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THE GENERAL STRIKE

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The National Union of Railwaymen have intimated that railwaymen have been asked to strike without notice tomorrow night. Each Great Western man has to decide his course of action. Will I appeal to all of you to hasten before you break your contracts of service with the old Company, before you inflict grave injury upon the Railway Industry, and before you arrive at locking in the Railway service which will take years to restore.

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Remember that your promise of being and your personal interests are involved, and that Great Western men are trusted to be loyal to their contracts of service in the same manner as they expect the Company to carry out their obligations and agreements.

John J. C. Pugh
General Manager
Reading Station.
May 2nd, 1926.

THE NATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAYMEN.

Unity House
Ruskin Road
London N.W. 1
May 1st 1926

MINERS' CRISIS.

Amongst one of the disputes in the Coal Industry the Union in common with others affiliated to the Trades Union Congress has agreed to give its support to the Miners during the present lock-out and further in accordance with the decision arrived at at a Conference of Trades Union Executive Committees convened by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. It has been agreed to take steps in conjunction with the Transport Workers' Union to call upon our members to cease work on Monday next the 3rd instant.

I am conveying this information to you in order that you may be cognisant of the fact that in ceasing work the men are acting upon the instructions of the National Union of Railwaymen.

C. T. Cramp

Unity House
Ruskin Road
London N.W. 1
6th May 1926

MINERS' CRISIS.

I desire to repeat on behalf of the N.U.R. what I said in yesterday's issue of the **BRITISH WORKER**

Members of our Union must
handle no traffic of any kind.
Food-stuffs or otherwise.

C. T. Cramp
National Union of Railwaymen

(See page 378, note 33.)

THE GENERAL STRIKE

*A Study of Labor's Tragic Weapon
in Theory and Practice*

BY
WILFRID HARRIS CROOK



2703

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TO

M. C. C. AND J. E. C.

WITHOUT WHOSE CONTINUED INTEREST,
ENCOURAGEMENT, AND MATERIAL AID
THIS BOOK WOULD NOT HAVE REACHED
PUBLICATION

INTRODUCTION

IN A WORK of this size it is well at the outset for the writer to make clear to his reader what he understands by the terms he is using. There are few terms more carelessly applied than that of the *general strike*. Frequently it is used, improperly as the writer believes, to describe a strike of the majority of the workers in any one trade throughout any large region. Thus one hears of the "general strike of the British miners," or the "general strike of the French railway workers." To such a strike the writer would apply the term "generalized" strike, but with such phenomena this book is not concerned.

Other students of labor will go to the opposite extreme and declare that no strike can be general which does not include the vast majority of the workers in *all* the trades of a region or nation. Again, the writer believes, such a definition is in error, this time in being far too exclusive. The term *general strike* is used in this book to imply the strike of a majority of the workers in the more important industries of any one locality or region. Thus one can find many instances of a genuine general strike confined to a city or a large urban district, in which case it is spoken of as a "localized" general strike. Seattle and Winnipeg in 1919 and Vienna in 1927 are good examples.

On the other hand the really important general strikes of history have covered a good deal more territory than any one city or urban district, as witness the Belgian strike of 1913 and the British one of 1926. They have not always included the cessation of communication by rail, though in some instances, such as Russia in 1905, that cessation gave the whip hand to labor. This is less likely to be the case in the future, as the British strike gave evidence, owing to the modern, alternative forms of communication, the auto and the aeroplane, the control of which organized labor will find a very difficult task.

For the purpose of clarity in discussion the writer has treated the general strikes of history as of three types, admitting freely enough that any one of the three may change suddenly or gradually into one of the other types. There is the *political* general strike, with the aim of exacting some definite political

concession from the existing government, such as the demand for universal suffrage in the Belgian general strikes, or, more rarely, for the purpose of upholding the existing government against a would-be usurper, as in the German strike against the *Kapp-Putsch* in 1920. The *economic* type is perhaps the most common form, at least at the beginning of the strike, and is exemplified by the Swedish strike of 1909. The *revolutionary* general strike, aiming at the definite overthrow of the existing government or industrial system, may be revolutionary in its purpose from the very start, or it may develop its revolutionary purpose as it proceeds. It is more likely to be found in countries where labor has not been long or intensively organized, or where the influential leaders of labor are largely syndicalist or anarchist in viewpoint, such as Russia in 1905, Spain or Italy.

The general strike, in practice, has seldom been carefully thought out or prepared. In this aspect the Belgian strike of 1913 was most unusual. In most cases the method of swift action, to surprise the government or the employing class, has been advocated and practised. In the majority of cases so little thought has been given to the matter that no definite aim or strict limit of duration has been set to the general walk-out before it commenced—an oversight that almost invariably has led to disaster.

With few exceptions, such as the Belgian political strikes, that in Sweden in 1902, and to a lesser extent that of Russia in 1905, the immediate aim has been one of protest. At times the protest has been against the undue use of the military or the police in labor disputes, as in Italy, the Argentine and China. Occasionally it has been a protest against impending repressive labor legislation, as in Holland in 1908. At other times the protest has been against the unfair treatment of fellow workers in kindred or other industries. This was true of the strike in Sweden in 1909, of the Seattle and Winnipeg strikes of 1919, and of the great British strike in 1926. Finally, and most rarely, it takes the form of protest against the usurpation of government by some group or class patently hostile to the interests of labor, as in the German strike of 1920.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of many recent general strikes, from the point of view of the student in social psychology, has been the growth of definite citizens' bodies, whose

specific aim was the continuance of the necessary public utilities. The Order for Maintenance of Supplies (the O.M.S.) in Great Britain, the Technical Emergency Corps (*Technische Nothilfe*) in Germany, the "Committee of One Thousand" in Winnipeg, are but examples of the common reaction of the individual property owner, professional man and salary-earner to the civic peril of a general cessation of essential labor. Incapable, perhaps, of any successful *prolonged* functioning, such organizations were at least efficient enough to tide over the gravest period of civic or national need; and *time* is everything to the opponents of any general strike. With the growth and experience of such citizens' emergency organizations, the ultimate possibility of success for labor in any future general strike becomes progressively fainter, unless the brutal logic of revolution is faced. And revolution as the aim and end of a general strike in any western civilized nation seems extremely improbable, so long as the ranks of the national armed forces possess so little class consciousness.

The origin, in modern times at any rate, of both theory and practice of the general strike can be found in Great Britain, with Benbow's notion of a "sacred holiday" for all the laboring class, and with Richard Pilling's great strike of 1842. France is, however, the land which has made the theory of the general strike peculiarly its own, and has popularized it among workers and social students, through the program of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (C.G.T.), and the philosophy of Georges Sorel.

Strangely enough, it is not to France that one must turn for the effective practice of the general strike. It is the more phlegmatic peoples of Sweden, Belgium, Britain, Germany and Russia who have provided general strikes on any large scale. Italy and Spain have likewise presented localized examples of the general strike; as also, in the New World, Seattle and Winnipeg, and certain South American nations.

The writer has not attempted to make this book absolutely inclusive. Localized general strikes in Australasia, in South Africa and Mexico have, perforce, not received notice. The effort has been made to trace the history of the theory and the method, and to pick out for intensive study the more dramatic and typical samples of its practice. Belgium, for example, offers

no less than three instances of the general strike used for purely political purposes; Sweden an outstanding example of a long-drawn-out economic general strike; Russia, Italy and Spain samples of the more bloody, revolutionary use of that weapon.

In the New World recent localized city strikes in Seattle and Winnipeg, and certain examples in South American lands, have been chosen because of their possible interest to American readers. The episode in China in 1925 is added to show the widespread vogue of the general strike method and its use for peculiarly nationalistic and anti-foreign purposes, not found in the other instances.

The strange anomaly of a general strike to retain a republican form of government in power, is the adequate excuse for dealing in such detail with the strike against the *Kapp-Putsch*. The two general strikes in Great Britain, the latter treated at greater length than any other example, need no explanation save that they were the first and the greatest general strikes in history. The general strike in Vienna in 1927 brings the record of important recent examples up to date.¹

To readers less interested in theory than in dramatic and recent practice the writer suggests that the second part of the book is more likely to meet their needs, but the social student will probably find that a real understanding of the general strike phenomenon will require the history of its development, contained in the first part of the book.

The writer holds no brief for the general strike. At best it is a two-edged weapon, likely to harm the working class more swiftly and grievously than any other section of society. It is, nonetheless, a last and desperate weapon much used in the past, and perhaps likely to be used again in the future, by the ranks of organized labor, when the massed forces of capital and government have refused, or shall again refuse, to yield justice to all strictly constitutional appeals of the working class.

This book has been written in the faint hope that both capital and labor will find something to learn from the long, tragic and often repeated story of misunderstanding, waste and suffering connected with the cause and use of the general strike weapon. If the indirect outcome of this book shall be the de-

¹ A brief appendix contains the important facts connected with the Spanish general strike of November, 1930.

velopment of some more rational method for channeling the stubborn heroism and prodigal sacrifices of labor in any general strike, and for using the resultant sudden outburst of the sense of citizenship on the part of the middle and employing classes, then the writer will be more than satisfied.

In the accomplishment of this work the writer has encountered so much kindness and courtesy from government officials, from large and small-scale employers, from union leaders and ranks that individual acknowledgment of all his debts would be impossible. He does, however, desire to voice his indebtedness to the late Professor Allyn A. Young for his initial approval and encouragement of this study, and for valuable suggestions offered in connection with the first three chapters of the book; to the authorities of Bowdoin College and to his colleagues in the department of Economics for granting him time from his professional duties for travel and writing; to Dr. Harry Laidler, Mr. Arthur Greenwood, M.P., and his old colleague and comrade, Rev. George S. Woods, for their aid in providing introductions to the British trade union world; to Professor Manley O. Hudson and the late Lord Frederick Hamilton for providing equally valuable access to governmental, international and industrial authorities in Great Britain and Geneva.

He is further indebted to Mr. W. A. D. Schumann of Blankenese, Mr. Guenther Tonn of Berlin, and Mr. Norman Ebbutt in the Berlin office of the *London Times*, for help in interviews, in gathering data or in press translations in connection with the *Kapp-Putsch*; to Miss Frances Owen and Miss Alice W. Clark for the collection or translation of matter relevant to the German and Viennese strikes; to Mr. Arnold Roller for valuable notes upon Argentina; and to Dr. W. Edwards Beach for interviews in connection with the Seattle general strike. A final word is due to his friend and colleague, Professor Roland H. Cobb, whose characteristically American and conservative reactions to the British general strike, during the early summer of 1926, provided the writer with a vital and useful balance to his own, perhaps more radical, background and sympathies!

Bowdoin College
August, 1930

WILFRED H. CROOK

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PART I

FROM CHARTISM TO THE WORLD WAR

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST GENERAL STRIKE: GREAT BRITAIN

THE HISTORY of the general strike during the past century points to Great Britain as the source of that method of protest or of revolution. In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the theorists of the general strike do not seem to have used that term, but rather to have called the cessation of work a "national holiday" or a "sacred month."¹ On the other hand, those who ultimately put the scheme into actual practice, the workers and the trade unionists, appear to have used the term "general strike" almost from the outset, and ultimately to have carried the use of their own term into the camp of the theorists, finally displacing completely the terms "national holiday" and "sacred month."

As early as 1817, the year of the "Manchester Insurrection" and the Nottingham uprising, a year of bad trade and worse wages, we hear of one Oliver, a government *agent provocateur*, meeting with a certain Jeremiah Bradreth. The latter, a "half starved, illiterate and unemployed frame-work knitter, to whom leadership and excitement were attractive," on May 23, 1817, "talked of the general strike" to take place in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Yorkshire, and other places on the following Sunday, or the Sunday after. Part of the plan was to seize soldiers' arms wherever they could get them, to march together to London, and in London to contend for a change in government.²

In July, 1818, the Lancashire spinners and weavers and the miners went on strike, and in 1820 the Glasgow workers issued a proclamation urging cessation of work in England, Scotland, and Ireland until a political revolution had been accomplished, phrasing their appeal as follows:

¹ It has been suggested by Bernstein, and by Georgi (*Théorie und Praxis des Generalstreiks*, p. 32), that the wholesale migration of the Jews from Rome to the Holy Mountain in 494 B.C. may have given rise to these terms "holy" and "sacred." The Jewish analogy used by William Benbow (see *infra*) is a much more likely origin.

² Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer*, p. 358.

In the present state of affairs, and during the continuation of so momentous a struggle, we earnestly request of all to desist from their labour from and after this day, the First of April, and attend wholly to the recovery of their rights, and consider it as the duty of every man not to recommence until he is in possession of those Rights which distinguish the Freeman from the Slave; viz. that of giving consent to the laws by which he is governed. . . .

By order of the committee of organization for forming a Provisional Government. Glasgow. 1st April, 1820.

Weavers of Glasgow and Paisley struck work on April 1, and on April 3 the miners, cotton spinners, machine-makers, and founders joined in, but the stoppage was not general.³

The degree to which the idea and the term "general strike" were common as early as the first quarter of the nineteenth century is not clear, but not until the period of the Chartist agitation do we find both the idea and the term becoming widespread. The term "general strike" was used in evidence presented to a Parliamentary committee, appointed in February, 1838, to inquire into combinations of employers and workmen. One John Doherty, a printer and bookseller of Manchester, once a cotton spinner, giving evidence of strikes in Manchester since 1824, declared that there had been ten or twelve partial ones, but only one general strike, that in 1829. This had been occasioned by the masters' proposing a very heavy reduction of wages. This "general strike" lasted six months and left the workers exasperated and apparently beaten, for Doherty added that intelligent operatives believed that general strikes terminated unfavorably.⁴ It is not at all clear from the context whether Doherty meant by the phrase "general strike" anything more than a strike of a single trade only but in many localities, or of several trades in sympathy. The former seems the more likely, judging by the evidence of other witnesses in the same inquiry.⁵ In support of this use of the term at that period

³ Alfred Plummer, "The General Strike during One Hundred Years," *Econ. Journal* (London) Supplement, May, 1927, p. 183.

⁴ Pamphlet, in comment on above Parliamentary Inquiry, published by the London Trades Combination Committee in 1839, possibly edited by William Lovett, the *Chartist*, p. 29.

⁵ Yet Beer, *History of British Socialism*, I, 318, speaks of "the first use of the term general strike" in the issue for April 2, 1834, of *The Herald of the Rights of Industry*, of which this same Doherty was editor.

we find in 1833 a "general strike" of Operative Tailors, in which some twenty thousand workers were thrown out of work, and a "general strike" planned by the Cotton Spinners in support of an eight-hour day, but twice postponed and ultimately not attempted.⁶ In both these instances evidently only a single trade is implied.

If any one individual can be called the originator of the "general strike" idea in Great Britain, and perhaps, therefore, in Europe also, in the sense in which we use that term today, it is William Benbow, radical, agitator, and pamphleteer. Benbow was born in 1784; as a young man he was a non-conformist minister, possibly a Quaker. By 1817 he was married and living in Manchester, an active worker among the radicals of northern England. In that year he was arrested and held in durance for several months.⁷ As a pamphleteer Benbow tackled various subjects, from an attack on Southey, the Poet Laureate, to a book of much painstaking research concerning the *Crimes of the Clergy*. About this time he appears to have been both publisher and bookseller,⁸ his large work bearing the address of "Byron's Head, Castle Street, Leicester Square," London.⁹

The particular pamphlet of interest in connection with the general strike was published in January, 1832,¹⁰ entitled "Grand National Holiday and Congress of the Productive Classes; printed and published by the author, 205 Fleet Street" which later in the dedication is given as "the Commercial Coffee House."¹¹ Possibly Benbow was the proprietor of this coffee house at the time; possibly he was a journeyman shoemaker; but whatever his means of livelihood, he was an active and loquacious member of the National Union of Workingmen which met in

⁶ S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 146, 181.

⁷ Niles Carpenter, "William Benbow and the Origin of the General Strike," *Quarterly Jour. of Econ.* XXXV, 481 f.

⁸ June, 1830, he published Cobbett's *Political Register*. See Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁹ Carpenter, *op. cit.*, pp. 462 f.

¹⁰ Advertised as published that day in the *Poor Man's Guardian*, Jan. 28, 1832, Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 494. In 1831 the Committee of the National Union of the Working Classes had persuaded Benbow to defer publication of his plan for a National Holiday; but he agreed merely to postponement and not to complete abandonment of this publication.—Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹¹ No date of publication is given in the British Museum copy of this pamphlet.

the Rotunda on Blackfriars Bridge Road.¹² There seems to be general agreement that Benbow was very much an agitator, with little hesitation as to the use of physical force by radicals.¹³ A meeting proposed by the National Union of the Working Classes for November 7, 1831, on the question of Parliamentary reform was abandoned partly because of "some very improper language used by Benbow at a meeting in the Rotunda. . . . which language, however, was strongly deprecated by the committee and members generally."¹⁴ Francis Place reports that in 1831 Benbow laid in a "stock of constables' staves, which he retailed at a few pence each to such of the members as desired to protect themselves against the police."¹⁵ In his speeches Benbow would express impatience with dependence upon political reform, and would even go so far as to advocate military drill.¹⁶ In 1839, when he was about fifty-five years old and back again in Lancashire, Benbow is reported as "the most outspoken of these advocates of armed revolution." At this time he traveled "all over Lancashire preaching his doctrine of strikes and insurrection."¹⁷

WILLIAM BENBOW'S PAMPHLET

Because of its influence upon the early theory and practice of the general strike in Great Britain, a summary of Benbow's pamphlet on the *Grand National Holiday* will not be out of place. Benbow's flowery dedication gives some hint of the man's style and character:

Plundered fellow sufferers! I lay before you a plan of freedom. Adopt it and you rid the world of inequality, misery and crime. A martyr in your cause, I am become the prophet of your salvation. A plan of happiness is pointed out and dedicated to you. With it I devote to you my life and body, my soul and blood.¹⁸

¹²The *Poor Man's Guardian* reports 22 speeches of his between Sept. 3, 1831, and Feb. 3, 1833.—See Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 495.

¹³Beer, *op. cit.*, implies that Benbow's pamphlet gives this impression. The actual wording of the pamphlet, however, is too clever to offer direct advocacy of violence.

¹⁴Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 188, quoting Additional MSS. 27, 822 (24).

¹⁵Graham Wallas, *Life of Francis Place*, p. 286.

¹⁶Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 495.

¹⁷Mark Hovell, *The Chartist Movement*, p. 138.

¹⁸Another summary can be found in Beer, I, 316-18. The summary in the text above is from the British Museum copy.

Benbow's philosophy would not be out of place on any modern radical platform. "All men," he wrote in his Introductory Address, "enjoy life, but do not enjoy it equally. The enjoyment of some is so very limited, that it does not deserve the name of enjoyment; . . . The only class of persons in society, as it is now constituted, who enjoy any considerable portion of ease, pleasure, and happiness, are those who do the least towards producing anything good or necessary for the community at large."¹⁹

Benbow declared that these lucky and powerful members of society constituted scarcely one in five hundred of the population:

The 499 who create the state, who are its instruments upon all occasions, without whom it cannot go on for a single second, who dig deep, rise early, and watch late, by whose sweat and toil the whole face of nature is beautified, rendered pleasant to the sight and useful to the existence; the 499 who do all this are reduced to less than nothing in the estimation of the *sait* who does no one thing, unless *consuming* may be called doing something. . . . the 499 are *his* purveyors, they procure him everything; and, more to be pitied and worse treated than the jackal, they are not left even the *offals*.²⁰

Yet it was this one five-hundredth part of the population that arrogated to itself the title, "the People." "They are the *people of substance*, the people of *character*, the people of *condition*, the people of *honor*! So *they* say; but perhaps another definition of what they are would make them more easily recognized." In typical language Benbow proceeded to make clear to his readers what *he* thought of this rich and powerful minority. "They are *jugglers of society*, the *pickpockets*, the *plunderers*, the pitiless *Burkers* . . . in fine they are all Bishops! . . . The 499 bleed for them, die of disease for them; by hard and cruel treatment they are hurried into crime and infamy, if crime and infamy can justly be imputed to beings who make an occasional effort to obtain a portion of the heaps they produce."²¹

Benbow then turned to the 499, accused them of never fighting for themselves, and asserted it was ignorance that permitted the majority to toil incessantly for others. Moreover, the knowledge that the 499 needed most was not book-learning, but

¹⁹ Benbow, *Grand National Holiday*, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

rather "a knowledge of ourselves: a knowledge of our own power, of our immense might, and of the right we have to employ in action that immense power." The remedy he offered for this parlous condition of the workers was "unity of thought and action."²² Hence, in his introduction, Benbow already voiced the gist of the modern theory of the general strike; that the many are subject to the few through ignorance of their own power, although, did they but know it, the state could not "go on for a single second" without them; that all that is required for remedy is united action—or, rather, cessation of all action.

Benbow then describes his panacea, the National Holiday.

A holiday signifies a *holy day*, and ours is to be of holy days the most holy. . . . In our holy day we shall legislate for all mankind; the constitution drawn up during our holiday, shall place every human being on the same footing. Equal rights, equal liberties, equal enjoyments, equal toil, equal respect, equal share of production: this is the object of our holy day. . . .²³

Benbow's ministerial bent showed itself in his allusions to the Jewish sabbatical year and to their year of jubilee; the suggestion being that during such Jewish festivals no servile work was done, and that masters and servants knew no distinction. One of the grounds for a national holiday of a month's duration was explained as due to the fact that the workers had no property, no wealth, that their labor was of no use to them, for what it produced went into the hands of others. Since these others, the Lords and Masters of the workers, proposed no plan by which the workers could improve their position, it was time that the workers themselves discovered a method. "Our Lords and Masters tell us, we produce too much"—a reference to the overproduction theory—"very well then, we shall cease from producing for one month, and thus put into practice the theory of our Lords and Masters."²⁴

A second reason given for the holiday was the need for a census of both population and resources, in order to confute the argument that the prevalent misery was due to overpopulation. During the period of this month's holiday "cunning and wise" men were to be chosen to form a national Congress whose

²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

duty should be to concert a plan for the diminishing, if not the complete annihilation, of the wretchedness and slavery of the masses. In theory, at any rate, this early advocate of the general strike saw the necessity for long preparation. "Before a month's holiday can take place universal preparations must be made for it. It should not take place neither [sic] in seed-time nor in harvest-time. Every man must prepare for it. The preparations must begin long before the time which shall be hereafter appointed, in order that everyone may be ready, and that the festival be not partial but universal."²⁸

A modern note of organization, not unlike the soviet, next appeared. Committees of management of the workers had to be appointed in every city, town, village, and parish, to carry through the project as effectively and quickly as possible. Frequent meetings were to be held to instruct the people as to the necessity of a national holiday and the need for extreme sobriety and economy. A week's provisions were to be laid in by all workers, the food supplies for the last three weeks to come from funds already existing in the cities, towns, and parishes, and from "the cattle upon a thousand hills"—which belonged to the people, because the cattle were the Lord's, and the voice of the people was the voice of God.²⁹ These same local committees were to be held responsible for local order. All attempts at disorder were to be punished by the committees, inasmuch as the "people, having a grand object in view, the slightest points in their character must be grand."

Benbow foresaw no lack of liberal-minded noblemen who would gladly provide the people with all the cattle they needed for food, during the national holiday. Should, however, some large cattle-owners prove refractory, then no violence would be used, but the committee would appoint twenty men to lay the matter respectfully before the cattle-owner. If that were to fail, then one hundred persons were to be sent on the same errand, to plead "still more respectfully and energetically." The numbers rose to one thousand in case of a second failure, "until the Lord's cattle be forthcoming."

Even at that point Benbow's naïveté could not refrain from adding "the persons sent by the Committee shall allow no one

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

to disturb the peace of the people.¹²⁷ In a similar manner the central place of meeting for the Congress of workers' delegates was to be "a mansion of some great liberal lord, with its out-houses and appurtenances." The owner of such a mansion was expected to "make those splendid preparations for the representatives of the sovereignty of the people that are usually made for the reception of a common sovereign."¹²⁸

Benbow summarized the purpose of the Congress in a few sentences: "To reform society, 'for from the crown of our head to the sole of our foot there is no soundness in us'. . . Every man that does not work is rotten; he must be made to work in order to cure his unsoundness. . . Everything, men, property and money, must be put into a state of circulation. . . Every portion must be made to work, and then the work will become so light, that it will not be considered work, but wholesome exercise. Can anything be more humane than the main objects of our glorious holiday, namely, to obtain for all, at the least expense to all, the largest sum of happiness for all."¹²⁹

BENBOW'S INFLUENCE

Naturally Benbow's pamphlet had considerable effect upon the radical movements of his time. Its phrases were on every Chartist's lips, and "all the debates on a general strike and all attempts at its realization" in the decade 1832-1842 "are to be traced to this pamphlet" or to its author's speeches. Yet, when Benbow was arrested in Manchester in August, 1839, and held in prison for eight months awaiting trial, no one offered bail for his release; nor had positions of trust been conferred upon him. He was not a delegate to any Chartist function, and he believed himself to be persecuted by both friend and foe.¹³⁰ That some of the wisest Chartist leaders distrusted the effect of a man like Benbow is evident from the comment of William Lovett, the real author of the Charter, that "violent words do not slay the enemies but the friends of our movement. What happened to the London National Union? Benbow's violent phrases crushed the life out of it."¹³¹ Benbow himself was never at a loss for speech, as can be seen from the fact that in his last

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁸ Beer, *op. cit.*, I, 316.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, II, 43.

trial he defended himself in a speech of over ten hours in length.²³

Benbow's pamphlet had, indeed, an almost immediate effect upon the workers' movements. After the Reform Bill there followed a great disillusionment with the political method, and Robert Owen and others started to organize the workers on a more strictly industrial plane, either in trade unions or in co-operative societies. In November, 1833, some 800,000 workers had been so enrolled and excitement was at fever heat. In this atmosphere charged with enthusiasm the operatives adopted Benbow's plan of a general strike—Benbow himself never called it anything but a national holiday or a sacred month—a large meeting of Glasgow workers passed a resolution on October 5 of the same year, endorsing Benbow's idea of a general strike, while an article in the *Glasgow Liberator* for February 1, 1834, discussed the effect of such a general cessation of work with as naïve a belief in its efficacy as Benbow's.

There will not be insurrection; it will simply be passive resistance. The men may remain at leisure; there is, and there can be, no law to compel them to work against their will. They may walk the streets or fields with their arms folded, they will wear no swords, carry no muskets; they will present no multitude for the Riot Act to disperse. They merely abstain, when their funds are sufficient, from going to work for one week or one month; and what happens in consequence? Bills are dishonoured, the *Gazette* teems with bankruptcies, capital is destroyed, the revenue fails, the system of government falls into confusion, and every link in the chain which binds society together is broken in a moment by this inert conspiracy of the poor against the rich.²⁴

Owing to the conflict of ideals between leaders such as Owen, who believed in the joint action of capital and labor, and the more extreme direct actionists who clung firmly to the class war idea, there followed a temporary but general collapse of both the trade union movement and the notion of a general strike.

The general strike again came into prominence as a method of achieving reform in the years 1838-1839, when Chartism and

²³ Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 159, citing *Northern Star*, April 18, 1840.

