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. met representatives of the General Council of the T.U.C. who promised to support the miners, and appointed a special industrial committee to follow the course of the dispute. A few days later, the T. & G.W.U. became the first union to ratify the proposed constitution of the Industrial Alliance.[2] The feeling of Labour unity was further impressed upon the Government by the General Council's action in summoning a meeting of the Executives of the railway unions, T. & G.W.U., and National Sailors' and Firemen's Union for July

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Bullock, A., op. cit., p. 275.

25th. At this meeting it was agreed to place an embargo on the movement of all coal if a settlement was not obtained. Events moved rapidly during the last four days of July with the possibility of a General Strike never far away. The MacMillan Court of Inquiry reported on July 28th, and the Prime Minister met representatives of both sides to the dispute during July 28th, and 29th. He rejected the idea of a subsidy for the coal industry and on July 30th, allegedly told the leaders of the M.F.G.B. that all workers might have to suffer wage reductions in order to put industry back on its feet.[1] That same morning a conference of trades union delegates in London approved the efforts of the General Council, who then sent out notices signed by the Chairman of the Council's Transport sub-committee, in addition to the Secretaries and Presidents of those unions involved, instructing union members to refuse to handle coal from midnight on July 31st. The Government ended the tension by capitulating. On the evening of July 31st, the Prime Minister saw the miners' representatives and persuaded them to co-operate in yet another inquiry into the efficiency of the industry. The owners' notices were to be withdrawn, and during the period of the inquiry, wages and conditions were to remain unaltered. In order to facilitate this, the Government gave a subsidy to the industry estimated at £10,000,000, though in fact it turned out to be over £23,000,000. The inquiry was expected to take nine months. The

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[1] Whether in fact Baldwin did say that is largely irrelevant. The remark was widely reported, and many people believed that he had said it. It provided a good reason, if one were needed, to support the miners. And of course, Keynes had made a similar prophecy in his famous pamphlet. See note 1 , above, p.89.

Government had yielded to the threat of an embargo on the movement of coal. This was 'Red Friday'. The General Council's report to the T.U.C. in September 1925 pointed out that the settlement was looked upon by the Press as a humiliating defeat for the Government inflicted upon them by the organised workers. The General Council felt that the special Industrial Committee ought to remain in being, as a further attempt to lower working class standards of living might be made.[1] Certainly many Government supporters were disturbed by what had taken place. In the House of Commons on August 6th, Mr Baldwin replied to criticisms of the course pursued by the Government. He listed three main reasons why it had been necessary to avoid a dispute. Firstly, the depressed state of trade, which a prolonged dispute would exacerbate; secondly, the detrimental effect such a dispute would have upon workers in all industries; and thirdly, the fact that no-one had had the time to think out the consequences of such actions. More significantly, he warned that if, at sometime in the future, the community, with the Government behind it, should have to protect itself against coercion by a minority,

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[1] Trades Union Congress, Annual Reports, (1925)

it would not hesitate to do so.[1] This did not necessarily mean that the Government were unprepared in 1925 and would use the time gained by the settlement on Red Friday to make ready, should a similar situation recur. Nevertheless, the triumph of the left in 1925, coupled with the anger on the right, the fears and exaggerations of both sides, contributed to a situation in which next time, capitulation by the Government was less likely.[2]

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1 187, H.C. Deb., 5s, 1612, 1637, 1646, 1647, 1689, 1690. The spectre of nationalisation and worse obviously tormented the minds of some members of the Commons. Mr Lloyd George called the agreement 'practical nationalisation ... And the right honourable Gentleman has conceded that merely because he was driven to it by the action of the direct actionists outside.' Sir Robert Horne, Conservative member for Hillhead, was worried about the effect which the granting of a subsidy might have on other industries which might, equally justifiably, ask for Government assistance. Colonel Gretton, the Conservative member for Burton, went much futher. ' . . . this is a revolutionary attack to which surrender is being made to-day ... They put these men in a much stronger position inside the ranks of the trades union movement than they were before. Those who are working in other great trade unions to produce similar results will receive great encouragement, and the sane, level headed leaders of the trades union movement are thrust backward, and their advice is damnified by the success of the movement promoted by the more violent.' The Chancellor of the Exchequer issued a warning to those 'direct actionists' however; 'There is a growing disposition among the great trades union authorities of the country to use the exceptional immunities which trades unions possess under the law, not for the purpose of ordinary trade objects, but in the pursuit of far reaching political and economic aims. It is obviously impossible for a Parliament ... to allow its authority to be disrupted by any section or organisation however respectable or however powerful ... The use of such a threat as a political weapon, which has been more and more apparent in recent years, is a grave fact which will require the profound and continuous attention of the House of Commons.' Did this mean that there were to be no more easy victories?

2 When asked by his biographer, Mr G.M. Young, why the subsidy was granted in 1925, Mr Baldwin replied, 'We were not ready.' Young, G.M., Stanley Baldwin (1952), p.99.

The members of the Royal Commission who were to attempt to solve the multifarious problems of the coal industry were appointed on September 5th. A prominent Liberal Party member, Sir Herbert Samuel, was appointed to the chair, and the other three members were all drawn from the rich and educated classes; General Sir Herbert Lawrence, a banker, Sir William Beveridge, ex-civil servant and economist, and Mr Kenneth Lee, chairman of a big Manchester cotton concern.[1] The first public sitting was fixed for October 15th. There were no representatives of Labour upon the Commission. This was to be an impartial inquiry. The Government could not afford to have another Commission like the Sankey one in 1919, which might reaffirm the efficacy of the public ownership of the mines. Contention between the individual commissioners at least, must be obviated.

In the meantime, the Government felt obliged to prepare for another industrial crisis, should the efforts of the Commission fail to produce a settlement satisfactory to all parties. They were assisted, unofficially, by two private bodies, one formed specifically to combat a general strike, should it occur, the other already in being before the crisis in 1925. This latter, the British Fascists, was not a very respectable organisation and its anxiety to help defeat any attempt to injure the

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1 Samuel, Herbert (1870-1963) Liberal M.P., 1902-1918 and 1929-1935; Parliamentary Under Secretary, Home Office, 1905-1909; Postmaster-General, 1910-1914 and 1915-1916; President, Local Government Board, 1914-1915; Home Secretary, 1916 and 1931-1932; High Commissioner, Palestine, 1920-1925; Knighted, 1920; Viscount, 1937.

established order was generally assuaged by official co-operation. The offer of the British Fascists to enrol their members as special constables in the event of trouble was generally not accepted.[1] The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, O.M.S., on the other hand, formed in September 1925, was of a less overtly reactionary nature. It was a voluntary organisation, depending upon private donations. Its declared aim was to recruit volunteers who in a national emergency, would perform certain essential services, such as ensuring that transportation of foodstuffs was not interrupted. The O.M.S. claimed to be non-political, insisting that interference in normal trade disputes was not part of its function. The leaders of the O.M.S. were mainly prominent military gentlemen, though little is known of the exact nature of its administration and financial organisation.[2] Volunteers were trained to drive road and railway vehicles and when the General Strike did occur, the O.M.S. handed over about 100,000 such volunteers to the Government. It remained in being, however, after the end of the General Strike, in case of future trouble. Some of the secrets of the O.M.S. inevitably leaked out, and it received the blessing of the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson Hicks, in October 1925.

Although the Government looked favourably upon the O.M.S., they did not in any sense rely upon it. Their own plans for combating a General

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1 Cross, C., The Fascists in Britain (1961) is a useful general account. For their activities in the general strike see pp. 61-62.

2 See Below, Chapter VI. The President of the O.M.S., was Lord Hardinge, previously Viceroy of India. Other well known names included Admiral Jellicoe, Sir Rennell Rodd, Major General Lord Scarborough, Lord Falkland, Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Lloyd, and Admiral Sir Alexander Duff.

Strike were well laid. The Coalition Government had used an Emergency plan of operations during the Railway Strike of 1919, under the direction of the Ministry of Food. During 1920 a more permanent structure was set up under the Ministry of Health, and could have been used in 1921, had the other members of the Triple Alliance supported the miners by strike action. The organisation was maintained, in a much truncated form, during the period 1921-1925, even during the term of office of the Labour Ministry. Following on the events culminating in Red Friday, it was rejuvenated. The Home Office was primarily responsible for the reorganisation, the work being supervised by the Permanent Under Secretary there, Sir John Anderson (later Lord Waverley).[1] England and Wales were divided into ten areas, each under a Minister, called for this purpose a Civil Commissioner. Each district had its own headquarters, and the staff of the Civil Commissioner consisted of a Road Commissioner, Coal, Finance, and Food officers. The whole emphasis of the scheme was on local organisation and initiative, centrally directed. Responsible to the ten Road Commissioners were to be 150 Road Officers, established at different focal points. Each of these points supported a haulage committee, staffed by local road hauliers, who during the General Strike, were to use their transport as directed by the Government. The Emergency Powers Act of 1920 provided the Government with extensive power to requisition vehicles, but this was

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1 Anderson, John (1882-1958) Joint Under Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1920; Chairman, Board of Inland Revenue, 1919-1922; Permanent Under Secretary, Home Office, 1922-1932; Governor of Bengal 1932-1937; Conservative M.P., 1938-1950; Lord Privy Seal, 1938-1939; Home Secretary, 1939-1940; Lord President of the Council, 1940-1943; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1943-1945; Knighted 1919; created Viscount Waverley 1952.

to be used only as a last resort. The Government did not wish to become involved in commercial activities. The hauliers were to attend to their normal business wherever possible, save that all goods carried should accord with the list of priorities issued by the Ministry of Transport. Drivers and staff were to be paid by their firms. The Food Officers were also important cogs in the system. Each of the ten sections of the country had a Food Officer who appointed representatives in all the municipal districts within his section. The representative was usually a permanent local government official. If local councils evincing Labour sympathies refused to co-operate, appointments were nonetheless made. The sectional Food Officers possessed wide powers under the Emergency Powers Act to requisition, fix prices, and compel traders to act as directed. The comparative shortness of the strike meant that the need to use these powers never arose.[1]

The Government's arrangements were almost completed by the end of November 1925. The Civil Commissioners had been appointed in September, and most of the local appointments had been made by the late autumn of 1925. Preparations were far enough advanced for the Ministry of Health to despatch the famous circular number 636 to all local authorities on November 20th, 1925. The circular set out the organisation which would function if a state of emergency was declared, underlining the fact that the Government organisation was designed to supplement local initiative and that each area was expected to maintain its own

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[1] Ministry of Health Circular No. 636 (England and Wales), November 20th, 1925. Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 304-306.

essential services. Further organisational conferences were held in the first months of 1926 and Road Officers and Haulage Committee Chairmen were asked to prepare for meetings on April 27th, and 28th, which in the event, did take place. By the end of that month, the Government's plans were ready, and only the 'Action' telegram from Whitehall was needed to put them into effect.

The preparations of the Government were not matched by similar activities on the trades union side. The fact of Government preparation was well known, even if the details were not. It was obvious to most trades unionists in official positions that the easy victory of 1925 was unlikely to be repeated in 1926. Yet little was done to formulate a plan of campaign should the Samuel Report not prove acceptable. The first backsliding was noticeable at the 1925 T.U.C. at Scarborough, where the caution of the delegates manifested itself in referring to the General Council for consideration a resolution requiring Congress to grant to the General Council certain special powers in the event of a stoppage in the coal industry. These included permission to draw up an agreement with the Co-operative Societies in order to provision the workers, should a general strike take place.[1] The Labour Party Conference a few weeks later underlined the strength of the right wing by proscribing Communist Party members, refusing them individual membership of the Labour Party, though MacDonald's criticism of the sympathetic

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[1] In fact, negotiations with the Co-operative Union, culminating in a joint meeting with officials of the M.F.G.B. and the General Council on February 26th, did take place. Outstanding debts incurred during the 1921 stoppage, together with several extreme speeches by Mr A.J. Cook contributed to the Co-operative Unions refusal to help without a pledge of the assets of the whole trades union movement. Nonetheless, local co-operative Societies did extend credit facilities and make donations to funds, especially during the long coal stoppage. See below, Chapter VIII.

strike was met resolutely by Bevin.[1] A further blow at the militants was the Government's arrest of twelve leading members of the Communist Party in October 1925 on charges of seditious libel and incitement to mutiny. Seven received six months imprisonment and five, twelve months. It is difficult to say who felt the most relieved over this, the Government, or the leaders of British Labour.[2] The General Council of the T.U.C. with the return to office of Thomas and Miss Bondfield and the elevation to the chair of Mr. A. Pugh, was also now more determinedly moderate in outlook, and this proved vital as with the failure of the projected industrial Alliance, the task of preparing a plan of action fell squarely upon its shoulders.

Negotiations between the major trades unions had continued throughout the autumn of 1925, but the N.U.R. destroyed what chance of an agreement there was by raising the controversial issue of industrial unionism, thereby antagonising the A.S.L.E.F., and they used this as an excuse to withdraw from the talks. Further spasmodic meetings of the Alliance did take place in 1926, but the impetus was gone, and the General Strike had already happened before an Alliance conference fixed for July 1st, could meet. The onus was therefore placed upon the General Council to organise trades union resistance should the miners need help. The General Council was not designed to be the executive of the British

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1 Bullock, A., op. cit., pp. 285-286.

2 Messrs. Gallacher, Hannington, Inkpin, Pollitt and Rust received twelve months imprisonment and Arnot, Bell, Campbell, Cant, McManus, Murphy and Wintringham, six months each. MacFarlane, L.J., The British Communist Party: Its origins and development until 1929 (1966), pp. 137-138.

Trades Union movement, and the individual sovereignty of unions which had so emasculated the Triple and Industrial Alliances did not facilitate action by a body on which the larger unions were in a minority.[1] The powers which it possessed for interfering in a trade dispute were not extensive and were likely to prove even less effective if conservatively interpreted by a General Council who wished to avoid an open struggle with the Government. The special Industrial Committee set up in 1925, remained in being, but only reported monthly to the General Council, and not until the coal dispute was almost inevitable was a Ways and Means Committee formed in order to formulate plans for assisting the miners. In the previous nine months, since Red Friday, the General Council had done nothing in the way of preparation should no settlement be reached in May 1926. The special industrial committee had been similarly inactive. A memorandum compiled by Citrine in January 1926 concerned with initiating an organisation should a dispute occur was shelved by the special Industrial Committee who on February 19th, agreed, on the suggestion of the leaders of the M.F.G.B., to postpone any action until the Royal Commission had published its report.[2] The Committee simply published a statement reiterating their support for the miners' position, which was in effect the slogan coined by Mr. A.J. Cook, not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay, and no abrogation

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1 On the growth of the General Council of the T.U.C. and the ideas which underpinned it see Allen, V.L., The Reorganisation of the Trades Union Congress, 1918-1927 in The British Journal of Sociology, vol. XI, No. 1., (March 1960) pp. 24-43.

2 The memorandum has been published in full in Lord Citrine's autobiography op. cit., pp. 146-153.

of the hard won national wages agreement. The General Council believed that the Samuel Commission would produce a solution to the coal industry's problems which both owners and men could accept. The members of the General Council certainly did not visualise taking any action until the report of the Royal Commission had been carefully studied. They refused to seriously consider the position which would arise, if the Commission's Report failed to achieve a settlement. The miners' leaders showed similar negligence. No-one ever prepared for strikes in the coal industry, and they did not really see the necessity of preparation before the event in 1926, though they frequently criticised the T.U.C. for its lack of foresight later. Neither the miners nor the General Council had thought of the possible consequences of large scale sympathetic strike action, if the Government vigorously opposed it. Direct action was a last resort, to be used in an effort to exert pressure on the Government. It was not an attempt to overthrow the constitution. The failure to prepare for 1926, coupled with the characters and views of the most influential trades unionists, offer ample evidence in support of this judgment. Men like Thomas and Clynes had spent their lives arranging compromises, and the findings of the Royal Commission were expected to provide the basis for yet another. The obstinacy of miners and owners, together with the irascible temper of some members of the Government prevented such a solution. The trades unions were left with the decision to retreat and be humiliated, or advance, they knew not where, for which they were unprepared. In the event, they did compromise again, a show of force being followed by a retreat. This policy merely

delayed their defeat.

The Report of the Royal Commission was published on March 11th, 1926. It rejected both the miners' scheme of nationalisation and the coal owners' proposals for wage reductions, increased hours of work, and the cutting of railway freight rates. It opposed any further Government subsidy. The owners' attitude towards the workmen in the industry was severely censured. On the positive side, the Report made a distinction between the future reorganisation of the industry, and the measures which must be adopted immediately in order to prevent the collapse of the industry. The reorganisation proposals were somewhat nebulous and indecisive and in fact were thrust further and further into the background as the negotiations progressed. Nationalisation of coal royalties was once again recommended. Reorganisation was to be effected under private ownership through the amalgamation of concerns and the co-ordination of the coal industry with allied trades, to be directed by a National Fuel and Power Committee whose function was to be solely advisory. Research and distribution facilities were to be improved, if necessary with assistance from the Government, and better industrial relations for the industry were to be encouraged by pit-committees, profit sharing, better houses, paid holidays, family allowances and amended pay schemes designed to give the men working at the face a direct interest in output. These would be all real gains for the workmen, provided the owners could be compelled to accept them. It was the absence of any element of compulsion which increased the miners' suspicions of the

intentions of the Report. They did not believe in the owners' good will. Would the Government coerce the owners into implementing the Report's reorganisation proposals at some vague date in the future? The miners had been the victims of broken Government promises before; the first half of the Samuel Report looked to them like another Government carrot, which would be snatched away once the miners had agreed to accept the remedies recommended by the Commissioners as essential for the industry's present continuation. These remedies were far from vague, though the prescription looked rather old fashioned. Costs must be reduced, and in order to achieve this, wages must come down. Hours of working should remain unaltered. So far as reorganisation was concerned, 'before any sacrifices are asked for from those engaged in the industry, it shall be definitely agreed between them that all practicable means for improving its organisation and increasing its efficiency should be adopted as speedily as the circumstances in each case allow.'[1]

It is conceivable that if both parties to the dispute had been willing to give up some of their demands in order to gain others, some sort of compromise along the lines of the Report might have been reached. In fact, both miners and owners were convinced of the justice of their own case. Both extracted from the Report those points with which they agreed, and ignored the remainder. The Government did not much care for the Report either, and only the General Council of the T.U.C., the spiritual home of the professional negotiators, really believed that the Report of the Samuel Commission offered a satisfactory basis on which to

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[1] R.C. on the Coal Industry vol. 1., (Cmd. 2600, 1925) pp. 222-237.

construct a settlement."

After the publication of the Report, both the Government and the General Council advocated silence while the findings were carefully studied. The *Times* suggested that all the recommendations of the Report should be accepted, and expressed doubts about the feasibility of suddenly cutting off the subsidy.[1] On March 24th, the Government's attitude towards the report was manifested in a statement which the Prime Minister gave to the other parties involved in the dispute. The statement pointed out that the Government did not like all the proposals contained in the Royal Commission's Report, but were willing to pass the necessary legislation and accept the Report, provided that the owners and the miners did the same. The Government must have been aware that such a contingency was extremely unlikely. Instead of giving a lead by declaring unqualified acceptance of the Report, they invited the two sides to disagree, which they promptly did. To the miners, reorganisation was a mirage on the industrial horizon ; the reality was to be reductions in wages. The owners could think of nothing else, and with trade depressed, could sneer at the plans for reorganising the industry and await events with equanimity.

The one effect which the Report of the Royal Commission did have, as the extreme left insisted that it was meant to have, was to widen the gap which already existed between the General Council of the T.U.C. and the miners' leaders. In February 1926 the special Industrial Committee had confirmed that the Trades Union Movement would support the miners if wages, hours, or national agreements were attacked. After the publication

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[1] *Times*, March 18th, 1926.

of the Report, the miners' leaders wanted the General Council to issue another declaration along the same lines which the miners' leaders could then present to their conference of executives scheduled to meet on April 9th. However, the special Industrial Committee resolved that negotiations between the miners and the owners, with the Report as a foundation, should continue. A letter was handed to Mr. Herbert Smith, the M.F.G.B. President, intimating that the special Industrial Committee did not think that the time was ripe for a final declaration of the General Council's policy. It asked for a detailed statement on the views of the miners on the recommendations contained in the Samuel Report, and urged that renewed effort should be made to find a solution. The following day the special conference of miners' executives passed a resolution repeating their determination to resist any attempt to impose longer hours, lower wages, and district agreements. On April 13th, negotiations broke down when the owners announced their intention of approaching the County unions in order to bring about district settlements. The special industrial committee saw the Prime Minister the next day, and while protesting at the action of the owners and declaring their full support for the miners, appeared to indicate that a negotiated settlement was still possible. This became more remote on the next day, April 15th, when the owners posted notices ending the wages agreement then in force on April 30th. No new terms were offered. In spite of the increasing seriousness of the situation, the Government made no immediate efforts to bring the two sides together. The Prime Minister did not see the owners until April 21st, and the owners did not meet the

miners' leaders until April 22nd. Deadlock was again the result. The miners were now ready for a fight, as indeed were the owners. The first signs of Labour preparations appeared on April 23rd, when a second special delegate conference of miners was summoned to meet on April 28th. The General Council also convened a meeting of trades union executives for April 29th.

Meanwhile attempts were made to revive the negotiations between the miners and the owners. On April 26th, the special industrial committee again saw the Prime Minister and a joint meeting of the representatives of the owners and the men was arranged, but by April 28th, no progress had been made. The next day both the meetings of executives were in session. The General Council of the T.U.C. had met two days previously on April 27th, and a Ways and Means committee had been established with Mr. A. Purcell as chairman in order to decide upon the form assistance to the miners should take, but at the same time the special industrial committee had been requested to try to obtain a resumption of the negotiations, with special emphasis on the reorganisation proposals of the Commission. The conference of executives adjourned on April 29th, after hearing speeches by Pugh, Thomas and Bevin. Mr. Thomas proposed a resolution endorsing the efforts of the General Council to obtain a settlement of the dispute, and instructing the special industrial committee to continue their efforts 'provided the impending lock-out of the mineworkers was not enforced.' Bevin talked of the necessity, should the negotiations fail, of becoming a single union with no autonomy. A significant speech was that of Mr. W.J. Brown of the Civil

Service Clerical Association who said that the conference seemed to lack the enthusiasm of the summer of 1925.[1]

On April 30th, the conference of trades union executives adjourned three times before finally deciding, at 8.30 p.m. to sit and wait for news of the final negotiations. Earlier that day the owners, on the request of the Prime Minister, had at last drawn up a national wages agreement. Many of the mineworkers were already locked out after finishing their shift. The owners' offer amounted to a return to the conditions of 1921 plus an eight hour day; wages reductions, and longer hours. The Prime Minister sent a letter with the proposals to the miners' leaders, in which he stated that the Government would be willing to legislate for the extra half hour, from seven and a half to eight, if the miners agreed. The letter also stated that the Government would give effect to those of the Report's proposals which in the opinion of the Government, would be most beneficial to the industry. Another inquiry, to report on the Report, was promised. This letter clearly illustrated the ambiguous Government attitude to the Report, and the

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1 Trades Union Congress; The Mining Situation; Report of the Special Conference of Executive Committees, April 29th, May 1st, 1926.

increasing similarity between their views and those of the owners.[1]

The miners rejected the owners' terms, but in their reply to the Prime Minister they included a copy of the proposals of the special industrial committee which emphasised the reorganisation section of the Samuel Report. A revision of the minimum percentage was to be a part of the reorganisation, but not the first and solitary one. Meetings continued throughout the evening of April 30th, with the industrial committee attempting to revive the negotiations by persuading the Government to continue the subsidy for a short time while the owners' notices were withdrawn. The Government intimated that before any such moves could be made, the miners must accept the findings of the Royal Commission and agree to a reduction in wages as a necessary prelude to reorganisation. The miners reply put the problem the other way round. After reorganisation measures had been initiated by the Government, they were prepared to consider what they could do to help the industry. The interpretation of the word initiated raised further difficulties. The miners' leaders refused quite adamantly, to agree to wage reductions in advance of reorganisation. They believed that more efficient management

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[1] The Report had quite definitely been opposed to longer hours, but Government initiated propaganda suggesting that longer hours was the best way out of the deadlock nevertheless appeared. On April 25th, while negotiations were still proceeding, there was an article to this effect by Sir Robert Horne, Minister of Labour in the Coalition Government, 1919-1922, in the Sunday Times, and on April 26th, a confidential document was sent to the press from the Conservative Central Office, though not to the Daily Herald, expressing the Government's anxiety that the public's attention should be drawn to the serious economic position of the coal industry ... 'Reference may also usefully be made to the question of hours, upon which it is desirable to concentrate attention, rather than upon the reduction of wages.' Quoted by J.H. Thomas in his speech to the House of Commons on May 3rd. 195, H.C. Deb., 5s, 79; Crook, W.H., op. cit., p. 345.

within the industry would remove any need for wage reductions. Stalemate was reached once more.

At this juncture, towards midnight on April 30th, the special industrial committee returned to the conference of executives in order to report on the progress of the negotiations. Printed copies of the General Council's plans for action in support of the miners were distributed to the General Secretaries of all the unions represented at the conference, which was then adjourned until the following day at noon.

In the meantime the Government had taken its own preparations a stage further. Earlier on April 30th, the Ministry of Health had issued to all local authorities circular number 699, warning them that if the negotiations failed, a portion of the organisation set out in circular number 636 was to be brought into operation. Attached to the circular was a list of the Civil Commissioners together with the more important members of their staffs. The press published this document in toto on May 1st. The second Government action carried with it an air of finality. On the evening of April 30th, following a meeting of the Privy Council, a document proclaiming a state of emergency under the Emergency Powers Act of 1920 was signed. It appeared in the evening newspapers of May 1st, and the following day's Sunday editions. All this happened before the actual calling of the General Strike. It coincided with the expiration of the time limit of the owners' notices, and in consequence, the beginning of the dispute if the negotiations failed. These acts may have been provocative, though they did not make the possibility of a settlement of the dispute more remote, nor make inevitable the calling

of a general strike. They did, however, make their own contribution to the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, and encouraged the extremists on both sides.

May 1st, was a day normally celebrated throughout the world by working class organisations. The conference of Executives resumed at 12.30 p.m. and immediately Mr. A. Pugh, the Chairman, read out the list of affiliated unions and requested a representative of each to say whether their respective societies agreed with the General Council's plan.[1] Executives representing 3,653,527 men did agree. A number of speeches followed the voting, including one from Mr. Bevin who stated, inter alia, that the proposals to aid the miners had not been printed until after the General Council had heard of the declaration of a State of Emergency and of the activities of the O.M.S. He accused the Government of declaring war, and offered to assist in the distribution of food. He also reiterated the General Council's readiness to continue negotiations. Meantime, however, the proposals for co-ordinated action directed that certain trades should stop work from midnight on Monday, May 3rd. The actual calling out of trades unionists was to be done by the officials of the individual unions concerned.

Another vital and controversial decision which the conference of executives took was to have serious repercussions. The General Council's proposals for co-ordinated action contained the request that those trades unions concerned in the stoppage should place their powers unreservedly in the hands of the General Council, and hand over to the Council

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[1] Three unions affiliated to the T.U.C. refused to take part; the National Union of Journalists, the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, and the Electrical Power Engineers Association.

the conduct of the dispute. It appeared to the members of the General Council that the leaders of the M.F.G.B., along with those of all the other unions involved, agreed to this request. The pronouncements of the miners' leaders on this issue were somewhat ambiguous, but the wish to preserve a united front amidst the mutual suspicions existing within the trades union ranks prevented the General Council from asking for more specific assurances. The miners were quite prepared to allow the General Council to assume control of the dispute provided that the General Council adopted the same attitude as the miners' leaders themselves, namely, that if the owners' notices were not withdrawn, then it was to be a fight to the finish until one side or the other was broken. Both the leaders of the miners and the moderates on the General Council must have been aware of the fundamental differences which existed between them, but the fear of what an open rupture might do to the movement induced silence, each side hoping, like Mr. Micawber, that something would turn up. At the inquest upon the events of 1926, held at the beginning of the next year, the miners' leaders accused the General Council of reversing conference decisions without consultation in reopening negotiations with the Government after the strike decision. Here was the basic difference between the General Council and the miners' leaders. The former argued that all the unions had handed over to the General Council the power to conduct the dispute. The General Council had agreed upon a plan of campaign to take the form of a strike in selected trades, should a settlement not have been obtained by midnight on May 3rd. In an attempt to achieve such a settlement, the weekend negotiations about which the miners so bitterly complained were undertaken. The General

Council wished to negotiate an agreement in which both owners and miners might make sacrifices, the former over reorganisation of the industry, the latter over wages. The miners, on the other hand, always claimed that the General Council organised a sympathetic strike in defence of the miners' wages, hours, and national agreements. Had the differences in outlook which existed between the members of the General Council and the leaders of the M.F.G.B. not been glossed over, it is doubtful whether the General Strike would have taken place at all. As it was, only the last minute action of the Government prevented an agreement being reached between it and the General Council.

After the adjournment of the conference of trades union executives the miners' leaders retired to their respective districts to report to their members and supervise the stoppage which had now begun. Only Mr. A.J. Cook and Mr. R. Smillie remained in London. The General Council meanwhile determined to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to obtain an equitable settlement, and on the afternoon of May 1st, two letters bearing the signature of the T.U.C. General Secretary, Mr W. Citrine,[1] were sent to the Prime Minister. One offered to help in the distribution of essential foodstuffs, the other, to resume negotiations. The former was ignored, but in response to the latter, a meeting was arranged later that evening between the special industrial committee and the Cabinet. On the suggestion of the Prime Minister, two sub-committees were

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[1] Citrine, Walter (1887 -) Secretary, Mersey District (Liverpool) of the Electrical Trades Union, 1914-1920; Assistant General Secretary, 1920-1923; Assistant Secretary, T.U.C., 1924; General Secretary, 1926-1946; Chairman, British Electricity Authority, 1947; Knighted 1935; Created Baron, 1946.

formed consisting of himself, Lord Birkenhead and Sir A. Steel -Maitland for the Cabinet, and Mr A. Pugh, Mr J.H. Thomas, and Mr A.B. Swales for the General Council. Sir Horace Wilson and Citrine were secretaries. By the early hours of Sunday, May 2nd, a formula had been agreed upon which was to be the basis for discussion. The formula provided for a continuation of negotiations, a withdrawal of the owners' notices and a declaration by the T.U.C. that a settlement could be reached in two weeks along the lines of the Report of the Samuel Commission. The formula was to be submitted to plenary meetings of the Cabinet and the General Council.

The next morning, May 2nd, Mr A.J. Cook met the General Council and was shown the formula. He had already been surprised to discover during the night, that negotiations were still in progress, and he in turn surprised the General Council when he informed them that the miners' executives had returned to their respective coalfields. He agreed to recall them but they could not arrive before late on Sunday evening. At this juncture, the General Council, by an unfortunate oversight, failed to communicate to the Prime Minister, the intelligence concerning the miners' executive. The previous night the General Council had promised the Prime Minister a reply on the formula by about noon, and a Cabinet meeting had been convened for that time. The vacillatory and dilatory nature of the whole of the pre-strike negotiations from the date of the publication of the Samuel Report was never more emphasised than on May 2nd. The Cabinet waited, growing ever more impatient, but apparently making no effort to discover the reason for the delay. Eventually, a

a meeting was arranged for 9 p.m. MacDonald and Henderson, representing the Parliamentary Labour Party, were also present. At this meeting, a second formula was drawn up by Lord Birkenhead. The General Council were asked to urge the miners to authorise them to continue negotiations with the understanding that both miners and General Council accept the report as a basis of settlement while recognising that it may involve some reduction in wages. It was this formula, together with a plan drawn up by Bevin for a National Mining Board to examine the whole of the Commission's Report, which the special industrial committee were discussing with the miners' leaders when they were summoned by the Prime Minister late on Sunday evening, May 2nd.[1] Mr Baldwin handed them a letter, and told them that since they had last spoken to each other, something had happened which had determined the Cabinet to break off the negotiations. The letter complained of specific instructions having been sent to trades unionists to begin a General Strike on the following Tuesday, and of overt acts which had already taken place, including interference with the freedom of the press. The letter went on to declare that the action of the trades unions was a challenge to the constitution, and that until the threat of a general strike was withdrawn, the Government could not participate in further talks. The members of the special industrial committee were very concerned at the contents of the letter. They had no knowledge of the overt acts to which the letter referred, and immediately

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[1] Bullock, A, op. cit., p. 311; Mowat, C.L., op. cit., pp. 306-307; Symons, J., op. cit., pp. 46-47.

repudiated them in a letter of their own which accused the Government of sabotaging the negotiations by an unprecedented ultimatum. Thus did the Government prevent the expert negotiators on the special industrial committee from arranging a solution without a strike. The unity of the trades union movement was cemented, and another Black Friday prevented by the Government's decision.

The overt acts which had precipitated the Government's decision to abandon the negotiations, concerned members of the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants who were employed by the Daily Mail. These men had refused to print a leading article headed, 'For King and Country' which stigmatised the threatened General Strike as a revolutionary movement.[1] The Cabinet contained a number of diehards who had long seen a struggle between the forces of capital and labour as inevitable. The implied threat to the constitution endemic in the idea of a general strike gave these men the justification for advocating the termination of all negotiations until the strike was called off.[2] Irritable, tired men, who had been meeting for something like twelve hours were easy prey for the less responsible Cabinet members who used the incident at the Daily Mail to persuade the more peaceable members

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[1] Only at the newspaper's London office. The Northern edition, printed in Manchester, came out normally, including the offending article.

[2] Mr Baldwin later claimed that the General Council had lost control of the extremist elements and that the action at the Daily Mail offices was the beginning of the General Strike. He also pointed out the risk he incurred continuing negotiations under the threat of a General Strike. Without such a threat, it must be considered doubtful whether negotiations would have been resumed at all. 195, H.C. Deb., 5s, 71.

of the Government that the time to be firm had come. The voices of Churchill, Chamberlain, Joynson-Hicks and Hogg were listened to for once. A member of the Cabinet afterwards described the scene.

> "We kicked our heels for hours. Presently, after 11 p.m. an exhausted Baldwin came in and collapsed in an arm-chair leaving it to Birkenhead to state the very inconclusive result ... Some of us would have been prepared to continue negotiations so long as there was the faintest chance of agreement. But opinion had hardened very much in view of the fact that notices ordering the General Strike to begin next day had been sent out, regardless of the negotiations the night before. While we were still discussing, the news arrived that the Daily Mail had been suppressed by the printers who disliked the leading article. This tipped the scales. It was clear that the only issue that now mattered, for the Government and the public, was whether Government and Parliament were to surrender to coercion. A note previously drawn up by the Cabinet was now stiffened to make it quite clear to the trade union leaders that negotiations could not be continued unless the interference with the Press was repudiated and the General Strike called off. We dispersed about 12.30 leaving Baldwin to hand the note to the trade union leaders and go to bed."[1]

Attempts to achieve a settlement of the dispute without resort to industrial action occupied the whole of Monday, May 3rd, but proved unavailing. The main point at issue between the General Council of the T.U.C. and the miners' leaders remained the possibility of a wage reduction which the miners believed reorganisation would obviate. The miners' executive voted in favour of keeping the national minimum of the 1924 wages agreement whereas the members of the General Council had hoped to substitute a national minimum in the terms which they had formulated. Mr E. Bevin argued that since the miners had handed over the

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[1] Amery, L.S., My Political Life, vol. II, (1953) pp. 483-484.

conduct of the dispute to the General Council, they ought to accept the Council's ruling. Once again the gulf between the General Council and the M.F.G.B. was opened up but the intransigence of the Government, who required a pledge that the miners would accept reductions in wages in advance of the negotiations, temporarily sealed the gap.

The strike began at midnight on May 3rd. From the Labour point of view it wasn't a particularly auspicious time for such a strike. Stockpiles of coal had been laid in, output in April 1926 being well up on the same month of 1925. Unemployment figures were high and trade slack. The weather was generally fair, and as has been shown, little preparation had been made by the trades union leaders. The Government organisation, however, went into action more or less smoothly. The export of coal stopped, and the domestic use of it was limited to one hundredweight per week. Economies in the use of all forms of fuel and lighting were initiated. The O.M.S. subordinated itself to the local voluntary service committees. Students, professional men and even some members of the aristocracy enjoyed themselves by taking the place of the workmen on the railways, roads and docks, whilst others assisted in the emergency canteens which were established. Special constables were enrolled, the parcel post suspended, and all forces leave stopped. The Navy were used to man a number of power stations, transport items varying from yeast to mail, and warships were stationed in all the leading ports. Troops were moved, but not used, save as escorts for food convoys within the City of London. The distribution of food was undertaken mainly by road transport, though as the strike continued, the number of

trains running did increase. Even on the last day of the strike, however, the London Midland and Scottish Railway's passenger services were only 12.2 per cent of normal. Freight services were almost completely withdrawn, being only 3 per cent of normal at the end of the strike.[1]

In spite of the volunteers, and the preparedness of the Government, the General Strike was indeed general in the sense that almost all the workers who were requested by their unions to stop work in support of the miners did so. The response to the strike call amazed many of the trades union leaders, optimists and pessimists alike. Many men risked jobs, pensions and privileges, evincing a remarkable enthusiasm and solidarity which inevitably was contrasted unfavourably with the attitude of many of their leaders. The normal life of the nation was severely interrupted. The instructions drawn up by the General Council provided for a first line of trades to cease work at the start of the dispute. The tendency in large scale strikes was for the transport workers to bear the brunt of the struggle, and it was partly to alleviate this, and share out the burdens, that workers in the printing trades, iron and steel, heavy chemicals, the building trades, electricity and gas industries were called out alongside the railwaymen, road transport workers and the dockers. The total lack of preparation for the strike, together with the issuing of separate strike instructions by each of the unions involved, placed a heavy obligation upon local trades unionists. Officials of the different unions in every locality were

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[1] Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 390-395; Mowat, C.L., op. cit., p. 312.

faced with the problem of co-ordinating their separate instructions in order that co-operation and unity with their fellows could be achieved. The failure to prepare led also to difficulties concerning the interpretation of the General Council's plan. For example the instructions from Eccleston Square did not make it clear what was to be done with regard to road transport workers normally engaged in food distribution. Should they remain at work beside Government volunteers, thereby perhaps releasing other volunteers to work elsewhere? Eventually most such workers were withdrawn. The problem of cutting off the supply of electricity and gas to industrial firms without interfering with domestic supplies proved technically insoluble. Similarly no hard and fast rule could be applied to the issue of permits for moving items during the strike. In spite of all the confusion at the centre, the improvisations of local trades union groups worked remarkably well. Each local union branch formed its own strike committee, and sent representatives to the local Trades Council, Council of Action, or Emergency Committee, set up to co-ordinate all strike activity in the districts, and consisting of representatives of all local Labour groups. These Councils of Action formed sub-committees to cope with particular problems such as permits, picketing, transport, entertainments and relief of distress. Many Councils of Action issued their own strike bulletins which attempted to counter the emasculated national press and the British Broadcasting Company, who supported the Government. The strike bulletins usually contained morale boosting examples of the inefficiency of the volunteers together with reports of the solidarity of the strikers

in other districts which were obtained by despatch riders who maintained a news carrying service within each local area. The Councils of Action also issued permits to local people in order that certain work could be done or transport moved but the difficulties involved in laying down rules for such issues, coupled with the abuse to which many were subject, led to their withdrawal by the General Council on May 7th, following an avalanche of complaints and requests from many districts. So effective was this order in some areas, especially where mining was a major industry, that mass picketing prevented the movement of all transport.

Peaceful Picketing was legal under the law, but extremely difficult to define, and large-scale picketing inevitably led to clashes between strikers and police. Although the strikers were generally orderly, there were several violent incidents throughout the country, whose numbers increased after the first week-end of the strike. Such outbursts were often said to have been provoked by police imported into one district from another. In fact, there were 3,149 prosecutions in England and Wales for violence and incitement during the strike. The Government were certainly prepared for more trouble than this. Many of their supporters enrolled as special constables, whose number had increased by 128,000 to 226,000 by the end of the strike. A Civil Constabulary Reserve of over 18,000 men was also recruited. Promises of compensation were made to both the volunteers and their dependents should they be injured during the course of duty. The Home Secretary appealed for 50,000 special constables to enrol in London before the first week-end of the strike, and on May 10th, the <u>British Gazette</u> underlined this

appeal by inferring that the regular police might be needed for more aggressive operations.[1]

With the national press being published in attenuated form, the Government published a newspaper called the British Gazette which appeared from the offices of the Morning Post every day during the strike save May 4th. It was edited by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Winston Churchill and became notorious for its provocative statements and exaggerated circulation claims. In its initial issue on May 5th, the Gazette attacked the General Strike as a challenge to ordered government, and on May 8th, printed an announcement to the effect that any action which the Armed Forces might have to take in order to aid the Civil Power would receive the full support of the Government. The paper went on to state that an organised attempt was being made to starve the people and to wreck the State, and that the legal and constitutional aspects were entering a new phase. According to the correspondent of the New York World, Mr Baldwin disavowed this statement after representations from the Parliamentary Labour Party that such provocation would encourage the extremists of both sides.[2] The official Government journal did not print the proposals for a settlement drawn up by representatives of the Christian Churches at their Lambeth Palace conference on May 7th, until the day the strike was called off on May 12th, and it frequently printed wildly optimistic statements

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[1] British Gazette, May 10th, 1926.

[2] Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 419-420.

concerning the numbers returning to work.[1] The British Worker on the other hand, the official T.U.C. newspaper, was far more restrained. Its pages persistently refuted the charge that the General Strike was an attempt to overthrow the established order. Its columns contained repeated requests to trades unionists not to be provoked into disorderly acts and stressed that the dispute was a purely industrial one. The circulation of their paper, however, was never large, and outside London and Manchester it encountered printing difficulties, strikers in the printing industry considering it unfair to print anything at all. It has been suggested that the muzzling of the national press effectively prevented the strikers' point of view from reaching the middle class public, to the detriment of the strikers' cause.[2] This idea however presupposes a favourable attitude to Labour on the part of the national newspapers, which had not been very conspicuous before 1926. Only the Daily Herald and the Sunday Worker of the national press did not condemn

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1 Nor were the Churches allowed to broadcast an appeal on the B.B.C. Mr J.C.W. (later Lord) Reith, the Director, was afraid that the British Broadcasting Company might be taken over by the Government if an 'impartial' line was adopted. Reith, J.C.W., Into the Wind (1949), pp. 107-112.

2 Historians of this persuasion include Bullock, A., op. cit., p.320; Mowat, C.L., op. cit., p. 320; Symons, J., op. cit., p. 176; Taylor, A.J.P., op. cit., p. 246. The most comprehensive account of the activities of the National Press during the General Strike is to be found in Martin, K., The British Public and the General Strike (1926). Mr. Martin believed that 'as their object was not revolutionary but merely to obtain a fair offer for the miners, they needed as much middle class support as they could get ... It is probable that they would have gained a fair measure of publicity in all the liberal papers if these had appeared.' Martin, K., op. cit., p. 89. Ignoring the fact that there were few Liberal newspapers, and that their circulation was small, it is still difficult to see what influence they might have exerted upon the Government. All condemned the strike, and when it was ended, all the Liberal newspapers advocated a give and take settlement of the dispute in the coal industry. Nobody took any notice. For an examination of a section of the local press see Chapter VII, below.

the General Strike. It is possible, however, that the moderate opinions, such as were expressed at the Lambeth conference for example, would have made a greater impression if it had been able to use the press as a medium for its views.

Although the British Worker might justifiably protest that the General Council of the T.U.C. had no revolutionary intentions, the revolutionary implications of a General Strike were unmistakable. The Government's policy before what they chose to consider as a threat to the constitution was one of unconditional surrender and by the first week-end of the strike, the leading members of the General Council were beginning to look for a way out of the impasse to which their lack of thought had brought them. Although the strike appeared to be a surprising success, moderate trades unionists doubted the ability of the strikers to hold out for much longer. Union funds were not inexhaustible. The stern opposition of the Government might lead to increasingly violent clashes and transfer of control to the more extreme factions which existed within both sides. The movement which Thomas, Bevin and Clynes had worked for years to build up might be crushed at a blow. All sorts of negotiations had been going on in private including those in which Mr. Thomas prominently figures, and the movement to call off the strike was given additional impetus by other events.[1]

On the evening of May 8th, the Prime Minister made a conciliatory speech on the B.B.C., in which he said that no door was closed to negotiations once the strike was abandoned. As he was to do many times in

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[1] For an account of the secret negotiations to end the strike see Sitwell, Osbert, Laughter in the Next Room (1958 ed.) pp. 212-259; and Citrine, Lord, op. cit., pp. 185-203.

the future, he appealed to his audience to trust him to obtain a fair and just settlement. Two days earlier, on May 6th, Sir John Simon had declared during a speech in the Commons that the General Strike was illegal as the men involved had broken their contracts. They were not therefore protected under the 1906 Trades Disputes Act and might be sued for damages by their employers. This opinion was later shown to be false by Mr A.L. Goodhart in the Yale Law Journal for February 1927 who pointed out that sympathetic strikes had always been legal, and that of necessity they put pressure on a third party; that the third party happened to be the Government made no difference.[1] That this view was generally accepted is illustrated by the fact that in 1927, the Government passed the Trades Disputes Act, one of the clauses of which specifically outlawed any future General Strike. In those first few days of May 1926, however, Sir John Simon's opinion only added to the uncertainty in the minds of leading trades union officials. Worse, his view appeared to have been substantiated by a judgment in the High Court given on May 11th, by Mr Justice Astbury. The National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, which had not supported the policy of the General Council, had applied for an injunction restraining the officials of their Tower Hill Branch from calling out on strike the members of that Branch without the necessary two-thirds majority of all union members ashore. In granting the injunction Judge Astbury declared inter alia that the General Strike was illegal, and contrary to law, as no trade dispute existed save in the

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1 Goodhart, A.L., in Yale Law Journal, 36; (February 1927), pp. 464-485; quoted in Crook, W.H., op. cit., pp. 474-477. See also Harrison, D., The General Strike and the Law, English Review, June 1926.

coal industry. The strikers were therefore not protected by the Trades Disputes Act. Both of these legal pronouncements added to the fears of those trades union leaders who had never been enthusiastic about the strike, and together with rumours of the arrest of the General Council and of the local Councils of Action, made them even more determined to find a way out. The problem was how this was to be achieved. Once again, the professional negotiators rose to the surface. The Government demanded unconditional surrender but the disillusionment which such a policy would inevitably precipitate might impair trades union development for twenty years. Some sort of compromise was preferable and might be achieved if a non-combatant intermediary could be discovered to bring the Government and the T.U.C. together. It was at this moment that the chairman of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, Sir Herbert Samuel, returned to England from his Italian holiday.

He arrived in England on May 6th, but failed to obtain any satisfaction from the Government concerning the possibility of negotiations. He therefore set out, acting on his own responsibility, to attempt to discover a formula on the basis of which negotiations could be re-started. He met the T.U.C.'s negotiating committee several times during the Friday and Saturday, May 7th, and May 8th. The miners' leaders were not present at any of these meetings and did not know of them; the absence of the two miners' representatives on the General Council facilitated the task of keeping the talks with Samuel secret. A memorandum was drawn up by Samuel providing for renewed negotiations and the temporary continuance of the subsidy. A National Wages Board, representing both

employers and employed in the industry with an independent chairman, should arbitrate all future disputes. Wages should not be reduced until adequate assurances had been given that the reorganisation proposals of the Commission would be implemented. The wages of the lowest paid men should not be affected. It was hoped that both the General Council and the M.F.G.B. Executive would agree to Samuel's plan, which could then be used as the platform on which to negotiate the end of the General Strike. Sir Herbert Samuel agreed to do what he could to persuade the Government to accept the peace plan. The miners' leaders did not discover what was happening until May 9th. Their distrust of the General Council, never far below the surface, was given additional strength when they found out what had been taking place behind their backs. On May 10th, the negotiations between Samuel, the miners' leaders, and the General Council foundered on the miners' refusal to consider wage reductions. The General Council told the miners' leaders that in the opinion of the Council, the Samuel Memorandum ought to be accepted as a foundation upon which to build a settlement. The miners' leaders were adamant. In addition to their objection to wage reductions, they wanted to know what assurances the General Council had that the Government and the owners would accept the Samuel Memorandum. The General Council had none. They had hoped to be able to call off the strike on May 11th, but the miners' obstinancy, together with the fast fading belief that all the workers should return together, influenced the General Council to make one last effort to persuade the miners to accept the Samuel Memorandum. The memorandum was extended by a further

three proposals. The first provided for the subsidy to be renewed during the period of negotiations. The other two dealt with problems of reorganisation. New workers above the age of eighteen were not to be recruited if unemployed miners were available, and those miners made redundant by the closing of uneconomic pits should be assisted by transfers to more prosperous districts and where necessary by temporary maintenance. The miners remained unmoved. Nor could threats by transport union leaders of a unilateral return to work alter their minds. By now the General Council, with Thomas and Bevin prominent, were determined to end the strike, and after a further acrimonious meeting with the miners' leaders on the morning of May 12th, they went shortly after mid-day, to the Prime Minister's residence to inform him of their decision.

It had become increasingly obvious to the members of the General Council that the miners' leaders did not share their fears about what the consequences might be if the General Strike was not soon ended. They were equally certain that the miners would not accept any reduction in wages unless imposed upon them after a long and bitter struggle. They had no will to compromise : it was to be all or nothing. Could the other unions continue to support, by industrial action, a position which ruled out all possibility of a negotiated settlement? Union funds, members' jobs, perhaps the whole Labour movement might be placed in jeopardy if the strike were continued. It was reasoning along these lines which culminated in the decision to call off the strike. The T.U.C. had come a long way, further than they had ever dreamed would be

possible, but now they were faced with a wide fissure which they dare not attempt to bridge. It was time to retreat.

The General Council's negotiating committee decided before leaving for Downing Street that in addition to informing the Government of their decision to end the General Strike, they would also broach the question of the return to work, and on the basis of the Samuel Memorandum, try to terminate the mining dispute. Unfortunately events did not work out in the way the General Council had hoped. The miners' decision to remain out had already reached Downing Street, and the fact that the Government knew that the ranks of Labour were divided may have bolstered their belief that they were now negotiating from a position of strength and need not make any concessions. Mr. Pugh made a long statement which culminated in his announcing the decision to end the strike. The Prime Minister replied that there was much to be done and that he would lose no time in bringing the owners and miners together in an attempt to obtain a permanent settlement. Mr. Thomas then made some tentative remarks requesting the help of the Prime Minister in securing a return to pre-strike conditions. Only Bevin tried to extract from the Prime Minister more precise assurances concerning victimisation, and the withdrawal of the owners' notices while negotiations to end the coal dispute proceeded. The Government were in no mood to make conditions. No mention was made of the Samuel Memorandum, in which the General Council had placed such faith.[1]

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[1] The best account of the Downing Street meeting is that contained in Bullock, A., op. cit., pp. 334-337.

The B.B.C. announced the ending of the General Strike shortly after 1.00 p.m. on May 12th. Many rank and file strikers at first refused to believe it. Others declared that it must be a glorious victory and began suitable celebrations. Slowly the truth became clear, though not due to the General Council, who persisted in optimistic interpretations of the situation until it became obvious that the miners were to be starved into acceptance of revised working conditions. The members of the General Council have been frequently censured for this conduct in 1926, and certainly the manner in which the Strike was called off deserves serious criticism. The British Worker of May 12th, had given no hint of what was to come, and only the day before, the second line of engineering workers had been ordered out. The strike was still solid and likely to become increasingly so during the next few days as other workers joined the strikers. It appeared to be a panic stricken betrayal of those who had come out on strike in support of the miners, a belief given added credence by the General Council's inability to arrange an orderly return to work. In the British Worker of May 13th, the General Council declared that they had obtained satisfactory assurances that the mining dispute could be resolved and therefore had agreed to end the General Strike.[1] They did not say that the miners had

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[1] This was altered later. At the Conference of Executives in January 1927 at which an inquiry into the events of 1926 took place, the General Council declared that they ended the General Strike because it had become clear that the miners were not interested in a compromise solution.

rejected the Samuel Memorandum but contented themselves by publishing the correspondence with Sir Herbert Samuel, including that in which he emphasised the unofficial character of his intervention.[1]

The triumphant headlines of the British Gazette ushered in the realisation among the strikers that they had been led into defeat. On May 13th, men attempting to return to work found themselves turned away or offered jobs involving loss of seniority or worsened conditions of pay. This was especially true of employees of the railway companies, many of whom were requested to sign statements acknowledging their guilt in breaking their contracts with the companies.[2] In consequence, the strike continued with an additional 100,000 men involved on May 13th. Some Strike Committees sent requests to the General Council asking that the strike be resumed. The Executives of the Railway unions were compelled to instruct their members to remain on strike until an agreement with the employers concerning reinstatement could be reached. In effect, the new agreement was little better than the original document, but the men were coaxed back to work.[3] In the House of Commons on May 13th, the Prime Minister made a speech appealing for peace, and warning employers that any general attack on wages would not be countenanced by the Government. The danger receded, and the majority of strikers returned

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1 For Samuel's account of these negotiations, including his letter to the T.U.C. Negotiating Committee, dated May 12th, in which he emphasised that he could give no assurances on behalf of the Government see Samuel, Viscount, Memoirs (1945) pp. 187-192.

2 See Chapter VII, below.

3 See Chapter VII, below.

to work at the same wage rates and under the same conditions as before. There was some victimisation, however, and attempts to enforce non-unionism; even the Manchester Guardian formed a 'company union' for its employees.[1] There was also unemployment and short time working made worse by the continuance of the coal dispute. The Railway unions, Boilermakers, and the Transport and General Workers were among the worst sufferers. Over 40,000 railwaymen had still not been able to resume work in October 1926 and many more were on a three day week. At the same time, the T. & G.W.U. had 80,000 of its members unemployed and a further 100,000 on short time.

The controversy surrounding the General Strike of 1926 has never completely evaporated. The left in particular have stigmatised it as the great betrayal of the British working class by the T.U.C. leadership. The more extreme right still profess to believe that it was an attempt, albeit an inept one, to overthrow the State. As we have seen, the idea of direct action to achieve industrial or political objectives had persisted in the British Trades Union movement, with increasing stamina, from about 1910 onwards. It was considered to be the legitimate last resort of British Labour to protect its fundamental interests from attacks from whatever source. The fact that the implications of such an idea were never properly examined and thought out is crucial to any understanding of the course of events in 1926. A strike which might paralyse the nations industry and trade was likely to be vigorously

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1 Crook, W.H. op. cit., p. 463.

opposed by any self-respecting Government. As in 1925, the idea of direct action in 1926 was to compel the Government to intervene in the coal dispute and impose, if necessary, a settlement which would be satisfactory to the miners. In 1926, however, the Government did not yield in face of the threat of a General Strike but opposed it as a threat to the constitution. The Trades Unions had therefore either to retreat and be humiliated, or stand and fight for which they were totally unprepared. The majority of the leaders of the movement had no stomach for a struggle which they were convinced would end in defeat. They neither threw themselves wholeheartedly into the battle, nor resigned in protest against a policy with which they did not agree, but like Mr. J. H. Thomas, Labour's most obvious villian, remained in control to ensure that the extremists of the left did not take over the movement.[1] At the earliest available opportunity; before the strike could get out of hand, they called it off, believing that by so doing, they had obtained the goodwill of the Government and thereby facilitated a more favourable settlement. In spite of a willingness to dabble in the 'underworld' of direct action, the leaders of the trades unions were moderate men who never contemplated extra-constitutional action. Only the Government's intransigence called their bluff and pushed them as far as

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[1] 'It is alleged that having battled for peace ... and having failed, having said what my views of the General Strike were, knowing inevitably what would happen, I at least ought to have chucked it up. Well, I hope I have never been a coward, and if I had chucked it up, it is a foolish person who would assume that that would have stopped the strike. It had gone too far for that. But what I did was to try to make the best of it, to find an honourable settlement, to save as much from an inevitable wreck as could be done.' Thomas, J. H., My Story (1937) p. 136.

a General Strike in the first place.

Whether better terms might have been obtained for the miners if the General Strike had lasted a little longer is obviously one of the imponderables of history. The solidarity of the strikers at the time of the General Strike's termination is undisputed. Within the next few days the number of men involved would have increased as other unions joined the first line. The members of the General Council persuaded themselves that the strikers could only remain unified while strike pay lasted and that would not be for long. They also believed that once the Government brought the full resources of the State into play, the strike was bound to collapse. Would the Government have used troops to counter the strike, with the probability of violence and civil war breaking out as a result? Could the Government have yielded had the strike continued, in face of the militancy of their own more aggressive supporters? These questions cannot be answered, yet they must have been nagging in the minds of the members of the General Council. Certainly the Government must have been reluctant to oppose the General Strike by force. Had the strike continued, the Government also would have had some serious problems to resolve. The action of the General Council on May 12th undoubtedly save the Government from a momentous decision.

The General Strike can be seen, retrospectively, as the final thrust of those who advocated large scale direct action in industrial or political disputes. Since 1921, the steady move to the right by the Trades Unions had been accompanied by a decline in the occurrence

of strike action compared with the years of unrest, 1919-1921. The idea of direct action, however, had never been discredited and remained, although modified, as a weapon of defence rather than one of attack. It was used as the last defence in 1925 and appeared to have been triumphantly vindicated during the ephemeral militancy which was a feature of that year. The events of 1926, however, finally buried the sacred cow of the syndicalists as far as the official trades unions leadership was concerned. The idea of the general strike did not survive the collapse of the alliance of unions, their breach with the Miners' Federation, and the final overwhelming defeat of the miners. The official leadership realised that unless they were prepared to risk a violent clash with the Government, nation wide industrial action was not a viable policy. They did not want any such clash.

What is the significance of the General Strike for the history of British Labour? The terrible defeat confirmed, as nothing else could have done, the move towards moderation and constitutionalism which, as we have noted, was always present in the movement and in the years after 1920 had been steadily gaining ground at the expense of the militants. It meant discussions with employers, socialism via the ballot box, and ultimately trades union participation in making the industrial system work. The Trades Union leadership which had presided over the death of direct action went from strength to strength; the Labour Party shook its head sadly and looked forward to 1929. It is inconceivable that victory in 1926 would not have resulted in a very different attitude to the Great Depression of the thirties than that which in fact

obtained. The defeat of British Labour in 1926 not only delayed its coming to effective power for twenty years; it determined how that power would be used. Here lies the significance of the General Strike.

CHAPTER IV

The Durham Miners' Association 1919-1926

The period 1870-1914 saw the Durham Miners' Association largely in the hands of four men: William Crawford, William Patterson,[1] John Forman,[2] and John Wilson. The continuity thus engendered tended to be resistant to any form of radical change. Liberal in their political outlook, nonconformist, mainly Primitive Methodist in religion, these men had built up the union until it had become as much a part of the industrial scene in Durham as the coalfield itself. John Wilson, the last of the old leaders, had been elected agent in 1882 and when he died in 1915 he had been the Association's General Secretary for twenty-one years. He had looked with some misgivings on the Union's affiliation to the M.F.G.B. in 1908 and the Labour Representation Committee in 1910. The period 1911-1919 saw the first real comprehensive turnover of officials the Association had ever known, yet the continuity of outlook was largely preserved. Although the D.M.A. could hardly expect to escape the influence of the period of unrest which succeeded the war, the new leaders brought with them no original philosophy. The process of transferring the political allegiance in fact as well as in name from the Liberal to the Labour Party which had

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[1] Patterson, William (1849-1896). Member of the first Executive Committee of the Durham Miners' Association 1869; Agent and Vice-President, 1870-1872; Financial Secretary, 1872-1890; General Secretary, 1890-1896.

[2] Forman, John (1823-1900). Member of the first Executive Committee of the D.M.A., 1869; President, 1874-1900.

gone on since 1906 was completed: but this did not make the union officials Socialists. On the contrary, the Lib-Lab tradition persisted and loyalty to the union remained the cornerstone of their existence.

Wilson's place as General Secretary was taken by Thomas Cann. Born at Chacewater, in Cornwall in 1858, Cann began work in the tin mines at the age of eight, although he did not begin underground work until he was fourteen. In 1876 he moved to Brotton in Cleveland, to try his hand at ironstone mining. Whilst there he became a Primitive Methodist. In 1882 he emigrated to America, but he returned after only twelve months. Six years later, in 1888, he moved to the Castle Eden Colliery in Durham and there mined coal for the first time, eventually becoming a deputy, a post he held until the colliery closed in 1893. During the 1892 look-out in Durham he was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment. The next year, he found work at Handon Hold Colliery. From 1890 until 1896 he had served on the D.M.A. Executive Committee and for three years he was a member of the Durham County Mining Federation Board. On the rearrangement of offices which took place on the death of Mr. W. Patterson in 1896, Cann became General Treasurer of the union, a position which he held until 1915. He represented Durham on the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. in 1909, 1911, 1913, 1916, 1918 and 1921. Cann was at first a supporter of the Liberal Party until, in the words of his contemporary at Burt Hall,

Mr. W. Straker[1], "he recognised that if labour was to be freed, labour would have to have its own party".[2] He continued the practice of issuing monthly circulars to the membership until his illness in 1922. These were always moderate in tone and dealt with a variety of subjects, such as the coal industry, the British economy and British foreign policy. He died on May 6th, 1924.[3]

His place was taken by William Pallister Richardson. Born the son of a Durham miner in 1872, William Richardson began working in the mines at the age of twelve. He becamse a check-weighman at Usworth and was appointed agent following the death of Wilson in 1915. Six years later he replaced James Robson as Treasurer of the M.F.G.B., a position he held until his death in 1930. In 1924, he was one of the defeated candidates in the election held to determine who should succeed Frank Hodges[4] as Secretary of the M.F.G.B., but in the same year he succeeded Cann as General Secretary of the D.M.A. He represented Durham on the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. in 1917, 1920 and 1921.[5] Richardson was a leader in the long line of traditionally moderate men thrown up by the Durham miners. As Treasurer of the M.F.G.B. he was present at all the negotiations which the Federation officials undertook at the time of the General Strike in 1926, but he appears rather

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1 Straker, William (1855-1941). General Secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Association, 1905-1935; Member of the Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1908-1925; C.B.E., 1930; Witness before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 1919. See Chapter V, below.

2 Northumberland Miners' Association Minutes, Circulars, 1924. Hereafter N.M.A.

3 Newcastle Journal, May 7th, 1924.

4 For biographical details of Frank Hodges see Chapter III, above.

5 Durham Chronicle, July 19th, 1924; N.M.A. Minutes Circulars 1930.

in the shadow of Smith[1] and Cook[2]. Even within his own union, Richardson is usually less well remembered than James Robson or Peter Lee, his two more illustrious contemporaries.

James Robson was born in West Auckland in 1860. He began work in a mine at Littleburn at the age of ten, eventually becoming check-weighman at Broomhaugh Colliery. He became an agent of the D.M.A. in 1911, and succeeded William House[3] as President in 1917, retaining the position until his death in 1934. For three years, 1918-1921, he was Treasurer of the M.F.G.B., and in 1912, 1915, and 1920, he represented Durham on its Executive Committee. For many years he was Secretary of the Durham County Mining Federation Board, the association bringing together all the mineworkers in the County. He was a big, blunt man, lacking sentiment, but with an aggressive determination to speak his mind. This quality often expressed itself at M.F.G.B. conferences. He visited the United States in 1926 as a member of the Miners' Federation delegation sent to raise funds for the victims of the lock-out.[4] A Labourite but not a Socialist, Robson's politics were of the moderate type perhaps best exemplified in his contemporary, Peter Lee.

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1 For biographical details of Herbert Smith see Chapter III, above.

2 For biographical details of A.J. Cook, see Chapter III, above.

3 House, William (1854-1917). Joint Committee Secretary, D.M.A., 1899; President, 1900-1917; Member of Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1908 and 1913; Vice President, M.F.G.B., 1914-1917.