²⁴ Beer, *op. cit.*, I, 333.

agitation in general had reached a high pitch, especially in the northern counties. This was the period when Benbow's pamphlet reached a phenomenal sale, Benbow himself traveling throughout Lancashire with a horse and cart, selling his *Grand National Holiday* and holding open air meetings.³⁴ In 1838 the "class strike" idea was much in evidence in Birmingham. Atwood, the Chartist leader, spoke in its favor at several meetings organized by the Birmingham Political Union in May of that year. "If Parliament," he said, "should be insane enough to reject the petition [of the Chartists] he would summon the people to a solemn, sacred general strike, not of worker against employer, but a strike of all against the common enemy. Then the working man, with such of the middle class as might be disposed to favor their views, should proclaim a solemn and sacred strike for every kind of labour. Not a hand was to be raised to work, but every heart, every head and every arm was to be directed to the furtherance of the people's cause, until victory should smile upon their efforts." Thereupon, by means of a "national strike for one week, during which not a hammer was to be wielded, not an anvil sounded, nor a shuttle moved, throughout the country," the people would be able "to exercise . . . a little gentle compulsion" upon the House of Commons.³⁵ Strangely enough, Atwood was not a physical force advocate, but seemed to feel that a general strike would strengthen the moral power of the people and so check the wilder counsels of violence then current.³⁶

With the winter of 1838 this peaceful attitude of the national holiday faded away before the change in leadership and the belief in a sacred *month* in place of the earlier holy *week*. Early in 1839 the National Convention (to obtain the Charter) met in London, and debated at length the methods of winning the desired reforms, with, as usual, a very noisy left wing demanding the use of physical force. In May the Convention, or the more radical members of it, moved to Birmingham and issued from that city a list of questions to be put to all Chartist meetings held before July 1st. The second question on the list ran as follows: "Whether, if the Convention shall determine that a sacred

³⁴ Mark Howell, *op. cit.*, p. 138; Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 71; I, 316.

³⁵ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

month will be necessary, to prepare the millions to secure the Charter of their political salvation, they will firmly resolve to abstain from their labours during that period, as well as from the use of all intoxicating drinks.³⁸ The Convention then proceeded to adjourn to give the people time to consider and answer the questions put to them by the Convention.³⁹

When the Convention reassembled in Birmingham on July 1 a considerable number of members had resigned. The party of violence advocated immediate armed insurrection and the setting of the date for the sacred month at July 15.⁴⁰ Lovett argued that a strike fund should first be formed, but the more violent preferred Benbow's method of seizing the "cattle on a thousand hills."⁴¹ Finally the general strike method was held over till the result of the petition was known, and the milder of the "ulterior methods" were advocated meanwhile, such as a run on the banks and a boycott of hostile newspapers. Even when Lovett was arrested and imprisoned the Convention still held the general strike method in reserve. Not until July 12 was a manifesto issued which included recourse to the "sacred month," but even then only in the finest type, whereas many other methods, such as the run on the banks, were printed in large type.⁴²

With the rejection of the petition for the Charter by 235 votes to 46 in the House of Commons, the Convention, now once more back in London, turned to the "sacred month" as their last weapon. In a meeting on July 15, 1839, with but thirty delegates present, the discussion began again. Marsden, a poor weaver to whom strikes were almost everyday affairs, favored the "sacred month." Most of the other delegates supported him, for lack of any better plan. They had so often roused their audiences with the story of what a general strike would achieve that it was difficult now to go back on their views. Yet they discussed no preparations; arrangements for supplies of food

³⁸ *Manifesto of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes*, signed by Hugh Craig, chairman, and William Lovett, secretary, by order of the members of the Convention; printed and published by Arthur Dyson, London, p. 7. For whole list of nine questions see Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

³⁹ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 70.

⁴⁰ Dolléans, *Le Chartistes*, I, 345-60.

⁴¹ Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 195; Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

and money did not interest them—they would live on the country, presumably. Only a handful showed clearly the utter unreadiness of their followers for such drastic measures. After two days of discussion the remnant of the Convention, by thirteen votes to six with five abstentions, voted to recommend the commencement of the "National Holiday" on August 12. "Thus the weightiest decision of the Convention was carried by one-quarter of its original strength."⁴³

The amazing folly of this decision of theorists is seen when one recognizes that eight appointed delegates sitting in London, "were given a month in which to organize a national stoppage of industry in a land where industry was stopping of its own accord, in a land where only a strike of agricultural labourers could have had much effect, in a land where men, women and children were begging to be allowed to work even for a pittance."⁴⁴ How little the implications of a really *general* strike were thought out by the majority who supported it is evident from some of the opponents' speeches in the Convention. One such speaker declared that a general strike that did not include the cities would be evil in its results, and that it was not enough that some small portion of the people were ready for the national holiday. The Rochdale delegate put the case even more baldly. "What is the meaning of the national holiday? Are we to abstain from all manner of work? If so, is the bread baked for a month? Is the corn ground for a month? . . . The people of Rochdale are of the opinion that there is not food enough in South Lancashire to subsist the people for a fortnight."⁴⁵ William Carpenter, complaining bitterly that the most violent advocates of a cessation of work were among the absentees, exclaimed,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 165, and William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 226; Dolléans, *op. cit.*, I, 380.

⁴⁴ Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 165. A typical meeting of the many held during this month before August 12 occurred at Manchester on the fourth of August. It was held to ascertain the feeling of the people as to whether the "sacred month" should commence on the 12th of August or not. "A Mr. Benbow, of agitating notoriety, also made a long speech, and concluded by moving a resolution to the effect that, if the 'national convention' should recommend the 'national holiday' to commence on the 12th of August, they would support the proposition to a man. The resolution was carried nem. con."—*Annual Register*, 1859, pt. II, p. 133.

⁴⁵ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 84.

"We are alike ignorant of the probabilities of the order for the sacred month being obeyed, and of the way in which the holiday should be turned to account, even did the people obey and leave their work. . . . Are we going to let loose hundreds of thousands of desperate and hungry men upon society without having any specific object in view or any plan of action laid down, but trusting to a chapter of accidents as to what the consequences should be?"⁴⁵

Richardson, at one time an enthusiastic advocate of arming the people, now wrote to the Convention regretting their decision; their plan to hold a national holiday was ill-timed. "In the South of England there was no following. Even in Manchester, the faithful stronghold, the Chartists could not make an effective strike; the hands were on half time; many have petitioned to be allowed to work longer. The employers were praying for the Convention to order a strike so as to be relieved of the necessity of locking their work-people out altogether."⁴⁶ Among others who criticized the decision was one of the Convention's most important absentees, O'Brien. On July 22 he addressed the Convention on the matter of their general strike decision and, physical force propagandist that he was, convinced the delegates that their followers in the country were far from unanimous, that the National Holiday should be indefinitely postponed, that the actual date should be left to the people themselves, who should be told that "nothing short of a general strike, or suspension of labour, throughout the country, will ever suffice to re-establish the rights and liberties of the industrial classes."⁴⁷

Included in O'Brien's resolution were the following significant paragraphs:

Because great diversity of opinion prevails amongst the remaining members (of the Chartist Convention) as to the practicability of the general strike, in the present state of trade in the manufacturing districts;

Because a similar diversity of opinion seems to prevail out of doors among our constituents and the working class generally;

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 88.

⁴⁶ Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; cf. Dolléans, *op. cit.*, I, 896-99. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, p. 146, gives date as July 16, not 22.

Because under these circumstances it is more than doubtful whether an order from the Convention for a general holiday would be generally obeyed, or whether the strike would not be a failure;

Because, while we firmly believe that an universal strike would prove the salvation of the country, we are at the same time equally convinced that a partial strike would only entail the bitterest privations and sufferings on all parties who take part in it, and, in the present exasperated state of public feeling, not improbably lead to confusion and anarchy. . . . be it resolved, etc.⁴⁸

There can be little question that in the majority of the most important districts there was little approval of the general strike idea. Only workers in the least secure positions and with the lowest wages espoused the scheme, while the trades associations rejected it entirely.⁴⁹

Finally convinced of this fact, the Convention passed a resolution countermanding the general strike order in favor of a one or two day strike for mere demonstration purposes. This resolution ran, in part, as follows:

Resolved, that from the evidence which has reached this council from various parts of the country, we are unanimously of the opinion, that the people are not prepared to carry out the "sacred month" on the 12th of August. The same evidence, however, convinces us that the great body of working people, including most of the trades, may be induced to cease work, on the 12th instant, for two or three days, in order to devote the whole of that time to solemn processions and solemn meetings, for deliberating on the present awful state of the country. . . .

We implore our brother Chartists to abandon the project of a "sacred month," as being for the present utterly impracticable. . . .⁵⁰

This resolution was moved by O'Brien and seconded by O'Connor, and large printed copies of it were posted about Manchester and other towns in Northern England, and met with a pretty general response, though not quite in the "deliberate and solemn" manner enjoined!⁵¹

For some three days around the twelfth of August riots occurred in various places, including Manchester, Macclesfield,

⁴⁸ Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁹ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 35, citing Brentano.

⁵⁰ Gammage, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 f.

⁵¹ *Annual Register*, 1839, pt. II, pp. 198 f.

Bolton, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Rochdale, with attempts to get the workers "out."⁵² These efforts were met by the police and magistrates, in obedience to instructions issued by the Government. Lord John Russell had informed the magistrates that "persons, in pursuance of an illegal combination, have gone about among the working classes of the people, exciting and endeavoring to persuade them to desist from working, and to desert their employers," and had ordered that such offenders must be apprehended and brought to justice.⁵³

That the disturbances and the preceding agitation seriously perturbed the authorities is evident from the discovery of some 272 heavy packing cases "each containing twenty guns and bayonets, with flints, ready for use" at Ellesmere Port, near Chester, but with no intimation as to their destination. They were reshipped to Chester and lodged, for greater safety, in the Castle. "It still remained a mystery," says the contemporary report, "as to whom they belonged; some persons, however, surmised that they were secretly sent down by the Government for the purposes of arming the middle classes, pursuant to a letter of recommendation of Lord John Russell to the lords-lieutenant of the counties."⁵⁴

The resulting wholesale arrests of prominent Chartists, among whom was Benbow himself, and the fiasco of the Convention's "sacred month," ended for the second time the prominence of the national holiday or general strike as a method of revolutionary reform.⁵⁴ When it reappeared, in 1842, it came from the workers themselves rather than from the theoretical supporters of the Charter.

THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1842

Just as William Benbow stands out as the originator of the "sacred month," in the early thirties of the nineteenth century, so, in the first really large-scale application of the general

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 139 f.

⁵⁴ Gamgee, *op. cit.*, p. 152. Benbow, tried on April 10, 1840, for inflammatory language used at Stockport June 8, 1839, and for inciting the Queen's subjects to take up arms, was found guilty and sentenced to sixteen months' imprisonment; cf. Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 196, citing the *Manchester Times*, April 18, 1840.

strike theory, that of the so-called "plug plot" of August, 1842, one Richard Pilling appears to have been the hero. Pilling was born in 1800, the son of a hand-loom weaver. In his earlier days he followed his father's trade, until the coming of the power-loom destroyed the market for his craft. In 1833 Richard Pilling entered the factory, which he always hated. As a young man he had been present at the Peterloo "massacre" of 1819, and from that moment he had become a determined radical. He joined the ten-hour movement, read Cobbett, Sadler, and Oastler, "became a trade union agitator and Chartist, and lost his berth in consequence in 1840."⁵⁵

In his speech to the jury at his trial Richard Pilling declared that he earned sixteen shillings for the first week he worked as a weaver, when he was but ten years of age. Thirty years later, in 1840, working hard all the week, he earned only *six shillings and sixpence*, and that in the factory which he hated so bitterly. His elder son, who had worked twelve hours a day from his tenth year, fell sick of consumption, and his father lost the aid of his meagre wage. Pilling described to the jury the heartbreak of watching his son slowly die before his eyes, with nothing to give him for food but potatoes and salt. Little wonder Pilling agitated for a ten-hour day.⁵⁶ He found a new position in Ashton the following year, and in 1842, when wages dropped for a second time, Pilling proceeded to organize strikes in Stalybridge and Ashton, which ultimately spread throughout the district, and in conjunction with the strike of miners in the Midlands and Scotland, constituted the general strike of 1842.⁵⁷

Conditions, both political and industrial, were ripe for some such insurrectionary protest. The second national petition for the Charter, this time more revolutionary in its demands, had been rejected by the House of Commons by 287 votes to 49. The one-man leadership of O'Connor had devitalized the Chartist movement, rendering any protest save a verbal one practically out of the question, so far as official Chartism was concerned. Nonetheless, great bitterness over the rejection of the petition was rife among the working class, and that bitter-

⁵⁵ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 141.

⁵⁶ Dolléans, *op. cit.*, II, 228-31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 234-38; Spencer Walpole, *History of England*, V, 30-21; S. J. Chapman, *The Lancashire Cotton Industry*, pp. 224 f.

ness was not alleviated by the extreme poverty of the wages then being paid by the owners of the mills and factories.⁵⁸

Despite all efforts of trade union organization wages kept falling from the 1839 level. "Many believed England to be on the brink of a social revolution."⁵⁹ A contemporary description of the conditions in Lancashire before the outbreak of the great strike will give some indication of the suppressed feeling:

Around us we see whole towns in ruin, and others verging rapidly towards it. In Manchester the poor rates are 67 per cent higher than they were last year. . . . Hordes of men, women and children, with famine depicted in their faces, are wandering about asking charity in all parts of the country and towns; whilst far greater numbers remain proudly sullen in their desolate homes. All is quiet at present. . . . awfully quiet; but there is no mistaking the muttered expression of a gathering and a concentration of angry passions which, if permitted to go on until the winter, will shake the foundations of the state.⁶⁰

Richard Pilling asserted that whatever might have been the cause of the strike for others, for him it was a question of wages and the ten-hour bill. For twenty years as a hand-loom weaver, and for ten years as a factory hand he had worked daily for twelve hours a day, save only for one year when the employers of Stockport would not give him employment. All that time, he alleged, the harder he worked the poorer he became year by year, so that at the close of the thirty years he was almost worn out. Had the masters made a further 25 per cent reduction of wages, he would rather have ended his existence than have continued to work for twelve hours daily in a cotton factory, with but potatoes and salt for diet.⁶¹

⁵⁸ General Sir Charles Napier, who was in command of the troops during the troubles of 1839 declared in that year, "at this moment the best hand-loom weaver can only earn five shillings a week, the price of food being such that this will not give him bread, without firing, clothes or lodging; hence a good workman in full wages must starve! And with this fact our rulers are called statesmen!"—W. Napier, *Life and Opinions of Sir Charles James Napier, G.C.B.*, II, 12. The year 1842 was even worse than 1839, as the wage rates had dropped still lower.

⁵⁹ Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁶⁰ "The Manchester Market" . . . a business letter contributed monthly to the *North of England Magazine*, I, 446, dated July 25, 1842.

⁶¹ Speech to the jury in *Dolléans*, *op. cit.*, II, 241.

The general strike of 1842 has been attributed to the Chartists and to the machinations of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and before the Lancashire Assizes of March, 1843, many Chartist leaders were so charged.⁶³ It is, however, quite unnecessary to read into the spontaneous outburst of suppressed misery and anger any deep laid plot of middle-class leaders of Chartism or of the Anti-Corn-Law League, although it is true enough that the latter League was ultimately the sole gainer from the disturbances.⁶⁴ Indeed, the conditions for a successful general strike were infinitely worse than those which gave the Convention of Chartists such good cause to hesitate in 1839. The immediate cause for the outbreak was unquestionably the unbearable economic pressure upon the workers themselves of still further wage reductions.⁶⁴

In July, 1842, the colliery owners of Staffordshire reduced wages from four shillings to three shillings and sixpence, with but forty-eight hours' notice, whereas two weeks' notice had hitherto been the custom. The miners naturally resisted the wage reduction and appealed to the magistrates. The mine owners, waiting for no external intervention, promptly blew out their furnaces. The struggle soon spread. Striking colliers marched to adjacent districts and forced other miners to join in with them. The resultant failure of the coal supply threw the employees of the pottery industry out of work.⁶⁵

About this time the flame, kindled in Staffordshire, spread to Cheshire, Lancashire, Warwickshire, Yorkshire, Scotland, and Wales.⁶⁶ Masses of workers at Stalybridge, Hyde, and Ashton gathered to deliberate, and most of the speakers recommended a stoppage of work, first of all to prevent any further lowering of wages and then to raise wages again to the level of the year 1839.⁶⁷ A manifesto of Ashton-under-Lyme opera-

⁶³ Bernstein, quoted by Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 36, and S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 175. Thomas Cooper in his autobiography says "The Ping Plot of 1842 . . . began in reductions of wages by the Anti-Corn-Law manufacturers, who did not conceal their purpose of driving the people to desperation, in order to paralyze the Government."—p. 191. William Hill had a similar belief as to the plots of the Anti-Corn-Law League, *Ibid.*, p. 209; cf. also Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁶⁴ See Dolléans, *op. cit.*, II, 210-25, for careful discussion of strike origin.

⁶⁵ Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁶⁶ Spencer Walpole, *op. cit.*, V, 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 227 f.

⁶⁸ Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

tives to the manufacturers of that town states clearly the workers' demands:

We therefore wish you to give us the same prices that we received in the year 1840. If you say that you cannot pay it, it is time you, one and all, held a consultation to find out the reasons why the labourer cannot be sufficiently remunerated for his labour. . . . we want a uniform price for the whole of the manufacturing districts; and it is to the interests of the masters to have it, in order that one man cannot undersell another in the market. Much is said about overproduction, and the markets being glutted; in order to obviate the first let us all work ten hours a day, and we are sure it will lessen the amount of goods in the market; the home consumption will also be considerably increased by increasing the wages of the labourer.⁶⁸

The shopkeepers, publicans and others of the towns of Ashton and Stalybridge seem to have been sufficiently in sympathy with the economic demands of the workers to pass resolutions favoring the workers' demands for a "fair day's wage for a fair day's work."⁶⁹

Had the workers originally made the Charter their demand, as they did shortly after the cessation of work, then such public support would not have been forthcoming. Again contemporary comments make this clear: "That the Chartist leaders have taken advantage of the movements is undoubtedly true, but it is equally certain, that they were not in the first instance the originators of that movement, that the objects of the people were at first non-political, and that it was not until idleness and disorder had produced their natural effects that the operatives were influenced by those who told them that they should look, not only for a present improvement in their condition, but for future security in the possession of legislative power."⁷⁰

On August 4, 1842, the workers of Stalybridge decided to strike, and with cheers for the Charter, for the Chartist leader O'Connor, and for his newspaper, the *Northern Star*, they proceeded to march on Ashton and the surrounding towns, gathering in their march willing and unwilling workers from the fac-

⁶⁸ *North of England Magazine*, vol. I, no. 9 (Sept. 1842), pp. 404-05.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

tories as they passed.⁷¹ To their strictly economic demands were added almost at once the political demand for the enactment of the Charter. With these combined demands, of a fair day's wage and the Charter the law of the land, the workers marched from factory to factory, drawing the fires and pulling the plugs from the boilers—hence the title of this strike, "the plug plot."⁷² At the same time they compelled the merchants to furnish contributions of food and money.⁷³ Committees of public safety regulated the conduct of the mob of strikers, allowing in certain cases, such as grain mills where the product would have spoiled, a continuance of work.⁷⁴

The strike was accompanied with acts of violence. In several towns the mobs plundered the shops of bread and other food.⁷⁵ In some places blood was shed, when collisions occurred between the strikers and the police or the troops. In Staffordshire, where the riots almost amounted to an insurrection, public buildings and private houses were ransacked and burned.⁷⁶ But the vast forces which had been set in motion might reasonably have been expected to result in graver disorder.⁷⁷

The *North of England Magazine*, already mentioned, which declares itself a "monthly journal of politics, literature, science and art," takes a much more lenient view of the workers' actions. Apparently Lancashire workers were more restrained than the colliers of Staffordshire. "No injury," says this contemporary, "was inflicted upon machinery, no attack was made upon property, no rich man was assaulted because he was a rich man, and his comforts and luxuries painfully contrasted with the destitution of the mechanic. . . . Even where force was used [as in the Potteries] only so much of it was executed as was necessary to accomplish their object, we grant an unlawful

⁷¹ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 142; *Annual Register*, 1842, pt. II, pp. 133 f.

⁷² Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 280; Geogrt, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 37; Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁷⁴ Spencer Walpole, *op. cit.*, V, 20-21; Geogrt, p. 37, note.

⁷⁵ Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 236. The mob forced entrance into the union work-house at Shawbath (Stockport) and took 872 seven-pound loaves.—*Annual Register*, 1842, pt. II, p. 134.

⁷⁶ *Life of Thomas Cooper*, by himself, pp. 194-97; *Annual Register*, 1842, pt. II, p. 168.

⁷⁷ Spencer Walpole, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21, quoting Prentice, *History of the Corn Law League*.

one, a general cessation from labour.⁷⁹

Beer would seem to agree with the last writer, for, in his description of the workers' entrance into Manchester, he states that the soldiers who met the strikers handed over the responsibility for order to the leaders of the workers, and that the latter broke up their massed forces into small groups, going from factory to factory in the city, inducing the operatives to join their forces.⁷⁹ "Force and intimidation were hardly necessary in Manchester. . . . It was not everywhere, however, that the working man's holiday started so peacefully as at Manchester. In many districts men willing to work were dragged by force away from the workshops, the windows and doors of factories were smashed in, the plugs of boilers unscrewed, and manufacturers who offered resistance were overcome by physical force.⁸⁰ On the whole, violence was the exception.⁸¹ Plundering, however, did not take place anywhere, and no property was wantonly destroyed. Starving operatives, in a state of civil war, poverty stricken insurgents of the working class remained for a whole week in possession of the richest center of the textile industry without laying hands on the smallest article of value."

Richard Pilling reports that when the great strike started there existed in the strike treasury the magnificent sum of twenty shillings.⁸² No wonder Benbow's method of living on the country-side was practised by the starving men. This was the more necessary as the trade unions were largely opposed to the strike.⁸³ Barely one-seventh of the population took part in the strike, even in the strike districts.⁸⁴ Comment of the writer of the monthly business letter, the "Manchester Market," contributed to the September issue of the *North of England Magazine*, is significant: "We hear that those operatives who are members of sick or benefit societies, are dividing the funds of those institutions and selling or pawning their effects. The

⁷⁹ Sept., 1842, p. 498.

⁸⁰ Cf. Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁸¹ Mr. Bradshaw of Stockport, who locked the mill doors against the mob, was later beaten with sticks when the strikers broke in.—Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁸² Cf. F. W. Slouson, *The Decline of the Chartist Movement*, p. 70, citing *London Times*, Aug. 20, 1842.

⁸³ Beer, *op. cit.*, pp. 141 and 142, citing newspapers of the time.

⁸⁴ S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁸⁵ Georg, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

small remnant of their means will therefore soon be exhausted, and they have no credit with the shopkeepers."⁸⁵

That the strike was economically doomed from the beginning, at least in the minds of the middle class, is evident from the same writer: "The sufferings of the working classes have given rise to the most extensive and alarming abandonment of labour that the history of this or any other country records. Although a political character has been given to the movement it is essentially an attempt to force up wages. It is a convulsive but vain effort of miserable men to free themselves from their misery: *for wages cannot rise* while, as has long been the case, *hands are superabundant.*" "Were the men, by means of intimidation, to succeed at this time, in forcing wages up, the multitudes who remained unemployed, would very soon pull them down again by under-bidding their brethren."⁸⁶ The same writer, using the method so common to present-day journalists, carefully computed the losses in wages that had been endured by the Lancashire workers from the beginning of August up to the third week of that month and came to the conclusion that they could not be less than one million pounds sterling.

Once the great strike had started, it was natural that its leaders should cast around for some assurance that what they had gained, if anything, by their sufferings, should be secured to them for more than a temporary future. Many felt that their trade unions had failed them, in that wages were still falling in spite of all trade union efforts, and that they might have some more effective protection should the Charter become the nation's law. With such views this group, which constituted the majority of the strikers, saw no reason for hesitation in pledging themselves to stay out till both wages and the Charter alike were obtained. The minority were nearer the facts of the case in that they believed that the middle classes would give them much sympathy in their efforts if they kept their aim strictly an economic one of fair wages for fair work. That this was true can be seen from such evidence as has been adduced above. Their need for all available sympathy and support from the other classes must be only too patent today, but at the time it was by no means so self-evident.

⁸⁵ *North of England Magazine*, Sept. 1842, pp. 510-11 (dated Aug. 27, 1842).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

Thus it happened that on August 7, 1842, a great meeting on Mottram Moor resolved "That all labour should cease until the People's Charter became the law of the land."⁸⁷ On the next day a similar resolution was passed in Stalybridge.⁸⁸ On August 11 and 12 a meeting of trades delegates in Manchester similarly pledged themselves to the People's Charter and that the strike should continue until it was won.⁸⁹ On the 15th of the month there met together over one hundred delegates from Lancashire and Yorkshire with strict mandates from their trades bodies. Here there was little deliberation, little consideration of the necessity of preparation for so large an ordeal as a general strike. As at the Chartist Convention in 1839, enthusiasm was thought to be sufficient.

Pressure of the authorities upon the strikers, through the display of military force, produced an excitement that was not a suitable atmosphere for calm consideration. There were, for example, over two thousand soldiers with six pieces of artillery in Manchester alone.⁹⁰ The delegates voted overwhelmingly for making the Charter one of the aims of their strike, only seven delegates standing out for the restriction of their aims to the economic demand of higher wages.⁹¹ Even as they met, the magistrates dispersed the meeting, but not so quickly as to prevent the passing of a resolution in support of the Charter, ending with the following demand: "We recommend that delegates be sent to the whole of the country to endeavor to obtain the coöperation of the middle and working classes in carrying out the resolution of ceasing labour until the Charter be the law of the land."⁹²

At its height, in the second week of August, there can be no question but that the strike was widespread and more complete than any previous strike in British history. It seemed indeed as if Benbow's dream had at last come true.⁹³ And now the

⁸⁷ Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 260; Dolléans, *op. cit.*, II, 190.

⁸⁸ Georgt, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38; Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 143; cf. *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 180.

⁹⁰ Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁹¹ Fifty-eight voted for the Charter, 7 against; 19 more cast their votes, by instruction, with the majority.—Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁹³ *The Times*, Aug. 12, 1842, cited by P. W. Slosson, *The Decline of the Chartist Movement*, p. 67, estimated the numbers thrown out of work as between 50,000 and 80,000.