4 Durham Chronicle, December 7th, 1917; N.M.A., Minutes, Circulars, 1934.

Peter Lee has become almost a legendary figure in the history of the D.M.A. A tall, upright, commanding presence, with a finely shaped head and a carefully cultivated white beard, Lee could hardly avoid standing out among his fellows. The surprising thing about his career as a trade union leader is that it took so long to fructify. In spite of the respect in which he was held, he did not become an Agent until he was 55 years old, though he was known long before then. He was born in 1864 at Trimdon Grange, County Durham, of Lancashire parents, and first went down a coal mine ten years later. On his own admission he lived a wild drunkard life at this time. He also led something of a nomadic existence and in a relatively few years in the late '70s and early '80s he lived in the United States, South East Durham, South Africa and Durham again, working as a pitman for most of the time. Finally he became check-weighman at Wheatley Hill in Durham, and in 1887 he was a delegate to the Council of the D.M.A. for the first time. By this time he had become a prominent local Primitive Methodist and had acquired those religious convictions which he was to retain throughout the remainder of his life. A partial explanation of Lee's comparatively late appointment as a full-time trade union worker probably lies in his intense interest and activity in local government politics. He was a member of both Wingate Parish Council and Easington Rural District Council and in 1909 he was returned as the representative of the Thornley Division on the Durham County Council, a position from which he did not retire until 1934. In 1919 he was elected Chairman of the County Council, the Labour Party having a majority of the members for the first time; and it was in 1919 also

that he was elected an agent of the D.M.A. The following year he became Financial Secretary and on the appointment of a further Agent in 1922, Lee took the job of Secretary to the Joint Committee, to which was added that of Executive Committee Secretary in 1924. On the death of Mr. W.P. Richardson in 1930, Peter Lee became General Secretary of the D.M.A. He represented Durham on the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. in 1921, 1923, 1924, 1926, 1928 and 1930, and became the Federation President in 1933. He died in June, 1935.[1]

It was Richardson, Robson and Lee who were to guide the union through the crisis of 1926. Of the other three agents appointed before 1918, William Whiteley[2] and Joseph Batey[3] became M.P.'s in 1922 and therefore, according to rule, relinquished their agents' offices.[4] Mr. Thomas Trotter,[5] formerly a clerk in the offices, who had become Treasurer of the Association in 1915, remained in that office until his death in 1932. On the election of Batey and Whiteley to Parliament, the Executive Committee decided to appoint only one new agent, a decision compelled by the financial condition of the Association which

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1 Lawson, J.J., Peter Lee (1949 edition); N.M.A., Minutes, Circulars, 1935; Northern Echo, June 17th, 1935.

2 Whiteley, William (1882-1955). Insurance Secretary, D.M.A., 1917-1922; Agent, 1912-1922; Member of Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1915, 1918, 1920; M.P. for the Blaydon Division of Durham, 1922-1931 and 1935-1955; Labour Party Chief Whip, 1942-1955.

3 Batey, Joseph (1868-1949). Agent, D.M.A.. 1915-1922; M.P. for Spennymoor, 1922-1942; Member of the Executive Committee, M.F.G.B. 1917,1919, 1922.

4 D.M.A. Rules, Nos. 116 (1916), 115 (1921), and 109 (1925).

5 Trotter, Thomas (1871-1932). Began as a clerk in the offices of the D.M.A., 1886; Joint Committee Secretary, 1913-1915; Treasurer, 1915-1932; Member of Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1916, 1919, 1922, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1930, 1931.

had not recovered from the stoppages of 1920 and 1921.[1] The lodges agreed with the Executive's recommendation and nominations were sent in, including that of Mr. J.E. Swan,[2] who had been elected Member of Parliament for Barnard Castle in 1918 but who had been defeated at the election of 1922. According to rule, Swan could not be considered for the position as Agent as he had left the collieries for some other occupation. The Executive Committee, doubtless not out of purely disinterested motives, had previously tried to persuade the membership to give the Executive Committee power to find employment for defeated M.P.'s. A special Council meeting was called to consider Swan's case, and the meeting recommended that his nomination be accepted. So much in accord with the views of the membership was this decision that in fact Swan was elected to the vacant position and became Financial Secretary.[3] In 1924, he became Compensation Secretary when, owing to the large increase in compensation work, a separate department was created and a new agent, Mr. James Gilliland, became Financial Secretary.[4]

On January 19th, 1921, the Executive Committee recommended an increase in the salaries of the agents. These salaries were governed

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Notice, December 13th, 1922.

2 Swan, John Edmund (1877-1956). M.P. for Barnard Castle, 1918-1922; Agent, D.M.A., 1923; Financial Secretary 1924; Compensation Secretary 1924-1930; Executive Committee and Joint Committee Secretary, 1930-1935; General Secretary, 1935-1945; Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1932-1933.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, January 29th, 1923; D.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, March 17th, 1923.

4 Gilliland, James (1866-1952). Agent, D.M.A., 1925-1945; President, 1934-1945; Member of Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1931-1934, 1936 and 1939.

by the rise and fall of the men's wages. In addition, the agents each had free house, coal and light, and were refunded expenses incurred in the work. It was stated that in September, 1914 an agent was receiving £3: 8: 5d per week and in January, 1921 this had risen to £7:18: 1d per week. It was argued that the wages of the men had increased by a greater margin.[1] This did not persuade the membership, one of whose perennial suspicions concerned the payment of their full-time officials. At the beginning of 1922, several lodges asked for an inquiry into the remuneration of the agents, and comparative figures were published, underlining the fact that the Durham agents were by no means overpaid as compared with the permanent officials of other County unions.[2] This question of agents' salaries was one on which the agents themselves were inclined to be touchy, especially if it was suggested, as it not infrequently was, that they were making more out of it then reason and the financial situation of the D.M.A. justified. In 1924 a sub-committee was set up to inquire into the matter of the payment of the full-time officials. Its proposals, which were accepted, included a basic rate of £4 per week for agents together with payments for arbitration cases, travelling and refreshment expenses when engaged on union business. Wages were not paid during any county or national stoppage.[3]

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1 D.M.A. Council meeting Minutes, January 19th, 1921.

2 D.M.A. Council meeting Minutes, January 20th, February 4th, 11th, 1922.

3 D.M.A. Council meeting Minutes, May 17th, July 5th, 1924.

By 1919 therefore, the D.M.A. had six permanent, full-time agents, holding the offices of President, General Secretary, Treasurer, Joint Committee Secretary, Financial Secretary and Corresponding Secretary. Only this latter post failed to last through our period, being abolished in the reorganisation of Agents' Offices which followed the death of Cann in 1924, the duties being divided between the Financial Secretary, General Secretary and the Committee Secretary.[1] The agents were appointed for life, there being no compulsory retirement age at this time,[2] and except in the case of the Treasurer, there was no provision in the rules specifying the ways and means of disposing of any agent who might lose the Association's confidence.[3] When a vacancyfor the position of agent occurred, individual lodges sent in nominations, prospective candidates having to be financial members of the Association with at least five years' pit experience. An individual ballot of the membership was then used to elect a new agent.[4]

All the agents were automatically members of the supreme governing body of the Association, the Council. In addition to the Agents, the Council consisted of one member duly elected by each lodge

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1 D.M.A. Circular, June 18th, 1924.

2 A scheme whereby agents retire on reaching the age of 65 now operates.

3 The power to remove the Treasurer was vested in a Council Meeting. D.M.A. Rules, Nos.13 (1916 and 1921), and 20 (1925).

4 D.M.A. Rules, Nos. 8 (1916 and 1921), and 13 (1925).

in the Association.[1] The Council met once every seven weeks to transact the business of the Association and Council decisions were submitted to a lodge vote of the membership, the result of which was final. Although there were several examples during this period of the lodges reversing Council decisions, it was more usual for the Council to subscribe to the policy of the Agents, and the lodges to confirm the decisions of the Council. A Special Council Meeting might be called at any time should twenty-five lodges sign a request for one or should the Executive Committee feel it to be necessary.[2]

In between Council meetings, the business of the Association was in the hands of the Executive Committee which was required to meet at least once a month according to rule but which in fact met about every two weeks throughout this period. This body was composed of not less than twelve, and after 1921,[3] not more than 19 members of the Association including the Agents. All members of the Committee

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1 The lodge representative on the Council could be chosen either by a majority of the members present at a lodge meeting, or by a ballot vote of the whole membership. The lodge also had the power to determine the length of time during which their representative should serve. D.M.A. Rules, Nos. 107 (1916), 106 (1921), and 84 (1925).

2 D.M.A. Rules, Nos. 5 and 6 (1916, 1921 and 1925), 27 (1916 and 1921), and 12 (1925). Voting at Council Meetings was based on the size of individual lodge membership. Although the scale was amended during this period, by 1925, lodges at the bottom of the scale, having less than 100 but more than 21 members had 1 vote; at the top of the scale, lodges having over 2,401 members had 16 votes. Six-monthly checks were made on the lodge membership and the actual voting was done by means of cards on which would be written the name of the lodge together with the number of votes to be cast: thus, BROOMHILL 2 votes.

3 Before 1921, the maximum figure was 17.

were entitled to vote at its meetings. For the purpose of electing the Committee, the County was divided into six wards. Each lodge in the ward nominated one candidate and all the candidates were then subject to a vote of the whole of the lodges in the County. After 1925 however, this procedure was changed, nominated candidates being voted for only by the lodges in their own wards. Any lodge member could be elected to the Executive Committee provided that he was financial and had been a member of the Association for the preceding six months. Half of the Committee retired every six months and were then not eligible for re-election for the next twelve months. If a casual vacancy occurred on the Executive Committee, due to the death of a member for example, it was automatically filled by the next member in the order of the ballot at the previous election.[1]

The individual lodges of the Durham Miners' Association or the branches as they are more frequently known, formed the nucleus of the organisation. Most collieries possessed their own individual lodge of the Association, although one or two of the larger collieries supported more than one lodge; this latter occurrance was not common in Durham. Each lodge elected its own group of officials, President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Council representative, together with a lodge committee of not less than five nor more than seventeen financial members. The lodge committee was elected once every six or twelve months by either a majority of members present at a lodge meeting, or

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[1] D.M.A. Rules., Nos. 21-26 (1916 and 1921) and Nos. 28-29 (1925).

a ballot vote of the whole membership. There were no obstacles or checks in the way of re-election. A general lodge meeting was held once a fortnight but the lodge committee met whenever it felt that it was necessary to do so.[1]

There were few major alterations in the rules of the Association during the early twenties, although those controlling contributions and benefits were always subject to the viscissitudes of the Union's general financial situation. In fact, the Rules were changed twice during our period, in 1921 and 1925. In the former year, several of the individual regulations were revised. The Association's closer co-operation with the Labour Party was further underlined by the insertion, in the Objects of the Association, of a clause pledging the Association 'to seek the abolition of capitalism and the substitution of common ownership and control of the means of livelihood.'[2] Presumably this was to be achieved by the election of a Labour Government. More practically it was decided to allow the Association's accounts to be audited by professional accountants and not by members of the union as heretofore.[3] In 1925, the Association's rules were largely re-written, but no important changes in their nature were carried through.

The membership of the Association reached a peak in the years immediately after the end of the War. In 1913 the membership had stood at 140,000 but by 1916, enlistments in the services had reduced that figure to 107,903. Thereafter however it rose annually until

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1 D.M.A. Rules. Nos. 86-87 (1916 and 1921), Nos. 74-76 (1925), Nos. 95-98 (1916 and 1921) and No. 88 (1925).

2 D.M.A. Rules, No. 3 (XIV), (1921). 3 D.M.A. Rules, No. 28 (1921).

1924 when it reached the record figure of 160,040.[1] The total capital of the Association was £320,567. 4. 1d. in 1918 and it had increased to £402,945. 14. 11d. by the end of the next year. The national strike of 1920 was the first of a series of national disputes which threatened seriously to undermine the financial stability of the Association. At the beginning of the dispute the Association had investments totalling £427,500 which bore an annual interest of £20,775. At the end of the strike in 1920, all that was left was worth £130,000. The rest had been sold at a loss to assist in two strike payments which had amounted to almost £400,000. An overdraft of £51,688. 1. 8d. had been obtained at the C.W.S. Bank, of which all but £12,000 had been paid off by February, 1921.[2] The problem had been made additionally awkward by the fact that contributions and benefits had been increased only eight months before the 1920 stoppage took place and the strike

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1 Average Annual Membership of the Durham Miners' Association, 1920-1925.

1920	151,029
1921	151,253
1922	155,380
1923	158,339
1924	160,040
1925	155,773

These figures include both 'full' members and 'half' members. A half member was a junior member under eighteen years of age. For the complete figures, 1918-1931, see Appendix III, below.

2 D.M.A. Circulars, February 11th, 1921.

began before the Association had secured any substantial advantage from the higher contributions.[1] The stoppage of 1921, occurring almost immediately afterwards, was an even more serious affair. The Association had no funds due to the strike of the previous October. The C.W.S. Bank agreed to an overdraft on a mortgage of all the Association's property on condition that the money be repayed as soon as possible. This enabled the union to make one strike payment of 20/- to full and 10/- to half members.[2] By July, 1921, £587,829, 16s. had been paid out during the stoppages of 1920 and 1921 and in ordinary unemployment relief, and the lodges agreed to a recommendation from the Executive Committee that a levy of 1/6d. per week from each full member at work and 9d. from each half member at work should be raised in order to assist those members who were still out of work and in order to pay the 5/- a week rent allowance to those living in rented houses for the 13 weeks during which the 1921 stoppage had lasted.[3] Unfortunately the levy proved insufficient for the purpose and in October, 1921 the scheme was drastically revised. The bank overdraft was still £130,000 and rent claims against the Association amounted to over £140,000. The levy was now to be paid according to gross weekly earnings so that those who earned under 25/- would pay nothing while the remainder would pay 6d. per week up to 35/-, and an

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1 In 1921 contributions were increased from 1/- to 2/- per fortnight for full members, and from 6d. to 1/- per fortnight for half members. D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, February 28th, 1920.

2 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, April 30th, May 3rd, 1921.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, July 13th, 1921.

additional 3d. per week for each 10/- above that. In order further to stabilise the funds, men in receipt of relief were to pay 6d. for each pound received together with their usual membership fee of 2/- per fortnight to the General Fund.[1] However, the end of December, 1921 saw over 23,000 members still unemployed. From October 1st, 1920 to December 10th, 1921 the gap between income and expenditure was £459,462 with over £794,419 paid out in relief and strike benefits. The bank overdraft was £140,000 and many members were still awaiting rent and relief payments. The only solution was a reduction in the weekly payment of relief. This had been raised to £1 per week in February, 1920; now £1 per week was to be paid for twelve weeks only. If a member was still without work after twelve weeks he was to be paid at 10/- per week for the remainder of his period of unemployment.[2]

A period of financial difficulty often stimulates criticism by the members of the way in which their Association's affairs are being conducted. After complaints by several lodges that the Agents were being too well remunerated, a Special Cpuncil Meeting, held on February 11th, 1922, and called to consider the financial state of the Association decided to appoint a Finance Committee to deal with all the financial transactions of the Union. This long overdue alteration was accompanied by a decision to institute a monthly examination of the accounts.[3]

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1 D.M.A. Circular, October 19th and 26th, 1921.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, December 28th, 1921.

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, January 20th, February 4th, 11th, 1922.

The real problem which faced the Association at this time however, was the huge backlog of relief payments following the national stoppages of 1920 and 1921.

The years 1922-24 were however the most prosperous that the coal industry experienced during this period.[1] The number of men employed in the industry in Durham between 1922 and 1924 was the highest, save for the single year of 1920, for any of the inter-war years.[2] There remained sectors of persistent unemployment which, coupled with the arrears of relief payments, concentrated the attention of both the officials and the membership on the financial position of the Association. In June, 1922 the Executive Committee announced the impossibility of continuing the scale of relief payments then operating. Since July, 1921, when the national stoppage had ended, the levy alone had yielded £310,774, yet this sum had had to be supplemented by £139,699 from the General Fund and still the Association was over twenty weeks in arrear with its relief payments. A number of alternative proposals were put before the membership but the lodges refused to sanction any further changes in the scale of benefits, against the advice of the Executive Committee.[3] Several lodges were of the opinion that contributions should be reduced, a course which the officials never failed resolutely to oppose, while others demanded the suspension of all benefits.[4] The position was improving throughout the whole of 1922 however, and at the end of October a start was made in the payment

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1 Mainly due to the cessation of production in the Ruhr; see above Chapter I.

2 See Appendix I

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1922.

4 D.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, October, 14th, 1922.

of rent allowance for the period of the 1921 look-out.[1] Nevertheless, some members had by that time been unemployed for twelve months, and it was agreed to continue relief payments for a further three months, after the twelve month limit which had been established in 1914.[2] Not until June, 1923 did it prove possible to clear all the rent claims and bring the relief payments up to date. The levy was also discontinued at the end of that month.[3]

During the period 1920-1924 the Association paid out over £2,250,000 in benefits to members of which relief, breakage[4] and lock-out amounted to £1,668,221.[5] The better times of 1923 and 1924 helped the Association partially to recover from this drain on its resources but heavy unemployment in 1925 caused further deterioration in the Association's financial position. Over 6,000 men and boys lost their jobs between March 25th and May 4th, 1925, and it was clear that this was only a beginning. At a Special Council Meeting called to consider the new crisis it was agreed to reduce all benefits from May 9th, 1925. Relief was to be paid at the rate of 15/- per week for the first ten weeks and 5/- per week for the next thirty weeks. Anyone who had been on the funds for forty weeks already was to receive 5/- per week up to May 16th, 1925 when his benefits would cease. The Sick Fund

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, October 28th, 1922.

2 D.M.A. Annual Council Meeting Minutes, December 16th, 1922.

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, June 6th, 14th, 1923.

4 Breakage was the term given to a stoppage of work caused by the breakdown of machinery at the colliery.

5 D.M.A. Circular, February 24th, 1925.

was wound up.[1] As the summer progressed, the position worsened until, on August 26th, the Executive Committee issued a statement to the membership drawing attention to the fact that,

> "...we have practically come to the end of our financial resources. We have delayed making known the position in the hope that the subvention granted by the Government might result in a large number of collieries getting re-started and thus ease the situation to some extent, but unfortunately that hope has not materialised as instead of getting better, the position has grown worse. We are at present saddled with the responsibility of paying relief allowance to about 39,000 members absorbing a sum of approximately £27,000 each fortnight, and owing to an additional 10,000 men having gone off our funds after receiving their full complement of relief, our income is a diminishing one exceeded by the outlay to the extent of nearly £20,000 per fortnight.
>
> This means that we cannot possibly continue on the present scale of payment beyond September 12th, 1925, as this will absorb what balance we possess, and as we consider that in equity those who are just coming on should have some measure of relief to look forward to, and this must necessarily come out of what income we receive, we are suggesting that the most we can do is to pay at the rate of 5/- per week for a period of ten weeks only." [2]

At a Council Meeting held on September 5th, 1925, this proposal was reluctantly agreed to.[3] For those members who remained in dispute with the management over the implementation of local wage reductions, or were simply unemployed, only the Guardians remained between them and complete destitution. Between 1920 and the end of

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1 D.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, May 4th and 5th, 1925. After 1921 men discharged from their work due to trade depression were eligible for relief at the rate of 20/- per week for full members and 10/- per week for half members.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, August 26th, 1925.

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, September 5th, 1925.

April 1926 the following benefits had been paid:[1]

	£.	s.	d.
Relief and Removals	1,528,857	3	9
Breakages, Strikes and Lock-out	571,202	18	5
Sacrificed Allowance	334	9	4
Death Benefits	182,646	13	1
Rent Allowance	155,867	7	9
	2,438,908	12	4

This statement was hardly the surest foundation for the greatest stoppage in the Association's history.

The period after the end of the war saw a tightening of the Association's political alliance with the Labour Party, and a corresponding increase in its political activities. In 1907, Object VIII of the Association had pledged the membership to support all labour candidates, independent of whatever political party the candidates embraced.[2] In an Association dominated by John Wilson, this had meant in practice, support for the Liberal Party. But by 1907, this support was by no means universal within the Association. The North of England Socialist Federation, formed by Tom Mann, J.L. Mahon, and James MacDonald, had flourished for a time in the '80s,[3] and

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1 D.M.A. Financial Statement, May 26th, 1926.

2 D.M.A. Rules, No. 3 (1907).

3 Torr, D., Tom Mann and His Times, vol. I (1956) pp. 242-250.

Lloyd Jones[1] had preached co-operation on Owenite lines before that. The I.L.P. began to form branches in the area in the '90s. and Tom Mann was invited to address the annual Miners' Gala every year from 1897 to 1901.[2] The pressure towards independent labour representation did not move men like Wilson, who remained fixed in their adherence to the Liberal Party, but it could not prevent the Association affiliating to the Labour Party in 1910. Wilson himself remained on the Liberal side in the Commons however and never took the Labour whip. When the Association rules were revised in 1913, an additional aim of the Association was 'to promote and financially support Parliamentary candidates, each ... must be a member of the D.M.A. and run solely under the auspices of the National Labour Party, and be subject to its decisions if elected.[3]

The coming of war in 1914 postponed for four years the first

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1 Jones, Lloyd. A former Fustian cutter and Chartist who became a Radical journalist on Joseph Cowen's Newcastle Weekly Chronicle. In 1885 he stood as an Independent Miners' Candidate in the General Election, at Chester-le-Street and did well although not well enough to defeat the Liberal. He was often called upon to arbitrate for the miners in local disputes with the management.

2 D.M.A. Gala Speakers, 1897-1901. The Agents of the Association did not care for Mann's violent oratory. At the Gala of 1901, his language upset the Association's President, William House, who acused Mann of breaking faith with Wilson. Mann stated that 'It was no secret that I have never been to the Gala by the wish of the Executive ... and that I should not be here if the officials could prevent it.' Welbourne, E., op. cit. p. 306. The officials were obviously more successful in their efforts after this because he did not speak at a Gala again.

3 D.M.A. Rules, No. 3 (1913).

electoral test which the Labour Party and the Association would face in alliance. At the General Election of 1918, Durham was to provide eight out of fifty-two M.F.G.B. Labour candidates, yet Labour Party organisation in the county was almost totally lacking.[1] Not until January 1918 were lodges urged to link themselves with the Labour Representation Committees in their districts, and in many districts these bodies were non-existent. Once the call had gone out however, local Labour Parties were rapidly set up, and only Sedgefield of the Durham Parliamentary divisions was without one by the end of January.[2] Preparations for the election, which was bound to come at the end of the war, proceeded quickly throughout the remaining months of 1918. At a Special Council Meeting held on March 23rd, the constituencies of Chester-le-Street, Spennymoor, Blaydon, Houghton-le-Spring, Seaham, Sedgefield, South Shields, Jarrow, and Durham were held to be favourable for the adoption of miners' candidates.[3] When the date of the General Election was announced, the Executive Committee circularised the membership urging them to support all bona-fide National

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, January 1918.

2 An example of their activity is illustrated by a letter dated January 19th, 1918, and addressed to the electors of the Durham division, signed by twenty one local men including four of the Agents of the D.M.A. The signatories advocated the setting up of a local Labour Party or Labour Representation Committee in the division and called a conference to establish such an organisation for February 9th.

3 D.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, March 23rd, 1918.

Labour Party candidates.[1] But the results of that unsatisfactory election were disappointing. Of the seven candidates which the Association in fact sponsored, only two were elected, Mr. R. Richardson[2] for Houghton le Spring, and Mr. J.E. Swan for Barnard Castle.[3] Over the country as a whole, 59 Labour members were returned, an increase of seventeen, and of the forty-seven finally sponsored by the M.F.G.B., twenty-three were successful.[4] The poor Durham results were probably due to the failure to organise in the constituencies until 1918, as much as to the promises of the Coalition Government, and the failure to organise was probably due in no small measure to the war.

The year 1919 saw the first attempts to strengthen the political organisation in the country. In October, it was decided by the Council, to appoint two more full-time political agents in addition to the two already employed, since this would make it possible for each agent to look after two of the eight constituencies in the county which had miners' candidates. It was not felt possible to maintain eight men. Mr. J. Foster and Mr. J. Cape were appointed by the Executive

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, November 25th, 1918; D.M.A. Annual Council Meeting Minutes, December 7th, 1918.

2 Richardson, Robert (1862-1943). Secretary, Ryhope Lodge of the D.M.A., 1887-1919; Member Executive Committee, 1897-1919; M.P. for Houghton-le-Spring, 1918-1931; Parliamentary Charity Commissioner, 1924, 1929-1931. The results of all national elections in the Durham miners' seats will be found in Appendix II.

3 The remaining defeated candidates in Durham were: at Blaydon, W. Whiteley; Spennymoor, J. Batey; Durham, J. Ritson; Sedgefield, J. Herriotts; Seaham, J. Lawson.

4 Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit. Appendix III, pp. 550-551. In South Wales, eight out of nine miners' candidates were successful, in Scotland three out of six, and in Yorkshire, five out of nine.

Committee.[1] That this improved political organisation was at least in part responsible for the much improved results of the 1922 General Election there can be little doubt. Of the eight candidates, only Swan and Mr. W. Lawther,[2] at Barnard Castle and South Shields respectively, were rejected.[3] Richardson retained Houghton-le-Spring and Mr. J. Lawson[4] retained the seat at Chester le Street which he had won in a bye-election in November 1919. They were joined in the Commons by Messrs. W. Whitely for Blaydon, J. Batey for Spennymoor, J. Ritson[5] for Durham and J. Herriotts[6] for Sedgefield. Labour held ten seats in

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, October 31st, 1919; D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, March 6th, 1920.

2 Lawther, Sir William (1889-). J.P. Chevalier of the Legion of Honour; Checkweighman at Victoria Garesfield, 1919; Executive Committee, D.M.A. 1919, 1925, 1927; Defeated Labour candidate at South Shields 1922, 1923 and 1924; M.P. for Barnard Castle, 1929-1931; Agent D.M.A., 1933; President, M.F.G.B., 1939-1944; First President, National Union of Mineworkers, 1944-1954; Knighted 1949.

3 D.M.A. Annual Council Meeting Minutes, December 16th, 1922.

4 Lawson, John James (1881-1965). First Baron, created 1950; Miner; M.P. for Chester le Street, 1919-1949; Financial Secretary to the War Office, 1924; Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour, 1929-1931; Secretary of State for War, 1945-1946; P.C. 1945.

5 Ritson, Joshua (1874-1955). J.P. A former Mayor of Sunderland; M.P. for Durham, 1922-1931 and 1935-1945; C.B.E. 1949.

6 Herriotts, John (1875-1935). J.P.; 1914; M.P. for Sedgefield, 1922-1923 and 1929-1931; Durham County Councillor, 1907-1910; His first official colliery position was checkweighman at Binchester Colliery which closed in 1908; he went on to similar positions at Windlestone and Fishburn; served on various D.M.A. committees including the Executive.

the County of Durham, out of a total of eleven County constituencies. Although this was a very satisfactory state of affairs it was felt by the Executive Committee that they might, in addition, make grants out of the political fund for organisation and election purposes to Labour Parties in county divisions other than the eight allocated by the M.F.G.B. In all of the Parliamentary units of the County, the Association had a numberous membership, and it was felt that financial aid was a sure way of stimulating the local organisations, thereby strengthening Labour's position in the County as a whole. On these sentiments being submitted to a Council Meeting in the form of a resolution, in November 1923, they were approved by a large majority, which was confirmed by a lodge vote of the membership.[1]

The elections of 1923 and 1924 underlined the grip which the miners' candidates had on their divisions and which the Parliamentary Labour Party had on the county as a whole. In both the elections, five out of seven candidates were returned, the unsuccessful ones in each case being Herriotts at Sedgefield and Lawther at South Shields. No candidate was run at Barnard Castle.[2] Nationally of course, the Labour Party was doing less well. Their devotion to the Parliamentary system encouraged them to take office, although in a minority, in 1924; not surprisingly, little was achieved, but the D.M.A. were admiringly uncritical. This admiration was given practical form by a grant of £100 to the Labour Party's Fighting Fund, and the Executive

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 24th, 1923.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, November 1923.

Committee congratulated the Ministry on its work "in difficult circumstances".[1] The old support for the Liberals had merely been transferred to the Labour Party; loyalty was to be shown to that Party and not to any philosophy or collection of ideas.

The Association was at first less active in local government politics, which, save for periodic pre-election exhortations to vote for working men, it left very much to local initiative. Numerous representatives of the working class had, in the past, been elected to various local bodies and John Wilson had been the Chairman of the Durham County Council in 1905. It was the entry into local government of the Labour Party after the War, together with the Association affiliation to that Party which caused the Association's attitude to alter radically. The importance of having working men on municipal organisations had for long been recognised, but comparatively little had been achieved because a focus for the necessary organisation was lacking. After the War, local Labour Parties filled this void, and brought the despised 'politics' into the field of local government.

The first major successes were in the elections for the County Council in January of 1919, when for the first time, Labour as a district group secured a majority of the seats, in fact 46 out of 77. Mr. Peter Lee was elected Chairman.[2] Previously. it had been considered a good result if twenty working men had been elected. In

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, October 11th, 1924; D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, October 27th, 1924.

2 D.M.A. Circular January/February, 1919; D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, March 24th, 1919.

urban and rural district council elections, further successes were recorded.[1] Yet significant as was the Labour majority on the Durham County Council, it was not of itself an assurance of future triumphs for Labour. In the elections of 1922, Labour lost control of the County Council, winning and losing 27 of the 54 seats which it contested, and in a circular on the subject to the membership the Executive Committee complained that too many colliery managers were elected, and that too few of those eligible to vote did so. Of a total electorate of 270, 589 only 181,467 people voted, a total of 67 per cent and a rather high figure one would think, but the Executive Committee felt that too many of the missing 33 per cent were working men and potential labour supporters.[2] Despite this setback, and the criticisms alleging financial extravagence which were frequently levelled at Labour-dominated localauthorities, the number of workers elected to local government bodies continued to increase and brought with it the problem of remuneration for lost wages and travelling expenses of councillors who depended on a small weekly wage for a living.

At the Annual Council Meeting held in December 1922, the Executive Committee asked for and were given powers "to take such steps as may be necessary to place beyond any doubt the right of our Association, through its lodges, to pay our representatives on Boards of Guardians and other Councils their expenses and payment for time lost when attend-

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1 D.M.A. Circular, May 1919. Details of these results are very difficult to obtain. They were not reported in any detail in the local press, and the Labour Party, for example, has no records of its efforts in local elections.

2 D.M.A. Circular, March 22nd, 1922.

ing meetings in connection with these bodies".[1] It was decided that the rules of the Association should be amended so that a 1d. per week per member be set aside for the purpose of paying expenses and wages for time lost by members who sat on such councils. This was submitted to a ballot vote of the members, who voted in favour of it by a large majority.[2] The Executive Committee were sensibly insistent that no loopholes should be left for political opponents to exploit. It was then submitted to the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for his approval. In the Durham County Council elections of 1925, a Labour majority was once more achieved in Durham.[3] The value of electing their own representatives to public bodies was to be underlined during the long stoppage in 1926.

During the period 1918-1926 the Association continued the traditional methods of encouraging solidarity among the rank and file, while simultaneously looking for new channels along which progress in this important sphere might be achieved. The Annual Galas were resumed after the War, although the lock out of 1921 together with the depression which accompanied it prevented the Gala being held in that year and in 1922. Nor was it held in 1926.[4] Some unusual nominations for speakers were sent in by various lodges; the names of both Mr. H.H. Asquith and Mr. W.S. Churchill appeared. The large majority of

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1 D.M.A. Annual Council Meeting Minutes, December 16th, 1922.

2 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, February 3rd, 1923.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, March 9th, 1925.

4 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, August 29th, 1921; D.M.A. 80th Annual Gala Souvenir Programme (1963). Lists of Galas.

lodges, however, favoured well known, orthodox members of the Labour movement.[1] The Galas were already becoming more like an enormous works outing than a demonstration of working class unity. Nevertheless the crowds of 200,000 and above which flocked to the Racecourse at Durham City on the day illustrated the massive solidarity, as well as the numerical strength of the Union.

A more frequent means of informing the membership about the activities and policy of the union were the monthly circulars, issued by the General Secretary. Owing to the illness of Mr. Cann in 1921 and 1922, however, these become less and less frequent and were discontinued altogether on his death in 1924. They were never entirely replaced in this period; in fact, to initiate policy changes and to pass on information the Executive Committee issued circulars, signed by them as a whole.

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[1] The following were the principal speakers at the Galas, 1919-1931.

1919	Sir Leo Chiozza Money; Robert Smillie; J.R. Clynes; F. Hodges
1920	Ernest Bevin; Phillip Snowden; George Lansbury; W.R. Fairley; Dean of Worcester (Moore Ede); Mayor of Durham, Councillor W.H. Wood.
1921, 1922	None held
1923.	J.R. MacDonald; Rev. H. Dunnico; F. Hodges; J. Jones.
1924	Robert Smillie; J.J. Lawson; George Lansbury; James Walsh.
1925	J.R. MacDonald; E. Shinwell; Sir P. Hastings; Miss M. Bondfield.
1926	None held
1927	J. Jones; A.J. Cook; Oswald Mosley; Ellen Wilkinson.
1928	E. Shinwell; D. Kirkwood; James Maxton; S. Saklatvala; Dean of Worcester.
1929	Ellen Wilkinson; A.J. Cook; Oswald Mosley; Jennie Lee.
1930	Ernest Bevin; A. Shepherd; William Graham; George Lansbury.
1931	E. Shinwell; Rev. H. Dunnico; James Maxton; A.J. Cook.

The Association's membership of the Labour Party after the War was accompanied by the observance of May Day as an annual holiday. The first May Day demonstrations were held in 1920, at nine centres in the County. Only those men on essential and necessary work went to the pit.[1] The next year, 1921, far larger demonstrations were held. Ernest Bevin, J.R. Smith, Ben Turner, and Jack Jones made speeches and meetings were held at sixteen centres, eight taking place on Saturday May 1st, and the others on the following Monday.[2] But this appears to be the high water mark of Executive Committee enthusiasm for the May Day meetings; in subsequent years, they were left very much to lodge initiative. If national speakers were required then they were to be chosen and paid for by individual lodges. Nevertheless, the Agents themselves were always prominent on the day, and in 1925, the Association signed an agreement with the Coal Owners' Association, fixing the first Saturday in May as a recognised holiday.[3]

Perhaps more significant was the encouragement given to working class education in this period. In the years 1918-1921 grants totalling £305 were divided almost equally between the Workers' Educational

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, February 7th, 1920.

2 D.M.A. May-Day Preliminary Notice, March 23rd, 1921.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Notice, April 19th, 1922; D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, March 16th, 1923; D.M.A. Letter from Secretary of the Coal Owners' Association, April 20th, 1925.

Association and the Central Labour College.[1] Both bodies had support among the membership and both were organising classes in the district. During 1918-1919, 224 miners were attending classes in eighteen centres, on subjects varying from Citizenship and English Literature to Industrial and Trades Union problems.[2] The financial economies necessitated by the stoppages of 1920 and 1921 determined the Executive Committee against further grants and the majority of the membership agreed. It was however agreed to send four members of the Association annually to the London Labour College for two years each. While resident at the College the students would be maintained by the Association. The first four were sent in 1924.[3]

As a corollary of the Association's support for independent working class education, the Executive Committee were keen to assist in the growth of 'the most powerful weapon the workers have had during recent years' - the Daily Herald.[4] Efforts to stimulate its cir-

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, January 15th, 1918; D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, May 11th, December 7th, 1918; March 15th, 1919; February 7th, May 29th, 1920; February 12th, 1921.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Note - Council Meeting Minutes, March 15th, 1919.

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 24th, 1923; D.M.A. General Secretary's Notice, May 28th, 1924.

4 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, February 7th, 1920. This campaign was part of the national effort to keep the Herald going, initiated in 1919 by the formation of a Daily Herald Trade Union committee. The paper's difficulties stemmed from its failure to gain advertising revenue and the onset of the depression prevented the unions from giving the financial help that was needed. The T.U.C. and the Labour Party helped to prevent complete insolvency in 1922, but in 1929 the paper was sold to Odhams Press, though its Labour views were guaranteed. The first northern edition came out in that year. See Postgate, R., Life of George Lansbury (1951). Chapters XI, XII, XIV, XV; Bullock A., op. cit. pp. 112-113, 149, 419-425.

culation among the miners of Durham were never ending in this period. In 1922, a campaign to secure new readers, initiated with the hope that it might lead to a northern edition of the paper, recommended lodges at large collieries to obtain volunteers in each shift of workmen who would arrive at the pit half an hour earlier than necessary, in order to issue order forms for the Herald. At the smaller pits, where the workers lived closer together, a house to house canvas was to be organised. The merits of the paper were also to be advertised at lodge meetings.[1] It is doubtful if this campaign had much success. By 1923, each County Association in the M.F.G.B. had agreed to a further levy of 2d. per year per member for five years.[2] The fact that the paper was now owned by the movement added urgency to the Association's efforts. At the Gala of 1923, Daily Herald Pledge Cards were handed out and before the end of the year a further Executive Committee notice had urged the membership to buy the newspaper.[3] The gathering crisis in the coal industry during the next two years however, thrust the problems of the Daily Herald into the background.

In spite of the Executive Committee's solicitations concerning the Herald the idea of establishing a monthly paper which would deal

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Notice, February 22nd, 1922; D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, April 4th, September 12th, 1922; D.M.A. Executive Committee Notice, September 19th, 1922.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, February 13th, 1923. The lodges in the D.M.A. endorsed the Federation decision by 738 - 23.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, July 17th, September 18th, 1923; D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, August 18th, 1923.

with the affairs of the Association and be run by the membership, did not secure much support. It was first raised at a Council meeting in March 1924 when the Westerton lodge suggested a journal dealing with industrial and political questions, together with the work of local authorities. The Executive persuaded the lodge to withdraw the proposal,[1] but later in the year, after further lodge resolutions on the subject, the Executive Committee reported to the Council on the matter of dissemination of Association news and a resolution in favour of the publication of a monthly paper was carried. However, at the same time the Council also agreed that the Executive Committee should investigate and explore the possibilities, and thus was the subject shelved.[2] There was always a fairly vocal, if small, minority against Executive Committee hand-outs and it could be that the Agents felt a newspaper might too easily become an organ for militant views. At any rate, the worsening depression once again acted as a carpet under which all disagreeable projects might be swept.

The one 'literary' success which the D.M.A. did have in this period was to publish a further edition of Richard Fynes' History of the Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham which the Sunderland firm of Thomas Summerbell brought out in 1923, the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication.[3]

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, March 15th, 1924.

2 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 29th, 1924.

3 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, September 11th, 1919.

The Association's relationship with other trades unions both inside and outside the mining industry were amicable enough during the period under discussion, although a serious dispute did take place with the Deputies' Association. It was well known that most mine-owners preferred their deputies to be in the deputies' union and not in one of the mineworkers' unions. At Hebburn Colliery in Durham, the pit was laid idle in June 1923 due to twenty six deputies leaving the D.M.A. for the Deputies' Association whom the D.M.A. accused of poaching.[1] A settlement was eventually achieved in August after the majority of the deputies involved had agreed to return to the D.M.A. but it resulted in the poaching charge being heard before the T.U.C. on March 19th, 1924. The decision went against the Deputies' Association who were told that their holding of meetings in an area in which there were no non-union men, was an act clearly aimed at the membership of the D.M.A.[2] A further disturbance of the D.M.A.'s monopoly of the labour in the Durham coal mines was precipitated by the activities of the Union of Winding and General Engineers - "Casey's Union". Having been deprived of affiliation to the T.U.C. for failing to pay the affiliation fees, this union was accused of attempting to persuade members of the various unions comprising the Durham County

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, July 4th, 1923; D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, August 21st, 1923.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, April 14th, 1924.

Mining Federation Board to leave their unions and join it. In August 1923, the D.M.A. Executive Committee issued a circular warning members who might be persuaded to join the erring union that attempts might be made to compel them to return to the benevolent and all embracing folds of the D.M.A.[1] Whether this warning was sufficient is uncertain; but nothing was heard of the Winding and General Engineers in the remainder of the period.

The national disputes of 1920 and 1921, together with the severe depression of 1925 and 1926, emaciated the Union's financial resources. Membership was falling as unemployment forced men to leave the pits, or to leave the union through inability to pay its dues. The attitude of the officials of the Association is best illustrated by the tone of the circulars issued during 1925 and the first months of 1926. The hope was frequently expressed that there would be no national stoppage, as the Association was in no position to face one. Union officials are usually jealous guardians of the wealth and power of their organisations and strikes tend to be looked upon as annoying interruptions of the bureaucratic process. And in 1926 an observer making an objective analysis of the condition of the D.M.A. would almost certainly have agreed with the officials.

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1 D.M.A. Executive Committee Circular, August 21st, 1923. Thomas Casey (1869-1949) worked in the collieries of South Yorkshire as an engineman and for twenty-five years was General Secretary of the National Winding and General Engineers Society. From 1918-1922 he was Labour M.P. for Sheffield (Attercliffe). The union was swallowed up by the Transport and General Workers in 1935.

APPENDIX I

The Chart below shows the number of persons employed in the Coal Industry in Durham, 1920-1931. It should be remembered that there were various seasonal fluctuations in employment in the coal mines and that these figures refer, in all cases, to December of the year concerned.

YEAR	BELOW GROUND	ABOVE GROUND	FEMALE	TOTAL
1920	137,695	37,821	270	175,786
1921	125,853	32,832	211	158,896
1922	128,447	33,014	191	161,652
1923	138,585	32,091	186	174,192
1924	137,528	32,991	93	170,612
1925	110,901	26,755	65	137,721
1926	90,965	23,762	--	114,727
1927	99,073	24,789	86	123,448
1928	103,984	25,062	80	129,126
1929	114,651	26,796	--	141,447
1930	96,892	23,451	76	120,419
1931	88,196	21,953	--	110,149

Source: Annual Reports of H.M. Inspectors of Mines and the Secretary of State of Mines, 1920-1931.

APPENDIX II

Election Results in those seats sponsored by the D.M.A. 1918-1929.

General Election, December 1918.

BARNARD CASTLE (19,954)

Swan, J. (Lab.)	5,468
Rogerson, Capt. J.E. (Coal U.)	3,837
Hillary, A.E. (Lib.)	2,180
Monkhouse, O. (Ind.)	1,274
Lab. maj.	1,631

CHESTER-LE-STREET (35,156)

Taylor, J.W. (Lab.)	unopposed

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING (32,552)

Richardson, R. (Lab.)	7,315
Wing, T. (Lib.)	6,626
Lindsley, J. (Co.N.D.P.)	6,185
Lab. maj.	689

SPENNYMOOR (31,517)

Galbraith, S. (Lib.)	9,443
Batey, J. (Lab.)	8,196
Lib. maj.	1,247

BLAYDON (32,811)

Waring, Maj. W. (Coal U.)	9,937
Whiteley, W. (Lab.)	7,844
Graham, T.A. (Lib.)	1,064
Coal maj.	2,093

DURHAM (28,338)

Hills, Maj. J.W. (Coal U.)	9,027
Ritson, J. (Lab.)	8,809
Coal maj.	218

SEDGEFIELD (24,861)

Burdon, Col. Rowland (Coal U.)	6,627
Herriotts, J. (Lab.)	5,801
Starmer, Sir Charles (Lib.)	3,333
Coal maj.	826

By-Election, November 1919

CHESTER-LE-STREET (35,156)

Lawson, J.J. (Lab.)	17,838
Gilmour, D. (Co.N.D.P.)	5,313
Lab. maj.	12,525

General Election, November 1922.

BARNARD CASTLE (20,790)

Rogerson, Capt. J.E (Con.)	8,271
Swan, J.E. (Lab.)	8,052
Con. maj.	219

BLAYDON (35,388)

Whiteley, W. (Lab.)	14,722
Simpson, Col. F.R. (Con.)	7,963
Cook, F.W. (Nat. Lib.)	4,606
Lab. maj.	6,759

CHESTER-LE-STREET (38,592)

Lawson, J.J. (Lab.)	20,296
Todd, Dr. T.F. (Con.)	9,335
Lab. maj.	10,961

DURHAM (31,102)

Ritson, J. (Lab.)	14,068
Hills, Maj. J.W. (Con.)	11,396
Lab. maj.	2,672

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING (35,825)

Richardson, R. (Lab.)	14,611
Shaw, Capt. W.W. (Con.)	7,555
Johnston, J.E. (Lib.)	5,958
Lab. maj.	7,056

SEDGEFIELD (29,392)

Herriotts, J. (Lab.)	9,796
Waddington, E. (Con.)	9,067
Brown, C.H. (Lib.)	3,561
Lab. maj.	729

SPENNYMOOR (33,482)

Batey, J. (Lab.)	13,766
Eden, Capt. A. (Con.)	7,567
Wing, T.E. (Lib.)	6,046
Lab. maj.	6,199

General Election, December 1923

BARNARD CASTLE (21,136)

Turner-Samuels, M. (Lab.)	9,171
Rogerson, Capt. J.E (Con.)	7,482
Lab. maj.	1,689

BLAYDON (35,788)

Whiteley, W. (Lab.)	15,073
Denson, G. (Con.)	7,124
Lab. maj.	7,949

CHESTER-LE-STREET (39,602)

Lawson, J.J. (Lab.)	20,712
Harris, C.R.S. (Con.)	7,015
Lab. maj.	13,697

DURHAM (31,763)

Ritson, J. (Lab.)	13,819
Bradford, Capt. T.A. (Con.)	10,530
Lab. maj.	3,289

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING (37,250)

Richardson, R. (Lab.)	15,225
Curry, A.C. (Lib.)	10,445
Lab. maj.	4,980

SEDGEFIELD (29,767)

Ropner, Maj. L. (Con.)	11,093
Herriotts, J. (Lab.)	11,087
Con. maj.	6

SPENNYMOOR (34,016)

Batey, J. (Lab.)	15,567
Appleby, Maj. W. (Con.)	8,116
Lab. maj.	7,451

General Election, October 1924.

BARNARD CASTLE (21,931)

Headlam, Lt. Col. C.M. (Con.)	9,465
Turner-Samuels, M. (Lab.)	9,152
Con. maj.	313

BLAYDON (36,644)

Whiteley, W. (Lab.)	17,670
Denson, G. (Con.)	10,549
Lab. maj.	7,121

CHESTER-LE-STREET (40,576)

Lawson, J.J. (Lab.)	22,700
McCarthy, M.D. (Con.)	9,250
Lab. maj.	13,450

DURHAM (32,158)

Streatfield, S.R. (Con.)	9,614
Ritson, J. (Lab.)	5,032
McKeag, W. (Lib.)	2,747
Con. maj.	4,582

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING (38,767)

Richardson, R. (Lab.)	17,857
Curry, A.C. (Lib.)	13,023
Lab. maj.	4,834

SEDGEFIELD (31,056)

Ropner, Maj. L. (Con.)	13,968
Herriotts, J. (Lab.)	12,552
Con. maj.	1,416

SPENNYMOOR (34,837)

Batey, J. (Lab.)	17,211
Surtees, Brig.-Gen. H.	10,101
Lab. maj.	7,110

General Election, May, 1929

BARNARD CASTLE (26,488)

Lawther, W. (Lab.)	9,281
Headlam, Lt. Col. C.M. (Con.)	8,406
Spence, E. (Lib.)	4,402
Lab. maj.	875

BLAYDON (45,204)

Whiteley, W. (Lab.)	21,221
White, Maj. R.C. (Con.)	7,847
Magnay, T.W. (Lib.)	6,878
Lab. maj.	13,374

CHESTER-LE-STREET (49,243)

Lawson, J.J. (Lab.)	26,975
Payne, E.G. (Con.)	6,334
Wright, J.W. (Lib.)	5,340
Lab. maj.	20,641

DURHAM (40,676)

Ritson, J. (Lab.)	18,514
McKeag, W. (Lib.)	7,266
Hamilton-Fletcher, G.M.A. (Con.)	6,870
Lab. maj.	11,248

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING (54,615)

Richardson, R. (Lab.)	25,056
Wing, T.E. (Lib.)	10,267
Pearson, W.G. (Con.)	8,545
Lab. maj.	14,789

SEDGEFIELD (39,833)

Herriotts, J. (Lab.)	15,749
Ropner, Maj. L. (Con.)	13,043
Leeson, W. (Lib.)	4,236
Lab. maj.	2,706

SPENNYMOOR (40,012)

Batey, J. (Lab.)	20,858
Gourlay, F.R. (Con.)	8,202
Lab. maj.	12,656

APPENDIX III

Membership of the Durham Miners' Association, 1918-1931. The figures are averages based upon the month of December in each case.

Source: Annual Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, together with Minutes, Reports and Circulars of the Durham Miners' Association.

YEAR	AVERAGE TOTAL MEMBERSHIP
1918	118,693
1919	128,812
1920	151,029
1921	151,253
1922	155,380
1923	158,339
1924	160,040
1925	155,773
1926	149,740
1927	137,853
1928	128,795
1929	132,081
1930	132,801
1931	127,976

CHAPTER V

The Northumberland Miners' Association 1918-1926

For a short period in the nineteenth century, the miners on both sides of the Tyne were members of the same trades union. But in 1864 the Northumberland miners prompted by Thomas Burt, broke away to form the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association. It was this union that sought to protect the interests of miners north of the Tyne in our period.

The structure of the Northumberland Miners' Association differed little from that of its Durham counterpart. The basic organisational unit was the branch or lodge. Each branch elected a President, Secretary and Treasurer, together with an Executive Committee of not less than four, nor more than twelve members, every twelve months. It was the branches, either by means of the individual ballot or the proxy vote,[1]

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1 Proxy vote. Except where an individual ballot was held, branches recorded their decisions upon resolutions passed at Council meetings by means of the proxy vote. Each branch possessed votes, not less than one and not more than twenty according to their membership, on the following scale:

Branches having less than 100 members											1	vote
100	members	and	under	150	members						2	votes
150	"	"	"	250	"						3	"
250	"	"	"	350	"						4	"
350	"	"	"	450	"						5	"
450	"	"	"	550	"						6	"
550	"	"	"	650	"						7	"
650	"	"	"	750	"						8	"
750	"	"	"	850	"						9	"
850	"	"	"	1000	"						10	"
1000	"	"	"	1150	"						11	"
1150	"	"	"	1300	"						12	"
1300	"	"	"	1450	"						13	"
1450	"	"	"	1600	"						14	"
1600	"	"	"	1750	"						15	"
1750	"	"	"	1900	"						16	"
1900	"	"	"	2050	"						17	"
2050	"	"	"	2200	"						18	"
2200	"	"	"	2350	"						19	"
2350	"	"	"	2500	"						20	"

The rules are not clear about how the decision to place the proxy vote is arrived at, but it is presumed that a simple majority at a branch meeting would be sufficient to determine its destination.

who were ultimately responsible for decision taking within the Association. In practice, branch votes rarely overruled either Executive Committee or Council decisions. Nevertheless, the leadership did not always triumph. When wages were low the membership could rarely be persuaded that the correct policy was to maintain contributions at the old levels.[1]

The Council of the Association met quarterly 'for the purpose of deliberating, free and untrammelled, upon the whole of the agenda; and after expressing their opinions by resolutions and votes, on the various questions, the agenda, together with the report of the Council meeting, shall be returned to the branches to be voted on by proxy.'[2] The Council was made up of one representative from each branch of the Association, together with the members of the Executive and Wages Committees, the Agents, Auditors, members who were Members of Parliament and any special representatives requested by branches. Only the representatives of the branches were allowed to vote at Council meetings.[3]

The business of the Association was conducted by a number of committees between meetings of the Council, the most important being the

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[1] See below, pp. 192-194.

[2] N.M.A. Rules (1920). If two thirds of the representatives present at a Council meeting considered a question to be so important as to merit an individual ballot of the membership, then this would be taken without consulting the branches.

[3] N.M.A. Rules (1920)

Executive Committee, the Wages Committee, and the Joint Committee. The Executive Committee consisted of the Agents and nine members of the Association. The nine members were elected annually by a ballot vote of the membership, the county being divided into nine districts for this purpose, each returning one member of the Executive Committee. All questions before the Executive Committee were decided by a simple majority, with the Chairman having the casting vote.[1]

The Wages Committee was made up of nine members, elected annually by ballot vote, one memberfor each of the nine districts. The duties of the Wages Committee in the absence of any agreement to the contrary,[2] was to meet representatives of the owners from time to time regarding the county rate of wages. The Wages Committee also constituted the workmen's side of the Northumberland district Board under the Minimum Wage Act.[3]

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[1] N.M.A. Rules (1920). At the Annual Council meeting in 1923, it was decided that in future, committees would be elected by means of a system of preferential voting.

[2] For example, a sliding scale agreement.

[3] N.M.A. Rules (1920). Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act, 1912 (2 GEO. V. C.2), officially described as "An Act to provide a Minimum Wage in the case of Workmen employed underground in Coal Mines (including Mines of Stratified Ironstone), and for purposes incidental thereto." It remained on the Statute Book until 1947.

The Joint Committee was a sub-committee of the Wages Committee, and its function was to meet the representatives of the Northumberland Coal Owners' Association to adjust disputes arising at any colliery in relation to work and wages. The Joint Committee was composed of those six members of the Wages Committee who had received the highest number of votes at their election.[1]

The organisation of the Northumberland Miners' Association was wedded firmly to democratic principles, but nevertheless the Association's leadership wielded considerable powers. The full-time officers of the Association consisted of a president, general secretary, financial secretary, and treasurer, who were elected by a preferential ballot vote of the members. These permanent agents of the Association held office during the pleasure of the Association. They were ex-officio members of all committees. Charges of neglect of duty against any agent were first heard by the Executive Committee, which had the power to propose sentence, including the dismissal of the offender. But no dismissal could actually take place without a ballot vote of the membership.[2] During our period, criticism of the leadership never raised the question of dismissal.

It is therefore hardly surprising that a position manifesting such security of tenure, coupled with the remarkable longevity of miners'

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1 N.M.A. Rules (1920)

2 N.M.A. Rules (1920)

leaders in the North East, should produce a continuity of leadership. Two men, in fact, bestrode the Association almost like colossi, during the first sixty years of its history. The name of Thomas Burt was for many years before 1900 almost synonymous with that of the Association. But even before the beginning of our period it was William Straker who had succeeded to Burt's powerful position. Straker's autobiography is almost the story of the coal industry in Northumberland. He was born in July 1855 at Snittar in Northumberland, the son of an agricultural labourer. He also began work on the land at the age of eleven and at a wage of sixpence per day. In 1861 his parents moved to Widdrington and it was there that he saw and went to work in, his first mine. It was also there that he began his long connection with the Northumberland Miners' Association. He joined the Association in 1872. In 1879 he was the lodge's delegate to the Council and by 1882 he had been elected to the Executive Committee. He was not yet thirty. From 1888 until 1905 he was a member of the Joint Committee of owners and men which met to consider the problems of the industry in Northumberland, and which was considered such a step forward in nineteenth century industrial relations. In 1905 he was elected Corresponding Secretary and when Thomas Burt resigned from the position of General Secretary in 1913, Straker took his place. He remained in that office until his retirement, at the age of eighty, in 1935. He was the Northumberland representative on the Executive Committee of the Miners'

Federation of Great Britain from 1908-1925, a member of the M.F.G.B. sub-committee which drafted a Mines Nationalisation Bill in 1912,[1] and the man who presented the M.F.G.B.'s case for nationalisation before the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry in 1919. Moreover Straker served on numerous public bodies[2] and this work was recognised by the award of the C.B.E. in 1930. It is hardly surprising that the membership held him in considerable esteem. Mr. Straker was a moderate man both in politics and in industrial matters, a true heir to Burt. Although he supported the Labour Party, he did not recommend industrial militancy save as a last resort. He was often alleged to have said that he gained more by conciliation than he would have gained by strikes and threats of strikes.[3] Mr. Straker was a fervent advocate of the trades union cause and although nominated for the parliamentary candidacy of Wansbeck following the death of the sitting member, Mr. Charles Fenwick[4] in April 1918, he quickly withdrew from the candidacy. The inference was that he preferred to remain secretary of a small, but important miners' trade union, rather than to take up a more splendid

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1 The other members were William Adamson, M.P. and Vernon Hartshorn.

2 Mr. Straker served on the Northumberland Education Committee for thirty-two years, the Newcastle Royal Infirmary House Committee for twenty-seven years, and was for twenty-eight years a Director of the Co-operative Printing Society. He was also a Land Tax Commissioner, and a member of the Investigation Committee, (Northumberland) Coal Mines Act 1920.

3 Newcastle Journal, January 1st, 1942.

4 See above Chapter II.

but less influential parliamentary career.[1] It ought perhaps to be pointed out, that in 1918 he was sixty-three years old.[2]

This continuity of official personel was also evident in the other major offices of the Association. William Weir became President in 1914 and remained in office until his death in December 1926. Born at Mickley Square on the banks of the Tyne in 1868, the son of a colliery fitter, he first worked in a mine as a trapper boy at West Wylam to which his family had moved. In 1900 he attended his first Council meeting and five years later was Branch President of the West Wylam lodge, a position which he held until his election to the Presidency. In 1906 Weir became a member of the Conciliation Board and he was elected to the Joint Committee in 1909. In December 1912 he was elected to the Executive Committee for the first time. Until his election to the Presidency he was a working hewer.[3] Like his General Secretary, Weir was a long standing Primitive Methodist. In politics, he began life as a Radical and a member of the Liberal Party, but he had joined the Labour Party before the end of the First World War.[4] Again like

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes April 30th, 1918.

2 He died in 1941.

3 Newcastle Journal, December 10th, 1926.

4 In fact he stood as Parliamentary Labour Candidate for Hexham in the 1918 General Election, but failed to win the seat.

Mr. Straker, he had a formidable record of public service.[1]

The Treasurer of the Association, throughout the whole of our period, was William Hogg. He was born at West Moor Colliery in 1865 and first worked in a coal mine as a trapper boy in 1877 at Seaton Burn. He became a putter at the age of sixteen, moving to Dinnington Pit where in 1895 he was elected checkweighman. He was also a Primitive Methodist and at first a Liberal in politics, having joined the Miners Political Reform Association in 1884.[2] Mr. Hogg was elected to the Joint Committee and to the Conciliation Board in 1903, and in 1910 to the position of Treasurer of the Association. It was a position he was to hold until 1944.

The Financial Secretary at the beginning of our period was John Cairns. Born at Choppington in May 1859, he began work at the local colliery at the age of twelve. He attended adult education classes and in his teens became Secretary of the Choppington Mechanics Association. He was a Primitive Methodist and a local preacher. He was elected Financial Secretary in 1906 after serving successively as Council delegate, a member of the Joint Committee, and on the Wages Committee. From 1900 to 1923 Mr. Cairns was Chairman of the Northumberland Aged Mineworkers Association. Like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Cairns supported the Radical cause in politics before turning to

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1 Mr. Weir was appointed a J.P. in 1909, he was an Alderman of the Northumberland County Council, a Parish and Urban District Councillor and for eleven years a member of the Hexham Board of Guardians. Following his election to the Presidency and subsequent removal to Newcastle, he also served on the Gosforth Urban District Council. He was for many years a member of the Northumberland County Council Education Committee and a Governor of the Royal Victoria Infifmary Newcastle upon Tyne. He was also an enthusiastic advocate of the Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association and was on its Board of Governors from its commencement.

2 This Association was wound up after the extension of the francise in 1884.

the idea of an independent Labour Party. He became a member of the Labour Party and on the retirement of Thomas Burt, was selected to contest the Morpeth Division in the 1918 general election.[1] Mr. Cairns was returned by a majority of 537, and an Assistant Financial Secretary was elected to perform his duties. The successful candidate was Ebenezer Edwards. 'Ebby' Edwards was to become a miners' leader of perhaps greater stature than Burt or Straker, indeed when he died his obituary filled one and a half columns of the Times.[2] During our period, Mr. Edwards held the position of Financial Secretary until 1929 when he became M.P. for Morpeth. Unlike the majority of his North Eastern contemporary miners' leaders, Edwards was never a Liberal, nor a 'Lib-Lab' proselytiser. Born in 1884 he was of the younger generation and a socialist. In 1908 he won a scholarship to Ruskin College, but left after ten months because he disliked the curriculum. He helped to form the Plebs League in 1908 to propagate the idea of independent working class education. Back in Northumberland, he was elected Ashington delegate to the Council in 1910 and to the Presidency of his branch two years later. He served on the Executive Committee of the Association from 1912 until 1918. He was defeated by William Weir in the election for the Association's Presidency in 1914.[3]

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1 Mr. Cairns had also a considerable record of public service. He was a Poor Law Guardian, Treasurer of the Bedlington Co-operative Society and he remained M.P. for Morpeth until his death in 1923.

2 Times July 7th, 1961.

3 Mr. Edwards represented the Northumberland Miners' Association on the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. from 1926 until 1930. 1929-1930 he was Vice President of the M.F.G.B. and in the following year, President. Since the salary of the Miners' Federation President was only £104 per year, he had to return to the mines. From 1932-1944 he was General Secretary of the Federation, being also President of the Trades Union Congress in 1944-1945. From 1946 until his retirement in 1953 he was an Industrial Relations Officer with the National Coal Board. He died in July 1961.

All these leaders survived the struggles of the period after 1918 which culminated in the tragedy of 1926. One of the most critical problems which they had to face during this period concerned the Association's financial position. Disputes cannot be fought without resources; and financial resources can only be obtained by avoiding industrial disputes. In the period 1918-1925, there were two national and numerous local strikes. Moreover many members of the Association suffered periods of unemployment, for which they received benefit from the Association, according to rule.[1] As in the case of Durham, by 1926, the Northumberland Miners' Association could hardly have been more badly placed, financially, to become involved in a long industrial conflict.

The effect of the 1921 lock-out, which lasted from April until July, rapidly made itself felt on the Association's finances. By the time the dispute had lasted for five weeks, there were no funds out of which to pay the cost of electing the standing committees.[2] The Executive Committee decided that the Association could not afford to send anyone to the Labour Party Conference save those whose expenses would be paid by the M.F.G.B. They also suggested to the Federation that due to the critical situation in the industry, the Federation's annual conference for 1921 should be cancelled.[3] Nor did the situation show any marked

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1 Rule 42. 'Should a pit be partially or wholly laid idle for a calendar week from any cause over which the members have no control, members affected shall be paid £1 per calendar week.' There were also payments for short time, children and rent.

2 Normally about £350.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 20th, 1921.

improvement after the dispute had ended. Wages were going down while the number of members unemployed went up. In August 1921 it was agreed to establish a fund to help those members of the Association who could not find work. Members working agreed to pay a 1/- per fortnight, and this was raised to 1/- per week in October.[1] But the fund never amounted to anything approaching satisfactory proportions. By January 1922 there were no funds out of which to pay out of work relief. A special Council Meeting was called to discuss the financial position, and the Finance Committee was asked to examine the whole question of contributions and benefits. At this juncture it will be profitable for us to do the same.

Anyone wishing to join the Northumberland Miners' Association had first to pay an entrance fee, 2/6 in the case of adults aged eighteen and above, 1/- for juniors, under eighteen.[2] Contributions of 1/- per week for adults and 6d per week for juniors were charged and usually collected fortnightly on Pay Saturday.[3] Members who worked only five days or less during the fortnight were exempt from paying their contributions, provided that the short time was due to sickness, accident, or the pit being idle.[4]

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[1] It was to be paid in any week during which the pit worked three or more days. N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes August 25th, 30th 1921; N.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes October 8th, 1921.

[2] N.M.A. Rules (1920). If a member left the Association but later re-entered the fee went up to £1 and 10/- respectively.

[3] Pay was fortnightly also. N.M.A. Rules (1920).

[4] Members out of work due to these causes for more than twelve months were required to pay a contribution of 1/- in the month of January following the twelve months being up, and each succeeding twelve monthly period. N.M.A. Rules (1920).

Benefits were paid to members, according to rule should they fall out of work through no fault of their own. Allowances to members on strike amounted to 5/- per day, save Sundays and Pay Saturdays, plus 2/- per week for each child not working and a rent allowance of 5/- per week where the member lived in rented property, the rent of which was not paid by the employers.[1] As we have already noted above, should a member be not working due to sickness, accident or the pit being stopped, he was paid £1 per week. If the member worked only one day in a week he received 10/- and if two days, 4/-. Again dependent children were paid for at the rate of 2/- per week each, and the rent allowance was 5/- per week. Such out of work benefits were reduced by one half after fifteen weeks, and stopped altogether after thirty.[2]

This 'friendly society' side of the Association was naturally a heavy burden during periods of depression. And the coal trade remained in the grip of such a depression, as we have seen, for almost the whole of our period. It was not surprising therefore that the Association's finances, its 'life blood' as one delegate called them, should be the most frequent item on the agendas of Council meetings in these years. The attitude of the branches was usually in favour of reducing contribut-

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1 N.M.A. Rules (1920).

2 N.M.A. Rules (1920). Any member receiving benefit for thirty weeks would have to work twelve weeks and be financial before entitled to such benefit again. A Death Legacy of £6 per adult member and £3 per junior member was also paid on the death of a member to the party paying the funeral expenses or to any other person, as decided by the Executive Committee.

ions while maintaining benefits at the old level;[1] the officials on the other hand pleaded the folly of reduced contributions and the necessity of curbing benefits.

The result of the investigation by the Finance Committee into this intractable problem in April 1922 was a series of proposals to reduce both contributions and benefits, an unhappy compromise.[2] Contributions would in the future be 1/- a fortnight for adult members and 6d a fortnight for junior members, instead of 2/- and 1/- as formerly. Members were to be exempt from paying their contributions if they worked only three days or under during the fortnight instead of five days as before.[3] Re-entrance fees were reduced by half from £1 for adults to 10/- and from 10/- for junior members to 5/-. This was obviously aimed at encouraging lapsed members to re-join. Benefits were similarly emasculated. Strike allowance was reduced from 5/- to 2/- per day. Out of work benefit was abolished as it was now covered

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1 Two examples of this branch pressure in favour of reducing contributions are worthy of note. At the Quarterly Council Meeting in February 1922 a Benwell resolution was passed, asking the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. to lay before a national conference a proposal to reduce contributions to 6d a week for a period of six months. The New Delaval Branch took matters into its own hands and unilaterally reduced the contributions of its members. A representative of the branch told a Council Meeting that they had realised such an action violated the constitution, but that owing to the small wages which were being paid, it was the only thing that could have saved the branch from extinction.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 3rd, 1922.

3 This decision was reversed in May 1923. N.M.A. Annual Council Meeting Minutes May 19th and 22nd 1923.

under the State Unemployment Acts. The removal allowance of 10/- for the first mile and 2/- for each subsequent mile up to a maximum of thirty six was halved. The provision made for sacrificed members[1] was reduced from £2 per week together with 3/- per week for each dependent child to £1 per week and 2/- respectively. The death legacy was cut by half from £6 and £3 to £3 and £1 :10s. respectively. The supply of all small articles from the Medical Charity Fund was discontinued. The branches too were squeezed into economies. Expenses for money orders and the branch treasurer's travelling allowance were discontinued, as was payment from the central fund for taking ballot votes.[2]

These measures, of course, were merely a temporary damming of the flood. And as the numbers of unemployed rose, it was increasingly felt that something had to be done to ameliorate their distress. To meet the need, the Council voted £500 from the general funds to be set apart as a nucleus of a distress fund. At the same time, the Association branches were circularised with a request for voluntary contributions to a distress fund, from which money would be distributed to these in need.[3] A further £500 was set aside for this purpose in April 1923.[4]

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1 A Sacrificed Member was 'any member of the Association losing his employment for taking part in advocating the claims of his fellow-workmen, or for acting in accordance with the objects of the Association.'

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 23rd, 1922.

3 Ibid.

4 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes April 11th, 1923.

The remainder of 1923 was a period of ephemeral improvement. The coal trade in Britain was given its unlooked for encouragement by stoppages first in the United States and then in the Ruhr.[1] But by 1924, the position had once more deteriorated and a Special Council Meeting was convened to discuss the difficult question of contributions and benefits in the light of the resolution passed at the Annual Conference of the M.F.G.B.[2] A sub-committee was appointed to consider the question and the Executive Committee presented a report on the question at a Special Council Meeting held in August 1924. The Executive Committee pointed out that the rules of the M.F.G.B. required all members to pay a contribution of not less than 1/- per week to their District Associations. Following the 1921 stoppage, several areas, including Northumberland, were allowed to pay only 6d per week, but now the Executive Committee of the Federation, at the Annual Conference had suggested that all Associations should revert to the pre-1921 payments, beginning in October 1924. The Executive pointed out that a refusal to comply with the M.F.G.B. resolution might result in the Association being expelled from the Federation. Moreover, funds were urgently needed to help assist a growing number of unemployed members. 2,023 full and 197 half members were totally unemployed due to the closing of seven pits.[3]

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1 See Chapter I, above.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes July 25th, 1924.

3 Blucher, Throckley, White's Cut, Percy, Whittle, Union and Barcomb.

Many others were partially unemployed, and as these and those permanently out of work were increasing in number, inevitably, contributions were falling off. By the end of July 1924, 3,350 full members had ceased to pay contributions, a twelfth of the total membership. The weekly income from contributions, excluding the 2d in the shilling retained by branches, was £709 19s 8d, which would be doubled under the proposed increase to £1,419 19s 4d. The average weekly expenditure was £312 5s 2d, but after out of work benefit had been paid, the weekly deficit amounted to £2,915 10s 4d. Coupled with this proposal to raise the members' contributions were several others adjusting benefits, notably that proposing to pay two shillings per pit working day lost, to totally unemployed members, together with that raising the strike allowance from 2/- to 2/6 per day. The Council Meeting accepted these recommendations. The lodges did not. By 231 to 190 in a proxy vote they rejected the increase in contributions. As the implementation of all the other proposals had been made dependent upon the acceptance of this one, the position remained unaltered.[1]

However, the unemployment situation in Northumberland did not remain static; it deteriorated still further. The Association just could not stand by and stare at the difficulties of its growing number of unemployed members. The preservation of the union might be ultimately

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[1] N.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes August 16th, 1924. For a list of membership figures for the period, see Appendix II, below.

at stake. The unemployed members were not eager to pay contributions. They might be more eager to do so if it could be seen that the Association was prepared to make financial sacrifices on their behalf. In September 1924, the Executive Committee circularised the branches inviting them to sanction the Committee to set aside £10,000 from the Association's General Fund for the relief of unemployed members and families.[1] The branches gave their assent, and the Executive Committee then drew up a scheme of distribution. Totally unemployed members who before the alteration of the rules in May 1922[2] would have been entitled to out of work benefit, were to be paid five shillings per week each, five shillings rent allowance and one shilling per week for each child under the age of sixteen and not working. For those on short time, working only one day a week, the scale was to be three shillings per week, with the child and rent allowances the same as for the wholly unemployed.[3] After two months, the £10,000 was almost exhausted and it was agreed to continue out of work payments until the first week in 1925.[4] But the position had then to be reviewed, and it had not improved. It must have seemed as if 'good trade' would never return.

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes September 16th, 1924.

2 See pp. 193-194.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes October 14th, 1924.

4 Financial Secretary's Statement to the Executive Committee. December 10th, 1924.

By February 1925, the total funds of the Association amounted to £50,000. It was estimated that for the six monthly period ending in December 1924, the Association had been losing twopence per week per member. Contributions during the second six months of 1924 compared with those of the first six months had dropped from eleven shillings and ninepence per member to ten shillings and fourpence,[1] and membership had lapsed by about 1000.[2] The agents pointed out the necessity of husbanding the Association's resources, especially in view of the possibility of a national stoppage, which they hoped would not take place. Had the rules of the Association still included provision for unemployment benefit, the funds of the Association would not have lasted until 1925.[3] Having placed all their information before the branches, the Agents required them to vote Yes or No as to whether a further sum should be set aside for the relief of unemployed members. If the Agents expected the membership to be swayed into a negative by their lugubrious if accurate statistics they were in error. The branches voted overwhelmingly in favour of utilising a further £10,000 to assist the unemployed section of the Association.[4] A further grant of £20,000 was made six months later, in August 1925, against the advice of the

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1 The actual figures were 11/9.76 and 10/4.38.

2 N.M.A. Circular February 16th, 1925.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. Voting 289-47.

Executive Committee.[1] The running battle between the Agents and Executive Committee on the one hand, and the branches on the other with regard to this question of contributions and benefits was continued with an Executive Committee resolution at the October Council Meeting. 'In view of the demands upon our depleted funds, and the necessity of helping our unemployed members, we recommend that members contributions be increased from 6d to 1/- per week.' A majority of the Council agreed, but a proxy vote of the lodges showed that a large majority could still be mustered to oppose an increase in 'off-takes' in difficult times.[2]

Like the Durham Miners' Association, the organised miners north of the Tyne were in no position to face any kind of stoppage of the coal mines. It was clear long before May 1926 that there were few funds left for strike pay.

The financial position of a trade union affects more than the union's industrial activities. It also determines how much can be spent on those other branches of trade union action which are designed to encourage unity and solidarity among the membership. If funds were low, these activities would be among the first to be curtailed, and, as

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes August 21st, 1925.

This money was distributed in accordance with the following scales:

5/- per week per member when no days worked
3/- per week per member when one day worked
1/- per week each for children under fourteen and not working
5/- per week per member living in a rented house.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 21st, 1925. The proxy vote against increasing contributions was 237-100.

we have seen, during our period funds were low. Thus in 1919 it was agreed at the Annual Council Meeting, and subsequently by the lodges to grant to the Central Labour College the cost of two students per annum.[1] In November of the same year it was also decided to pay all members who had been sent to either Ruskin College, or the Central Labour College, a weekly allowance of 10/- for expenses during their term of one year at the respective colleges.[2] At this time, the Association sent two students a year to each of the two 'labour' colleges. The successful members were selected by the Executive Committee following applications, interviews and essays.[3] In 1920, it was agreed to pay for two years tuition for each student sent to the colleges instead of one as formerly.[4] But the picture changed following on the 1921 lock out. In that year, no new appointments to Ruskin or the Central Labour College were made.[5] An attempt, at the beginning of the following year, to increase the weekly allowance paid to students from 10/- to £1 was withdrawn after the treasurer had pointed out the serious economic plight of the coal trade.[6] In 1922, it was decided to send no more students to the two

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1 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 17th, 19th, 20th, 1919.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 15th, 17th, 18th, 1919. At the same meeting it was unanimously decided to forward a resolution to the M.F.G.B. suggesting that the T.U.C. be sent a proposal that the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. be instructed to take over and run as trade union colleges, the Central Labour College and Ruskin College.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes September 22nd, 1919.

4 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 15th, 17th, 18th, 1920.

5 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes July 11th, 1921

6 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes February 18th, 20th, 1922.

colleges until the financial situation 'considerably improved'.[1] Yet as soon as things appeared to be returning to normal in 1923, four students were sent to the two colleges and their annual allowance was raised from £26 to £36.[2] With the return of the slump however, came the inevitable pruning of Association spending and eleven months before the General Strike, the Executive Committee circularised the branches to the effect that with so many members unemployed the sending of any more students to either Ruskin or the Central Labour College should be postponed.[3] None were sent in 1926, either.

These were disappointing decisions for an Association which almost from its inception, had sought to encourage the growth and development of educational projects among the membership. In fact, in May 1918, an elaborate scheme of liberal adult education was drawn up by a sub-committee of the Executive Committee and approved at the Annual Council Meeting.[4] The object of the scheme was 'to further educate the members and their families in any subject other than learning a trade or profession, so as to create a more intelligent labour movement in our midst'.[5] In the best traditions of British adult education, the core

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 3rd, 1922.
N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 18th, 20th, 1922.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes February 17th, 19th, 1923.
N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 17th, 1923.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes June 9th, 1925.
The interesting question which remains unanswered is, what did those Association members who went to the labour colleges do after their period of study ended? Did most of them return to mining? One certainly did and could not find employment. But what of the remainder?

4 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes March 18th, April 6th, 1918.
N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 18th, 21st, 22nd, 1918.
The members of the sub-committee were Mr. E. Edwards, Mr. R. Browell, Mr. H. Dunn and Mr. W. Reavley.

5 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 18th, 21st, 22nd, 1918.

of the scheme was the coming together of a group of members interested in studying a particular subject. Any branch, or branches, could establish a class under the scheme. The class would be responsible for securing a room for the meetings, and should organise the class in conjunction with a representative of the branch of the Association. The class would select the tutor. Each member of the class was required to pay 2/6 in advance for a term of not less than twenty six weeks. Those students having an attendance record of seventy-five per cent or better would have this fee refunded. On payment of half of the cost, all text books became the property of the individual student. The hope was expressed that the class would meet once weekly for two hours and that work in the form of 'essay writing, speech making and debating' should be undertaken. The Association contracted to support any class which qualified under the scheme by meeting the cost of the tutor's salary and half the cost of all text books.[1] The Executive Committee could also give help and advice, and supply a tutor if this was necessary.

At the end of the report announcing the preparation of the scheme was attached an interesting list of subjects which might be studied. There were thirteen items on the list arranged in a kind of natural selection, beginning with the 'empirical' subjects, such as 'How to Read, Write and Speak correctly', the 'Science of Mining' and 'Trade Unionism : its history and problems', and ending, at the summit of achievement with

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[1] Ten was considered to be a viable group.

'English Literature' and 'Music and the higher life'.[1] How many of these groups were functioning in our period is not known. The brevity and scarcity of branch minutes may forever conceal the answer. But such a detailed scheme must surely have been motivated by an intense and widespread interest which may not have been wholly crushed by the depression years.

If education provided the means with which to equip the spirit of the members, then the great physical manifestation of the Association's solidarity was the Annual Gala, or Picnic as it was called in Northumberland, perhaps to differentiate it from the 'Big Meeting' south of the Tyne. The first Picnic was held in 1866, and as the title suggests it was as much a day of gaiety and enjoyment as a rededication of faith in the efficacyof organisation. These were the days when each lodge had its brass band, and on Picnic days not only did they march to the site, but took part in competitions when they got there, and there were

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[1] N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 18th, 21st, 22nd, 1918.
The complete list was as follows :

1. How to read, write and speak correctly.
2. The Science of Mining.
3. Trades Unionism : its history and problems.
4. The Co-operative Movement : as it is and as it should be.
5. Industrial History.
6. Economics.
7. Organic and Social Evolution.
8. Local Government; its work and utility.
9. Origin and Development of the State.
10. Nationalism and Internationalism.
11. Economic Basis of Imperialism.
12. English Literature.
13. Music and the Higher Life.

Note. Other subjects may be taken if desired by the students.

prizes, including one for the band with the smartest turn out.[1] Even in times of financial difficulty, it was felt that the Picnic ought to be held although even it was cancelled in 1926.[2]

The General Secretary's Monthly Circular was a method of disseminating news and views on a vast number of topics to the membership, providing as it did, material not often available in other more accessible publications.[3] But during the inter-war period the whole question of whether a monthly circular should be published at all was one which occassioned considerable argument. A proposal to discontinue it was heavily defeated in 1918 after the General Secretary, Mr. Straker, in a circular entitled 'To be or not to be' had underlined what he considered the purpose of the Monthly Circular to be. 'The greatest difficulty in

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1 Extract from the Picnic Day Programme, held at Morpeth on July 12th, 1919. There was also a Quick Step Contest and prizes for the best instrumentalists.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes June 28th, 1926.

3 To give some indication of the wide area covered by the Monthly Circulars here is a selection from 1921 and 1922.

February 1921	The Slump
March 1921	Germany
May 1921	The Strong Man of the Government (Robert Horne)
June 1921	The League of Nations
July 1921	The Royal Victoria Infirmary
September 1921	Unemployment
	Ireland
November 1921	Unemployment
December 1921	Washington Peace Conference
	Ireland
January 1922	Reparations Scheme
February 1922	The Economy
March 1922	The Future
	The Japanese in Siberia

the road of all working class leaders has been to arouse the workers to recognise their servile position. There are always those who object to being disturbed, hence this proposal. There is no sense in confining the circular to matters on which there is no difference of opinion. The leaders must expect disagreement and criticism and also misrepresentation and abuse by those who profit by the existing state. I have no interests other than yours, to serve.'[1] It is difficult to isolate the separate strands of criticism which were aimed at the Monthly Circular. The President seemed to believe that they came in the main from the enemies of the working class.[2] But he also implied that there were other critics and it may be that more militant members of the Association were critical of the influence which they thought the moderate tone of the circulars was having on the membership. Suggestions for replacing it included that of publishing a weekly paper, which was rejected by the lodges, and one in 1923 to develop the circular into a monthly magazine with articles on current problems, their effect on miners, trade union and business matters, working class education and book reviews, which was accepted by a majority of the lodges.[3] With the return to depression conditions however, the lodges had more pressing problems with which to deal. The Monthly Circular continued to be published until the resignation of Mr. Straker in 1935, when it was

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1 N.M.A. Monthly Circular November 1918.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 16th, 18th, 19th, 1918.

3 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 19th, 22nd, 1923.

replaced by the Agents' Quarterly Report.

If the Monthly Circular was designed to present a viewpoint which was difficult to obtain elsewhere, in published form, the officials of the Association were not slow in underlining that a working class consciousness could become sharpened and more informed by subscribing to the one labour daily newspaper, the Daily Herald. As we have already noted when examining the Durham Miners' Association, the Herald could never gain a sufficient circulation to ease its financial difficulties and was continually making appeals to other labour organisations for help. The Northumberland Miners' Association donated five hundred pounds to the Herald at the beginning of 1920, but the deterioration of its own financial circumstances precluded further gifts in our period,[1] although a cheque was sent to meet the Northumberland share of the M.F.G.B. levy in 1923.[2] The Executive Committee and the Monthly Circulars together with individual advertising campaigns were used as media to exhort the membership to buy the Daily Herald but little impact appears to have been made on the membership. Nevertheless, the Association persisted in its efforts on behalf of the Herald throughout the period.

The Association was never backward in reminding the membership of the struggles of the past, perhaps a necessary precaution in the perilous times after 1918. Eight hundred copies of the life of the

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes January 22nd, 1920. N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes April 3rd, 1922.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes September 17th, 1923.

Right Honourable Thomas Burt, by Cox Meech, were purchased, at a cost of threepence halfpenny each and put on sale to the membership.[1] The Executive Committee also instructed Mr. Straker to gather material for a history of the Association, and actually went so far as to provide him with clerical assistance in his work as General Secretary in order to enable him to work on the history.[2] Unfortunately there does not appear to be any record of what happened to this project. It was certainly never published.

The only mention of political activities in the rules of the Northumberland Miners' Association occurred under Rule 3, section b, Objects : 'To provide and maintain a political fund under the Trades Union Acts of 1871 and 1913'.[3] No mention there of support for any particular political group. But in fact, ever since the decision of the M.F.G.B. in 1909 merging the miners' M.P.'s with those of the Labour Representation Committees, the Northumberland Miners' Association had expended considerable effort in the support of the emerging Labour Party. By 1918 the Association was awaiting with some eagerness the

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes December 19th,1919
Meech, Thomas Cox, From Mine to Ministry; the Life Story of the Right Hon. Thomas Burt M.P. (Darlington, 1908)

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 3rd, 1922.
N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 18th, 1923.
N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes February 17th, 19th, 1923.

3 N.M.A. Rules (1920).

first General Election for eight years. But it was not prepared to lavish the political fund on lost causes. In March 1918 the Executive Committee decided that before asking local Labour Representation Committees[1] to adopt the Association's nominees as Parliamentary candidates they would require the local L.R.C.'s to answer a questionnaire. The Association wanted to know the population of the constituency, the total number of electors, the number of coal miners, the number of working class electors, whether there was an active political organisation in the constituency, and the general prospects of a Labour victory.[2] On the basis of the replies, they would decide which seats to fight.[3] The decision was partly taken for them however when the M.F.G.B. agreed to sponsor three seats in Northumberland, but the three still had to be chosen. The decision was not too difficult. Morpeth and Wansbeck had for long returned the miners' candidate and the third constituency chosen was Hexham.[4]

Before the 1918 General Election however, the Association was involved in a dispute with the Labour Party, following the death of Mr. Charles Fenwick, M.P. for Wansbeck.[5] Mr. Fenwick's death of course, precipitated

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[1] The Labour Party did not officially assume that name until June 1918.

[2] N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes March 18th, 1918.

[3] The L.R.C.'s thus circularised were Hexham, Morpeth, Newcastle, Wallsend and Wansbeck.

[4] N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 1st, 1918.

[5] For a brief biography of Mr. Fenwick see Chapter II above, Note 3, p.43.

a by-election which the National Executive of the Labour Party refused to fight on the grounds that the political truce entered into at the beginning of the war was still operative. This argument between the political groups in Parliament had given each party the right to fill any vacancy in any constituency during the war with a member belonging to the same party as that to which the previous member had belonged. The National Executive claimed that Fenwick had been a Liberal. The Association criticised this decision on two counts; first, that Fenwick was in reality a 'Lib-Lab' and that in consequence Labour supporters had as much right as Liberals to choose the next incumbent, and second that Wansbeck was a miners' seat in which the Association had the support of the M.F.G.B. It is an interesting example of the problems surrounding Lib-Lab agreements. In the event, the Association with M.F.G.B. support decided to go ahead and fight the seat, and Mr. E. Edwards was defeated by five hundred and forty seven votes in a straight fight with the Liberal Party candidate.[1]

The General Election took place on December 14th, 1918, and in addition to the three seats sponsored by the M.F.G.B. the Association had also agreed to finance the candidature of Mr. J. Chapman[2], a member

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 6th, 1918
The figures were Ald. R. Mason (Liberal) 5814
Mr. E. Edwards (Labour) 5267
Liberal majority 547
The major platforms of the two candidates concerned the prospects of peace. The Liberal stood for peace via the knock out blow and Mr. Edwards for peace by negotiation. He expected to be heavily defeated.

2 Chapman, John, b.1880 - Started in the pit at Dinnington Colliery in 1892; Member of the Labour Party since 1906; First elected to Newcastle City Council in November 1912; Created Alderman in 1930; Checkweighman at Benwell 1926-1939; M.B.E. 1957. Chairman of Newcastle City Labour Party during World War II.

of the Association's Wages Committee, who had been adopted by the Wallsend L.R.C. as their candidate. The 1918 election was a triumph for those candidates who supported the Lloyd George Coalition Government which had 'won the war'. The results in Northumberland were particularly disappointing for Labour. Of the seats contested, only Morpeth was won, by Mr. J. Cairns.[1]

Mr. Cairns' election raised an interesting and important issue. Under the new rules of the Association, revised at the beginning of

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[1] The full results were :

HEXHAM	Brown, Capt. D.C., (Coalition)	7,763	
	Weir, W., (Lab.)	4,168	
	Beaumont, Maj. W.C., (Lib.)	3,948	
	Maj.	3,595	Total Electorate 25,431
MORPETH	Cairns, J., (Lab.)	7,677	
	Thornborough, F.C., (Coalition)	7,140	
	Mears, C.H., (Unionist)	4,320	
	Newton, Capt., (D.S. & S.)	2,729	
	Allison, Maj., (N.D. & C.)	511	
	Maj.	537	Total Electorate 39,773
WALLSEND	Simm, T., (Coalition)	10,246	
	Chapman, J., (Lab.)	6,835	
	Robertson, J.M., (Lib.)	3,047	
	Maj.	3,411	Total Electorate 36,739
WANSBECK	Mason, Ald. R., (Coalition)	14,065	
	Edwards, E., (Lab.)	10,666	
	Maj.	3,399	Total Electorate 42,750

Notice the small numbers voting.
Mr. W. Straker, in his Monthly Circular for January 1919, considered the election a defeat for Labour and that only the industrial weapon was left.

1920, no Agent, elected an M.P., could remain an Agent. Thomas Burt had remained in union office as well as being an M.P. for over thirty years. The change in rule may well have reflected a feeling that the dual function could not be performed adequately. Mr. Cairns was given the opportunity to state his views before a Special Council Meeting. He said that he did not wish to be cut off from the Association after a relationship lasting thirty four years but that if he had to make a choice, he would go to Parliament as he felt that he could best serve the interests of the Northumberland miners there. It was eventually decided not to apply the new rule to members sitting at the date of the registration of the rules.[1]

But it was the state of the political fund which governed the extent and scope of the Association's political activity. The fund consisted of a contribution of one shilling per member per annum. That this was considered insufficient was a view not confined to Northumberland and in 1919 the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. decided that it should be raised from one to two shillings.[2] This doubling of the amount which the Association could spend on political activities gave to the Association the opportunity to do two things which the need for economy had previously prevented. It could now pay the salary of three full-time political organisers for the three constituencies where M.F.G.B.

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1 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes October 11th, 1920.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 17th, 19th, 20th, 1919.
N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes January 27th, 28th, May 12th, 26th and December 29th, 1919.

sponsored candidates stood.[1] It could also pay an additional two pence per annum per member contributing to the political fund, to each L.R.C., to be used for municipal purposes.[2] It also made grants to the Tynemouth and Newcastle L.R.C.'s.[3]

A combination of these factors, together with the changed political and economic situation in the country as a whole, probably contributed to the Labour Party doing much better in the three miners' seats in Northumberland in the General Election of 1922. Mr. Cairns increased his majority at Morpeth, the Conservative victory margin at Hexham was reduced, and a new candidate, Mr. George H. Warne, won back

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1 Hexham, Morpeth and Wansbeck. The salary was £250 p.a. There had previously been one organiser who had concerned himself with the constituencies of Morpeth and Wansbeck. The Association stipulated that each organiser should send a copy of his report to the Association at the same time as to his L.R.C., that the Association was to have two representatives on each of the L.R.C.'s; and that each organiser act also as Secretary to the L.R.C.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes December 29th, 1919.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes February 22nd, 1920.

Wansbeck.[1]

But the relative affluence of the Political Fund did not last. The first sign of a new period of austerity came in May 1923, when it was decided to dispense with the full-time political agents and appoint three part-time ones at a wage of two pounds per week.[2] In the same month, the Executive Committee refused to give a donation to the Newcastle Labour Party, who wished to run a candidate in the Berwick constituency, due to the heavy political liabilities which they already had in Hexham, Morpeth and Wansbeck.[3] They also told the Wansbeck

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[1] Details of the results were:

HEXHAM	Clifton Brown, Maj. D., (Con.)	9,369
	Finney, Lieut, V., (Ind. Lib.)	6,486
	Shield, G.W., (Lab.)	5,050
	Majority	2,883
MORPETH	Cairns, J., (Lab.)	15,026
	Thornborough, F.C., (Ind. Lib.)	10,007
	Short, L.S., (Con.)	6,045
	Majority	5,019
WANSBECK	Warne, G.H., (Lab.)	16,032
	White, R., (Unionist)	11,149
	Neal, Maj. J., (Nat. Lib.)	5,192
	Davey, M., (Ind. Lib.)	3,134
	Majority	4,883

Warne, George Henry (1881-1928). born at Cramlington in Northumberland, he began work as a trapper boy in Shankhouse pit at the age of twelve. He moved to Woodhorn Colliery in 1897 and there became a hewer, at which job he remained until his election as M.P. Was elected successively Council delegate, President and Compensation Secretary of the Woodhurn branch, and a member of the N.M.A. Executive Committee in 1909 and 1921. He also served on the Wages and Joint Committees. He joined the I.L.P. in 1905 and helped to form the Wansbeck Divisional Labour Party, of which he was Secretary until 1918, when Ashington including Woodhorn was transferred to the Morpeth Division. He became President of the Morpeth Divisional Labour Party and was nominated as candidate in 1922. He regained the seat for Labour, holding it in the elections of 1923 and 1924. A Junior Lord of the Treasury in the first Labour Government.

[2] N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 18th, 1923.

[3] N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 23rd, 1923.

L.R.C. who had asked for a sum over and above their usual grant, that any balance from the political fund, after all normal expenses, would be used to pay off the affiliation fees of those members then in arrears.[1] Short time and unemployment had yet again had serious financial repercussions. Yet this curb on political spending did not disturb the grip on the two miners' seats which the Association had built up. Following the death of Mr. J. Cairns in 1923, Mr. R. Smillie, formerly President of the M.F.G.B. was adopted as candidate for Morpeth and he not only won the by-election, but completed a hat-trick of victories in the General Elections of 1923 and 1924, increasing his majority on each occasion.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Details. The By-Election

Smillie, R., (Lab.)	20,053
Thornborough, F.C., (Lib.)	13,087
Lab. majority	6,966

General Election December 6th, 1923

Smillie, R., (Lab.)	16,902
Dodd, J., (Lib.)	9,411
Lab. majority	7,491

General Election October 29th, 1924

Smillie, R., (Lab.)	19,248
Ward, Irene (Con.)	10,828
Dodd, J., (Lib.)	3,805
Lab. majority	8,420

Mr. Warne consolidated his position at Wansbeck, though with more difficulty.[1] Nevertheless, the Hexham Labour Party were informed at the beginning of 1924 that the Association could not agree to run a miner there at the next election, and that the part time organisers' salary of £2 per week would be discontinued after the end of March 1924.[2]

In local government politics, the Association was always keen to encourage the members in active participation in the Labour cause. This encouragement was given practical form by an Executive Committee resolution passed in 1924, that 'each County Councillor who is a member of our Association and of the Labour Party, shall be allowed, on an average, one return railway fare per week from his home to Newcastle. He shall also be allowed 2/6 for expenses confined to each such journey. The herein mentioned payments to be paid out of our Central Political

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1 Details.

General Election December 6th, 1923

Warne, G.H., (Lab.)	18,583
Phillipson, H.,(Con)	14,131
Lab. majority	4,452

General Election October 29th, 1924

Warne, G.H., (Lab.)	21,159
Middleton, Mrs.,(Con)	18,875
Lab. majority	2,284

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes January 26th, February 4th, 18th 1924. The Association did eventually relent to the extent of a gift of £20 to the Hexham Labour Party's Political fund.

Fund, previous to the allocation of that Fund to the different constituencies covered by our Association, according to membership.'[1]

The economic position of the coal trade, unemployment, the financial position of the Association: these were the major problems with which the Association grappled in the inter-war period. There was one other, however, which in retrospect appears to have occupied a disproportionate amount of time and energy, the question of non-unionism. Organisation is strength, and the maintainance of a strong trades union requires vigilance and a continual stream of persuasion directed at those workmen yet outside the organisation. Certainly before 1926, a casual observer would not have thought that many mineworkers remained unorganised. Yet this question of mineworkers not in the union was frequently the subject of debate at both Executive Committee and Council levels. As early as May 1922, a Special Council Meeting passed a resolution pledging united action against non-unionism, and the Coal Owners' Association were asked to grant an interview to discuss measures by which non-union men might be forced to join the union.[2] The owners' promise to 'give all reasonable assistance' was too obscure for the Executive Committee, who after issuing a circular on the subject, stipulated that if any workman remained outside the Association, after

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes July 18th, 1924.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes June 20th, 1922; N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes May 23rd, 1922.

having had the circular, liberty would be given to any branch, according to rule, to take strike action in an attempt to persuade non-union labour to join the Association.[1] A further appeal was made the following year but coupled with a warning that there were no funds available to support strike action.[2] In this context therefore, there was little the Association could do when they were once again informed by the owners that they, the owners, were not prepared to employ only those workmen belonging to recognised trades unions.[3]

The apparent concern of the Association with non-unionism might imply that large numbers of workmen were involved. What figures there are suggest that this was not so. The collieries at Lambley and Scotswood (Montague) were prepared to strike in order to persuade three and eleven men respectively to join the Association.[4] Moreover, although a campaign against non-unionism was run in the autumn of 1925 by the officials of the Association, a resolution from the Crofton Lodge to the Council Meeting of February 1926, requesting the Executive Committee to prepare yet another scheme to combat non-unionism, 'which is becoming

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes August 11th, 29th, 1922; N.M.A. Circular September 5th, 1922.
The Circular phrased the question to non-unionists; what would the workers' position be without unions? It would mean lower wages and no help over compensation. Union work cost money, yet non-unionists contributed nothing. Contributions were only 6d per week. 'The Coal Owners have expressed their sympathy with our Association in this matter and have authorised us to say so. In their opinion it is in the interest of the Coal trade, owing to collective bargaining, that both sides should be as strongly united as possible. If strong measures are resorted to, you are to blame. Drastic action will be injurious to all. In the interests of yourselves and your families, join your union at once.'

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes May 18th, 1923.

3 Letter from the Secretary of the Northumberland and Durham Coal Owners' Association, May 9th, 1923.

4 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes October 19th, 1924; March 26th, 1925.

rife throughout the county', was withdrawn, after the Executive Committee had pointed out that such a resolution might create a false impression among the membership.[1] Unions near to achieving closed shop conditions may well be more sensitive to sectors of non-unionism rather than complacently accepting what has already been achieved.[2] This particular problem was to be made more serious following on the 1926 dispute.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the Association's relations with other unions during this period was the lack of interest shown in working more closely with Durham. At the half yearly Council meeting in 1918 an attempt had been made to arrange a conference with representatives from Durham with the object of taking united action to establish increased basis wages, but this was heavily defeated.[3] Trades union autonomy was the most blessed of gifts.

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes September 17th, October 19th, 1925; N.M.A. Circular October 20th, 1925; N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes February 20th, 22nd, 1926.

2 For a detailed discussion of this question of the closed shop see McCarthy, W.E.J., The Closed Shop in Britain (Oxford, 1964).

3 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes November 16th, 18th, 19th, 1918. This diffidence may go some way towards explaining the reluctance shown by the Durham Miners' Association in 1926 to send a representative to a Strike Committee whose headquarters was in Newcastle.

Save for this, the records of the Association during the period before 1926 only mention other unions in the context of complaints. The first was by the General Workers' Union concerning miners who had done farm work during the coal stoppage of 1920; the second by the Musicians' Union who accused some members of the Association of accepting theatrical and musical engagements at less than trades union rates; and finally, the Association itself accused the General Labourers' Union of poaching some of its own Ashington members who had got into arrears with their contributions.[1] Such bread and butter issues were swallowed up by the terrible stoppage of 1926 which was to dominate Association affairs for a decade after.

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[1] N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes February 3rd, April 23rd, October 23rd, 1920; N.M.A. Monthly Circular April 1923.

APPENDIX I

The chart below shows the number of persons employed in the Coal Industry in Northumberland, 1920-1931. It should be remembered that there were seasonal fluctuations in employment in the coal mines and that these figures refer, in all cases, to December of the year concerned.

YEAR	BELOW GROUND	ABOVE GROUND	FEMALE	TOTAL
1920	47,537	14,906	142	62,585
1921	46,092	12,593	104	58,789
1922	47,964	13,066	108	61,138
1923	50,668	12,231	122	64,021
1924	50,745	13,078	56	63,879
1925	44,088	10,892	48	55,028
1926	39,832	10,402	-	50,234
1927	36,517	9,609	40	46,166
1928	37,033	9,441	38	46,512
1929	39,225	9,943	-	49,168
1930	35,823	9,610	37	45,470
1931	32,722	9,075	-	41,797

Source: Annual Reports of H.M. Inspector of Mines and the Secretary of State for Mines, 1920-1931.

APPENDIX II

Membership of the Northumberland Miners' Association, 1918-1931. The figures are averages based upon the month of December in each case. Source: Annual Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, together with Minutes, Reports and Circulars of the Northumberland Miners' Association.

YEAR	AVERAGE TOTAL MEMBERSHIP
1918	32,340
1919	43,832
1920	46,081
1921	42,960
1922	38,149
1923	43,464
1924	43,988
1925	43,482
1926	40,081
1927	34,850
1928	31,872
1929	34,126
1930	31,245
1931	29,889

CHAPTER VI

The Government Organisation

As we have seen in Chapter III, below, Government preparations were thus almost completed by the late autumn of 1925. Northumberland and Durham were grouped together in the Government's decagonal division of the country under the title of the Northern Division, with headquarters in Newcastle. The Civil Commissioner in charge of the area was to have been Lieutenant Colonel J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon, M.C., M.P., but at the last minute he was replaced by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood. The details regarding the personel of the Government's organisation were made public on Saturday, May 1st, that is to say, before the negotiations had finally broken down. This may appear a cynical, if not a sinister, commentary on the progress of the negotiations; in fact, the Government were taking no chances. Six years of preparation might mean nothing if the public were not given the outline of the scheme before the emergency actually began.

On May 1st, both the Newcastle daily newspapers, the North Mail and Chronicle and the Journal and North Star, reported the Government preparations and printed lists of the Government officers who would be responsible for the maintenance of essential services in the Northern Division.[1] The Civil Commissioner's Chief Assistant was to be Mr.

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[1] Newcastle Chronicle, May 1st, 1926; Newcastle Journal, May 1st, 1926.

T.N.B. Bratterbury, employed in the North East as the Chief Inspector for the Ministry of Health. Other appointments included :-

Deputy Chief Assistant	Mr. E.F. Davis
Coal Officer	Mr. G.C. Robinson
Finance Officer	Mr. H.W. Magrath, M.C.
Food Officer	Maj.-Gen. Sir R.A. Kerr-Montgomery K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.
Military Liaison Officer	Maj. W.A.T. Barstow, D.S.O., M.C.
Police Liaison Officer	Dr. J.B. Wright, C.B.E., LL.D.
Postal Representative	Mr. C. Creighton
Railway Representative	Mr. J.L. Naisby
Road Commissioner	Mr. R.S. Moon
Water Transport - District Committee	Mr. T.E. Brown

The headquarters of the organisation was to be situated at 81 St. Mary's Place, Newcastle and in addition to containing, within his sphere of influence, all the municipal authorities of Northumberland and Durham, the Civil Commissioner was also to exercise his authority over several local government bodies in the North Riding of Yorkshire.[1] The Government looked for the co-operation of all the municipal authorities of the area. The Ministry of Health Circular No. 636. to local authorities, pointed out that Civil Commissioners and their staffs should be constantly in touch with local authorities during any emergency, and the hope was expressed that one centre would be used for the enrollment of volunteers for the work of maintaining both national and local services. The circular also pointed out that in an emergency it might be necessary to ration coal supplies, and local

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1 These were, Middlesbrough County Borough and Rural District Councils; Redcar Borough Council; Richmond Borough and Rural District Councils; Thornaby-on-Tees Borough Council; the Urban District Councils of Eston, Gisborough, Hinderwell, Loftus, Saltburn, Skelton and Brotton, and Croft; and the Rural District Councils of Gisborough, Reath, Startforth and Stokesley.

authorities would have the responsibility of regulating the consumption with a Coal Emergency Officer and a local Coal Traders' Committee. It was foreseen that the maintenance of law and order might be one of the most important tasks. Although the organisation and control of the Police and Special Constabulary rested with the Police Authorities and the Chief Constable, the local authorities could co-operate in the enrollment of Special Constables by referring enquiries to the Police Station. Local authorities were not expected to undertake the distribution of food, nor to be responsible for shipping, railway or postal communications, docks or harbours.[1] Moreover, permanent local government officers such as Town Clerks and City Engineers, were given posts on the Civil Commissioner's Headquarters staff, or on one of the local volunteer service committees.

If the co-operation of local authorities was important, it might not always be obtainable, in those areas where local councils had elected Labour majorities. This possibility may have been in the minds of those who had planned the emergency organisation so as to limit the actual area in which local authorities were expected to act. On the other hand, some delegation of powers was obviously essential. In the North East, the question is especially interesting due to the strong labour representation on some local government bodies. It seems however that if the Government did have any fears on this issue, they were not justified by events. None of the Borough and County Borough Councils

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[1] Ministry of Health Circular 636, November 20th, 1925.

at Darlington, Durham, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland, Tynemouth and West Hartlepool were controlled by Labour. The Newcastle City Council had a large anti-labour majority and complied with all the Government's suggestions. The concert room in the Town Hall was placed at the Government's disposal as a volunteer recruiting office.[1] A Coal Emergency Committee was set up, and it was agreed that the Town Clerk and the City Engineer should act as the local food and Road Officers respectively. In addition, a committee, consisting of six members, was set up to advise the Lord Mayor during the Emergency.[2] Of the larger urban centres in the North East, only Gateshead had a labour majority on the Council in May 1926, albeit only a slender one. The actions of this body amounted to a show of defiance rather than an organised attempt to interfere with the running of the Government's Emergency organisation. This defiance consisted of a refusal to take any action as authorised under Circular 636 or the Coal (Emergency) Directions. However, by the casting vote of the Mayor, it was agreed that the Town Clerk should be authorised to act as the representative of the Local Emergency Food Offices in the Borough.[3]

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1 Bookings were to operate normally, so long as the Government's requirements were not interfered with!

2 Proceedings and Reports, Newcastle City Council, General Committee Minute Book, May 3rd, 1926.

3 Proceedings of the Gateshead Town Council, May 5th, 1926. On May 26th following a warning from the Ministry of Mines that the powers and duties of the Council under the Coal (Emergency) Directions, would be delegated to a representative of the Secretary of State for Mines if Ministry directions were not complied with, the original decision was reversed.

The smaller local government authorities have left little material relevant to their activities during the Nine Days. In many cases it is more than likely that the councils would not have met. Many of these in the North East would probably be controlled by Labour majorities, but it is difficult to come up with any reliable statistics. As we have seen, Party politics was still something of a novelty in local government, (although education had for long been a 'party' issue), so much so, that it is not until 1927 that the Times begins a 'state of the parties' feature following local government elections, and it is not easy to discover, from an equally reticent local press, the exact party composition of local authorities. The local press did contain some account of local government activity in the North East. For example the Newcastle Chronicle of May 7th, reported that the Town Council at Jarrow had refused to provide facilities for the recruitment of volunteers. The reason given by the Councillors of Jarrow was that the T.U.C. had offered to maintain essential services and had been rebuffed by the Government.[1] However, one Urban District Council with a Labour majority was that at Blaydon-on-Tyne, which included within its boundaries the Chopwell area of North-West Durham, and there the Council did act positively to support the Strikers. When the Circular 636 was received, the Blaydon Urban District Council, dominated by a number of militant Labour supporters including the Chairman, Henry Bolton, passed a resolution strongly condemning the circular, the object of which was 'to defeat the efforts put forward by organised labour to resist wage cuts and a worsening of conditions.'

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[1] Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926.

The Council refused to 'be a party to a strike-breaking scheme designed to assist the Iron Heel of capitalism and to bring disaster to our own class.'[1] Consequently, when the General Strike began, the Council refused to appoint a Coal Officer or put into effect any of the other Coal Emergency directions.[2] More interestingly, the Housing and Plans Committee of the Council, at a meeting on May 10th, agreed to the use of the typewriter and other apparatus by the Trades Council for the period of the dispute.[3] This is the one known instance, of direct assistance given by a Labour controlled Council to a local Strike Committee or Trades Council in the North East. There may, of course, have been others, although if the controversy which this one aroused is a guide, it is unlikely that the details would have escaped the North Eastern Press.[4] Although a sample of four is by no means a representative one, it would be very surprising if the vast majority of the local government bodies did not assist the Government in whatever ways they could. Some councils did pass resolutions calling for

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1 Proceedings of the Blaydon Urban District Council, Volume 20, December 15th, 1925.

2 Ibid., Volume 21, May 18th, June 8th, 1926. The Council continued to refuse, in spite of threats from the Ministry of Mines.

3 Proceedings of the Blaydon Urban District Council, Volume 12, Housing and Plans Committee, May 10th, 1926.

4 Interview with Councillor J.T. Stephenson, July 10th, 1963. Mr. Stephenson, a Councillor of long standing, recalled that the Chairman of the Council, Mr. Bolton, ordered all those permanent local government workers who might be antagonistic to the Strike to take their annual holiday when it began.

a resumption of negotiations.[1] The General Strike came just too soon to be affected by the great Labour take over of local authorities in the North East which was a feature of the next decade. We must now return to consider in more detail the Government organisation and in particular the way in which the police were utilised.

Once it became known that a General Strike would in fact take place, the local press published details of where volunteers could enrol, together with exhortations to people to do so.[2] Centres were opened at Alnwick, Bishop Auckland, Blyth, Darlington, Durham, Middlesbrough, South Shields, Stockton, Sunderland, Tynemouth and West Hartlepool. Each of these centres was administered by its own Volunteer Service Committee, made up of prominent local citizens who were not, one supposes, of known labour sympathies. These committees were organised on almost exactly similar lines to the main Emergency Committee in Newcastle and had their own Food, Road, Coal, Finance and Railway Officers. The local Road Haulage Committee chairmen were also represented on these committees. It is not known precisely how these committees functioned, nor what kind of relationship existed between individual committees and the Newcastle headquarters.[3]

How many people volunteered? At the end of the dispute, Sir Kingsley Wood claimed that about 20,000 persons had volunteered in the

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1 Among them Ashington Urban District, Stockton Borough and Newcastle City Councils.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 4th, 1926.

3 It has proved impossible to discover any details of the work of the Volunteers Service Committees, the Government refusing to permit what material they have retained on the subject to be consulted.

whole of the Northern Division. He also said that 12,000 special constables had been enrolled.[1] Earlier, on May 12th, it had been reported that of the 18,000 people who had volunteered for service up to that date, only 1,000 had actually been given jobs.[2] This is probably some indication of the remarkably few jobs in which volunteer labour was able to replace men engaged in the dispute in the North East. Obviously transport services could be 'blacklegged' more easily than almost any other work; and many people volunteered their motor vehicles as well as themselves, but in the mining areas, the effectiveness of such activity would be limited by the large scale picketing which went on in many districts.[3] Unloading at the docks was another channel into which volunteer labour could be made to flow, but again, the numbers needed would not be large due to the dearth of shipping in all of the North Eastern ports. As the Chairman of the Newcastle Volunteer Service Committee explained on May 7th, general labourers and motor drivers were most in demand, and preference would be given to those who worked normally at those jobs.[4] This, of course, was an attempt at strike breaking. It would be interesting to discover just how many strikers did in fact take volunteer jobs during the dispute; all the evidence suggests that it is unlikely to have been many. An even more pointed appeal was made to the unemployed on the

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 17th, 1926.

2 Ibid. May 12th, 1926.

3 See Chapter VII, below.

4 Newcastle Chronicle, May 8th, 1926.

same day, in a statement to the Press made by Sir Kingsley Wood.[1] From the figures which were released at the time, it would appear that those who signed on as Special Constables, saw most of the action during the General Strike. On May 7th, the Chief Recruiting Officer for the Government organisation together with the Chairman of the Northumberland and Newcastle branch of the O.M.S., issued an appeal for more special constables, in which they pointed out that being a volunteer did not preclude a man from also registering as a special constable.[2] According to the Chronicle by May 10th, the mounted section was full 'for the present', the majority of its personnel being ex-Army officers.[3] A total of 1,500 Special Constables were enrolled in the City of Newcastle during the General Strike. They were organised in eight sections. The mounted section had a strength of 44 men and 22 horses and did duty in two reliefs. The Light Car section contained 350 men and 170 cars and was used in the main for 'speedy supervision and conveying'. There were forty men in a heavy lorry section, together with 18 vehicles which were used to provide a rapid transport for large

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., May 7th, 1926.

[3] Ibid., May 10th, 1926.

numbers of police. 80 men and 80 machines made up the motor cycle section, and their duties consisted of despatch carrying, patrolling the city, and co-ordinating the various units. 60 men were used for point duty. An Intelligence section of 8 men spent their time arranging protection for convoys and ascertaining the freedom or otherwise, of routes in country areas. Twelve men helped with the registration and issuing of equipment and clothing, and the remaining 910 formed a Foot Section. These men were maintained in reserve at the Newcastle United Football Club's ground on the Gallowgate in the city centre.[1] They were to provide reinforcements for crisis areas. They also provided guards for certain vulnerable points, thus relieving the First Police Reserve. Only 487 out of the 1,500 were uniformed. The Chief Constable's report unfortunately gives no indication of the actual use which was made of either the 'specials' or the regular force, which in Newcastle was 390 strong. In addition, 33 members of the First Police Reserve were employed from periods of six to fourteen days.[2] The total cost of the extra police services incurred during the General Strike was £1,029:11:11d.[3]

It is not known how efficiently these men functioned, nor, for example, whether 1,890 regular and special policemen would have been sufficient had the dispute lasted into another week. The Chief

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1 The Newcastle United Football Club wanted a payment of £50 for the use of St. James's Park. The City Council tried, unsuccessfully, to knock them down to £25. Proceedings and Minutes, Newcastle City Council, Watch Committee Minute Book No. 16, September 10th, 1926.

2 Ibid, April 23rd, 1926; May 21st and June 2nd, 1926.

3 Ibid, July 16th, 1926.

Constable was certainly satisfied with the work which the 'specials' had done, because at a Council meeting on July 22nd, he recommended that a permanent force should be set up. In spite of Labour criticism, his proposal was accepted.[1]

The Government organisation, in the North East as elsewhere, was reinforced by the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, which on the commencement of the strike, handed its membership over to the Government. To this even more meagrely documented organisation, we must now turn.

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[1] Proceedings and Minutes, Newcastle City Council, July 22nd, 1926.

The O.M.S.

Although the Government were prepared, if necessary, to resist a general strike in May 1926, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies had not been able to create a viable organisation in the two north-eastern counties before April 1926. This lack of preparation, at least in this area, placed it upon a rather similar footing to the various Labour organisations.

The O.M.S. had been formed as a national body in September 1925 in order to organise those citizens who might wish to assist in the running of certain essential services, should a general strike take place. Its President was a former Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, and its Council included several public men who had at one time held Government positions including Lord Ranfurly, Lord Jellicoe, Lord Falkland, Sir Rennell Rodd, Sir Alexander Duff, and Sir Frances Lloyd. Although independent of the Government, it had been welcomed by the Home Secretary, as we have seen, and it hastened to dampen trades union suspicions by pointing out its sympathy with any 'constitutional' action to bring about a move equitable distribution of the nation's wealth.

Its first appearance in the North East was in January 1926. The Newcastle Journal reported on January 7th, that the work of setting up the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies in the two counties had begun, and that Captain A.E. Brooks had been appointed local secretary for Newcastle, with an address at Loraine Place. The article went on

to set out the usual assurances with regard to the right to strike, and requested volunteers to present themselves, especially for duty as special constables, railway and train workers. drivers of motor vehicles, and messengers.[1] The Northern Federation of the Industrial Alliance of Employers and Employed was approached by the O.M.S. with a view to co-operation between the two bodies, but the Alliance's annual meeting, while not in disagreement with the objects of the O.M.S., thought its policy rather outside their scope.[2] A more severe blow was the refusal of the Durham Coal Owners' Association, either to donate any funds to the O.M.S. or to advise colliery managements to support the organisation.[3] Of course, neither of these decisions precluded individual members of either organisation from subscribing to the O.M.S., and undoubtedly some did so, but the failure to gain the unqualified and open assistance of those who theoretically ought to have been their most solid supporters, added to the difficulties of the O.M.S., especially in Durham.

In fact, nothing appears to have been constructed in an organisational sense until April 1926. A private meeting, with admission by ticket only, was convened, with the help of the Durham Municipal and County Federation, for April 10th, 1926.[4] It was held in the Town

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1 Newcastle Journal, January 7th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, February 2nd, 1926.

3 Durham Coal Owners' Association, Executive Committee Minutes, February 8th, 1926.

4 After the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry had reported.

Hall at Durham City and presided over by Lord Barnard. Sir James Rennell Rodd represented the Council of the O.M.S., and Captain W.J. Matthews, on the staff of the Durham and Northumberland area, was also present.[1] Over sixty prominent local men were also there, most of them concerned with industry and commerce. The Marquis of Londonderry and Lord Joicey, both large coal owners, regretted that they could not be present. The meeting was addressed by Sir James Rennell Rodd, who outlined the aims and objects of O.M.S. He underlined the non-party nature of the organisation, and answered several questions on the progress which the organisation had made in other parts of the country. A resolution was then unanimously passed approving the aims of the O.M.S. and pledging the meeting 'to support and further them by all possible means.' A County Committee was appointed, with power to co-opt, consisting of twenty eight members, and most of the audience completed enrollment forms.

The County Committee's first meeting was held in the Mayor's Chamber of the Durham Town Hall on Thursday, April 15th; barely two weeks before the period of the Government subsidy was due to end. Although this did not allow much time for organisation, it at least ensued that they would have a two weeks' start over any labour movement organisation. Only the Government, it would appear, gave themselves

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[1] The Dillon Papers, Box L to O (1926). This collection, in the main consisting of letters between Lord Londonderry and his Agent, Mr. Malcolm Dillon, is located in the Durham County Record Office.

ample time in which to prepare for the emergency of 1926.[1] The meeting was taken up largely by an exposé of the organisational system previously worked out for Northumberland. Captain Matthews recommended a similar system for County Durham. It was agreed to form a working executive of six members drawn from the existing County Committee. District Committees were in the process of being formed in the boroughs of Gateshead, South Shields, Hartlepool, Stockton and Darlington, and each of these would have a representative on the County Committee whose headquarters were to be Durham City. Captain Matthews emphasised the need for a strong financial committee to be formed, and the County Committee unanimously resolved to send a letter appealing for funds and assistance to all the principle firms and residents in the County. The aims and objects of the organisation were to be publicised by poster and in the Press, and members of the County Committee were to encourage the registration of volunteers in the districts in which they were resident. Mr. N. Prest, of Birtley, had agreed to become Honorary Secretary to the County organisation. What its financial position was, and how many volunteers were enrolled have not been discovered. All that can be remarked, with regard to the financial backing available, is that only a single idustrial company had replied to the appeal for funds by April 26th.[2]

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[1] There is no evidence of the kind of preparation about which Crook writes of, for example, drivers being trained on factory premises at weekends. See Crook, W.H. op. cit. pp. 300-301.

[2] The Dillon Papers, Box L to O (1926). Letter from Mr. N. Prest to Mr. M. Dillon, April 26th, 1926.

Although it would appear that the O.M.S. in Northumberland managed an earlier start,[1] no documentary evidence has been found.

The Newcastle Journal, a firm supporter of self-help in any form, reported under the headline 'What Women can do for the O.M.S.', a meeting which took place in Newcastle on April 15th, sponsored by Mrs. Bean, the O.M.S. Women's organiser for the County of Northumberland and the City of Newcastle. The meeting was addressed, among other people, by Admiral Slater, Chairman of the Working Committee for the County and Mr. Wilfred Burt, the son of the renowned Thomas Burt, one of the founders of the Northumberland Miners' Association. It was stated at this meeting that the kind of organisation of O.M.S. forces required for a city like Newcastle was a series of district divisions, each having its own vice-chairman and committee of workers, together with a long list of members ready for service should an emergency arise. A number of ladies were nominated to serve upon the Newcastle Executive Committee, and the hope was expressed that a womens' branch of the organisation might be formed in the area.[2] Several prominent local industrialists, including Lord Joicey, Sir. G.B. Hunter, Viscount Allendale and Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland, were among a list of vice-presidents of the joint committee of the O.M.S. for Newcastle and Northumberland which the Journal published, together with an interview with Sir Alexander Leith,[3] the organisation's president, on April 12th, Leith

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1 See above p. 233.

2 Newcastle Journal, April 16th, 1926.

3 Leith, Lt. Col., Sir Alexander (1869-1956). First Baronet, created 1919; Director of various public companies; fought in France and at Gallipoli; Food Commissioner for Northumberland and Durham, 1917-1919; High Sheriff of Northumberland, 1923-1924; Chairman, Northern Counties Area, Conservative Party, 1930-1936.

confessed that Newcastle and Northumberland were 'rather late' in setting up their O.M.S. organisation, compared with other parts of the country, but he was confident that a reliable tool could be forged.[1] In a similar interview for the Newcastle Chronicle seven days later, Sir Alexander gave details of the type of recruits needed. These included officers and other ranks of the Territorial Army and members of sports clubs, whom he hoped would enrol en bloc. He hoped that employers would encourage their employees to join O.M.S.[2] The non-political nature of the organisation was again stressed, as was its firm adherence to 'normal' manifestations of collective bargaining. As the organisation did not get under way until late April, and as it received what can only be described as tentative support from several of the leading industrial organisations in the North East, the value of the O.M.S. in terms of numbers of volunteers registered was probably not very great. It was useful in reminding patriotic citizens that their services might be needed at the beginning of May. It may also have helped to heighten class feeling at a time of impending crisis. As far as providing volunteers was concerned, the Government would probably have done quite as well without it.

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1 Newcastle Journal, April 12th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, April 19th, 1926.

CHAPTER VII

The General Strike in the North East

The General Strike in the North East is especially interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, it was in this area that an attempt was made by the strikers to organise themselves on a similar basis to that of the Government's Emergency Organisation. As we have seen, England and Wales had been divided into ten areas by the Government for the purposes of ensuring the maintenance of essential services during the dispute. One of these areas, the Northern Division, consisted of the counties of Northumberland and Durham, and part of the North Riding of Yorkshire. The headquarters of the Government organisation in the region was situated at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The strikers ambitiously attempted directly to counter the Government organisation, establishing their own central strike committee for the area in Newcastle. Secondly, an interesting document has been preserved, in which the main problems with which the strike committee had to cope have been set out, together with a section taken directly from the minutes of its meetings. Unfortunately, it appears that the minutes themselves have long been lost and probably destroyed; all the officials of the Strike Committee are dead, and with a solitary exception, left no papers. Nevertheless this document, An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee,[1] provides the historian with

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[1] Flynn, C., An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee (1926), pp. 22. Very few copies of this document have survived. Mr R.P. Arnot has a copy. Mr. H. Green, the Communist Party Organiser on Tyneside has one, and there is one in the area office of the A.E.U. There is also a xeroxed copy in the library of the University of Hull. The document was also printed, in shortened form and without the lists of the members of committees in Labour Monthly, vol. 8., No. 6 (June 1926) pp. 359-374.

some valuable, if incomplete material.

The quasi-metropolitan situation of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the social hub of a large part of Northumberland and Durham, would in itself be sufficient to account for the importance which must be attached to the strike situation in that city, but the position there was given additional significance by the confrontation between the Government and Trades Union organisations.

'What happened in Newcastle' has long been a subject for argument during discussions on the General Strike, and in his book on the General Strike, Mr J. Symons devoted a chapter to an examination of the problem.[1]

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[1] Symons, J., op. cit., pp. 124-133. See also The General Strike in the North East, History Group of the Communist Party, Pamphlet No. 22 (1961) pp. 19. Mr Symons' Answer to the question 'What happened in Newcastle?' is set out in Chapter VI of his book. He concludes:

> 'Accepting this report (of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee) at its face value, what does it amount to? The strikers had checked the free flow of food, but that was a success which must have most effect upon their own supporters. They had stopped public transport. They had organised, very quickly, a plan of operations. These were real achievements, but they gave no cause for optimism. There does not seem to be any evidence to justify Connolly's claim that the Government had lost control of the situation, or that its organisation broke down in any sense. To say that on Friday the success of the General Strike 'appeared completely assured' was mere self-deception.'
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> But these 'real achievements' reluctantly styled by Mr Symons were cause for optimism. The strike was solid, all seemed to be going well, and the prospect was that the strikers' organisation would become increasingly efficient. Moreover, although volunteers were actively maintaining essential services, there was a limit to what they could do. The longer the strike lasted solidly - which it seemed likely to do - the more difficult would become the problems facing the Government. Could they have risked a civil war situation? Any agreement which preserved the status quo was a victory for the strikers. And on Friday there seemed no reason to expect the sudden and complete capitulation of May 12th.

It is a question which, in common with many others, may never receive a satisfactory answer: yet an attempt must be made if the events of those nine days in May 1926, in the North East, are to be understood.

So far as can be ascertained, the Northern trades unionists conformed to the national pattern in that they had made no preparations for a stoppage before the week-end of May 1st and 2nd, 1926. Miners traditionally just 'left the pit' when a strike was declared, and it is likely that little else would have occurred on this occasion, had not an external stimulus to action been present in the person of Mr. R.P. Arnot. Mr. Arnot was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and also on the staff of the Labour Research Department. He was among those prominent members of the Communist Party who had been arrested in October 1925 and convicted of offences under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797.[1] His six month term of imprisonment ended in April 1926, and on May 1st, he was addressing a May Day meeting in the mining village of Chopwell in North Western Durham. Mr. Arnot has recalled how he "jotted down headings for a plan of campaign in the Durham-Northumberland area," after the meeting.[2] He placed these plans before an emergency meeting of local trade union leaders held at the Co-operative store in the village of Spen, a short distance from Chopwell.[3] He underlined the fact that a General Strike, unlike

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[1] See note 2 p.102, Chapter III, above.

[2] The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., p.2.

[3] Interview with Mr. R.P. Arnot, November 19th, 1963.

a miners' strike, would need organised pickets, and in reply to a question by Mr. Henry Bolton,[1] the Chairman of the Blaydon Urban District Council,[2] suggested that local authorities with Labour majorities could effectively disrupt the Government's plans by refusing to carry out Government instructions.[3] A further meeting in the Chopwell Miners' Club later the same evening stressed the need for organisation, and those present, including the officials of several local miners' lodges, agreed that a meeting should be called for the evening of Sunday, May 2nd, of all trade union secretaries and chairmen, all members of boards of the three or four local co-operative societies, and all local Labour Councillors of the County and urban district.[4]

On the afternoon of the day of the meeting, Mr. Arnot, together with Mr. Will Lawther, had visited the Sunderland printing works of Thomas Summerbell,[5] a known Labour sympathiser, and arranged for the

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1 Bolton, Henry (1874-1953) A local Labour leader, who represented the Chopwell lodge on the Council of the D.M.A. for many years, and also served long terms on the Blaydon Urban District Council and the Durham County Council. At the time of the General Strike, Mr. Bolton was Chairman of the Blaydon Urban District Council, a J.P., and a Primitive Methodist.

2 The Blaydon Urban District Council included the village of Chopwell.

3 Interview with Mr. R.P. Arnot op. cit.

4 The General Strike in the North East, Ibid.

5 Summerbell, Thomas (1888-1955) Son of the first Labour M.P. for Sunderland, Thomas Summerbell senior, he entered the family printing business on leaving school at the age of fourteen. Elected to the Sunderland Town Council in 1930, and to the Aldermanic bench in 1935, he became the first Labour Mayor of Sunderland in the same year.

production of a printed bulletin.[1] On the journey back to Chopwell, the two men visited the headquarters of the Northumberland Miners' Association in Burt Hall, Newcastle, where they spoke to the unions' Financial Secretary, Mr. Ebby Edwards.[2] They acquainted him with the idea of establishing a regional organisation to control the conduct of the strike and informed him of the forthcoming evening meeting. Mr. Edwards agreed to support the plan and suggested that contact should be made with Mr. Charles Flynn,[3] the Northern Divisional Officer of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, a prominent trade unionist and an active member of the Independent Labour Party.

That evening, the meeting at Chopwell took place and the plan which Mr. Arnot had drawn up was put forward.[4] It was nothing if not ambitious.

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1 The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., p. 3.

2 Edwards, Ebenezer (1884-1961) Miner; Ruskin College, 1908; Member, Executive Committee, N.M.A., 1912-1918; Financial Assistant, 1918-1923; Financial Secretary, 1923-1929; Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1926-1930; Vice-President, 1929-1930; President, 1931-1932; General Secretary, 1932-1944; President, T.U.C., 1944-1945; Labour M.P. for Morpeth, 1929-1931; Member of the National Consultative Committee set up by the Government under the Emergency Powers Act, 1940; Industrial Relations Officer, National Coal Board, 1946-1953. See also Chapter V, above.