Chartist delegates—not of course, the trades delegates just mentioned—gathered in Manchester to commemorate Peterloo and unveil Hunt's statue. With such startling industrial conditions all around them, with not a wheel turning or a chimney smoking, it is little wonder that they promptly turned their thoughts and debates to the general strike. The declaration of the trades meeting of the previous day roused them to a high pitch of enthusiasm, and they thought the time had come at last to paralyze the government.⁸⁴

The greater part of the delegates believed that the strikers should be encouraged to stay out till the Charter was law. Thomas Cooper, however, expressed the opinion that a peaceful general strike would be impossible, for the armed forces of the government would certainly try to suppress it, and violence would inevitably result. Nonetheless Cooper enthusiastically supported it. Hill, the editor of O'Connor's paper, the *Northern Star*, spoke against the motion, declaring that the people had nothing with which to fight and that they would be mown down by artillery.⁸⁵ Yet Hill's honorable position received but six votes. O'Connor, who expressed himself as having no use for physical force, had not the courage to stand by Hill, but weakly left the decision "to the people," departed to London, and asserted that the strike was a crafty device of the mill owners and of the Anti-Corn-Law League to reduce wages and divert men's minds from the Charter!⁸⁶

Thus basely deserted by the political leaders who had so long promulgated the notion of the "sacred month" or the general strike, the workers slowly were driven back to work. The riots had commenced in July; before the end of August the disorders were virtually at an end.⁸⁷ In the course of September the strike wore itself out, the workers going back with no assurances as to their wages. "Persecuted by the authorities, who made wholesale arrests; oppressed by misery, which was rendered more acute by the strike; the workmen gradually returned to the factories, but even at the end of September the strike

⁸⁴ Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 147; *Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 206.

⁸⁵ *Life of Thomas Cooper*, pp. 208-9.

⁸⁶ Mark Hovell, *op. cit.*, p. 262; Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁸⁷ Spencer Walpole, *op. cit.*, V, 21; *Annual Register*, 1842, pt. II, p. 134.

still possessed a partial character.⁹⁸

The bitter implications of the end of this first real general strike in Britain can be read between the lines of the following most matter-of-fact statement, in the monthly business letter to the *North of England Magazine* for October, 1842: "The turn-outs [strikers] with the exception of the Bolton spinners, have resumed their occupations without any advance of wages, in *some instances, indeed, under a trifling reduction.*"⁹⁹ After the experience of 1842 the organized workers and their leaders in Great Britain did not turn again to the expedient of the "sacred month" or the general strike until the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Mark Howell, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁹⁹ "Manchester Market" letter, dated Sept. 28, 1842, in *North of England Magazine*, Oct., 1842, p. 874. Italics ours.

¹⁰⁰ It is true that there was some talk of a general strike by W. R. Cremer and George Fother, labor leaders, if the vote were not given to working men in the manhood suffrage campaign of 1865-67, but the whole discussion led to no action. Cf. Alfred Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp. 204 f. The concept of a general strike as one of the weapons used by the revolutionists was contained in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (chap. xvii) published in 1891—a romance of the coming of a socialist Utopia.

CHAPTER II

FRANCE, THE LAND OF THEORY

EVOLUTION OF THE GENERAL STRIKE IDEA

THE THEORETICAL, if not doctrinaire, character of the labor movement in France can be understood only in its setting of national history. The successive "breaks" in historic continuity after the Revolution of 1789 have left their mark upon French labor. More than once, after one of the national upheavals, the labor movement has had to build itself up from the ground, and the need for rapid rebuilding has caused *theory* to play a large part in its organization. Nor have revolutionary principles and acts been able to fade from the memories of the leaders, to the degree that was possible in a nation like Great Britain. At the same time, the curse of pure theory has been laid somewhat heavily upon the French workers, with the inevitable outcome of manifold schisms within the movement itself, which have not seldom consumed a large part of the energy of organized labor in useless dispute. Thus it can happen that, in a land given enthusiastically to clear-cut theories of social reorganization and laboring class unity, scarcely a single satisfactory example of the general strike *in practice* can be found up to the time of the Great War. Nevertheless, to those who have not followed the actual history of the general strike method in action, France remains as the typical home of the general strike in theory and practice!

For some time after the fiasco of the "Sacred Month" in Chartist Britain there was no further discussion of a class strike. Even when discussed, the general strike did not materialize. Thus, on December 3, 1851, the publicist Girardin declared that Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of the previous day must be answered, not by any vain use of armed force, but by a universal strike.

Let the merchant cease to sell, the consumer to buy, the laborer to work, the butcher to slaughter, the baker to bake, let everyone cease work, even at the national Press; let Louis Bonaparte find

neither compositor to set up *le Moniteur*, nor a pressman to run it off, nor a bill poster to put it up! Isolation, solitude, emptiness all round this man! . . . With nothing but "folded arms" around him he must fall. Let us organize the universal strike!¹

Although this idea may have been in harmony with the general hostility and discouragement of the people, yet the situation was utterly unfavorable to a successful experiment such as Girardin had suggested, and even his republican sympathizers gave it no further attention. Possibly Auguste Comte's essay² published a short time afterwards, contains a reflection of Girardin's thought when it declares that the proletariat possesses the extreme weapon of suspension of labor "against serious and prolonged violations of the sociocratic order." Still later Girardin returned to his concept of a universal strike, by which means he hoped to wring from the government a large scheme of workers' insurance against want and accident, but again he received no support.³

A wider circle than the Socialists saw in the general strike the only effective weapon against the threatening war between France and Germany, but again the idea ended in words.⁴ The French internationalists were responsible for rousing interest in the formation of the International Association of Workingmen (the "First International") which, from its very inception, advocated the general strike. It is not certain, however, whether this attitude of the International was due to the ideas of Girardin, or went back further to the theories of Benbow and the Chartists, or was merely the natural outgrowth of certain tendencies in the labor movement of the time.⁵ After the split between the followers of Marx and those of the anarchist Bakunin, with the subsequent dissolution of the First International, the idea of the general strike vanished from the French and European labor movements. Nor did it return until the fatal Haymarket Riots, in Chicago in 1886, arising out of an agitation for

¹ Albert Thomas, *Le Second Empire* (Tome X of *Histoire Socialiste* edited by Jean Jaurès), p. 12.

² "Système de politique positive" quoted by Georges Weil in *Histoire du mouvement social en France*, p. 23.

³ Geogr. *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴ André Saulière, *La grève générale de Robert Owen à la doctrine syndicaliste*, p. 32.

⁵ Geogr. *op. cit.*, p. 39.

a general strike in favor of an eight-hour day, roused keen interest in Europe and especially in France.⁵

With this interest in the American radical movement there returned to Belgian and French labor circles an enthusiasm for the general strike. Whereas in Belgium the agitation for the general strike among the Walloons had as its aim reformist gains, especially universal suffrage, in France the Socialist journals began to speak of a general strike for the purpose of expropriating the capitalists. The first of the new propagandists of the general strike in France was one Tortelier, a carpenter. "Short of stature, bull-necked, with a hoarse voice, rough gestures and rougher clothing, while not a bad fellow, he had a somewhat terrifying appearance. When one saw this fierce enthusiast one suddenly thought of the revolutionists who paraded, with decapitated heads on the points of their pikes, as the bodyguard of the 'divine Marat,' and executed the summary sentences at prison doors in September, 1792." Having talked about his idea at much length in street meetings, Tortelier had gone to the London Congress of 1888 to propose the general strike as a revolutionary labor weapon. In London, however, this illiterate militant received but slight attention. He had far better success among the Parisian workers, and the revolutionary Socialist group known as the Allemanists became infatuated with the general strike idea—the more so because that concept greatly displeased the intellectuals of the Guesdist Labor party.⁷

The history of modern trade unionism in France really begins with the law of 1884, promulgated by the Waldeck-Rousseau Ministry for the purpose of defining the legal position of workers' organizations. This law gave the individual *syndicat*,⁸

⁵ A bomb was thrown at the police in revenge for the deaths of several laborers. This outrage led to the arrest of eight Anarchists, all of whom were found guilty, although no trace of the man who actually threw the bomb was ever discovered. Seven were sentenced to death and one to the penitentiary. Four of the seven were hanged. Such men as William D. Howells, Robert Ingersoll, and Samuel Gompers vainly protested against the execution of men merely on the plea that their words had caused an unknown person to commit murder; the public lust for vengeance conquered, and European labor circles were deeply stirred with the "judicial murder." Cf. Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, II, 232-34.

⁷ Terrail ("Mermel"), *Les syndicaliens contre le socialisme*, pp. 124-26. Cf. André Saulière, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁸ A *syndicat* was a local trade union.

a corporate personality before the law, permitted the organization of strikes, but left threats or violence in strikes still criminal offences. A National Federation of *Syndicats* was promptly formed by the revolutionary syndicalists, but the Federation was immediately captured by the political Labor party of Jules Guesde, the French Marxist. As the Labor party congresses met each year immediately before those of the Federation of *Syndicats*, and as the majority of the delegates to the one congress sat also in the second, it was a simple matter for the political collectivists of the Labor party to dictate the policy of the *syndicats*.⁹

Jules Guesde was an adherent of the belief that at some opportune moment the social revolution would occur by the joint action of the army and the proletariat. Many of the workers desired to know why such a defection of the army should be held inevitable. What would be the occasion for this defection? If war, then the workers would suffer even more than the middle class; if defeat threatened their nation, both classes would be buried in the same ruins; if victory were the outcome, the requisite social catastrophe would be so far postponed that the proletariat would no longer be interested in it. If war were *not* the signal for the social revolution and the defection of the army, would famine or economic depression be any more favorable? The modern world-market rendered famine in a western nation almost impossible, and an economic depression seldom affected every trade at the same moment. To these questions, which the Guesdists failed to satisfy, the syndicalists offered the solution of the general strike. The general strike would cause the catastrophe that would end capitalism, would, indeed, be the catastrophe. Moreover, this catastrophe, unlike that of the socialists' fatalistic theory, would occur whenever the workers were ready, and desired it.¹⁰

With such alluring arguments did Tortelier and his fellow enthusiasts persuade the willing ranks of the French *syndicats*, to such good purpose that, at the Bordeaux-Bouscat¹¹ congress of the National Federation of *Syndicats*, in 1888, the principle

⁹ J. A. Estey, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁰ Terrail ("Mermet"), *op. cit.*, pp. 120-22.

¹¹ When the Bordeaux police refused permission to meet in that city the Mayor of Bouscat invited the congress to his town.

of the general strike was proposed and adopted with enthusiasm. To the disgust of the Guesdists the Federation declared:

Whereas the monopoly of capital and the means of production in the hands of the employers, gives to them a power which diminishes in proportion as a partial strike puts them in the hands of the workers; and as capital is useless unless put into action by labor,

Therefore, in refusing to work, the workers, at one blow, destroy their masters' power.

Whereas the partial strike is but a means of agitation and organization,

Therefore Congress declares that the general strike alone, that is the complete stoppage of all work, or the Social Revolution, can incite the workers to gain their freedom.

This vote, passed by a purely trade union body, was the first time since the demise of the First International that a labor congress had affirmed its belief in the general strike. The vote, moreover, was an evident sign of *syndical* opposition to the methods of Parliamentary politics typified in the Guesdist Labor party. This opposition between the advocates of "direct" economic action and those who favored the political method was shown in the congress of the Guesdist Labor party at Lille in 1890, when the general strike was rejected as "demanding for its achievement a Socialist state of mind and a labor organization to which the proletariat had not attained."¹² This Guesdist congress did go so far as to support a general strike of miners of all nations to win the eight-hour day, as the only form of a general strike that would not prove illusory or premature. The fourth congress of the National Federation of *Syndicats*, meeting shortly afterwards, at Calais, also supported the general strike of miners.¹³

Two years later, in the congress of the Federation at Marseilles in 1892, a further vote in favor of the general strike was carried, in the face of opposition from Jules Guesde himself, as a result of its enthusiastic advocacy by one Aristide Briand, still a relatively unknown young man. In the meantime the Allemanists (followers of Allemane, and themselves strictly revolutionary Socialists) had at their own party congresses in

¹² Etienne Buisson, *La prime générale*, pp. 16-18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

1891 and 1892 adopted the general strike as the principal and final aim of trade union and political activity. The Blanquist group (communists) had admitted the general strike as one of the available revolutionary methods, thus leaving the Guesdist party in complete isolation as opponents of the general strike.¹⁴

Up to this time the current conception of the general strike, even among the most ardent advocates, was a peaceful cessation of work, a legal strike spreading to all industries, which would allow the workers to accomplish an easy and legal revolution. A complete cessation of work, it was argued, would paralyze the life of the country, and compel the government to capitulate after a strike of a few days' duration. At first the belief was that such a general strike would be decreed ahead of its actual outbreak, but slowly that concept changed to a strike that would be spontaneous and without any warning. The general strike was clearly advocated as a method far superior to that of political, parliamentary reform. The Guesdists bitterly criticized the whole argument. The workers would starve long before the capitalists would feel the pangs of hunger. A peaceful general strike was an impossibility; either the workers would lose their composure or the authorities would provoke collisions. A successful general strike presupposed such complete organization of the workers as would make the general strike itself unnecessary. Only on the political field were the workers equal, if not superior, to the capitalists, for on the political field numbers counted. In short the "general strike was general nonsense."¹⁵

In spite of all the popular labor support for the general strike idea, it was evident that the concept had not been thought out at all clearly. This fact was recognized at the combined congress, at Paris in 1893, of the National Federation of *Syndicats* and the Federation of *Bourses du Travail*¹⁶ when a

¹⁴ Louis Levine, *The Labor Movement in France*, p. 62; cf. Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁵ G. Deville, *Principes Socialistes*, pp. 191-201, cited by Louis Levine, *The Labor Movement in France*, p. 64.

¹⁶ The first *Bourse du Travail* was founded in Paris in 1887 to be an employment bureau, a workman's club and a center of union organization. Many other cities followed suit. The "direct actionists" seized upon these new institutions as unique centers for their agitation, and in 1892 a Federation of *Bourses du Travail* was founded with the aid of the belligerent,

committee was established to study and advocate the general strike.¹⁷ In 1894 Briand again supported the general strike at a second combined congress at Nantes, suggesting that in six years there was to be a great Exposition at Paris. Four months before it opened, a threat of a general strike would force the Government to grant many reforms, such as the eight-hour day and one day's rest in seven. Lavigne opposed Briand, showing that the recent general strike in Belgium for universal suffrage had not been a class strike, but that the workers had been assisted by political parties, by the smaller trades folk, and by the newspapers. Despite this warning the congress voted for the general strike, as opposed to the parliamentary method, by 65 votes to 37. The Guesdists being in a minority, abandoned the congress, and in a year or two the National Federation of *Syndicats* ceased to hold any more congresses, its strength now passing to the Federation of *Bourses du Travail*, which had always upheld the use of the general strike weapon.¹⁸

From this Congress of Nantes in 1894 really dates the formal separation of the politicians and the *syndicats*. Under the guidance of the Anarchist, Fernand Pelloutier, the Federation of *Bourses du Travail* rapidly developed, determined to avoid the disastrous divisions that were wrecking the political Socialist movement in France, and confining its efforts to the organization of the workers on the economic field and to that form of "direct action" which looks upon the general strike as its most important weapon. What was left of the older Federation of *Syndicats* finally cast aside any remaining dependence upon political action and formed the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, commonly known as the C. G. T., or as Americans would name it, the General Federation of Labor. Although its founders had no intention of making it a rival of the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail*, but on the contrary hoped it would be inclusive enough to embrace the separate *syndicats*, the local groups of *syndicats* and *Bourses du Travail*, the federations

revolutionary, Socialist Allemanists. The temporary combine of the two Federations resulted from the closing of the Paris *Bourse du Travail* by force of arms. This governmental act accomplished more for labor unity than all the propaganda of twenty years! Cf. Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

¹⁷ Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Terrail ("Mermet"), *op. cit.*, p. 129.

of craft and industry, and even the Federation of *Bourses du Travail* itself, yet personal animosities and differences of theory between the leaders of the two great Federations bid fair to make the syndical movement permanently two-headed. The absurdity of this position can be seen when it is remembered that both organizations alike, without qualification, supported the method of the general strike rather than that of the political, parliamentary reformist method.¹⁹

Not until 1903 did a revised "C. G. T." represent in a single body the organized labor of France, with a revolutionary program, controlled by men who preached class war, the general strike, and anti-militarism as the chief forms of syndicalist activity. At last revolutionary Socialists like Griffuelhes, the secretary of the new C. G. T., and Anarchists like Émile Pouget, editor of the C. G. T. organ, *La Voix du Peuple*, cooperated to keep organized labor out of the hands of the much hated "reformist" politicians.²⁰

By this time the earlier and rather child-like idea of the general strike put forward by the Anarchist Tortelier had taken on a different aspect. The notion that one fine morning the workers would walk out into the country and watch with amusement the helpless rage of the powerless exploiters, was seen to be an idyll that would not stand criticism. The bourgeois would have ample resources for such an eventuality, whereas the starved workers would once more be forced back into the factories under harder conditions than heretofore.²¹ At the Congress of the C. G. T. at Tours in 1896, Guérard, delegate of the railroad workers, urged that, as partial strikes had failed through the intimidation of the workers by employers and government, recourse should be had to the general strike. The general strike would last a short while, and its repression would be impossible, he held, for the governmental troops would be scattered all along the railroads, protecting the permanent way from damage, and would not be available for use at the factory doors.

"The general strike," Guérard added, "cannot be decreed beforehand; it will burst forth suddenly; a strike of the railroad

¹⁹ Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ Terrail ("Mémoriel"), *op. cit.*, pp. 136-37.

men, for instance, will be the signal for the general strike. . . . those who continue to work on that day will be urged, or forced, to quit. *The general strike will be the Revolution, peaceful or not.*"²² The peaceful character of the general strike had thus become incidental, dependent, not upon the workers, but upon the action of the government and the other classes.

In 1898 the *Syndicat* of the Railroadmen had a dispute with the railroad companies, and a railroad strike was imminent. The Secretary of the C. G. T. sent out a circular to all French syndical organizations calling attention to the "formidable consequences for capitalism" which such a strike might have, were it combined with a strike of all trades. Demands such as the eight-hour day, or old age pensions, "could be realized in a few days if the working class, conscious of its power, and of its rights, was willing to act energetically." The Commission on the general strike also took up the question, asking all *syndicats* if they were ready for an immediate general strike, in case the railroadmen declared a strike. In its report to the Congress of Rennes in 1898 this commission complained that the *syndicats* voted in the successive congresses in favor of the general strike, but changed their opinions or their disposition when the hour for action arrived. "It was disastrous to make such a discovery," declared the irritated commission, "when it was expected that, by the strike of our comrades of the railroads, many other trades would be compelled by the force of events to quit work, and that this would have been the starting point of the general strike, and possibly of that economic revolution which alone can solve the great problems that confront the whole world."²³

At the Congress of Paris in 1900 many *syndicats* through their delegates thought the time ripe to treat the question of the general strike practically. According to these delegates it was not necessary to win over a majority of the organized workers, nor to accumulate a large sum of money, in order to wage a successful general strike. A daring and conscious revo-

²² Sellhaç, *Les congrès ouvrier en France*, p. 331, cited by Robert Hunter, *Violence and the Labor Movement*, pp. 294-335.

²³ Louis Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 94. The *Syndicat* of Railroadmen decided upon a strike, but the strike was intercepted by the Government and the strike never occurred.

lutionary minority would carry along the majority of the workers and appropriate the means of production for society as a whole. "The less money the better," they held, "everyone would take what he needed wherever he found it and the result would be the completest possible emancipation." Only a minority still looked upon the general strike as a peaceful folding of arms; the majority rejected that view as childish, and saw clearly the inevitable conflict to which the general strike must lead.²⁴ The united and spontaneous action of the workers in a peaceful cessation of work, pictured by Tortelier, had been left far behind in this typical, modern syndicalist viewpoint.

This natural anxiety, to put the past years of theory into practice, was seen in the report of the Commission on the general strike made to the congress of the C. G. T. at Lyons, in the following year, when a miners' strike was under discussion. "The idea of the general strike is sufficiently understood today," the commission reported, "in repeatedly putting off the date of its coming, we risk discrediting it forever by enervating the revolutionary energies. What better occasion to realize it! The miners will give the signal on the first of November." The miners' delegate asserted the readiness of his fellows to postpone their strike for some months, if, by so doing, the whole syndical movement would strike with them and bring about the social revolution. Congress adopted a resolution containing the following paragraph:

Congress, in view of the situation, declares that the movement which may take place in favor of the miners, the importance or character of which nobody can foresee and which may go to the point of a general emancipation, will be in any case a movement of solidarity which will not impair in the least the revolutionary principle of the general strike of all workmen.

A significant, but vain protest against the general strike was raised by the delegate from the federation of printers' *syndicats* (*la Fédération du Livre*), who showed that the general strike would be folly, inasmuch as there were but 16 per cent of the French workers in the *syndicats*.²⁵

How utterly empty of value was the majority vote of the C. G. T. congress, in favor of a general strike to support the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

miners, can be seen from the events that followed. The federal committee of miners took a referendum of the 125,000 men on their list; 70,000 abstained from voting; but 84,000 out of the 80,000 votes cast favored a "generalized" mine strike on November 1, 1901, if by that time the Government had not granted the miners' demands.²⁵ November 1 arrived, the Government had not yielded, but no strike took place, either among the miners or among the *syndicats* who had so fervently voted their support that same year. The committee appointed to take charge of the affair, seven in number, despite the referendum, could come to no decision, for the committee was rent in two by the old divisions of parliamentary versus direct action, and the members wasted their efforts by defending their own viewpoint in the public press. This resultant campaign of personalities, where unity should have been practised, caused scandal to the whole labor movement. Ultimately the decision was referred to a special congress in March, 1902. Congress itself, seeing that many of the *syndicats* were unprepared for the struggle, were, in fact, in many cases, scarcely organized, concluded that it would be better to postpone action until the regular annual congress of the C. G. T. in October.²⁷

This congress finally proclaimed a general strike for October 9, 1902, the French Government still having the mine problem under consideration.²⁸ The strike was a failure, even among the miners. The majority of the miners in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais districts were strong believers in the political method, had little sympathy with the revolutionaries, and were ready from the first to make terms with their employers. Meanwhile the C. G. T., in spite of the enthusiasm of its organ, *Le Voleur du Peuple*, for the mine strike, gave no aid of any kind to the miners, even when the miners called upon it for help. The excuse for this refusal was the plea that the strike had then ceased to be "generalized" and had become a series of local conflicts. Thus at the first attempt to put high sounding theories into practice the French syndicalist movement had shown a lack of solidarity that was positively pathetic.

²⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., X, 867. As shown elsewhere the strike of a whole trade was often mis-called a general strike, when it should properly be termed a "generalized" strike of one particular trade or industry.

²⁶ Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

It may be contended that such an example of failure to carry out a long debated theory is not sufficient proof of the inadequacy of the revolutionary leadership of the C. G. T., and such a contention would be just, were this the only sample of failure to materialize theory. As it happened, however, there were several other instances in the same decade, which will be mentioned before a summary of the conflicting theories is offered.

From January 1, 1903, when the C. G. T. and the Federation of *Bourses du Travail* finally united for common action, there was an incessant conflict between the revolutionary and the reformist groups in the French labor movement to control the C. G. T. As a rule the revolutionaries carried off the victory, especially after the congress of Bourges in 1904, when the principle of "direct action" as against that of Parliamentary representation, was voted by 825 to 869. After that dramatic vote Griffuelhes, the secretary of the C. G. T., rejoiced that "henceforth Anarchists and Socialists, free from all governmental influence, all political authority, will fight side by side, determined to pursue their activity in that field of Revolutionary Syndicalism which is common to them both."²⁹

An instance of this "direct action" was at once forthcoming in the attempt to run a successful general strike in the city of Marseilles in the autumn of 1904. Following a long dispute between the shipping companies and their employees, and a lock-out of the harbor workmen, the workers in Marseilles retaliated by proclaiming a general strike of all kinds of labor, from flour-mill workers to municipal street-cleaning employees, and a widespread boycott of all Marseilles shipping in other French, Spanish, and Italian ports. Though public opinion was at first on the side of the workers, the resultant stoppage of the harbor trade and of industry, with the consequent rise in prices, finally lost the strikers this support and ended in their defeat.³⁰

A far more ambitious effort, and one directly sponsored by the C. G. T., was the long planned general strike of May 1, 1906. At the congress of Bourges in 1904, it had been decided that an eight-hour day was indispensable to the well-being of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰ *Georgy, op. cit.*, pp. 78-80. Cf. André E. Sayous, *Les grèves de Marseille en 1904*.

the workers. As the revolutionary leaders of the C. G. T. had no use for the parliamentary method, an energetic campaign was started among the workers to have work cease on May 1, 1906, with the idea of returning to work only when the eight-hour principle had been recognized by the employing classes. This publicity campaign certainly had considerable success, in that it did much to convince the labor ranks and the general public that the advantages of the eight-hour day were at hand if the organized workers made the required effort to obtain it.

The propertied classes were in something of a panic on the eve of May 1, in many cases actually fearing a social revolution. Where possible, capital was converted into movable form, provisions were stored away as if for a siege, and the peasants finally refused to bring their produce in to the Paris markets, lest they be plundered. The dreaded first of May arrived, the streets were deserted, but no violence was committed, and as the employers resolutely refused to make any concessions on the working hours, the majority of the workers returned to work with scarce a protest. The larger labor federations of the railroadmen, the textile workers, and the miners made no strike move whatsoever. The ninety-three organizations that actually stayed on strike were mostly small and revolutionary bodies. Not even these more courageous groups gained their aim, for nowhere was the eight-hour day granted. Though some wage gains were made, the net result was a loss to the unions concerned of over five million francs.

To some of the organizations the strike was positively disastrous. The Federation of Lithographers, for instance, which had deserted a long tradition of conservative action at the pleading of a militant secretary, almost succumbed to the crisis. There can be no question that in spite of all the energy of the C. G. T. revolutionary leadership, the majority of the organized workers of France were hostile to the general strike method, and the ubiquitous and noisy minority was unable to overcome their passive resistance.³¹ To that minority the evident defeat taught no lesson. In due conformity with the syndicalist theory, that the success or failure of a strike is unimportant beside the gesture of solidarity that it implies, Émile Pouget, editor

³¹ Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-52.

of the C. G. T. organ, *La Voix du Peuple*, declared that the action had justified itself, and that there was no need to seek results.⁵²

Two more instances must suffice. In the spring of 1909 the postal workers had carried on a losing battle with the Government. An effort was made to draw in many other unions. At the national congress of French miners, Niel, then secretary of the C. G. T., warned the militant groups that the "masses were not yet ready for a general strike," a view that seemed to find support among the miners themselves. On May 18, however, the C. G. T. seems to have ignored its secretary's warning, for the secretary of the Post Office Mechanics' union announced that some 86 unions, including the electricians, were ready to strike in their support. Once again the Government defeated the C. G. T., dismissed 600 recalcitrant postal employees, and the fiasco that followed caused the C. G. T. to call off the "general" strike on May 21.⁵³

Finally, in 1910, the French railroadmen attempted a "generalized" strike of their trade, but were foiled by the one-time arch-enthusiast for the general strike, Aristide Briand, now head of the French Government, who declared a railroad strike illegal under an old act of 1845, arrested the strike committee, called out the troops, and actually mobilized the striking railroadmen in their position as military reservists.⁵⁴ Briand, who, as general strike advocate before the congress of the French Socialist party of December, 1899, had asserted that the bourgeois "would think twice before putting rifles and ammunition in the hands of the strikers,"⁵⁵ now dared to use those very methods against his former comrades and succeeded in suppressing the strike. The irony of this episode ended, for the time, the efforts of the revolutionary syndicalists to make of their general strike doctrine anything more than a theory. Little wonder that Sorel, for many years a professional philosopher of French syndicalism, confessed himself disappointed in the effectiveness of the "mythical" general strike, and turned his attention to other topics.⁵⁶

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 86. ⁵³ Sir Arthur Clay, *Syndicalism and Labour*, pp. 28-30.