3 Flynn, Charles Richard (1883-1957) Northern Divisional Officer of the National Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, 1915-1947; Secretary of the North East Socialist Federation and the Northern Area of the I.L.P. for many years; Delegate to the T.U.C. for twenty years; Unsuccessful Parliamentary candidate, Hexham, 1924 and Hallam, July 1928; Adopted for Rossendale in 1933 but resigned for domestic reasons; Gateshead Town Councillor, 1932-1952; Alderman 1945; Mayor 1949-1950; O.B.E., 1948.

4 This plan was first reproduced, without stating the area involved, in the Labour Monthly for June 1926, and has since been included in Volume Two of The Miners by R.P. Arnot. It has also been summarised in the pamphlet The General Strike in the North East mentioned above.

It divided into thirteen sections, the apparatus needed and the tasks which had to be accomplished if the primary aim of the campaign, the defeat of the Civil Commissioner and his organisation, was to be achieved. After listing the forces which would be working to break the strike, the plan set out the form which the working class machinery for organising the strike should adopt. It must be "simple, easy to throw up (and) all inclusive. All activities in each locality should be centralised in a single body to be called Council of Action, Strike Committee, Trades Council or what you will: all such bodies should be linked up and centralised in the county capital town under a body responsible for the whole region." Such a "central directing body" would have the same "authority and scope on our side" as the organisation controlled by the Civil Commissioner. The problem of how this central strike committee was to be formulated and staffed was a vital issue. It was imperative that such an all-embracing body should be made up of men "who by (their) experience and routine are capable of thinking in terms of the counties as a whole" and this meant the regional or district officers of trade unions. Some unions would not have such officers in the area, and in that event, representatives would be sent from what units of organisation existed. In order to encourage the setting up of Local Councils of Action, a printed bulletin must be circulated by means of despatch riders throughout the two counties. The bulletin would be the most effective and practical way of linking up the numerous local bodies into a regional organisation. Finally, the tasks of the Councils of Action once the strike had begun would be so numerous and

varied that sub-committees would have to be established to deal with them. Their activities should cover food and transport, picketing, defence corps, local government, co-operative societies, permits and publicity. So far as local government was concerned, the hope was expressed that some authorities might not assist the Civil Commissioner but might instead further the cause of the strikers. The plan of campaign ended by emphasising that "the problem of the General Strike can be focussed down to one thing - the struggle for food control. Who feeds the people wins the strike!"[1] This was the plan which was to be the basis on which the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee was to operate.

The evening meeting of Sunday, May 2nd, unanimously adopted these plans and agreed to publish a broadsheet calling on all the strikers on the North East coalfield to set up Councils of Action.

On Monday, May 3rd, with the stoppage due to begin at midnight and the miners already engaged, Mr. Edwards contacted several local trade union officers, including Mr. Charles Flynn and Mr. James Tarbit,[2] the Northern Organiser of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, and broached the idea of a regional strike committee.[3] Later

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1 Labour Monthly vol. 8, op. cit., pp. 355-358; Arnot, R.P., vol. II., op. cit., pp. 436-439.

2 Tarbit, James (1878-1956) A member of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour; He played a prominent part in the organising of horse drivers and drivers of traction engines before 1914; He became a district official of the N.A.U.L. in 1911 and in the National Union of General and Municipal Workers on the Amalgamation in 1924.

3 The General Strike in the North East, Ibid. This information is also provided in the notes, brief and in the form of a diary, which Mr. Edwards made at the time. They are in the hands of his daughter, Mrs I. Kennedy. Throughout the remainder of the thesis they are referred to in the footnotes as Edwards, E., Notes.

that afternoon, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Flynn, and Mr. Arnot, who had assumed the name of Mr. Black, met at the N.U.D.A.W. offices in Newcastle and agreed that a meeting of representatives of as many unions as possible should be convened for the following day, May 4th.[1] Increased efforts were made to get in touch with local trade union officials. It was especially important that the projected regional committee should include representatives of the Durham Miners' Association.

Mr. Will Lawther, while playing a prominent role in the work of organising the two counties for the stoppage, could in no way be construed as an official representative of this union, his connection with the Minority Movement and his "leftish" tendencies not having endeared him to the official leadership. Co-operation between trade unions, never easy to achieve, was a plant which needed careful tending; even during a general strike, it was only simple prudence not to give the impression that the sole impetus for the hoped-for organisation came from Burt Hall. It was therefore agreed that Mr Arnot should visit Durham in order to invite the co-operation of the D.M.A. He had worked with the two leading Durham officials, Mr. J. Robson and Mr. W.P. Richardson, during the preparation of the miners' case for the Sankey Commission in 1919. On the Tuesday morning when Mr. Arnot arrived at the miners' headquarters in Durham, a Council meeting was in progress. He therefore returned the next morning, Wednesday May 5th, to be told by Mr. Robson that he would bring the matter before his colleagues, and that the appointment of a representative could only be made after the proper

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[1] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., p. 1; The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., p. 8. Edwards, E., Notes.

constitutional action had been taken. Apart from an official visit which Mr. Peter Lee paid to Burt Hall later on in the week, no decision about either forming a Council of Action or sending a representative to the regional strike committee in Newcastle was arrived at by the leaders of the D.M.A. until May 12th, the day on which the T.U.C. called off the strike.[1] This inevitably loosened the authority which the Newcastle strike committee hoped to attain, especially in south Durham, where the scattered mining villages were to prove almost impossible to include in the organisation, communication difficulties serving to aggravate the situation.

Meanwhile the gathering of trade union officials met at the N.U.D.A.W. offices in Leazes Terrace, Newcastle, on the afternoon of May 4th. The Area Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Mr. James White,[2] was elected to the chair, and Mr Charles Flynn elected secretary. Fourteen organisations were represented at the meeting, including the Boilermakers' Union, the National Union of Railwaymen, the Railway Clerks' Association, the Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council, and the Newcastle Trades Council.[3] The purpose of the meeting

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1 Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 1, 5; Interview with R.P. Arnot, November 19th, 1963; The General Strike in the North East, Ibid.; Horrabin, J., Postgate, R.W., and Wilkinson, E., A Workers' History of the Great Strike (1927) p. 66.

2 White, James (1886?-1941) Northern Area Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union at the time of the General Strike; One time Chairman of the Northern Area of the Joint Conciliation Board for Road Transport; Member of the Tyne Improvement Commission; Twice Mayor of Gateshead; Expelled from the Labour Party in 1936, but later reinstated.

3 For a full list see Appendix I.

was outlined by the Chairman and the need for co-ordination emphasised. Each union represented gave a statement concerning its position vis-à-vis the general strike. It was then agreed to form a local General Council to cover the counties of Northumberland and Durham, the Council to consist of two representatives from each trade union. In addition, a Joint Strike Committee, comprising one representative from each affiliated union on strike or locked out was established. Mr. R.P. Arnot was co-opted on to both bodies. A number of sub-committees were also set up: Publishing, Propaganda, Ways and Means, Entertainments, and Demonstrations were to be the concern of the General Council, while Joint Strike Committee Sub-committees included Transport, Picketing, Permits and Food Supplies. The plan which Mr. Arnot had drawn up had so far been followed very closely. It now remained to be seen whether its practical implementation could be achieved.[1]

It was arranged that the General Council should meet daily at the N.M.A. headquarters, Burt Hall, Newcastle, at 3 p.m. each day. The first meeting of the Joint Strike Committee was fixed for 7 p.m. on the same evening, May 4th. Nearly all the trade union representatives present had separate sets of instructions issued from their respective head offices, concerning the way in which the strike affected them. Such instructions were often conflicting and before any progress could be made in organising the actual conduct of the strike, attempts had to

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[1] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 2-3; Edwards, E., Notes; The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., pp. 8-9; At the end of the meeting the members of the committee were presented with their first problem, a complaint that miners' clubs, faced with a shortage of ale, were sending motor vehicles to the towns to fetch it while transport workers were on strike.

be made to co-ordinate the various head office communications. "So far was it from being a question of putting previously prepared plans into action, that the Committee was forced to spend the evening in problems of simple co-ordination."[1] No sub-committees could be set in motion until a single policy could be formulated, and consequently, the Joint Strike Committee decided to deal with each question itself until such time as such a policy was evolved. This in turn meant a considerably expanded volume of work for the Joint Strike Committee and "within a few days the Committee began to sit in the morning, and to continue from morning till afternoon, evening, and midnight. It resulted further in the concentration of all activities in the hands of the Strike Committee." An example of this concentration is illustrated by the fact that all permits were eventually issued only under the signatures of the Chairman and Secretary of the Joint Strike Committee, and not by the unions directly involved. However, progress was made towards decentralising the organisation as the strike went on, but the strike was terminated before the effects of this could be measured.[2]

The Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee continues with a discussion of some of the problems which were tackled on the second full day of the strike, Wednesday, May 5th. At the afternoon meeting of the General

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[1] Flynn, C.R., Ibid.; The General Strike in the North East, Ibid.

[2] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., p. 4. An example, without naming the unions involved, is given in the Report of the Northumberland and Durham Joint Strike Committee, of the confusion which the separate strike instructions caused. On the first day of the strike, one transport union had called out all men concerned with the movement of food but had given permits for the removal of building materials; another transport union had refused to allow permits for the movement of building materials but had continued to issue permits for the transport of food.

Council, the representative of the Electrical Trades Union reported that his association had decided to curtail power used for commercial or industrial concerns. In order to obtain uniformity of action, the representatives of the workers' side of the Joint Industrial Council for the Electricity Supply Industry, agreed that their strike policy should be directed by the General Council. The Council decided that, save in certain unspecified cases, all supplies of electricity to local industry should be cut off. However, although the labour was withdrawn, the Newcastle Electric Supply Company, with the aid of consumer economies and volunteer labour, maintained current throughout the dispute, which did not last long enough to reduce seriously the Company's stocks of coal.[1]

Three more urgent problems occupied the Joint Strike Committee on Wednesday, May 5th. The question of permits had already punctuated the earlier work of the Committee, but the complexity of the problem increased as more and more requests for permits to perform a variety of tasks, arrived at the offices of many trade unions, as well as at the Joint Strike Committee Headquarters.[2] At the same time it became obvious that many individuals were ignoring the permit system and that "unscrupulous" contractors were labelling their vehicles with "Food Only" permits while loading them with items for the movement of which,

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[1] Flynn, C.R. op. cit., p. 6; The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., p. 10; Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926.

[2] Some requested permission to move furniture. One revue manager wanted a permit to transport 'our gels' and scenery 'back home'. Plebs, August 1926, p. 279.

permits had not been granted. On Wednesday evening therefore, following reports received from the Transport Unions, the Joint Strike Committee decided that no more permits for the transport of building materials would be issued, and all those already issued would be withdrawn. The T.U.C. were informed of this decision and returned the following telegram, dated 5th May, from Mr. E. Bevin: "From reports received food permits are being abused. Instruct local Transport Committee to exercise close supervision and not issue permits for outside their own district and act in full agreement with the three Railwaymen's Unions." The Joint Strike Committee felt strongly about the movement of any transport. "The effect on the mind of the workers out on strike of any transport was found to be bad; the mere rumble of wheels was something that weakened the morale of our men and correspondingly cheered the other side."[1] It was but a short step from this view, to the complete withdrawal of all permits, which took place on May 6th.

Meanwhile, the irritating question of how to obtain a permit from the printers' unions in order to have their own strike literature and bulletins printed underlined one of the organisation's more serious shortcomings. After the printing of the initial strike bulletin at the Sunderland works of Thomas Summerbell, nothing else could be done due to the printers' determination to act 'fairly' and print nothing for 'either side.' In vain was it pointed out to them that such an attitude only served to obstruct the trades union cause. The T.U.C. themselves would do nothing to assist. On May 10th, Mr. Charles Flynn

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[1] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 6 - 7

wrote to Mr. W. Citrine, the T.U.C. General Secretary, enclosing a copy of the bulletin issued on May 3rd, and emphasising the urgency of combating the opposition of the strike sheets of the local newspapers and the broadcasts of the B.B.C. Mr. Flynn acknowledged the attempt, then being made, to print a Newcastle edition of the British Worker but claimed that it would be deficient in local news and that an ideal situation would be for the British Worker to appear in the mornings and the Strike Bulletin in the evenings.[1] The T.U.C. remained sympathetic but unhelpful. It is probable that most members of the General Council of the T.U.C. had no wish to see the growth of press organs which they could not control and which might therefore fall into the hands of 'extremist' elements and deviate from the official T.U.C. line.

The General Council of the T.U.C. had hoped to print their own strike newspaper, the British Worker in several provincial cities. However, they also found the workers in the printing trades difficult to convince that they should work for them and not for their regular employers. It was not until Saturday, May 8th, the fifth day of the General Strike, that Mr Arnold Dawson, who was to organise the Newcastle edition of the British Worker for the T.U.C. arrived in Newcastle.[2] The T.U.C. had hoped to print the paper at the Co-operative Society's Works in Newcastle, but the works manager confronted Dawson with instructions which he had received from his executive at Manchester ordering him not to touch the paper. The alternative appeared to be the Co-operative

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1 Letter from C.R. Flynn, May 10th, 1926; Contained in the T.U.C. local Collection on the General Strike, Box No. 2., Congress House, London.

2 Mr Dawson's report to the General Council of the T.U.C., dated May 27th, 1926; Contained in the T.U.C. Local Collection on the General Strike, Box. No. 9, Congress House, London, hereafter T.U.C. Local Collection Box No. It has proved impossible to trace any biographical details of Mr. Arnold Dawson.

Wholesale Society's printing establishment at Pelaw, but the directors refused to assist in the production of the British Worker as a reprisal for the decision of the Joint Strike Committee in Newcastle who had withdrawn all permits, including those issued for the transport of food, a decision which hit the local Co-operative shops especially hard.[1] Only two private printing firms, run by Labour supporters, and both on a relatively small scale, remained. One was the Summerbell shop at Sunderland to which reference has already been made. The other was the Gateshead firm of which Mr. Stephen Wilson, a member of the I.L.P., was the proprietor. Both shops had only one machine with a speed only slightly in advance of one thousand copies an hour, but if volunteers could be obtained to do the work, both Wilson and Summerbell were willing to allow their machinery to be used. In fact, raising volunteer labour proved to be a comparatively simple task, although the Secretary of the Newcastle Branch of the Typographical Association told Dawson that the Newcastle Chronicle had given an undertaking to his branch not to call in any of their men who were out on strike, but that they might not adhere to that position if the T.U.C. newspaper appeared in Newcastle. The Secretary thought that "considerable numbers" might return to work if this happened. Mr. Dawson thought these fears groundless but in fact they did foreshadow the attitude to the General Strike which the branch was later to adopt.[2]

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[1] See below pp. 261-262.

[2] T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 9

The third major problem which faced the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee concerned the conversations which took place between the Committee's representatives and the Civil Commissioner for the Northern Division, Sir Kingsley Wood. Two separate and different accounts of these talks exist, and an analysis of the conflicting views is attempted below.[1] Our present concern is with the problem as it apparently presented itself to the Joint Strike Committee. It was the introduction of volunteers to unload ships at the docks which initiated the chain of events leading to the meetings with the Civil Commissioners. On the evening of May 5th, Mr. Tarbit, of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and a prominent member of both the General Council and the Joint Strike Committee, informed the latter body that the O.M.S. had been brought on to the quayside in order to help unload foodships.[2] In consequence of this, trade union labour already employed there under permit had refused to continue working. An additional irritant was the mooring in the Tyne of two destroyers and a submarine. Later on the same evening, the Northern Division's Food Officer, General Sir R.A. Kerr Montgomery, telephoned a request from Sir Kingsley Wood that he would like a meeting with Mr. Tarbit. Following a second telephone call, Mr. Edwards arranged a meeting between the Civil Commissioner and three representatives of the

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[1] See below pp. 292-300.

[2] Strictly speaking the O.M.S. merged their organisation with the Government forces once the strike began; but many trade unionists persisted in calling all volunteers O.M.S. It was an easily remembered collective term of contempt.

Joint Strike Committee, Mr. Flynn, Mr. Tarbit, and Mr. White.[1] After this meeting, the three men reported back to the Joint Strike Committee. In the Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee extracts from the minutes taken at the meetings with the Civil Commissioner were included and deserve complete quotation.

> "Wood had stated that his duty was to see that food supplies are maintained. There would, he said, be no interference if the Trade Unionists would continue to do the work. Tarbit had explained why the men had withdrawn their labour, and Wood replied that he had no knowledge of the importation of the outside labour (O.M.S.), and it had certainly made its appearance on the quay without his knowledge or authority, and he would not allow, so long as he got the food to the people of Newcastle and District, anyone, in any way, to interfere with the habitual occupations of people who usually do this, so long as they will do it. Tarbit raised the question of unloading ships, part of which only was foodstuffs, and stated that his men would equally object to working with the Emergency Organisation (formerly O.M.S.), if these people unloaded the other parts of the cargo. Wood asked what our proposal was in such cases. We made the suggestion to him that the ships could either go to anchorage in the river with their non-food cargoes on board, waiting the end of the dispute for complete discharge, or return to their port of origin. It was further represented by us to him, with the utmost emphasis, that he should take steps to have the naval contingent, which had been berthed alongside the quay, in a most provocative manner, moved back to the usual naval anchorage at Jarrow, as it was impossible for us to agree that our men should be forced to work under the shadow of their guns. Wood stated that he had no control over the Admiralty in this matter, but appeared to indicate that a suggestion from him to the Commanders of the vessels might have the desired effect. He repudiated the idea that the anchorage taken up by the naval contingent had reference to the quay workers, but that these boats were kept in their present position to deal with possible riots or attacks upon power stations. He expressed himself as being obliged to us for the statement of our position, and thanked us for the valuable information we had given relating to quay work, etc.,

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[1] Flynn, C.R., Ibid.; Edwards, E., Notes.

and stated that he would like an opportunity of talking the matter over with his officers. He asked if we would adjourn the conversations, and meet him and General Kerr Montgomery on the morrow at 12-30 p.m. We agreed.

Report received and agreed that the same deputation continue the conversations tomorrow with the whole of the Strike Committee in session at 12-30 p.m. to consider any proposals which might come from Wood and his colleagues." [1]

The following day's meeting was similarly reported.[2]

"Wood stated that they agreed to take steps to see that no outside people were brought in. He suggested that so far as the quay is concerned, the Trade Unions appoint an officer to work in conjunction with an officer appointed by him, Wood, to deal with any trouble which might arise and to supervise the work. Generally, they (Wood and Co.), agreed to the definition of foodstuffs as outlined by the T.U.C. and felt that no disagreement would arise on this head. We asked what would be the position regarding non-unionists and blacklegs, as our men would only acknowledge permits issued to the trade unionists by the Strike Committee. Wood replied: "They would welcome any suggestions which we can make inside the Government scheme, but any question of trade union labour loading and unloading vessels should be obviated by dual control." We suggested that this could only be met by him clearing off the quay altogether and leaving the men who usually did the work to carry on as usual. He replied that he could not abrogate his functions or act contrary to the instructions he had received. Montgomery stated that the full extent to which they would go, and they were anxious that this should operate, was that "all men now doing their ordinary work should continue to do so." Wood concurred and stated "he would take any steps in conjunction with the Executive here to see that this is carried out." A general discussion then took place in reference to non-union labour, and Montgomery stated that they would go as far as to see that any chauffeur whose normal work is not to drive the lorries would be put off. Wood concurred, and in saying the position was reasonable, stated he would take steps to stop anyone not normally doing the work of transport. We replied that we would have to make a report to our Executive and would convey our decision later, and Wood requested that his proposals

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[1] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 8 - 9; Edwards, E., Notes.

[2] At the second meeting, Wood and Montgomery were accompanied by Mr. Moon, incorrectly styled Food Officer in the Report. He was in fact Road Commissioner.

should be put fairly before the Executive. In promising to do this Flynn stated that he would not be able personally to recommend the form of dual control proposed. It was agreed that Montgomery should come back again at 4 p.m. to receive our reply." It was agreed after hearing the foregoing report that the representatives of the Executive inform Montgomery that "having heard this report, and recognising that our men cannot, and will not, work in conjunction with O.M.S., we instruct that a reply be sent to the gentlemen named, that we cannot agree to our men working under any form of dual control.' It was after this meeting that the decision was taken to withdraw all permits.[1]

In any general strike, transport is likely to be one of the first industries to be affected. Moreover the stopping of transport services is likely to be felt by the community in a way which will be immediate and obvious; the delivery of food, mail, and newspapers, even the ability to get to work, will all be impaired. But it is a relatively easy matter to organise a skeleton transport service. Volunteer labour is always ready to drive trains or motor vehicles, and the individual ownership of such vehicles inevitably means that a good supply of them will be available. As the stoppage of the transport services is bound to be a vital element in any successful general strike, the effectiveness of the stoppage in the transport sector of industry may be a useful guide to the effectiveness of the strike as a whole. Unfortunately, evidence concerning the movement of traffic during the General Strike is of a very meagre nature.

In Newcastle, the stoppage among the workmen employed by the Corporation on the tram and bus services was complete and no services

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[1] Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 9 - 10; Edwards, E., Notes.

were provided throughout the nine days. An offer to run the trams by a body of students was refused by the City Tramways Department.[1]

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[1] Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926; Letter from the General Manager of the Newcastle Transport and Electricity Undertaking, September 23rd, 1963. The students at Armstrong College, Newcastle, were not all on the side of the Government. In the June edition of their magazine, The Northerner the editor printed what he described as 'representative' opinions, which included the following estimate of the situation:

> 'It has been suggested that the S.R.C. or some other body, such as a committee elected from those who had volunteered for O.M.S. work, should have taken the lead in organising student volunteers and have offered their services as a College to the District Emergency Controller. That was absolutely impossible for two reasons.
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> In the first place, the students as a whole were not in favour of doing volunteer work. Many believed that the miners had a fair case and that their comrades were justified in supporting them on the grounds that a general attack was being made on the standard of living for which British workmen had fought for over a century. Others regarded the strike as primarily an industrial dispute in spite of the British Gazette, a struggle between masters and men in which each side was out to get as much for himself as possible ...
>
> In the second place, the College is not a private institution but is supported by public money. For this reason it is only courteous that the body of college students should refrain from taking any one side in controversial industrial and political disputes ... '

The general impression given by the 'representative' opinions is one of confusion. No-one seemed to know what the College policy was, for example, with regard to the sitting of examinations. One writer described the eventual settlement as 'unexpected;' perhaps that is significant. The Northerner, vol. 26, No. 4, June 1926, pp. 110-113.

During the first few hours of the dispute, privately owned buses began to run at irregular intervals from the centre of Newcastle to the suburbs. Some drivers were alleged to have taken advantage of their monopolistic position by charging fares far in excess of those which were normally paid, and on one occasion, an angry crowd surrounding a bus had to be dispersed by a force of police. The activities of pickets and their supporters led to the withdrawal of most of the private buses, and lorries labelled 'food only' were the most frequent vehicles seen on the streets of the city, at least during the first two days of the strike.[1] According to a report in the Northern Echo, eighty private buses were given licences to run services and the difficulties of picketing inside the City boundaries, aggravated by the close proximity of a large force of police, must have meant that some of the eighty buses would have provided a service, however intermittent.[2] Nevertheless, the Newcastle Chronicle pointed out on May 7th, that the lack of transport was inconveniencing those workers not on strike. Shipyard men were finding difficulties in travelling to and from work.[3] Similarly the lack of transport had an impact on the food situation. The only cattle market to be held in the city during the strike evinced a much reduced stock entry. The Journal put this down to the dearth of transport, and it might have added the strong picketing in the mining districts.[4]

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 5th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, May 5th, 1926.

3 Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926.

4 Newcastle Journal, May 11th, 1926.

It was the strike on the railways which really disrupted transport services and threatened to bring to a standstill the industries of the country. On May 4th, the first full day of the strike, no electric trains ran between Newcastle and the Northumberland coast, and according to the Northern Echo, only fifteen trains were running on the whole of the northern section of the L.N.E.R.[1] However, with the aid of volunteers, emergency rail services were set in motion from Newcastle. The timetables were posted up at the Central Station and published each day in both Newcastle newspapers, alongside L.N.E.R. appeals for volunteers. It is not known how many of the scheduled trains did in fact run, but the L.N.E.R. issued a warning on May 6th, that the services would be subject to alteration "although the Company hope to be able to augment their train services from time to time ..."[2] Certainly the L.N.E.R. claimed to have run an increased number of trains on each succeeding day of the strike, both generally on the system and from Newcastle. Yet such trains as were run were only a small percentage of the normal, and without a large scale return to work, the limit to the number of trains run with volunteer and blackleg labour would have soon been reached. As it was, the Newcastle Chronicle thought it worthy of note on May 7th, to report

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 5th, 1926; Northern Echo, May 5th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926. According to figures given in the L.N.E.R.'s North Eastern Area Bulletins Nos. 2 and 3, published during the strike, 8,365 staff personnel were working on May 11th and 8,607 on May 12th. These figures represented 15.4 per cent and 16 per cent. respectively of the total labour force in the North East; they were supplemented by 9,591 volunteers on May 11th, and 12,101 on May 12th. L.N.E.R., North Eastern Area Bulletins, Nos. 2 and 3, May 12th, 13th, 1926.

that "a train from King's Cross arrived in Newcastle Central yesterday."[1] The L.N.E.R. withdrew its advertisement for volunteers on May 12th, when it had received sufficient numbers. Several of these were students of one kind or another. A correspondent who was studying at the Newcastle College of Medicine in 1926, wrote of his experiences:

> "The electric train circuit to and from Whitley Bay was manned by volunteers and the trains were often placarded with slogans - 'The Fenwick Special' etc. (Fenwicks being the large Newcastle store). Several of us volunteered as platelayers. We had a great sense of power as we sailed through the ticket barrier calling out "Platelayer!" A word to the driver and he stopped the train specially at our training depot. After several hours of backbreaking training at laying and removing rails, we made our way, very dirty, to the line, where we held up the next train, climbed aboard, and travelled free to the Central Station.. I don't think that we did 'our bit' with any great feeling of public good, it was what we should now call 'a teenage lark.' It was a great bit of fun undertaken outside parental supervision and the unskilled wages we received were gratefully received." [2]

The emergency timetable remained in force until May 15th. It has not proved possible to obtain details of the response to the strike of the Newcastle railwaymen, but it is obvious from the evidence which does exist that a very high proportion of the railway workers went on strike. Mail was delivered by air to the city, but there were delays.[3] It would appear that emergency transport services were just about keeping things moving inside the city. Food supplies were interrupted, but withdrawal of permits by the Joint Strike Committee could not prevent

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1 Two 'Novocastrian ladies' spent three days, from Tuesday May 4th, to Friday May 7th, travelling by rail from Torquay to Newcastle. When they arrived at Newton Abbot they were told that a journey to London by train was impossible, but a series of lifts, culminating in one on a milk train from Dorchester, eventually got them to the metropolis. King's Cross to York took twelve hours. Newcastle Chronicle, May 11th, 1926.

2 Letter to the author dated May 14th, 1963. The writer wishes to remain anonymous.

3 Newcastle Chronicle, May 8th, 1926.

the movement of all transport, although it was especially effective against the Co-operative Society, most of whose employees were trade unionists and ceased work.[1] This effectiveness created fresh problems. Had the General Strike lasted for another week perhaps a more clear cut situation would have arisen. As it was, the grip which the strike exercised upon Newcastle's transport did not completely paralyse movement within the city, though as we shall see in the rural districts, the grip was tighter.

The stoppage of transport naturally had its effect upon the city's retail trade. The Newcastle Chronicle reported on both May 5th, and May 6th, that "ordinary trade" and "business in the shopping centre were" heavily depressed.[2] By May 7th, however, the city looked "busier" and the previous day, market gardeners had taken up their usual positions in the Green Market.[3] The Chronicle did not think that there was any panic buying or hoarding, and there was no immediate prospect of food rationing. Yet there were some shortages. The Journal reported on May 8th, that the city's milk supply was then "up to 75% of normal" and both newspapers reported the increase in the price of potatoes which came into force on May 10th. The new prices were fixed by the Divisional Food Officer, and showed an increase of £2 per ton. Some shops in the Newcastle suburbs imposed rationing in order to keep faith with their

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1 Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 13-15.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 5th, 6th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 7th, 8th, 1926.

customers.[1] On the same day, the price of milk went up by 1d per quart although "ample" supplies were said to exist. The cattle market again had a reduced entry of stock, but prices remained normal and there appeared to be no meat shortage.[2] The Journal claimed that on Saturday May 8th, "the shopping centre of Newcastle and the markets presented almost their customary appearance ... the latter being thronged with buyers. There was certainly no appreciable shortage of foodstuffs and the prices seemed much as usual, fish indeed being cheaper than the week previously. Strangely enough the cafes and restaurants were not as busy as expected. Shops closed early so that workers could get home and streets seemed quiet."[3] Nevertheless trade, especially in the shopping centre, was seriously diminished. The takings of Fenwicks, the large department store on Northumberland Street, dropped by 30 per cent during the week May 3rd to May 10th, and by 25 per cent during the week May 10th to May 17th.[4] Similarly Councillor A. Lowe, of Lowe and Moorhouse Ltd. another large store, told the Journal's correspondent: "The strike could not have come at a more unfortunate time. May is one of the months we trust to make up for the months that don't pay expenses. But during the past ten days we have not done one fifth of average business".[5] Post-strike sales were the method chosen by several shops in an effort to recoup losses.

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1 Ibid., May 11th, 1926; Newcastle Journal, May 11th, 12th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Journal, May 11th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 10th, 1926. Fish was cheap because local landings at the Shields ports were all dumped in the local area. Lack of transport prevented them from being sent to markets further afield.

4 Letter from Fenwicks Ltd., June 17th, 1963.

5 Newcastle Journal, May 15th, 1926.

There was little disorder in the city until the week-end of May 8th and 9th. Previously the police had dispersed crowds three times, on May 6th, apparently without drawing their batons. The three incidents were separate and took place on the Quayside, at the Central Station and on the High Level Bridge. This latter demonstration was apparently aimed at frightening away the toll-gate keepers thereby freeing the bridge from toll as had been done during the railway strike of 1919. In 1926, the police intervention prevented the desired effect being obtained.[1] At the week-end, however, the situation was radically altered. On Saturday night, May 8th, the police made two baton charges on crowds in Grainger Street in the City centre and on the High Level Bridge.. In the first incident in Grainger Street, a crowd estimated at 10,000 by the reporter of the Newcastle Chronicle, "swept one or two point duty specials from their posts" and then made "a deliberate attack on the several uniformed policemen that were on the scene." Stones and rotten fruit were thrown at the police who made a baton charge after the arrival of reinforcements. Many of the crowd were thought to come from Gateshead and they were driven back over the High Level Bridge, during which action another baton charge occurred. Some members of the crowd were armed with pieces of iron, sticks and stones and twenty-four arrests were made.[2] The Journal claimed that only twenty-two arrests were made and reported the Deputy Chief Constable as saying that some reports (presumably those of the Chronicle) had been exaggerated and

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[1] Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926.

[2] Ibid., May 10th, 1926 .

that no dangerous weapons were used, nor was anyone injured.[1] On May 10th, thirteen men were charged with offences under the Emergency Regulations. Nine were charged with actions likely to lead to disaffection among the civilian population. Of those, two were bound over, three received four months' hard labour, one two months' imprisonment, and three one month's hard labour. One man was charged with wilfully obstructing the police and with disorderly behaviour and he was sentenced to one month's hard labour and fined £1. The remaining three men were all convicted of being drunk and disorderly: two were sent to prison, one for a month, the other for two weeks. The third man was fined £2. In court it was stated that the Chief Constable was satisfied that the cases were in no sense connected with organised labour. "They were the acts of loafers, rowdies or hooligans."[2]

The Joint Strike Committee, however, was of a different opinion. It believed that the authorities were attempting to break down the effectiveness of the pickets by the use of force. In a report to the General Council of the T.U.C. on Monday, May 10th, the Strike Committee reported that it was sending a deputation to meet the Chief Constable. "We must not have our people ridden down." Reports of arrests were coming in from all over the region by May 10th, including that of Mr. W. Lawther, a member of the Joint Strike Committee, and Mr.H. Bolton, the Chairman of the Blaydon U.D.C.[3] Once again the historian is faced with the

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1 Newcastle Journal, May 10th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 11th, 1926.

3 Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 12, 15-16; The General Strike in the North East, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

dichotomy of apparently irreconcilably opposed views of the same facts. It is undisputed that a large number of arrests were made in the Northern Division for alleged offences under the Emergency Regulations, during the four days which immediately preceded the calling off of the strike on May 12th. In the City of Newcastle itself however, the three days of the strike after the week-end of May 8/9th were quiet and free from incident. If the Saturday night incidents were symptomatic of a hardening of the attitude of the authorities, it would seem that either this had the effect of quietening the situation, or that the policy was changed after the protest by the Joint Strike Committee. There is no evidence to support either hypothesis. Again, it may be that the police were not carrying out a preconceived plan, aimed at breaking up picketing, but merely dealing with an awkward crowd who were being incited by well known trouble makers. Yet of the thirteen men convicted, such relevant facts as whether they had any previous convictions, whether they were trade unionists and/or strikers and not just "hooligan", are totally absent. In such a situation as existed during the General Strike what people think is so becomes as important as the truth itself. Whether the Strike Committee really believed that the central authority was adopting a more coercive policy cannot be determined, and the outcome of their proposed deputation to the Lord Mayor is not known. It is probable that only material presently held by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and unlikely to be released even after the expiration of the statutory fifty years, could illuminate this particularly

dark corner of the General Strike.[1]

The Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee attempted to establish an organisation which would be able to oppose the Government's strike breaking machinery throughout the whole of the two counties. It was a comparatively simple affair for the Committee to organise the trade unionists within Newcastle itself, though it must be borne in mind that co-operation between trade unions is by no means an easily manageable task. The Northern Division, however, included a large area outside Newcastle, the extensive coalfield area, and the industrial centres on Wearside and Teeside. How could an organisation which had sprung up without any preparation hope to guide the policies of the proliferation of strike committees and councils of action which were thrown up by the General Strike in North East England? The evidence on this matter is sparse indeed, and what there is suggests that the Joint Strike Committee had virtually no importance north of Ashington or south of Gateshead. This can be no more than a tenuous conclusion based on quite insufficient evidence. Mr. R.P. Arnot, in an interview with the author, said that it would be extremely

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[1] Of course it may be that no such papers exist. The Government organisation in the region had no permanent offices or staff, and lost their whole raison d'être once the strike ended, which it did after the relatively short time of nine days. It is possible that the documents relating to the local activities of the Emergency Services were destroyed. Nevertheless, Government holdings might add useful details to our present knowledge. The Intelligence Committee of the General Council of the T.U.C., in a survey of the strike position on the morning of May 11th, noted the arrest of pickets and strike leaders in various parts of the country, and concluded that the Government was becoming more aggressive and determined. Contained in the T.U.C. General Strike Collection, Box No. 7.

difficult to estimate how effective the Newcastle Strike Committee was in co-ordinating the activities of the whole of the two counties. He doubted whether any strike bulletins from Newcastle reached as far north as Berwick, nor many places in south Durham.[1] Mr. S. Rees, who was employed by the N.C.L.C. in the area at the time of the strike, visited "nearby" councils of action and made verbal reports to the Strike Committee in Newcastle about their activities.[2] Mr. H. Bell was a motor cycle despatch rider for the Newcastle Strike Committee and he was able to recall journeys which he had made into Northumberland to local miners' lodges. He also delivered strike bulletins to several places in the county including Bedlington.[3] Mr. J. Kennedy, a railway worker and a member of the Blyth Council of Action, said that he thought that the Council of Action acted under the instructions of the Newcastle Strike Committee "to a certain degree" but he was unable to give any details, save that despatch riders had been sent to Newcastle every day of the strike.[4] Mr. G. Cole, a miner, and subsequently a member of the British Communist Party, recalled the events of the strike in his

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1 Interview with Mr. R.P. Arnot, November 19th, 1963.

2 Interview with Mr. S. Rees, August 7th, 1963. Mr. Rees was an organiser of the National Council of Labour Colleges (N.C.L.C.). He has been a member of the Newcastle City Council for many years, and Chairman of the Education Committee.

3 Interview with Mr. H. Bell, August 9th, 1963. An activist in the British Labour movement since 1919, Mr. Bell was a Labour Councillor at Wallsend up to 1963. He was a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

4 Interview with Mr. J.W. Kennedy, September 13th, 1963. Mr Kennedy retired from work on the railway in 1951. He has been a Labour Councillor and Alderman at Blyth in Northumberland, continuously since 1942, and has been three times Mayor of the town.

village of Cornforth, which is about seven miles south-east of Durham City. He said that communications with Newcastle were maintained throughout the strike and that despatch riders visited the Joint Strike Committee there twice daily. "Orders" from the Joint Strike Committee in Newcastle were strictly obeyed.[1] Unfortunately no documentary details remain to add weight to Mr. Cole's reminiscences. With personal involvement and the memories which that has produced, so with other evidence concerning the Newcastle Strike Committee's relations with other strike committees in the two counties: it is frugal and far from conclusive. An undated report, but probably of the 6th or 7th of May, was sent by the Darlington Joint Strike Committee (Transport) to the headquarters of the T.U.C. in London repeating the "news" which they had received from the "Newcastle Joint Strike Committee" that the O.M.S. had broken down in the city and was to negotiate with the strike committee.[2] The Darlington Joint Strike Committee (Transport) received despatch riders from Newcastle on May 8th, 9th, 10th and 13th, and "news" bulletins on the 8th and 11th.[3] An undated letter signed by a Mr. A.J. Thacker, sent to the T.U.C. headquarters and headed "The Stockton and Thornaby Joint Strike Committee" reported, inter alia,

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1 Interview with Mr. G. Cole, July 3rd, 1963. A miner, he became a member of the I.L.P. and later of the Communist Party in the early 1920's. He was checkweighman at Thrislington Pit for nearly thirty years. Lodge delegate to the D.M.A. Council.

2 T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 9.

3 Transport Joint Strike Committee, Darlington, Rota Committee Minutes, May 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 1926.

that the committee had "linked up" with the "Northumberland and Durham Council of Action." No interpretation of "linked up" was offered.[1] The August 1926 issue of Plebs contained a report on the strike situation in Newcastle-upon-Tyne written by Lily Davison, in which she expressed her views about the power of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee.

> "Not until my services were transferred to the Northumberland and Durham General Council did I grasp the significance of this body, which had gradually grown up to direct the General Strike in the area. It had seemed to me that each union ran its own course in such matters as strike pay, keeping up the spirit of the members, issuing their own bulletins etc., and only on general questions such as permits etc., did the officials come together. This accounted for the mysterious meetings, which certain officials attended, morning, noon and night, and in some cases left their members grumbling. It was on this Council ... that the local trade union officials, members of other working organisations, came down to earth ... From the Council, circular instructions were sent out to the newly formed Councils of Action, strike committees etc. To the Council these bodies sent in reports, enquiries etc. Step by step, this body learned its job and perfected its machinery." [2]

Again, no details are given of the co-ordination or control which the Newcastle Joint Strike Committee might have exercised over the multitude of strike committees throughout the two counties.

More concrete evidence of the support which the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee obtained from local strike committees and Councils of Action in the area, is presented by the attendance at the conference which met in the Gateshead Town Hall

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[1] T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 3.

[2] Plebs, op. cit., pp. 279 - 281.

on Saturday morning, May 8th. This conference was convened by the Newcastle Strike Committee and attended by 167 representatives of 87 organisations, including 28 Councils of Action and 52 Strike Committees of Northumberland and Durham. The conference also included representatives from Carlisle, Workington and Middlesbrough. A report of the activities of the Joint Strike Committee was given and approved, but it was made clear that the Strike Committee was subject to the decisions of the T.U.C. General Council and to those of the Trade Union Executives and not to any decisions which that particular conference might take.[1] Mr. C. P., later Sir Charles, Trevelyan,[2] M.P. for Newcastle Central, who was present at that conference, reported to the General Council of the T.U.C. that "the Central Committee of Action at Burt Hall is fully recognised as the controlling authority, under the T.U.C., by both Counties.[3] The fact that such a conference took place at all says much for the organising powers of the Newcastle Strike Committee and for their ability to achieve satisfactory communications with

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1 Flynn, C.R., op. cit., pp. 12-13, 20. The Conference did however, by 69 votes to 64, pass a resolution remitting to the consideration of the Strike Committee the matter of negotiations with the Co-ops.

2 Trevelyan, Rt.Hon., Sir Charles Philips (1870-1958) Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1892-1893; Contested North Lambeth as a Liberal, 1895; Member of the London School Board, 1896-1897: Liberal M.P., Elland Division of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1899-1918; Labour M.P., Central Newcastle, 1922-1931; Parliamentary Secretary, Board of Education, 1908-1914; President, Board of Education, 1924, 1929-1931.

3 Undated letter from Mr. Trevelyan to the T.U.C. Intelligence Committee. T.U.C. General Strike Collection, Box.No. 3.

other strike committees in the district. However, it would be useful to know exactly, the areas in which those 80 Councils of Action and Strike Committees operated. It is almost certain that there were more than eighty such bodies throughout the two counties as many miners' lodges would establish one, and there were over two hundred of them. Thus a knowledge of the situation of the strike bodies whose representatives attended the conference, would help build up a picture of the extent of the Joint Strike Committee's influence. Moreover, the fact of the conference, at which no really important decisions were taken, does not suggest that the Newcastle Strike Committee controlled the counties' strike activity. The only conclusion which can be drawn is the fact of contact between the Strike Committee in Newcastle and eighty others in the two counties, a contact which does not by any means imply that the Newcastle Strike Committee could influence the actions of the other Strike Committees. After all, perhaps one would not expect it - the difficulties were immense. Striking trade unionists were not obeying a central authority, but the calls of their individual unions. Without any pre-strike preparations such an organisation as was contemplated by the progenitors of the Newcastle Strike Committee could not hope to succeed, as the problems of communications, together with the facts of trade union history were set up against them. Moreover, the short duration of the strike did not allow the Newcastle Strike Committee time to do more than take the initial steps necessary to facilitate the development of the all-embracing central strike authority which had been conceived. This only gradually developing practical implementation of Mr. Arnot's theory, is well illustrated by the

"Circular Number 1" issued by the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee and addressed "to whom it may concern". This document set out the form of organisation which should be adopted by all strike committees and councils of action in order effectively to carry through the General Strike. The date is significant: May 11th, only twenty-four hours before the strike was called off. Had the strike lasted another week for example, then it is probable that the area in which the Newcastle Strike Committee exercised authority would have been enlarged. Its own publicity and communications services would have improved, and it would have been more likely to attract to it representatives from other bodies.[1] The longer the strike continued, the more serious would the situation have become and the more open the confrontation between capital and labour. This would have been especially true of a mining area such as the North East where picketing on a considerable scale was interfering with traffic in the rural districts and the use of force to break it down must have aggravated the situation. Had the Government decided on such action by May 9th? Certainly fears of what might happen if the strike continued, together with reports which they were receiving of clashes between crowds of people and police, was probably a vital factor in the reasoning of the members of the General Council of the T.U.C. which influenced the decision to end the strike. The situation in Newcastle would probably have deteriorated if the strike had gone into a second week. Only a large scale return

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[1] Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee, Circular No. 1, May 11th, 1926. For the complete text, see Appendix II.

to work, of which there was no sign on May 12th, could have retrieved the situation.[1]

The local press obviously is an important provider of evidence in any regional historical study. It becomes even more valuable in this role, if evidence from other sources is scarce. But when making use of the press as evidence, its 'impartiality' should not be taken for granted. Moreover, it is well to remember that the trade union side of the dispute is unlikely to receive very detailed treatment from the local press, primarily because the strikers will not give interviews to representatives of what they consider to be a 'blackleg' press. Indeed it is only common prudence to examine with some care the evidence which the local newspapers offer.

At the time of the General Strike, there were three daily newspapers in the two counties; the Journal and North Star and the North Mail and Chronicle in Newcastle, and the Northern Echo in Darlington. The Journal was a whole hearted supporter of Mr. Baldwin's Conservative Government owned by the Northern Counties Conservative Newspaper

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1 In this connection, it would obviously be of some importance to discover how the so-called 'second line' of strikers, called out by their respective unions at the behest of the T.U.C. on May 11th, responded to the strike call. These workers included those in the Engineering and Shipbuilding trades not previously affected by the stoppage. The Newcastle Strike Committee claimed that at the Elswick works of Vickers Armstrong, almost every man came out. The local press, on the contrary, reported that 75 per cent of the workmen at Elswick stayed in. In fact, there are no reliable figures for any of the firms in the district. The author has corresponded with fourteen of the larger companies but only two have given any assistance, and in neither case did it prove possible to discover any information concerning this problem. Northern Echo, May 12th, 13th, 1926.

Co. Ltd., and strenuously opposed in the inter-war years, any proposals aimed at the nationalisation of the coal industry. Numerous examples of the Journal's unsympathetic attitude towards the labouring community could be given, but a sample or two must suffice here. On the eve of the presentation, by the coal owners, of their proposals concerning the future of the industry to the Samuel Commission, the Journal attempted to forecast what these would be. They would certainly not include "the nostrums which for political purposes, not for economic reasons, have been promulgated by the Communist element among the miners. It has been urged all along in these columns that without the eight hour day there is no salvation for the mines. Seeing the wide divergences of customs and conditions, the district regulation of wages is imperative. A reduction in railway rates is an essential corollary if coal prices are to be reduced to a level which will enable exporters to meet the intense foreign competition now availing."[1] It was to prevent hours being lengthened and wages agreements being concluded on a district level, that the miners were in dispute with their employers. The Journal believed that sacrifices must be made by the miners if the coal industry was to be made efficient, and the miners themselves would see that such changes would be for their own benefit, were it not for certain "ill-disposed" persons. "It is said that a good deal of bitterness has now crept into the owners'

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[1] Newcastle Journal, January 5th, 1926. The remark about lower railway rates was the kind of comment which helped to give additional credence to the idea that a successful attack upon the conditions of the miners would presage an attack upon other groups of wage earners. Compare this with the alleged statement of the Prime Minister, referred to above in Chapter III, p.94 note 1.

attitude. Is it any wonder? What they feel they are up against is not British Workmen willing to listen to reason, but a widespread foreign political conspiracy which has wrought wholesale ruin, havoc, and murder in its own land and has beguiled a numerical fraction of our own citizens, loud-mouthed, blatant fanatics for the most part, to preach and apply as far as they dare the iniquitous behests of Moscow."[1]

The Journal's fierce opposition to organised labour was intensified by the outbreak of the General Strike. The paper managed to appear throughout the stoppage, though in attenuated form. On Wednesday May 5th, it came out as a single sheet, but thereafter it printed a four page morning edition. News was scarce, especially at first, and the repetition of items was by no means rare.[2] The edition of May 6th, contained two pages of advertisements out of four pages. Several editions were produced in facsimilie and the ones which came out on May 6th, and May 7th, were difficult to read. Nevertheless, a paper was produced on every day during which the strike lasted, in spite of the fact that most of the Journal's production staff were on strike. Although the paper's appearance differed from the normal, the contents remained very recognisable. It accused the "Trades Union vehmgericht" of delivering a blow at freedom and "at the constitutionalism which enshrines freedom".[3] Unlike the T.U.C. General Council, the Journal was clear that the strike was a challenge to the constitution

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1 Newcastle Journal, April 23rd, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 7th, 8th, 10th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 5th, 1926.

because "it is the effect, not the aim by which a particular policy must be judged."[1] The majority of trade unionists the Journal declared on May 10th, had not desired a strike but had answered the strike call because they feared that otherwise they might be deprived of their trade union benefits.[2] After expressing its opinions so forthrightly it is not surprising that the Journal was quick to magnify rumours and reports of strikers returning to work. In the editorial of May 7th, headed "Trust the Government", it urged its readers not to believe rumours, but this advice was presumably to be followed selectively, because the next day the paper reported: "It is stated that some of the men ordered on strike are joining up under the Emergency Committee and returning to their old job. We do not vouch for the truth of this, but it is not at all improbable."[3] On May 12th, the paper's editorial pointed out that "it is all very well to talk of the strike being solid, but the cold unimaginative fact is that the men are returning to work in daily augmenting numbers." No cold unimaginative facts were produced to substantiate that statement.[4] The end of the strike was met characteristically, with suggestions that the trade union system should be overhauled, and that in many ways it was a pity that the General Strike had not struggled along for another two weeks more. Then the trade unions could have been taught a real lesson![5] The Journal

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1 Ibid., May 8th, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 10th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 7th, 8th, 1926.

4 Ibid., May 12th, 1926.

5 Ibid., May 13th, 1926.

resumed its normal appearance on Monday May 17th.

As we have seen, the Journal in 1926, was completely opposed to the political and economic aspirations of "Labour". It remained largely the newspaper of the middle class, devoting, for example, a wide coverage to commercial, industrial, and financial matters. The Newcastle Chronicle, on the other hand, was more the large circulation paper and in consequence less overtly hostile to the views of "Labour". The paper was also possessed of a Liberal, indeed Radical tradition, going back to the nineteenth century days of the ownership of Joseph Cowen,[1] which it had not perhaps entirely lost. Whatever the reasons, the Chronicle was far more a journal of compromise than one of rigid adherence to principle or prejudice. This did not, however, make it a supporter of the General Strike.

The Chronicle had poured scorn on the impractical schemes of the "Socialist Intellectuals" for the nationalisation of the coal industry, but it believed that a solution must come by negotiation, with a continuance of the Government subsidy while the talks were going on.[2] The General Strike was a "wicked attempt to coerce the nation" and must never be repeated.[3] After the House of Commons pronouncements on the illegality of the dispute by Sir John Simon, and the Astbury judgment, the Chronicle took the view that besides being wicked, the General Strike was also unlawful, which was doubtless considerably worse. The

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1 Cowen, Joseph (1831-1899) Coal owner, Manufacturer, Journalist; Proprietor of the Newcastle Chronicle, which followed his Radical political line. M.P. for Newcastle 1873-1886. Imperialist and anti-Socialist. Linked with the Democratic Federation when that body was first set up in 1881.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, January 18th, April 19th, May 6th, 7th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 13th, 1926.

Chronicle was also not averse to publishing accounts of doubtful authenticity which had, as their moral, the futility of the strike. On May 10th, for example, the paper published an anonymous statement by the "loyal clerical staff" of a large goods station somewhere in "the north eastern area of the L.N.E.R." The statement emphasised the futility of the sympathetic strike, and criticised the extremists among the leaders of the Railway Clerks' Association who had called the stoppage without consulting the membership. It was almost immediately repudiated by the Association's Newcastle branch, who, however, failed to discover the source of the Chronicle article.[1] Similarly it announced on May 11th, that 603 railwaymen had returned to work on the L.N.E.R., and that strikers were returning to work in places as far apart as Bristol and Scarborough. The failure to print details of these alleged returns to work, in conjunction with the general vagueness of the reports, inevitably raises doubts as to their veracity. True or not, they may have helped to weaken the resolve of some strikers, although evidence either in favour of this view or against it is totally lacking. The Chronicle was reduced to one sheet on May 5th, but like the Journal, produced a four page issue throughout the remainder of the strike. Almost the whole of the Chronicle's staff had ceased work by nine a.m. on May 4th, but "a handful of men, boys and girls, directors, managers, editors, apprentices and secretaries" got out an evening edition of 150,000 copies, many of which were dropped from an aeroplaneloaned by the Newcastle Aero Club, over the two northern counties in an attempt to achieve a wide circulation, at the

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[1] Ibid., May 10th, 11th, 12th, 1926.

expense of actual sales.[1] Distribution was obviously made difficult by the lack of transport and the effective picketing, especially in the mining districts away from the urban areas. Nevertheless, the emergency staff produced a large edition of the Sunday Times during May 8/9, despatching it to London by air from Catterick and Newcastle. On the nights of May 10/11 "we prepared, printed, and distributed many thousands of copies of the Daily Graphic," these also being transported by air.[2] There was no lack of opposition when loads of newspapers travelled by road, as a rather self-congratulatory account of how papers were smuggled out of Newcastle illustrates.

> "In each case the papers were removed from the Chronicle buildings under police escort, owing to the activities of the highway pickets. On Tuesday night, the papers went by road to Cramlington (Northumberland) with a big squad of Northumberland constabulary in attendance ... These manoeuvres were necessary owing to a mass attack by pickets on the Sunday Times consignment early on Sunday morning. On that occasion, many thousands of papers were stolen by the pickets, but the staff in attendance, after securing police aid, headed off the raiders on the Town Moor and forced them to reload the papers. Another stirring episode occurred in the early hours of Tuesday morning. Parcels of photographs for the Daily Graphic and the North Mail were sent from London to Newcastle by road. The driver of the car that carried them was heavily attacked at Ferryhill in County Durham, and came into Newcastle with his windscreen smashed, his bonnet and wings dented and broken, and his hands streaming with blood." [3]

Stirring events indeed.

The third daily newspaper published in the area was the Northern Echo from Darlington. This newspaper had traditional associations with

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1 Ibid., May 5th, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 13th, 1926.

3 Ibid.

the Liberal Party, being a stable mate, so to say, of those two pillars of Liberalism, the Sheffield Independent and the Westminster Gazette. Not surprisingly therefore, it adopted a less vituperative attitude towards the General Strike than the conservative journals of Tyneside. While affirming the need to maintain essential services the Echo urged that the main point at issue must not be forgotten, and that was the condition of the coal industry. A drastic reorganisation was needed if the industry was to be placed on a profitable basis. Reconstruction had been delayed for too long.[1] The General Strike, however, was not the answer to the problem. In the opinion of the paper the stoppage could do no good and might do much harm. "No one who knows his England imagines that the peace-loving folk of ... a Durham pit village want civil war as a corollary of their insistence upon a reasonable standard of life." The editorial did not go on to examine the ethical basis of a society which had allowed such a situation to arise. It adopted the traditional Liberal view when faced with the fact of working class militancy; Parliament will provide if only we can abolish the Tories.[2]

The Northern Echo printed a daily edition throughout the strike, although from May 5th, until May 15th, it was limited to four pages instead of the usual eight or twelve. Like its Newcastle counterparts, the news which the Echo contained was often brief and lacking in detail, but it generated a feeling of authenticity which the two Newcastle

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1 Northern Echo, May 1st, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 4th, 1926.

papers were unable to do. Also like them, the Echo depended upon voluntary labour, especially by its journalistic and retired staffs. This enabled a larger emergency edition to be produced than was normally printed in non-strike times. In an article on May 17th, the Echo explained how it was done. "...Working under police protection, and sometimes in the teeth of threats and intimidation, a mechanical staff one-tenth its normal size produced and printed in twelve nights 2,000,000 copies of a four page paper. Not a single piece of plant or machinery was smashed or damaged; not a single person suffered any accident in any one of the many mechanical processes. Nine adults and nine youths and boys were employed and half of this eighteen were unskilled or semi-skilled. Jack Haworth, aged 78, a veteran compositor of 51 years service, did much —— 18 hours a day on a diet of tea and ham sandwiches."[1] Details were given of the numbers printed:-

May 3rd. 117,350	May 4th. 139,000	May 5th. 183,000	May 6th. 208,400
May 7th. 173,500	May 8th. 180,100	May 10th. 170,000	May 11th 160,300
May 12th. 152,300	May 13th. 163,500	May 14th. 154,610	May 15th. 150,800.

The normal average nightly print was 100,000.[2] A large fleet of motor vans was used for distribution, many being loaned by local trades people. These travelled as far south as York and Hull, and north into Northumberland.[3] Distribution had its problems however, usually connected with the activities of pickets. "There were difficulties of distribution, especially in Durham and Northumberland,where vans were blockaded,

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[1] Ibid., May 17th, 1926.

[2] The second largest among provincial morning newspapers.

[3] Northern Echo, May 5th, 1926.

supplies burnt and drivers injured, although none seriously. Sand bags, carts, wire ropes, railway sleepers, broken glass, sticks and stones were all used."[1] Even if the Echo was attempting to add greater glory to its achievement, it is obvious from this and other evidence that the movement of traffic in the colliery districts was a very hazardous business which the majority of private vehicle owners would not attempt.

The General Strike failed to muzzle completely the press, and the three North Eastern daily newspapers, while finding distribution outside the cities difficult owing to the lack of transport and the activities of pickets, performed a useful service for the Government. The British Gazette the Government's official strike publication, arrived in Newcastle for the first time on May 5th, but its circulation does not seem to have been large nor its arrival regular.[2] In any event, the Gazette was never taken seriously by most strikers; its main result in the area seems to have been, according to some witnesses, further to lower the stock of the paper's editor, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill.[3] The local press, however, besides helping to lower the morale of the strikers and conversely, to stiffen that of those people opposed to the strike, was able to assist the Emergency Services in a number of more tangible ways. For example, they printed O.M.S., L.N.E.R., and Government recruiting posters, together with emergency railway timetables, the names of the officials in charge

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1 Ibid., May 17th, 1926

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 6th, 1926.

3 Letter to the author from Mr. W. Lowes, August 12th, 1963.

of the Volunteer Service Committees, and the places where volunteers could enrol. Had the strike continued, it is probable that shortage of newsprint would have further reduced the scope of the papers. As it was, the Strike Committee in Burt Hall was only too well aware of the value of disseminating news. They had their own problems in this particular field.

There were three papers produced by the strikers in the North East. As we have already seen, the T.U.C. General Council's British Worker encountered serious permit troubles in Newcastle. The sympathetic printing firms of Summerbell in Sunderland and Wilson in Gateshead eventually agreed to produce the paper, but it was not until May 11th that the first edition of 22,000 copies was distributed. This printing took place at Sunderland, described by Mr. Dawson as being 'woefully deficient' in transport facilities, vehicles having to be fetched from Newcastle, eighteen miles away before distribution could begin.[1] Mr. Dawson discovered that improvisation and rapidly thrown up organisation suffered from other defects. Despatch riders sent to collect copies of the British Worker for distribution took away all that they could carry and after delivery reported back to their respective strike committees instead of returning to Mr. Dawson for another load. In consequence, of the 22,000 copies printed on the first day, only 16,000 were actually distributed. During the subsequent days, about 16,000 copies were printed daily at Sunderland, the last work being done on Saturday May 15th. Printing at the Gateshead works took place only on

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[1] T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 9.

the three days May 13th, 14th and 15th.[1] One of the volunteers has described his part in the work at Gateshead.

> "Work started at 5 p.m. and went on until about 8 a.m. next morning. The men sometimes travelled fairly long distances from their homes to the printing works to put in about two hours shifts. My home was only about three hundred yards away and I was looked upon as being in charge. I put in full-time, 5 p.m. until approximately 8 a.m. I looked after the packing and distribution. Two printing machines were kept running, and if a relief man failed to turn in, I took over one of the machines until someone turned up. In addition to the printers who volunteered for this work we also had a number of motor cyclists, who began to arrive about 6 a.m. who took parcels of the British Worker to the outlying districts.[2]

Not only the strikers helped with the distribution of the British Worker. The Secretary of the local Newsagents Federation helped market copies with retail newsagents in Newcastle, Gateshead and parts of Northumberland.[3] It is doubtful if very many copies circulated in the areas south of Gateshead. The British Worker came too late, and had barely got over its teething troubles when the strike was called off. Although the Joint Strike Committee agreed to support the British Worker, they had, since May 5th, been relying on two cyclostyled sheets, the Chopwell based Northern Light and the Newcastle Trades Council's newsheet, the Workers' Chronicle for disseminating their own view of events.

The Northern Light's main distribution area was north western Durham

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1 Ibid.

2 Letter from Mr. J.A. Hutchison, O.B.E., August 10th, 1963.

3 T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 9. Mr. Dawson expressed the hope that the financial loss incurred by the British Worker in Newcastle would be at least partly compensated for by the stimulus which would be given to the sales of the Daily Herald in the North East.

although some copies were sent to Newcastle and into the Northumberland coalfield.[1] The Workers' Chronicle was compiled and distributed in Newcastle itself, although a few copies filtered into other parts of the two counties. Copies of both bulletins have proved difficult to obtain and in neither case has it proved possible to collect a set of all the numbers which were produced, but enough have been found to permit an analysis of content and purpose.

The Workers' Chronicle first appeared on Wednesday, May 5th, 1926. Its declared aim was "to provide our class with correct news of the great struggle into which we have entered in defence of our wages and hours. We will also indicate the kind of policy necessary to give a workers' victory. Every instruction received from the General Council in London will be published instantly in the Workers' Chronicle ... This paper is the official journal of the Newcastle Trades Council of Action which was set up last night. We shall also work in conjunction with the Durham and Northumberland Council of Action and will try to

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[1] Interview with Mr. S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963. Mr. S. Lawther is the brother of Sir William Lawther. He began work as a miner and was Chairman of the Chopwell lodge, 1919-1920. He later worked for the Blaydon Urban District Council. Served on the Durham County Council. Interview with Mr. J.T. Stephenson, July 10th, 1963. Mr. Stephenson first worked underground at the age of sixteen. He was a member of the I.L.P. and Chairman of his lodge. He served three terms on the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. Checkweighman at Blaydon Burn Colliery, 1930-1946. Worked for the National Coal Board, 1946-1957. Four times Chairman of Blaydon U.D.C.

get out two issues each day, if our technical resources permit."[1]

Both the Workers' Chronicle and the Northern Light were primarily propaganda sheets. National news was scarce but the real function of the bulletins was to provide a local news coverage, together with the inclusion of instructions and exhortations to strikers. Such bulletins would obviously be morale-boosters in the face of the continued publication of a press, and the broadcasts of a radio, generally hostile to the strikers. The Workers' Chronicle began moderately enough in price, and in outlook, charging a ½d a copy, which after the first two days was increased to a 1d. A change is however, noticeable from edition No. 6 on May 8th, to the end of the strike. A more militant tone replaced the previous non-violent, "go and dig the garden" attitude. This change coincided with the appearance at the foot of items of the

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[1] Workers' Chronicle, May 5th, 1926. Note the use of the phrase 'our wages and hours.' The Newcastle Trades Council today has retained no record of the events of 1926, but a pamphlet written by the Trade Council's General Secretary in the early 1930's during an attempt to revitalise and reorganise it, presents an unhappy picture of what it was like in 1926. At one point in that year, although whether before or after the General Strike is not specified, only nine societies were affiliated to the Trades Council with a total membership of 3,000. The then General Secretary, a Mr. G. Wood of the Life Assurance Workers, industriously worked throughout the year in an effort to expand the membership, and this effort was partially successful in that, by the end of 1926, 21 unions were affiliated representing just over 10,000 workers. This increase in membership may have been in some measure a result of the General Strike, as this event gave a function and a purpose to the Trades Council, which however transient, showed that it could be something far more vital than a mere talking shop. Despite its small membership, the Trades Council of Newcastle, set up its own Council of Action at the beginning of the dispute, and several sub-committees to deal with particular issues, but remained subordinate, throughout the strike, to the Burt Hall organisation. Yarwood, John A Retrospect and an Explanation, Newcastle and District Trades Council Executive Committee, pp. 16 (Newcastle, 1932). Letter from Mr. J.A. Hutchison, O.B.E., August 10th, 1963.

name A. Geddes, who was the local organiser for the Communist Party. Although small in number, the Communist group was very active and, characteristically, they saw the importance of controlling such a medium for information and propaganda. They were re-inforced by Mr W. Brain, who had been sent to the North East by the Communist Party, and whose activities were often reported in the Workers' Chronicle.

An example of the new tone in the evening edition of May 8th, was a complaint that although all permits had been withdrawn, transport continued to move. Trade Unions now on strike and normally engaged in transport, were urged to open offices and register their members for mass-picketing. These forces should then be handed over to the Newcastle Council of Action, - presumably the Burt Hall organisation - who would direct the picketing. In the same edition, both Mr. Geddes and Mr. Brain were advertised to speak at several week-end meetings during May 8th and 9th.[1]

In the evening edition of May 10th, the mass picketing of the docks was advocated to prevent the unloading of food. Following week-end clashes with the police in Newcastle and a battle between police and pickets on the A1 at Birtley, the Workers' Chronicle pointed the moral: "There is a WAR on. There are bound to be casualties. BE MEN! Only cowards flinch in face of the foe."[2] On the next day, May 11th,

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1 Workers' Chronicle, No. 6, May 8th, 1926. The only biographical detail concerning William Brain which it has proved possible to discover is that he was Midlands Organiser of the Communist Party for a period in the 1920's. MacFarlane, L.J., op. cit, p. 88.