⁵⁴ See Laddler, *A History of Socialist Thought*, p. 384.

⁵⁵ Briand, *La grève générale et la révolution*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-1. At the 12th annual congress of the C.G.T. held

THE CONFLICT OF THEORY

If the French labor movement has provided no startling example of a wide general strike of vital industries, such as occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century in so many European nations, it has offered in the clearest and most violent form a fierce conflict of theories on the uses, character, and methods of the general strike. Supporters of "reformism" and of "revolution" have fought bitterly for nearly three decades over the relative superiority of parliamentary representation on the political field and the method of "direct action" on the economic plane. The extremists have seen no possible good or utility in the method of their opponents. Groups such as the followers of Guesde on the one side,⁸⁷ and the more anarchistic members of the *Bourses du Travail* and the C. G. T. on the other, have wasted untold effort in criticizing the arguments of the opposite camp.

It would be unnecessary repetition to recount the personal views, or shades of difference, of all the leaders of French Socialism and Syndicalism. Some care has been taken in the preceding section of this chapter to show the attitude of the ranks, as embodied in the various congressional resolutions, lest the common error be made of treating French general strike theory as solely the product of a few leaders. In what follows, therefore, it must not be thought that, by the selection of a few outstanding men on either side of the dispute, it is implied that these leaders were

at Havre in September, 1912, the decision of the Amiens congress of 1906 was reaffirmed, *viz.*, to remain outside of any political school. The 1912 congress, moreover, declared that the complete emancipation of the workers could be realized only by the overthrow of capitalism, with the general strike as the means of action, and the *syndicat* as the future production group in the reorganized society.—Spargo, *Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism*, Appendix VI, pp. 231-32.

⁸⁷ In the debate at the congress of the French Socialist Party at Lille in 1904, Jules Guesde had declared: "The concept of the general strike and Socialism are incompatible . . . Our duty is to liberate the trade union workers from the nebulous notion of the general strike. A resolution in favor of the general strike would not augment our party's influence on the masses; it would destroy it, for it would be a condemnation of political action . . . Where the proletariat is deprived of political rights and cannot even agitate politically, the general strike may well serve as a means of pressure . . . A revolution may be made by a minority, but not a general strike." See Lagardelle, *Le grève générale et le Socialisme*, pp. 63-64.

the *creators* of French general strike theory. They were rather the spokesmen of views held by large numbers of the French working class, though their form of expression was probably more logical in its argument and more philosophical in its tone than would have been found common among the ranks.

Perhaps the most typical of the political Socialists was the late Jean Jaurès, assassinated on the very eve of the war of 1914, a man who had no hesitation in believing that the time would come when Socialists must take part in the actual responsibility of running the political machine of their nation. An upholder of his comrades Millerand, Briand, and Viviani in their acceptance of high political office, Jaurès himself never served in a French Cabinet nor accepted any of the spoils of political office. A great lover of liberty, a champion of Dreyfus, an opponent of international war, he would not follow the extremists of his side in denouncing the "direct action" group as the bourgeoisie had previously denounced the political Socialists. His sympathy for the newer syndicalist movement was the more remarkable because his own personal bias was most strongly towards an orderly, evolutionary, method of progress. Jaurès hated mere formulae when they threatened to separate him from any movement that sprang from the people, even if those formulae belonged to his own party.⁵⁵

To Jaurès a *general strike* implied the cessation of work by the majority of the workers in all the "key" industries of a nation, as, for example, the railroadmen, miners, dockers, textile workers, and building workers. He did not apply the term to a "generalized" strike in a single industry such as the railroads or coal mines. At the same time he held "it would be puerile to say that there could not be a general strike unless all wage-earners, in all departments of production, quit work simultaneously." Nor was any general strike "absolutely and unconditionally efficacious." The conditions under which it took place, the methods it employed and the ends it sought, all alike determined whether a general strike would be chimerical or practical.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Margaret Pesse, *Jean Jaurès*, pp. 14-15, 105-7.

⁵⁶ Jean Jaurès, in Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, pp. 97-99. Cf. Jaurès, *Studies in Socialism* (translated by M. Minturn), pp. 104-6.

Three conditions were essential for a successful general strike. The working class must be deeply and truly convinced of the importance of the object for which it was declared; a large section of public opinion must be prepared to recognize the legitimacy of that object; and the strike itself must not seem like a disguise for violence, but must be the exercise of the legal right to strike, more systematic, vaster in scope, and with a more marked class character.⁴⁰ The workers were willing to fight for large and quite definite aims, for positive and immediately practicable reforms, such as the eight-hour day, or old age pensions, and under such conditions, would obey the signal for a general strike given by the labor organizations. Such unanimity on the part of the working class, however, would be insufficient, for a general strike inevitably implies disorder in economic relationships, which would endanger many interests. Herein, Jaurès believed, lay the need for support from a large section of the public, especially of those workers who would not actively take part in the strike and would be hostile to whatever group was responsible for any prolongation of the struggle. Such hostility would not be turned against the capitalist class unless the justice of the strikers' claims, and the possibility of their immediate satisfaction had been clearly demonstrated by serious propaganda.⁴¹

To the easy belief of the revolutionary syndicalists, that a stoppage of the most important trades would be sufficient to bring about the Social Revolution and the consequent fall of the capitalist system, because the workers would be compelled to resort to revolutionary violence in order not to face starvation, Jaurès made answer that such a concept was utterly false. "A tactical movement," he argued, "is especially dangerous when it cannot fail *a single time* without involving an immense disaster for the whole working class." A revolutionary general strike that *failed* would leave capital in power, "armed with implacable fury" and "the proletariat would be disarmed, crushed and fettered for an indefinite period."⁴² Unless the working class were clearly warned in advance that the general strike was for the Social Revolution, any attempt of the militant minority

⁴⁰ Jaurès, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴¹ Jean Jaurès, *Studies in Socialism*, pp. 109-10.

⁴² Jaurès, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-2.

to steer a general strike, for definite and immediate reforms, into the road to revolution, could but lead to failure. Such an effort to withhold the real purpose of the general strike from the workers themselves Jaurès regarded as a vicious "trick to entrap the workers."

Even if the general strike should become a revolutionary strike it was by no means certain that it would overthrow capitalism. The resistance of the middle class, physically fit as that class would be from its long habit of sport and gymnastic training, would be exerted to the utmost, whereas the energies of the working class would be scattered in the effort to circumvent any "blackleg" labor, or in the attempt to seize the various factories, mines, and workshops. Mere occupation of the nation's industrial plants by the workers would not be enough, unless the whole economic machine of society were also controlled. Destruction would be the sole resource left to the workers in such an event—and such a weapon would be as deadly for labor as for capital.⁴⁸ In this warning Jaurès was justified, with remarkable completeness, by the post-war efforts of the Italian workers to seize the great factories, an effort that ultimately ended in the worst Fascist reaction.

In spite of Jaurès' unhesitating opposition to any syndicalist idea of the general strike, he was not prepared to declare that weapon completely useless. The general strike could hasten social evolution, and be a terrible warning to the reactionary elements of society, as Mirabeau, "the first prophet of the general strike," had once suggested with regard to the Third Estate, which at that time still included the bourgeois as well as the working class. "Take care," Mirabeau had warned the privileged classes of his day, "do not irritate this people, which produces everything, and which, to make itself formidable, has only to become motionless."⁴⁹ So, to Jaurès, the general strike was a "revolutionary index." If the middle class tried to withdraw the liberties won by the working class, then the violent general strike would certainly be the form that a revolt of labor would take, a final and desperate recourse, aimed rather to injure their enemy than to save themselves.

⁴⁸ Jaurès, *Studies in Socialism*, pp. 114-25.

⁴⁹ Jaurès, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

As Jaurès represents the conservative, political Socialist attitude toward the general strike, so, on the side of revolutionary syndicalism one finds such leaders as Victor Griffuelhes, secretary of the C. G. T. from 1901 to 1908 and one-time member of the Allemanist group; Émile Pouget, assistant secretary of the C. G. T., editor of *La Voix du Peuple* from 1900 to 1908, and himself originally an Anarchist; Lagardelle, the founder of *Le Mouvement Socialiste* in 1899, a journal that became revolutionary syndicalist in character after 1904; and, rather removed from active participation in any of the labor organizations, the "syndicalist philosopher," Georges Sorel.⁴⁵ To Griffuelhes, secretary of the C. G. T. during its campaign for the eight-hour day, already described, the general strike was equivalent with the revolution itself, otherwise "it would be simply a new form of deception." Despite his experience of the 1906 fiasco, Griffuelhes could still believe that as a revolutionary weapon the general strike was growing more and more in favor among the workers. In labor circles, he believed, the general strike in its last expression would not be the simple stoppage of work, but would include the taking possession of social riches for the benefit of all—a violent or peaceful process according to the resistance it had to encounter.⁴⁶

Hubert Lagardelle, to whose efforts are due the collection of opinions on the general strike from many Socialist leaders of all schools,⁴⁷ contended that the general strike was "at once the simplest and the most perfect method of direct action which

⁴⁵ It may be asked why Aristide Briand has not been listed on either side among the leaders of French labor, in the discussions on the general strike. Although one of the earliest of the strong advocates of this "peculiarly working class" weapon, having carried the day for the general strike resolution at the congress of Marseilles in 1892, and again at Paris in 1893, Briand's most famous speech in favor of the general strike delivered before the general congress of the Socialist Party in December, 1899, contained little distinctive theory that could not be found, in clearer and more developed form, in the utterances of the leaders considered in the text of this chapter. The only original remark, that "the bourgeois would think twice before putting rifles and bullets into the hands of the strikers" Briand himself belied, when Prime Minister, by mobilizing the railroadmen who had gone on strike in 1910. See stenographic report of his speech *La grève générale et la révolution*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Victor Griffuelhes, *La grève générale*, pt. II of *L'Action Syndicaliste*, pp. 28-33; cf. *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Jan. 1, 1908.

⁴⁷ *La grève générale et le Socialisme; enquête internationale*, first published serially in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, June-Sept., 1904.

the proletariat possessed.⁵⁷ To revolutionary Socialists, among whose ranks Lagardelle placed himself, the essence of Socialism was contained in the class struggle. The general strike had to be regarded in the light of this "yard-stick of Socialism" (the class struggle), for Socialism could be won only in the degree to which the proletariat was able to realize this fact. Recourse to the general strike, whether for a limited gain or for the final revolt, was the best means of education and organization that the proletariat had discovered.⁵⁸ To Lagardelle the general strike appeared as the sovereign act of a working class that had attained full maturity, overthrowing bourgeois ideas and bourgeois institutions—including that of Parliamentary representation—in order to substitute new ones. It was, in fact, the Social Revolution, accomplished by the proletariat, which in a movement of supreme revolt would take possession of the means of production and the machinery of the State.⁵⁹

With this same viewpoint the Commission of the C. G. T. on the general strike met Jaurès' attack upon the revolutionary concept of the general strike with a counter-attack in a pamphlet contrasting the reformist and the revolutionary general strikes.⁶⁰ "We are as convinced as Jaurès," they wrote, "that a general strike which is limited to the suspension of social life would be a grave deception on the working class." The workers must not restrict themselves to the strike of "folded arms," but must immediately busy themselves with the task of putting at the community's disposal the social stock of tools. Jaurès only visualizes the revolutionary general strike on its negative side, with the ports stopped, the railroads destroyed, the capital and the large cities lacking supplies, and a few peculiarly working class districts in complete control of the workers. In those same districts where the revolution had been successful the *syndicats* would be controlling production in each industry. To the *Bourses du Travail*, now become the nerve centers of the new social organization, would come the demand for products, which would be transmitted to the groups of *syndicats* concerned. The Transport Federation would be responsible for the circulation of these products. The extra labor

⁵⁷ Hubert Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁵⁹ *Grève générale réformatrice et grève générale révolutionnaire*, reprinted in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*

of the parasitic workers of the old régime would make possible a diminution of hours with an increase of products. The rural districts would lose their suspicion of the towns when they found an abundant exchange of manufactured goods for a portion only of their abundant farm products.⁵¹

Over against Jaurès' fear that the capitalists and the State would be conserving their armed forces to recapture the abandoned regions little by little, the Commission set the hope of the army being affected by their anti-militaristic campaign; that, in fact, the soldiery would desert. The dispersion of the revolutionary centers which Jaurès felt was a weakness, would, on the contrary, render the general strike invincible. The whole of France would be the field of battle. Even if armed, the capitalistic middle class would be powerless before such dispersion of the revolution, and yet more so if the army should desert. Furthermore, even a political social revolution, such as Jaurès pictured, by a majority electoral vote for Socialism, would not be accomplished without force, for the middle class would not yield their privileges without a fight.⁵² Since the present arrangement of modern cities makes the use of armed force on the part of the government, for purposes of repression, exceedingly easy, any return to the old, bloody, method of the barricades would be folly. Street fighting, the Commission held, was a method belonging to the past. "For the future, the general strike appears to be the one and only means, at the disposition of the working class, of rising out of wage-slavery, and of overthrowing the capitalist and governmental order of society."⁵³

A similar view, executed in the dramatic form of an utopian novel,⁵⁴ was held by Émile Pouget. In this case the Anarchistic background of the writer is only too evident—and, all protests notwithstanding, the revolutionary syndicalist is the direct intellectual heir of the anarchist movement of Bakunin's days.⁵⁵ In a vivid picture of the true syndicalist ideal of a revolutionary general strike, supposed to have occurred in Paris and the provinces sometime in the twentieth century, there is no hesi-

⁵¹ C.G.T. Commission on the General Strike, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 f.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁴ Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, *Syndicalism and the Coöperative Commonwealth* (translation of *Comment nous ferons la révolution*, by C. and F. Charles.)

⁵⁵ Louis Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 163 f.

tancy in describing, with approval, the free use of force by a minority of the workers to close factories and bring out recalcitrant workers;⁵⁶ the use of carefully planned sabotage in the electric light plants, in the gasworks, on the locomotives and the railroad permanent way;⁵⁷ the discrimination by the municipal sanitary services between laboring and middle class districts;⁵⁸ raids by the unemployed on provision stores, and the subsequent official requisitioning of supplies by the trade unions themselves;⁵⁹ the use of incendiarism in the soldiers' barracks and the revolt of the army to the side of the workers.⁶⁰

The syndicalist contempt for political representation in the "bourgeois Parliament" is shown by the march of the victorious mob upon the *Palais Bourbon* (the legislative Houses) and the resolute refusal of the strikers to allow any of the left wing (Socialist) deputies to form a revolutionary Parliamentary government.⁶¹ According to Pouget and his co-author, the general strike ended in the resumption of work all over the nation, under the direction of the *syndicats*, freed at last from any bourgeois or capitalistic control, with the precise details of which this chapter is not concerned.

Wherever revolutionary syndicalism and the general strike are discussed, one name in particular is likely to be mentioned as an authority, that of Georges Sorel,⁶² the syndicalist philosopher who was always tilting against the ignorant folly of the "reformist intellectuals." The clear expectations of practical syndicalists, such as Pouget and Griffuelhes, as to the precise manner in which the great, final, general strike will revolutionize society, are not found in Sorel's curiously disjointed theorizing. To Sorel the general strike had become a strangely abstract concept. To him the *idea* of the general strike was everything, the practical expression of it, the manner of its development, even the possibility of its ever being successfully carried out, were very secondary and unimportant matters. "Men," declared Sorel, "who are participating in a great social movement, always

⁵⁶ Pataud and Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 22 f., 44, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 26, 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-84.

⁶² Georges Sorel, born at Cherbourg in 1847, retired at the age of forty-five from his profession as engineer of public works. In the nineties he was a keen student of Marx and subsequently deeply interested in the syndicalist movement. Cf. A. D. Lewis, *Syndicalism and the General Strike*, pp. 37-38.

picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph." Such belief was common to the early Christians who believed in the imminent return of the Christ, and the victorious battle with the powers of darkness; such a belief, on the part of orthodox Marxism, was the view of the inevitable social catastrophe that would end capitalism; such a belief was the hope of the final revolutionary general strike held so enthusiastically by the syndicalists; all alike were what Sorel chose to call "social myths."⁸³

This general strike "myth" inspired fear in many on account of its character of *infinity*. "The general strike has a character of *infinity*, because it puts on one side all discussions of definite reforms and confronts men with a catastrophe."⁸⁴ In history these "myths" have performed very useful functions, "the framing of a future in some indeterminate time, when it is done in a certain way, may be very effective," and, "even supposing that the revolutionaries have been wholly and entirely deluded in setting up this imaginary picture of the general strike, this picture may have been, in the course of the preparation for the Revolution, a great element of strength."⁸⁵ The reality of the general strike did not trouble Sorel;

The question whether the general strike is a partial reality, or only a product of popular imagination, is of little importance. All that is necessary to know is whether the general strike contains everything that the Socialist doctrine expects of the revolutionary proletariat. Strikes have engendered in the proletariat the noblest, deepest, and most moving sentiments that they possess; the general strike groups them all in a coordinated picture, and, by bringing them together, gives to each of them its maximum intensity.⁸⁶

Sorel claimed that the direct actionists were the real Marxists, that the basic principle of Marx was not that of surplus value but of the *class struggle*. The development of industrialism since the days of Marx had actually intensified the division of interests between the forces of capital and those of the proletariat.⁸⁷ And yet the political Socialists and the philanthropic members of the middle class had "rendered the future of the

⁸³ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 2. Cf. Estey, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ Sorel, *op. cit.*, p. 27 and footnote.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 136.

⁸⁷ Estey, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

world completely indeterminate." In other words, Sorel was deeply disturbed at the possibility that the clarity of the class war might be slurred over, and the Marxian forecast of capital's ultimate self-destruction never materialize.⁶⁸ Nothing could be more offensive to him than the slow reformism accomplished by political Socialism within the confines of the existing system. Something, therefore, had to be done to keep alive the spirit of class warfare, and herein lay the use of proletarian violence, and especially the general strike. "The day on which employers perceive that they have nothing to gain by works which promote social peace . . . there will be some chance that they may get back a part of their energy" and become once again "ardently capitalistic," like the employers of the earlier periods of the English Industrial Revolution, or the modern American captains of industry (1). Such "proletarian violence" would suffice to suppress the Parliamentary Socialists, and the class war in general would be suitably embittered. "Everything may be saved, if the proletariat, by their use of violence, manage to reestablish the division into classes."⁶⁹

How closely Sorel's concept of "proletarian violence" and the revolutionary general strike were connected in his own mind can be seen in the faculty of the general strike idea to keep the class conflict at its maximum intensity. Two citations will suffice to show his argument:

The idea of the general strike has such power behind it that it drags into the revolutionary track everything it touches. In virtue of this idea Socialism remains ever young; all attempts made to bring about social peace seem childish; desertions of comrades into the ranks of the middle class, far from discouraging the masses, only excite them still more to rebellion; in a word *the line of cleavage is seen in danger of disappearing*.⁷⁰

The idea of the general strike destroys all the theoretical consequences of every possible social policy; its partisans look upon even the most popular reforms as having a middle class character; so far as they are concerned, nothing can weaken the fundamental opposition of the class war.⁷¹

In a long and turgid argument Sorel endeavored to show that it was the idea of revolution that had raised the proletariat

⁶⁸ Sorel, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

from its degradation, and that in the concept and practice of the revolutionary general strike lay heroic and sublime possibilities that could not be found in the creed of the reformist Parliamentary Socialists, nor in the ideas of those who organized merely political general strikes.⁷³

Sorel likened the general strike enthusiasts to the soldiers of the French wars of liberty. Then "each soldier considered himself as an individual having something of importance to do in the battle. . . . the soldier was convinced that the slightest failure of the most insignificant private might compromise the success of the whole and the life of all his comrades."⁷⁴ "The same spirit is found in the working class groups who are eager for the general strike . . . each working with the greatest possible zeal, each acting on his own account, and not troubling himself much to subordinate his conduct to a great and scientifically combined plan."⁷⁴

If anything more is needed to show the amazing inconsequence of this professed anti-intellectual, Sorel's solution of the problem of what would be done after the revolutionary general strike had conquered capitalism, is a perfect sample:

Revolutionary syndicalism is the greatest educative force that contemporary society has at its disposal for the preparation of the system of production, which the workmen will adopt, in a society organized in accordance with the new conceptions. The free producer in a progressive and inventive workshop must never evaluate his own efforts by any external standard; he ought to consider the models given him as inferior, and desire to surpass everything that has been done before. Constant improvement in quality and quantity will be thus assured to production. . . .⁷⁵

The little, but important words "must," "ought," and "will," tell the tale of utopian idealism against which, in reformist political Socialists, Sorel so bitterly inveighed. Once the general strike has destroyed the old and sordid system of bourgeois

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-47. Sorel poured scorn upon the Belgian general strikes as evidence that the only aim of Socialist politicians in such popular insurrections was to take power from one group of politicians and hand it to another. The political general strike did not presuppose a class war nor an irrevocable transformation of society. Cf. pp. 173-82.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-84.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

masters all men *must, ought, and therefore will*, find their natures so changed, that, far from exercising any more sabotage on the industrial machine, they will all turn to and produce more and better goods than ever before. They *may*, but there is no evidence to prove that this, too, is not a delightful "social myth" along with the Second Coming and the general strike.

Perhaps the fairest criticism of such anti-Parliamentary, syndicalist supporters of the general strike is contained in the comment of another French writer, Étienne Buisson. The revolutionary syndicalists, he held, "content themselves with criticizing Socialist tactics. They assert that the general strike will be the Revolution, but they do not indicate either the methods of its preparation, nor the means of action, nor the conditions that would prove most favorable. This absence of all self-criticism appreciably weakens the value of their theory, which is still very far from having become a method of action."¹³ This criticism does not, perhaps, apply quite so thoroughly to such leaders as Pouget, whose whole-hearted advocacy of sabotage, proletarian force, and subsequent dictatorship of the *syndicats* has been described, as it does to writers like Sorel. Buisson's general comment, however, on the syndicalist ideal of working class unity, sublimated in the general strike, can be cited justly enough as an analysis of French syndicalism's failure to achieve any general strike of the character described in many of the other chapters.

To advocate a policy of union of all the working class is a charming program: but in practice we see division almost everywhere; in the political field it is almost a necessity; in the trade union field it is an actual and indisputable fact. We are told that a community of interests should be enough to unite all the proletariat in common action against capital. But in the first place their interests are not common. The working class, like the middle class, is composed of groups whose interests differ, sometimes even are hostile. Besides, even postulating community of interests, there remains the question of methods. Never will a class-conscious, critical and intelligent proletariat accept with unanimity one program or one method. Variety of characters and of temperaments, inherent in human nature, would certainly prevent such general agreement.¹⁷

¹³ Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

CHAPTER III

BELGIUM, THE LAND OF THE POLITICAL STRIKE

THE PERIOD OF VIOLENCE

Few countries have had so long an experience of the general strike for purely political purposes as has Belgium. In no other country to date has there been a *peaceful* general strike so long and carefully prepared as in Belgium in 1913. That strike was achieved by one of the most completely organized socialist parties in the world at that period, based as it was on the triple foundation of political, industrial, and commercial organization—the party, the trade unions, and the coöperatives all working closely in harmony.¹ Sociologically speaking, moreover, Belgium offers a remarkable example of a general strike laboratory—violent and sudden strikes, strikes more carefully prepared but still giving rise to much violence, and finally the great general strike of 1913, prepared for many months and amazingly peaceful in its execution; all alike organized and fought for the purpose of gaining complete and unqualified universal suffrage.

At the time of the 1913 strike Belgium had a population of about seven and one-half millions, a little less than that of the state of Pennsylvania, but with a land area only one-quarter the size of that state. Considering the density of population in Belgium, roughly 650 to the square mile, the amount of intensive agricultural cultivation carried on was surprising. The bulk of the population was engaged in agriculture and some six and one-half million acres of land were under cultivation. The Flemish people have made of their sandy plain one of the most productive areas in the world, by their careful and patient cultivation.²

Coal is the chief mineral product of Belgium, and is found mainly in the Borinage district near Mons, in the district called the Center, around Charleroi, in the neighborhood

¹ Van Overbergh. *La grève générale*, Introduction.

² R. C. K. Ensor, *Belgium*, pp. 27-28.

of Liège, and finally and most recently in the province of Limburg. Collieries and ironworks give the district around Charleroi the title of the Black Country, and the coal mines of Belgium give employment to over 150,000 persons. Yet the majority of the industrial population lives in the smaller towns around the larger cities of Liège and Charleroi and does not crowd into one or two great cities. One does not, therefore, find square miles of mean streets such as characterize large areas of the English Black Country. A good deal of this diffusion of the working population has arisen from the pre-war state-ownership of the major portion of the Belgian railways and the low rate of transportation for workers that resulted.⁸ Belgium is rich in quarries of marble, granite, and slate, while all the towns of Flanders are actively engaged in producing woolen and cotton goods and in lace manufacture.

The population of Belgium is composed, in about equal parts, of Walloons, who speak a Romance language much like the French, and of Flemings, whose language is closely akin to the Dutch. These two groups are often, but incorrectly, spoken of as *racially* distinct. In point of fact, the differences, which are real enough, are linguistic and traditional. The Walloons inhabit, for the most part, the more hilly and picturesque portion of Belgium—recently disfigured by pit-heads and slag-heaps—and in the past their wealth consisted chiefly in pasture, forest, and quarries, rather than the tilled land of the Flemish plain. The ancestors of the present population were largely foresters, hunters, charcoal-burners, and shepherds. Many were soldiers of fortune, some of Europe's best mercenaries being recruited from this country. Its traditional industries were quarrying, smiths' work, and the manufacture of arms. To these historic trades have been added in modern days those of coal-mining, steel-smelting, and engineering. In politics the Walloons tend to be Liberals or Socialists, strongly anti-clerical in viewpoint.

In strange contrast to the Walloons are the Flemings of the featureless plain of Flanders, where constant human labor over eleven centuries has wrested from the sandy soil some of the richest crops of Europe. Their manufacturing wealth has been built up by foreign trade, the import of raw materials and the

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 60.

export of the finished goods, and by slow determined accumulation of charters from unwilling feudal lords. "The Fleming is the heir to the oldest and most sorely tried of modern civilizations, except the Italian; there is bred in his bone a conservative tenacity, a rooted instinct of loyalty to the religion and traditions of the past, a plodding, pondering habit of mind, and the sedulous detailed industry of the intensive cultivator and the handi-craftsman."⁴ Naturally enough the Flemish-speaking population is largely Catholic and provides the majority of the votes for the Catholic party, which held political power in Belgium without interruption from 1884 until after the great strike of 1913.

This Flemish-Walloon division, of geographic environment, of historic background, of language, and of religious and political beliefs, has from time to time presented very serious problems to the Belgian rulers and has simultaneously offered great temptations to those who have sought to divide Belgium into two hostile, or at the least, two autonomous sections. It has, to no little degree, offered obstacles to the labor leaders of Belgium, particularly in the organization and accomplishment of their great political strikes.