2 Workers' Chronicle, No. 10, May 10th, 1926.

Mr Brain issued a warning in the paper: "the working class are not consciously making a revolutionary assault on the constitution yet, but if the boss declares that the constitution debars the working class from doing anything effective to defend its bread, then the constitution is due for rapid and radical transformation."[1] On May 12th, was printed the fifteenth and last edition of the Workers' Chronicle, largely devoted to a statement on the end of the dispute by the Northumberland and Durham General Council.

The Northern Light, issued by the Blaydon and Chopwell District Council of Action was always "left wing" in tone, stemming as it did from the most militant district in the two counties. Very few copies of the bulletin have survived but, like the Workers' Chronicle it was a cyclostyled production of two sheets, printed on both sides, containing cartoons and jokes, together with local news and comment and instructions to strikers. The first edition appeared on Wednesday May 5th, and it came out, although not, it seems every day, as the Workers' Chronicle managed to do, until May 17th. Its failure to appear every day was probably due to the attention of the authorities. According to the paper itself "During the whole of the time we have been in existence we have had to live in an atmosphere of possible police raids. We were always ready and prepared for that with a duplicate editor, headquarters, machines etc., so that the day we were raided we would still have appeared. Supplies of paper, ink, etc. were only one of our troubles and those were mostly procured from reluctant business

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[1] Ibid., No. 12, May 11th, 1926.

firms by means of audacious bluff." The bulletin was printed in the headquarters of the Blaydon Urban District Council for a time and this was to have repercussions after the Strike.

The major problem which faced both bulletins was the insoluble one, at least in the context of the nine days, of being unable to print a sufficiently large number of copies and of ensuring a wide circulation. Only a relatively few copies of the Northern Light penetrated outside North West Durham and, in the same way, few copies of the Workers' Chronicle circulated outside Newcastle. The numbers printed were inevitably small, due to the method which had to be employed. One man who helped to stencil the Workers' Chronicle in Newcastle, said in an interview that it was difficult to print more than 3,000 at a time.[1] Accurate circulation figures are impossible to obtain, but in comparison with the 150,000 copies of the May 5th emergency edition of the North Mail and Evening Chronicle they would be small indeed. Had the Strike continued, the lack of effective machinery and newsprint would have probably resulted in a further deterioration in the position, but this would have been accompanied by similar problems for the regular local daily press.

It is difficult to calculate the effect of the Press upon the General Strike in the North East, or more importantly, upon the strikers. Interviews with about thirty local people who took some active part in the dispute suggest that little heed was paid to the emasculated

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1 Interview with Mr. W. Beach, July 4th, 1963.

editions of either the Journal, Chronicle or Echo. It is unlikely that the committed and the determined among the strikers would be seriously worried. The waverers, however, and those men who came out reluctantly might have been persuaded, by the printed rumours of men returning to work in large numbers, together with the inducements to return to work offered to men who went back before a settlement was arranged. The light thrown upon the strike situation by the local press is not, therefore, especially bright. News was difficult to get, and its collection was probably hampered by the fact that many of the reporters were being employed in the production of the papers. Moreover, the press were unable to print anything concerning, for example, the way in which the strike was being organised from a trade union point of view, because with the printing unions on strike, the newspapers were being produced by blackleg labour in consequent of which no loyal trade union official would talk to them. From the standpoint of the historian it might have been better if the printers had remained at work, though there is no guarantee that the officials of the Joint Strike Committee would have been any more forthcoming. All three daily papers consistently opposed the strike, and the evidence which their columns provide of the stikers' conduct must be seen in the context of their opinions and attitudes. This does not mean that such evidence should be disregarded; nor does it mean that it should be uncritically accepted.

The view which one takes of the effect of the General Strike in the

North East is likely to be conditioned, at least partly, by one's interpretation of the conversations, on May 5th and 6th, which members of the Joint Strike Committee had with the Civil Commissioner, Sir Kingsley Wood. Two separate and different accounts of the talks exist. As we have seen, the Joint Strike Committee interpreted the conversations as an offer of a share in the maintenance of essential services in the district. Sir Kingsley Wood, in a House of Commons statement on May 20th, 1926, rejected their claims. Corroborative evidence for either view, where it exists at all, is inconclusive. Mr. R. Page Arnot, for example, is convinced of the authenticity of the Joint Strike Committee's account of the meetings, although he himself was not present.[1] The contemporary jottings of Mr. Ebby Edwards appear to confirm the Joint Strike Committee's description of the meetings, but these are brief in the extreme and so far as is known, Mr. Edwards was not actually present at the discussions. The question was first raised in the House of Commons by Mr. Martin Connolly, the Labour Member for Newcastle East, on May 6th.[2] Mr. Connolly alleged that the O.M.S. had broken down in Newcastle, and that the running of essential services had been taken over by the trade unions after the authorities had agreed to withdraw "all extra police, all troops, and all O.M.S. services ..." This was later denied by the Attorney General.[3] Sir Kingsley Wood did not leave Newcastle until the General Strike had been terminated; and in

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1 Interview with Mr. R.P. Arnot, November 19th, 1963.

2 195 H.C. Deb., 5s, 486-487; Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926. Connolly, Martin (1874-1945) Assistant General Secretary, Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders Society; Newcastle City Councillor; Contested Middlesbrough, 1922-1923; Labour M.P. for Newcastle East, 1924-1929.

3 195. H.C. Deb., 5s, 498.

consequence it was not until May 20th that he was given the opportunity of answering the allegations of Mr. Connolly and presenting his own narrative of the events. He had refrained from issuing any statement to the press in the intervening period, save for a denial of the allegations[1], which he now repeated.

"There is not a word of truth in any of these allegations. At no time, and I challenge anyone who has been in Newcastle-on-Tyne or in touch with anybody in Newcastle-on-Tyne to deny it, did the vital services fail. In other words, from the time I reached Newcastle, so far from there being any danger of the vital services failing, they steadily improved. At the end, as I could demonstrate to the House if necessary, there was not a single person in Newcastle, or in the very large district with which I was associated, who in any way was prejudiced or hurt so far as food supplies were concerned. I think that that is not by any means a discreditable record. The hon. Gentleman has referred to certain interviews and statements that were made. It is well that I should tell the House exactly what happened, so that the truth may be known. On May 3rd, I am glad to say, the men who were unloading the boats at the docks were carrying on their duties. The transport men had come out, and my officer, to whom largely the credit for the conduct of affairs in Newcastle is due, arranged that immediately the transport workers came out their places would be filled and vehicles be made available. So far from there being any shortage in that direction, we had far too many vehicles, without making a requisition for a single one of them.

These men were working, and I was very glad that they were working, and glad to encourage them to do so, because it was the opinion, not only of myself, but of all sound trade unionists in Newcastle, that it was no part of the policy, at any rate, of the miners to interfere with and hold up the food supplies of the country. But on that evening certain ill-disposed people had gone to a number of the men working at the docks, and were inducing them to break their contracts by giving up their work. I then intimated publicly that if that took place, there would be no course for me but to put voluntary labour in the place of those men immediately, to give the necessary police protection, and to remove from the docks any ill-disposed people. My Food Officer, General Sir Kerr Montgomery, whose name is universally respected in Newcastle, and who received the freedom of the city by the unanimous vote of

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[1] Newcastle Chronicle, May 7th, 1926.

all sections of the City Council, reported to me that Alderman Weir, a very respected trade unionist in the district, president of the Miners' Federation, (sic)[1] was of the opinion that there was a considerable misunderstanding as to the Government's position at the docks, and what steps were being taken. He told my officer, and subsequently repeated to me, that he believed the men desired to play the game, that they did not desire to leave the City of Newcastle and that great northern area deprived of food; and he suggested that if I saw the secretaries of the three trade unions concerned, he was confident that no further attempt would be made to interfere with the food supplies of the people. He invited me to see him in his own room at the offices of the Miners' Federation. I saw him, and I explained to those present that, as far as I was concerned, I was there representing the Government Department to see that the food supplies of the city were available for all classes of the community, that under no circumstances would the Government give up that position, but ____

Mr. Connolly: At that juncture did you propose dual control with the Government?

Sir Kingsley Wood: No, nor at any other time. I told them that that was my duty - - that I was anxious if, as was represented to me, their men were prepared to continue working, to do everything in my power to facilitate their doing so, and that if they had any difficulties they were to explain them to me. I sat patiently for some hours listening to a recital of the difficulties. The only suggestion I made to them, and one which, on reflection, I should make again today, was this, that if they found there was any difficulty at the quay in relation to the employment of labour, they were to report it to my officer or to me, and I would immediately deal with it. The reason for that was that certain ill-disposed people, I hope unconnected officially with the trade unionist movement of the district, were going round and saying that the presence of a destroyer in the harbour meant that naval ratings were to be used, and that the men were to be turned out of their work. That was the position which I adopted, and the position which I would adopt again, notwithstanding whatever misrepresentation may be made as to the result of that interview. I endeavoured to deal fairly with the situation as I found it. At no time was I informed that these gentlemen were members of a strike committee. They gave me their cards, or at least one of them did, and the other two were introduced to me by the President. I gathered that they were secretaries of certain associations.

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[1] Alderman W. Weir was in fact President of the Northumberland Miners' Association.

Mr. Connolly: What were the associations?

Sir Kingsley Wood: I could furnish the names to the hon. Gentleman but not at the moment. Then they told me that they were going to consult their men. I told them that I should await the reply which they desired to make, but I said that if they were not prepared to work the Government scheme, I would that night see that the docks were properly protected, that all ill-disposed people were removed from the docks, and that if the men did not turn up the next morning, volunteers would take their places. I received a message telling me that they were not prepared to work the Government scheme, and there were some references, I will not mention them now, because I do not want to make any further bad feeling in the matter, to the treatment that would be meted out to people who undertook the work of food supply. Immediately I received that message I did what I said I should so. The docks were cleared, and ill-disposed people were removed. Voluntary labour took the place of the men who refused to work, and from that day to the end of the strike, the whole of the work of the food supplies in that district was carried out by voluntary labour under police protection.

That is a statement which I think any hon. Gentleman who has been in the district and knows the position, as some hon. Members do, will agree is a perfectly faithful and truthful account of what has taken place. I regret very much that when all these efforts have been made by the people of the district, when volunteers have come forward in so many thousands, it should be insinuated that even for a moment the organisation had broken down, or that I as Civil Commissioner had done anything to intimate to the people of Newcastle or the district that the Government were not prepared to take every step that was necessary, which in fact they did take, in order to protect the food supplies of the people." [1]

He then went on to instance an occasion when the Government acted promptly following a withdrawal of labour by some flour mill workers. He agreed that Newcastle had had "many difficulties to contend with during the late strike including the nearby derailment of an express train; and in many parts of the district men, not young boys or people without responsibility, took very extreme and active steps to hold up

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[1] 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 545-548

food supplies." However "the people of the district generally, including the men who had been on strike in connection with the mines for a long time ... certainly bore the struggle well and maintained order."[1] Sir Kingsley Wood then spoke of a talk he had had before leaving Newcastle, with Councillor Adams, the leader of the Labour group on the City Council in which Mr. Adams had said that he personally believed that the emergency organisation had worked admirably.[2]

Finally Mr. Connolly asked Sir Kingsley Wood whether he really believed that the three men he saw at Burt Hall, Flynn, Tarbit, and White, were not connected with the strike. Sir Kingsley remained consistently adamant. "At that time I was quite unaware of the formation of this Strike Committee which, I understand, supplied the hon. Member with certain particulars. I met these three gentlemen as I have said, as representing the trade unionists concerned, and I understood they were going back to their own people who were involved. I do not think it is a matter of importance whether they were on such a committee or not, but what I want the hon. Member to know is that I saw them in their capacity as representatives of the trade unionists concerned. If the hon. Member asserts that they did say something about that, I do not wish to contradict him but, so far as I knew when I left, I had met them simply in the capacity of representatives of the organisations which were concerned with the particular work at that moment and, in fact, they were so introduced to me."[3]

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1 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 549

2 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 549-550.

3 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 550.

There are quite obviously some important differences in the two accounts of the interviews between Sir Kingsley Wood and the three members of the Joint Strike Committee. In the first place, the Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Coucil Joint Strike Committee instances two meetings between Messrs. Flynn, Tarbit, and White and the Civil Commissioner. Sir Kingsley Wood's House of Commons speech suggests that there was only one.[1] Both sides give different versions of how the meeting(s) were arranged. The Strike Committee's account points to two telephone calls from the Civil Commissioner's headquarters requesting a meeting specifically with Mr. Tarbit. Mr. Ebby Edwards, who answered the phone on May 5th, relates that the caller was General Montgomery. The Civil Commissioner claimed however, that the President of the N.M.A., Alderman William Weir, had initiated the discussions in a conversation with General Montgomery. Weir does not appear in the Strike Committee's record of these events, although he did, with Edwards, represent the N.M.A. on the Joint Strike Committee. It is possible that Sir Kingsley Wood confused the May 5th meeting with the Strike Committee Executive, with a visit which he paid to Burt Hall the previous day, May 4th. Edwards noted that Wood called on that day and saw Weir, Kinghorn and himself. The meeting was also reported in the Newcastle Journal of May 6th, but as having taken place "yesterday morning", which may mean a mistake on the part of the newspaper, or that Edwards has also mixed up the two meetings. However, two meetings at least, there appear to have been.[2]

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[1] See above pp. 294-295.

[2] Edwards, E., Notes; Newcastle Journal, May 6th, 1926

Sir Kingsley Wood also maintained that he did not know when he met Flynn, Tarbit, and White, that they were representing the Joint Strike Committee. He was concerned with having the unloading of food-ships at the docks undertaken by those workmen who were normally engaged in that job, and he believed that the three trade unionists members whom he saw represented the dock workers, which indeed they did. Flynn, Tarbit, and White were all officials of general workers' unions in which dock labour was an important section.[1] It is also a fact that in the Strike Committee's account of the interviews, the three men talk of reporting back to "our Executive" and not Strike Committee, which may have added to any confusion which already existed, and confirmed the Civil Commissioner's view of the status of the three men whom he saw. The question is an important one because there is a considerable difference between being in full control of the situation and requesting help from the representatives of a particular group of trade unions, help which, if not forthcoming, will not seriously impair previously formulated plans, and asking for assistance from a Strike Committee, whose aims, inter alia, are to prevent the functioning of the Government's strike breaking organisation.

The most vital discrepancy follows on from the above considerations, and concerns the Strike Committee's allegation that the Civil Commissioner proposed a system of dual control for the running of the docks, an allegation which Wood always denied. He certainly did suggest that each side should appoint an officer to supervise the dock work and iron

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1 N.U.D.A.W., N.U.G. & M.W., and T. & G.W.U.

out any difficulties which might arise. Was this offer misunderstood by the Strike Committee? Certainly with the strike going well, it was but a short step from this offer for the Strike Committee to conclude that the Civil Commissioner only desired such co-operation because his own emergency organisation was not functioning smoothly and efficiently. Hence the charges that it had broken down. Wood said afterwards that his only motive in approaching the trade unions was his desire to maintain the food supplies of his area by the simplest means possible. This involved persuading those men who normally unloaded food ships at the docks to remain at work during the strike. If they refused, then he was quite prepared to use volunteer labour, as in fact he did, although with what success is not known. It is possible that a serious misunderstanding took place and that either both or one of the parties involved read into the conversations a meaning which it was not intended to do. Certainly Wood's House of Commons account is somewhat rambling to say the least, and he may not have made himself clear to the members of the Strike Committee whom he saw. On the other hand, they may have allowed their optimism at the apparent success of the strike to cloud their judgment and to see the visit of Wood as being in the nature of a capitulation by the local Government forces. Again, it may be that both parties, or one of them, were guilty of a certain degree of mendacity in this matter. The evidence remains inconclusive. Many active Labour supporters in the district who have been interviewed still believe that the Emergency Services in Newcastle collapsed. On the other side, a letter of support

from the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, a Conservative, was read in the House of Commons' debate on May 20th[1] and during the same debate Sir Kingsley Wood quoted the views of the leader of the Labour group on the Newcastle City Council to the effect that the essential services in Newcastle had been maintained throughout the dispute. Sir Kingsley Wood left no papers and the bulk of the Joint Strike Committee's documents are lost, believed destroyed. The two interpretations of the events in Newcastle during the General Strike may thus never be entirely resolved.[2]

The course of the General Strike in the North East outside Newcastle is, not surprisingly, even less well served by documentary evidence than Newcastle itself. Only fragments of the trade union material have survived, and together with the local newspapers, and the reminiscences of individuals involved, make up a picture which the passage of time is unlikely to assist the historian to complete, rather the contrary. With such slender resources, it is the remaining urban

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1 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 543-544.

2 Mr. A.J.P. Taylor in his book, English History, 1914-1945, previously quoted, refers to the situation in Newcastle in the following terms: 'In one district collaboration went further. At Newcastle upon Tyne the local strike committee joined with the district commissioner to organise the unloading and delivery of food. The Government did not like this arrangement and soon stopped it. The General Council were equally disapproving.' Taylor, A.J.P., op. cit., pp. 245-246. This is rather an astonishing summary in view of the evidence. There does not appear to have been any collaboration, we do not know what the Government would have thought about it if there had been, neither did the T.U.C. 'disapprove'. Mr. Taylor is obviously referring to the meetings between representatives of the Strike Committee and Sir Kingsley Wood, concerning which the evidence is far from clear as we have seen. But both sides appear to be quite certain that 'collaboration' did not take place.

districts upon which the historian must rely for the bulk of his material. Of these, Darlington provides the greatest volume, and this is probably partly due to the fact that the offices of the Northern Echo were situated there.

Very little information has been unearthed about the Government organisation in Darlington. There was a branch of the O.M.S. formed in the town, but the only document known to have survived relating to it is a propaganda leaflet containing seventeen questions and answers around the basic one of why should anyone join the O.M.S. Unfortunately it bears no date so we do not know how far in advance of the strike it appeared.[1] Once the strike had begun, the Government's Emergency Organisation began to function. Apart from the names of the officials who comprised the Volunteer Service Committee in Darlington, nothing is known of its organisation nor of its achievements. According to the Northern Echo 126 volunteers enrolled on May 3rd, although it is not clear from the report whether these were handed over to the Government forces by the local O.M.S.[2] By May 5th, 400 men and 130 women had volunteered for service, which does not appear an excessive number for a town the size of Darlington, which had a population in 1926 of around 70,000.[3]

Darlington was an important railway centre in 1926, and with over

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1 See Appendix III.

2 Northern Echo, May 4th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 6th, 1926.

3,000 workers in the National Union of Railwaymen alone, the effect of the strike on local transport services was rapidly felt. The Northern Echo reported on May 5th, that the municipal trolley bus service had stopped. The United Automobile Services Ltd. however, ran normal services and placed extra buses on routes to West Hartlepool, Barnard Castle, and Richmond.[1] Only two trains left Darlington for Saltburn on May 4th.[2] A skeleton rail service was run from Darlington on May 5th, but it consisted of only six trains, of which three went to Middlesbrough and Saltburn, two to Newcastle, and one to York. According to the Northern Echo there were few passengers.[3] No details are available of the exact volume of traffic which ran in the area during the strike; apart from the United buses, it seems unlikely that very much other traffic did so.

The effect of the stoppage on Darlington's other industries varied directly with the necessity of taking in supplies of raw materials. The Corporation Gas and Electricity Departments appealed for economy by consumers, but both reported coal stocks which at the normal rate of consumption would last for two months. The Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company Ltd. also had sufficient fuel for a month but was dependent on supplies of steel reaching the works. The Darlington Forge had only a limited supply of coal and expected to shut down several departments

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1 The United Company informed the author that they had no records relating to the strike. It would appear, however, that they maintained their services on many routes though not without opposition. Much of their labour was non-union.

2 Northern Echo, May 5th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 6th, 1926.

within the first few days of the strike.[1] In fact, it would appear that although workers in the engineering industry were not among those called out by the T.U.C. in the original strike plan, the lack of steel coupled with the determination of some workers to strike in support of the miners, reduced the efficiency of several of the factories in Darlington. At the Cleveland Bridge Company works, the men left work in sympathy with those already out, while at Summerson and Son Ltd., the number of men working amounted to 240 instead of the usual 600. At the Darlington Forge, over 800 men failed to report for work on May 4th.[2] By May 5th, the Darlington works of the Blake Boiler Company, Messrs. Williams & Co. Ltd., and the Rise Carr Rolling Mills, were all closed.[3] There is the possibility that some of these men left work in the mistaken belief that their unions had in fact called them out. It is an unfortunate gap in the evidence that it is not known how many, if any, of these men returned to work before May 12th. Nevertheless, even a cautious enquirer must be impressed by these figures if the Northern Echo reported them correctly.

There appears to have been little disorder in Darlington compared with Newcastle and the colliery districts. The worst incidents occured on May 6th, when crowds prevented any buses running in the town by throwing stones at the windscreens, and on the night of May 6/7th, when police charged a crowd outside the offices of the Northern Echo in

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[1] Ibid., May 4th, 1926.

[2] Ibid., May 5th, 1926.

[3] Ibid., May 6th, 1926.

Priestgate. In the same issue in which it reported, without comment, the police baton charge outside the offices of the paper, the Echo published a denial that it was using non-union labour in the production of the paper.[1] The Darlington Joint Transport Strike Committee protested to the Chief Constable of Darlington concerning the baton charge "on peaceful citizens" but the outcome was not recorded.

The strikers' own organisation in Darlington appears to have suffered from a defect which the Newcastle organisation had been partly designed to remedy, namely, numerous autonomous strike committees with little or no central direction. The brevity of those documents which remain in existence, however, preclude any examination of the problems of co-ordination among the local strike organisations. That such problems existed may be judged by this extract from a letter received by the T.U.C. from the Secretary of the Darlington Council of Action, a body centred on the local Trades Council. "I beg to report that a Council of Action has been set up and is in constant session. This represents every union in the town. There is some lack of co-ordination with the Rail and Transport Strike Committees, owing to their refusal to take part in a Joint Strike Committee representing all the other unions. It would be useful if representation could be made to Unity House recommending the local rail and transport committee to co-operate with the other unions for joint purposes." The letter was dated May 9th, 1926.[2] This failure to co-operate on the part of the

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[1] Ibid., May 7th, 8th, 1926

[2] Letter to Citrine from Pearson Harrison, May 9th, 1926; T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 3

railway unions is less surprising in the context of the local situation in Darlington. Besides numerous strikers belonging to A.S.L.E.F. and the R.C.A., over 3,000 men were in Darlington's seven branches of the N.U.R. This compared with about 1,000 members of the A.E.U. who were on strike and considerably less in most other unions.[1] Coupled with the railwaymen's feeling that he was among the aristocracy of labour this would explain the local railway leaders' reluctance to concede any of their authority to a joint body who might take decisions with which they did not agree and attempt to issue orders to their membership. It would follow from this that the Council of Action was of less importance than the Joint Strike Committee formed by the Transport Unions. There is insufficient evidence, however, on which to formulate any definitive conclusions. The Council of Action left behind it no records and its only known acts were the organisation of a large demonstration on Sunday May 9th, addressed by Mr. A. Shepherd M.P. and attended by representatives of five miners' lodges, and the establishment of a force of Peace Patrols on May 8th and 9th, designed to prevent outbreaks of disorder in the town.[2] Unfortunately we know even less about the activities of the Joint Transport Strike Committee, save that it printed a daily bulletin. However, due to the fact that the present Secretary of the Darlington District Council of the N.U.R. has held that post for 45 years and has kept a large amount of material, one interesting document has come to light. The Joint Transport

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1 Letter to Citrine from Darlington District Committee of the A.E.U., May 8th, 1926, T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 3.

2 Letter to Citrine from Pearson Harrison, May 9th, 1926, op. cit., Minutes of the Darlington Rota Committee, May 8th, 1926. Hereafter this body will be styled Rota Committee.

Strike Committee, presumably in order to allow its members time off for other activities, and in order to maintain a round-the-clock service, appointed from its members a series of five-man Rota Committees, who sat for four hourly periods and dealt with whatever matters were brought before them, referring matters with which they felt it beyond their competence to deal to the meetings of the full strike committee. These Rota Committees were staffed by one T. & G.W.U. representative, two A.S.L.E.F. men, three R.C.A. representatives and 24 representatives of six N.U.R. branches in Darlington. The minutes of the sittings of these Rota Committees were taken by each shift secretary and written down in a 9d. black exercise book, mainly in pencil; this book has survived.

The first Rota Committee sat from 12 noon to 4 p.m. on Wednesday May 5th, thirty-six hours after the beginning of the General Strike, and the last one completed its shift at 8 p.m. on Friday, May 14th.[1] The problems which confronted them can be divided under three main headings; viz Communications, Permits and Picketing. The Rota Committee's deliberations are interesting not only for the light which they thrown on the energy and organisational zeal which marked the workers' approach to the General Strike, but also for the loyalty to their individual unions which the strikers showed.[2]

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1 Rota Committee, May 5th, 14th, 1926.

2 Perhaps sometimes against their better judgment. Mr A.J. Best, then Mayor of Darlington, had his name at the foot of Volunteer Service Committee recruiting posters, while at the same time himself on strike with the Railway Clerks' Association.

The maintenance of communications was an obvious necessity, not only to bolster the morale of the strikers, but simply to transmit intelligence of what was happening. The Rota Committee was in touch with joint strike committees and railway unions strike committees at Ferryhill, the Hartlepools, Shildon, Hylands, Gateshead, Northallerton, York, Saltburn, Redcar, Spennymoor, Wingate, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Kirby Stephen, Barnard Castle, Thirsk, Sunderland, Goole, Durham, Richmond, Wakefield, Mexbrough and Pontefract. Relations were maintained either by letter, or despatch rider, and often printed news bulletins were exchanged. Postal bulletins were received from as far away as Nottingham and Leicester. On May 9th, a despatch rider arrived from T.U.C. headquarters in London and following a visit to Newcastle returned with news of the situation in the North East and several copies of strike bulletins, on May 10th.[1] Several requests for news or help came from the more isolated spots, such as Kirby Stephen, Richmond and Barnard Castle, and arrangements were made to send out speakers and bulletins to those places. Darlington became the centre to which all news for the Hartlepool area would first be sent. It would then be collected by Hartlepool despatch riders. Assistance was given in other ways to lesser centres. For example a member of the R.C.A. was sent to Ferryhill in order to persuade eight members of that union employed there to stop work. The minutes do not record the outcome of the visit.[2] More significantly perhaps it was

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[1] Rota Committee, May 5th-11th, 1926.

[2] Ibid., May 8th, 1926.

decided on May 10th, to write to the Strike Committee at York and Newcastle intimating that in future, they should arrange all transport direct from either place to the other, save in the case of members of the organisations involved in the Darlington Transport Joint Strike Committee. This assertion of the transport unions' autonomy is indicative of the struggle which the Strike Committee at Newcastle would have had to persuade the railwaymen of Darlington to join their two-county organisation. In fact by the end of the General Strike, there was no sign that the Newcastle organisation's authority had reached as far south as the Tees.

The issue, or usually the refusal to issue, permits to allow transport of all kinds to move, occupied much of the time of the sittings of the Rota Committees. According to the minutes, a total of thirty-five requests for permits were dealt with between May 5th and May 12th. Of these, thirty-one were refused. The four which were granted concerned the removal of persons from hospital and in one case, an agreement to allow a man to exercise the horses normally used for carting by the L.N.E.R. at their Bank Top Goods Station. The majority of the refused requests, concerned permission to move goods from the railway station, in four cases the goods in question being bananas. One of the refused petitioners was the Newcastle Co-operative Society Ltd. On May 5th, the Joint Transport Strike Committee ordered that no further permits were to be granted for the removal of goods and this was strictly adhered to. Whether such a declaration could be maintained in the face of attempts to remove goods depended to some extent on the efficiency

of the picketing.[1]

The details of the picket organisation are not known, but the Rota Committees received frequent reports from pickets stationed at various strategic points. The most important picketing point from the railwaymen's point of view was of course Bank Top Station, and the Rota Committee minutes record a number of successes which pickets had in turning away men, several of whom had been sent by the Labour Exchange.[2] In fact, on May 8th, the picket at Bank Top was involved in an argument with a police sergeant over the removal from the station of a load of bananas. The difference of opinion culminated in the sergeant writing down the names and addresses of the pickets and saying that he would protect the traders' lorries. This may reflect on the success which the pickets were having, although there is not sufficient information on which to assess the nature of the situation.[3] But the Northern Echo of May 12th contained the following news item. "As a result of threats and efforts to interrupt the distribution of foodstuffs from Darlington L.N.E.R. Bank Top Goods Yard, convoys were yesterday escorted by police, forty foot and five mounted." There were no outbreaks of disorder.[4] Without such disorder, the strikers could not prevent movement of goods in this way, of course, and that was one of the unresolved dilemmas of the General Strike.

On Teeside the main centres of strike activity were in the towns of

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1 Ibid., May 5th, 1926.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., May 8th, 1926.

4 Northern Echo, May 12th, 1926.

Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, and the Hartlepools. In all these places, the Trades Councils attempted to co-ordinate the activities of those trade unionists on strike. Lack of preparation and a determination to preserve the autonomy of individual unions combined to make their task a very difficult one, and the fact that a small measure of success was achieved in both Middlesbrough and Stockton says much for the efforts of the men concerned.

The General Strike took place when Middlesbrough was suffering more severely than most from the effects of the trade depression. The Northern Echo printed a gloomy picture when it prophesied that a long stoppage in the coal industry would halt production in the iron and steel works of the Middlesbrough area, affecting 25,000 employees.[1] In fact, after two weeks of the coal stoppage 19,559 people were registered as unemployed at the Middlesbrough Employment Exchange, an increase of 25 per cent on the period immediately preceding the General Strike.[2]

It has not proved possible to discover the effect of the General Strike on each one of the separate companies engaged in the production of iron and steel in the Middlesbrough area. It is also difficult to set out the specific effects of the General Strike upon an industry which was at the same time severely depressed. However one example will illustrate some of the general problems which the stoppage created for the industry. A shortage of coal was of course the first immediate effect of the strike.

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[1] Ibid., May 3rd, 1926.

[2] Ibid., May 28th, 1926.

The firm of Dorman Long and Company made a loss on the year's working in 1926 of £178,962 2s 6d. The Directors' Report stated that the collieries owned by the firm together with the Iron and Steel works, had been closed down between the beginning of May and the end of November. A certain amount of work had been carried on in the Constructional Departments and the Sheet and Wire Works. The normal coal consumption was about 7,000 tons a day, hence the difficulty of stockpiling supplies for even a few weeks. The Blast Furnaces, Steel Works, and Rolling Mills were therefore compelled to cease production, and what coal could be obtained, from abroad for example, was used to keep the coke ovens warm and to help maintain a limited output in the Constructional and Sheet Wire Works sections. Normal working was not resumed until February 1927.[1] It is clear that once production had stopped in the coal mines, a stoppage in the iron and steel industry could not be long delayed. The interdependence between various sections of industry made nonsense of the T.U.C.'s partial strike call. Dorman Long's, for example, were able to continue production in their constructional departments because the engineering trades were not among those workers called upon to strike from midnight on May 3rd.

The organisation of the strike in Middlesbrough was at first left to each branch of those unions who had members involved. These were notably the transport unions and those men in the iron and steel works

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1 Annual Reports, Dorman, Long and Co. Ltd., 37th Ordinary General Meeting, December 1926. Advantage was taken of the enforced idleness brought about by the strike to carry out a good deal of necessary overhaul and repair. Staff were kept on instead of being discharged, and when production was resumed, the 'works were in better order than for years past'.

who were affected. No preparation seems to have been made by the local trade unionists for the strike, but the Trades Council appears to have played an active part in getting things moving once the strike had started. On May 4th, a joint meeting took place between the Executive Committees of the Trades Council and the East, West, and Borough Labour Parties. As a result, it was decided to form a Publicity Committee which would attempt to counter any misrepresentation of the strikers' case which might be broadcast by the Government or the employers.[1] The joint executives themselves made up the Publicity Committee, and immediately arranged a series of open air meetings in the district. The next day, May 5th, the second day of the General Strike, the Trades Council proposed that a central strike committee should be formed. It was to be composed of the whole of the Executive Committee of the Trades Council and two members from each trade strike committee.[2] The President of the Trades Council, Mr. C.R. Stephenson of the N.U.R., was appointed secretary of the Middlesbrough Joint Transport Strike Committee, and the Central Strike Committee was therefore presided over by Mr. L.G. Allen, also of the N.U.R., the Trades Council Vice-President.[3] It is interesting to note that Mr. Stephenson chose to act on the Joint Transport Strike Committee and not on the Central Strike Committee. One of the keynotes of the General Strike was the loyalty shown by the strikers

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1 Burns, E., The General Strike, May 1926 - Trades Councils in Action (1926) pp. 145-146.

2 Burns, E., op. cit., p. 146; Middlesbrough Trades and Labour Council, 48th Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ending December 31st, 1926 (1926) p. 8. Hereafter styled 48th Annual Report.

3 48th Annual Report, Ibid.

to their own unions and the jealous wish to preserve the independence of those unions. In this, of course, the members were mirroring the leadership. In the context of the General Strike, an important corollary of trade union separatism was the extreme reluctance to delegate any powers to a central co-ordinating body. The Newcastle Strike Committee experienced this difficulty, as did the Darlington Council of Action and similar problems confronted the Trades Council at Middlesbrough. This crucial question came up at the first meeting of the Central Strike Committee, which took place at 88 Grange Road East, on Thursday May 6th, at 3 p.m.[1] The report of the Secretary of the Middlesbrough Trades Council, Mr. E. Turner, describes the meeting. "The decision of the Trades Council re the forming of a Central Strike Committee was considered, and it soon became evident that centralised strike direction was not yet practical in Middlesbrough, owing to the fear on the part of some of the delegates that it would result in what was termed "domestic affairs of individual unions being interfered with." The terms of the Trades Council resolution, however, were modified to meet the criticism by adding further words stating that the Central Strike Committee would not interfere with the domestic policy of any union, in any other than a constitutional way. Having regard to the discussion which took place on this point, it became evident that the Central Strike Committee could only hope to act as a co-ordinating and not a directional body at the outset, whatever may have been possible as the strike continued."[2] In fact, the General Strike did not last

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[1] Burns, E., op. cit., p. 146.

[2] Ibid.

long enough for the Central Strike Committee to direct operations. An interesting picture of the strike in the area as seen through the eyes of the Middlesbrough Trades Council Secretary, can be obtained from a study of his report.

The solidarity of the workers in the area surpassed that known in any previous strike.[1] There were 10,964 men on strike in the Middlesbrough area and 3,250 blastfurnacemen unemployed as a result of the strike.[2] The Central Strike Committee met each day at 3 p.m., "whilst from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. various delegates arranged to be at the headquarters to deal with any emergency. The attendance of the delegates was not as good as it might have been, but this was no doubt due to the fact that the delegates were also members of their Trade Strike Committees, whose meetings they also had to attend."[3] So much for organisational efficiency! Inevitably such a division of responsibility as existed was bound to be a hindrance to the work of the Central Strike Committee. Nevertheless, the volume of work of the Secretary of that group increased, and it became necessary to appoint a Minute Secretary, and use another room for clerical work in connection with correspondence and despatch riders. Unfortunately no records of the minutes taken at the meetings of the Central Strike Committee have survived. Seven despatch riders with motor cycles and sidecars, enabled the Central Strike Committee to establish communication with York, Darlington, Stockton, Haverton Hill, Hartlepool, Newcastle, South Bank,

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[1] Ibid. 48th Annual Report, op. cit., p. 8.

[2] Burns, E., op. cit., pp. 148-149.

[3] Ibid., p. 147.

Grangetown, Redcar, Loftus, Carlin How, Skelton, Brotton, Guisborough, Great Ayton and Stokesley.[1] The Trade Council headquarters were not designed to house an energetic strike committee. Almost no office equipment was available until the Secretary "commandeered" the typewriter and duplicator belonging to the Borough Labour Party.[2] This lack of basic office equipment delayed the production of a strike bulletin, and it was not until the strike had been called off that preparations were completed for the issuing of a daily bulletin. A number of T.U.C. bulletins were received, and these were duplicated and distributed with the assistance of two shorthand typists from the local branch of the Railway Clerks Association and the staff of the Blastfurnacemen's Union. The financial statement of the Middlesbrough Central Strike Committee sums up the lack of preparedness and the meagre resources which were at the Committee's disposal during the General Strike. The expense of the stoppage, largely met by a £7 grant from the Darlington and District Labour College; amounted to £8 12s 1d, of which £3 17s 6d was for "rent", presumably for the extra accommodation which the extra work required.[3]

The interaction of the failure to prepare and the inevitability of each trade union acting independently and largely without a central direction, prescribed the limits within which the strike could be effective. This is manifested in all the centres for which evidence has been presented so far. It does not, however, appear to have been the case at

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., pp. 147-148. 48th Annual Report, op. cit., p. 11

Stockton-on-Tees.

Immediately the General Strike was announced, the Trades and Labour Council at Stockton called a conference of all the affiliated trade unions, which resulted in the formation of a Joint Strike Committee. This body branched out into several sub-committees including Publicity and Rota Committees.[1] The Publicity Committee was responsible for the issuing of a daily bulletin made up of local strike news as well as news received from other districts. The Publicity Committee also arranged the meetings which the Joint Strike Committee sponsored during the nine days. The duties of the Rota Committees were similar to those of the Rota Committees which the Darlington Joint Transport Strike Committee formed. They were primarily concerned with the organisation and execution of picket duties. Sports and Entertainments and Transport Committees, the latter dealing with applications for permits, were also set up. A despatch route was mapped out and Stockton arranged with the Middlesbrough Council of Action that despatches from the Cleveland district for the north should be sent via Stockton and that Darlington should act as a receiving bay for despatches for the south. This was the kind of inter-strike committee co-operation which could be achieved easily as no relinquishing of authority by strike committees or individual unions was involved.[2] The Stockton Strike Committee established communications with strikers in

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[1] Letter from J. Alderson, Secretary of the Stockton and Thornaby Trades and Labour Council Joint Strike Committee, May 8th, 1926. T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 3.

[2] Ibid.

West Hartlepool, Seaham, Sunderland and Newcastle besides Middlesbrough and Darlington. A Mr. A. J. Thatcher, in a letter to the T.U.C. also dated May 8th reported, among other things, that "we are doing well here ..... and this is the headquarters of the strike and all unions concerned recognise our instructions. We are also linked up with the Durham and Northumberland Council of Action."[1] If this state of affairs did in fact exist, then the Stockton Strike Committee had achieved a control of the organisation and policy of the strikers in its area which similar bodies in Newcastle, Middlesbrough, and Darlington had not been able to approach. Unfortunately no evidence corroborating Mr. Thatcher's statement has been discovered and it is not known what his personal position in the organisation was. In The General Strike of 1926 - Trades Councils in Action by Emile Burns, the section on Stockton contains a scheme of organisation which was "in force towards the end of the strike..."[2] This is set out in detail, under ten headings, but appears rather as a plan for the future, than an outline of what in fact took place.[3] The position at Stockton, like that of the other areas, cannot be analysed on such relatively meagre evidence as presently exists.

It was in the urban centres where the ideas of strike organisation and trade union co-operation were most needed. In the greater part of our area, there was virtually only one group of workmen engaged in the

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[1] Letter from A.J. Thatcher, May 8th, 1926. T.U.C. Local Collection, Box No. 3.

[2] Burns, E., op. cit., p. 178.

[3] Ibid., pp. 179-180.

dispute; the coal miners. Traditionally, for either strike or lock-out, these men just left their place of work. Further organisation than that already provided by their trade union was unnecessary. Black-legging, at least at the beginning of a stoppage, was most unlikely in the tightly-knit community of the pit village, which mitigated against any organised form of strike breaking. However, as we have seen, the General Strike involved workers other than miners, notably transport workers. A skeleton transport service was fairly easy to arrange with the help of volunteers, and one of the more obvious effects of such a service would be to sap the morale of those transport workers on strike. It followed from this that attempts should be made to prevent any vehicles using the roads and contributing to a weakening of the strike. In the mining districts of Durham and Northumberland, large scale picketing of the roads by the miners severely restricted the movement of traffic. This in turn led to affrays with the police and numerous arrests under the Emergency Regulations. These attempts to stop traffic are perhaps the most significant events of the General Strike in the mining areas. Once again, the historian has to rely on reports in the local press and the personal memories of individuals, with the limitations which these sources imply. Nonetheless, the main lines of the situation can be sketched in.

In County Durham, over 150,000 miners were affected by the dispute, and by May 8th, the Northern Echo and the Newcastle Chronicle were reporting the hold up of traffic by strikers in the Stanley area of North West Durham.[1] The Echo went on to state that throughout the whole of

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[1] Northern Echo, May 8th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 8th, 1926.

North West Durham, traffic was being held up and instanced the situation at Hamsterley on the Newcastle to Consett road where all vehicles were being turned back by a large crowd of miners thought to come from Chopwell.[1] In the early hours of May 10th, "an apparently organised attempt took place to stop road traffic on the main Newcastle-Durham road."[2] Baton charges by the police dispersed the crowds. The police had been informed that large crowds were assembling along the Great North Road at various points between Chester-le-Street and Low Fell. Consequently about a dozen policemen set out from Chester-le-Street in a lorry and were joined by other police at Birtley. Before Birtley was reached however, a baton charge was made to scatter a crowd who threw stones at the police. Just north of Birtley, at the Teams Colliery, a further use of police truncheons was made. At this spot, pickets had attempted to block the road with railway sleepers. During a fight between the police and pickets, three policemen were injured.[3] The Chronicle had reported on May 10th, that "Motorists were complaining bitterly of the attitude of the strikers and pickets at different stages of the journeys between Sunderland and Newcastle and between Sunderland and Durham."[4] The United bus company, which as we have seen, attempted to maintain services in many parts of the county, met with heavy opposition from strikers. In the Bishop Auckland district alone, the cost of repairing damage done to United vehicles

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1 Northern Echo, May 8th, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 11th, 1926.

3 Ibid., Newcastle Chronicle, May 11th, 1926.

4 Ibid., May 10th, 1926.

amounted to £600.[1] The L.N.E.R. also suffered from attacks on its property. On May 11th, the 9.55 a.m. train from Sunderland to West Hartlepool via Wellfield was held up after a rail had been removed from the track between Shotton Bridge and Thornley stations.[2] These were just several of the attempts made by strikers to prevent the movement of transport in the county. It is not a complete list. The consequence was numerous arrests and charges under the Emergency Powers Act.

In a statement in the House of Commons on June 2nd, the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson Hicks, gave details of the number of proceedings taken under the Emergency Regulations during the General Strike. In twenty three counties and seventy two boroughs there had beennone at all. He divided the offences into two major groups, viz. 1. Incitement to sedition by speech or writing, and 2. Actual disorder or violence. There had been 150 cases under the first heading and 1,389 cases under the second. Of the 1,389 cases of violence, 583 had occurred in the English counties, and of those 583, 183 cases had been in County Durham. The Home Secretary went on to state that the counties of Durham, Northumberland, and Glamorgan, all containing extensive mining areas, provided "more than their fair share" of such cases.[3] Although it is not possible to break down the number of cases where violence was alleged into specific categories, it is a reasonable assumption to make from those cases which were reported by the newspapers that a large proportion of the charges of disorder arose out of

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1 Northern Echo, May 17th, 1926.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 12th, 1926.

3 196 H.C. Deb., 5s, 822-825.

attempts to prevent the movement of transport. The difficulty of defining, in practice, peaceful picketing and the thin line which separates it from intimidation, together with the determination on the part of the strikers that nothing should move, was bound to lead to trouble if vehicles tried to carry on regardless of the strike. That an effort would be made to carry on was inevitable, and once interference had occurred, police action was certain. Throughout the county there appears to have been little uniformity in the type of transport which would be stopped and that which would be allowed to move. Some areas did not try to stop vehicles carrying food for example, whereas in other places, the strategy employed was to close the roads to all traffic irrespective of what goods were being carried.

Two examples of the kind of offences which led to appearances before the Courts, together with the sentences which were imposed, must suffice. Two men were charged at Sunderland on May 15th, under the Emergency Regulations following incidents on the main Newcastle to Sunderland road on May 5th. It was alleged that they had stopped and immobilised a laundry van which had been giving lifts. The police evidence stated that a crowd of about 150 had been obstructing the roadway. Some stones had been thrown. The defence argued that only peaceful persuasion was used. The men were each fined £20, with the alternative of two months' imprisonment, the magistrate remarking that both would have been sent to prison without any option but for the more peaceful atmosphere "that had prevailed in the last day or two."[1]

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[1] Northern Echo, May 17th, 1926

At the Gateshead Magistrates Court on May 20th, the bench sat for five hours dealing with 47 offenders charged under the Emergency Regulations. Most of those charged were miners from the Chopwell district of Durham. The bulk of the charges were concerned with attempting to prevent the proper use of the highway, although one man received two months' imprisonment after being found guilty of being concerned in the circulation of a paper, the Northern Light, "whose contents were likely to cause disaffection among the people." Of the 47 charged, two were bound over, eleven were discharged, ten were fined, and twenty four given prison sentences varying in range from one to three months.[1]

Chopwell was something of a storm centre during the whole of the 1926 coal stoppage, and was well known throughout the inter-war period as an area of mining militancy. Relations between the management of the Chopwell collieries, the Consett Iron Company, and the workmen had been poor since the end of the ephemeral post-war boom in the industry in 1920. Before the General Strike, the three pits at Chopwell had been idle from June 22nd, 1925, because of the workmen's refusal to discuss with the management a proposed revision of wages.[2] The period between June 1925 and May 1926 was therefore one of continual strike activity in the district, with what amounted to a private war going on between the owners and the men. Coal stealing raids, clashes with the

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1 Ibid., May 21st, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 21st, 1926.

2 The workmen interpreted revision to mean reduction although the management said that this was not necessarily true. Both thought that if they stuck out long enough, they would win.

police, and the inevitable soup kitchens, had become a permanent feature of Chopwell life. In Chopwell, the General Strike was merely an extension and a widening in scope of a process which had been underway for almost twelve months. When the General Strike was declared, local Labour leaders, by now well versed in the courses of applied militancy, immediately formed a Council of Action to cover the Blaydon, Crookhill, Chopwell, Crawcrook, and Ryton areas.[1] The most prominent among these leaders were two members of the Lawther family, Will and Steve, together with Mr. H. Bolton. Will was a checkweighman at the Victoria Garesfield colliery, a member of the National Executive of the Labour Party, and a Durham County Councillor.[2] Steve Lawther had been an official of the Chopwell Miners' Lodge when working at Chopwell colliery and remained active in lodge affairs, although by May 1926, he was employed by the Blaydon Urban District Council as a rent collector. He was secretary of the Spen and District Trades and Labour Council.[3] Henry Bolton was a well known Chopwell miner, a Methodist, and Chairman of the Blaydon Urban District Council.[4] These three men were assisted during the General Strike, by the presence of Mr. R.P. Arnot, who was to speak at the Chopwell May Day demonstration. As we have seen, he and the Lawther brothers were the prime movers behind the formation of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee in Newcastle. The Chopwell organisation was left largely in the hands

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1 Northern Light, No. 1, May 5th, 1926. Interview with Mr S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963.

2 Interview with Sir William Lawther, July 11th, 1963.

3 Interview with Mr. S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963.

4 Information supplied by Mr. Bolton's son, Mr. W. Bolton. See above p. 242, note 1.

of Steve Lawther, Henry Bolton, and several other Left-wing militants including Mr. J. Stephenson, Mr. R. Curry, and Mr. Jack Gilliland.[1]

It was a simple task to obtain large numbers of miners to picket the roads in the district and little transport could move without either a Council of Action permit or police protection.[2] A mobile picket was set up in an attempt to avoid the police patrols which were operating in the area. A duplicated strike bulletin, the Northern Light, was issued from the offices of the Blaydon Urban District Council, on which there was a Labour majority. The Council's Gestetener and paper were used, although it was claimed that some of the paper used was purchased from wholesalers.[3] The Northern Light reflected the militant attitude of its publishers, and in order to avoid police interference, a number of different places were used to print it as the Strike wore on.[4]

Police reinforcements had been active in the Chopwell district for many months, escorting a small number of officials to and from the colliery, and attempting to prevent raids on the coal stocks. The calling of the General Strike, however, together with the increase in the activities of the strikers led to Chopwell being created a new

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1 It has not proved possible to discover any biographical details concerning Mr. R.Curry or Mr. Jack Gilliland.

2 Mr. S. Lawther recalled a girl due to be married in Gateshead on May 7th, asking for and being granted a permit in order to travel by car from Chopwell. Interview with Mr. S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963.

3 Northern Light, No. 8, May 13th, 1926.

4 Interviews with Mr. S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963 and with Mr J. Stephenson, July 10th, 1963.

police division under the control of Superintendent Davis of the North Riding police from which authority a body of policemen had been borrowed.[1] Many arrests were made in the area, exact figures being impossible to ascertain. The strikers often complained bitterly about the activities of the police, whose actions inevitably placed them, in the eyes of the strikers, on the side of the employers and the Government. Perhaps the most notorious incident in the Chopwell district involving the police, was the arrest of Mr. Will Lawther and Mr. Henry Bolton on Sunday May 9th. This was a peculiar affair, not least in that it appears to have been the result of a chance meeting between the two men and a force of police at a public house. The police were accompanying a food lorry on a round of distribution and had stopped at the public house for refreshment. Mr. Lawther and Mr. Bolton had also stopped for a drink en route to Chopwell and they were approached by Inspector Thompson who asked if he, Mr. Lawther, would assist in the delivery of the food. Mr. Lawther asked the Inspector if he possessed a permit from the Council of Action. The Inspector said that he did not need one, whereupon Mr. Lawther was alleged to have lost his temper and together with Mr. Bolton issued threats concerning what might happen if attempts were made to deliver the food. The two men were then arrested.[2] At the trial, it was alleged that "peaceable people in Chopwell and district have been terrified out of their wits by the actions of Bolton and you and your comrades ..."

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 21st, 1926.

2 Interviews with Mr. S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963 and with Sir W. Lawther, July 11th, 1963. Newcastle Journal, May 14th, 1926.

A fine of £50 was inflicted with the penalty of two months' imprisonment for non-payment. Both men refused to pay and so went to prison.[1]

After the trial, which was held at Gateshead, a crowd of people from the Chopwell district, who had come into Gateshead to hear the verdict, clashed with a force of police. A baton charge and several arrests resulted. In court it was claimed by the prosecution that the crowd made an unprovoked attack upon the police. Members of the group being tried, however, claimed that the police deliberately lay in wait for them as they were peaceably going home to Chopwell.[2] Which claim is true is still uncertain. There is, however, a third version which would explain the difference between the claims of police and arrested. A Mr. A. Walker, at the time a colliery manager for Priestmanns Ltd., remembers a conversation he had with one of his employees who lived in Gateshead, who claimed that a number of Gateshead miners took the opportunity provided by the crowds in the streets to begin to settle a number of scores with the Gateshead police, and that the Chopwell men suffered the blame, together with the vengeance, of the police.[3]

The General Strike saw the climax of Chopwell militancy. The closing down of one of the village's three pits together with the migration from the area and the continuation of the depression gradually sapped the energies of the local leaders; but Chopwell did not fade

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1 Ibid.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 14th, 15th, 1926. Interviews with Mr S. Lawther, June 19th, 1963 and with Mr J. Stephenson, July 10th, 1963.

3 Conversation with Mr. A. Walker, Secretary of the Northern Institute of Mining Engineers (Newcastle upon Tyne), December 30th, 1964.

from the scene before the local press, in two hysterically anti-Communist articles and leaders, had heaped scorn, invective, and hatred in a bitter trinity upon the happenings in the district during the Strike.[1] Even the Morning Post published an article on the subject on June 15th, an article headed "The Reddest Village in England" and "How Chopwell has lived on the dole for a year". The veracity, as well as the general tone of this article may be judged by the newspapers' description of Newcastle as "... The landing place of the Russian invasion." The Morning Post was, at the time, industriously engaged in proving that the General Strike had been a Communist-inspired plot.[2]

There were, however more serious complaints by some residents in the district, who formed the Blaydon and District Municipal Vigilance Association in an attempt to increase the representation of moderates on the Urban District Council.[3] The Association wrote a letter to the Minister of Health protesting at the squandering of the rate-payers' money by their elected representatives, but after an inquiry by the District Auditor, the Minister intimated that no useful purpose could be served in pursuing the matter further.[4]

The situation in Chopwell is important not solely because it was there that a number of militant trades unionists attempted to prevent the organisation of any activities calculated to lessen the effect of the strike, but because it became a symbol both in the North East and

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 21st, 22nd, 1926.

2 Morning Post, June 15th, 1926, and subsequent editions.

3 Newcastle Chronicle, May 21st, 1926.

4 Ibid., August 18th, 1926.

outside, of the workmen's struggle against the depression and their employers. To the middle-class, it represented either the sober British workmen, made inebriated by agitators, or the logical outcome of trade unions and Labour Governments. To these people, Chopwell was a malady which they could not understand and which they wished to destroy in case the disease should prove contagious. "Little Moscow" was a threat to their ordered and comfortable existence.[1]

In the Seaham area of County Durham, the Estate Agent for Lord Londonderry, Mr Malcolm Dillon, described the effect of the strike in a number of letters which he wrote to his Lordship at the time. These are useful both for the information they provide, and for the light they shed upon the attitude to the events of a prominent member of the local middle-class; unworried, but rather annoyed that orderly life should be so crudely disarranged.

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[1] The mingled fear and bitterness which the doings at Chopwell engendered in the middle classes was well expressed by the Chairman of the Gateshead magistrates, Sir Alfred Palmer, on May 20th, during the sentencing of Edward Wilson, charged with being concerned in the circulation of a paper likely to cause dissatisfaction among the people, the Northern Light. 'The manner in which Chopwell has been governed for some time past is a scandal, and this bench is determined to see that that state of things is put an end to. If you think that the Council of Action can hold up the inhabitants in a state of tyranny you are very much mistaken. Why you and those associated with you don't go to Russia, I don't know. I am sure the Government, and I personally, would subscribe willingly to get rid of the whole lot of you and let you go and live in that country where everything is so blissful and so happy. We don't want you. Nobody wants you. You are just a source of danger to the community, and the sooner you make up your minds to either reform or get away, the better for all concerned.' Newcastle Chronicle, May 21st, 1926.

On the 3rd of May he wrote:

"Arrangements have been made this morning as to safety men in the pits, and the eight hundred ponies in the two collieries[1] are to be brought up and put out to grass. The men are quite docile and taking very little interest in the situation. They have little idea of the merits of the dispute and say that everything is done in London. They will draw lying on pay on Friday and they had a week's wages last Saturday so that they are quite happy. They will keep all ready cash for their amusement and beer, and leave the feeding to be done, as far as possible, by others better off. After next Saturday they will be feeling the pinch a little and then I suppose we shall have to go through the same wearisome performance of feeding the children."[2]

On May 4th, Mr. Dillon wrote that the stoppage was not popular, especially among those men earning £1 per day, and the wives of subsistence workers. But he believed that the miners had a fair chance of holding out because so much money was going into the villages in the form of old-age pensions, widows, and ex-soldiers' pensions, Guardians' relief, compensation, health insurance and money from Regimental and Soldiers' Societies.[3]

On May 5th, Dillon reported that the men were quiet and that they occupied themselves by scavenging coal from railways and waggonways in order to sell it in Sunderland. He claimed that two men made 12/- each the day before, for coal which they had picked up. Only an attenuated edition of the Northern Echo reached Seaham. He had heard that the waiters at the Station Hotel had been called out, being members of

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1 i.e. Seaham and Dawdon.

2 The Dillon Papers, already cited in Chapter VI, above. Dillon, Malcolm (1859-1945) M.B.E., D.L., J.P. Chief Agent to the Marquis of Londonderry, and Managing Director of the Londonderry Collieries, Ltd. Mayor of Jarrow, 1903-1906; Chairman, Seaham Magistrates, 1912-1941; Wrote The History of Irish Banking (?).

3 Ibid.

the Railway Men's Union.[1]

The third day of the General Strike, May 6th, saw no change in the local situation. Mr Dillon reported in his letter of May 6th, a trip by car which he had made on the previous day, to Newcastle. Large numbers of pickets were to be seen and there were no buses running between Seaham and Newcastle and no trains between Hartlepool and Sunderland. Some of the colliery officials had found some bricks placed upon the railway line at Seaham.

Coal raiding was continuing and Mr. Dillon complained that the culprits were even stealing the Colliery Company's bags in which to carry it away. They were not taking the coal for personal use but solely to sell it for a high price. "The last pay is tomorrow morning, a total of £19,000 and special precautions are being taken about transporting the money to the collieries."

Mr. Dillon reported that the publicans of Seaham were saying that their takings on the previous Saturday, May 1st, were a record. So far there had been no court proceedings in the district arising out of the dispute.

The mail was delayed and no letters had arrived from London for two days. The Seaham Postmaster told Dillon that no trains were running to Sunderland and that he was not allowed to incur the expense of a motor to take his mails to a point where they could join the railway.[2]

On May 7th, Mr. Dillon wrote to Londonderry saying that he had

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[1] Ibid. Probably the Station Hotel, Newcastle, where the waiters did go on strike.

[2] Ibid.

just received two forms posted in London on May 4th. He narrated a story which he had been told, concerning a lorry load of Nimmo's beer. The vehicle had been delivering at Blackhall and while the men in charge of the lorry were inside the public house arranging for the beer to be taken in, the lorry disappeared. The two men had to walk home. A lorry load of beer for the Nimmo house at Dawdon was turned back by pickets. Mr. Dillon had also heard of a "Conservative" newsagent at Houghton-le-Spring who had been visited by a "Bolshevist County Councillor" and two friends, who informed him that as the newspapers were now being set up by non-unionists, he would not be allowed to sell any. The newsagent has since exhibited a notice in his window announcing that no newspapers would be sold during the strike.[1]

The next letter is dated May 10th and in it, Mr. Dillon relates that he had attended a Coal Trade Meeting in Newcastle in spite of pickets on some roads. Very few police were about. He mentions the arrest of Lawther and Bolton but not by name. "Our own men are quiet. The Dawdon men have constituted a kind of Soviet and have intimated to the police that they are going to take possession of the roads to help the police and to ensure the safety of the public. No cars will be allowed to pass unless they have a permit from them. The police told me that this threat has not yet been carried into effect, but that the men state they are proposing to begin tomorrow,[2] and permits are certainly being issued by them to those people who have been to ask for

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[1] Ibid.

[2] If this is correct, it provides an interesting illustration of the manner in which the strike developed, organisation of permits and picketing beginning to be attempted in an ambitious way only at the end of the nine days. Given another week, such organisation might well have increased in confidence and efficiency.

them. This is, of course, a quiet way of assuming control."[1]

May 11th saw the situation unchanged. "The Strike Committee have not taken over control of the roads. A meeting will be held tonight to make arrangements to put into operation the Feeding of School Children Act as from Monday next. I do not believe that there is any necessity for it. The manager of the Co-op store told me that he has ceased to sell any flour because he found that the miners' wives were buying and hoarding it".[2]

The following day, May 12th, the General Strike was ended and in his letter of that date to Lord Londonderry, Mr. Dillon expressed pleasure at the news which he had heard over the wireless. "Our vehicles were not interfered with until today, when pickets turned back a cart containing bricks. They adopted methods of peaceful picketing: that is to say, they advised the driver on his own account, to go back."[3]

On the 14th May, Mr. Dillon recorded that he had received no letters from Lord Londonderry since the beginning of the stoppage.[4] The Coal Strike was already settling down into a familiar pattern. The school children were being fed and the long wait had begun.

In Northumberland, the coalmining area to the south and east of Morpeth was the one most affected by the General Strike. The main

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[1] The Dillon Papers, op. cit.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

towns in the area, Ashington, Bedlington and Blyth were quiet throughout the General Strike, although industry was at a standstill. Not a single train arrived at Blyth on May 4th, and the harbour remained silent.[1] The following day, one ship left for the Baltic. The harbourmen were still being employed and a certain amount of ship repairing was being undertaken. The Blyth Trades Council established a Council of Action and despatch riders made the journey to Newcastle every day, maintaining communications with the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee. It has been impossible to discover more details concerning the relationship between these two bodies. The only thing that is certain is that copies of the Newcastle Trades Council's Strike Bulletin The Workers' Chronicle were sent to Blyth. A Joint Transport Strike Committee, consisting of representatives from the three railway unions was also functioning during the General Strike but no copies of its meetings' minutes have survived.[2]

In Ashington, the situation during the General Strike remained quiet, but there were no train services and children attending secondary schools at Blyth and Morpeth had to obtain lifts or board one of the buses which were still running through the district.[3]

The mining districts outside the urban settlements provided the main scenes of disorder. The United Bus Company continued services for a time in the Ashington, Blyth and Bedlington districts, but the

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1 Morpeth Herald, May 7th, 1926.

2 Interview with Mr. J.W. Kennedy, September 13th, 1963.

3 Morpeth Herald, May 7th, 1926; Newcastle Journal, May 11th, 1926.

activities of pickets and the alleged intimidation of drivers led to a suspension of services in the Ashington area on May 9th.[1] Accounts of charges under the Emergency Regulations are useful illustrations of the scope and nature of picketing activity which was energetically pursued in the mining areas, together with the efforts of the police to stifle such activity. Thirty-one miners together with one transport worker were charged with acts "calculated to prevent the proper use of the highway" at Throckley during the period of May 6th and 7th. On May 7th, a crowd of over four hundred people were alleged to have stopped all traffic and broken the windows of seven buses belonging to the United Company. A police Inspector, in his evidence, stated that the crowds were not disbursed for several hours because police reinforcements were not available due to other disturbances elsewhere.[2] Ten Stakeford miners were charged under the Emergency Regulations with attempting to stop and burn a newspaper van. Seven were found guilty and sentenced to one month's imprisonment.[3]

Attempts to prevent the movement of traffic were also made on the railways. A passenger train travelling from Berwick to Newcastle had to reduce speed at Killingworth due to obstacles on the tracks and as it passed over the crossing stones were thrown and many windows broken.[4] The most notable incident on the railways during the General Strike

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1 Newcastle Chronicle, May 10th, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 18th, 1926; Northern Echo, May 18th, 1926. All were fined £5 save one who was sent to prison for one month.

3 Newcastle Journal, May 12th, 1926.

4 Ibid., May 8th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 8th, 1926.

occurred in Northumberland on May 10th. An express train travelling south on the L.N.E.R. main line from Edinburgh to King's Cross was derailed at the pit village of Cramlington.[1] Nine miners were arrested on June 6th and charged with having maliciously displaced a certain rail with intent to overthrow the train. One man was discharged but eight were sent for trial.[2] The case was heard on June 30th and July 1st at Newcastle. Several miners gave evidence for the prosecution that the men charged had been in a group who had removed the rail. The witnesses alleged that the arrest of a man who was charged with withholding information concerning the incident had stimulated them into coming forward.[3] The defendants all pleaded not guilty and alleged that several prosecution witnesses had taken part in the removal of the rail. All eight men were found to be guilty, three being sentenced to eight years imprisonment, two to six years and the remainder to four years.[4]

It would appear that a meeting of miners at West Colliery, near Cramlington on the morning of May 10th, had been addressed by Mr W. Golightly,[5] then a member of the N.M.A. Executive Committee. He had

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[1] Ibid., May 11th, 1926; Northern Echo, May 11th, 1926; Newcastle Journal, May 11th, 1926.

[2] Ibid., June 15th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, June 15th, 1926; Daily Herald, June 15th, 1926.