From the year 1830, when Belgium gained its national independence, up to 1894, the Belgian electorate was exceedingly small. Property qualifications kept the voting power in the hands of a limited class. In the year 1893 out of a population of some six and one-half million souls there were but 137,772 voters! Agitation for a wider and fairer basis for voting originated as far back as 1866 with a Manifesto of Workers. A temporary solution of the question was made by the last Liberal Ministry (1878-1884) by the addition of *capacitaires*—those with special educational qualifications—to the straight property qualification, in provincial and communal elections, but not as yet in national elections.⁵

The first attempts to make use of the general strike for the political purpose of gaining popular suffrage were not made in Belgium until the years 1886-88. In 1885 the Belgian Labor party had been formed with a socialistic program, its propa-

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

⁵ Vandervelde, "Le suffrage universel en Belgique." *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Jan. 4, 1902, pp. 4-8. Cf. Bozor, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

ganda stimulated by an economic crisis. By 1886 "Socialism of a German type had taken deep root among the working men of the Flemish towns, especially at Ghent and Brussels; socialism of a French revolutionary type among the Walloon miners and factory hands. On the 18th of March, 1886, a socialist rising suddenly burst out at Liège, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Paris Commune, and rapidly spread to other industrial centers of the Walloon districts. Thousands of workmen went on strike, demanding better wages and the suffrage."⁶ Factories were burned, convents and country houses pillaged. There was little plan or leadership behind these uprisings, and the outbreak was suppressed by the military, numbers being killed and wounded in the restoration of order. The Government held an inquiry into the causes of the trouble and much remedial legislation followed, though not immediately.

In the following year miners and other workers started a violent strike movement, against the advice of the Labor party leaders. They issued a manifesto urging a march on Brussels and even resorted to dynamite outrages. At the end of four weeks this further abortive attempt to get popular suffrage failed and the strike ended owing to lack of resources. At a special meeting of the Labor Party Congress that August, the method of the general strike was seriously debated for the first time, the following motion being the outcome: "Recognizing that the general strike is a powerful means of forcing the Government to grant universal suffrage to the workers, and economic reforms in which everyone is interested: whereas such an enterprise can only succeed on the condition of being seriously organized, resolved that the Labor party conduct the necessary propaganda among the workers to bring about the general strike at the earliest possible moment."⁷

A group of extremists, thinking that this resolution implied an immediate general strike, began at once to organize, and in December, 1888, the same type of violent outbreak occurred as in 1887. Several arrests were made and at the trial, in May of 1889, there were some startling revelations of Government secret service and the presence of *agents provocateurs* among the more extreme labor groups. Some of the dynamite outrages were laid

⁶ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., III, 678.

⁷ Vandervelde, *La grève générale en Belgique*, pp. 25-48.

at the door of the Government agents. The accused were acquitted and most of the credit of the trials went to them. Their counsel subsequently stood for a vacant Parliamentary seat in Brussels and was elected. In general, these revelations resulted in a better understanding between the two wings of the labor movement and the left wing realized the wisdom of the advice to prepare carefully before next calling a general strike.⁸ In May and June of 1891 a political strike of the colliers and metal workers of Charleroi, Mons, and Liège, lasting through June, exerted further pressure on the authorities but scarcely reached the proportions of a general strike.⁹ Largely due to these continued strike tactics, however, was the ultimate surrender of the class monopolizing the franchise.

In 1892 the two Chambers passed formal resolutions to amend the Constitution and were then dissolved. In the new Parliament the elections did not give a two-thirds majority to the Catholics, so that some support of the Liberals was required to carry revision of the franchise basis. A long and violent debate followed, during which many alternatives were discussed, and at the same time rioting occurred in Ghent and Brussels.¹⁰ Finally, on April 11, 1893, the Belgian Parliament rejected the motion for universal suffrage at the age of twenty-one years. Not waiting until a further resolution, granting the vote at twenty-five years with a two-year residence requirement, had been voted on and defeated, the General Council¹¹ of the Labor Party sent out orders for an immediate general strike.¹²

Again the popular storm broke. The strike order was received by impatient and united workers with great joy, and a large-scale stoppage of work occurred in all industrial centers the next day, April 12. By the 17th of that month the strike was at its height with some 200,000 strikers.¹³ This time there was

⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. Ensor, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁹ *Georgi, op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁰ Ensor, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹¹ The General Council of the Belgian Labor Party was composed of (1) Representatives of the Party in the Belgian Parliament—with advisory powers only. (2) The executive committee, elected at the annual Congress—with voting power. (3) Delegates from independent federations with voting power.—*Confidential Report to U. S. Government on Labor Situation in Belgium*, p. 2.

¹² The Labor Party had already threatened a general strike but had been ignored.—*Georgi, op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹³ Georgi puts the total as high as 250,000.—*Op. cit.*, p. 43.

no dynamiting, but the agitation was by no means peaceful.¹⁴ The lives lost at the end of the strike were more by accident than by intentional opposition to the armed forces. The Government, as usual, took stern measures, calling out great forces of police and gendarmerie, forbidding all massed gatherings.¹⁵ Since the workers refused to remain in small groups frequent charges were made all through the strike, and many were wounded as a result. The *garde civique*, at first sympathetic, soon became alarmed and simultaneously more brutal towards the workers, in Mons, for example, firing upon them and killing four. Though the regular army was called up it was not used, possibly for fear of rebellion.¹⁶

The situation grew hourly worse, and the strike took on a more violent aspect as the workers lost patience and refused to accept defeat after such long agitation. The Government wavered between conciliation and repression. On the evening of April 17 the members of the General Council were warned that they were about to be arrested. The morning of the 18th opened in great uncertainty. A workers' demonstration planned for that day, offered an opportunity to the Government to use extreme repressive measures. The *garde civique*, at the entrance to the city of Brussels, and the troops holding the neighboring heights, were in great force. At two o'clock that afternoon the Chamber resumed its session, and half an hour later came the news that the gendarmerie were firing upon the workers, with many deaths resulting. Though the Prime Minister endeavored to persuade the members to proceed to budget business, telling them that adequate precautions had been taken for protection—the streets of the vicinity were crowded with striking workers—a deputy who had just been the object of a

¹⁴ Attacks were made on property and an attempt on the life of the Mayor of Brussels. Thousands marched nightly singing revolutionary songs. Street disturbances occurred in provincial cities on the 11th and 14th and many were killed, wounded, or arrested.—Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ "The Belgian army is divided into the regular army, the gendarmerie and the *garde civique*. The gendarmerie is a mounted force composed of men picked for their physique. . . . the *garde civique* does not pretend to possess military value. It is a defense against sedition and socialism."—Encyc. Brit., 11th ed., III, 672.

¹⁶ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-68. Military officials later admitted that armed and uniformed recruits had taken part in the workers' demonstrations. Cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

hostile demonstration outside the House moved the adjournment, in order that the special committee on the suffrage might make an immediate report.

The special committee ended its labors at 4:35 that afternoon, though it had hitherto been pursuing them, without any conclusion, for many months, and its report was read to the House. This suggested universal manhood suffrage, qualified with the plural vote system. At seven o'clock that evening the motion was carried by 110 votes to 14, with 12 abstentions. That same evening the General Council called off the strike and agreed to carry on the struggle for unqualified universal suffrage—the abolition of the plural vote. Next day, April 19, work re-started all over the country, though here and there some disappointment was expressed that the strike had not been continued until Parliament had been forced to grant a better form of suffrage.¹⁷

In 1894 the first elections took place under the new system, and the Catholics gained an overwhelming majority (104 seats to the Liberals' 19) while the Socialists were represented for the first time in Parliament with 29 seats. The new system gave a vote to more than a million new electors, but its effect was modified by giving an additional vote to a father of a family who was thirty-five years of age or more and paid at least five francs in direct taxes, and to every man over twenty-five years who drew revenue of one hundred francs from Belgian funds, or owned land of a certain rental value, or held certain diplomas of learning. Three votes were the maximum number that any one voter could possess. For the local and provincial elections¹⁸ the qualifications were even more in favor of property

¹⁷ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68. John Spargo (*Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism*, p. 118), implies that the Belgian general strike of 1893 lasted but a day. Vandervelde, cited as the authority for this statement (*Revue des Mois*, May, 1906), makes no such assertion. On the contrary, his book, *La grève générale en Belgique*, written in 1913, contains much detail controverting this view of Spargo. Georgi (*op. cit.*, p. 43), calls the 1893 episode an eight-day strike, and Gehrig und Wsentsig (*Belgische Volkswirtschaft*, p. 124), speak of it as a week's strike.

¹⁸ Belgium was divided into nine provinces, subdivided into 342 cantons and 2,823 communes. The commune was the administrative unit possessing self-government in all local matters. For each commune of over 5,000 inhabitants a burgomaster was appointed by the King, having first been selected

owners, and a maximum of four votes could be held in this case.¹⁹

The extension of the franchise in 1894 had a curious effect. In the first place it set the Labor party of Belgium politically on its feet, with twenty-nine representatives in the House. The same extension of voting power, however, dealt a blow at the Liberal party from which it never recovered. As the party of the well-to-do urban classes, with the manufacturers and coal owners of the Walloon provinces as their influential supporters, the Liberals were able to hold their own against the Catholic party so long as the franchise was on a very narrow basis. Once the masses had a hand in the vote the Liberal party inevitably slipped into the political background, for the Belgian masses were either devotedly religious, as in the thickly populated Flemish countryside, or else, as in the Walloon manufacturing districts, they wanted something more strongly democratic than Belgian Liberalism had to offer. The plural vote merely played still more into the hands of the Catholic party, inasmuch as the Roman Church, through its varied organizations, was the largest property owner in the country.²⁰ From 1894, therefore, the "clerical party appeared to the eyes of the middle class as a real government party, the only one capable of defending the political and economic privileges of the bourgeoisie."²¹

The discontent of the Socialists, whose demand was "one man, one vote," and of the Liberals, with the new basis of the franchise, resulted in more agitation and violence in 1899, but with less success from the labor viewpoint than in 1893, for now all that Parliament offered in reply to the agitation was the introduction of proportional representation. This the Socialists did not desire, inasmuch as it increased the Liberal seats in the House, while checking the advance of the Socialists. Meanwhile the much detested plural vote remained, so that in 1902 some 915,000 electors with one vote apiece were overwhelmed by

by the communal council; King Leopold II always refused to appoint a Socialist as burgomaster, even if selected by his communal council.—*Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., III, 670; Ensor, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁹ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., III, 679.

²⁰ Ensor, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-70.

²¹ L. Durieu, "Les élections législatives (Belgique)," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, June 7, 1902, p. 1096.

557,000 plural voters casting 1,353,000 votes.²³

The consequence of all this was a further attempt in 1902 to wrest unqualified universal suffrage from the Catholic Government of Belgium by force of riot and general strike.²⁴ This time, however, the workers gained nothing whatsoever by their struggle, for the Government was ready, and the middle class, tired of violence, was far more hostile to their agitation than heretofore. Preparation for this agitation had been going on for some time before the actual outbreak of violence and strike. A universal suffrage fund started among the twenty-five Liberals, who had joined the Socialists in the House for franchise reform, and the Socialists, succeeded in raising 10,000 francs for further intensification of propaganda.²⁵ The Labor party had issued a manifesto asserting that the Socialists would, if necessary, have recourse to revolutionary methods to obtain political equality. Socialist deputy, Smeets, had declared in public meeting that "the workers must reply with rifle shots to the rifle shots of the army," and the Labor Party was already considering the use of the general strike.²⁶

In Parliament a preliminary skirmish occurred when the Labor party proposed in March, 1902, the granting of the vote at the age of twenty-one without distinction of sex, for provincial and communal elections. This motion was defeated, the Liberals fearing woman suffrage would merely mean an accession of power to the Catholics and not desiring to give up proportional representation. At a special congress of the Labor party that Easter, it was agreed to drop the demand for woman suffrage and to stand by proportional representation, in order to gain the support of the Liberals.²⁷ Demonstrations of the united parties of the Socialists, Liberals, and Christian Demo-

²³ Vandervelde, "Le suffrage universel en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Jan. 4, 1903, pp. 4-8.

²⁴ Vandervelde himself, writing in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 3, 1902, pp. 324-41, declared "the clerical despotism" in Belgium "is tempered only by rioting"; referring to the concessions won by previous uprisings.

²⁵ Vandervelde, "Le suffrage universel en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Jan. 4, 1903, pp. 4-8.

²⁶ Gaston Vandermeeren, "La lutte pour le suffrage universel," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Jan. 18, 1902.

²⁷ L. Durieu, "La lutte pour le suffrage universel," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 19, 1902, pp. 738-41.

crats²⁷ in favor of revision of the franchise now took place in all the large cities of Belgium. The clerical party had far too strong an interest in the plural vote to let the matter go by default, and they fought with the energy of despair against the united revisionists. M. Woeste, the most reactionary of the clerical party leaders, declared in a Berlin journal that to yield universal suffrage would be suicidal.²⁸

When the House reassembled on April 8, the Government, forestalling the Socialist deputies, demanded that the franchise revision debate take place on April 16 and at the same time showed clearly its intention of moving the closure on that debate. As a result of this step, agitation for the suffrage began that very night in the streets of Brussels, and daily the demonstrations grew more violent. Windows were broken in the houses of certain Catholic deputies, dynamite exploded in the house of another, and in the large towns ever growing crowds accompanied the clerical Parliamentary representatives to and from their homes, singing at the top of their voices the *Marseillaise*, the *Carmagnole*, and another favorite song of the young Socialists:

Down with War, sabre and cannon!
Long live the Republic!
Down with the paste-board King!

Some of the Catholic deputies were pulled from the train by the mob, and finally the deputies of Gand fled with their whole families and furniture—in the manner of emigrants—to comparative safety in Brussels.²⁹

On April 10 the General Council of the Labor Party, recognizing that the decisive moment had come, issued an appeal for a general strike on Monday, the 14th. In the meantime, sporadic strikes had already started, in spite of the assertion by the Labor party leaders that the success of the movement would be compromised by premature action.³⁰ Louis Bertrand, writing

²⁷ Followers of the Abbé Daens, a Catholic radical.

²⁸ Vanderveelde, "La grève générale en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 3, 1902.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 828; cf. *La grève générale en Belgique*, p. 80.

³⁰ L. Durieu, "La lutte pour le suffrage universel," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 26, 1902, pp. 791-96.

some years later, stated that "the general strike declared April 13, 1902, with no preparation, was only an outcome of bloody riots, in order to avoid inevitable massacres." It is certainly true that the strike of 1902 was not nearly as well prepared as that of 1913, but Bertrand perhaps exaggerates in declaring that there was "no preparation."⁸¹

The Government on its side had not been inactive. On April 10 it called back to the colors the two classes of reservists most recently released. This call was characterized by military demonstrations in favor of universal suffrage, and the Government held its troops in reserve, using the police and gendarmerie more freely. Even the *garde civique* was somewhat under suspicion for disaffection. While there was rioting on the side of the suffrage agitators it cannot be denied that there was excessive brutality on the part of the police and gendarmerie, many workers being killed and wounded in Brussels, Houdeng and Louvain. At Brussels the police would mark with a chalk-cross the shoulders of citizens who left the *Maison du Peuple*, headquarters of the local labor movement, in order that the gendarmerie might the better pick them out for punishment.⁸² Vandervelde tells of a scene he himself witnessed. The Socialist crowd accompanying their political representatives back from the House to the *Maison du Peuple* were attacked and sabred as they walked, and Vandervelde himself arrested. Immediate release and apology followed, when the police officials discovered what had occurred, and the Burgomaster of Brussels and Vandervelde walked out of the police station arm in arm. As they separated one said to the other "And now, M. le député, let there be peace," and Vandervelde answered, "I was just going to make the same recommendation to you, M. le Bourgmestre."⁸³

The workers, exasperated by the Brussels and Hainaut "massacres," answered the general strike order readily. In the coal mines the strike was almost complete and rapidly extended to other industries. In Gand, in spite of business depression in the textile industry, the workers followed the example of the others. At Brussels 20,000 were out, and in Liège, where the unions

⁸¹ Louis Bertrand, *La grève générale en 1902 et en 1913*, p. 9.

⁸² L. Durieu, *loc. cit.*

⁸³ Vandervelde, "La grève générale en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 3, 1902, p. 835.

were weakened by a recent strike, the cessation of work was almost complete. To the violent riots of the first few days succeeded the more impressive quiet of over 200,000 workers waiting, silently, for Parliament's decision.⁸⁴ Every speaker now emphasized the need of sobriety, lest the least conflict provoke new slaughter. The Liberal middle class who had turned against the riotous methods of the agitators, now began to swing back against the Government. Many heads of industry declared themselves favorable to the workers' demands⁸⁵ and the newspapers denounced the brutality of the gendarmerie. On the 15th of April the Liberal left wing took the initiative to suggest, failing revision, that Parliament be dissolved and the electors consulted. The Prime Minister answered that dissolution was the King's prerogative, and that as far as the Government was concerned they would not abdicate.

On the 16th the funeral of the slain workers took place, by order of the authorities, at 6:30 in the morning, lest riots follow. As it was, thousands of mourners gathered at the doors of the hospital where the dead had been taken. In torrential rain the cortège started, with the Parliamentary Socialists leading, among them Vandervelde himself. Among the dead was a young party secretary, and Vandervelde tells a vivid detail of that hour which always haunted his memory. The rough coffin in which his young comrade lay, "leaked, and every ten steps a drop of blood mingled with the mud in which the living comrades of the dead men were tramping." One can not wonder that, in 1913, Vandervelde was among the stoutest fighters for an absolutely peaceful general strike.⁸⁶ Direct from such an experience the Socialist deputies proceeded to the suffrage revision debate in the House. It lasted for three days, in spite of the efforts of the clerical party to apply the closure. The Government declared itself absolutely against revision, although M. Woeste

⁸⁴ London *Times*, April 17, 1902, estimated the number of strikers at 200,000. Vandervelde, *La grève générale en Belgique*, p. 81, gave the numbers at 300,000. The facts were probably between the two estimates, though Georghi puts the numbers on strike as high as 360,000.—*Op cit.*, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Many employers closed their factories during this strike, fearing, in some cases, that if they kept the machinery running with non-strikers they might lose their whole plant. See Oresbergh, *La grève générale*, chap. IV.

⁸⁶ Vandervelde, "La grève générale en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 3, 1902, p. 639.

admitted that he was more hostile to universal suffrage than he was in favor of the plural vote, and that if the parties desired, without passion, to examine the electoral problems and seek a different solution than the current system, without going so far as universal suffrage, he was convinced that many among his party would favor such an examination. With that cold comfort the Socialist party had to see the revision motion finally defeated, on April 18, by 84 votes to 64.⁸⁷

That night five workers were killed by the *garde civique* in Louvain.⁸⁸ Otherwise the streets of the Belgian cities were quiet, guarded by 60,000 bayonets. That same night the General Council unanimously voted to continue the general strike, but in forty-eight hours it had reversed its decision and called off the strike.⁸⁹ Sitting with the secretaries of the national federations of the trade unions, and the Parliamentary members, the General Council of the Labor party decided that to prolong the strike after the negative vote of the House and the refusal of the King to dissolve Parliament, would drain the financial resources of the coöperatives and trade unions, and "condemn to misery thousands of families with a certainty of having to resume work after eight or fifteen days, without obtaining the least result."⁹⁰ Better to resume work with the unanimity with which the general strike had started. The General Council's appeal to the workers to resume work covered the complete defeat in such terms as the following: "From the present moment the revision is practically accomplished. Reaction has triumphed in appearance; in reality it is conquered. . . . The revision is near! Long live Universal Suffrage!"⁹¹

The General Council had made a bad error in judgment. Believing that in the presence of a formidable general strike the clerical party would be terrified into yielding Revision, as it had done in 1893, it used the general strike as a sudden, solemn expression of popular wishes, only to find that the Government

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *London Times*, April 19, 1902.

⁸⁹ Raoul Briquet, "Les événements de Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 26, 1902, pp. 791-96.

⁹⁰ Vandervelde, "La grève générale en Belgique," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 3, 1902.

⁹¹ L. Durieux, "La lutte pour le suffrage universel," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 26, 1902.

would yield nothing. The General Council was thus faced with the possibility of a general strike for which both it and the workers in general were quite unprepared. The biennial election to the Belgian Parliament took place on May 25, 1902. Only half of the representatives of the House were up for election, giving the clerical party an *increase* of 47,000 votes against a mere 4,000 on the part of the Socialists,⁴² though the Socialist Party gained three seats.⁴³ Vandervelde, writing eleven years later, admitted that "it was the first great defeat in twenty years for the Belgian Labor Party."⁴⁴

THE GENESIS OF THE GREAT STRIKE OF 1913

The years 1912-1913 demonstrated to the world that the leaders of Belgian labor had thoroughly learned the lessons of their serious defeat eleven years before. The strike of 1913, while not as "general" as the great British strike of 1926, inasmuch as none of the transport workers took part, was altogether more impressive than that of 1902: the numbers of strikers exceeded the previous strike by some hundred thousand, the strike was prepared with infinitely greater care as to resources and the preservation of order, the number of trades affected was larger, the coöperation of the Flemish workers was much more marked, and the strict discipline of the strikers was held from start to finish. Although its immediate political result was not startling, it could in no wise be placed in the same category of defeat as the strike of 1902. The *London Times* admitted that it was "one of the most remarkable strikes on record" and that "the art of playing with fireworks is to produce as much effect as possible without an explosion, and the leaders of the strike have succeeded in effecting this in their admirably disciplined movement." "It may fairly be reiterated," their Brussels correspondent concluded on the day the strike ended, "that honours are easy."⁴⁵

To understand this "disciplined" strike one must go back to the national elections of 1912, when the socialist trade unions

⁴² *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, June 7, 1902.

⁴³ *London Times*, May 28, 1902.

⁴⁴ Vandervelde, *La grève générale en Belgique*.

⁴⁵ *London Times*, April 26, 1913.

tried their political strength at the polls in their campaign for universal suffrage. The peculiar political atmosphere of Belgium must also be remembered. The most sympathetic and careful foreign observer of Belgian life, Seebohm Rowntree, writing in 1910, declared that "there is extraordinarily little social intercourse between Catholics and Liberals, and practically none between Catholics and Socialists. Politics enter into almost every phase of social activity and philanthropic effort, and it is the exception rather than the rule for persons holding different political opinions to cooperate in any other matter. Thus in one town there will be a Catholic, a Liberal and a Socialist trade union, a Catholic, a Liberal, and a Socialist cooperative bakery, a Catholic, a Liberal and a Socialist thrift society, each catering for similar people, but each confining its attentions to members of its own political party. The separation extends to cafés, gymnasia, choral, temperance, and literary societies; indeed it cuts right through life."⁴³

Industry furnished recruits for the Socialist party, while the agricultural population formed the basis of the Catholic party, especially its more democratic wing, the Christian Democrats. Before the campaign of 1912 a certain amount of log-rolling between the Liberal and Socialist parties resulted in the placing of universal suffrage as the foremost plank in their combined platforms.⁴⁴ This campaign for suffrage at twenty-five with the abolition of the plural vote, coincided with a violent educational struggle between these two parties and the Catholics. Education in Belgium, especially primary education, was largely in the hands of religious denominations. To these denominational schools the Government proposed to accord the same treatment as that given by the State to its own official schools. This proposal raised a storm of opposition, and the Socialist and Liberal parties organized a monster demonstration at Brussels. The two parties went so far as to issue in many towns a combined list of Liberal-Socialist candidates for the election. In the elections the Walloon districts returned a large majority of Liberals and Socialists but the rural districts and

⁴³ Rowntree, *Land and Labour*, cited by Esnor, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁴⁴ Overbergh, *La grève générale*, p. 9.

the Flemish towns gave the Catholic party a continued majority.⁴⁸

Shortly before the elections anti-clericalism had grown almost as strong as the demand for universal suffrage. The Socialist party felt certain they had won universal suffrage and the abolition of the plural vote. Scarcely any country had a larger proportional number of workers in its population, and to attain political power, they perceived, there must be "one man one vote." Apparently the middle class felt that defeat of the clerical party was likely and, disturbed at the prospect, swung over to the support of the Government. Blow after blow fell as the Catholic victories were reported from Flanders, even from Brussels itself. The Government majority of six now became sixteen. The triumph of the Catholic Government was so overwhelming as to surprise even the voters.⁴⁹

There followed a mad explosion of rage on the part of the workers, especially in the Walloon districts. A repetition of 1902 was threatened, and for two or three days after the elections (June 2) the workers went on strike spontaneously. The Socialist leaders did not attempt to stop it immediately, for that would have been impossible, but they did try to gain time. The Government intervened at once with pitiless repression and bloodshed, and the General Council of the Labor Party, to prevent matters becoming worse, themselves went into the provinces to calm the strikers. On their return the full General Council was all but overwhelmed by the pressure of the militants of their party, who desired an instant general strike to abolish the plural vote. The Council, however, was not rushed into action, but decided to use Parliamentary methods at first and to call a special congress of the Labor party for June 30—again, of course, playing for time.⁵⁰ The Council delegates had a hard time convincing the workers of the wisdom of this delay when they returned to the provinces, but "growing, the proletarian lion agreed to draw in his claws for a while."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Envoys Brit.*, 11th ed., XXX, 480; 13th ed., I, 851.

⁴⁹ Overbergh, *La grève générale*, p. 13; E. Mahaim, "The General Strike in Belgium," *Envoys Jour.*, June, 1913.

⁵⁰ Vandervelde, *La grève générale en Belgique*, pp. 21-22

⁵¹ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

The largest delegate congress in Belgian history took place in Brussels on June 30, some 1,584 delegates taking part, 1,500 of whom had come with a mandate to call a general strike. Some of the delegates present represented bodies that were not affiliated with the Labor party, but whose workers would be called on to strike when the general strike was ordered. These non-affiliated bodies received the right of consultation, but not the right to vote on the resolutions. Thus began a greater democratization of the general strike management than had hitherto been the rule. Congress was unanimous in desiring a general strike, but in disagreement as to the date on which it should take place. The left wing feared that there would ultimately be no strike at all unless a definite date were set by Congress itself. It was finally agreed to let the General Council do its best to get a revision of the franchise through Parliament, when it reassembled in November, with the general strike as the final weapon.⁵²

In the meantime a special national committee was formed for "Universal Suffrage and the General Strike," consisting of the General Council of the Labor Party, the Trade Union Commission, the Committee of the Federation of Coöperatives, and the committees of the national federations of crafts. Thus did the political organization of the labor movement abandon its monopoly and share the direction of the suffrage and strike campaign with the economic organs of labor. The result was a long step towards centralization, the special organ entrusted with the campaign including and dominating the existing ones. The size and inclusiveness of this special National Committee became the symbol of the workers' desire to conquer universal suffrage at all costs.⁵³

The peculiar task of this National Committee was to prepare for the strike, and at the propitious moment, when it considered the working class was ready, to order the strike. On the 17th of July, 1912, the National Committee held its first meeting. Four important commissions were constituted, concerned respectively with a nation-wide propaganda to all classes; with the organizing of finances and the raising of funds; with the wholesale purchase, division and distribution of food supplies to the strikers;

⁵² Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-97.