[3] Ibid., July 1st, 1926; Newcastle Journal, July 1st, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, July 1st, 1926. The man was subsequently discharged.

[4] Daily Herald, July 2nd, 1926.

[5] Golightly, William (1874-1940) Miner. Elected to Executive Committee of N.M.A., 1914; President, 1927-1940; Executive Committee, M.F.G.B., 1939-1940; Member of Seghill U.D.C. and Northumberland County Council; Torpedoed while sailing to Canada to represent the T.U.C. at an International Conference of Miners.

been asked for advice with regard to what should be done about the few trains which were running on the main line. No actual record of what was said at that meeting exists, but it is possible that it was pointed out that the trains were being worked by blacklegs and ought to be stopped. A crowd of miners, certainly many in excess of the eight who were charged, removed the rail. The train, which had been stopped further up the track and warned of possible dangers, was travelling at a slow speed and was derailed; none of the passengers was seriously hurt.[1]

As in Durham, so in Northumberland, where serious attempts were made to obstruct road traffic by picketing these were largely successful, and only the intervention of the police curbed such activities. The police, however, were insufficient in numbers to be in many places simultaneously and much successful picketing must have been carried on throughout the General Strike in these mining areas, uninterrupted by the actions of the authorities. Peaceful picketing, easy to define theoretically, but almost impossible to prescribe practically, was quite useless against transport driven by blacklegs. Such traffic was also a provocation and led quite logically to intimidation and disorder. How serious such disorder might have become had the Strike lasted another week it is obviously impossible to calculate.

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[1] Correspondence between the author and one of the accused, May 14th, 1963, February 6th, 1964, February 14th, 1964.

There is far from an abundance of evidence concerning the immediate reaction of the strikers in the North East to the news that the General Strike had been ended. The Northern Light of May 12th (?) contained an item of late news as follows: "Special late news - General Council called off Strike - Seven Hours Day maintained - 45/- minimum - Subsidy for three months - Re-inforcements does the trick."[1] However the Northern Light was more cautious in its next edition of May 13th (?).

> "... it is too early for us to speculate about what it exactly means to us, but certainly the Government has had to climb down from the pedestal upon which it had placed itself at the beginning of the week. Sir Herbert Samuel has acted as a go-between without authority, this of course is merely a pose in order to save Baldwin's face." [2]

This belief that a victory had been secured was initially also held by the publishers of the Workers' Chronicle. On May 12th, at 5 p.m., a special edition was issued by the Northumberland and Durham General Council and addressed to all Councils of Action and Strike Committees.

> "On the basis of the proposals put forward by the Chairman of the Coal Commission for a continuance of the subsidy for three months and the establishment of a national minimum, with no increase in hours, the T.U.C. had decided to call the General Strike off. In doing so we are informed the Congress felt the above proposals gave a reasonable opportunity of the Miners obtaining a fair deal.
>
> The M.F.G.B. Conference meets on Friday to discuss the proposals as stated above when it is anticipated that the lock-out will also be declared off. The last point, however, is not finally settled and all local organisations should maintain themselves for the next few days to bring such aid to the miners as the General Council may determine ... it is necessary to state that the British

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[1] Northern Light, No. 7(?), May 12th(?), 1926.

[2] Ibid. No. 8(?), May 13th(?), 1926.

> Broadcasting Company and the News Agencies have been completely misrepresenting the end of the lock-out as a defeat of the General Strike. This is entirely untrue.... The first General Strike of modern times in Great Britain has proved a complete success."[1]

This was not merely a case of putting on a defiant face. With the strike apparently so successful, and likely to become increasingly so with the calling out of more workers, victory was thought to be inevitable.

By May 14th, the true nature of the situation had become more evident. The Workers' Chronicle of that date printed a front page cartoon showing the axe of right wing treachery sunk deep into the block of national Trades Union Solidarity with Messrs. J.H. Thomas and J.R. MacDonald as the official mourners.[2] Yet the contents of a statement signed by Mr. Charles Flynn illustrate only too clearly that the Newcastle Strike Committee did not appreciate the unconditional surrender which had taken place, even then. "Whilst the General Strike has compelled the Government to grant a subsidy, yet the manner of ending the General Strike resulting in the collapse at London headquarters has left us exposed to the most bitter persecution by the local employers.... Keep all the local Councils of Action, Trade Councils, Strike Committees etc. in being and communicate with us regularly. Hold together!" [3]

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[1] Workers' Chronicle, May 12th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 15th,1926.

[2] Workers' Chronicle, No. 14, May 14th, 1926. See Appendix IV for reproductions of strike bulletins.

[3] Ibid. It is not known how, if at all, this advice was followed. Once the magnitude of the defeat became known, most men were too concerned with getting their jobs back to maintain their strike organisations. So far as the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee was concerned, Mr R.P. Arnot, its progenitor, remained in Newcastle until May 16th or 17th. Mr. E. Edwards and Mr C.R. Flynn went to London to ask why the strike had been called off when it was apparently so successful, but by the time they arrived in London, there was little point in the question. Interview with Mr. R.P. Arnot, November 19th, 1963.

The way in which the strike was called off undoubtedly created confusion and uncertainty in the ranks of the strikers. Only the previous day, May 11th, the so-called second-line of workers had been ordered out. Thus on the morning of May 12th, many had already withdrawn their labour or were preparing to do so when news arrived that the General Strike was over. They were thus faced with a humiliating return to work within hours of having joined the strike. In addition, some employers were determined to reduce their costs by sackings and wage cuts, and to impose unfavourable conditions of work upon employees. Workmen seeking to restart were turned away, asked to sign declarations of repentance for their recent actions, or confronted with reductions in earnings and loss of seniority. Many workers resisted attempts to alter their pre-strike conditions of employment and for two days more after May 12th, the strike continued. These two days, in conjunction with the Prime Minister's request on May 13th in the House of Commons, that there should be no victimisation, probably prevented widespread and severe reprisals by the employers. As it was, getting back to work proved to be a difficult business.

In the North East, the transport workers bore the brunt of the employers' wrath. When the news reached Darlington that the General Strike was over, the Joint Transport Strike Committee issued instructions that no return to work was to be made until official notification had been received from the national executives. However, it proved impossible to prevent men attempting to restart. The Joint Transport Strike Committee's decision was not upheld by a meeting of the Railway Clerks'

Association who decided to resume the next day, May 13th.[1] N.U.R. members also began to turn up for work, but found that they were not required. The Darlington Joint Transport Strike Committee Rota Committee minutes provide a number of examples of this. In the early hours of May 13th, Foreman Smedley reported that neither he nor his men were allowed to resume work at North Road Goods Station at Hopetown, when they presented themselves.[2] On the same morning several men normally working in the Cleveland Bridge Yard were not allowed to resume, and a report came in from the Whessoe railway works that the men had been told to report for work on May 14th, when "after signing some document" they might be given a job. In fact the L.N.E.R. Company declared their intentions in a notice which they issued on May 12th, to all their workmen who had been on strike. "... at the conclusion of the strike, the number of staff that the Company can employ will be materially reduced. The Company will give preference to those who had remained at work or those who seek re-employment without delay."[3] A reduction in trade consequent upon the continuation of the coal stoppage was the reason given for the proposed redundancies.

The reply to the Company's statement was issued in the form of a circular by the Darlington Railwaymen and Transport Workers' Joint Strike Committee on May 14th. Those men whom the Company had summoned to resume work were being handed the following statement, the circular

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1 Rota Committee, May 12th, 13th, 1926.

2 Ibid.

3 Northern Echo, May 13th, 1926.

reported: "Mr. —— formerly employed as _____ at _____ office or station in the _____ depot.

You are hereby re-engaged, but your re-engagement is on the understanding that the Company reserve any rights they possess in consequence of your having broken your contract of service."

The circular asked the men to notice especially the words "formerly" and "re-engagement."

> "We desire to stress the meaning which these terms may cover. Remember that your contract prior to the strike included, among other things:
>
> (1) National Agreements governing wages, salaries, and other conditions of service.
>
> (2) Certain well-defined rights regarding superannuation, pensions etc.
>
> (3) Pass and privilege ticket regulations equally well-defined.
>
> (4) Conditions under which certain grades received annual holidays.
>
> We ask you to consider whether the Company's reference to "reserve any rights they possess in consequence of your having broken your contract of service", is likely to mean that they intend to interfere with any of the above conditions.
>
> We understand that a notice will be published by the Company today denying the statement that this is their intention.[1] If this is so, why do they not put it into black and white with our trade union leaders in London, agree definitely that there shall be no victimisation, everybody shall be back together on the old job with the old conditions?
>
> This is not being done because the Companies do not mean that this state of affairs shall come about if they can possibly avoid it, and they will not hesitate to adopt any means to bring about the breaking down of our present conditions.

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[1] None of the three North Eastern daily papers, the Echo, Journal or Chronicle, contained such a statement.

Read their notices, look for the traps and avoid them. Splendid reports are coming in from all quarters regarding the stand taken by all the Trade Unions concerned against the Company's action and we only have to prove that we cannot be coerced, cajoled or tricked into a false position, to come through these later stages of this struggle triumphant." [1]

The Darlington railwaymen remained out on Strike. Reports reaching the Joint Transport Strike Committee showed that a similar situation existed in other centres, notably at York, Goole, Hull, Nottingham, West Harlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Durham, Kirby Stephen, Thirsk, Sunderland, Gateshead and Newcastle.[2] Later on the same day, May 14th, came the telegram signed by the general secretaries of the three railway unions announcing that complete re-instatement had been secured without penalties, and therefore all members of the three unions shouldreturn to work at once.[3] When the full text of the agreement became known, it was clear that the return to work was on the Company's terms. Clause four of the agreement signed between the trade union representatives and the Railway Companies' management laid down that arising out of the strike, it might be necessary 'to remove certain persons to other positions but no such person's salary, or wages will be reduced. Each Company will notify the unions within one week of the names of men whom they propose to transfer and will afford each man an opportunity of having an advocate to present his case to the General Manager.'[4] The problems of returning to work on the

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1 Darlington Railwaymen and Transport Workers' Joint Strike Committee, Circular, May 14th, 1926.

2 Rota Committee, May 12th, 13th, 14th, 1926; Northern Echo, May 14th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 13th, 14th, 1926; Newcastle Journal, May 14th, 15th, 1926.

3 Newcastle Journal, May 15th, 1926.

4 Circular letter from the Chief General Manager, L.N.E.R., May 14th, 1926.

railways, however, were especially aggravated by the continuation of the stoppage in the coal industry. Men could only be taken on as work became available. At first it seemed that the agreement might not be accepted by the men. Lengthy, packed meetings of railwaymen argued the point at Newcastle and Darlington, but agreed to return to work on May 15th and 16th.[1] Similar decisions were taken throughout the area. The full guaranteed week was lost.[2] Evidence of actual cases of victimisation is almost totally lacking, but it is not without significance that a mass meeting of railwaymen was held in Darlington on May 21st to discuss the problem.[3] What is undisputed is that many railwaymen lost their jobs, either temporarily or for good. One guard employed by the L.N.E.R. at Blyth in Northumberland recalls being offered a three day week, while many of his colleagues were even less fortunate.[4] The pre-strike staff in the Carriage and Wagon Departments of the Northern Division of the L.N.E.R., covering the whole of the two North Eastern Counties, numbered 296; only 149 had re-started work by May 25th.[5] By May 17th, 25 per cent of the staff at Sunderland's Central Station had not been re-engaged.[6]

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1 Northern Echo, May 17th, 1926; Newcastle Chronicle, May 15th, 18th, 1926.

2 It was not restored until April 1927.

3 Northern Echo, May 21st, 1926. The outcome of the meeting was not reported.

4 Interview with Mr. J.W. Kennedy, September 13th, 1963; Northern Echo, May 18th, 1926.

5 L.N.E.R. Staff Records - General Strike File, held in the British Railways Record Office, York.

6 Northern Echo, May 18th, 1926. Personnel who had joined the strike certainly suffered when work was being allocated after it. At the Shildon Wagon Works, out of a total of forty strikers, one third were laid off three days every third week. L.N.E.R. Staff Records - General Strike File.

Road transport workers also experienced difficulty in resuming work on pre-strike terms, or, indeed, at all. Most corporation transport workers in the towns were able to resume on the old conditions, but at Darlington, the men were re-engaged on day to day contracts.[1] It was in privately owned road transport concerns that the workmen were more severely treated. In his Quarterly Report of June 1926, the Area Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union stated that fifty nine members of the Union had been definitely dismissed for taking part in the General Strike, most of them members of the Road Transport Commercial Section of the Union.[2]

The Northern General Transport Company, with the aid of a number of employees, formed a Company Union, centred and mainly confined to the Sunderland depot. A former Secretary of the T. & G.W.U. branch there became the Company Union Secretary. The management also attempted to have the men sign a circular of a 'conditional character', on May 13th, which had the effect of rekindling the strike. The negotiations which followed preserved the pre-strike terms and, following on a re-organisation of the T. & G.W.U. Road Passenger Transport Group's Sunderland branch, the Employer's Union gradually lapsed.[3]

Victimisation also took place in the printing industry. The firms of Bowling's of Newcastle, Hewitt and Brown of Whitley Bay and Rutherford and Co. of North Shields decided to set up non-union shops.[4]

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1 Northern Echo, May 17th, 1926.

2 Transport and General Workers Union, Area Committee Minutes, Newcastle Area Office. Report of the Area Secretary, June 1926.

3 T. & G.W.U., Area Committee Minutes, July 1st, September 30th, December 29th, 1926, and March 31st, 1927. Reports of the Secretary, Road Passenger Transport Group.

4 Newcastle and District Branch of the Typographical Association, Minutes of meetings of the Executive Committee, May 29th, 1926.

Seven members of the Newcastle and District branch of the Typographical Association lost their jobs as a result of their participation in the General Strike.[1]

The continuance of the coal stoppage after the General Strike had ended, had a serious effect on the employment position in other industries, especially in the iron and steel works of South Durham and Cleveland and in the docks. The South Durham Iron and Steel Company closed down their West Hartlepool shops because of lack of fuel, one thousand men being affected. The North Eastern ports were seriously affected by the coal stoppage, although work was resumed at all of them immediately after the General Strike, and the same thing happened on Teeside. There, the port employers insisted that all workers, both those who were permanently as well as those who were casually emgaged, should return to work on a day to day basis, as insufficient work existed for the complete reinstatement of all regular dock employees. The Union refused to agree to this, as it contradicted the terms of the National Agreement. Some 2,000 men were affected.[2] An agreement was eventually signed and work resumed on May 25th. The port employees agreed to re-engage men as laid down by the National Agreement which the men admitted they had broken. The Union undertook, in the future, not to instruct their men to strike either nationally, sectionally or locally without first exhausting the conciliation machinery of the National Agreement, and not to support or encourage their members to

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1 Ibid., June 26th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, May 21st, 1926; T. & G.W.U., Area Committee Minutes, July 8th, 1926. Report of the Secretary, Docks and Waterways Trade Group.

take individual action.[1]

The Teeside Tugboat owners also refused to allow their employees to return to work after the General Strike under the old conditions. They demanded a day to day contract and stipulated that all other conditions and agreements should be given up. Even if that were agreed to, only 33 per cent of the men could be re-employed. The Transport and General Workers' Union, to which the men belonged, refused to accept the owners' offer. While the negotiations were proceeding, several tug-boats were manned by office workers. The Ministry of Labour intervened in the dispute and a meeting was arranged between a tug owner, the Chairman of the Middlesbrough Shipbrokers' Association, and Mr. E. Bevin, the Union's General Secretary. The meeting produced an agreement which the men refused to ratify. A provisional agreement was, however, signed locally, differing from the London agreement by virtue of the owners agreeing to put four tugs underway instead of three. The men agreed to resume, sharing out the work between them.[2]

Although such trade union material concerning this period has long since been destroyed, and employers are either reticent about what records they have retained, or have also deposited large quantities of documents into their waste bins, or have suffered losses due to the depredations of the Blitz, enough remains from which to compose a canvas of the events which immediately succeeded the General Strike. As has already been seen there was some victimisation - probably less than

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1 Northern Echo, May 24th, 1926. Report of the Secretary, Docks and Waterways Trade Group.

2 T. & G.W.U., Area Committee Minutes, July 8th, 1926.

might have been expected. For other workers, as has also already been seen, the return to work was made under worse conditions of employment. For yet others there was either short-time working or actual unemployment. This last was especially true of those industries which were seriously hampered by the continued coal stoppage. The coal trimmers and teamers, iron and steel workers and railwaymen were the most affected. In the North East, unemployment had increased by 25 per cent on May 17th, as compared with the figure of May 3rd, and so stood at 166,804,[1] and most of this was the result of the fuel shortage which the lock-out of coal miners precipitated.[2]

Although accurate figures are difficult to arrive at, some losses in trade union membership also occurred after the General Strike and were directly attributable to it and the general depression of trade and industry accentuated by the coal stoppage. For example, the management of the Northern General Transport Company chose the end of the Strike to make it a condition of employment of their clerical and inspecting staffs that they should not belong to the same unions as the ordinary staff. This decision meant a loss of 169 members from the T. & G.W.U.'s Road Passenger Transport Clerical and Supervisory

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[1] Northern Echo, May 28th, 1926.

[2] This being so, it is of course not possible to find out how many were out of a job because of the General Strike itself.

group.[1] The National Union of Railwaymen lost over 1,000 members in the North East between December 31st, 1925 and December 31st, 1926.[2]

Although it would be wrong to attempt a definitive conclusion from the few figures which it has been possible to obtain the general picture which emerges is of increased unemployment and losses in trade union membership. This picture is repeated nationally. Over the country as a whole, unemployment rose from 1,034,000 of the total of 11,900,000 people covered by the Unemployment Insurance Acts on April 26th, 1926, to 1,675,000 on May 31st, and reached a peak for the year of 1,699,000 at the end of June.[3] In trade union membership, there had been a fall in 1925 but this had been an insignificant one of 10,000 in 4,500,000. 1926 saw the total membership fall from 4,447,818 to 4,147,653 and this initiated a decline which was to continue until the later 1930's.[4] The North East, with its dependence on three staple industries, shipbuilding, mining, iron and steel, which were the most severly affected by the depression, naturally suffered accordingly. The General Strike and the coal dispute which succeeded it appear as punctuation marks in the long story of the inter-war depression.

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1 T. & G.W.U., Area Committee Minutes, Report of the Secretary, Road Passenger Transport Group, July 1st, 1926. The Secretary further stated that his union would have fought this position, but the staff itself voluntarily resigned their membership of the Union and had since been given a wage increase in consequence. The Branch Chairman however, would not sacrifice his membership of the Union and was offered a job as a conductor which he accepted. This was quoted as a splendid example of sacrifice and loyalty to Trade Unionism.

2 National Union of Railwaymen, Proceedings and Reports, (Unity House) 1925, 1926.

3 Ministry of Labour Gazette, May, June, July, 1926.

4 Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, Annual Reports, 1920-1939.

Much has been made, and quite rightly, of the tremendous feeling of solidarity which the General Strike induced in the British working class. This was especially true of industrial regions such as the North East, with their long history of trades union activity. The disappointment and bitterness in which the General Strike ended provided a short stimulus for more militant political activity. At the Eighth Congress of the British Communist Party held in October 1926, it was claimed that the Tyneside Area had the largest Party membership in the country, standing at 1,900. This increase was a short-lived one, however, and by the time the Ninth Congress met twelve months later, membership had declined by over 1,000.[1] The persistence of the depression after the Strike seemed to subdue men rather than urge them on to more virulent activities.

The disillusionment and bitterness which was ushered in by the collapse of the General Strike, had another effect. Some trade unionists had not wanted such a strike in the first place, and the ignominious defeat converted others to their view. Some left their unions, others joined industrial or non-political unions, whilst a third group remained within their original union whilst at the same time attempting to ensure that such a strike would not have the support of their branch again. There was such a (last) group in the Typographical Association. The Executive Committee of the Newcastle and District branch of this Association, at a special meeting on May 3rd, had endorsed the action

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1 MacFarlane, L.J., op. cit., p. 177.

of the Association's National Executive who had voted in favour of the T.U.C.'s strike resolution.[1] The following day, a special branch meeting carried by a large majority an amendment "strenuously supporting the action of the Executive Committee." The original motion, which was lost, had proposed that "we, the members of the Newcastle branch of the T.A., decline, with all due respect, to act otherwise than in accordance with Association rules, viz: to demand a ballot of the members before tendering 14 days notice to employers."[2] Once the strike was ended, the opposition to the strike policy gained more support. On May 29th, the Daily Chronicle Chapel forwarded a resolution to the Union's Manchester Headquarters protesting at the action of the National Executive "in giving permission to the T.U.C. to withdraw all members of the T.A. at a few hours notice. As it is the second time in twelve months that the Executive Committee have broken two of our most important Association rules, we think it is time those responsible cleared out to make room for men who will act according to the dictates of T.A. members and the rules laid down on constitutional lines."[3] A further resolution was carried on June 5th, demanding the resignation of the National Executive "as they exceeded their duty in calling an unconstitutional strike, thus jeopardising the whole position of the T.A." An attempt to pass a further resolution instructing the National Executive to take a ballot of members on

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1 Newcastle and District Branch of the Typographical Association, Minutes of meetings of the Executive Committee, May 2nd, 1926.

2 Ibid., May 4th, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 29th, 1926.

the issue of withdrawing from the T.U.C. was deferred until the following Quarterly Meeting.[1] The storm did not blow itself out until the November Quarterly Meeting of the branch when the following resolution was defeated by four votes:

> "That we ... indignantly repudiate(s) the action of a small section of the Executive Committee in pledging the Association to the policy of a General Strike and usurping the authority of the full Executive Committee in delegating power to call a Strike to the T.U.C. This branch further demands an explanation (a) why such delegation of power was given, (b) under what rule of the T.A. was it authorised and (c) the reason why a ballot vote of the membership was not taken according to rule. This branch further demands that a special delegate meeting be called by the Executive Committee in order that those members of the Executive Committee primarily responsible for the strike may give their personal explanations and receive the instructions of the delegate meeting as to the future conduct of Association affairs."[2]

This episode does illustrate that there was opposition to the General Strike, even within those unions whose executives pledged their support for the T.U.C.'s policy on April 30th; but the opposition does not appear to have been especially strong and, throughout the unions as a whole, was that of a generally incoherent and small minority.

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[1] Ibid., June 5th, 1926. The matter was then deferred again and allowed to lapse.

[2] Ibid., November 20th, 1926.

APPENDIX I

Northumberland Miners' Association; Northumberland Colliery Mechanics Association; National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers; Transport and General Workers Union; National Union of Sailors and Firemen; Shop Assistants Union; National Union of General and Municipal Workers; Boilermakers' Unions; Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades; Railway Clerks Association; National Union of Railwaymen; Builders' Federation; Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council and Newcastle Trades Council. The representative of the National Union of Sailors and Firemen was, of course, not backed by the national executive of the union.

APPENDIX 2

NATIONAL GENERAL STRIKE

NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM GENERAL COUNCIL
JOINT STRIKE COMMITTEE

Circular No. I. ORGANISATION 11th May 1926

To all whom it may concern.

I. MACHINERY The General Strike is to be carried through in the Northumberland and Durham Area by a net work of Councils of Action co-ordinated by a Joint Strike Committee, sitting in Newcastle-on-Tyne, and responsible for the whole area of the two counties and subject to the decisions of the T.U.C. General Council, conveyed directly or through the Trade Union Executives.

2. COMPOSITION Each locality should immediately wherever this has not already been done set up a Council of Action. A Council of Action is an extra-ordinary Committee of ALL local working class forces combined for the specific purpose of the general strike. No working class organisation however small, should be omitted or excluded.

3. STRIKE COMMITTEE The Council of Action should appoint a controlling body which can be known as the Strike Committee, to consist of one member from each of the principal unions, or groups of Trades Unions (where Unions are small) actually on strike.

4. SUB-COMMITTEES Sub-Committees of this body or of the General Council of Action should be set up to deal with particular tasks.

5. AREA The Area covered by a Council of Action will vary. When there is a Trades Council this will form the best basis on which to build a Council of Action. Each council should keep in close contact with all the others nearest to it, as well as with the centre.

6. TASKS Amongst other matters to be dealt with, for some of which SUB-COMMITTEES will be needed are:-

(a) Communications.
(b) Picketing.
(c) Transports.
(d) Feeding Centres.
(e) Sports.
(f) Organisation of Women.
(g) Local Bulletins.
(h) Discipline & Public Order.

ORGANISATION (Continued)

7. REPORTS: A report should be sent every day to the Central authority in Newcastle-on-Tyne, which will enable them to view the situation in the two counties as a whole, and take decisions based upon this view, subject as above stated, to the General Council of the T.U.C. decisions.

8. PICKETS: Peaceful picketing is legal under the Trades Disputes Act of 1906.

9. DISCIPLINE AND PUBLIC ORDER: Where Defence Corps have been formed care should be taken to see that no irresponsible elements are admitted. They should be composed of the most reliable and experienced Trade Unionists.

10. FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE If troops are moved into any Area Trade Unionists should not take up a hostile attitude or do anything calculated to lead to disturbances and breaches of the peace. On the contrary they should cultivate a friendly atmosphere so as to minimise risks of disturbance.

11. BULLETINS: In any Bulletins that may be published the Councils of Action should as far as possible confine themselves to giving correct information and news, in order to counteract false statements that may be spread about both by the Press and other sources.

12. ACTION: You must get to work immediately and link up your local body with the Northumberland and Durham General Council at:-

The Burt Hall,
Northumberland Road,
Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Telephone No. 2402 Central.

NO DELAY GET BUSY

APPENDIX 3

ORGANISATION FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF SUPPLIES

DARLINGTON AND RURAL DISTRICT

QUESTION	ANSWER
1. Is there any relationship between O.M.S. and the Government?	None. But O.M.S. has the entire approval of the Government.
2. How does the Government Scheme affect the O.M.S.?	The Government Scheme does not affect O.M.S. The Government Scheme is a skeleton, and O.M.S. is expected to clothe it.
3. Why should I join the O.M.S. when the Government have got their Scheme?	Because the Government will not recruit you until the Emergency starts. Their Scheme does not provide for personnel until then.
4. Is there any relationship between O.M.S. and the Local Authority?	No official connection. O.M.S. is a private organisation only. It expects to have the goodwill of all Local Authorities.
5. How does O.M.S. view the right to strike?	The O.M.S. acknowledges the right to strike. This is legal. It does not acknowledge the right of any section to inflict privation on the whole community by means of the General Strike, which is revolutionary in its inception and would be disastrous to the country.
6. Supposing I join Class "A", and eventually become a Special Constable, shall I be paid, and if so, how much and by whom? Shall I be released when the Emergency is over?	In 999 cases out of 1,000 Special Constables' Employers pay them during the time they are called out. If their pay is dropped by the civil employers, the Police Authorities will pay in accordance with Regulations - 10s. per day. You will be released directly the Emergency is declared "off".

QUESTION	ANSWER
7. If I join as a Worker, whose orders shall I take, and am I paid?	The orders of the Government Official who takes over the Register in which your name is recorded. You will be paid at the current rates.
8. Supposing I or my car get smashed up, shall I be compensated?	Yes. If smashed up while employed in Government service the Government will compensate.
9. What will O.M.S. do when the Emergency is declared?	O.M.S. will hand over its Register of Volunteers to authorised Government officials and suspend its operations as a body.
10. Why register now. Why not wait till the necessity arises?	Because if everyone waits till the crisis is here, the officials will be submerged by a crowd of total strangers whose capabilities are unknown.
11. Is not the O.M.S. provocative?	No. It is common-sense citizenship. It simply insists that the essential services shall be maintained by volunteers when other workers refuse their labour.
12. If I enrol, can I remain in my own district?	Yes. But willingness to go anywhere if required, is more valuable service.
13. Is it any use my joining O.M.S. if my business is likely to continue in spite of a General Strike?	You will be playing your part by continuing your business and thereby maintaining the life of the community. Numbers count.
14. Will the O.M.S. feed the strikers and their families?	The Government will be responsible for all supplies and will make no discrimination.
15. Is 45 the age limit for joining the O.M.S.?	No. 45 refers to Class "A" only.

QUESTION	ANSWER
16. What obligations do I incur by joining O.M.S. and under what conditions shall I serve?	No. obligations. Registration in O.M.S. implies a willingness to serve, when required, if circumstances permit, and subject to conditions which you approve at the time when you are called upon.
17. Why should I join the O.M.S. when I belong to several other bodies?	Your other societies have each their own policies and platforms. The O.M.S. forms a non-contentious common meeting ground for all patriotic citizens. It has no political aims.

Enrolment Forms may be had from R.C. PEARCE, CENTRAL HALL, DARLINGTON.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Coal Stoppage

With the termination of the General Strike, the miners were left either to continue the struggle alone, or to return to work on terms which would be dictated by a triumphant Government and owners. There was little doubt as to which the miners would choose, although in the first few days after May 12th, a conciliatory approach by the Government might have encouraged the miners to go back to work. On May 12th, A. J. Cook the Secretary of the M.F.G.B., had instructed the districts to remain away from work pending a national delegate conference, which was hurriedly summoned for May 14th. The Conference was adjourned when it was announced that Government proposals for a settlement were being prepared.[1] These proposals were received the next day, together with a letter from the Prime Minister which urged acceptance. A subsidy of £3,000,000 was to be granted for three weeks in an attempt to break the fall of the mineworkers' weekly wage. At the same time, a National Wages Board was to draw up a national wages and hours agreement which would usher in further wage reductions once the subsidy had been exhausted. The wages of the lowest paid men were no longer to be guaranteed if they exceeded £2 5s. a week. The Government also intimated their willingness to give effect to certain of the reorganisation proposals of the Royal Commission but only after consultations with the Coal Advisory Committee of the Secretary of State for Mines. A modification of the statutory

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[1] Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Annual Proceedings (Hereafter M.F.G.B.) May 14th, 1926.

hours of work could be arranged if the owners and the miners agreed.[1] These terms were less favourable than those of the Samuel Memorandum, which the miners had earlier rejected.[2] At least the Memorandum had contained an assurance that reorganisation of the industry, as recommended by the Report of the Royal Commission, would precede any wages revision, and that the lower paid men would not be seriously affected. The official historian of the M.F.G.B. has probably best summarised what the leadership felt about these proposals. They meant 'in addition to wage cuts, the abolition of the national minimum; the sapping of the seven hour day; an increase of unemployment; the weakening and splitting of the Miners' Federation by the introduction of District settlements; the substitution of compulsory arbitration for collective bargaining.'[3] The miners were to suffer all these, and more, before 1926 was out, but on May 20th, still feeling strong and undefeated, they rejected the Government's proposals.[4] The Government reply on May 22nd, noted that the Federation 'still refuse to consider any alteration of wages or hours. So long as this is their attitude, and in the absence of any practical proposals from the Federation designed to meet the circumstances of the industry, the Prime Minister does not see that any useful purpose would be served by his meeting you, but he will hold himself available to arrange a further discussion the moment that he is informed that you find

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1 M.F.G.B., May 15th, 1926.

2 For more details on the Samuel Memorandum see Chapter III, above.

3 Arnot, R.P., vol. II, op. cit., p. 459.

4 M.F.G.B., May 20th, 1926.

yourselves in a position to submit suggestions of the kind required.'[1] That time was still a long way off.

Meanwhile, on May 21st, the Mining Association, speaking for the large majority of mine owners, had also rejected the Government's proposals. As an alternative, they suggested that the miners' hours of work should be increased from seven to eight, and that wage reductions would 'not exceed 10% when wages are at the minimum in the worst placed districts.' They also criticised Government intervention in the dispute. 'It will be impossible to continue the conduct of the industry under private enterprise unless it is accorded the same freedom from political interference as is enjoyed by other industries.'[2] The following day the Prime Minister pointed out somewhat tartly, that the Government could not stand aside in a matter affecting the 'national well-being'. He went on to deplore the attitude of the owners, but he agreed that they had 'made some advances from their original position in order to try to reach a settlement,' whereas the Miners' Federation had refused 'to consider any concession that would give such a reduction in costs of production as the Royal Commission pointed out was indispensable.'[3] All parties to the dispute now sat back to await developments. The Government began to prepare for the importation of coal and on May 27th issued regulations rationing the amount of domestic coal to one hundredweight per household per fortnight. On May 31st, the House of Commons renewed the Emergency

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1 Ibid., June 9th, 1926.

2 Times, May 22nd, 1926.

3 Ibid., May 23rd, 1926.

Regulations for another month.

In the two northern counties of Northumberland and Durham, the prospect of a long stoppage was received with some apprehension. As we have seen,[1] the two miners' unions were in difficult financial situations, and did not expect to be able to provide much financial help for their members. It was in the hope of an early settlement that the Financial Secretary of the N.M.A., Mr. Ebby Edwards, had put forward the view, on April 30th, 1926, that his Union's financial position was considerably better than it had been at the beginning of the fourteen weeks' stoppage in 1921.[2] The Association's first payment of relief to locked out members had come during the General Strike and had consisted of 12/- per adult member and 6/- per junior member. The second payment, fixed for May 25th, only the twenty-sixth day of the stoppage, was down by half, to 6/- per adult member, 3/- per junior member, 2/6 rent allowance, with an extra 1/- for each child. It had been reported that some young men had obtained jobs on farms in the Stobswood district, and it was agreed that the funds were such that anyone who found such temporary employment would not be entitled to dispute benefit.[3] The next payment under this heading was made on June 14th, and was reduced to the low figure of 3/- per adult member, 1/6 per junior member, with 1/- for each

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1 Above in Chapters IV and V.

2 Newcastle Chronicle, May 1st, 1926.

3 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, May 25th and 29th, 1926.

child and a rent allowance of 2/-.[1] A fortnight later, on June 28th, similar amounts were distributed.[2] The knowledge that the time would soon be reached when dispute money could not be paid weighed heavily on the Association's leadership. With an early settlement looking increasingly remote, a special council meeting only rejected by three votes on May 29th, a resolution recommending the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. to re-open negotiations with the coal owners and the Government 'with a view to ascertaining the best terms possible of a national settlement on the lines of the Coal Commission's Report, such terms to be laid before a national conference for decision, and afterwards submitted to a ballot vote of the Federation.' On a lodge vote however, this proposal was decisively rejected by 389 votes to 30.[3]

The Durham Miners' Association made its first payment of benefit to members involved in the dispute on May 19th, at the rate of 10/- to each full member and 5/- to each half member. This money was only paid to those members who kept up the payment of subscriptions. Those members who had been unemployed for some time before the general stoppage were required to pay 4d per fortnight in order to remain eligible for benefit.[4] A similar payment was made on June 5th. This second payment was only

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1 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, June 14th, 1926.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, June 28th, 1926.

3 N.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, May 29th, 1926. The voting at the Council meeting was 36-33. It would have been interesting to have had an individual ballot vote of the men instead of by lodges, although there is no reason for thinking that the result would have been any different.

4 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, May 19th, 1926.

made possible by a grant of £36,000 from the M.F.G.B. Central Relief Fund, and supplemented by the 'small balance' remaining in the Association's funds. Only the Death Benefit Fund remained inviolate. Any further payments would depend entirely upon receipts from the Miners' Federation. One such receipt enabled payment of 5/- per full member and 2/6 per half member to be made on June 24th.[1]

An investigation of the position in the North-East carried out at the end of May by the Northern Echo warned against the dangers of a fight to a finish. It pointed out that already, 'thousands of families are reduced to a state bordering on poverty. With no wages, no dole, and in many cases no relief from trade union funds, it is only the tremendous drains made upon the Poor Law authorities which are preventing actual starvation ... Cases can be quoted from various districts where families receiving food instead of actual loans from the Guardians, have not handled money since the beginning of the strike.' The paper went on to state that in the majority of cases, the workers were in a much worse position to face a prolonged stoppage than in any period since the war. The 1921 stoppage had followed a period of high wages, and even those workers who had saved little or nothing were able to face a strike of moderate length without the prospect of acute hardship. The situation was not nearly so favourable now. Many collieries had only worked intermittently over the last eighteen months and some had not worked at all for over a year. In very many cases only the Boards of Guardians

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[1] D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, June 5th and 24th, 1926.

prevented complete destitution.[1]

The problem of obtaining the necessities of life was the greatest one which the mineworkers engaged in the dispute had to face. Unemployment benefit was denied to them because they were involved in a trade dispute, and as we have already noted, the funds of the trade unions were rapidly consumed. It is doubtful whether many workmen possessed savings from which they could draw. Under the provisions of the Education Act of 1921,[2] necessitous children could be provided with meals at school by local education authorities. The extensive realm of private charity similarly gave help to numerous deserving cases. The miners' families, in the self-helping tradition of such communities, organised soup kitchens, assisted at the feeding of the children, repaired the children's footwear and performed many other similar tasks. Nevertheless, in order to survive at all, the great majority of the working people concerned in the stoppage were compelled to rely upon the Poor Law, that final bastion against complete poverty.

The Poor Law was administered through elected Boards of Guardians. The money doled out was found in part from a special poor rate, in part from loans which were sanctioned by the Government. The burden upon Boards of Guardians in industrial areas had been very great since the end of the war. Massive and continuous unemployment had led to frequent recourse to the Guardians by families either not covered by any Unemployment Insurance Scheme, or those stranded between periods of unemployment benefit. In an attempt to curb the spending of local authorities,

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[1] Northern Echo, May 28th, 1926.

[2] See below p. 392.

the Government had passed, in 1921, the Local Authorities (Financial Provisions) Act,[1] which gave the Ministry of Health power to refuse permission for increased borrowing, and thereby lessen the amounts which some Boards of Guardians were spending on outdoor relief. Its effect had been little more than marginal. With the persistence of the depression in the coal trade, the Guardians of Northumberland and Durham found themselves increasingly subjected to demands for the payment of outdoor relief. If not actually Labour controlled, many Boards in the two counties did tend to divide into political groupings. Many workmen sat on the Boards. It was difficult for them to refuse deserving cases; and there were many of these. Local poor rates steadily increased. With the ever mounting public expenditure, of which the poor rate formed a significant portion, came local rate payers associations, formed or given new life to protest against the way in which public money was being spent. One such society, typical of many springing up at this time, was the High Spen and District Ratepayers' Association in Durham. Its aims were economy in public spending. It demanded that all public bodies should be composed of men who represented the community as a whole and not any particular class or party. The payment of generous relief scales to the families of men on strike was calculated only to prolong such disputes. Their slogan, then as now, was 'keep politics out of local government.' This was, of course, aimed at the Labour Party who had introduced politics into local affairs. Although unable to make

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[1] Local Authorities (Financial Provisions) Act, 11 & 12 Geo.V, 1921, Chapter 67.

much progress against this particular iniquity, the Spen Association did manage one successful issue. In the summer of 1925 it obtained an injunction to prevent the Gateshead Board of Guardians from granting illegal payments of relief.[1]

On May 5th, 1926, the Ministry of Health issued circular number 703 to all Boards of Guardians, setting out the Ministry's view on the scale and distribution of relief during the Emergency. It was pointed out that the questions for the consideration of the Guardians on any application for relief made by a person who was destitute in consequence of a trade dispute were questions of fact, namely, 'whether the applicant for relief is or is not a person, who is able-bodied and physically capable of work: whether work is or is not, available for him, and if such work is not available for him, whether it is, or is not so unavailable through his own act or consent.' It emphasised that where the applicant for relief was able-bodied and physically capable of work, it was unlawful to grant him relief if work was available for him or if he was thrown upon the Guardians 'through his own act or consent.' Furthermore, penalties were provided, by law, in cases of failure to support dependents, 'though the Guardians may lawfully relieve such dependents if they are in fact destitute.' This interpretation was based upon the judgment of the Court of Appeal in 1900 in the case of the Attorney

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1 Blaydon Courier, July 4th, 5th, 18th, 19th, 1925. Even before the coming of Labour majorities, Boards of Guardians in coal mining districts had for long been notoriously lax in adhering to official relief scales. So far as bringing politics into local government is concerned, it could be argued that the nonconformist element in the Liberal Party had been guilty of this, especially with regard to education.

General against the Merthyr Tydfil Guardians.[1] If a married man with a family qualified for outdoor relief from the Guardians, it was to be paid on the scale, 18/- per week for the husband, 5/- per week for the wife, plus an additional 2/- per week per child. The wife and child allowances could be increased if the man was ineligible for relief - for instance if he was involved in a trade dispute - but a maximum scale of 12/- per week for the wife and 4/- for each child was recommended. At least half of the weekly relief should be given in kind and the communal feeding of children under the 1921 Education Act was also suggested. The value of such meals, or any other means of subsistence, should be taken into account when applying whatever scale of relief was adopted.[2]

Such regulations presented the moderate 'Lib-Lab.' Labour members on the North Eastern Boards of Guardians with a dilemma. If they failed to act upon the Ministry of Health's recommendations, either by paying higher scales of relief, or by paying illegal relief to single miners for example, the Ministry would probably cut off the Guardians' financial supply by refusing to sanction any further loans. This would mean no relief for the people whom they represented and inevitable defeat in the coal dispute. The increasing insistence on economy, together with the feeling that the dispute was being prolonged by thus subsidising miners' families, which it was, gradually led to a lowering of the scales of

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1 Ministry of Health, Eighth Annual Report, (1926-1927) Cmd. 2938 p. 116.

2 Ministry of Health Circular No. 703 extracted from the minutes of the Proceedings of the Auckland, County Durham, Board of Guardians, May 18th, 1926. These records, together with those of the other Boards of Guardians in the county, are deposited in the County Record Office, County Hall, Durham.

relief. Anything, however low, was better than nothing at all. The alternative also incurred the risk of a special audit, followed by a surcharge, and after July 15th, 1926, when the Board of Guardians (Default Act) became law, supersession.[1] It is instructive to examine the different methods employed by different Boards of Guardians in attempts to resolve this problem in County Durham.

The Auckland and Easington Boards of Guardians were two which observed Ministry of Health instructions, though not without some soul searching by their respective members. The Auckland Board agreed to comply with the proposals set out in circular 703, as they required Ministry permission to incur an overdraft of £16,000. Permission was made conditional on the carrying out of the recommendations contained in the circular.[2] Nevertheless, the Board was soon in difficulties with the Ministry. The Board decided that in assessing the amount to be paid in outdoor relief, it would disregard disability pensions and the infrequent trade union dispute payments. Further, it was decided to deduct only one shilling per week for meals given under the school-children feeding scheme. The result was, that when the Clerk, on behalf of the Board, applied to the Ministry for further loans, he was

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1 The Board of Guardians (Default) Act, was occasioned by the refusal of the West Ham Board of Guardians to practise economies in accordance with Ministry of Health instructions. The Act gave the Ministry the power to replace recalcitrant Boards of Guardians with their own nominees. Board of Guardians (Default) Act, 16 & 17 Geo.V (1926), Chapter 20.

2 Minutes, Auckland Board of Guardians, May 18th, 1926.

informed that permission would be withheld unless certain economies were introduced, notably fixing a maximum scale of relief per household, and increasing the amount deducted if the children took advantage of the free meal service.[1] The Guardians replied with a resolution demanding assistance from the national exchequer in order to relieve local burdens. On July 1st, the Ministry extended the period within which sums borrowed under the authority of the Ministry had to be repaid, to September 26th, 1926. It was to be the first of a long series of extensions.[2]

Whilst negotiations over further loans were continuing, the day to day administration of outdoor relief created its own peculiar problems. The Spennymoor Butchers' Association complained of unfair treatment with regard to the distribution of Guardian vouchers. The Auckland Board therefore instructed its Relieving Officer that in cases where the firm supplying the groceries did not also supply meat, the food vouchers were to be made out for the actual amount of groceries supplied and the balance for the meat given in cash. The issue of food vouchers to a store in Crook was suspended for two weeks in consequence of their having supplied goods, including cigarettes, pickles and tinned salmon, in the place of those authorised on the food vouchers. The desire on the part of those on poor relief to relieve monotonous diets must have been strong.[3]

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1 Auckland Guardians, May 28th, June 3rd, 17th, 1926.

2 Auckland Guardians, July 1st, 1926.

3 Auckland Guardians, September 9th, 1926.

By October 1926, the Ministry of Health had agreed to extend, until March 25th, 1927, the period within which the Auckland Guardians' overdraft, then standing at £100,000, together with the interest, had to be repaid. The Guardians had undertaken to mortgage the common fund of the Union and all the funds, properties, and revenues of the Guardians, as security for repayment of loans. A further reduction in the scale of relief, suggested by the local Ministry of Health Inspector, was refused.[1] In November the pressure for economy led to the Ministry requesting the Guardians to enquire into cases of men unemployed before the coal stoppage and still on relief, 'especially as to whether the men in question are members of the Miners' Federation.' By this time, however, the dispute was coming to an end and no results issued from an investigation hardly begun. As work began to be resumed, the Auckland Board resolved that all recipients of relief on loan be required to sign an authority to their employers to deduct an amount from their wages, the amount to be decided later. On December 2nd, 1926, the Board abandoned the use of the Emergency Regulations as set out in circular number 703.[2]

The Easington Poor Law Union contained several large collieries on the east coast, including Easington, Horden, Dawdon and Shotton, and it is therefore not surprising that greater pressure was exerted upon the Guardians in the Union, by the miners, than that placed upon the Auckland Board, in whose Union the collieries tended to be smaller and

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1 Auckland Guardians, September 23rd, October 7th, 21st, 1926.

2 Auckland Guardians, November 18th, December 2nd, 1926.

more scattered. The problem which caused the Easington Guardians the most difficulty was that of single, able-bodied men, engaged in the coal industry dispute, but not legally entitled to any relief save dispute pay from their trade union or private charity. At the beginning of the stoppage, the Easington Board had decided that all outdoor relief should be paid in kind and be on loan. Dispute benefit from the local colliery lodges of up to 12/- per week was to be allowed for personal maintenance before deductions in the scale of relief granted to the wife and family were made.[1] It is significant that no deductions for this reason were ever made.

By May 27th, 1926, the cost of emergency relief in the Union was £10,000 per week, with an estimated 30,000 recipients. A number of the Easington Board's Labour members clearly felt something should be done for the large numbers of young men, debarred by law from receiving help from the Guardians, but in difficult circumstances. The clerk warned the Board of the consequences of any illegal action on their part, but suggested that the Minister would 'overlook a little elasticity.' The Clerk proposed that providing relieving officers were satisfied that any single man had been without food for twenty four hours and had no means to obtain food, it might be assumed he was no longer able-bodied. He might then be relieved, in kind and on loan to the value of one day's rations. This would keep him from actual starvation and he would receive the one day's rations on every alternate

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[1] Easington Guardians, May 12th, 1926.

day. The groceries provided were to be about 2/- in value, though the Clerk underlined the fact that such a scheme could only be applied in necessitous cases, each case to be carefully investigated by the relieving officers. Any infringements of the plan would lead to prosecutions. The Board reluctantly agreed to this at first, moderate members speaking of the consequences which would follow overt illegal activity by the Guardians.[1] Pressure from local miners however resulted in an extraordinary meeting of the Board being called to reconsider the decision not to relieve single men engaged in the dispute. A deputation from a 1,000 strong demonstration of Shotton miners was interviewed. One member of the deputation said that many of the men threatened to go into the Poor Law institution if nothing was done to help them. Men in lodgings were especially hard hit and married men and single sons were compelled to take a portion of the food given for the wife and children. A Board spokesman pointed out the futility of disobeying the law and it was eventually agreed to discuss the matter yet again.[2] Even the Clerk's moderate scheme had to be abandoned however, on the grounds that the Ministry required medical certificates to be produced, certifying that each recipient of relief was not able-bodied. Further Ministry of Health exhortations to economise led to the amount deducted in cases where the children benefited from the school feeding scheme, being increased from 1/- to 1/6 per week, although the Ministry had suggested 2/- or 2/6.[3]

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1 Easington Guardians, May 27th, 1926.

2 Easington Guardians, June 7th, 1926.

3 Easington Guardians, July 8th, 1926.

At the end of the first week in August, the Easington Board's total liability stood at £90,348 together with a further overdraft of £50,000 sanctioned by the Ministry of Health. Barclays Bank were pressing for a mortgage on the rates.[1] At an emergency meeting of the Board held on September 2nd, the clerk stated that 'nearly half of our population are on out relief, and our emergency relief expenditure for this half year will be about four times our normal expenditure.' The Durham County Council had authorised the clerk to issue a warrant for the £34,000 due the previous June on the County precept, but the Clerk hoped to withhold the warrant as long as possible. He estimated that even if the output of the collieries within the Union was normal, the poor rate would have to be doubled for four years in order to clear the emergency overdraft. Moreover the colliery estimates, which yielded a third of the total rates, would be enormously reduced for the next two years owing to the diminished output this year, and this would mean increased burdens for other ratepayers. He optimistically hoped that the money might eventually be recovered as 'each recipient of emergency relief had signed an agreement, that it was received on loan and would be paid back, through the Colliery offices.' Additional economies had to be effected because the Guardians had no money to meet any debt incurred over the payment of emergency relief after August 14th.[2] On September 30th the Ministry of Health did agree to a further loan of £30,000, but added the warning that if the dispute was not quickly

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[1] Easington Guardians, August 5th, 19th, 1926.

[2] Easington Guardians, September 2nd, 1926.

settled, an Inspector might be sent to check the investigations of income of applicants for relief made by the relieving officers. The Ministry also stipulated that the maximum amount of relief entering a single household should not exceed 35/- weekly, and that the relief of boys aged between 14 years and 16 years who were not trade union members might still be subject to surcharge and should cease. The Board however recognised the impossibility of obtaining money from poverty stricken people and agreed to defer proceedings for the recovery of rates against those ratepayers who were engaged in the coal dispute.[1]

The rapid settlement of the dispute hoped for by the Ministry did not materialise and during October 1926 the Board had to request permission to borrow a further £50,000. The Ministry required more definite evidence of economies, and it was suggested that 2/6 per week should be deducted from the allowances for children in respect of school meals instead of the 1/6 as formerly. The Ministry also considered that the scale of relief being paid by the Easington Board was too high and suggested that the Board should fall into line with other Unions in Durham, including Durham, Hartlepool and Houghton-le-Spring, who had reduced their scales on the Ministry's suggestion. The Ministry proposed a new scale of 10/- per week for the wife with an additional 2/- for each child if school meals were taken. The Ministry intimated that if these scales were not implemented, further loans would not be sanctioned. The Clerk explained that this would mean that the

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1 Easington Guardians, September 30th, 1926.

£145,000 already borrowed would cover expenditure up to the end of the first week in September, but that by 'next Saturday, October 30th, we shall require a further £77,000 which will bring our total indebtedness to £215,000, which represents a rate on the Union of 12/- in the £.' Although the Labour members were not happy about the proposed reductions, the new changes were accepted after a vote of 19-16 in their favour.[1]

Further loans were obtained towards the end of November, including one of £100,000 from Barclays Bank, who insisted that ⅙ of the principal should be repaid each half-year for the next three years, together with the appropriate interest on the outstanding balance. By the middle of the month, some £250,000 had been expended on emergency relief in the Union. No economy was effected by increasing the amount deducted for school meals, in fact weekly expenditure went up by £400. This was almost entirely due to many parents withdrawing their children from the school meals and drawing the full 4/- allowance in groceries.[2]

The settlement of the dispute brought no immediate relief to the Guardians. At a meeting on December 16th, 1926, the Board was informed by the Ministry of Labour that miners not yet working would not be entitled to unemployment benefit, until the collieries had reverted to 'normal' working, and the Companies had decided which men would be 'surplus to requirements.' Until then, the dependents of such men would be relieved out of the local rates and not out of the national

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1 Easington Guardians, October 28th, 1926.

2 Easington Guardians, November 26th, 1926.

exchequer. The County Council had decided to discontinue the provision of school meals from the following week, and applications for the continuance of feeding centres would have to be made by parents to the Education Committee, through the Headmaster of the school concerned. The Board resolved to extend the payment of emergency relief by one week to necessitous cases in which, though the men had resumed work, another week would elapse before their first pay day. Dependents of those men who had not yet found work would be relieved until unemployment benefit was sanctioned. In the latter cases, repayment was to be made direct from the employment exchanges when unemployment benefit became payable.[1] The total expenditure on emergency relief up to January 1st, 1927 in the Easington Union was £293,588, plus an additional £1,000 for the week ending January 8th. The Board had sanction to borrow only £280,000 but the Ministry agreed to the balance being borrowed on January 21st, 1927.[2]

The Boards of Guardians at Auckland and Easington, although having Labour majorities and exhibiting at times a wish to resist the central authority's recommendations, never acted in an openly illegal fashion. The fairly innocuous proposal from the Clerk at Easington with regard to the relief of single men engaged in the dispute, mentioned above, was the nearest either came to contravening the Ministry of Health's regulations. In a similar way, members of the Boards of Guardians at Sedgefield, Durham and Newcastle all contemplated taking the law into

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1 Easington Guardians, December 9th, 1926

2 Easington Guardians, January 6th, February 3rd, 1927.

their own hands, either by refusing to adopt a maximum scale of relief per household, by relieving those men concerned in the stoppage, or by not making the appropriate deductions for school meals. All thought better of it, however, though majorities in favour of carrying out Ministry instructions were often small. It is significant that charges of various illegalities coupled with threatened surcharges against several Boards arising out of their activities during the dispute were in every case rescinded by the Ministry of Health.[1] There was however one Board whose activities did precipitate Government action.

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[1] Northern Echo, May 28th, June 1st, 14th, July 5th, 1926. Perhaps the two most serious attempts, in Unions other than Chester-le-Street, to exceed Ministry regulations occurred at Sedgefield and Houghton-le-Spring. At Sedgefield on May 13th, the Guardians decided to grant relief to able-bodied married miners on a scale of 25/- per week for a married couple. The Ministry of Health's Inspector explained the illegality of this position at a special meeting on May 27th and it was subsequently discontinued. At Houghton-le-Spring about 2,000 unmarried miners were being relieved at the rate of 10/- per week if lodgers and 4/- per week if living at home. In this case the Board of Guardians were told by the Inspector that medical certificates must be produced in order to establish that the men relieved were physically incapable of work. Several temporary medical officers had to be appointed to assist in the examination of all those who applied for relief. On the first day on which examinations were made a crowd made a violent assault upon two of the doctors with the result that all the doctors refused to continue. Fortunately this coincided with the announcement by the local miners' lodge of an agreement which they had concluded with the local Co-operative Society. This specifically provided for assistance to be given to unmarried miners.

This exception was the Board at Chester-le-Street, where as at Easington and elsewhere, the crucial problem concerned those men who were ineligible for outdoor relief yet had no other source of income. The dispute had only been in progress five weeks when a demonstration of around two hundred unemployed workmen, mainly young miners, sent in a deputation to the Board demanding relief payments of 20/- per week for lodgers whether involved in the stoppage or not. The Guardians were accused of not helping the workers, and of acting as buffers for the Tory Minister of Health. One man said that he was married and had a wife and ten children to keep on 44/- a week.[1] This kind of pressure was extremely difficult to resist. The Labour members of the Board, 47 out of a total of 59, many of whom were in positions similar to those occupied by the applicants for relief, were torn between doing something for 'our own people' and adhering strictly to the law. In such a situation it is perhaps surprising that only Chester-le-Street should have decided to relieve single men.

Among the hundred or so distressed Unions in the United Kingdom in 1926, that at Chester-le-Street had at no time the largest proportion of persons in receipt of poor relief, nor was its scale of relief the most liberal in the country, and neither did its indebtedness in proportion to rateable value rise to the greatest heights.[2] Nevertheless,

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1 Northern Echo, June 18th, 1926.

2 Webb, S., and B., History of English Local Government. English Poor Law History, Vol. II, Part II (1929) p. 930. The cost of poor relief in Chester-le-Street between May 1st, 1926 and December 11th, 1926 was £254,390. £7,499 of this was granted on loan. On July 3rd, when the coal dispute was at its height, 42,722 persons received outdoor relief. By December 25th this had been reduced to 9,735. Chester-le-Street Union. Report of the Board of Guardians on the Administration for the Period 30th August, 1926, to 31st December, 1926. (1927), Cmd. 2818, p. 4.

once the members of the Board had decided to pay what the Government considered to be illegal relief, and when threats of Government action failed to alter the Board's attitude, then action, if not inevitable, was always very likely. No Board could be allowed to circumvent Ministry of Health instructions; if one did so, it would precipitate a deluge. The Government had the instrument for use against obstinate Boards of Guardians to hand. On July 15th, 1926, the Board of Guardians (Default Act) had received the Royal Assent. It was initially used against the West Ham Guardians and now it was turned upon the Chester-le-Street Board. The terms of the Act empowered the Minister of Health, when it appeared to him that any Board of Guardians had ceased, or was acting in such a manner as would make it unable, to discharge all or any of its functions, summarily to supersede such a Board by his own nominees, who would thereupon take over all the powers and duties of the superseded Boards. This was a severe measure, involving as it did, the replacement of legally elected representatives of the ratepayers, and was justified only by continual defiance of ministerial orders, or the desperate financial position of a Union.[1]

The Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health pointed out that for some twelve months before the coal dispute of 1926, the Board of Guardians at Chester-le-Street had increased their scale of relief, and as a result, had not been able to meet the cost of relief out of

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1 Surcharges on people with no property generally proved ineffective. After the Audit (Local Authorities) Act, 1927, 17 & 18 Geo.V, Chapter 31 surcharge carried with it disqualification to sit on any local government body for five years.

the current poor rate. The rapid increase in the numbers of persons receiving outdoor relief after the beginning of May exacerbated still further an already serious situation. Moreover, 'from the commencement of the dispute the Chester-le-Street Guardians made a regular practice of relieving unmarried miners.'[1] The situation came to a head in August, when in spite of a further Ministerial warning, the Board decided on August 14th, to continue to pay illegal out relief to single men engaged in the dispute. The press was excluded from that particular meeting, but Alderman J.R. Mole, the Vice-Chairman of the Board, was reported as having said before the meeting that 'we mean to feed the people and damn the consequences.'[2] On August 19th the Ministry of Health instructed the Relieving Officers in the Union to withhold relief in all circumstances from any miner unless he was so reduced by privation as to be physically incapable of work. A medical certificate to this effect had to be produced.[3] Four days later, on August 23rd, it appeared that, as the Northern Echo put it, 'The Guardians had hauled down the flag of defiance' by deciding that in future the responsibility for relieving single miners should be that of the Relieving Officers alone. This meant, in effect, that single men would not be relieved.[4] The result of this action was a demonstration on August 26th, the day on which the Board met to reconsider the

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1 Ministry of Health, Eighth Annual Report (1926-1927) op. cit., p. 120.

2 Northern Echo, August 16th, 1926.

3 Ministry of Health, Eighth Annual Report op. cit., p. 121.

4 Northern Echo, August 24th, 1926.

problem. About five thousand people with the bands and banners of local lodges invaded the town. In addition makeshift banners were engraved with such slogans as 'We want Bread' and 'To Hell with the Ministry'. Who inspired this gathering, and what effect it had upon the meeting is difficult to assess, but that it had some effect is almost certain. In any event, after hearing further stories of privation among people in the district, the Board decided to suspend the three Relieving Officers for allegedly refusing to relieve those in privation and want. The payment of relief to single miners was renewed and a request was sent to the Ministry of Health for a further loan of £35,000.[1] The next day the Ministry issued a statement, reinstating the Relieving Officers, and 'since it was impossible in the circumstances to grant further loans to the Guardians, and without such loans the Guardians were unable to exercise their functions, an order was made on August 30th under the Board of Guardians (Default) Act 1926, appointing the General Inspector of the District to be the Board of Guardians in lieu of the elected Guardians.[2] The chairman of the old Board called the charges 'a tissue of lies' and said that he was proud to preside over such Guardians who would fight to the last ditch in the course of justice.[3] The supersession of the Board led to another, larger demonstration on September 1st, when a crowd estimated at about

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1 Ibid., August 27th, 1926.

2 Ministry of Health, Eighth Annual Report op. cit., p. 121.

3 Northern Echo, August 31st, 1926.

ten thousand, with twelve lodge banners, together with the red standard of the Birtley Communist Party gathered in Chester-le-Street. The Guardians were meeting the District Auditor on the question of a proposed surcharge of £480 in respect of the Birtley Relief District, spread over a period of eight weeks ending on July 7th, 1926. The total amount involved was £48,015 in respect of 370 cases. This sum was alleged to represent relief granted to single men for whom work was available and of whom there was no evidence to show that they were so reduced by privation as to be unable to work. A decision was postponed.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Health Inspector, now the ipso facto Board of Guardians, reduced the scale of relief, all of which was to be distributed in kind and on loan. Reductions of 1/6 per week were to be made if a child attended the school meals, and no rent or coal allowance was to be given.[1] Three prominent Novocastrians, Mr C.S. Shortt, Mr J. Wile, and Vice-Admiral W.F. Slater, were appointed to the Board from September 20th and the new Board reduced the scale of relief still further. The dependents of miners engaged in the coal dispute were to receive 8/- per week for the wife, with 4/- a week for each child and appropriate deductions for school meals. The 8/- per week allowance for the wife was a reduction of 4/-. These actions were justified by the new Board on the grounds that the former scale enabled strikers to support themselves, although not actually in receipt of relief. The

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[1] Ibid., September 8th, 1926.

maintenance of married strikers was not the function of the Guardians.[1] Figures were published to illustrate the beneficial economies wrought by these changes. For the week ending August 28th the amount of emergency outdoor relief paid in the Union was £9,796 3s 6d. By the week ending September 18th, with the District Inspector now performing the Board's functions, that sum had been reduced to £8,951 2s 2d.[2]

Protests followed the action of the new Board. They again took the form of a demonstration, this time, by about five thousand Labour women. At first, the Guardians refused to receive a deputation and police reinforcements had to be called when an attempt was made to rush the Guardians' offices. Order was restored only after two former members of the Board announced that the new Guardians had agreed to discuss the matter with them, although the revised relief scales remained in force.[3]

A Government inquiry was held at the beginning of 1927, into the affairs of the Chester-le-Street Board of Guardians, out of which arose

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1 Ibid., September 24th, 1926.

2 Ibid., September 29th, 1926. That was a considerable reduction and only the beginning. More drastic economies were expected once the new Board became settled. Chester-le-Street Union, Report op. cit., p. 5.

3 Ibid., October 8th, 1926. During the demonstration, traffic was held up, and one of the demonstrators was run over by a lorry and killed. The reporting of this incident led to two members of the staff and the proprietors of the Workers' Weekly being charged with 'unlawfully and maliciously publishing a defamatory libel concerning the police of the County of Durham.' The case against Mr. J.R. Campbell was dismissed, but Mr. T. Hines and Mr. L.S.F. Condon were both sent to prison.

several charges of maladministration. These included not paying the full scale of relief to applicants in arrears with their trade union subscriptions, and instituting a fund for the relief of those members of the Board who themselves were in need.[1] The latter charge was vigorously denied by the former Chairman of the Board, but the former was justified on the grounds that it was felt 'not proper to pay the full scale to those who through their own neglect were unable to claim as much from their Trade Union, as their more careful and thrifty fellows,'[2] observations closer to Samuel Smiles than to the Welfare State. The Minister of Health, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, in a debate in the House of Commons in March 1927 on a motion calling for the repeal of the Boards of Guardians (Default) Act, made it clear that the reason for supersession was not connected with the charges levelled in the report, 'but because they persisted, in spite of warnings from myself, and promises to amend, in giving illegal relief to single miners on strike.' He had not used the powers given to him with partiality

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1 This was alleged to have been practised in the Birtley District of the Union. Chester-le-Street Union Report op. cit., p. 8. Guardians and members of Councils in the Spen and Chopwell area of North-West Durham solved the problem of maintaining themselves and retaining their elected places by collecting monetary assistance from recipients of relief. Most of the money was obtained from house to house collections. The fund was known as the Spen and Chopwell Labour Representation Maintenance Fund and six Blaydon Urban Councillors, one County Councillor, and two members of the Gateshead Board of Guardians were supported by it. The councillors concerned emphasised that no pressure was placed upon anyone to subscribe, and the sums paid out were the same as those for outdoor relief, namely, 12/- for the wife and 4/- per week for each child under fourteen years of age. A monthly statement of the fund was submitted to the Chief Constable. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, August 21st, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, March 12th, 1927.

or indulgence, but in the interests of sound local government. The papers of the Chester-le-Street Board of Guardians were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions, but as the Northern Echo pointed out, 'the political reaction of a prosecution, whether successful or unsuccessful, would not be of a kind that the Government could afford to risk.'[1] In fact, the matter was diplomatically allowed to fade away, though it was periodically rejuvenated during 1927-29. The Government's appointees continued in office until 1929, by which time a new Local Government Act had destroyed the old Boards and established in their stead, the Public Assistance Committees of the County Councils.