⁵³ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

and with the evacuation of the children of the strikers into rural homes or into foreign lands during the period of the strike. Each such Commission appointed a delegate whose task it was to act as liaison officer with the four great bodies that composed the National Committee for Universal Suffrage and the General Strike. The office of the General Council of the Labor Party served as the executive office for general administration. The declared aim of the National Committee was to prepare for "a six-week stoppage of work of some 500,000 persons." The Special Congress of June 30 had overwhelmingly declared for a general strike "formidable and irresistible . . . but *peaceful*, despite all possible provocations," and it was the new aspect of a *peaceful*, non-violent strike on which the National Committee concentrated during the ten months of its existence before the strike actually occurred.⁵⁴

When the House reassembled in November, Vandervelde, in the name of the Socialists, gave notice of a resolution for revision of the Constitution (without which the franchise basis could not be changed) by which adult suffrage should be substituted for the plural vote. The motion was not debated until January, 1913, and then Vandervelde was met with the reply by Prime Minister de Broqueville, "We cannot consider a proposal for revision under the menace of a general strike." Thereupon the Liberal leader of the Opposition, M. Hymans, suggested the examination of the whole electoral problem by a commission, to be appointed either by the House or by the Government. To this conciliatory proposal the Socialists gave their assent, but again the Government gave answer: "So long as the menace of a general strike lasts we will not consent to discuss any revisional proposal, direct or indirect." Not, however, until the revision proposal was defeated in the House by 99 votes to 83, on February 7, did the National Committee decree a general strike, and even then the date was fixed for April 14, leaving two months' leeway for conciliation.⁵⁵

On February 16, 1913, the committee of the Belgian Democratic League took a position against the general strike but declared itself in favor of revision by legal methods. As the Democratic League included some 200,000 members, all Catho-

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁵ Mahaim, *loc. cit.*; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

lies, public opinion commented in this fashion: Socialists, Liberals, and the Catholic Democratic League are all in favor of revision of the franchise. They constitute the majority of the nation. The general strike, therefore, is needless. At the coming elections, in 1914, a favorable response for revision will be possible. On the 25th of the same month the burgomasters of the chief towns of Belgium besought the Labor party to withdraw the menace of the general strike, and asked for an appointment with the Prime Minister, in which they hoped to persuade the latter to agree to have the electoral system studied by a commission. Under misapprehension of the Premier's answer, both the mayors and Vandervelde, who had interviewed them subsequently, believed that the government would yield if the strike order were withdrawn. On March 8 the National Committee accordingly abandoned the strike.⁶⁶

The anger of the whole labor movement can be imagined, therefore, when, on March 12, the Prime Minister stated in the House that "the Government has always declared that two factors prevented them from entering the road to Revision. The first was the menace; the second, the conditions under which the majority had been elected on June 2, [1912]. The first factor had disappeared. The second remained. The regular means to modify the latter lay with the electorate. When calm returned to the people's minds the Government would appoint a commission to study electoral reform." De Broqueville, however, did not consent to extend the scope of the proposed commission to include the Parliamentary franchise but announced his intention of confining its labors to the amendment of the provincial and communal franchise only.

The anger of the Socialists took form in a special Congress of March 24, which resolved to stand by the original date of April 14 for the general strike. The regular leaders of the Labor party, Huysmans and Vandervelde, were not supporters of this action and believed that the tactics of the Socialists had delayed revision of the Constitution. Vandervelde declared that he had done all he humanly could to spare the workers the burden of a general strike, and, for the time being, he lost considerable prestige among his followers. Anseele, who stood out for

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18; Mahaim, *loc. cit.*

the general strike, declared: "We don't want a humiliating peace; a defeat without a battle. The Government has thrown down the gauntlet . . . let us pick it up. Rather defeat than retreat without combat."⁸⁷ There can be no question that this was the feeling of the masses and that the strike was far from being an agitation manufactured by the leaders of the party. In its decision for the calling of the strike Congress stood by the original determination to make that strike completely orderly, and in this decision was seen the influence of Vandervelde, who had from the very start impressed upon his party the absolute need for a non-violent general strike. Finally Congress decided that it alone would decide at what date the general strike should be ended.⁸⁸

PREPARATION FOR THE STRIKE

The spontaneous and riotous cessation of work on the days following the electoral defeat of June 2, 1912, was contrary to the will of the party and trade union leaders, and of less importance than the strikes of 1893 and 1902, except that it showed how strong was the undercurrent of mass feeling. For twenty years the general strike theory had been slowly penetrating the minds of the workers, through experiment and debate. Suddenly, with the defeat of June 2, 1912, the subconscious forces burst forth like a volcano, with such irresistible energy that the Socialist leaders perceived that all they could do was to provide peaceful channels through which those forces might run.

It was this task, the taming and canalizing of the mass feeling, which occupied the leaders of labor from June, 1912, to the outbreak of the general strike in April, 1913. Some of these leaders undoubtedly hoped, by playing for time, that something might turn up to avert the actual strike, but even these men, such as Vandervelde, once they were convinced that the masses would have no further delay, declared themselves the servants of their followers and took their part in organizing the strike along with the rest.⁸⁹ Though the methods of the leaders failed to avert the final occurrence of the general strike, the ten months'

⁸⁷ *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, March-April, 1913, pp. 223-27.

⁸⁸ Overberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

delay did permit the evolution of a very peaceful general strike, by means of long organization, constant propaganda, and the slow substitution of the calm reason of 1913 for the wild emotions of June, 1912.⁶⁰

Inasmuch as the peculiar character of the 1913 strike in Belgium was due to its long preparation and its peaceful execution, it will not be out of place to consider in some detail in what this preparation consisted. The four vital commissions, already mentioned, for propaganda, finances, food supplies and the evacuation of strikers' children will be described in turn and their work appraised.

The first and undoubtedly the most important commission was that concerned with the universal suffrage and general strike propaganda. The principle on which the campaign was organized was the centralization of the means of propaganda, but the decentralization of the financial responsibility. A moment's thought will show the wisdom of this principle under the conditions of high emotional pressure among the masses. But for the strong central control of propaganda the militant wing, and especially the "young guard," of the Socialists, might easily have run away with the movement and have ended in anything but a non-violent general strike. At the same time, once the strike started, the need for financial resources would be greater than any central bureau could handle, unless the various districts had, for a long time, prepared their own local and regional funds.

The general substance of instructions to the countless speakers and writers during the ten months ran something as follows: Make a ceaseless attack upon the plural vote that renders the workers but half-, third-, or quarter-citizens. Make it clear to your hearers that universal suffrage is indispensable to Belgian workers. Without electoral justice they cannot hope for economic justice. All their efforts for material and moral elevation run foul of hostile legislation. Nor can they hope for real social legislation without the weapon of universal suffrage. To get universal suffrage the workers must rely upon themselves. If all Parliamentary methods fail there remains only the general

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-88.

strike. In order to make the general strike successful it must be both formidable and peaceful. To be formidable from four to five hundred thousand workers must be ready to strike for several weeks. To be peaceful all noisy processions and riotous demonstrations, and all alcohol, must be avoided. There must be no sabotage, no attacks on the liberty of work. Carry this message to the workers: "Cross your arms! Make the strike a joyful one. Keep it up six weeks and you will win. To keep it going for six weeks you must *save*. Save out of your expenses at cabarets, sports, and gambling. Don't compromise the trade union funds which are reserved for *economic* strikes. Your sacrifice will enhance the prestige of Socialism in the eyes of the bourgeois classes. Belgians, remember that the flag of the general strike is entrusted to you! Do better than the Swedish workers, who were magnificent. So will you be worthy of international Socialism, and thus will you conquer universal suffrage, which will be your instrument of emancipation."⁶¹

During July, August, and September, 1912, many large meetings were held in the cities and industrial centers, and the labor press repeated the arguments of the speakers. On the eve of the reopening of Parliament in November, thousands of meetings were held simultaneously over the whole country. To broadcast this propaganda the National Committee for Universal Suffrage and the General Strike issued four manifestoes of a million copies and five booklets with an edition of a million. Specialized propaganda of all kinds was organized for local appeal, for individual family discussion, for musical and sporting circles. There were general strike stamps for correspondence, though later the Postmaster refused to allow these to be affixed to the mail. There were general strike buttons for enthusiasts and songs to awaken class sentiment even in the byways and small cottages of the poorest workers.⁶²

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 36; Vanderveide, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-16, 283. Such local tasks as meetings at factory exits (e.g., in Brussels and the Liège province), house to house visits among the workers (e.g., in Hainaut), the organization of "propaganda days" for different districts, were undertaken by the regional propaganda bodies, in addition to the regular work of the National Committee. The cooperative societies circulated their own members, urging economy, saving, and abstinence from alcohol and expensive amusements. Cf. Overberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40.

The miners, always among the first to act, issued their own manifesto to their members, pointing out that men of their trade spent proportionately more on sport and amusements than the other workers, and that saving was, therefore, peculiarly their duty. They were warned that the orders of the National Committee, of which the miners' committee was a part, were the only strike orders they must obey. Reactionary attempts to provoke disturbance through *agents provocateurs* must be defeated by extreme discipline. Overtime in coal production should cease at once, so that no accumulation of coal stocks would be possible.⁸⁸

The Propaganda Commission was not content with appealing to the workers of Socialist persuasion. It tackled both the Catholic workers and country folk, and the other classes of society. Various attempts were made by the Labor party organ, *Le Peuple*, to prove that Socialism was not in essence anti-religious; the argument of the common interests of all Belgian workers was stressed; and Vandervelde appealed to the more intolerant of his followers to act upon their professed principle that "la religion est une affaire privée." Lack of Socialist organization in the country districts, the inaccessibility of individual workers on the farms, the overwhelming preponderance of Liberal or Catholic newspapers and journals in the villages, and the fact that "the rural vote was the plural vote," all told against Socialist propaganda in the rural areas. The seasonal workers on the land, who went yearly to France and Germany during the harvest, were absolutely hostile to the general strike idea and were largely organized in Catholic unions. The country folk who worked each day in the towns were much more affected by the Socialist propaganda in workshop, dockyard, mine, train, and tram; and it was through them, and through the few partisans of the general strike in the villages, that the National Committee and the Propaganda Commission were able to reach even difficult rural spots. On the eve of the strike, extravagant leaflets were circulated among the unconverted advising them to "be prudent. Do not take a train to work on April 14. There will be danger. Stay at home, the strikers may harm you."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50 f, 58 f.

To the industrial middle class the Socialists offered the plea that a general strike would entail heavy financial losses, and that it was to the interest of the *entrepreneurs* to bring pressure to bear upon the Government. MM. Warocqué and Boël, Liberal deputies and themselves large-scale producers, sought to gather their business colleagues in some such gesture of intervention, but met with an almost unanimous refusal from the business men, who declared it was a matter of politics and not their business at all to interfere.⁵⁵ A few individuals did promise aid by agreeing not to dismiss any striker from their employment, by promising to close their factories, by holding a referendum of their employees, or by making a donation to the strike funds.⁵⁶

The appeal to the retail traders was even more difficult to compass, for the feeling was general that they were ultimately to be crushed out of existence between the big department stores and the ever growing business of the Socialist coöperative societies.⁵⁷ Consumers' or producers' coöperative undertakings existed in at least 300 towns, and the National Federation of Coöperatives had issued a definite appeal to its members to buy only from the coöperatives. All of these facts showed the theoretical and practical hostility of the Labor party to the retail traders, who were commonly termed in Socialist circles "social parasites." Nevertheless, the Propaganda Commission considered that these lower middle classes were of real importance in the struggle for universal suffrage and tried to rouse their interest. Politically these classes voted to some degree for the radicals, but in much larger number for the Catholics. A policy of fear was used towards them. Phrases such as "business breakdown," "long-term credits," "insolvency," "bankruptcy," "ruin" were much used. "Do not stock up too much," they were advised, "you will scarcely sell your goods, for the workers will

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 61.

⁵⁶ The day and hour of referendum were set by the employer, all his workers voted, by secret ballot, for or against the strike, and the inspection took place in the presence of the employer or his representative. The management then stood by the majority decision of the workpeople.—Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ In 1910 the Socialist party had organized three million members in its coöperative undertakings, which had an annual turnover of over one hundred million francs.—*Esays. Brit.*, 13th ed., I, 361.

save for the strike. Who knows if, at the moment of the general cessation of work that you will not be pillaged?" In the long run this propaganda had effect. In Charleroi, for instance, 10,000 traders signed a petition to the government to avoid a general strike.⁶⁸

Much pressure was brought to bear upon the public authorities and their employees. Many communal councils were urged to pass resolutions in favor of universal suffrage, but only a few acceded. The burgomasters of the Charleroi district passed a resolution urging the Labor party to renounce the general strike and the Government to consent to study the electoral problem. In Brussels an attempt was made to obtain a pledge from the municipality to close all restaurants and cafés at ten o'clock every evening, and not to allow any liquor to be sold during the general strike. Burgomaster Max refused to make any such pledge until the crisis actually arrived.

To the employees of the Local and State Authorities the Propaganda Commission gave much attention, endeavoring to get the railroad and tramway workers and the workers at the gas and electric light and power plants to join the strike. For the state railroadmen the *grève perle* was suggested—a "stay in" strike, with too strict obedience to all the written regulations. Such action, if widely practised, would have held up traffic most seriously.⁶⁹ To such appeals the State Railroads replied by announcing that "those who quit work on April 14 and the following days, without proper reason, will immediately and permanently have their positions filled." The municipal authorities of all the larger towns declared in similar manner that "the public services must continue, the general interest demanding it. Those of our employees who go on strike will be immediately replaced."⁷⁰ The Minister of War came to an agreement with the Ministry of Railroads that he would provide all necessary men to take the place of railroad workers, postal servants or telegraphists who went on strike.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 f.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63 f and 47 f; Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁷⁰ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 145, 314; London Times, April 11, 1913, reports, "The Government announces that state employees who strike will be dismissed immediately."

⁷¹ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 285 f.

Not even the King of Belgium could escape the propaganda. Liberals and Socialists alike appealed to him to intervene by dissolving Parliament and causing a further election. *Le Peuple*, on the 12th of April, declared that then, if ever, was the time for the royal intervention, inasmuch as the election of the previous June had been accompanied by fraud and corruption and did not represent the people. M. Destrée, one of the strike leaders, went so far as to suggest that the monarchy itself was at stake. As the King made no move the *Journal de Charleroi* on April 22 asserted that King Albert's refusal to intervene was a "criminal and insensate act."¹⁷

Perhaps the gravest problem before the Propaganda Commission, during the ten months' preparation for the general strike, was the need to ensure the strike's completely peaceful conduct, if and when it finally occurred. It remained a constant source of anxiety to the leaders right to the end of the strike and had not a little to do with the final decision to resume work. M. Hubin, representative of Huy, and generally looked upon as leader of the manual workers, did not believe in the possibility of the non-violent general strike: "a general strike of several weeks cannot remain peaceful," he declared. His view, supported by previous experience of Belgian general strikes, created a great impression upon the public. Yet in spite of almost completely hostile non-Socialist opinion, the special Congress of June 30, 1912, had pronounced in favor, not only of the possibility of a peaceful general strike, but of its absolute necessity.¹⁸

Vandervelde and his supporters were confident of the possibility of a non-violent general strike, because the Swedish workers had succeeded in 1909 in effecting such a strike, and a million British miners had also achieved a peaceful strike. Moreover, the strike was being organized by the Labor party, with the definite intention of keeping it orderly. Vandervelde believed, moreover, that the workers would obey the command of Congress. To meet the danger of disturbance from the more militant of the young Socialists the Labor party leaders con-

¹⁷ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-67.

¹⁸ Jules Destrée, "La grève générale en Belgique," *Revue Socialiste*, June, 1913.

ceived the highly successful plan of turning the most influential of these young enthusiasts into a special Labor police. As will be seen later this scheme worked with extraordinary success. After the strike started, all speakers at strike meetings were definitely appointed by the federation whose members were holding the meeting, lest tumult should arise from uncertified orators. A final measure of keeping the strike orderly was the distribution, one week before the 14th of April, of strike cards, uniform for the whole country. These identification cards gave the name, residence, trade and employer of each striker, and affiliation, if any, with a trade union, a coöperative organization, and the Labor party. The card also carried the number of members in the worker's family.⁷⁴ In spite of all these precautions and propaganda, even to the end of the strike, the majority of the leaders secretly feared that the general strike might become violent. Hence it was rather natural that such bitter terms as "*agents provocateurs*," "traitors," "criminals" were applied to any who sought to incite to violence.

The second great commission appointed by the National Committee was concerned with the financial side of the campaign. There was really a triple task before this Commission on Finances: it had to raise a fund for the vast propaganda campaign and for reserve to aid the weaker labor groups in the event of a general strike; it had to aid the district federations raise regional funds for strike relief; and it had to consider schemes for obtaining financial aid from foreign Socialist and labor groups. The National Committee in August, 1912, agreed to the raising of funds from sympathizers by the issue of receipt books for one, five, ten, twenty, fifty and one hundred francs. Of the funds so raised 75 per cent went to the district in which those funds had been collected, 15 per cent went to the expense of propaganda and administration in the same district, and only the remaining 10 per cent went to the national propaganda fund.⁷⁵

Only vouchers and receipts authorized by the National Committee could be used for collecting funds. These were so made as to prevent imitation, and were countersigned by the Secretary of the General Council. For individual saving the National

⁷⁴ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-75.

⁷⁵ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 110, 122; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Committee issued saving stamps of 0.25, 0.50, one and five francs in value. Strict rules were laid down as to raising funds at fêtes, games, and entertainments, and much centralized control of tickets and prompt return of all proceeds were entailed. In the event that the general strike did not take place, all savings were to be returned in full to the individual savers. Half the salaries of Parliamentary representatives, and of the pay of union and coöperative officials went to the strike funds during the period of the strike. Belgian workers in foreign lands sent either half of their earnings or else a definite sum. From the Belgians in Boston, Massachusetts, for example, came a subscription of seven thousand francs. Donations from middle class sympathizers figured rather largely in the lists. Weekly pledges of some fifteen thousand francs were made by such middle class supporters, and *Le Petit Bleu*, a radical newspaper, not a Socialist organ, pledged 100,000 francs a week as long as the strike lasted.⁷⁶ Some 39,000 francs were raised for propaganda through the trade unions and coöperatives.

The strike funds were more difficult to raise, and the problem there even greater. From four to five hundred thousand strikers had to be kept alive for some weeks, only a third of whom would be members of any union, yet the strike must not drain the regular funds of the unions and the coöperatives, lest a defeat in the general strike should leave the workers wholly unprotected against subsequent counter-attacks by the employers. To this end most unions decided that they would not pay strike pay until the strike had run for fifteen days. It was expected that each striker would help keep himself, hence the emphasis on saving beforehand, even if that saving merely took the form of fattening a pig! A special coöperative society was formed to make the holding of such strike funds legal, and this organization called down upon its innocent head a general attack from the non-Socialist press, allegations being freely made that it was for the private profit of its founders.⁷⁷

The results of the Finance Commission's work can be seen in the figures given by both friend and enemy of the general strike. Overbergh, while he gives no national total, reports that the Brussels committee raised some 98,000 francs, over 32,000 of

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67; *Vanderrelde*, *op. cit.*, p. 112. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-24.

which was for propaganda, and some 65,000 francs for strikers' aid. Of these sums only 6,000 francs were spent on propaganda, and 64,000 on the aid of strikers.⁷⁸ Vanderveelde states that the National Committee received in all over 258,000 francs for relief and propaganda, and that the district federations gathered a sum of nearly 278,000 francs—a total of well over half a million francs, not including sums paid direct to members of co-operative organizations and trade unions.⁷⁹ Statistics on the saving accomplished are harder to obtain, but *after the strike was over* workers in a great many places put into co-operative or State savings banks sums from thirty to seventy-five francs a head.⁸⁰ Moreover, a very considerable reduction in the consumption of alcoholic liquors was evident, showing that economies were being made by the workers. In the first three months of the campaign, July-September, 1912, over seven million kilos less malt were used than in the same period of the previous year.⁸¹

When the National Committee spoke of preparing for five hundred thousand strikers over a period of several weeks, there was no intention of giving sufficient aid to every family, but only to the very poorest—and even then much of the aid given was to be in the most economical form possible, in community meals for the strikers, in some cases for their children; and in the second place by arranging to send the children of the neediest strikers away to other homes, either in the rural districts, or out of the country. In this sense, then, the last two Commissions were merely adjuncts of the first two mentioned. It was good propaganda to assure the workers who would go on strike that the worst suffering of actual starvation, or of seeing their children starve, would be avoided. It was good economy to ensure that every franc raised would be expended with the greatest material return for all concerned.

The Commission on Food Supplies was able to turn to the co-operatives for valuable experience in wholesale buying and distribution, and the suffrage and strike campaign gave an opportunity to coördinate the too diverse efforts of the co-operatives. The distribution of needed food was a far greater problem. How were they to determine the need of the strikers? The Com-

⁷⁸ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁷⁹ Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁸¹ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

mission's task was to map out districts and local areas in such a manner that not more than two hundred strikers should be brought together in any one spot, lest the strike cease to be peaceful. Yet how could they be certain that possible strikers in any particular district would be sufficiently in need to come to communal meals, if such were organized? Nonetheless *la soupe communiste* remained to the end a very favorite method of meeting the problem of feeding the strikers. Hence the development of the local centers to which the strikers must come daily not only for food but for registration and for news of the strike's progress. In this scheme for local centers the Commission endeavored to keep the inter-trade and inter-craft character, in order that the very essence of the *general* strike should be clearly grasped by all on strike. Of course particular trade union gatherings were not prevented, but these would be in addition to, and not in place of, these communal gatherings for food and news. Twice a day the common meal would gather the strikers together, encourage them and keep them peaceful and orderly, and would provide a place for orders to be given and for the plans of the leaders to be explained. There was perhaps a sneaking hope that the contrast of a good cheap meal in the common hall with the disorderly meal in the striker's home, might arouse the desire to renew this method whenever future *economic* strikes should occur. The Commission undertook its task with such care that it had even prepared some twenty different menus before the strike actually occurred.¹⁶²

The Commission for the placement of the strikers' children had a double task. It had to convince the workers of the wisdom of parting with their children during the period of the strike, and it had to find and investigate homes in which these children would be properly welcomed and cared for. As it turned out, the first part of the task proved to be much the harder. The argument put forward by the Commission was the impossibility of a six-week strike if all the strikers' children had to be fed daily by their parents—in such case the savings of the would-be strikers would rapidly be consumed. Wherever possible the Commission promised to find homes in the same regional area as the strikers, but this would mean either rural homes or the

¹⁶² Vanderveide, *op. cit.*, pp. 226, 267; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-103.

homes of bourgeois sympathizers. On the other hand, should the evacuation of children be on any large scale the available homes in Belgium would be inadequate, and preparations must be made among their comrades in France and Holland. In such case the children would have the advantage of an experience of travel in a foreign land, as did the children of the middle classes. Incidentally the strike leaders saw ample opportunity of propaganda among the middle classes by the spectacle of the children's exodus. To those middle class families who harbored a worker's child, that child would be a symbol of the sacrifices which the workers were making to gain political equality.

The appeal for offers of homes was very successful. France, Germany, and Holland replied promptly. In Belgium itself both the rural folk and the democratic middle classes in the towns offered homes. In Brussels alone some six hundred children were asked for.⁸³ As it turned out there were not nearly enough child guests for the homes offered. The workers rather feared the effect of middle class habits upon the minds of their children when they once more returned to their working class homes, even if proper care and moral environment were assured. As for letting their children go to a foreign country, that thought was even less attractive!⁸⁴

Aside from the main functions of these four commissions, a good deal of organization of minor importance remained. The committees of the local centers had the task at least once a week of taking a census of the workers on strike in their particular area. Schemes of all kinds were devised for study and amusement on the part of the strikers during the period of the strike. Fêtes, concerts, brief readings of a humorous or Socialist character; preparation of temporary labor libraries, and arrangement for the fuller use of existing ones; the planning of collective visits by workers to the various museums and art galleries (no group to exceed twenty-five persons); daily excursions into the country and the full use of public parks for

⁸³ Many offers came from those who disapproved of the method of the general strike, but wished to show their appreciation of the workers' spirit. France offered 5,000 homes and Holland 2,800.—Vanderveide, *op. cit.*, pp. 268 f. At the end of the strike the London *Times* reported that 1,874 Belgian children had gone to French homes during the strike. (April 24, 1913.)

⁸⁴ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-9; Vanderveide, *op. cit.*, pp. 182 f.

sports—these and other aspects of the possible strike were taken under careful consideration by the National Committee and its district committees.⁸⁵

THE DATE OF THE STRIKE AND THE CONDITION OF PUBLIC OPINION

The Special Congress of June 30, 1912, did not fix the date of the general strike but delegated full powers for that purpose to the National Committee for Universal Suffrage and the General Strike. This committee, as already stated, did not decree a general strike until its meeting of February 12, 1913, and even then it was set for April 14, two months later. It is easy to understand why the strike was not fixed for the first few months of the great campaign—it was not good political logic to declare a definite date until the House had actually considered the Labor party's revision motion. Moreover, one does not commence a general strike in the winter. The most suitable time is the spring, when the workers' gardens can be cultivated during the leisure period of the strike—an April stoppage would be practically an Easter vacation!

The winter of 1912-1913 had been a mild one, and work and wages had been fairly plentiful. Labor, therefore, had a favorable opportunity to save for the strike period. The comparative business prosperity was a trump card for the strikers, the heads of industry were more likely to bring pressure to bear upon the Government to prevent an industrial stoppage. Some such reasons influenced the National Committee in their decision for the month of April as the strike period. But why the 14th? Because in 1913 the 14th of April was a Monday, and Monday in Belgium is by custom something of a holiday, not unlike the English Saturday. If, therefore, the strike were to start on a Monday, there would be added to the strikers' ranks a considerable number of workers who made a custom of taking that day as a holiday (*chomeurs habituels*), and the effect on the public would be the more impressive.⁸⁶

As the day for the general strike drew near the condition of public opinion became most interesting. "An intense and widespread uneasiness made itself felt throughout a great portion

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 f. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-20.

of the population, especially in the large towns and the industrial districts. Catastrophes, violence, and terrorism were predicted by some; others were sure that the strike would be a miserable failure; all, whether openly or secretly, took elaborate precautions. There was not a middle class housewife but laid in a stock of coal and provisions, and many supplied themselves out of all proportion to the danger. In fact there was a very extraordinary panic before the event.⁸⁷

The Catholic press and part of the Liberal press had maintained that the general strike would unchain violence whose limit none could foresee. The experience of former years gave strong reason for such views. Besides the hoarding of food by the middle class a great number of lamps were provided lest the gas and electricity should fail. Fears of all kind were rife: that strike pickets would stop vegetables and milk coming into the towns; that the peasants would not send their supplies into the towns lest they risk the loss of them; that sabotage or the *grève perlée* on the railroads would hold up transportation; that the cities would be thrown into profound darkness; and that the country districts, left destitute of defense, would be the prey of marauding bands. Allegedly well informed people spoke of the disloyalty of the troops—that the reservists were not in a condition to be called upon. In 1902 the Liberals had opposed the Socialists, but now those two parties were anything but enemies and people began to whisper of civil war. Reports spread of the doings of anarchists at Liège, who on April 13 had distributed leaflets, during a speech of Vandervelde to his faithful supporters, inviting the workers to wait the favorable moment in the general strike for taking over the factories and mines, and for seizing upon clothing and provisions.⁸⁸

On the other hand, opposition to the general strike was not disguised. Several radicals favored the general strike and advised surrender to the labor demands, but the greater part of the Liberal party shared the view of the *Journal de Liège* that even if the general strike were legal, it was nonetheless a means of exerting pressure upon society that was not legitimate and one that must be opposed by all men who favored order. It goes without saying that the Catholics were unanimous in their

⁸⁷ Mahain, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-97.