Before this event, however, all Boards of Guardians had the problem of repaying the money which they had borrowed to finance emergency outdoor relief, and recovering the amounts which they themselves had allowed out on loan. The Easington Board's clerk wrote to local M.P.s and the D.M.A. after the return to work, requesting them to bring what pressure they could on the Government in an effort to induce them to assist local ratepayers, who were expected to repay, within a few years, all the loans raised during the coal stoppage. Such a debt would inevitably retard the progress of housing and other schemes in the area and might mean bankruptcy to smaller ratepayers. The Clerk pointed out that had this expense not been thrown upon the ratepayers, the National Exchequer would have incurred a far greater cost in dealing with the disturbances which must have arisen among a starving population.

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[1] Ibid., March 12th, 30th, 1927.

If the state would not or could not assist by paying the bill, then the period during which the loans were to be repaid should be extended to at least ten years.[1]

In January the Easington Board had decided to adjourn the question of fixing a date, from which emergency relief must be repaid, for three months. On March 31st, 1927 they decided that the agreements entered into with the recipients of emergency relief, that it would be repaid at the rate of 2/- per week, would be enforced from April 1st. Those men who were on the subsistence wage i.e. the lowest paid, were to repay at 1/- per week, provided that their payments were regularly maintained.[2] The Clerk approached the colliery companies within the Union requesting their help in the recovery of the money weekly from the miners' wages at the colliery office. All the Companies agreed to help, but all save one asked for a commission for so doing. This varied from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 per cent and was required to cover administrative costs. The Board reluctantly agreed to a uniform commission of 5 per cent.[3] The working of this agreement would have been a relatively simple matter if all the men concerned had been in regular employment. Unfortunately, many were still out of work, others were on short time, all at work had suffered wage cuts, and many had contracted other debts during the long dispute, for example at local grocery stores. Although individual cases of hardship were sympathetically treated, numerous families discovered that a large proportion of their weekly income was already mortgaged.

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1 Easington Guardians, February 17th, 1927.

2 Easington Guardians, January 20th, March 1st, 1927.

3 Easington Guardians, April 21st, 1927.

The local lodges sent deputations to the Board in an effort to persuade the Guardians to reduce the scale of repayment. The request was refused, although it was agreed that no reduction should be made from a man's wages where the colliery worked four or any less number of shifts in a week. In this way, £10,000 had been repaid by the end of September 1927.[1]

Further wage reductions at the beginning of 1928 revived the problem of repayment, and at the request of the Easington Miners' Lodge, the Board agreed to reduce the rate of repayment to 6d. per week.[2] The Ministry of Health however, refused to allow such a severe reduction. A graduated scale of repayment, based on earnings, was suggested by the Ministry, who agreed that the lowest paid workers should not be expected to pay more than 6d. per week. The subsistence wage for a full week at Easington Colliery was £1 12s 8½d, and it was feared by some members of the Board that the men would repudiate their debts if the repayment scales remained unaltered.[3] An agreement was finally reached, that where gross earnings during the previous week were £3 or less, only 6d. should be deducted: over £3 and up to £4, 1/- to be deducted: over £4 and up to £5 1/6 to be deducted: and over £5 and up to £6, 2/- to be taken off. However, the management of the Easington and Dawdon collieries refused to administer this new scale because it involved them in too much work. They suggested either a flat rate

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1 Easington Guardians August 4th, November 27th, 1927.

2 Easington Guardians, February 16th, 1928.

3 Easington Guardians, March 8th, 1928.

of 6d or 9d, of 1/- for piece workers and 6d. for subsistence men, and to this the Board had to agree.[1] In spite of these difficulties, the Easington Board had collected a total of £50,000 from recipients of relief on loan during the 1926 coal dispute, by April 1930.

After that date, the Local Government Act of 1929 came into force, transferring the functions and responsibilities of the old Boards of Guardians to the newly formed Public Assistance Boards of the County Councils. This change did not wipe the slate clean so far as outstanding loans were concerned. It simply meant that the County Councils had now to repay the loans which the Guardians had raised.[2] Moreover they had received no authority to cease collecting relief repayments from those who had obtained relief in 1926. The recovery of such monies was becoming increasingly difficult. The persistence of the depression, the removal of families from the area, the death, or arrival at pensionable age of many of those still owing money from 1926, made the collection of repayments extremely hazardous. And it was very unpopular, as the following resolution from the Ryhope Lodge of the D.M.A. indicates. 'That owing to the terribly low wages ... and taking into consideration the short time and unemployment that is prevailing, we think the time has arrived when the Labour County Council

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1 Easington Guardians, March 22nd, April 12th, 1928.

2 The amount still owing by the various Boards of Guardians in County Durham on loans raised during the 1926 stoppage on April 1st, 1930, was £492,756 16s 5d. The Ministry of Health agreed to waive any claim for interest but requested repayments of the principal in fifteen annual instalments of £32,850, a rate of approximately $2\frac{3}{4}$d. in the pound, each year. The final instalment was paid in 1945.

could with advantage forego all debts which were contracted by the workers from the old Boards of Guardians during and since the 1926 lock-out.'[1] It is without doubt that many members of the Public Assistance Committee sympathised with this resolution. But they had no power to make such a frontal assault upon the problem. However, although the Public Assistance Committee could not pass a general resolution cancelling all arrears of loans granted to applicants for relief, they could write off amounts as bad debts, after a 'careful consideration of each individual case.' The reasons for the decision had to be recorded in every case in order that the District Auditor could be satisfied that each action was justified. This loophole was increasingly exploited, and large sums were written off. For example, in September 1931, in the Easington area, 1,962 cases totalling £44,756 2s 8d were cancelled. Similarly in the Auckland district, 1,794 cases were so dealt with, the irrecoverable amount being £73,413 13s 11d.[2]

There is little doubt that without the assistance obtained from the Boards of Guardians by the dependents of miners engaged in the 1926 dispute, the mineworkers themselves could hardly have remained away from work for seven months. The Government were quite aware of this, but no doubt they were not unhappy to see the status quo continue, provided that no Board overtly exceeded Ministerial instructions. No poor relief would have meant near starvation and, in all probability, considerably more violence. By the end of May, 133,000 cases of outdoor

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1 Durham County Council, Public Assistance Committee Minutes, September 25th, 1930.

2 Public Assistance Committee Minutes, September 24th, 1931.

relief were being dealt with in the North East at a weekly cost of £100,000. In the period August to October 1926, a peak of 143,000 was reached. The Ministry of Health's Inspector for the area estimated that 86 per cent of the Northumberland and Durham married or widowed mineworkers applied for relief for their families during the 1926 coal dispute.[1] It is difficult to assess the effect of this crisis upon those responsible for changing the nature of the Poor Law, but as part of the cumulative effect of the persistent depression of the 1920's, it played a part in that undermining of the old Poor Law which contributed to the legislation of 1929-1930.

The Poor Law was the major but not the sole source of relief for the miner and his family. There was a degree of private charity, in amount impossible to estimate because of the anonymity of so much of it. Certain individuals loaned boilers for use in soup kitchens for example, and in some districts, gifts of money or food were made to the voluntary committees. On July 24th, 1926, models of miners' lamps were sold in order to raise money.[2] Some local tradesmen made gifts in addition to granting credit arrangements, and assistance from national commercial undertakings was not unknown, for example, J.S. Fry & Sons of Bristol, distributed 7,500 ¼lb. tins of their cocoa to miners' families in County Durham, through the Durham Miners' Association.[3] Cheap fish was obtained from merchants in South Shields and Hull. In an

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1 Ministry of Health, Eighth Annual Report, op. cit., Appendix XVI, p.262.

2 Northern Echo, July 26th, 1926.

3 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, May 27th, 1926.

attempt to finance miners' local relief organisations, the Northern Echo newspaper established a shilling fund, to which many people contributed during June and July 1926. Unfortunately it rather withered away in August after some £500 had been collected and distributed. The newspaper had noted on the inauguration of the fund, that many people refused to contribute to relief funds because 'they felt that by subscribing, they would be helping to keep the miners out. Our own view... is that it is our plain duty as citizens to minimise the hardships of innocent children, who are in no way responsible for the dispute.' There were always some supporters of the view expressed by the Secretary of the Consett Property Owners' Association: 'If the Miners' Federation brought the men out, they ought to keep them.'[1] That the shilling fund was a valuable asset in the amelioration of distress in the area cannot be doubted. One example of the help given to voluntary relief bodies by the fund must suffice. In a letter acknowledging a gift of £5 from the fund, the Secretary of the Newbiggin (Northumberland) Distress Committee underlined the dependence of such committees on external financial support. 'We have two centres for feeding the children. One is in the schools and the other in the Wesley Hall. We give on an average 1200 meals per day. Our staff is entirely voluntary ... There has to be no waste to carry on at 2½d. a meal. Your cheque came just when we were needing it.'[2] As the dispute dragged on however, people grew less and less inclined to 'give generously' or indeed to

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1 Northern Echo, June 4th, August 19th, 1926: Blaydon Courier, October 23rd, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, July 3rd, 1926.

give at all.

The situation was made additionally difficult for voluntary distress committees in Northumberland due to the refusal of the County Education Committee to provide meals for school children as allowed under the 1921 Education Act. As we have noted above, this Act provided, inter alia, for the provision of school meals by local education authorities. It also gave guidance upon the action to be taken in coping with cases of distress.

> 'Where the local education authority resolve that any of the children attending an elementary school within the area are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of the education provided for them, and have ascertained that funds other than public funds, are not available, or are insufficient in amount to defray the cost of food furnished in meals under this act, they may spend out of the rates such sum as will meet the cost of the provision of such food.'[1]

This act was put into operation by the Labour controlled Durham County Council before the end of May and was of immense importance in relieving the existing distress. The Northumberland County Council was not Labour controlled, and the act was never widely applied there. This, of course, placed increased pressure on the voluntary committees in the mining areas of the county.[2]

In Durham, 309 canteens were set up by the Education Committee,

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1 Education Act, 11 & 12 Geo V, 1921, Chapter 51 Sections 82-85.

2 It is not easy to analyse in a scientific way the differences between Durham and Northumberland. The most significant may have been that in Durham, coal was mined throughout the county, more or less. In Northumberland, coal was mined mainly in the South and east, which meant that a large area in the north and west of the county was largely rural. One consequence of this was that the Northumberland County Council was never dominated by Labour, as Durham was.

and besides schoolchildren, the 3-5 age group were also fed. It was estimated that 100,000 children were being provided, for five days a week, with breakfast and dinner throughout the whole of the dispute.[1]

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[1] This estimate, by the Durham County Medical Officer of Health does not agree with the figure given in the House of Commons on March 24th, 1927. Perhaps the Commons figure did not include the 3 to 5 year olds.

PROVISION OF MEALS Particulars of Provision and Cost in Mining Areas, May 1st - December 31st, 1926.

L.E.A.	Highest number of children fed in any one week	Total number of meals	Estimated total cost	Average cost per meal
Durham County	64,746	19,387,504	£283,781	3.5d.
Hartlepool	189	23,240	484	5.0
Felling	2,457	731,657	9,954	3.3
Hebburn	1,476	212,872	3,104	3.5
Gateshead	1,330	270,072	4,745	4.2
South Shields	2,396	292,761	6,102	5.0
Sunderland	4,430	1,103,618	15,649	3.4
West Hartlepool	434	63,933	666	2.5
Northumberland	1,516	243,499	2,029	2.0
Blyth	2,109	217,430	4,953	5.5
Wallsend	-	-	-	-
Newcastle	2,776	418,300	3,528	2.0
Total	83,889	22,964,886	£334,998	3.3

The figures for Durham were the highest in the country, followed by Lancashire, Glamorgan, and the Rhondda. The respective figures for the whole country were: 251,305; 57,603,124: £714,604; 3.0d. 204, H.C. Deb. 5s., 582-586.

No meals were provided at weekends.

> 'Canteen Committees were formed, boilers bought or hired, and fires were arranged either under pent house roofs, or in the open. In some areas, men who had been army cooks were on the canteen committees and gave valuable service. For breakfast, cocoa, or milk, bread and margarine, or butter, or jam, were provided. Oat meal porridge was occasionally provided. Owing to the nature of the cooking apparatus, the dinners were chiefly soups and stews boiled suet and even milk puddings were contrived in some areas. Occasionally the milk puddings were made in large tin dishes and the voluntary workers took it in turns to cook them in their own ovens. When eggs were cheap they appeared on the menu, and the same remarks apply to salads and fruit, which chiefly consisted of apples and bananas.'[1]

With so many of their customers affected directly by the industrial dispute, local traders found themselves in a tenuous situation. Many sympathised with the miners and wished to help them. In bad times, the purchase of food is usually the first victim of economies and grocery stores had either to extend credit facilities to customers, with a hope that recovery could be made when work was resumed, or prepare for a considerable reduction in sales. Evidence upon this subject is extremely difficult to obtain. Small shops frequently change hands more than once in forty years and in any event rarely maintain records of transactions long since settled. Discussion of this subject with miners and traders leaves the impression that most local stores helped the miners as best they could, either by gifts, credit to individuals, or agreement with local lodges. Some traders had lost money during the 1921 stoppage through failing to obtain adequate

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1 Durham County Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) p. 39.

securities for the credit given and in 1926 the evidence seems to suggest that traders preferred lodge to individual agreements. The lodge's responsible officials were more likely to make vigorous attempts to secure repayment. This arrangement worked well in Wheatley Hill for example, though as in most areas, there was a limit on what credit could be given.[1]

Many of those engaged in the coal dispute in the North East were Co-operative Society members. At the beginning of 1926, Societies in the two counties had a total membership of 400,457.[2] 273,867 of these were in County Durham Societies. There was a tendency, throughout the twenties, to look upon the Co-operative Society as the victualling section of the workers' army, rather than just another business grouping.[3] And indeed considerable assistance and sympathy was given by local Co-operatives, but usually on a very businesslike basis. A sample of Co-operative Society activity during the dispute, taken from the records of twelve societies scattered over the whole North Eastern region has provided an interesting sketch of their involvement. Only one of the twelve, Blaydon, refused to enter into credit agreements with local miners' lodges due to debts incurred during the 1921 stoppage being still outstanding.[4] The Society did not persist with pending legal actions against the lodges concerned, in an attempt to recover the money

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1 Interview and Notebook of Councillor E. Cain, January 31st, 1964.

2 Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, Annual Report (1925).

3 See for example, some of the speeches of A.J. Cook.

4 The amount still owing from the 1921 dispute to the Blaydon Society in 1929 was £1,787. Blaydon Co-operative Society, Executive Committee Minutes, April 15th, 1929.

while the 1926 dispute lasted.[1] The Blaydon Society also refused to contribute to the national Relief Fund set up by the Co-operative Union because of the bad trade and distress in the district, and in common with a number of other Societies, reduced the wages of some of their employees. The Society did however make small donations to several voluntary relief bodies such as local childrens' boot repairing funds, which appeared in nearly every village.[2] However, the Society did provide extensive credit facilities for its own members.

All of the twelve Co-operative Societies whose records were examined accepted vouchers from the national relief fund of the Co-operative Union. The vouchers, worth 5/- and 2/6, were distributed to the most necessitous among the Society's membership. There were not very many of them. Some Societies gave practical assistance to the miners at their own expense. Ashington Co-operative Society, in Northumberland, gave bones to local soup kitchens, and agreed to supply goods to the kitchen at Lynemouth at a discount of 10 per cent. They also agreed to grant the use of what facilities they had at the butchering factory to the Ashington Miners' Distress Committee, to whom they also gave an old shop for use as an office at a nominal rent of 3d. a week. They also allowed the Co-operative Hall to be used, free of charge, for fund raising concerts and dances. During the dispute the Society gave amounts totalling £116 6s 4½d to the distress committee. This assistance was of especial value in an area where the schoolchildren were not

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1 Blaydon Co-operative Society, Executive Committee Minutes, June 28th, 1926.

2 Ibid., September 13th, 1926.

being fed as in the County of Durham. With regard to the extension of credit, the Committee decided that only eight weeks per member should be allowed, but extensions were granted by the credit committee, on application. To facilitate the collection of accounts, members were provided with small memorandum books, showing the amounts owing and the payments made. Short time was worked in the grocery, drapery, furnishing, shoe, and butchery departments.[1]

In Consett, the Co-operative Hall was used as a feeding centre for the schoolchildren of the district. Special credit facilities were granted to members for the duration of the dispute, and were not terminated until December 18th, 1926. The Society also negotiated a credit agreement with the Victory Lodge of the D.M.A., whereby credit for lodge members was to be allowed to the value of £10 per week for four weeks, after which it would be reviewed. The final amount was to be repaid within a stipulated period after the resumption of work. By October 1926, a total of £3,667 12s 11d was owing at the central grocery department, but these debts were gradually paid off.[2] This was not always the case. The present Head Cashier at the offices of the Birtley Co-operative Society recalls a sum in the region of £20,000 eventually having to be written off as bad debts, following upon the extensive credit arrangements of 1926.[3] The Ryhope and Silksworth Co-operative Society, which had credit agreements with five

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1 Ashington Co-operative Society, Executive Committee Minutes, June 7th, July 27th, August 26th, September 20th, 1926.

2 Consett Co-operative Society, Executive Committee Minutes, May 17th, November 8th, December 13th, 1926.

3 Interview at Birtley, February 16th, 1964.

lodges in East Durham and was owed a sum in excess of £44,000 in September 1926, eventually recovered the money, the last payment being made in 1947.[1]

The membership of those Societies whose documents have been consulted, remained fairly constant throughout this period, though all suffered some loss in share capital, together with a temporary decline in both the value and the volume of their trade. Most did what they could to help their members, and the local miners' lodges, but it is impossible to estimate how many suffered financial losses as a result of the dispute. Both the agreements with lodges, and the way in which the agreements were kept, differed from one society to another. In reality, in a mining area, the Co-operative Societies did not have very much choice. They had to stand by their members, many of whom were miners, and their connections with Labour were such that they could not remain inactive whilst families in their districts experienced hard times.

All efforts to eradicate distress could only cushion the miner and his family from the worst effects of the prolonged dispute. The search for further help took representatives of the M.F.G.B. to the United States of America. Shortly before they left, the Prime Minister in reply to an inquiry from the United Press of America, said that there was no foundation for any statements as to starvation among the mining population. He pointed out that the dependents of miners in England and

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[1] Ryhope and Silksworth Co-operative Society, Balance Sheets, September 1926 to March 1947.

Wales were receiving about £230,000 a week in outdoor relief from the Guardians. The children were being fed by the education authorities and there was 'little or no indication of the presence of severe distress even among such miners and dependents of miners as are not receiving poor relief in their own homes.' He went on to say that it was clear from the reports of the Ministry of Health Inspectors 'that there is good ground for thinking that in many areas the children are actually being fed better than they were before the strike.'[1] This statement has been sharply criticised since, as indeed it was at the time. Yet it appears to be correct in one respect, at least so far as the North East was concerned. There is little doubt, that actual starvation was absent from the two northern counties. This is not to say that extreme poverty did not exist; nor is it to condone the Prime Minister's mischievous statement. Rather it is a tribute to all those who worked throughout the seven months to prevent starvation from overtaking the miners. Nevertheless the standard of living amongst the mining population was remarkably low at this time and the continued collection of funds was imperative if the distress committees were to do their work. The effect of the poor standard of life on the people is difficult to assess.

The Northumberland Medical Officer of Health, in his annual report for the year 1926 did not think it possible to discover the influence of the dispute upon the general health conditions prevailing

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[1] Northern Echo August 7th, 1926.

in the county, but he thought that it was 'more than probable that of all the classes in the community the women folk suffered most.'[1] His Durham colleague agreed. 'There is ... no doubt, that the mother, self-sacrificing as she usually is, tends to be the worst fed member of the family at any time of scarcity ...'[2] Both doctors made somewhat pious statements concerning the feeding of the children, which they considered to be more wholesome than when the children were fed at home. There was less pandering to the children's 'caprices and fancies' and less reliance on canned foods and fish and chips.[3] The Medical Officer at South Shields however, reported that 'the adverse effect of the industrial depression was especially noticeable in certain of the schools, where many of the children were below the average physically. Those suffering from anaemia, debility, and malnutrition, were unfortunately far too numerous.'[4] The Medical Officer in Northumberland, when noting an increase in the infant mortality rate from respiratory diseases, suggested that the long stoppage might have contributed to the rise.

> '... although the infants were well enough fed, there is no doubt whatever that they were not sufficiently clad, and were allowed to sit about upon the pavements and cold floors of the houses in this condition. From my own experience it was no uncommon sight to see young children in bitterly cold weather running about wearing little more than a thin cotton vest.'[5]

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1 Northumberland Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) p. 58.

2 Durham Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) p. 39

3 Northumberland Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) loc. cit.

4 South Shields Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) p. 55.

5 Northumberland Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report (1926) loc.cit.

We must now return to the progress of the dispute. On June 15th, 1926, the Government announced a programme of legislation for the mines, in which the primary recommendation was for the lengthening of the working day to eight hours, including winding times. Amalgamations, and the development of new mines, were to be stimulated, and the mineral rights duty was to be doubled in order to finance amenities like pit-head baths. The employment of men over eighteen years of age was to be restricted to those already working in the mines. This appeared to the miners as an example of the Government taking the side of the coal owners, and further examples soon followed. Amid rumours of changes in the law relating to Trades Unions, the Coal Mines Act 1926, became law on July 8th. The seven hour day, secured in 1919, was to be suspended for five years. This Act did much to stiffen the miners' determination to carry on the struggle, especially in Durham, where the proposed increase in hours was particularly resented.[1] Meanwhile the T.U.C. and the M.F.G.B. had agreed to sink their differences until the end of the stoppage. The Trades Union conference of executives, scheduled to meet on June 25th to discuss the conduct of the General Strike, was indefinitely postponed. On July 2nd, the General Council of the T.U.C. issued a statement, denouncing the Government Bill and requesting support for the miners, though at the same time declining to impose a levy on affiliated unions, or to place an embargo on the

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1 The Durham hewers had worked a seven hour shift since the nineteenth century. The M.F.G.B. programme for the Eight Hour Day during the first decade of the twentieth had not endeared the Federation to the miners of Durham. See Chapter II above.

movement of coal, this latter decision merely reflecting the refusal of the railway unions on May 19th.[1]

Meanwhile in Durham on May 29th, the Durham County Mining Federation Board had arranged for their officials and agents to address twenty-seven meetings throughout the County on June 2nd, as part of an attempt to keep abreast of local opinion. Several of the meetings manifested a very obstinate adherence to the 'not a second on, not a penny off' slogan, much to the chagrin of the leadership of the D.M.A., who realised the inevitability of negotiations, at some stage. Mr Peter Lee, the Financial Secretary of the D.M.A. and a Durham delegate to the M.F.G.B., addressed several of the meetings held on June 2nd. He suggested that the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. should be empowered to meet the owners and the Government, on the understanding that the matter was submitted to the members' conference of the Federation, or that there was an individual ballot of the members for acceptance or rejection. Government, owners and Executive Committee, ought to get together and decide what was a living wage. The price of coal should then be fixed and any deficiency between that price and the amount paid in wages should be temporarily made up by the Government until such time as the reorganisation of the industry enabled it to stand upon its own legs. This was based partly on the Samuel Report and partly on Mr Lee's own particular brand of wishful thinking, and it

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[1] The railway unions pointed out that the General Strike was over, and that many railwaymen were not working due to the coal stoppage. They did not believe that anything could be done.

aroused strong criticism, notably at meetings at West Stanley and Tyne Dock. At the latter meeting, where some thousands had gathered from half a dozen East Durham lodges, Mr. Lee pointed to a banner bearing the inscription, 'No reductions, no increased hours, and no district settlements,' and said, 'That will never be my case. Anyone can shout that motto. What we want is thinking.' These remarks led to angry exchanges with members of his audience and he was unable to finish his speech. The meeting terminated by passing a resolution supporting A.J. Cook and the Federation in their demands, and asking that there should be no settlement until every man imprisoned during the crisis had been set at liberty. Similar resolutions were passed at meetings at Wearmouth, Hylton, Silksworth, Ryhope, Blaydon, Bowburn, Kelloe, Thrislington, Trimdon, Shildon and Coxhoe. At the latter meeting, the Durham miners' agent, a man of more radical views than Mr. Lee, Mr. James Gilliland, said that the Miners' Executive at Durham would never give a vote in favour of a reduction in wages, district settlements or longer hours, unless there was a demand from the men, and a mandate to do so.[1]

That at this date the large majority of Durham miners agreed with Mr. Gilliland rather than Mr. Lee, there can be little doubt, and Mr. A.J. Cook was afforded a 'wild and tumultuous welcome' on his first visit to the County during the dispute, on June 18th. A crowd of over 10,000 at Wardley Colliery heard Mr. Cook say that he knew that there would be no breakaway in Durham. When he asked the crowd

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[1] Northern Echo, June 3rd, 1926.

what he should do when he returned to London, a voice shouted, 'Fight like Hell!'[1] The emotional fervour of Cook's meetings reassured any waverers. Nevertheless a thin trickle of men back to work began in Durham during June. On the first day of the month, a small pit at Tanfield, normally employing eighty men, was reported to have restarted with only three absentees.[2] At a meeting of miners at Stanley on June 5th, Mr. J.E. Swan, an agent of the D.M.A., underlined the fact that only a very few men had returned to work. He urged the avoidance of provocative action against men who went back to work. The Executive intended to do all it could to advise men who resumed work that such an action was wrong, and was false to their fellow miners.[3] Men returning to work had always had an adverse effect upon the morale of those who remained out. This increased as time went on, especially as the sources of relief slowly dried up. In June, however, only small collieries, whose owners were not members of the owners' Association, were affected. Four such pits were reported as having restarted by June 20th. At the end of June, the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. requested lodges to forward weekly reports of the situation to Durham. Unfortunately, none of these survive.[4]

In Northumberland also the first few men to return to work did so

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1 Ibid., June 19th, 1926

2 Ibid., June 2nd, 1926; D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, June 5th, 1926.

3 Northern Echo, June 7th, 1926.

4 Ibid., June 29th, 1926; D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, June 28th, 1926.

in June. As in Durham, the collieries concerned were small and their owners not affiliated to the owners' Association. At Hepscott Colliery, near Morpeth, all the men normally employed had returned, but this only amounted to thirty men. The Northern Echo alleged that two collieries at Healcote and Woodburn had never stopped working, but no details were given and no confirmation has been found.[1] The general attitude of the North Eastempress towards the mining stoppage, was far less united than it had been during the General Strike. A number of weekly papers including the Blaydon Courier and the Auckland Chronicle, were especially sympathetic to the miners' cause, which they interpreted as a defence of their standard of life against an unwarranted attack by the owners.[2] The two conservative Newcastle daily newspapers however, the Journal and the Chronicle, remained bitterly opposed to the dispute, and particularly to the speeches of Mr. A.J. Cook, until the end of the stoppage. The other daily paper in the area, the Northern Echo, published at Darlington, was a supporter of the Liberal Party, and like the Party, attempted to combine disapproval of the strike as wasteful and stupid, with criticism of the Government for not enforcing a settlement based upon the Samuel Report. In the main they reported fairly both sides of the dispute, but they aroused the hostility of the miners by their

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[1] Northern Echo, June 15th, 1926.

[2] In an editorial on June 12th, 1926, the Blaydon Courier wrote:

> 'Whatever may be the outcome of the present battle, it is to be hoped that he (the miner) will not have to submit to any further reduction in wages. The man who daily risks his life and toils hard is worthy of something more than a bare subsistence wage.'

sensational accounts of the numbers of men returning to work, some of which were demonstrably false, and also by their frequent publishing of unsigned letters criticising the miners' standpoint. Such letters were often signed by suspicious looking pseudonyms, and always stimulated angry comment.

The first week of July 1926, produced the third reading of the Government's Coal Mines Bill, the T.U.C. denunciation of it, and their call for support for the miners; the new terms upon which work could be resumed were also published by the mineowners of each district. The terms upon which the Durham and Northumberland mineowners were prepared to reopen their pits on July 12th, were based upon the eight hour day plus winding time, for all classes of underground workers, in addition to a 10 per cent reduction in actual earnings. A subsistence allowance of 6/9½d. a shift in Northumberland, and 6/8½d. in Durham was to be paid to the lowest paid, day wage men. The President of the Northumberland Miners' Association was reported as saying that the terms were impossible. 'If that is the best the Northumberland coal owners can do, it would have been more creditable to them to have said simply, we cannot pay adequate wages to workmen and keep the industry alive, therefore we have decided that our pits will be closed.' The Durham coal owners, in a statement accompanying the terms, pointed out that in addition to the money wage, all married workmen and those having family responsibilities were provided with free houses or a rent allowance in lieu, together with free coal. The Northumberland owners also made conditional certain modifications of

old local arrangements, for example, that pits and seams were to be cavilled separately if desired by the management, and that the management were to have the power to arrange the different shifts to suit the circumstances at each individual colliery.[1]

Terms closely resembling these would be signed before the year was out, but in July, there was no possibility that they would be accepted. The terms involved an abrogation of all the three requirements of the M.F.G.B., namely that wages should not be reduced, longer hours should not be worked, and that agreements should be at a national and not a district level. The Executive Committee of the four sections of workmen which formed in Durham, the County Mining Federation Board, miners, mechanics, enginemen and cokemen, met in Durham on July 8th and formally rejected the terms. The President of the D.M.A., Mr. James Robson, said:

> 'The terms offered cut across all for which we have been standing for the last ten years and are precisely the same terms as were offered on April 30th. As honourable men we must be loyal to our obligations, and resist any district settlement, and maintain the solidarity and strength of the Federation. The Executive Committee have no hesitation in saying that if the proposals are accepted they would create conditions of employment in Durham that will be intolerable. The Committee urge the miners to offer the stoutest resistance possible to the terms. If a settlement is arrived at, it must be for the coalfields as a whole.'

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1 Northern Echo, July 8th, 1926. The cavill was the quarterly draw for working places.

The following table of how the wage reductions would affect Durham was published:

	Previous Wage	New Offer/Per Shift
Deputies	11/6.6d.	10/4.74d.
Fillers	10/-	8/11.4d.
Hewers	9/8d.	8/7.4d.
Stonemen	9/1.2d.	8/7.4d.
Shifters	6/5.18d.	5/9.46d.
Putters, piece over 21	9/8d.	8/7.4d.
Winding Enginemen	11/6.6d.	10/4.74d.
Hauling Enginemen	8/4.8d.	7/6.72d.
Boilerminders	7/10.5d.	7/1.05d.

These were County averages: piece workers would normally earn more. Meanwhile the N.M.A. adopted the following resolution on July 9th: 'That we cannot accept the Northumberland Coal owners' invitation to meet them to discuss the terms under which they will reopen the Northumberland pits, closed by the owners at the end of April this year, as any district negotiations would be contrary to the national policy of the M.F.G.B., of which Northumberland is a loyal part.'[1]

Eleven days earlier the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B., had received a letter from the Industrial Christian Fellowship, communicating the result of a meeting of representatives of all the Christian churches held on June 28th. The meeting had decided that the coal dispute could only be resolved by a return to the original proposals of the Royal Commission. The letter further intimated that should

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[1] Northern Echo, July 9th, 10th, 1926.

the M.F.G.B. accept these proposals, the Industrial Christian Fellowship would urge the Government to reopen negotiations. A meeting took place between these representatives of the Churches and the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. on July 14th. The next day a special conference of the M.F.G.B. heard the proposals which the Executive hoped might form the basis for a resumption of negotiations. They provided for an immediate resumption of work on the terms prevailing on April 30th. The settlement, when concluded, was to be in the form of a national agreement, to be reached in a short defined period not exceeding six months. During this period, financial assistance was to be granted by the Government under a scheme which was to be drawn up by the Commissioners. The problems of wages and reorganisation were also to be settled by the Commissioners, whose findings, as far as possible, were to be incorporated in appropriate legislation. Where reorganisation was capable of early application, it was to be proceeded with at the earliest possible moment. If disagreement persisted at the end of the defined period, a Joint Board, consisting of representatives of both parties, should appoint an independent chairman whose award in settlement of these disagreements should be accepted by both sides.[1] These were the so-called 'Bishops' Proposals', which were persevered with for another month by the M.F.G.B., although rejected by the Government on July 19th, ostensibly because a further subsidy was out of the question.

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1 M.F.G.B. June 29th, July 15th, 1926.

The 'Bishops' Proposals' illuminated the divisions existing within the M.F.G.B. Both the Durham and South Wales Miners' Associations objected to the activities of the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. on the grounds that by initiating such negotiations, the Executive Committee were pursuing a policy in opposition to Conference decisions. A Durham resolution of July 21st protested against the action of the National Executive -

> 'in empowering the members of the Christian Fellowship Society to meet the Prime Minister on behalf of the miners on definitely arranged terms, which suggest that a subsidy should be continued for a short period and reorganisation work to be thoroughly gone into, at the end of which short period if no settlement is arrived at on the matters in dispute an independent chairman must be appointed to decide between the two parties, which is accepting the principle of compulsory arbitration which the miners have already refused. The procedure in an important step like this, ought to have been that the districts should at first have considered and decided upon such step, and then been confirmed, or otherwise, by a national conference. This, in our opinion, is subversive to the policy of the Federation.'[1]

Two points of view were slowly emerging within the Federation. A District vote on the 'Bishops' Proposals' showed a small majority against them, 367,650 to 333,036. Both Durham and Northumberland voted in favour of the proposals after lodge votes.[2] It was now four weeks since the Cabinet had rejected the 'Bishops' Memorandum';

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1 M.F.G.B. July 30th, 1926.

2 M.F.G.B. August 16th, 1926.

and the proposals were now quickly forgotten,[1] though not before relations between the Durham miners and the chief representatives of the Established Church in Durham had been further exacerbated, following a letter to the Times by the Bishop of Durham, Dr. Hensley Henson, illuminating his economic philosophy. 'Neither justice nor religion requires, and neither justice nor religion could long enable, any industry to be carried on at a loss.' He criticised the entry of the Churchmen into the coal dispute, due, he said -

> 'to certain fallacies which infect the thinking and disturb the imagination of many clergymen.
>
> In their ardour to improve the conditions of popular life, our clerical reformers forget the stern conditions under which alone that life can proceed. They talk of indefeasible rights, the right to work, the right to leisure, the right to a living wage, but they forget that before any of these rights can materialise men must live and in order to do so must work.
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> Sometimes the salient facts in an economic dispute are so obscure that it is not easy to determine where the limit of claim must be acknowledged, but in the present conflict no such obscurity exists. The facts have been ascertained by an independent authority and are not really in dispute.

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[1] The 'Bishops' Proposals' aroused other opponents in the North East. Sir George Hunter, the Tyne shipbuilder, wrote to the Prime Minister about 'certain well-meaning but unwary Bishops and Nonconformist Ministers who do not understand Mr. A.J. Cook and what he is aiming at, any more than he understands their theology and the teaching of Christ, have taken sides with him and the Socialists and Communists working with him, and against the Government and the community, and against the real interests of the miners. They are prolonging the Strike.

It would be a terrible mistake for the Government to give way to them. No one can say the refusal of the miners to make any sacrifice for the good of their brother workers and the community is a Christian or patriotic or reasonable attitude. They are callously causing the present deep depression ... I write to you now on behalf of the shipyard workers, who are worse off than the miners ... I venture to say, if you had told the miners' leaders a year ago how impossible and harmful to the country, and especially to the miners, their attitude is, the present strike would not have taken place ... Northern Echo, August 9th, 1926.

> Those facts, not the greed of mineowners, determine the unpalatable demand that if the mining industry is to continue the miners must for the time being either work for longer hours or work for smaller wages. It is altogether fallacious to bring in pleas ethical and religious ... I suggest that in future, when bishops intervene in public disputes without other authority than their own, they should use their own names and not their official signatures. Whatever the final settlement may be, I am sure that the intervention of the ten bishops has done much harm. It has prolonged the crisis, obscured the true issue from the miners, and stimulated their natural but unfortunate disposition to think of themselves as the victims, not of economic conditions, but of oppression.[1]

Many ministers of religion of all denominations assisted at local feeding centres and soup kitchens, but the Bishop and Dean of Durham spoke against the miners continuing the dispute throughout.

Meanwhile, the first safety men were withdrawn, in Durham in July, from the Trimdon Grange Colliery, after reports that the colliery manager had been sending coke from the yard.[2] During the month, great meetings were addressed by A.J. Cook in both North Eastern Counties. On July 11th, he spoke at mass meetings of Northumberland miners at Ashington and Bedlington, sharply criticising the Government and the railwaymen, the latter for blacklegging the miners. He declared that the Federation would never negotiate with the owners nor the Government while longer hours remained a question

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1 Times, August 13th, 1926. As the Bishop himself admitted 'the large stake in the Durham minefield (sic) of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as administering the episcopal and capitular property, gave me, as myself a Commissioner, direct personal interest in the problem ...' Henson, H.H., Retrospect of An Unimportant Life, (Oxford, 1943) p. 110.

2 Safety men were those workers who were concerned with the maintenance of the individual pits in as safe a working condition as possible. For example, men responsible for the pumps which removed water from the workings. D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, July 5th, 1926.

for discussion.[1] One week later, Mr. Cook addressed a crowd, numbering some 35,000 at the Durham village of Burnhope. The local lodge had organised a miners' gala as a substitute for the annual gala of the D.M.A., normally held on that day, but cancelled because of the dispute. About fifty colliery lodges were represented, though the gathering did not have the blessing of the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. who pointed out that a substantial majority in a lodge vote had decided against holding a gala. Mr. Cook told the meeting that he was going abroad the following week in order to obtain 'more foreign gold'. He announced a new slogan, 'For work we will go, on the status quo'. This was in effect not new at all, because the status quo included the wages, hours and national agreements in existence before the stoppage. Mr. Cook urged that the fight must be continued: 'any man who works eight hours is a traitor.' He again pledged his determination never to agree to an increase in working hours, and a resolution in favour of the continuance of the dispute was unanimously acclaimed.[2]

The two most significant happenings of July in the North East were not concerned with local Labour or Trades Union activities, however. On July 13th the first cargo of foreign coal to be imported into

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1 Northern Echo, July 12th, 1926.

2 Ibid., July 19th, 1926. The coal dispute was an important issue in the Wallsend by-election held at this time. An enthusiastic crowd heard Mr. Cook speak in favour of the Labour candidate, Miss Margaret Bondfield, with whom, it was thought, he did not agree. The result, declared on July 22nd, showed an increase in the Labour majority from 1,602 to 9,027 in a three cornered contest. Northern Echo, July 23rd, 1926.

Sunderland since the beginning of the dispute arrived from Antwerp.[1] This was the first of a series of unloadings which were to contribute to the undermining of the miners' cause, and stimulate both Government and owners to ever more determined resistance. Secondly, the Secretary for Mines was able to remove the necessity of a permit for quantities of domestic coal up to one hundredweight per fortnight, at the end of July. The increasing difficulty of the situation was further underlined by an announcement by Messrs. Bolckow Vaughan and Co., extensive coal owners in Durham, that five of their pits would not reopen at the end of the dispute. 'In all probability, all coal getting (at the five pits) will be ceased permanently.' Some hundreds of workers were expected to be affected. The prospects of those men thus made redundant gaining employment at other collieries belonging to the Company were considered to be remote.[2] It is difficult to assess the effect of such a statement on the men in the area engaged in the dispute who, win or lose, would have no jobs. The stoppage was thirteen weeks old, with no prospect of a speedy settlement. Relief payments were increasingly meagre. The pressures upon the miner and his family were slowly increasing, and would continue to do so, especially when summer mildness gave way to autumnal frosts. As the Bank Holiday approached, the first signs of a breakaway were appearing in the Midlands. Outcropping was becoming a problem.[3] The situation was

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1 Northern Echo, July 14th, 1926.

2 Ibid., July 21st, 1926.

3 In some areas of the coalfield, it was possible to get coal from the surface. These points at which outcrops of coal were visible attracted the attention of some miners; and the feeling that such coal, when taken, might be sold and thereby help to undermine the miners' cause, aroused bitter feelings and, in some cases, violence. See below pp. 421 and 434.

unlikely to improve. Yet the men were still strong and united. Reasoning on these lines persuaded a number of the moderate miners' leaders of the area that the time to reopen negotiations had arrived. In his monthly circular to the members of the N.M.A. the General Secretary, Mr. W. Straker, warned that starvation was getting among the miners: the alternative to negotiation might be defeat.[1]

At the special conference of the M.F.G.B. on August 16th and 17th this issue was keenly debated. Were the three principles adhered to at the beginning of the stoppage to be discarded? Would a settlement include either longer hours, lower wages or a return to district agreements? After two days of argument and discussion, the conference decided to empower the Executive Committee to reopen negotiations with the coal owners. Yorkshire, Lancashire, South Wales and the Forest of Dean made up the large minority against this decision. Prominent Northumbrian leaders, including Mr. E. Edwards, Mr. P. Lee and Mr. W. Hogg spoke in favour of it. Mr. Hogg epitomised their argument. 'The question is, are we going to return as a disciplined army, or are we going to be driven into district arrangements, district agreements, and the disintegration of this magnificent machine which we have spent so much time in building up?'[2]

On August 19th the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. met the Central Committee of the Mining Association, but nothing was achieved. The miners were prepared to consider reductions in wages but the owners

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1 N.M.A. Monthly Circular, August 12th, 1926.

2 M.F.G.B., August 16th, 1926.

required alterations in hours of work also, any changes to be carried out in the districts.[1] Seven days later, the four officials of the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. met representatives of H.M. Government at 10 Downing Street. Once more the outcome was deadlock. The Coal Mines Act was not reorganisation in the way the miners understood it. The Government would give no further financial aid to the industry. The miners remained determined to resist longer hours and district settlements. They were, however, offering to negotiate on wages. By the end of the month, the House of Commons had risen, the Emergency Regulations had been renewed, and spokesmen for both the Government and the owners had declared that they had no power to negotiate nationally.[2]

August in the North East was a month in which the men continued to stand firm. The safety men at Shotton Colliery were withdrawn when local lodge officials alleged that the Colliery management had violated the agreement with regard to coal drawing. Officials took over the safety workers' duties. Later in the month, the safety men were also withdrawn from the Hetton group of collieries in Durham. This inconvenienced local residents whose gas and water supplies depended upon the local collieries.[3] Reports of men returning to work increased in number, though the numbers involved were very small. The Northern Echo, on August 24th, expressed the opinion that while

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[1] Ibid., August 17th, 1926.

[2] 199, H.C. Deb., 5s., 156-157.

[3] Northern Echo, August 2nd, 27th, 1926.

a few non-federated collieries in the area were back at work, less than a thousand men were engaged. The great majority of the miners in the two counties showed no sign of resuming.[1] At the special conference of the M.F.G.B. held on September 2nd, the Northumberland General Secretary, Mr. W. Straker, reported that about 1,870 men were at work in Northumberland, of which 450 were outcroppers. Mr. W.P. Richardson, the General Secretary of the D.M.A., said about 250 miners had resumed in Durham, but that 'so far as the general situation is concerned, our people want an honourable settlement, but are still desirous of the fight continuing for the time being ...' Both Associations immediately disenfranchised their members who returned to work.[2] Mr. Richardson's assessment of the position is borne out to some extent by the enthusiastic reception accorded to A.J. Cook during further visits which he made to Durham in the first ten days of August. Although reaffirming his support for the original slogan, he pointed out that the miners' leaders could not ignore the sufferings of the women and children, and it was their duty to explore every avenue which might lead to an honourable and peaceful settlement. Mr. Cook said that the M.F.G.B. were prepared to review the whole wage position, but they believed that reductions would be unnecessary after reorganisation. The climax of this visit was a large meeting at West Rainton in Durham, where 40,000 people waited in hot sunshine for over two hours. The bands and banners of over thirty lodges were present.

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[1] Ibid., August 24th, 1926.

[2] M.F.G.B., September 2nd, 1926.

Banners inscribed 'We will put our trust in Cook' were prominent. The keynote of his address on this occasion was 'no surrender'. He challenged anyone to point out where the M.F.G.B. had deviated from their initial position. At the close of the meeting Mr. Cook asked if they were prepared to continue the fight until victory was secured, and a forest of hands went up amid great cheering.[1] These meetings were revivalist in a very real sense, most men present being uplifted, their courage for the fight restored, and their hopes of victory revived. A.J. Cook symbolised the discontent of the miners; they felt that he spoke for them. That explains the tremendous support which they gave to him. He expressed the dissatisfaction of the coalfields, he did not cause it.[2]

At the special conference of the M.F.G.B. held on September 2nd the Executive Committee had refused a request by the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, to open negotiations with local owners, on the grounds that such a move was directly contrary to Federation policy. However, with over 7,000 men at work in Nottinghamshire, together with the feeling that the M.F.G.B. position could get no stronger, conference decided to empower the Executive Committee to continue their efforts to negotiate a settlement nationally. The following day, the Secretary wrote to Mr. Churchill,[3] asking him to arrange a meeting with

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1 Northern Echo, August, 2nd, 3rd, 10th, 1926.

2 The most interesting recent research on A.J. Cook is an unpublished Manchester University M.A. Thesis: Quine, W.G., A.J. Cook - Miners' Leader in the General Strike (1964).

3 The Prime Minister was on holiday abroad.

representatives of the Mining Association. 'We are prepared to enter into negotiations for a new national agreement, with a view to a reduction in labour costs to meet the immediate necessities of the industry.' Unfortunately the owners were able to point out to the Government that the latter had urged the owners to offer relatively high terms in certain districts, in the hope of producing a district by district breakaway.[1] A national agreement was incompatible with this policy. Meanwhile the T.U.C., meeting at Bournemouth, again refused a levy on all British Trades Unionists. Although another instalment was due from the Soviet Trades Unions, the M.F.G.B. position was not a happy one. The coal owners were obviously convinced that they had but to remain obdurate to gain all their demands, and on September 14th, the Secretary of the Mining Association wrote to Mr. Churchill informing him that the District Associations refused to give the Mining Association power to negotiate a settlement.[2] Hence any meeting with the mineworkers' representatives would be pointless. This attitude only served to stiffen, at least temporarily, the spirit

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1 M.F.G.B., September 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 1926.

2 The resolution of the Durham Coal Owners' Association read: 'While the Durham Coal Owners' Association is not prepared to agree that the Central Committee of the Mining Association of Great Britain shall be reconstructed as a national negotiating body, it is prepared to agree to a tripartite conference between the representatives of the mineowners, the unions, and the Government, on the express condition that all questions as to wages, (including minimum percentage) hours, and conditions of work in each district shall be discussed and settled by the employers and workmen in that district.' The Northumberland Coal Owners' Association was similarly determined on district settlements. Northern Echo, September 14th, 1926.

of the M.F.G.B., who in a statement requested the miners in every area 'to resist the efforts of the coal owners to secure their defeat.'[1] After further Cabinet discussions, the Prime Minister, returned from his annual continental holiday, forwarded another set of proposals to the M.F.G.B. on September 17th, in which he noted that a 'satisfactory settlement should combine district arrangements with national supervision.' A National Appeal Tribunal was to be set up to ensure proper application of the agreement.[2] On September 21st the miners rejected these proposals and the same evening were summoned to Downing Street, where they told the Prime Minister that they would recommend an immediate resumption of work, temporarily at wages prevailing under the 1921 agreement, and that they were prepared to submit the terms of a national wages agreement to an independent tribunal which should also consider putting into effect the recommendations of the Samuel Commission. Three days later, the Prime Minister replied, that although he recognised an advance had been made, H.M. Government did not feel that the M.F.G.B.'s proposals afforded 'the means of reaching an early or a lasting settlement of the present dispute.'[3]

Throughout September, Northumberland and Durham remained relatively immune from the drift back to work, which was gradually spreading outwards from its centre in the Midlands. By the last day of the month, only 3,935 miners were reported to be at work in the whole of

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1 M.F.G.B., September 14th, 1926.

2 Ibid., September 20th, 1926.

3 Ibid., September 21st, 24th, 1926.

Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and the North Riding of Yorkshire. A number of men were outcropping in some districts, and at Stony Gill near Sunderland, a meeting was held to protest against outcropping activities. Two members of the Durham Miners' Executive, Mr. J. Gilliland and Mr. J. Swan, spoke at the meeting, and Mr. Gilliland described the outcroppers as 'traitors of the worst class'. At Craghead, outcroppers were encouraged by gifts of timber from the local colliery company to 'shore up the workings'. Such gifts, whether intentional or not, tended to outrage local opinion. Outcropping was to become a more serious problem, and to lead to ugly clashes.[1] It was becoming more difficult to persuade men bent on returning to work to remain loyal to the Union. A small pit at Acomb in Northumberland went back to work after two members of the Executive Committee of the N.M.A., one of whom was Mr. Ebby Edwards, had visited the pit and obtained a pledge of loyalty from the men.[2]

Men returning to work could not fail to arouse the hostility of the majority who remained out. Intimidation and violence, together with their corollorary prosecution under the Emergency Regulations, became more frequent in proportion as the number of men going back to work increased. Although no figures are available for the whole length of the dispute, there is a noticeable increase in charges involving violence against persons during the last three months of the dispute. The number of clashes between miners and police similarly

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1 Northern Echo, September 17th, 30th, 1926.

2 N.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, September 8th, 1926.

increased. No amount of secrecy could conceal the fact that the pit-wheel was turning. An early example of such a disturbance occurred at the Fanny Pit at Gateshead, on September 6th, where twenty-nine men had restarted work. By the time a second shift had arrived at 2 p.m., a crowd of some 2,000 people had gathered. The presence of Mr. Gilliland and Mr. Swan, agents of the D.M.A., failed to prevent the stoning of a tramcar in which half a dozen workmen, escorted by police, were leaving the pithead. Windows in the vehicle were smashed, and the men were attacked by a group of women in the crowd, one of whom broke a leg in the skirmish. The men were only able to leave after several hours had passed and a number of arrests made. The situation was exacerbated by the rumour that the men working were not locals but had travelled from other parts of the North East.[1] With the channels of relief drying up, the numbers of men returning would continue to grow.

Between July and the end of September, the D.M.A. were able to make four relief payments to members, totalling 17/- for full, and 8/6 for half members.[2] The N.M.A. could make only two similar payments during this period, totalling 5/- with a further 6d. for each child for full members, and 3/- for half members. The Executive Committee of the N.M.A. rejected a proposal to mortgage the Association property in order to raise more funds for the relief of members. It was decided that the amount realised would be so small as to nullify the

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1 Northern Echo, September 7th, 1926.

2 D.M.A. Executive Committee Minutes, July 12th, August 9th, September 17th, 30th, 1926.

value of such a scheme. The Committee did agree however to sell two of the Association's houses.[1] Several lodges in both Associations did mortgage their Miners' Halls during the dispute. Meanwhile, the Executive Committee of the D.M.A., after hearing a report of the negotiations in London between the Government and the M.F.G.B., decided to request the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. to approach the General Council of the T.U.C. requesting them to convene a special Trades Union Congress to deal with the situation.[2]

The meeting between the Executive Committee of the Miners Federation of Great Britain and the General Council of the T.U.C. took place on October 27th. The miners failed to persuade the General Council to impose a levy upon their affiliated membership. This was a serious blow, as the financial position of the miners' unions was critical. The bulk of the M.F.G.B. Relief Fund had been subscribed by the Russian Trades Unions, and Mr. W.P. Richardson, the Durham General Secretary and M.F.G.B. Treasurer, noted with some bitterness the smallness of the contribution of the British Labour movement; 'less than a penny per head per week.'[3] With some Boards of Guardians adhering more strictly to the law, shopkeepers limiting credit facilities, and public charity slowed to a trickle, the pressure upon the men to return was clearly increasing. The fact that this would be a continuing process, especially with the onset of the cooler weather,

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1 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, August 9th, September 8th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, September 27th, 1926.

3 M.F.G.B., October 22nd, 1926.

was not lost upon the miners' leaders. The prospect of victory was now extremely remote. The important issue concerned what kind of defeat it was going to be.

The Special Conference of the M.F.G.B. which met in London on September 29th and 30th 1926, received reports from the various district associations giving details of the numbers of men who had returned to work. The total was 81,178. After hearing an account of the actions of the Executive Committee with regard to the Government proposals of September 17th, the conference referred both the report and the proposals to the districts. During the meeting, Mr. G. Spencer, M.P., a delegate from the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, recommended the acceptance of the Government proposals. 'Now, if we are going to fight on, does anyone think for one moment that we are going to succeed in achieving our original object? Is there any man in this conference who thinks that? I think we had better face realities, and what are we going to gain by prolonging this struggle for another fortnight or three weeks?' Few were prepared to say that they agreed with him at this stage. The Durham officials, though all moderate men, were as yet, firm, as Mr. W.P. Richardson pointed out, '... that so far as Durham is concerned, on the question of hours, we shall fight a long, long time yet.'[1] In fact, Derby and Leicester were the only counties to have voted in favour of the Government proposals when the adjourned conference reassembled on October 7th. The lodge vote

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[1] Ibid., September 29th, 1926.

in Durham was decisive, 15 in favour and 1,067 against the Government proposals.[1] The Northumberland leaders however were uncertain as to what they ought to recommend their members to do. The Special Council meeting of October 2nd voted by 30-25 in favour of a compromise as an alternative to continuing the uneven struggle. Eventually, a resolution, authorising the Executive of the M.F.G.B. to make the best terms possible, was passed by 42-15, and a vote of confidence in the national leadership carried unanimously. However, the lodges rejected both resolutions, the former by 325-91, the latter by 317-99.[2] Mr. W. Straker, the N.M.A. General Secretary, was not happy about the result of the lodge vote, although recognising its firmness. 'Even if we have to concede eventually, terms to which we cannot agree at the present time, I hope that we will agree as a united body, and not drift away piecemeal. That would be a calamity, not only for the mineworkers, but for the coal owners, as there would be neither peace nor satisfaction in a settlement of that kind.'[3] The fear that the movement that had been built up might be splintered by the dispute was a frequent theme of moderate speeches in the last weeks.

The October 7th Conference had before it a letter from the Prime Minister requesting a decision on his proposals of September 17th, which would be withdrawn if rejected. The districts had in fact decisively rejected them, and the conference passed a militant resolution, sponsored by the South Wales delegation, calling for a return to the

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, October 5th, 1926.

2 N.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, October 2nd, 11th, 1926.

3 Northern Echo, October 7th, 1926.

'status quo conditions.' This was in reality still the policy of the initial slogan, 'not a penny off, not a second on.' It was to be buttressed, however, by a series of steps aimed at improving the miners' chances of success. All safety men were to be withdrawn. An embargo on all foreign coal was demanded, as was the cessation of all outcrop working. The T.U.C. should summon a special conference to again discuss the levy question. Together with a nation wide propaganda campaign, all these were to be instituted under the auspices of the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. The voting was 589-199, with Durham and Northumberland both voting in favour.[1] The resolution was then referred to the districts.

A special council meeting of the N.M.A. rejected the South Wales resolution by 40-24. An amendment, asking the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. whether negotiations should be commenced with a view to obtaining district agreements 'in view of the impossibility ... to get a national agreement' was only defeated by three votes. It was finally resolved that the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. be requested to lay down certain principles, and ask the districts to make their settlements within these principles.[2] The lodge vote in Northumberland was also against the South Wales resolution, the figures being 224-185.[3] In Durham, lodges voted in favour of the proposals of South Wales, 691-387.[4] All the districts comprising the Federation

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1 M.F.G.B., October 7th, 1926.

2 N.M.A. Special Council Meeting Minutes, October 11th, 1926.

3 Northern Echo, October 15th, 1926.

4 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, October 22nd, 1926.

favoured the South Wales proposals by 460,150 to 284,336.[1] The South Wales resolution was really little more than a defiant gesture. The M.F.G.B. had no power to enforce several of the steps suggested in the resolution. More significant developments had taken place elsewhere.

On October 8th, Mr. G. A. Spencer, M.P., had been expelled from the special conference because he had conducted negotiations with the employers concerning a return to work at a Nottinghamshire colliery. His expulsion from the Union and suspension as a Miners' M.P. were left to the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association. On October 15th, the Executive Committee decided, as part of its propaganda campaign, that future meetings should be held in the coalfields, beginning at Nottingham on October 19th. Morale was to be stiffened where it was most required.[2] Meanwhile the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association had suspended Spencer and twenty-five delegates for resuming work. Some temporary success was obtained by this more active policy, in the shape of a reduction in the number of men working over the country as a whole by 20,000. Although men might be swayed for a short time, the pressure, both economic and social, forcing them to return to work were increasing daily, and the Miners' leaders could not be everywhere at once. Even in Northumberland and Durham, where the number of men returning to work was relatively small, the effect upon the morale of the remainder was feared by prominent members of the two Associations.

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[1] M.F.G.B., October 13th, 1926

[2] M.F.G.B., October 8th, 15th, 1926.

Inevitable defeat, together with the collapse of their own unions and the Federation to which some had devoted their lives, seemed a very real danger. Mr. J. Robson, the President of the D.M.A., undoubtedly spoke for many such men, when at Consett on October 23rd he said: 'If there is any feeling that we are done, and if there is to be any going back, for God's sake let us get into the Miners' Hall at Durham and let us all go back together. Whatever may happen in the struggle, I am going to save the D.M.A. first and foremost, whatever else may go. The D.M.A. and its kindred associations are the only heritage we have to hand down.'[1]

On October 26th, representatives of the General Council of the T.U.C. met the Prime Minister, who told them that the Government was prepared to intervene if the miners would accept district settlements with a national tribunal, in substance the offer of September 17th. When the General Council sub-committee met the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. on October 29th to report this they explained that they had signed a statement as representing their present view as follows:

> 'The miners are, in our sincere belief, prepared to negotiate with the Government for an immediate ending of the dispute by district settlements, providing that satisfactory conditions can be arranged with the Government for the subsequent review and co-ordination of such district settlements in accordance with certain agreed national principles. Failing agreement with the Government all offers are withdrawn.'

The Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. said another Conference would be necessary to effect a change in Federation policy, and one was

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[1] Northern Echo, October 25th, 1926.

summoned for November 4th.[1]

The position in the North East during October had not deteriorated as much as in other areas, notably the Midlands, but nevertheless October did show a strengthening of the forces aligned against the miners. At the start of the month, a total of 4,058 men were at work in the North East.[2] On October 4th, the D.M.A. issued a circular, 'Men At Work', stating that owing to the publication in the press of exaggerated figures purporting to show the number of men who had returned to work, the Executive felt they must appeal to all lodges to immediately supply Durham with the facts up to date, in order that a complete picture could be given at the national conference. The N.M.A. did not make a similar request until October 23rd, likewise mentioning the 'unreliable' nature of press figures. Although it has proved impossible to secure conclusive evidence with regard to the accuracy or otherwise of reports and figures given in the press concerning the numbers of men working, there was usually a discrepancy between press figures and figures issued by the Miners' unions. The D.M.A. at the beginning of October reported that about 250 men were back, the N.M.A. about 2,000, together just above half the figure quoted by the Northern Echo on October 2nd. It is not inconceivable that both sides to the dispute, together with their supporters, were more concerned with morale, or the damaging of it, than strict and impartial accuracy.[3]

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1 M.F.G.B., October 29th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, October 2nd, 1926.

3 M.F.G.B., September 29th, November 19th, 1926; D.M.A. Circular, October 4th, 1926; N.M.A. Circular October 23rd, 1926. Of course it is interesting that the headquarters of the two unions didn't consider the need for accurate statistics earlier.

In an attempt to discourage their members from returning to work before a settlement was reached, the D.M.A. issued a general instruction on October 18th, expelling any branch which had, or would in future, resume work. Individual loyal members of such branches would retain membership. This was an important step, in that it meant that men who ignored it would forfeit all friendly benefit normally derived from membership of the Association.[1] It is difficult to assess the effect of this. It may be significant that several members of the miners' non-political union said that they joined because they had been removed from the D.M.A. for returning to work before the end of the stoppage. In any event from October 18th until the end of the dispute, the numbers of men returning to work in Durham did go up, albeit slowly.

They went up in Northumberland also. By October 20th, there were some men working at twenty one collieries in the County. Two days later, the most serious breakaway of the dispute to that date occurred at Ashington, where 985 men and boys were reported to have restarted. The N.M.A. claimed the number was nearer 500, but that the matter was serious was recognised by the Council, who on October 23rd requested the M.F.G.B. to provide two national speakers per week for Northumberland during the remainder of the dispute, in an attempt to stabilise morale.[2] Another severe setback occurred on October 26th, when the Walbottle Colliery, owned by the Co-operative Wholesale Society, re-opened after the lodge had

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1 D.M.A. Circular, October 18th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, October 21st, 23rd, 1926. N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, October 23rd, 1926.

carried a resolution to return to work.[1]

Two Durham breakaways caused concern to D.M.A. leaders. At the Adventure Pit of the Rainton Coal Company, 57 out of 260 men had restarted and were participating in a co-partnership scheme. The Rainton Colliery Employees Thrift Fund was inaugurated to preserve for the men at work the benefits ordinarily obtained from their trades unions. This is the only example so far discovered of such an arrangement between employer and employed during the dispute. The fate of the scheme remains unknown.[2] At St. Hilda the situation was more serious from the union's point of view. The colliery company wrote to individuals with regard to re-opening the colliery, and the first 50 men resumed on October 21st. A large meeting in the Pavilion Picture Hall, addressed by Mr. J. Robson and Mr. J. Gilliland of the D.M.A., unanimously agreed to stand by the Federation. Some men had signed on, wrongly believing that the lodge had arrived at an arrangement with the Harton Coal Company, the owners of the pit. When 60 men resumed at the Ouston 'E' Pit at Birtley serious disturbances resulting in clashes with the police occurred. The men were escorted to and from work by police, travelling in closed furniture vans. This did not prevent stones from being thrown and a baton charge was made by the police, resulting in four arrests.[3]

The Northern Echo described the scene:

> "Over 100 men, 40 more than on the previous day, were stated to be at work. When they came up the shaft after

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1 Northern Echo, October 27th, 1926.

2 Ibid., October 16th, 1926.

3 Ibid., October 22nd, 26th, 27th, 1926.

finishing their shift, 80 police, including a detachment from Hull and Darlington, were assembled in the colliery yard. Accompanied by constables, workers from Gateshead were conveyed to their homes in closed furniture vans, past a jeering throng. In view of the trouble in the district the previous day when three officers were hurt by stones, the Ouston and Pelton men were not escorted homewards until the great majority of the police had again been marshalled at the colliery. The workers made the journey to Ouston, which is about a mile and a half from the pit, in a covered lorry between an escort of two buses loaded with police. As the procession entered Ouston it was met by a crowd of over 2,000 strong, and amid jeers and booing, a volley of stoneswas hurled at the vehicles, women being amongst the aggressors. The police immediately drew their truncheons and charged, scattering the crowd along the road. So far as can be ascertained, none of the uniformed men was hurt, but there were several casualties among the strikers. Some distance from the scene a Northern Echo reporter and two colleagues were surrounded by a crowd and threatened with violence unless they moved away. They eventually retired discreetly. Remarks and references to the 'boss' press followed them as they walked away. At Pelton, stones were thrown through the window of the house of P.C. O'Hara.'

Several similar incidents took place in the last three weeks of October and the first fortnight of November.