⁸⁸ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 142 f.

opposition to the strike method, even if, like the members of the Democratic League, they were not hostile to franchise revision. As for the manufacturers, the majority showed no hesitation in threatening their workers with instant dismissal if they joined the strike. The Catholic unions, politely termed the "yellow unions" by the Socialists, conducted a great campaign to increase their numbers and to persuade all manufacturers to keep their plants working. As these unions numbered some 100,000 members their influence was considerable.⁸⁸

The State and municipal authorities gave the same warning to their employees as did most of the manufacturers—to strike meant instant and permanent dismissal. On the part of the authorities, moreover, there was a tremendous preparation of armed force, in spite of the heroic efforts of the workers' organizations for the past ten months to prepare an absolutely non-violent strike. Before the 13th of April, railroads, bridges, and all strategic points were heavily guarded. Even in the most peaceful villages soldiers were stationed. And lest the soldiers be not too faithful, as the soldiers watched the striking workers, so, in turn, the gendarmerie watched the soldiers. Thus where trouble was not expected the gendarmerie were asked to release men for service in the more densely populated industrial centers, and the places of such men were to be taken by soldiers. Moreover, wherever there was a daily route of a gendarme that route was to be covered by a soldier and gendarme in company. The gendarme was to draw up the report of the day's task while the soldier signed it.⁸⁹ As the fatal date approached, the conservative press made much of the alleged illegality of a "strike against the State." It was said that all members of the National Committee would be promptly arrested on the outbreak of the strike, and that all strike funds would be seized.⁹¹

Over against all this open and secret hostility toward the organizers of the general strike, the Socialist trade unionists, there was a constantly increasing enthusiasm among the ranks

⁸⁸ Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, p. 237; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-49.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148; Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 234 f. Some weeks before the strike a circular was issued by the commandant-general stating that every gendarme who found himself in the presence of a man who would not "lever les mains" at command, must consider himself in a state of legitimate defense and could make use of his arms!—Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

of the non-Catholic workers. Only the leaders were anxious. After all the propaganda it would be easy to keep the strike going for one or two weeks but, beyond that, who could tell? Would it be necessary to cut into the regular trade union funds? Could the transport workers be relied upon to take their part? In spite of all care and exhortation would the ranks break out into violence? Vandervelde, in a great demonstration in Mons on Sunday, April 13, delivered a typical speech:

Your opponents have the power of gold, of steel and of the priests. The power of gold, whence does it come? From your interminable and patient labor; to diminish that power it is enough that the labor giant cross his arms. The force of steel? They have their soldiers and their gendarmes, but the soldiers are men of the people, like yourselves; they have sent them against you, receive them well, they are your brothers; under their uniforms there beats a heart for justice! As for the gendarmes, those unfortunates in the pay of the Government, serving it as watch dogs, they are individually often honest folk; but remember that all the deeds of blood that mark the history of the clerical Government are their doing and that of the civic guard. They have the power of the priests, which, more than all others, makes slaves. . . . servitude with whom stifles even the desire to shake off their fetters.

Then referring to the Catholic workers who refused to strike he continued:

When you see before you these men, for whom you must have pity, who wish to work; let them work and sink into a dishonor for which they will blush later, when, in their behalf, you will have conquered universal suffrage, and have broken their chains. They deserve only pity, these unhappy folk, who from fear of Hell, agree to conditions that make their life on this earth an eternal hell. You are soldiers of a great army. Tomorrow, by hundreds of thousands, the workers will go on strike. You know I have not desired you to do it. But since it cannot be avoided, let it be peaceful and impressive. It is not Belgium that watches you, but all of Europe. Be worthy of the Socialist International!²²

²² Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 148, 151. Vandervelde in a controversy with Cyrille van Overbergh, in the columns of *Le Peuple* declared: "Will the strike succeed? . . . It will succeed, whatever its immediate result, in this sense that it will be the most impressive manifestation . . . in favor of political reform." (April 11, 1913; cf. Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 121.)

THE STRIKE RUNS ITS COURSE

In the discussion of French general strike theory it has been shown that it is not necessary to have a strike include all the working class to justify the term *general*. The Belgian strike of 1913 was a cessation of work in a great number of trades. Almost all the miners ceased work; the quarry workers and the glass makers; most of the metal workers; a large number of the dockers of Antwerp, of the wood workers and builders, of the spinners and weavers; and many even in the luxury trades. At its height the Belgian general strike of 1913 claimed a "large third" of the industrial workers of that country.⁵⁵ It is true that the railroad men did not join the strike, in spite of Socialist hopes, but that was not an absolute *sine qua non*. The strike was still sufficiently "general" to upset the national economy profoundly.

From the start order and discipline were shown to a remarkable degree. Workers left the factories in excellent order, cleaned and oiled their machines and their tools, and left everything in such condition that there would be little rust to delay the resumption of work when the time came. Even opponents of the strike had to admit that this was pretty clear evidence that the strike was not against the individual employers.⁵⁶

In the province of Hainaut, the industrial province *par excellence*, some 178,000 workers out of 204,000 quit work. In the province of Liège the strike was only slightly less important. An employers' journal, *La Meuse*, estimated that on April 16, the third day of the strike, 81,300 miners out of 41,800 were out on strike, and that in the industrial plants 80,100 workers out of 71,900 had quit work. Vandervelde attempts to show that these figures considerably underestimated the number of strikers, and there can be no question that they do not exaggerate the actual figures.⁵⁷ In the provinces of Brabant, Namur, Antwerp, and Eastern Flanders the strike was localized in certain centers. In the remaining provinces it scarcely counted. In Verviers, the center of the woolen industry, and its surrounding district, Vandervelde claims some 18,000 to 20,000 went on

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141; Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 238 f.; Overberg, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

strike, even the non-textile industries joining in.⁹⁶ At Antwerp about 20,000 workers ceased work. Of these over 8,500 were dock workers, 4,100 diamond workers, and 4,100 metal workers, the remainder belonging to various trades. At Gand, which, like Verviers, was a center of battle between the Socialist and Catholic trade unions, between 20,000 and 25,000 workers were on strike. In Brussels where there are between 135,000 and 160,000 workers, Vandervelde admits that only 31,000 ceased work at the height of the general strike, but he endeavors to explain this small figure by the fact that the workers in that district were largely in small-scale industries, with many of the workers living in country districts outside the city.⁹⁷

The total numbers out at the peak of the strike period are hard to ascertain with certainty. In an ordinary economic dispute it is a simple matter to discover the numbers on strike, for their relief cards will give the data. In this general strike, where relief was not granted in the same manner this became a much more difficult matter. The Belgian Government did not follow its usual custom of keeping record of those who quit work, declaring that this was not an industrial dispute. Although many districts had kept official note of the numbers out, and the gendarmes had done the same, no total was either made or published. The employers' figures were naturally suspected by the Labor party, as the Labor party estimates were by the Catholics. The fact remains that as the strike continued the numbers out kept growing, and those who retired from the strike were more than balanced by those who joined after its inception. Vandervelde and Anseele claim that at its maximum some 450,000 workers were on strike.⁹⁸

On the other hand, *Le Correspondant*, an anti-Socialist journal, carrying a list of strikers day by day for two weeks, placed the highest total at 300,000 on the first Saturday of the strike, April 19. Both estimates were probably colored by the desires of their authors. Professor van Overbergh, founder of the Belgian Sociological Society, and author of the exhaustive treatise on the strike so frequently referred to in this chapter, is probably nearer the facts when he puts the maximum figure

⁹⁶ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-48.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 257 f; *Le Peuple*, April 17, 1913.

at 875,000.⁹⁹ The London *Times* correspondent in a message from Brussels on April 20 stated that the strike had reached its high water mark with the numbers between 350,000 and 380,000.¹⁰⁰ Professor Ernest Mahaim of the University of Liège, writing to the *Economic Journal* believed "that the strike attained the maximum proportions anticipated by anyone acquainted with industrial conditions. . . Taking the most trustworthy calculations the total number of strikers at the outset was nearly 800,000 and the maximum of nearly 400,000 was reached on April 19th."¹⁰¹

As in 1902, the miners formed the backbone of the strike, nearly 120,000 out of 132,000 going out on strike. "The stoppage was practically universal in all the collieries in the districts of Liège, Charleroi, in the midland districts and in the Borinage. The great metallurgic factories were reduced to complete inactivity or to the most trifling output."¹⁰² The industrial centers of Liège and Charleroi offered an impressive spectacle—smokeless chimneys, noiseless workshops; the Black Country had become green and clear, but over it brooded the silence of death.¹⁰³ The variety of trades taking part in the strike was remarkable; the strike was considerable in the coach-making, hat-making, hosiery, glazing, fur, printing, and diamond trades, besides the basic trades of mining, metallurgy, and textiles. The diamond workers of Antwerp, though not included in the strike call, came out en masse from their workshops.

The weak spot in the chain was seen in the public services of communication, gas, and electricity. Practically none of the railroadmen quit work, and only a very few of the tramway men. The postal and telegraph services were untouched owing to the great pressure of the Government upon their employees, many of whom were either Socialists or advocates of franchise reform.¹⁰⁴ Trams, cabs, and taxis ran as usual in the cities. Cafés were open, and the large stores unaffected. Apart from the Black

⁹⁹ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ *Times*, April 21, 1913.

¹⁰¹ June, 1913, pp. 284-97.

¹⁰² In the metal trades the employers did their utmost to break the ranks of their striking workers, offering three days' holiday on pay, but threatening dismissal for all workers who did not return on the fourth day. Dormitories and excellent meals were provided for the workers who did not strike.—Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 241 f.

¹⁰³ Mahaim, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, pp. 247, 259.

Country, the life of the great cities functioned as usual, and the strike was scarcely visible. Yet it was distinctly felt; if stores were open, business was poor. Commercial travelers and business men stayed home, tourists followed their example, and the workers had nothing to spend. Unlike Brussels the port of Antwerp did show signs of the cessation of work. A London *Times* correspondent cabled home, "A visit to Antwerp gave the first real impression of the strike the writer has been able to find in Belgium. The docks were certainly working at low pressure, and the idling dockers looked as if idleness without compensating excitement were a tedious pastime."¹⁰⁵

In spite of the fear, on the part of some of the port workers, that grain elevators would be introduced if they ceased work, thus permanently depriving them of their jobs, the strike was very general at the port, but the port did not cease for lack of workers. The priests of the surrounding villages compelled their flocks to take the train to Antwerp, to act as substitutes for the strikers. Little by little they accustomed themselves to the task of unloading wheat ships, but they handled things clumsily and slowly, so that even where the labor outfits were complete there was much delay.¹⁰⁶ The deserted aspect of the quays was due more to the lack of ships than to the lack of casual labor of the rural variety. Shipowners and business firms had diverted their vessels to Rotterdam and other ports, fearing the effect of the general strike. Vanderveelde boasts that, while on the 15th of April some 9,300 workers came in from the northern villages near Antwerp, on the following day only 2,600 appeared. Overbergh suggests that considerable intimidation of a quiet type was used by the regular dock workers. The strikers gathered before the station, in groups sufficiently scattered to avoid the appearance of an assembly, but in such manner as to compel the non-strikers to pass right through their midst, under hostile looks, and occasional threatening remarks, such as "Look out for yourselves. We'll take revenge later. If you work in the hold you'll catch a sack on your head," and "If you come tomorrow you're a dead man."¹⁰⁷ But, judging by the reputation for rough manners which the Antwerp dockers

¹⁰⁵ *Times*, April 22, 1913.

¹⁰⁶ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 178 f.; Vanderveelde, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

possessed, this form of "intimidation" was an exceedingly mild expression of feelings. Far greater disturbances might well have been expected and perhaps would have occurred but for the careful preparations of the unions and the energetic action of five hundred vigorous "strike police" who patrolled the quays incessantly, telling the strikers not to form groups, always alert to oppose any attempt at violence against the "yellow unions." Not once, however, did they have to intervene in any serious matter.¹⁰⁸

Great efforts were made to draw into the strike all the typographical workers and to stop the press, including the Socialist papers, with the exception of a single official bulletin edited by the National Committee. The first ballot of the typographical members gave a majority against joining the strike. A second vote on the proposition that only the workers in the book-printing concerns should cease work met with even stronger opposition. Finally, four days after the strike started, a vote to include the press as well was overwhelmingly carried, this strike to begin on April 20. Some 600 typographical members struck in Brussels, and *Le Peuple*, the Socialist organ, *La Gazette*, *Le Petit Bleu* (which had pledged 100,000 francs a week for the duration of the strike to the strike funds), *La Chronique*, and *Le Soir* all failed to appear on certain days, but the majority of the press passed through the crisis without too many difficulties. One of the ironies of the strike was the refusal of the typographical union to provide personnel to print the strike bulletin, and the latter had to be printed at Lille, in France!¹⁰⁹

The glass workers were the aristocrats of the strike. The glass blowers earned from 400 to 1,200 francs a month. They declared that they would resume work when everyone else did, whether the strike lasted eight days, eight weeks, or eight months. These workers were used to long strikes; in 1900 they had conducted one that lasted twelve months, and again in 1904 a six months' strike. Their union secretary is said to have admitted that their treasury possessed three million francs. Two-thirds of these workers were owners of property.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁹ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 173; Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹¹⁰ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

"As the total working population of the country is estimated at over a million, those who expected a universal stoppage could fairly declare that the strike had failed. But it is clear that neither the small independent workers, nor those engaged in home industries or in agriculture, can have contributed any appreciable contingent to the body of strikers. Nor, with the exception of the port of Antwerp, were the transport industries much affected; there was no stoppage of the State railways, nor interruption in the tramway services; and the public gas and electric works scarcely suffered. On the other hand all the great manufacturers were paralyzed. If we estimate that these absorbed 700,000 workpeople, the strike certainly withdrew one-half of them." This seems a fair enough summary of the situation.¹¹¹ The "general" strike of 1913 was to all intents and purposes a "mine and factory strike,"¹¹² but at that, and considering the well organized opposition of the Catholic workers, it was a surprising achievement for the National Committee.

THE GREAT SILENCE

The aspect of the great strike that most impressed public opinion was the profound quiet with which the strike started and the calm discipline with which it ran its course. This impression was the stronger because nearly everyone outside the Labor party ranks expected violence of the type to which the public had become accustomed. Cabling to his newspaper on the first day of the strike, the *London Times* correspondent bore witness that "Calmness is reported everywhere. The strike. . . is perfectly peaceful." At Charleroi, where the great majority of workers struck, there was "no molestation of men at work." The same correspondent on the following day was able to report that "perfect order still prevails." On the third day of the strike he telegraphed, "The same peaceful aspect and absence of disorder are maintained. . . . The strike leaders have fully carried out the promise that the strike should be peaceful and the strikers have rendered admirable obedience to orders." Though large numbers of foreign correspondents were in all parts of Belgium, watching the progress of the strike, the *London Times* could still declare of the fourth strike day, "The

¹¹¹ Mahaim, *loc. cit.*

¹¹² *London Times*, April 15, 1913.

quiet has been complete so far. . . there has been no ruffling of the calm on succeeding days." On the 20th of the month the *Times* reported that "the strikers have a rather holiday and good natured demeanor and show nothing approaching that lowering, sullen aspect that portends desperate earnestness in a desperate cause."¹¹³ When the strike had ended the *Times'* Brussels correspondent declared, "the Government failed to believe that their opponents could control the elements for the passive coercion with which they were threatened. These opponents have demonstrated their ability."¹¹⁴

It is true that every possible precaution had been taken by the authorities. Soldiers and police were everywhere. The assembly of more than a few persons in front of any Catholic coöperative was forbidden. Railroad stations and tracks were patrolled, and the tunnels guarded by soldiers. Nunneries were guarded. On the first day of the strike military and police were present at six in the morning at all factories and workshops. No little credit, however, must be given to the special "strike-police" organized by the Labor party. These "police" were present at all trade union meetings, all fêtes, games, or conferences. The surroundings of factories and workshops were guarded by them. Each member of this force carried his identity card, to be shown wherever intervention became necessary. Any "incident" had to be promptly reported to the local committee, and in the meantime no parades or processions were permitted save with the official sanction of the regular trade union committee.¹¹⁵

The workers themselves walked around their towns, looking quietly in the store windows; slept late and went to bed early; cultivated their gardens; visited the local *Maison du Peuple* to read the press or learn the news from the local control committee; visited their parents in other towns, making the journey *on foot* lest they give any of their money to the State railroads! Many others availed themselves of the officially organized group visits to the museums and galleries or attended the labor musicales and lectures. The metal workers obtained work in France and sent a large part of their earnings back to the strike fund. The more energetic and "militant" occupied themselves with the actual running of the strike organism—helping in the soup

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, April 21, 1913.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1913.

¹¹⁵ Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-66.

kitchens, distributing strike cards, acting under the Propaganda Commission, or else functioning as "strike police."¹¹⁸

Since the main aim of the National Committee was to keep the strike both "formidable and peaceful" it was not an easy task to keep the workers stirred to enthusiasm. Three methods were used for this purpose: the carefully disciplined demonstration, the Parliamentary tribune, and the printed manifesto. The simple type of demonstration with bands, ending in an open-air meeting was used at La Louvière and Gand on the third day of the strike. The memorial procession, of a very impressive and silent character, was used by the workers to pay respect to the memory of M. Janson at Liège and Charleroi, and again, at his interment, at Brussels. Then the official parade of some trade was a common method of demonstration. The metal workers, for instance, made a silent journey through the middle class districts. Some trades marched in procession in the mornings, others in the afternoons. Finally there was the demonstration when strikers' children were escorted to the station for departure to their temporary homes.

Parliamentary discussion occurred as soon as the strike started. The radical deputies demanded that the regular order-of-the-day be set aside and the general strike be discussed in the House. A good deal of "talking to the strikers" undoubtedly took place in these House debates. The method of the manifesto was used after the House adjourned, to encourage the strikers to keep out in full force until negotiations really had accomplished something, and to prevent their believing the fight was already over.¹¹⁷ In the *Bulletin de La Grève* for April 21 a flaming manifesto appeared, with headlines all across the page: "Attention! No resumption of work today, if the working class does not wish to lose the fruit of the immense and magnificent effort which it has just made."

Had the strike been prolonged beyond the second week it is possible that the manifesto method might have displaced the rest in relative importance. As it was all the methods used seemed remarkably restrained. "The fire of wild enthusiasm appeared nowhere. . . . The strike was ruled by the firm desire of all the militants to preserve the peaceful attitude."¹¹⁸ Van-

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-89, and 107-69.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-215.

dervelde admits that it is hypothetical whether the same calm would have lasted had the resistance of the Government continued after several weeks of strike. "The proletariat would not have remained passive before the ruin of all their hopes."¹¹⁹

THE STRIKE ENDS: VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

From April 16, when Parliament reassembled, the strike completely occupied the time of the House, being hotly and continuously discussed. The Prime Minister admitted that the Commission which was to be appointed to discuss the possible amendment of the municipal and provincial franchise "might also occupy itself by 'talking' of the Parliamentary franchise." This point of entry was skillfully seized upon by the Opposition. M. Masson, a Liberal deputy, offered a resolution, calling upon the House to resume the regular business of the day in view of Prime Minister de Broqueville's declaration, and including a good portion of that same declaration in the resolution. The Prime Minister suggested adjournment of the House till the 22nd, presumably for negotiations. The Socialists meanwhile appealed to the strikers to make the strike even more effective during the period of delay.¹²⁰

On April 23 the Masson amendment, again amended by M. Liebaert for the Right, with a paragraph condemning the general strike, was passed by a great majority—the first part unanimously, the condemnatory paragraph by 124 votes to 39 with 12 abstentions. The final vote was 138 to 2, with 38 abstaining.¹²¹ After the House session closed, the Socialist deputies returned to the Brussels *Maison du Peuple*. From the balcony MM. Destrée of Charleroi, Ansele of Gand, Troclet of Liège, Pepin of Mons and Vandervelde of Brussels addressed the masses of their "comrades." Vandervelde declared that the Socialist deputies had brought to them "un rien avec une longue queue" and asked them all to remain out on strike at least until Congress should meet a day or so later; that if some of them were furious at the trifling result there were others, among the Right, who were even more furious at having to vote for the Masson resolution. The strikers had won a partial victory; he

¹¹⁹ Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹²⁰ Mahaim, *loc. cit.*; Overbergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 214 f.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

was sure that revision would triumph.

A special Congress was called for the 24th of the month, and on the 23rd the National Committee for Universal Suffrage and the General Strike decided:

(1) That the strike had attained impressive completeness and discipline and had proved the power and solidarity of the working class.

(2) That the strike had placed before the public in the most pressing manner the question of universal suffrage.

(3) That the strike had compelled discussion of the question in Parliament for more than a week, and had won a precise statement of intention from the Government leader as to the establishment of an electoral commission. That in view of these achievements the National Committee would propose to Congress the immediate resumption of work.¹²²

Vanderveelde, Destrée, and Anseele were chosen to report to Congress. Vanderveelde had opposed the general strike in the Congress of March 23rd; Destrée and Anseele had both upheld it. After much discussion Congress adopted the resolution of the National Committee for immediate resumption of work. The president of the Congress appealed for the same unanimity of action in the resumption of work as marked its cessation. In fact a rush back to work had already started with the statement of the National Committee the previous day, and Congress would have had hard work to stem the rush had it tried. When M. Tilmans of Anderlecht cried out: "In spite of all, as far as I am concerned the strike must continue," a voice from the floor interjected "without strikers!"¹²³

The Masson resolution did not give complete satisfaction to the strikers. It was a partial victory, as Vanderveelde had admitted, the first decisive step towards revision, as Anseele had remarked. The latter was accused by Volhaert of accepting after the strike a resolution in which he had no confidence on March 23rd—a reference to Anseele's protest that he would not stand

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 221-23.

¹²³ The opponents of resumption of work in the Congress were of two kinds; one group objected to the manner in which the hands of Congress had been forced by the recommendation of the National Committee, the other group objected to the motion in the House as quite inadequate.—*Ibid.*, p. 224.

for a retreat without a battle. Tilmans went further and asserted that the workers had "obtained nothing, had been decoyed, trapped, as in 1902." Nevertheless the strikers returned with considerable discipline, though on April 26 there were still 95,000 men out on strike in Hainaut province, and troops were still on guard. The opinion of the workers was strongly divided on the question whether the results of the great strike had justified their sacrifices.¹²⁴

Vandervelde, in *Le Peuple*, asserted that the strike had succeeded beyond all hopes, but one suspects that he was looking more at the orderly discipline of the strikers than at the size of the victory over the Government. The Liberal press claimed that Premier de Broqueville had yielded in the strike what he had refused to yield beforehand—the possibility of the Electoral Commission considering the national Parliamentary franchise as well as the provincial and communal one. The Catholic press naturally declared that the Right had ceded nothing whatever that had not already been promised before April 14. Perhaps the editorial writer of the *London Times* was nearer the truth than any of the extremists when he said: "The affair has not been a general strike as we understand the term. It has been a miscellaneous strike organized as a political demonstration, and regarded in that light it has, on the whole, been successful. . . . what has happened is that the question of electoral reform has been advanced a step. Perhaps we may concede that the strike has impressed the extreme wing of the Catholic party, and thus at any rate facilitated and hastened the proposed inquiry into the electoral system, which is the first step toward reform."¹²⁵ An independent Belgian observer in appraising the strike thinks "there can be no doubt that the Labor party emerges from this experience with enhanced reputation. It has given evidence of a remarkable control over the working population, and ability to enforce discipline and exact considerable sacrifices for the sake of political reform. It has given proof of conspicuous organizing power, and has gained much prestige from the fact that the strike remained everywhere from first to last completely peaceable. . . ."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ *London Times*, April 28, 1913; cf. Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

¹²⁵ April 26 and 26; cf. Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹²⁶ Mahaim, *loc. cit.*

At the beginning of the strike the Socialist leader Anseele had stated the purpose of the great cessation of work as a quadruple one: to win universal suffrage, to preserve Belgian Socialist unity, to maintain the confidence of the working class in itself, and to keep intact the weapon of the general strike for future struggles.¹²⁷ If the brutal fact must be told it was not until the Great War had ended that universal suffrage "pure and simple," for all men of twenty-one years of age, with the abolition of the hated plural vote, actually became the law of the land. And it is doubtful if it was not even more the levelling effect of the War that ultimately achieved the victory than it was the lesson of the general strike. At the elections of November 16, 1919, the clericals were defeated, the Labor party receiving some 650,000 votes to the 600,000 votes of the Catholics and the 350,000 of the Liberals. Whether it was war or the general strike or both, by 1919 the trade union membership in Belgium of the non-Catholic type, had jumped from 120,000 to 600,000.¹²⁸

The second and third aims stated by Anseele were undoubtedly attained—the Labor party members and the Socialist trade unionists, as has been attested by impartial critics, had no cause to be anything but satisfied with their showing of ability, self-control and unity. As to the attainment of the last aim—was the general strike discredited as a weapon?—let two non-Socialist Belgian writers give the answer. Professor Mahaim evidently thinks it was not. "It is clear that the temptation to repeat this kind of experiment will be very strong," though he adds, "we may well ask with anxiety what irreparable misfortune such events might not bring in their train, if they were frequently repeated."¹²⁹ Professor Overbergh concludes his book with the following significant passage: "Ce qui parait certain c'est que, en attendant, la grève économique, de plus en plus générale, est une des probabilités de demain."¹³⁰ That he is not far wrong can be seen from the great economic and political general strikes that have taken place since the war—to no little degree encouraged by the qualified success of the Belgian experiment of 1913.

¹²⁷ *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, March-April, 1913, pp. 223-27.

¹²⁸ Vanderveide, "The Belgian Elections," *The Socialist Review*, New York, Feb. 1920, pp. 136 f.

¹²⁹ *Loc. cit.* ¹³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 648.

Before closing the chapter on Belgian general strike history, it will not be out of place to consider very briefly the reasons for the very qualified success of the great strike, the more so as many of the reasons will be found to apply to almost every large-scale "general" strike before and since. It has already been shown that the public authorities, state, provincial and local, took the attitude of never yielding so long as the social threat of the great strike remained in existence. The emphatic warning to their employees, before the strike, of instant dismissal if they joined the ranks, told heavily against the cessation of the public services. Public opinion itself was bitterly against the Labor party so far as the general strike method was concerned. A few of the advanced Liberal newspapers showed some favor to the Socialists after the declaration of Premier de Broqueville on March 12. The majority of the press and public remained hostile, in spite of all the Labor party could do and notwithstanding the admirable order of the strike itself. The Catholic unions formed strong nuclei of opposition to the strike in every district where they were organized. The manufacturers and big business men were largely Liberal in politics and hostile to the strike, imitating the public authorities in stern warnings of dismissals to their employees if they ceased work. With the small trader class, with the workers in small-scale industry, and with the agricultural classes the Labor party failed utterly.