The first five months of the dispute had not been marked by widespread disturbances. The moderate leaders of the miners' unions frequently included in their speeches condemnation of all illegal activity, and even the more excitable pronouncements of Mr. A.J. Cook were hardly incitements to violence. Frequent references to the orderliness of those engaged in the dispute were made by public men of all political shades. Why then were police reinforcements needed? The General Secretary of the N.M.A., Mr. W. Straker, at a mass meeting at Amble on

October 14th said that he regarded the drafting of policemen 'as an insult to the character of the Northumbrian miner.'[1] Nevertheless, the feeling against men returning to work before a settlement was concluded, was very strong indeed. This feeling manifested itself in the increase in the number of violent incidents involving miners and police. Clashes occurred at Silksworth, Greenside and Ryton, in Durham, and Ashington and North Walbottle in Northumberland, in addition to those already discussed above. All were the result of a small number of men returning to work. It is significant that police reinforcements were sent into Durham during the General Strike, and again during the period October 25th to November 7th. In this period, police from Newcastle City, Hull City and the North Riding of Yorkshire were used in Durham.[2]

The presence of police from another district tended further to antagonise local people. 'Foreign' police were always considered to be tougher and more provocative, the Hull contingent being especially notorious. Yet the local police who attempted to protect 'blacklegs' were looked upon with equal disfavour. The idea of protecting coal owners' property out of public funds did appear to many miners to provide additional

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[1] Ibid., October 15th, 1926.

[2] The details were as follows: A total of 243 extra police were drafted into County Durham between October 25th and November 7th. 105 came from the North Riding, 88 from Hull, and 50 from Newcastle.

The cost -	North Riding	£ 3,334
	Hull	2,930
	Newcastle	154
	Lodgings, Subsistence, Refreshments	2,184
	Total	£8,602

The Government would pay 50 per cent, the remainder to be paid by the Durham County Council. The total extra cost entailed during the whole of the seven month Emergency was £32,556. Northern Echo, February 3rd, 1927.

evidence as to the bias of the Government. It was the trickle of men back to work which stimulated the disorder that occurred. The use of police from other areas probably made the situation worse, though without some kind of protection, men who returned would undoubtedly have been severely handled in some districts. It was the Government's policy to protect such men, as the Home Secretary, Mr. W. Joynson Hicks, pointed out in a speech at Lewes on October 22nd 1926.

> '... On behalf of the Government I say that we will place at the disposal of every man who desires to work, the full forces of the Government, and will protect and are protecting in Wales and Lancashire, the Midlands and the North, those men who want to work ... I have intimated to every Chief Constable in every mining area where there has been, where there may be, or where there can be difficulties, that they can have what reinforcements they deem necessary.'[1]

With such a difficult situation, the surprise is that there were not many more violent scenes than in fact there were.

Another practice which was resented by the majority of those engaged in the dispute was that of digging coal where a seam reached the surface and selling it for commercial use. Outcropping, as it was called, twice led to angry scenes in Northumberland during October. At Bedlington, dynamite was used to destroy the outcrop workings after peaceful persuasion had failed to deter the men involved. A fight ensued before the invading force of miners could detonate the workings.[2] At Newsham, picks and shovels were used to fill in the holes in which burrowing for coal had been going on.

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1 Northern Echo, October 23rd, 1926.

2 Ibid., October 11th, 1926. For a definition of outcropping see Note 3, p.414 above.

More serious was the attitude taken up by two North Eastern Colliery Companies in an attempt to break the strike. The Broomhill Coal Company posted notices intimating that men who interfered with those resuming work would not be re-employed when a settlement was finally reached. Moreover men whom the Company alleged had been guilty of such interference were served with eviction orders from their colliery houses. At a meeting held to consider the situation, the N.M.A. General Secretary advised the men to ignore any notices from the Company, and promised victimisation pay for those who were affected. He appealed to the men to remain firm in face of this new threat. The break up of the Union must be avoided at all costs. 'Shall we have a union, or shall we not have a union? ... if there is no union, I ask you to consider what will happen. The Union has given us every one of our privileges we have today.'[1] Feelings such as these enabled the miners' unions to survive, almost intact, the defeat which they were about to have inflicted upon them. Yet such appeals to solidarity might be transcended if a man's livelihood appeared to be at stake. The owners of the South Tyne Colliery at Haltwhistle announced that if sufficient workmen had not signed on by October 18th in order to justify a resumption of work, the colliery would be dismantled and 700 men would lose their jobs. According to the Northern Echo 650 men had been engaged by October 18th.[2]

By the end of October, the Northern Echo reported 15,727 men to be

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[1] Ibid., October 13th, 14th, 15th, 1926.

[2] Ibid., October 19th, 1926.

working in the mines of Northumberland, Durham and Cumberland, an increase of 11,000 in four weeks. Most of the increase occurred in Northumberland. The D.M.A. and the N.M.A. had between them about 160,000 members: the numbers returning were still relatively small. Added to those returning in other parts of the M.F.G.B. however, the breakaway looked more formidable. The total number of miners working was now 269,557.[1] The leaders of the two Northern unions were determined to have no indiscriminate rushing back to work: but the time for negotiations had come.

Before the crucial special M.F.G.B. conference, summoned for November 4th, met, three events occurred which were bound to influence the proceedings. The suspended members of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, led by Mr. G. A Spencer, M.P., decided to meet local owners in order to negotiate a district settlement. On November 2nd representatives of the Transport Workers' Unions refused the request of the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. to place an embargo upon the movement of imported coal. The following day, the conference of Trades Union Executives convened to discuss a levy to aid the miners, passed a resolution recommending 'a special daily contribution of not less than one penny from every one of its members for every day such member is at work, until the dispute is settled.'[2] This was to be voluntary, but was nonetheless welcome for that.

The M.F.G.B. Special Conference of November 4th discussed the status quo resolution of the previous month. It was opposed by a majority of

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1 Ibid., October 30th, 1926.

2 Arnot, R.P., Vol. II, op. cit., pp.499-500.

speakers including Mr. W. Straker, the N.M.A. General Secretary. It was finally agreed that the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. should continue discussions with the General Council's mediation committee. A meeting between these two bodies was held the next day, when the General Council Committee told the miners that the Government was prepared to discuss with the leaders of the Federation principles to be agreed upon prior to the Miners' Executive ordering district negotiations. The Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. told the General Council Committee that they might tell the Government that subject to such principles being satisfactory, they were prepared to order immediate district negotiations.[1] Eventually, after talks involving all interested parties to the dispute, the Secretary for Mines listed 'general principles which the Government understand the owners in each district are prepared to follow in negotiating district settlements.' The Miners' Executive objected to the wording; there was no mention of hours and no reference to any national machinery for safeguarding national principles and co-ordinating district agreements.[2] The position was again one of deadlock. The extension of the working day appeared to be the chief obstacle and the Government told the miners that they would not discuss any question of national principles and safeguards until the Executive of the M.F.G.B. were 'in a position to direct unfettered district negotiations.' After discussion it was decided to summon a special conference of the Federation for November 10th to hear a report upon the situation.

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1 M.F.G.B., November 5th, 1926.

2 Ibid., November 8th, 1926.

The situation with which that conference had to deal is admirably epitomised by Mr. R.P. Arnot in his history of the M.F.G.B.

> 'It was over six months since the beginning of the lock-out. For 194 days, the miners, with themselves their wives and their children, subsisting on a dwindling pittance, had withstood the might of the British Government and of all the other forces arrayed against them. The reports from the counties showed the majority still standing firm, but such a breakaway in a number of districts that the total working was now 237,547. This was well over a quarter of the organised miners.'[1]

The conference decided to authorise the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B., 'to continue the negotiations with the Government unfettered.' The Durham General Secretary, Mr. W.P. Richardson, spoke strongly against an increase in working hours.[2]

In the early hours of November 12th a lengthy memorandum of settlement was sent by the Government to the Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. The proposals included an immediate resumption of work, the hours not to be excluded from district negotiations. In some districts, the owners offered to pay temporarily a district percentage not less than that prevailing on April 30th. The exceptions to this were Cumberland, North Wales, Northumberland and Durham. There was no guarantee against victimisation; 'workmen shall be reinstated as opportunity offers, without prejudice to the men at present at work.' Any district agreement embodying certain general principles was to be regarded as a standard agreement

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1 Arnot, R.P., Vol. II, op. cit., p. 504. Note the discrepancy between the M.F.G.B. figures and those quoted by the Northern Echo above.

2 M.F.G.B., November 11th, 1926.

containing provision for a district board with an independent chairman. The ratio of division of net proceeds was to vary between 87:13 and 85:15. The agreements were to last not less than three years. Where an increase in hours was decided upon, there would be formal right of appeal to a national arbitral authority which the Government would set up for a period of six months only.[1]

The delegates at the special conference decided to ask the Government for a further explanation of these proposals. These were arranged in question and answer form, and as Mr. Arnot has pointed out 'show vividly the fears the miners entertained.'[2] After examining the answers, the conference decided that the proposals should be remitted to the districts to decide whether they should be accepted as a basis for settlement. Conference itself recommended acceptance by 432 to 352, the Durham and Northumberland delegates voting with the majority. The Northumberland representatives also voted in favour of a ballot vote on the proposals, but this was not carried.

On November 16th, Mr. E. Edwards, the Financial Secretary of the N.M.A. and a delegate at the special conference, reported to the Council of the N.M.A. upon the state of the negotiations. The Council decided by six votes,

> 'that after the most careful examination of the Government's proposals, and though these are far from adequate, or what we should have, yet, as they do preserve to us some safeguards, especially with regard to the right to know, by accountants, what is the economic position of the

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1 Ibid., November 12th, 1926.

2 Arnot, R.P., Vol. II, loc. cit.

> industry, we, in keeping with the national conference, strongly recommend the acceptance of the proposals to our branches.'

The lodges however, rejected the proposals by 317-87.[1] In Durham, the proposals were also turned down by 742 to 359 on a lodge vote after the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. had recommended acceptance.[2]

This recommendation in Durham aroused lodge opposition to such an extent that the Executive issued a circular justifying their action in voting in favour of the proposals. It is an interesting document, and illuminates the way in which the D.M.A. leaders were thinking, whilst illustrating their determination to preserve the Association. The circular agreed with those who argued that the Government proposals were unjust, but the Durham delegates voted in favour of them because the 'magnificent army was breaking up. Even in our own County, where the men are as solid as ever, small cracks are appearing.' This was only to be expected after thirty weeks 'heroic struggle'. Nevertheless, district agreements were now inevitable and the interests of Durham men demanded that negotiations should begin while 'our army remained unbroken'. Durham had more to lose than any other county.

> 'Judging from things as they are, it would appear that our hopes of negotiating with our men solid is gone; our crime is not that we acted too soon, but too late. The forces of reaction have forced their will upon the nation. The power of the press, the Government, the coalowners and federated capitalism has proved too strong for us. In spite of their declarations, they are enforcing slave conditions upon the miners, and the same spirit prevails among the Durham coal owners, who are enforcing their will in a ruthless way upon

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1 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 16th, 22nd, 25th, 1926.

2 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 17th, 1926.

our people. Let them do their worst. This is not the end, and it must for us, be a beginning. Your task, our task, is to rebuild so that we may recover not only what we have lost, but make sure that the power that has been used to crush the miners is wrested from those who possess it and put into hands who will organise and run industry for the benefit of the human race, and not for the selfish idea of profits. We must cling together in these dark days of need.[1]

When the special conference resumed on November 19th, it was clear that a settlement could not be long delayed.

The conference assembled to hear the result of the district vote on the Government's proposals. A majority was recorded against the proposals, the voting being 460,806 against the proposals and 313,200 in favour. After a long discussion, the conference voted in favour of a resolution sponsored by the South Wales delegates instructing the districts to immediately open negotiations with the owners in their respective areas, with a view to arriving at an agreement. The Executive Committee of the M.F.G.B. were asked to consider what general principles should guide the districts in any negotiations. No district should enter into a final settlement until a further conference had been held to receive reports of all the negotiations. The following guiding principles were approved, and recommended by conference:

1. The method of ascertaining the district percentage on basis rates to be as provided by the National Wages Agreement of 1924.

2. The ratio of division of net proceeds to be 87:13.

3. A minimum percentage to be provided of not less than 20 per cent upon the standard wages prevailing on April 30th, 1926.

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[1] Ibid., November 25th, 1926.

4. The payment of April, 1926, subsistence wages to low paid day wage men.

5. All agreements to be terminable by one month's notice from either side.

6. Districts to endeavour to effect the complete reinstatement of all men and boys employed at April 30th, 1926, on the lines provided by clause 13 of the National Wages Agreement of 1921.[1]

During the conference of November 19th Mr Peter Lee, a delegate from Durham, complained that at meetings held in the County advocating acceptance of the Government terms, as recommended by the previous conference, a circular, issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain, had been given to men entering the various meetings. The circular included a statement from Mr. A.J. Cook. 'My advice is to the men to reject the Government's terms. The T.U.C. have acted as mediators for the coalowners urging us to accept first, lower wages, then longer hours, and now district settlements.' This statement had allegedly been made by Mr. Cook in the Sunday Worker of November 14th, 1926. Mr. Lee said that there followed a long article by Mr. A. Horner, and at the end of the circular, in big type appeared the sentence: 'Stand by Cook and reject the terms.' Mr. Lee objected to 'things which are sent into the County after a conference has told you to recommend the terms. You can quite understand how they have influenced the vote.' Both Mr. Cook and Mr. Horner denied the statements attributed to them.[2] In fact, the vote against the Government proposals had no influence upon the November 19th conference. The miners were defeated,

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[1] M.F.G.B., November 19th, 20th, 1926.

[2] Ibid.

and the South Wales resolution advocating district settlements was the logical outcome of the situation.

The M.F.G.B. Special Conference reassembled on November 26th to hear the terms which had been offered to the County Association by the owners. The defeat was total. In four districts, Bristol, Kent, Leicester, and Nottingham, the owners refused to meet the representatives of the men. The conference passed a resolution expressing indignation at the terms and asking the Cabinet to investigate the activities of the owners in the four districts named. The conference recognised its impotence by leaving each district to make an agreement on its own responsibility.[1] By November 29th, work had restarted in all important districts save South Wales, Yorkshire, and Durham. Durham was the last coalfield to resume work. In fact a ballot taken among the men showed a simple majority in favour of rejecting the owners' terms. The voting was 49,217 to 40,583. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the vote was that out of a membership of 142,403, only 89,800 had voted. The Executive Committee of the D.M.A. used the failure to secure the necessary two thirds majority, as the lever by which the men were instructed to return to work, which they did on November 30th.[2] Only small numbers voted in the Northumberland ballot, although the terms were accepted. Some large lodges, including Ashington, Linton and Woodhorn, still showed majorities against the terms.[3] In both northern counties, lower wages, longer hours, and local settlements had to be accepted, a defeat magnified by the problems and

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1 Ibid., November 26th, 1926.

2 Northern Echo, December 1st, 1926.

3 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, November 25th, 1926.

difficulties which attended the resumption of work.

The acceptance of the owners' terms did not ensure the immediate return to work of all those miners who had been engaged in the dispute. The Durham Coal Owners Association sent a questionnaire to its members at the end of January 1927, asking each company to give the date when work was re-commenced at its collieries; the number of persons employed prior to the stoppage; the number presently employed; the additional number, if any, likely to be required; and the number of persons who would still remain unemployed when 'normalcy' was attained. Several companies failed to answer the last two questions, a factor which serves to further underline the grim nature of the figures. The mines belonging to members of the Durham Coal Owners' Association employed 151,505 men on April 30th 1926. On January 31st 1927, this figure had fallen to 126,595. A further 7,000 were likely to be required in the future, which would leave another 17,000 unemployed. A glance at the employment figures in Northumberland and Durham collieries illustrates the serious effect of the depression in the coal trade.

	Total Employed, Durham	Total Employed, Northumberland
1923	175,173	-
1924	174,147	-
1925	154,762	-
December 1926	117,088	50,370
May 1927	134,537	54,430
November 1927	123,507	45,974 [1]

Those men who could not find jobs after the stoppage merely added to the

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[1] Annual Returns and Report of the Durham Coal Owners' Association, Jan. 1927 - Durham County Archives.

already high numbers of miners unemployed in the two north-eastern counties. In the House of Commons on February 10th, 1927, the Minister of Mines said that 7,463 miners were wholly unemployed in Northumberland, and 38,123 in Durham. The Durham figure was the highest for all the colliery areas save Wales.[1] Some collieries in the county were especially badly hit. According to the Coal Companies' return of January 1927, twenty-one collieries[2] would have 300 or more men less, on their books, than at the end of April 1926. At least four had closed altogether. The group of pits owned by the Consett Iron Company employed 10,345 men in 1925. Then a dispute lasting virtually eighteen months occurred. The numbers employed by the Company in 1927 and 1928 were 6,726 and 6,860 respectively. The Chopwell No. 3 pit in this group was never reopened after 1926. Other areas were similarly affected.

Some of the more adventurous, or desperate, amongst the unemployed, from Ryhope and Silksworth, dissatisfied with the Durham terms, moved to South Yorkshire. Rumour had spread in the district that the terms were better there, and that vacancies existed. About 500 men set out, but only 50 secured jobs, at Hickleton Main and Hatfield. Yorkshire was not free from unemployment either.[3] The men returned to Durham, where the Executive Committee issued a circular warning their members that they

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1 202, H.C. Deb., 5s., 271-272.

2 The collieries named were: Bearpark, Emma, Mainsforth, Eldon, Chilton, Murton, Harton, St. Hilda, Boldon, Morrison North, Shotton, Pelton and Newfield, Hebburn, Springwell and Vale, Heworth, Houghton, Dorothea, Lambton 'D', Silksworth, Hamsteels, and Chopwell.

3 Northern Echo, December 3rd, 4th, 1926.

ought to discover the position in other coalfields by writing to the Secretary of the County Association concerned, before moving elsewhere.[1]

In these circumstances, victimisation of workmen by the more unscrupulous owners was inevitable, and there was little the trade unions could do about it save protest. In clause eighteen of the agreement between the Durham Coal Owners' Association and the D.M.A., the owners had stated that they would not victimise any man on account of his activities during the stoppage. However, they also made clear that they could only take on men as required, and that they would not discharge any men who had been employed during the stoppage.[2] In fact, men were reduced in grade, those who signed on before the settlement were preferred to men who remained out until the stoppage ended, and lodge officials were refused employment. This latter problem was the subject of angry exchanges between the representatives of the workmen and those of the coal owners at a meeting in June 1927, when cases concerning the alleged victimisation of lodge officials at Sacriston, Hylton, Chopwell, and Esh were under discussion. The owners of the Consett Iron Company were especially singled out for criticism. Finally the representatives of the Coal Owners' Association agreed to draw various managements' attention to the promise given in the agreement, and to ask them to observe it. Further than that, they could not go, and individual owners continued

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1 D.M.A. Circular, December 3rd, 1926.

2 Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, December 4th, 1926.

to do as they pleased in the matter.[1]

The payment of contributions, suspended during the stoppage, was resumed in both counties before the end of 1926, and relief payments to financial members who remained unemployed continued. The problem of those members who had returned to work before the end of the stoppage exercised the minds of officials of both unions. These men had been disfranchised on resuming work and intense local feeling had arisen against them. Lodge opinion however generally favoured the recommendation of the Executives to reinstate such men as members at the earliest opportunity. It was idle to complain about the formation of other unions if membership of the two existing organisations was restricted.[2] Other unions meant in effect, the non-political union, which arose out of the dispute, and threatened, for a short time, to disrupt the M.F.G.B. by gaining control of its County Associations. Nottinghamshire, South Wales, and Northumberland and Durham, rapidly became the most important sectors of the non-political union.

The first mention of the existence of a miners' non-political trades union in the north-east, was contained in a report in the Northern Echo for December 18th, 1926. The report stated that a new society had been formed by a group of miners at Esh Winning, in County Durham, who had resumed work before the end of the dispute. The new

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1 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, July 8th, 1927.

2 D.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, January 5th, 26th, February 8th, 1927. N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, December 17th, 1927.

organisation was called the Esh Winning Miners' Industrial (non-political) Society. A similar society had been set up a mile away at Waterhouses. Both groups had appointed unpaid officials and levied a contribution of 3d. per week from their members. The Secretary of the Esh Winning branch, in an interview, said that about fifty men who had resumed work before the termination of the stoppage had been informed by the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. that they would be deprived of all trades union benefits. This had motivated them in establishing the new Society. Its main aims were to avoid strikes, and promote a spirit of harmony between workers and employers. The Secretary expressed the hope that the coal owners would quickly recognise the new union.[1]

During the month of January 1927, several branches of the non-political union were formed in the two northern counties, claiming membership figures of from 40 at the Eden Colliery to 500 at St. Hilda.[2] After two local delegate meetings, representatives of twenty branches, meeting in Newcastle, decided to officially form a non-political union, appointing as organiser a Mr. E. Oswald Snowden.[3] Mr. Charles A. Forster was appointed Secretary, and Mr. James Pringle, Treasurer. An executive committee was also set up. A total membership of 6,000 was claimed. At a further meeting at South Shields on

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1 Northern Echo, December 18th, 1926.

2 Ibid., January 17th, 1927.

3 Mr. Snowden was not a miner, and appears to have lost his position due to that fact, together with some rather controversial views which he expressed concerning education. See below, p. 451.

February 12th, a set of rules was approved for submission to the Registrar of Friendly Societies. It was decided to name the new organisation, the Northumberland and Durham miners' non-political Trades Union. (hereinafter N. & D. N.P.T.U.) Thirty-two branches, with 10,500 members were claimed. By April 1927, these figures had risen to forty-six branches, and 14,000 members.[1] These figures may

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[1] Northern Echo, January 24th, February 14th, April 18th, 1927. The membership claims of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Industrial Non-Political Trade Union seem somewhat exaggerated when placed beside the figures which they gave to the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies. The following table is interesting:

N. & D. N.P.T.U.

Year	Membership	Funds	Unemployment Pay
1928	3,911	£36	£43
1929	4,081	Deficit £649	£104
1930	4,068	£47	-

In the same years, the respective figures for the Nottinghamshire and District Miners' Industrial Union and the South Wales Miners' Industrial Union were as follows:

Nottingham

1928	12,853	£3,904
1929	15,086	£2,480
1930	10,774	£3,471

South Wales

1928	6,435	£78
1929	7,635	£87
1930	7,116	£123

After 1930, the entry of the N. & D. N.P.T.U. in the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies Annual Report does not appear.

mark the peak of the new union's achievement. The newspapers, from which much of the evidence concerning the N. & D. N.P.T.U. is drawn, contain few references to it after the autumn of 1927 and no further membership figures are published. According to the first number of the 'Non-Political Miners' Journal', the official organ of the Miners' Industrial Non-Political Trades Union, published by the National Union of Seamen, in June 1927, there were forty-seven branches of the Union in Northumberland and Durham. This compared with 50 in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and 79 in South Wales.

The strength of the N. & D. N.P.T.U. in Durham seems to have been primarily confined to the north-west of the County, or to groups of pits under a common ownership, notably the Consett Iron Company Ltd. and the Stella Iron Company Ltd. There is no evidence to suggest similar patterns for Northumberland, where there were considerably fewer branches than in Durham, eight out of forty-seven in June 1927.[1] Mr. J. Edmondson, who became President of the N. & D. N.P.T.U. in February 1927, had been a prominent member of the D.M.A. and lodge Secretary and checkweighman at St. Hilda Colliery since 1916.[2] As far as can be ascertained, no other notable officials of the two County Associations gravitated into the non-political union, an important weakness. The inclusion of men like Spencer and Ben Smith stiffened the non-political union in Nottinghamshire in a manner never achieved

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1 The Miners' Non-Political Journal, vol. I, No. 1, June, 1927.

2 Northern Echo, April 22nd, 1927.

in the north-east.

The connection between the N. & D. N.P.T.U. and the 'Spencer' Union in the Midlands appears to have been a very loose one, and included membership of the Federation of Industrial Mining Unions, established at a meeting in London in July 1927. Mr.G. Spencer presided, and a financial membership of between sixty and seventy thousand was claimed.[1]

The attitude of the Durham and Northumberland Miners' Associations towards the new union was one of uncompromising antagonism, as one would expect. At first, the officers of the D.M.A. were inclined to dismiss the claims of the non-political organisation as 'exaggerated'. The new union was alleged to be a 'gaffers'' union, a stigma which the non-political union could never escape, not even after it had dismissed the President and Organiser, Mr. E.O. Snowden at the beginning of February 1927. Mr. Snowden had suggested that miners' children should be educated to appreciate the economic difficulties of the coal owners. He was not himself a miner.[2] The charge of being a 'gaffers'' union was given added credence by some of the public pronouncements of members and officials of the new union. A delegate to one of the N. & D. N.P.T.U. conferences in January 1927 was reported to have said that the owners would be bound to recognise the new union because its policy 'would suit the workmen in general and the owners in particular.[3]

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1 Ibid., July 8th, 1927.

2 Letter from Mr. E.O. Snowden to Mr. M. Dillon, February 7th, 1927.

3 Northern Echo, January 17th, 1927.

The D.M.A. and the N.M.A. used both reasoned arguments and emotional appeals to loyalty in attempts to persuade former members who had joined the non-political union to return. In a circular of January 25th, 1927, the Executive Committee of the D.M.A. warned that eliminating politics from Trade Unionism would be playing the employers' game. 'Does anyone doubt that if the workers, and chiefly the miners, had not used their money and their votes to secure control of some of these (public) bodies, the owners would have starved us in much less than thirty-one weeks?' A resolution was passed enabling anyone to rejoin the D.M.A., even if previously in arrears with their contributions. The scheme was to remain open for a limited period.[1] Officials of both County Associations denounced the N. & D. N.P.T.U.'s activities and attempted to organise boycotts of its meetings.[2]

The coal owners' attitude to the new union was much less consistent. As early as January 1927, the Secretary to the Durham Coal Owners' Association, answering a request for recognition from the N. & D. N.P.T.U., had replied that it was impossible for the coalowners to enter into a discussion directly with representatives of the workmen at an individual colliery. They could only deal on behalf of the County generally with organisations representing the majority of the workmen. As to separate collieries, the management would receive those duly authorised to represent the workmen.[3] This was a blow from which the N. & D. N.P.T.U. never

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1 D.M.A. Circular, January 25th, 1927.

2 N.M.A. Council Meeting Minutes, January 13th, 1928.

3 Northern Echo, January 17th, 1927.

really recovered. The majority of owners in the two counties were prepared to 'wait and see' if the new organisation could make any substantial inroads into the older unions. Undoubtedly some coal owners did support the non-political union, and at several collieries would only negotiate with its representatives for a time, but the N. & D. N.P.T.U. could never persuade the Durham or Northumberland Coal Owners' Associations to treat with it directly. A far greater membership than 14,000 would have been needed for that to have happened.

The attitude of Lord Londonderry, a leading colliery owner in the north east, is indicative of the cautious way in which the majority of owners dealt with the N. & D. N.P.T.U. It also sheds interesting light upon that movement's activities in the two counties. On June 27th, 1927 Mr. J. Havelock Wilson, the President of the National Union of Seamen, issued a circular, in which he appealed for £30,000 in order to form nine district miners' unions on a non-political basis. This circular was sent, together with a Mr. F.H. Pruen, formerly Secretary of Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to 'mine-owners and employers generally' in order to solicit subscriptions for Mr Wilson's scheme. Eventually, it was hoped to establish a Miners' and Seamen's Confederation, whose object would be 'to endeavour to secure five years Industrial peace on non-political lines.' A provisional committee was appointed, consisting of G. Spencer and D. Gascoyne of Nottinghamshire, Forster and Clarke of the N. & D. N.P.T.U., Batterbee

and Williams of South Wales, with Mr. J. Wilson as the Secretary.[1] In this connection, Mr. Pruen wrote to Mr. Malcolm Dillon, the agent of Lord Londonderry, on July 16th, 1927, requesting help for the new venture. Mr Dillon was in favour of such help being given, and after consultation with Lord Londonderry, a sum of £50 was agreed upon. His Lordship wished the donation to remain anonymous 'as otherwise the fact of his subscription would be open to misconception and would certainly be intentionally misinterpreted.'[2] Even this tepid support for the non-political organisation aroused misgivings. On October 24th, 1927, Lord Londonderry wrote to Dillon; 'but quite privately, whereas I like the idea of the industrial union, I am not altogether sure that it is quite wise, when we are doing our best to remain friends with the Unions with which we deal, to emphasize this organisation which is really wholly opposed to them.'[3]

The N. & D. N.P.T.U. held annual galas during July 1928, 1929, 1930 and 1931, otherwise receiving little attention from the local daily press in those years. This is probably a sign of declining influence, as in the year of its birth, 1927, it was prominently publicised in the newspapers. However, the exact stages of the decline, and its rate,

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1 Papers and Letters of Mr. M. Dillon. The National Sailors and Firemen's Union was the largest union to vote against the T.U.C.'s policy of a General Strike in support of the miners in May 1926. The General Secretary, Havelock Wilson, had begun his trade union life as a militant in a union which had a long and bitter struggle for recognition by the owners. By 1926 however, Havelock Wilson was the high priest of worker-employer co-operation, which he believed was being frustrated by political extremists.

2 Letter from Mr. M. Dillon to Pruen, August 2nd, 1927.

3 Letter from Lord Londonderry to Mr. M. Dillon, October 24th, 1927.

are difficult to establish. Membership was dwindling in 1929 and 1930, and the staff in the Newcastle office was reduced in the latter year.[1]

This decline may be attributed to several factors. Firstly, there were traditions of adherence to the established unions in the two northern counties which went back almost a century. The two County Associations had combined membership figures of 180,000, and a bond with their members forged over many previous disputes. This was not so in the relatively young colliery areas of Nottinghamshire, where the non-political movement met with more success. Secondly, and probably partly as a result of the strong ties which the unions engendered, none of the miners' leaders in the North East, however uncertain they may have been with regard to the policy of the M.F.G.B., joined the non-political movement. No important minority in the North East's two unions opposed openly the policy of the Federation. The majority of the officials of both the D.M.A. and the N.M.A. were in the 'Lib-Lab' tradition, and deeply suspicious of the left wing activities of Mr. A.J. Cook and other prominent miners' leaders, but they were not forced out of the movement, thus forming a nucleus for a rival faction, as Spencer was in Nottinghamshire. Thirdly, the N. & D. N.P.T.U. received discouragement from an unexpected source. Two important decisions by Judge Greenwell at the Newcastle County Court in 1927 and 1928, both subsequently confirmed by higher courts, seriously

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[1] Northern Echo, July 30th, 1928, July 29th, 1929, July 28th, 1930, July 27th, 1931. Letter to the author from a member of the N. & D. N.P.T.U., April 10th, 1964.

restricted the negotiating powers of the non-political union. The first stabilised the position of checkweighmen elected by members of the D.M.A. if the majority of the workmen at a colliery belonged to the County Association. In such cases checkweighmen had the right to receive remuneration from those workmen who were members of the N. & D. N.P.T.U.[1] The second and perhaps more important judgment occurred in 1928, when Judge Greenwell found in favour of two Chopwell coal hewers who had sued the Consett Iron Company over a wages agreement which the Company had made with representatives of the non-political union. These representatives had not represented the majority of the workmen employed. The local D.M.A. branch had 600 members whilst only about 200 workmen belonged to the N. & D. N.P.T.U.[2]

All these factors tended to mitigate against the owners emerging openly, as a body, in support of the non-political union. There were individual exceptions such as the Consett Iron Company, but these were not enough seriously to undermine the established miners' unions; indeed they tended to strengthen the arguments of those who charged the N. & D. N.P.T.U. with being a 'gaffers'' union, and further cemented the men's determination to oppose it.

The miners had been defeated. To the large majority of those engaged in the stoppage, it had been fought to defend their living standards. It could not have been successful unless the economy

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1 Northern Echo, October 20th, 1927.

2 Ibid., October 31st, 1928. It was a difficult problem for the N. & D. N.P.T.U. to recruit sufficient members to form a majority of the workmen at each individual colliery.

could have been starved of coal and this, the miners alone, had not the power to do.

The dispute's failure led to a disillusionment with trades union activity and to a fall in trades union membership, a trend that was accelerated by the persistence of the depression. The membership of the D.M.A. fell from 155,733 at the end of 1925 to 128,795 at the end of 1928.[1]

Nevertheless the leadership and organisation of both the D.M.A. and the N.M.A. emerged from the 1926 stoppage virtually unscathed. Mr. Peter Lee for example, was frequently criticised at meetings during the stoppage, when his moderate policy appeared to the men to be essentially defeatist; yet he was never in any danger of losing his Executive position. The leaders kept their places despite bitter criticism from both the right and the left. The right, consisting of, in the main, the non-political union, accused the miners' leaders of persisting with the dispute for political ends. They alleged that the leaders of the D.M.A. had lost sight of the real objectives of trades unionism. The union leaders replied to these charges by levelling some of their own, accusing the non-political union of being a 'gaffers'' organisation, and of being willing to subordinate the true interests of the mineworkers to the chimera of industrial peace at any price. The challenge of the non-political union however met with no permanent success.

The criticism from the left came in the main from the Communist Party or the Communist inspired Minority Movement. It is difficult to

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[1] As the number of unemployed miners in the County during this period never fell below 30,000, this reduction in membership is remarkably slight.

estimate its effect. Did it move the essentially moderate leadership of the North Eastern miners' unions on to more militant ground? It certainly did not remove them. The personnel and organisation of both the Durham and Northumberland Miners' Associations survived the great crisis in their affairs of 1926 intact. This was a considerable achievement and says much for the loyalty of the men to their union. It is this tremendous feeling of a shared catastrophe which must have generated a feeling of brotherhood and provided the will to keep the mines closed for so long. Such an experience must have sharpened the group consciousness in the mining districts. But the continued depression had the final word. During the period 1921-1931, 148,496 persons migrated from County Durham, over 129,000 of them in the five years after 1926.[1]

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1 Ministry of Labour. Reports of Investigations into the Industrial Conditions in certain Depressed Areas. (1934) Cmd. 4728, pp. 74-75. 148,000 was approximately 10 per cent of the population.

APPENDIX I

A statement was issued in the House of Commons on November 22nd, 1926 listing the number of persons in receipt of Domiciliary Poor Law Relief (excluding casuals and persons in receipt of medical relief only) on the Saturday nearest to the 16th day of each of the undermentioned months in 78 Poor Law Unions in England and Wales. These unions accounted for about 85% of the Mining population.

The figures for Northumberland and Durham were:

DURHAM

UNION	1921 Dispute April	May	June	1926 Dispute May	June	July	August	Sept.	October	Nov.
Auckland	4629	7298	15517	25994	28329	29343	29537	30534	30139	29017
Chester	856	858	847	28854	35937	40418	40951	36921	35934	35794
Durham	897	938	942	6881	27088	30580	29008	30008	29839	30306
Easington	1002	1311	2478	20632	39562	43786	46681	47809	48864	49577
Gateshead	1672	16150	19054	38111	41291	40834	41343	42147	42481	42494
Houghton	918	4917	2343	14549	26781	27707	28980	27840	28049	28410
Lanchester	1665	15603	24801	10239	41961	42222	42541	42342	43110	41937
Sedgefield	493	1588	1643	2130	15105	16532	17173	16949	16788	16658
South Shields	3919	9330	22096	16840	35661	35788	36411	36965	37605	37217
Sunderland	2007	2184	2290	14967	23678	24239	25287	25727	26067	26467
Teesdale	251	272	425	252	950	1013	1015	1028	1004	974

NORTHUMBERLAND

	1921 Dispute April	May	June	1926 Dispute May	June	July	August	Sept.	October	Nov.
Alnwick	155	525	675	216	1561	1581	1632	1608	1556	1604
Castle Ward	418	897	1301	3384	7384	7687	7865	7445	7693	7332
Hexham	344	941	1226	1687	3944	4084	4050	4113	4026	3912
Morpeth	705	4051	6627	1831	23368	25543	29855	31254	32310	31006
Newcastle-on-Tyne	4461	7032	10785	28021	24938	23878	23835	24061	24116	24008
Tynemouth	1315	3002	3819	12545	42078	43930	46552	47259	47777	40454

APPENDIX II

Terms of settlement between the Northumberland Miners' Association and the Northumberland Coal Owners' Association. Signed November 25th 1926.

1. There shall be established a District Board of such number of members as may be determined by the N.C.O.A. and the representatives of the Northumberland colliery workers, with an independent chairman. The voting at the meetings of the Board shall be by sides.

2. The wages shall be determined in relation to the ascertainment of the proceeds of the industry.

3. The percentage addition to basis rates shall not be less than 80, subject to efficient recoupment of deficiences.

4. There shall be a subsistence allowance to make up the wage of low paid adult day-wage workers to 6/9½ per shift. Alteration of this figure may be raised at the District Board, and decided if necessary, by the Independent chairman.

5. The method of ascertainment to be determined by the parties, but the value of the allowances in the shape of free houses, or rent allowances, and free coals, shall be treated as wages paid and not as other costs.

6. The wages payable, from the resumption of work at the mines until the 28th February 1927, shall be at the rate of 80% above basis rates. The wages payable in the month of March shall be determined by the ascertainment of proceeds for the month of January 1927; for the month of April by the proceeds for the month of February, and so on.

The above arrangements are conditional on the acceptance of the following terms.

7. If all the other proposals of the owners, as now amended, are accepted the ownerswill agree to 7½ hours' shift plus one hour winding time, for coal hewers, and an 8 hours' shift plus one hour winding time, for all other classes of underground workers, with unrestricted coal drawing hours. The County basis wage of hewers, for Joint Committee purposes, at the Steam Coal Collieries shall be raised to 5/6; that of hewers at the Soft Coal Collieries to be in the same proportion.

8. The hours of persons employed on the surface shall be 49 per week, exclusive of meal times.

9. The percentage additions to piece-workers (whether merged in the prices or not) which were granted for the reduction of hours, no longer apply.

10. The ratios for the division of surplus proceeds to be 87 to wages and 13 to the owners.

11. Pits to be cavilled separately if desired by the management.

12. Hewers, fillers, and conveyor men to be cavilled separately where desired by the management.

13. The full hours of the shift to be worked by the first shift on the last day of the quarter and by both shifts on the first day of the quarter.

14. Arrangements to be made for working a single shift of normal length on both Pay and Baff Saturdays.

15. The management have the power to arrange the different shifts to suit the circumstances at each individual colliery, but this clause not to apply to the establishment of a three shift system.

16. The Sunday repairing shift to be on the Sunday night instead of Sunday morning. The customary short shift on Sunday night to continue.

17. The Agreement to continue for 2 years, subject to one month's notice by either party after the expiration of that period, provided that after the Agreement has been in operation for one year, the District Board shall have the power on the application of either party to revise the minimum percentage addition to basis rates.

NOTE 1. By local agreement the end of coal drawing may be at 5 o'clock, but this is left finally to the Manager.

NOTE 2. On the Committee agreeing to recommend the acceptance of these terms, the owners agree that men signing on after to-day, November 25th 1926, shall have no privilege as to employment over men who are loyal.

Terms of settlement between the Durham Miners' Association and the Durham Coal Owners' Association. Signed November 30th, 1926.

1. A District Board to be established, of such number of members as may be decided by the Durham Coal Owners' Association, together with the representatives of the Durham County Mining Federation Board, with an independent chairman. Voting at meetings to be by sides.

2. Wages to be determined in relation to the ascertainment of proceeds of the industry.

3. The percentage addition to basis rates shall not be less than 89, subject to the efficient recoupment of deficiences.

4. A subsistence allowance to be paid to make up the wages of the low-paid adult day wage workers, to 6/8½ per shift. There would be no provision for extra payment to other persons receiving more than that sum.

5. The method of ascertainment to be determined by the parties, but the value of the allowances in the shape of free houses or rent allowances, and free coals, shall be treated as wages paid and not as other sorts. The sums required to make up the subsistence allowance shall also be treated as wages paid.

6. The wages payable from the resumption of work at the mines until February 28th, 1927, shall be at the rate of 89% above basic rates. Wages payable in the month of March 1927, shall be determined by the ascertainment of the proceeds for the month of January, and so on.

7. This agreement to continue in operation for a year, and thereafter subject to one month's notice by either party.

The foregoing arrangements are conditional upon the acceptance of the following terms.

8. All hewers to work 7½ hours per shift plus one winding time. All classes of underground workers to work 8 hours per shift plus one winding time. The variation of the county standard of peace-workers to be fixed by the parties. The hours of deputies shall be 7½ per shift plus one winding time, it being understood that if required, they stay longer and be paid an equivalent wage for overtime.

9. All surface workers to work 49 hours per week exclusive of meal times

10. The 12½% addition granted to piece workers (whether merged in the basic rate or not) on the reduction of hours no longer to apply.

11. The ratios for the division of surplus proceeds to be 87 to wages and 13 to the owners.

12. If the owners require, hewers and fillers shall do the necessary stone and shift work on and about the face in all systems of working, and if the managers require, they shall work together and pool their wages.

13. Where machine mining is in operation, the persons employed, whether machinemen, drillers, fitters, pullers up of conveyors, or cauchmen, shall when required, work in conjunction with each other, and by order, any of them shall do any necessary work when required, although it may be outside their ordinary work.

14. All seams to be cavilled separately if required by the management

15. Sitting at the Kist to be abolished. The men will go straight into the working place when authorised by the deputy, and remain there for the full hours of the shift.

16. The present arrangements concerning the minimum wage of piece workers to be terminated, and the matter further considered.

17. Machinery to be set up, without further delay, for the adjustment of piece rates and the determination of other matters of dispute continually arising.

18. There is no disposition on the part of the owners to victimise any men on account of his actions during the stoppage. With regard to the employment of men who were employed during the stoppage, the owners cannot consent to discharge any such men. Subject to these conditions, the owners are prepared to engage men who took part in the stoppage, as they are required.

APPENDIX III

The Report of the Seaham Harbour Canteen Committee December 22nd, 1926

The inaugural meeting was held on May 11th, 1926. It was decided to establish feeding centres for the schoolchildren at

DAWDON WARD	(a) The Club (b) Miners' Hall
CENTRAL WARD	(a) Londonderry Institute (b) U.M. Church Hall (c) Wesley School room
ROPERY WARD	The Schools
NORTH WARD	Co-op Hall

The centres opened on 17th May. At all except the North Ward, the food was bought by the canteen committees of each ward, and prepared by the cooks.

North Ward. The Co-operative Society fed R.C. children at inclusive rate of 3d for breakfast and 4d for dinner.

Centres for 3 to 5 year olds set up at :

Dawdon Parish Hall
Stewart Street Primitive Methodists' Hall
Salvation Army Hall

Feeding at these centres commenced on May 24th, 1926.

The Welfare centre gave dried milk to nursing and expectant mothers.

The Feeding continued for 31 weeks, concluding on the 17th December, 1926.

Meals provided were :

	Breakfasts	Dinners	Costs
Schoolchildren	293,905	325,479	£7,477 10s 4d
3 to 5 year olds	34,829	50,679	810 19s 4d
TOTALS	328,734	376,158	£8,288 9s 8d

Average cost per meal, 2.82d.

Maximum expenditure allowed by County Education Authority, 3d per breakfast and 4d per dinner. The total expenses were £2,090 below the sum which would have been spent if the above figures had been adhered to.

The Welfare centres served 1,264 mothers.

Boot Fund Voluntary subscriptions. Necessitous schoolchildren given 398 pairs of boots costing £159 4s. The assistance of tradesmen, the Co-operative Union, and the Womens' branch of the British Legion, brought the total number of pairs to 567.

Thanks given to:

1. Voluntary helpers at the Feeding centres and Welfare Centres.
2. Trustees of the various halls for their free use.
3. The Londonderry Collieries Ltd. for the free supply of fuel at the feeding centres.
4. Organisers of Whist Drives, Dances and Concerts in aid of the Boot Fund.
5. Teaching staffs of all schools.

[Dillon Papers, Durham County Archives]

APPENDIX IV

MINERS' AND SEAMENS' CONFEDERATION (NON-POLITICAL)

The following subscriptions or donations have already been promised or received.

	£	s.	d.
Anonymous	250	0	0
Anonymous	250	0	0
Anonymous	200	0	0
Anonymous	50	0	0
Anonymous	50	0	0
Anonymous	50	0	0
Swan, Hunter and Wigham Richardson Ltd. (Already contributed £250 to Industrial Peace Union Fund)	50	0	0
Mr. F. Stirling Newall, J.P.	50	0	0
The Pelton Steamship Co. Ltd	25	4	0
Mr. Stephen Aitchison, J.P.	25	0	0
Anonymous	25	0	0
Anonymous	25	0	0
The Sheaf Steamship Co. Ltd.	23	2	0
Messrs Ridley, Son & Tully	21	0	0
Carricks Caterers Ltd.	21	0	0
Anonymous	10	10	0
Mr. Harold Currie	10	10	0
Fisher, Renwick & Co. Ltd.	10	10	0
Messrs. Stephens, Sutton Ltd.	10	10	0
Hall Bros. Steamship Co. Ltd.	10	10	0
The Sharp Steamship Co. Ltd.	5	5	0
Messrs. Wilson & Carter	5	5	0
Messrs. Lowe & Moorhouse	5	5	0
Messrs R. Hood, Haggie & Son Ltd.	5	5	0
The Hon. Sir Charles Parsons, O.M., K.C.B.	5	0	0
Messrs. Wilkinson & Marshall	5	0	0
Anonymous	5	0	0
Anonymous	5	0	0
Anonymous	5	0	0
Anonymous	5	0	0
Messrs. Osbeck & Co. Ltd.	3	3	0
Messrs. J. Cameron, Swan & Co. Ltd.	3	3	0
Mr. Howard Pease	2	2	0
Anonymous	2	2	0
Messrs. Swan & Morgan	2	2	0
Messrs. The Wailes Dove Bitumastic Ltd.	2	2	0
Sir John Fitzgerald	1	1	0
Ald. Anthony Oates	1	1	0
Messrs. Nielson, Anderson & Co.	1	1	0
Mr. W.W. Gibson	1	0	0
Mr. C.O.P. Gibson	1	0	0
Anonymous	100	0	0
Anonymous	50	0	0
Messrs Joseph Thompson & Son Ltd.	50	0	0
Hon. Francis Bowes Lyon	5	0	0
Messrs J. Coxon & Co. Ltd.	5	0	0
Messrs Botterell, Roche & Temperley	5	0	0

Signed by F.H. Pruen, July 23rd 1927.

[Dillon Papers - Durham County Archives]

APPENDIX V

Durham Coal Owners' Association - Return of Stoppages caused by disputes with workmen 1926.

Colliery	Date of Stoppage	Returned	Number of Men & Boys Laid Idle	Working Days Lost
Murton	May 1, 1926	December 5	3,698	591,680
Cornsay	May 1, 1926	November 29*	161	23,836
East Pontop	May 1, 1926	November 29	189	31,374
South Pelaw	May 1, 1926	December 2	909	150,894
Washington 'F'	April 30, 1926	December 2	1,155	189,420
Washington Glebe	April 30, 1926	December 2	635	104,140
South Hetton	May 1, 1926	December 8	1,162	187,082
Wearmouth	May 1, 1926	December 6	2,381	376,198
Hylton	May 1, 1926	Jan. 24, 1927 Not restarted	1,831	316,763
Urpeth 'C'	May 1, 1926	November 22*	780	122,460
Bewicke Main 'D'	May 1, 1926	November 29	386	62,918
Ouston 'E'	May 1, 1926	October 25*	975	131,625
Ravensworth 'G'	May 1, 1926	December 23	105	18,900
Black House 'H'	May 1, 1926	November 22*	245	38,465
East Hetton	April 30, 1926	December 6	1,373	219,680
Trimdon Grange	April 30, 1926	December 6	665	96,800
Hamsterley	April 30, 1926	December 2	523	87,341
New Brancepeth	April 30, 1926	December 4	226	38,646
Wingate Grange	May 1, 1926	December 7	1,289	211,396
Easington	May 1, 1926	December 6	3,104	505,952
Deaf Hill	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,023	166,749
Tudhoe	May 1, 1926	November 19*	656	102,992
Black Prince	May 1, 1926	August 25	170	14,506⅔
Thornley	May 1, 1926	December 7	1,795	294,380
Wheatley Hill	May 1, 1926	December 8	1,827	301,455
Stella Emma	May 1, 1926	October 28*	943	131,077
Addison	May 1, 1926	November 18*	389	60,295
Stargate	May 1, 1926	November 15*	945	143,640
Greenside	May 1, 1926	November 9*	1,225	181,300
Clara Vale	May 1, 1926	November 15*	1,207	183,464
Bearpark No. 1 Busty	May 1, 1926	December 6	615	111,930
Brockwell	May 1, 1926	December 6	544	99,008
Harvey	May 1, 1926	December 6	154	28,028
Hollinside Drift	May 1, 1926	December 31 Not restarted	181	29,684
South Medomsley	May 1, 1926	November 22*	461	72,377
Littleburn	May 1, 1926	December 6	742	135,786
Louisa Old Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	816	137,088
Louisa New Pit	May 1, 1926	December 3	831	138,777

* Partial resumption before the end of the stoppage.

Colliery	Date of Stoppage	Returned	Number of Men & Boys Laid Idle	Working Days Lost
Hedley Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,078	181,104
Morrison North Pit	May 1, 1926	December 3	1,543	257,681
Morrison South Pit	May 1, 1926	December 3	592	98,864
William Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	718	120,624
Morrison Busty	May 1, 1926	December 2	87	15,747
Tanfield Lea	May 1, 1926	December 7	452	69,608
Browney	May 1, 1926	December 1	679	124,257
Tursdale	May 1, 1926	October 26*	885	134,520
Bowburn	May 1, 1926	October 22*	705	105,045
Hedley Hope	May 1, 1926	December 3	428	79,394
Mainsforth	May 1, 1926	December 6	2,183	403,855
Sherburn Hill	April 30, 1926	December 6	1,288	217,672
Sherburn House	April 30, 1926	December 3	985	165,480
Medomsley	July 4, 1925	April 12, 1926	966	
	May 1, 1926	November 1, 1926*	786	108,075
Derwent	July 4, 1925	April 12, 1926	1,525	
	May 1, 1926	November 1*	799	109,862½
Eden	May 1, 1926	November 1*	1,125	154,687½
Crookhall Victory	May 1, 1926	November 22*	925	141,525
Crookhall Humber Hill	May 1, 1926	November 1*	402	55,275
Westwood	June 29, 1925	April 14, 1926	798	
	May 1, 1926	November 1*	578	79,475
Langley Park	July 4, 1925	April 19, 1926	1,135	
	May 1, 1926	November 15*	864	128,088
Garesfield	May 1, 1926	November 22*	797	121,941
Chopwell	June 22, 1925	May 1, 1926	2,536	
	May 1, 1926	November 2*	2,536	351,236
Hebburn	May 1, 1926	November 22*	1,050	162,750
West Auckland	NOT WORKED THROUGHOUT PERIOD			
Shildon Lodge	May 1, 1926	December 2	603	102,510
Black Boy	NOT WORKED THROUGHOUT PERIOD			
Auckland Park	May 1, 1926	January 22, 1927		
		Not restarted	555	89,910
Leasingthorne	May 1, 1926	December 2	1,539	262,143
Westerton	NOT WORKED THROUGHOUT PERIOD			
Merrington	May 1, 1926	December 3	322	53,613
Dean & Chapter No. 1 Pit	May 1, 1926	December 1	1,087	185,152⅓
Dean & Chapter No. 2 Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	998	172,654
Dean & Chapter No. 3 Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	239	41,347
Byers Green	May 1, 1926	January 22, 1927		
		Not restarted	290	47,270
South Pontop	May 1, 1926	December 1	256	42,752

*Partial Resumption

Colliery	Date of Stoppage	Returned	Number of Men & Boys Laid Idle	Working Days Lost
Burnhope	May 1, 1926	December 9	101	17,473
Warren Drift	May 1, 1926	December 2	170	28,560
Annie Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	373	63,410
Charlaw	May 1, 1926	December 2	505	83,830
Sacriston	May 1, 1926	December 2	686	113,876
Shieldrow	May 1, 1926	December 2	285	47,310
Kimblesworth	May 1, 1926	December 2	975	161,850
Horden	May 1, 1926	December 6	4,099	692,731
Shotton	May 1, 1926	December 16	2,095	377,100
Blackhall	May 1, 1926	December 6	2,009	337,512
Dipton	May 1, 1926	November 26*	556	93,964
Burnopfield	May 1, 1926	November 15*	434	73,346
Byermoor	May 1, 1926	October 26*	376	64,296
Marley Hill	May 1, 1926	October 26*	914	156,294
Robert Pit	May 1, 1926	November 24*	557	104,159
East Stanley	May 1, 1926	December 6	313	47,889
Beamish Mary	May 1, 1926	December 6	748	114,444
Beamish Second	May 1, 1926	December 6	209	31,977
Twizell	May 1, 1926	December 6	383	64,344
Handon Hold Old	May 1, 1926	December 6	164	25,092
Handon Hold Busty	May 1, 1926	December 6	592	90,576
Twizell Burn Drift	May 1, 1926	December 6	55	9,240
Brancepeth 'A'	May 1, 1926	December 1	586	106,652
Brancepeth 'B'	May 1, 1926	December 2	535	97,905
Brancepeth 'C'	May 1, 1926	December 1	555	101,010
Brancepeth 'D'	May 1, 1926	December 1	613	111,566
Brandon 'A'	May 1, 1926	December 6	72	13,824
Brandon 'B'	May 1, 1926	December 15	86	15,910
Brandon Pithouse	May 1, 1926	November 29	96	17,280
Willington 'B'	May 1, 1926	December 1	252	45,360
Victoria Garesfield	April 30, 1926	December 8	581	98,770
Lilley Drift	May 1, 1926	December 6	547	91,075½
Blaydon Burn 'Mary'	May 1, 1926	December 3*	694	115,204
Blaydon Burn 'Bessie'	May 1, 1926	December 3	373	61,918
Axwell Park	May 1, 1926	November 22	504	79,128
Watergate	May 1, 1926	October 26*	473	64,328
Chester South Moor	May 1, 1926	December 6	342	57,456
Waldridge 'Shield Row'	May 1, 1926	January 17, 1927 Not restarted	175	29,400
Seaham	May 1, 1926	December 2	2,760	466,440
Dawdon	May 1, 1926	December 2	3,906	660,114
Usworth	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,909	315,621
Hetton	May 1, 1926	December 6	655	105,455
Elmore	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,344	216,384
Eppleton	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,890	304,290
Hazard	May 1, 1926	December 6	954	153,594

* Partial Resumption.

Colliery	Days of Stoppage	Returned	Number of Men & Boys Laid Idle	Working Days Lost
Houghton	May 1, 1926	December 2	2,062	342,292
Dorothea	May 1, 1926	December 9	1,471	253,012
Lambton 'D'	May 1, 1926	December 2	1,827	303,282
Herrington	May 1, 1926	December 8	1,140	194,940
North Biddick	May 1, 1926	December 7	1,171	199,070
Lumley Sixth	May 1, 1926	November 29	989	161,207
Harraton	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,266	213,954
Silksworth	May 1, 1926	December 10	2,884	498,?32
South Derwent	May 1, 1926	November 22*	236	37,052
West Shield Row	May 1, 1926	December 2	257	42,662
West Stanley	May 1, 1926	December 1	508	83,820
John and Ada Pit	May 1, 1926	December 13	1,373	241,648
Fanny Pit	May 1, 1926	December 1	816	136,272
Busty and Brockwell	May 1, 1926	December 2	473	86,086
Grange Drift	May 1, 1926	December 20	287	57,113
Springwell	May 1, 1926	November 26*	1,014	189,618
Vale Pit	May 1, 1926	December 6	384	71,808
Follonsby	May 1, 1926	December 7	975	164,775
Felling	May 1, 1926	December 6	856	142,952
Pelton	May 1, 1926	December 6	1,542	259,056
Dunston	NOT WORKED THROUGHOUT PERIOD			
Norwood	May 1, 1926	December 2	96	15,408
Swalwell Garesfield	May 1, 1926	December 1	149	23,542
Craghead Thomas	May 1, 1926	December 3	946	157,982
Craghead Oswald	May 1, 1926	December 6	979	164,472
Craghead Busty	May 1, 1926	December 3	849	141,783
Harton	May 1, 1926	December 3	2,848	430,048
St. Hilda	1925	April 30, 1926	2,402	
	May 1, 1926	October 26*	2,395	296,980
Boldon	1925	April 30, 1926	2,842	
	May 1, 1926	December 7	2,842	434,826
Whitburn	May 1, 1926	December 6	3,109	472,568
Ryhope	May 1, 1926	December 4	2,623	415,308
Roddymoor	May 1, 1926	December 1	1,016	185,928
Bowden Close	May 1, 1926	December 1	999	182,817
Wooley	May 1, 1926	December 1	560	102,480
Waterhouses	May 1, 1926	December 1*	407	74,481
Esh	May 1, 1926	December 1*	771	141,093
Ushaw Moor	May 1, 1926	December 1	862	157,746
St. Helens	May 1, 1926	February2,1927 Not restarted	209	34,276

*Partial Resumption

Colliery	Date of Stoppage	Returned	Number of Men & Boys Laid Idle	Working Days Lost
Marshall Green	May 1, 1926	November 3*	19	3,021
Eldon	April 30, 1926	December 2	1,952	359,168
Chilton	April 30, 1926	December 6	1,736	324,632
Randolph	May 1, 1926	December 2	880	159,280
Gordon House	May 1, 1926	December 2	506	91,586
North Bitchburn	May 1, 1926	October 18*	162	23,004
Thrislington	April 30, 1926	December 2	996	183,264
Newton Cap	NOT WORKED SINCE MARCH 31, 1926			
West Tees, Railey Fell	May 1, 1926	December 2	390	70,590
Fishburn	April 30, 1926	December 2	636	117,024

*Partial Resumption

Conclusions

Historians working in the field of twentieth century history have often, unlike their brethren in earlier periods, listed as one of their major problems the huge mass of material which they are called upon to examine. The problem has not been one of scarcity, but one of over-abundance, demanding skilful selection techniques as well as considerable stamina. Although this remains generally true, there are still several tantalising gaps in our knowledge of the General Strike, gaps which a regional study has served to bring out all the more clearly. No complete set of minutes of the daily activities of a major Strike Committee have been found. There is, no doubt, sufficient material on which to speculate fairly accurately about the work of such committees and the difficulties which they faced, but the fact remains that in a large industrial area, intensively unionised, no running record of the unions' most traumatic experience in the twentieth century exists. Similarly the dearth of Trades Council and Labour Party records is a considerable disappointment. And this shortage of key documents is not confined to the side of labour. We know really very little about the O.M.S., about how it was organised and financed and who were its volunteers. Did they include anyone from among the ranks of the unemployed? Was it a predominantly middle class organisation? And finally, of course, there are the Government preparations and emergency activities. It is possible that unlike the trades unions and the O.M.S., the Government have retained records of their emergency organisations. At present, the fifty year rule applies to these and the author has been informed that even after 1976 certain documents may well remain hidden from historians.

This is an especially serious loss for the North East because it is there that this enigmatic problem concerning trades union and Government co-operation to run certain essential services, remains to be solved. It is clear from all this that the least that can be said is that some interesting details remain to be filled in.

What of the evidence actually available? Historians are continually being reminded, and quite rightly, that newspapers are one of the most valuable sources for the writing of modern history. But care has to be exercised in their use, and nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than when employing them in local studies of labour history. The three North Eastern daily newspapers, and especially the Newcastle Journal and the Newcastle Chronicle, not only opposed the General Strike but also consistently denigrated labour policies and organisations both before and after the nine days. Moreover the stoppage deprived them of a large part of their staffs. This in itself inhibited the collection and dissemination of news. More crucially, no trade unionist on strike was likely to talk to a blackleg press, especially one which, as in Newcastle, was known to adopt energetic anti-labour attitudes. These facts, taken together, underline the need for caution when approaching the newspapers of the time.

A similar care has to be exercised when corresponding with or interviewing people who participated in, or remembered, the events of 1926. Some points made in both letters and interviews have proved to be verifiable, and this has given an air of authenticity to the recollections of particular correspondents. But there are many pitfalls. Some

writers undoubtedly confused in their minds the General Strike of May 3rd to May 9th, 1926, with the miners' stoppage which followed it. Others mixed up the lock outs of 1921 and 1926. And still others were unable to give any viable information at all, but offered opinions of the dispute which seemed more applicable to the 1960's and very remote from 1926. Nevertheless some people provided first hand accounts of an experience which had obviously left a lasting impression upon them, and without such interviews and letters, the difficulties encountered in isolating rank and file attitudes would be even more acute than they are. Visiting trades union officials and Labour Party members is a necessary step, but these are the activists, the minority who are continually concerning themselves with trades union and political affairs. What did the bulk of the strikers, who normally care little about these things, feel about the strike? They seem certainly to have supported it strongly enough, which is perhaps the only answer this historian is going to get.

Even if there were no breaks in the chain of historical evidence there would still be several unanswered questions. One of the elementary ones concerns the actual number of the strikers. It has not been possible to uncover any figures at all for the North East. Such figures would be especially useful in enabling us to estimate more precisely how solid the strike was when it was terminated. They would tell us how the 'second line' of strikers responded to the strike call on May 11th. For example just how many of the engineering workers at the great Tyneside firm of Vickers Armstrong actually went on strike? Perhaps some companies possess such figures; it may be a long time before historians see

them.

These qualifications having been underlined, there are certain more positive points which can be made. The regional study confirms generally, the national picture of the General Strike which historians like Mowat and Bullock have painted. The solidarity of the strike cannot be doubted. It is clear from both press and union sources that the vast majority of those workers in the North East called out on strike on May 3rd, came out and were still out nine days later. Secondly, it is also clear, that the major trades unions in the area had made no preparations for such a stoppage and that the whole of the strike organisation was improvised and had barely begun to approach efficiency when the strike was terminated. Loyalty to their trades unions, as well as a belief in the justice of the miners' cause, were the strength and weakness of these organisations. Inter-union co-operation was not made easy by the facts of traditional autonomy and the reluctance of unions to surrender independence of action. Perhaps the most notable example in the North East was the failure of the Durham Miners' Association to associate itself with the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee in Newcastle, although this might be explained in part by the fact that coal miners had not in the past had to 'organise' their strikes. Thirdly, there is little doubt that surprise and confusion entered the ranks of the strikers when the strike's abrupt ending came. This complicated the problem of getting back to work, especially on the railways. The question of victimisation is a vexing one because of the lack of evidence, but it is clear that some workers, again notably

in transport, were discriminated against, the action of the Northern Transport Company providing a clear example.

If those are judgments made about the General Strike on a national level, confirmed by the regional study, there is perhaps one area where the regional study at least suggests a deviation from the national picture. Relations between strikers and police in the North East were not good. There was no playing football together there. Police were imported from other regions and this may have exacerbated differences but it seems certain that striker-police relations in the area worsened after the first week-end of the strike. Whether this was in any sense contrived by one side or the other cannot be deduced from the evidence. The police records may help, if ever they become available to historians.

Finally what does clearly emerge is the tremendous grip and influence which the two mining trades unions exercised upon their members and members' dependants in the area. Both weathered the crisis of 1926 more or less undamaged. Membership fell, but this can be attributed more to the slow and painful decline of the coal industry than to the disappointments of the General Strike. The organisation remained as solidly based as ever, and the personnel of the leadership remained unchanged. The attempts to establish a non-political trade union in the North East had little success.

What is needed now is more research in the regions to uncover the material from which comparative studies can be made. Not only would comparisons with other coal mining areas be instructive, but also needed are studies of more diverse industrial regions like the Midlands. Moreover if the material for such studies is to be collected and preserved,

the work has to be done soon. People who took part in the events of 1926 or remember them are a dwindling group, and anyone who has attempted to collect documentary evidence on labour history knows how easily valuable material is discarded and destroyed. Only through such local studies; can a more comprehensive and soundly based national picture be constructed.

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