Among the citizens in general was the fear that if the Socialists gained universal suffrage by the general strike they would not hesitate to use that same method in the future to obtain the whole program of the Labor party.¹³¹ The historic differences between the Walloons and the Flemings, though not so marked as in the strike of 1902, when only one-tenth of the strikers' ranks were found in Flanders, still remained in sufficient strength to make the situation more difficult than would otherwise have been the case. All the pleas for delay in fixing the date for the 1913 strike came from the Flemish districts. Even in 1913 the Walloon districts accounted for nearly seventy-five per cent of the workers on strike.¹³² Finally, the lack of visible effects of the general strike in the political capital of Belgium,

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-340 and 364.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 361.

and in many of the Flemish cities, had no little to do with the semi-failure of the strike. The strike was not evident to the Brussels public in anything like the degree it was to the public of London in 1926, or even to the citizens of Stockholm in 1909. And what the public does not see or feel is not likely to stir it to great efforts of intervention.

The relative success of the great strike of 1918 gave international Socialism a new confidence in the general strike as a powerful labor weapon. But it did far more than that. It was a new fact which gradually began to penetrate the minds of the ruling classes throughout all Europe. Their fear of the future caused the building up of more than one bulwark against such occurrences in their own lands. Professor Overbergh summed up upper and middle class opinion when he wrote: "*Against the general strike, those classes must find a means of defense or be conquered and crushed.*"¹²⁸

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

CHAPTER IV

SWEDEN "TRIES ANYTHING ONCE"

THE POLITICAL STRIKE OF 1902

SWEDEN OFFERS an interesting example of a national labor movement that has been willing to "try anything once," but has rejected mere repetition. Both the political and the economic general strike were actually practised in Sweden during the first decade of the twentieth century; and a political mass-strike to prevent international war was threatened, when Sweden and Norway were untangling their constitutional difficulties.¹ This threat of the political strike may possibly have aided in the prevention of war between Norway and Sweden, as Ensor believes; the actual political mass-strike of 1902 for universal suffrage was claimed as a partial victory; but the great economic general strike of 1909, organized by the trade unions to bring pressure to bear upon the Swedish Employers' Association, was, as far as any labor gains were concerned, admittedly a complete failure.

The unsuccessful general strike in Belgium, of April, 1902, was scarcely over when a large-scale cessation of labor was threatened in Sweden for a largely similar aim—drastic revision of the suffrage. It would, however, hardly be true to conclude that the Swedish struggle was in any way a direct outcome of the Belgian one of the same year, for the agitation for universal suffrage in Sweden was as old as the socialist movement.²

At the opening of the twentieth century the right to vote for the Second Chamber of the Riksdag depended on qualifications

¹ R. C. K. Ensor, *Modern Socialism*, p. xv.

² At the second congress of the Socialist party at Noviköping in 1891 the question of the general strike was discussed as a method of exerting political pressure, as an effective way to win universal suffrage, and even as a revolutionary method of overthrowing the existing system. This Congress declared the general strike a useful method to impose political or economic demands for which the popular conscience was ripe, but that it was neither possible nor prudent to fix any date at that time.—Huss, *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède en 1909*, p. 24.

which could not be attained by the majority of the population. Only those citizens could vote who had attained their twenty-first year, who drew an income, liable to tax, of 800 kronor (about \$200), rented a piece of property worth 6,000 kronor for a period of five years, or possessed a taxable property of at least 1,000 kronor. In Stockholm only 4.3 per cent of the residents had the right to vote.³

The First Chamber was elected by indirect method through the vote of the district and city governments, and was, at the time mentioned, even more conservative than the Second Chamber. The Government itself more than once proposed measures of suffrage extension or of amelioration of labor conditions which were rejected by both Chambers of the Riksdag.⁴ On the other hand, laws which were likely to have an oppressive effect on the working class were readily passed. A long agitation for a more liberal basis of election had been made by the labor movement in conjunction with other, democratic, but "bourgeois" groups, without result. In congress at Gothenburg in 1894 the socialists recommended the workers to become familiar with the idea of a complete cessation of work, as a weapon for obtaining the suffrage. This weapon was rejected by a "popular parliament" of labor and middle class democrats in 1896, and this rejection caused a definite break between the liberal and labor campaigns for a wider electorate.⁵

At the Malmö congress, in 1901, universal suffrage was again energetically demanded and the general strike designated as the final method of its attainment. In the same year a bill was introduced into the Riksdag for the reorganization of the army, entailing a very considerable increase in the burdens of taxation and military service placed upon the people, but including no grant of electoral representation. The workers felt that the time had come for action. Some \$30,000 was raised for the expenses of the suffrage campaign. When, in the following year, the Swedish Government offered a thoroughly unsatisfactory bill for electoral reform, the workers looked upon it as an insult,

³ Erik Brunte, "La lutte pour le suffrage universel (Suede)," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 31, 1902, pp. 1082-89.

⁴ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XXVI, 212.

⁵ Erik Brunte, *loc. cit.*

and an extraordinary congress of the Socialist party was held at Stockholm, April 10-18.⁵

This special congress passed a resolution declaring it necessary to organize an energetic campaign in favor of a wide cessation of labor. From Sunday, April 20, there were to be great demonstrations every Sunday in all the Swedish cities and towns until the Riksdag committee on the suffrage question published its report. From that moment similar mass meetings were to be held every evening until the day when the Riksdag actually commenced the debate on the suffrage bill. The day the debate started a complete cessation of work was to take place, wherever such action would serve to exercise pressure upon the Government. During the general strike the régime of nightly meetings was to be continued, but all demonstrations connected with the campaign were to be kept within the limits of the law.⁷ This program was carried out with discipline through April and the first part of May, and the only untoward incident took place in Stockholm, where the police sabred the allegedly peaceful manifestants, still further inflaming the popular excitement.⁸

On the 15th day of May, when the Riksdag began its discussions, the general strike broke out, with irresistible effect. Never before in Sweden had work ceased with such unanimity and discipline. The most varied trades followed the instructions to strike; factory workers, builders, butchers, bakers, gas-workers, printers, cab-drivers and tramway employees joined the strike. Stockholm seemed like a small provincial town, with its means of transportation at a standstill, and its light poor or completely lacking. No newspapers appeared in Stockholm, their proprietors threatening their employees, quite in vain, with a fourteen-day lock-out.⁹ Although the normal functions of social life were more or less suspended and the troops invaded the city en masse, the most complete order reigned. This orderliness of the strikers gained for them considerable support from

⁵ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XXVI, 195, 212; cf. Hjalmar Branting, in Lagardelle's *Le grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 377

⁷ *London Times*, April 15, 1902.

⁸ Hjalmar Branting, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 377 f.; cf. *Times*, April 21, which reported "rioting before the King's Palace."

⁹ Georg, *Theorie und Praxis des Generalstreiks*, pp. 52-54.

the other classes. In all some 120,000 strikers made the sacrifice of half a week's wages in their demonstration for universal suffrage.¹⁰

Meanwhile, in the Riksdag, the Senate rejected the Government program and requested the Ministers to present a new scheme, before 1904, based on universal suffrage, proportional representation, and the minimum age of twenty-five years. The Second Chamber also rejected the bill and voted an "order-of-the-day" asking for renewed study of the question, with a new bill giving universal suffrage to all citizens of twenty-five years of age who had satisfied their military service requirements. The Government scheme thus rejected and a more satisfactory plan demanded by the Riksdag, the general political strike was called off, as already planned, and the workers resumed work with the same unanimity and discipline with which they had ceased. Although it had been stated most clearly at the beginning that the strike was political and in no sense against the individual employers, a few of the latter took the opportunity to penalize their workers, but this was by no means general.¹¹

It has been stated that the strike failed in its purpose.¹² It is true that when the Government produced its new scheme it was a strange compound of universal suffrage, with many restrictions, and proportional representation, which did not satisfy the workers. A further general strike was considered, but the wisdom of the leaders and ranks finally rejected the idea, for the following reasons: the element of surprise would no longer be present, and a long and well organized strike would call forth against it preparation by the Government and the employers, with severe reprisals from the latter; it would mean a serious split between the radicals and the socialists in the elections due in the summer of 1905, and might even throw the voters toward the parties of the Right, to the detriment of electoral reform. The choice had to be made between the general election or the general strike.

¹⁰ Spargo, *Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism*, p. 117; cf. Branting, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, and Brunte, *loc. cit.*

¹¹ Erik Brunte, *op. cit.*, p. 1039; Branting, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 377 f.

¹² "As this strike was of an exclusively political kind, and was intended to put pressure on the Chambers, it was generally disapproved, and failed in its object." *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XXVI, 213. As the Riksdag rejected the Government scheme this seems hardly a legitimate conclusion.

The executive of the Socialist party, therefore, in 1904 took a careful referendum of working class opinion, asking the various trade unions if they were willing to undertake a further general strike, without any hope of economic assistance from their unions, and without having the date for resumption of work fixed before the strike commenced. Moreover, the referendum made it clear that the strike would be called by the political party, and that the unions, to protect themselves, would disclaim all responsibility for the strike and for the reprisals which might well take place after the strike ended. On the basis of this referendum the congress of the Socialist party in February, 1905, was to decide for or against the resumption of the political general strike.¹³

In point of fact this referendum showed clearly that the workers were not prepared to try the political strike weapon twice in such swift succession.¹⁴ Not until 1907, after protracted dissension between the two Chambers of the Riksdag, was a measure of universal manhood suffrage introduced.¹⁵ The completely democratic suffrage, however, with equal and universal suffrage for adult male and female citizens, was a product rather of the world-wide ferment of the common people, immediately after the close of the Great War, than of the political general strike;¹⁶ though, it must be admitted, in Sweden's case, that the general political strike of 1902 was more of a success than was its immediate predecessor of the same year in Belgium.¹⁷

LABOR AND CAPITAL IN SWEDEN

Swedish labor has the distinction of organizing the most complete, non-revolutionary, general strike, for distinctly economic purposes, in the history of the labor movement up to the outbreak of the Great War of 1914. Just as the Belgian strike of

¹³ Branting, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

¹⁴ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 64; cf. Huss, *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XXVI, 195. ¹⁶ *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., III, 701.

¹⁷ The report, presented by the Social-Democratic party of Holland to the Amsterdam Congress of the International, referring to the political strike in Sweden, 1902, asserted that the trade unions suffered no loss because the political Socialist party was solely responsible. The remainder of this chapter will show the error of such a conclusion. See Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 397.

1913, standing as the most effective, peaceful, political strike in labor records up to 1914, justified a chapter to itself, so too, with the Swedish example of an orderly, economic general strike. In no other country at that date could the experiment of an economic general strike have been so complete and the results so definite, for in no other country were the opposing forces of labor and capital so well organized, or the field of their operation so carefully observed and recorded.¹⁸

Although these opposing forces were well organized it was a comparatively recent achievement on both sides. The workers themselves began it, under the influence of Danish and German socialism. Small trade unions were started in various industrial centers, but it was the Swedish socialist pioneers who drew the attention of labor to the importance of trade organization on a larger scale. The close connection between "social democracy" and the union movement favored the development of both, but laid the movement open to possible dissension later. Owing to lack of propagandists the union movement grew somewhat slowly at first, and its policy towards employers was correspondingly prudent. Before long, however, the workers felt the need for defense against occasional coalitions of employers in various localities, and the outcome was the establishment of national federations of unions in the same trade or "profession." The first of these, the Federation of Swedish Typographers, was formed in 1886 and remained a strong and independent federation at the time of the great strike.¹⁹

Due to the strictly occupational alignment of the Swedish trade unions, one small section of a factory would win improved labor conditions entirely regardless of the rest of the workers therein. The necessity of general organization, which would include the national federations, became apparent. After many failures the *Sveriges Landsorganisation*, the Swedish

¹⁸ T. H. Fenson, "The Swedish General Strike," *Econ. Jour.*, Dec., 1909, pp. 602-9. The Swedish Department of Labor made an exhaustive inquiry into this general strike and published its findings in three volumes. Recognizing the wide interest aroused abroad by this strike the Swedish Government in 1912 published a most valuable summary of these reports in German and French.

¹⁹ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède en 1909*, p. 4. This is the summary, in French, referred to in footnote 18, and is largely used in this chapter.

National Federation of Labor, was formed in 1898. At the beginning of 1909 this body included 2,172 unions, with 162,391 members, divided among some twenty-seven different occupational federations. The vast majority of this membership was industrial, only some seven thousand agricultural and forestry workers being organized. The most important constituent federations in the National Federation of Labor were the Swedish Federation of Factory Laborers and Mechanics, with some 40,000 members; the Federation of Swedish Metal-workers with nearly 34,000 members; the Federation of Woodworkers with 12,000 and the Federation of Swedish Sawyers with 11,000 members. Certain federations remained outside the National Federation of Labor but maintained friendly relations with it. Of these the most important were the Federation of Swedish Typographers with nearly 6,000 members, and the Swedish Federation of Railwaymen with about 26,000 members.²⁰

All told, the ranks of Swedish workers in trade unions of socialist tendency, amounted to some 200,000 members. Unlike Belgium, the Swedish labor movement had no serious religious division, nor any large numbers of "yellow" unions to fear. The largest non-socialist labor organization in Sweden in 1909 was the Swedish Workers' Federation with only 11,000 members belonging to many different trades, and scattered widely over the country. In addition to this organization there were a few non-affiliated local union groups, bringing up the total of non-socialist union membership to 15,000. These 215,000 organized Swedish workers represented 50 per cent of the workers in trades wherein union ideas had been applied, so that the Swedish workers' organizations were relatively the most important in Europe at the time of the great strike.²¹

On the side of the employers, organization on any large scale was more recent. Significantly enough, it was the shock of the great political strike of 1902 that awoke the individual employers to their unprepared condition. In view of the effort to mass over one hundred thousand Swedish workers for common action, albeit strictly political in aim, the industrial leaders of Sweden recognized that their old organizations were no longer of a size or a character to meet the struggle. Out of 490

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

strikes between 1895 and 1902, the results of which were known, the workers had won 243, the employers only 63, while 184 had ended in mutual concessions.²²

The existing employers' organizations were more of the nature of social clubs and had to be completely transformed. On the one hand, employers' associations of every kind were started, intended to balance in every branch of industry the forces of production and consumption; on the other hand, protective organizations were formed to counteract those of the workers and to regulate labor conditions in the best interests of the *entrepreneurs*. The new basis for such organizations consisted of a monetary deposit liable to forfeiture if the common agreements were not complied with.

The Swedish Employers' Association was the largest and most important of these new organizations dating from the strike of 1902. The purpose of this Association was to "facilitate understanding among the masters," to aid them in solving their labor struggles, and "to recompense them for losses occasioned by strikes or lock-outs."²³ The most important constituent employers' federations in this new association were the Federation of Foundries and Ironworks, with 86 employers employing some 80,000 workers, the Federation of Textile Industries claiming 128 employers and employing 22,700 workers, and the Federation of Sawmills with 64 employers and 17,500 workers to its name. The rapid growth of the Swedish Employers' Association can be seen in a comparison of data for 1903 with that for 1909. In membership the Association jumped from 101 to 1,423, in number of workers employed from 29,000 to 163,000, and in accumulated funds from two million kronor to seventeen and a half million.

At first this organization was content to act on the defensive, providing insurance against strikes, but before long it began to regulate labor conditions in the interests of the employers by means of collective contracts. This new attitude was seen in the famous *Article 25*, of their statutes, which compelled every employer-member to submit any contract with a labor organization to the bureau of the Association. Every such contract, in fact, had to obtain the approval of the Association before

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

It could be signed by the individual employer. Each such contract, moreover, had to contain a clause recognizing the right of the employer to "hire and fire" his workers, to direct and apportion the work, and to employ the workers of any union or of none.²⁴ This great power, put into the hands of the leading employers' association, was soon to cause the greatest strike of Swedish history, with the gravest defeat that Swedish labor had offered. It must not, however, be forgotten that this powerful liberty-restricting employers' association was the direct outcome of the political strike of organized labor in 1902.

Outside of this powerful employers' organization there existed several other smaller groups of employers. Thus the steel, ship-building, coach-making, and electro-mechanical industries were included in the Association of Swedish Workshops, also founded in 1902, possessing some 162 members and employing 25,500 workers in 1908. The Central Federation of Employers, scarcely more than a casual group of building trade employers in 1903, had grown gradually by the absorption of all the building trades and their purveyors, so that in the early part of 1909 it included some 2,000 employers giving employment to nearly 45,000 workers.²⁵

THE POLICIES OF THE TWO CAMPS

It has been shown that the Swedish workers were the leaders in the matter of organization. Being in the lead, it was natural enough that for many years organized labor should have had the advantage over their employers. Gradually the recognition of the union was forced from the individual employers, and the acceptance of collective bargaining. By the close of 1908 there were in existence some 2,400 collective contracts, including in their scope 9,600 employers and 825,000 workers. Gradually the workers compelled consideration in the matter of wages, hours of labor, the right of the unions to consider the application

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵ Besides this "Big Three" there were the following employers' associations in existence in 1909: The Union of Swedish Railroads, employing 20,000 workers; the Union of Swedish Agriculturalists, employing 30,000 workers; the General Union of Swedish Master-Printers with 4,000 workers; the Central Federation of Swedish Master-Tailors with 3,500 workers; the Union of Swedish Shipowners with 594 ships and 1,000 men, and the Union of Swedish Master-Bakers with 1,000 employees.—*Ibid.*, p. 14.

of employers for collective contracts, and the right of the union member to priority in employment. In some unions, such as those in the transport industry, this union power was gained at the expense of the non-union worker. The efforts of the organized workers were aided by a steady increase in industrial production—from 1897 to 1907 the value of production output all but doubled, while the number of workers employed increased from 290,000 to 390,000.²⁶

A factor that ultimately aggravated the tension between the organized workers and the more recently organized employers was the considerable degree of autonomy still retained by the federations that were affiliated with the National Federation of Labor. Not only in their internal affairs but in their relations with the employers' associations, the lesser organizations could, and did, act with a considerable degree of independence of the National Federation of Labor. A situation in which individual unions or federations could take action against the advice of their superior organization, and then, when in trouble as a result of the precipitate action, could call upon the larger group for aid, contained within itself many dangers for the labor movement and had already raised grave difficulties between the labor and the employers' organizations in 1907-8. This problem of more complete centralization was made the subject of the most vital discussion at the congress of the National Federation of Labor in November, 1909, after the general strike had ended, but, as will be seen, with no satisfactory result.²⁷

On the side of the employers the issue began by the Association of Swedish Workshops declaring general lock-outs in 1903 and 1905, obtaining as a result a *national* settlement. This kind of contract was now aimed at by all the employers' groups, and was the especial aim of the great Swedish Employers' Association. The third member of the "Big Three," the Central Federation of Employers, did not succeed in making any national contracts until May, 1909.²⁸ On the eve of the general strike of 1909, the employers' associations had so far succeeded with their policy of national contracts as to include in such settlements some 138,000 workers and 3,200 employers. The

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁸ This was in the building trades.—*Ibid.*, p. 17.

political strike of 1902 had shaken the faith of the employers in ordinary collective bargaining, and from that time on every effort was made to include in the new contracts a clause expressly forbidding suspension of work during the period of the contract. Not content with its added powers, the Swedish Employers' Association, from 1906 onwards, endeavored to insert in all new contracts the right to cease work—which from the employers' side meant, of course, to *lock out*—before the termination of contracts, *provided the respective superior organizations of capital or of labor approved such action.*

This seemed a strange line of action for the employers' association to be taking, and at first it met with the strongest opposition from both masters and men, who argued that such a clause would entail great insecurity. In 1908, however, the National Federation of Labor agreed to this new principle and it was inserted in the contracts made by the Federation of Foundries and Ironworks. One can only conclude that both the great organizations felt themselves strong enough to take the major advantage of such a proviso. The other employers' associations, in spite of their hostility to this new policy, were compelled by force of circumstances to come around to the view of the Swedish Employers' Association. Contracts entered into by both of the other two members of the "Big Three," already described, now recognized the principle of "solidarity" conflicts being undertaken by their respective organizations. Thus, by the beginning of 1909, the masters had obtained in a great number of their agreements the right to organize a general coalition of masters, at no matter what moment—which is tantamount to stating that they were now about ready to turn the general strike weapon against the workers in the form of a general lock-out.²⁹

In the meantime the National Federation of Labor had been fighting the insertion of clauses consistent with *Article 23* of the Association statutes,³⁰ giving the employer the right to "hire and fire" without union intervention. The National Federation of Labor was compelled, under threat of a lock-out, to accept a compromise on this matter, whereby, if the workers believed the "hire and fire" clause had been used to attack union liberty, an investigation of the case should be made by the labor

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁰ See *supra*, p. 110.

organization concerned before any other step was taken.³¹ This concession, under threat of a lock-out, was the first instance in which the two great organizations of capital and labor had engaged in serious conflict. When the time came to apply this compromise more trouble arose with the Federation of Transport Workers. The unions in that federation had previously obtained a labor monopoly over available jobs and had acquired some influence over the actual direction of work. To bring about a definite solution to this tangle the Swedish Employers' Association proceeded to organize a general lock-out in 1908, unless by a given date an agreement had been signed by this Federation of Transport Workers.³²

To prevent a general suspension of labor in a period of business depression, both the Government and public opinion brought pressure to bear on the parties concerned, and an agreement was signed in July, 1908, though under some protest at having been forced by Governmental interference.³³ Meanwhile the case at law, bearing on the application of *Article 23*, was decided in complete conformity with the desire of the employers. In this conflict with the National Federation of Labor and its subsidiary federations all three of the big employers' associations had acted in concert.

One more factor of importance aided in exacerbating the feeling of tension between labor and capital at this time. From the close of 1907 the continuous progress in business and production began to show signs of a break. In spite of a lowering of prices, production no longer found an easy market. Profits grew less where they did not threaten to become an actual deficit. It became of vital importance not to increase expenses, and, in 1908, when the depression reached its acutest point, the employers' organizations combined to prevent any raise in wages. They persisted in demanding national contracts which would permit the levelling of wages in different districts. From the workers' point of view such a levelling of wages always implied an *increase* in certain districts, in conformity with the highest wages current. Once again the difference in viewpoint brought many serious conflicts. Generally some local section of the

³¹ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 20.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 23, footnote. Speech of the Minister for the Interior of Jan. 26, 1910.

workers, by an aggressive wage policy, would provoke the first hostilities, which the labor federations either could not, or would not, prevent.

On the other hand, while the National Federation of Labor may have recognized by this time the peril of irritating the employers still more, by a too urgent policy on wages, they were unable, because of statutory decentralization of control in the labor ranks, to take any action in the *first phases* of the conflicts, when a peaceful settlement of the problem might have been more easily secured.³⁴ With the grave crisis of 1909 the essential defects of the internal organization of the Swedish labor movement became only too clearly apparent. "The National Federation of Labor was pressed by an adversary against whom it could maintain the struggle with but inadequate financial resources; yet, on the other hand, it was forced to protect its members, who often had been exposed to danger through their own fault but who were not compelled to obey an order of the central organ upon whose thorough aid they had a right to call at the last moment."³⁵

THE GREAT STRIKE OF 1909

"The Swedish general strike was in progress for a whole month. Of the 500,000 workers engaged in manufacture and transport, nearly 300,000 obeyed the order to stop work. Industry was for the most part at a standstill. Both parties were opposed to arbitration; both were confident of ultimate victory and were unwilling to accept anything in the nature of a compromise. In the end the labor leaders proved unable to continue the struggle; they surrendered practically without conditions, and the attempt to secure their objects by a general strike failed." In this terse summary of the great strike we have a flashlight photograph of the great conflict of 1909.³⁶ It remains to develop the details of that snapshot.

After the decisive referendum and the Socialist party congress of February, 1905, the general strike as a political weapon ceased to be a matter for discussion. The general feeling of the union leaders at the time had been that the unions which ordered the cessation of work in 1902, often against existing contracts,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ T. H. Penson, *loc. cit.*

had gained but little immediate advantage, but had laid up for themselves much trouble with the employers. The general strike as a political weapon had for some years eclipsed the consideration of the general strike for purely economic aims. Even if this had not been the case, the comparative ease with which the unions, in their earlier history, had gained victory after victory over individual employers would have rendered recourse to a general strike both unnecessary and unpopular.³⁷ Not until the political strike had roused the employers to organized resistance and the régime of easy local victories for labor had ended, did the thoughts of organized labor return to the weapon of the general strike, this time as an economic weapon.

At the congress of the National Federation of Labor in 1906 the general strike was once more considered as a means of struggle. The General Secretary issued a statement that complete cessation of labor would have as its consequence the cessation of regular strike pay to the participants, and that such a struggle should not be undertaken until the original conflict had arrived at a point where the regular strike aid could no longer be continued. Congress voted in favor of the general strike, but left the decision as to its actual use to the Federation executive in cooperation with the unions concerned.³⁸ At the Socialist party congress in May, 1908, discussion took place as to the use of the emergency strike fund.³⁹ The critical period that immediately followed this congress and preceded the forced settlement of July, 1908, familiarized the working class with the notion of an imminent general strike. Considerable disaffection followed the settlement and led many workers, even among the less extreme socialist groups, to feel that the ultimate use of the general strike was inevitable.⁴⁰

The leaders of the unions were not enthusiastic over the use of the general strike weapon, which always impeded progress and interfered with the system of collective contracts. On the other hand, they were unwilling to break with the more radical of the workers, by overt opposition. It was found opportune

³⁷ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 26-27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹ Although no longer aiming at universal suffrage by means of the general strike the party still demanded an easily realisable emergency fund for use in such an event as a general strike.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

to maintain the threat of a general strike as a final means of pressure upon the employers and the public. The agitation, therefore, had its free course, to such a degree that, when the psychological moment arrived, the various executives found themselves faced with a popular excitement which it was no longer possible to control, except by yielding to the demand for a general cessation of work.

The direct causes of the great conflict were all of small importance, taken individually. Some of the disputes in question were more than a year old while the others were very recent. Most of the disputes were in the cellulose or in the wholesale and retail clothing trades. Some of the contracts were due for renewal, and the workers took advantage of this to demand higher wages, especially where new machinery had resulted in larger output without an increase in the labor force. The masters stood rigidly for the same wage totals, even if that entailed a cut in the piece-rates.

In six of the cases at issue the workers began the hostilities by local strikes. In three other cases the employers started the trouble by declaring lock-outs.⁴¹ In all but one of these conflicts the competent conciliator had intervened at least once, but without success. The Swedish Employers' Association finally brought matters to a head by declaring a lock-out for July 5, 1909, embracing some 104 employers and 12,700 workers. Meanwhile there were also in process strikes involving six employers and 2,500 workers. After a meeting of the Swedish Employers' Association on July 14, a letter was despatched to the National Federation of Labor threatening a lock-out against all the workers of that organization in the trades involved, on July 26, if all the disputes described above were not, by that date, settled in conformity with the conditions of the Employers' Association. Any new dispute started before July 26 must also be included in the settlement. If necessary the lock-out would be further extended on August 2 to include the workers in the forges and foundries.⁴²

This letter, addressed to the National Federation of Labor, as if it were the central and responsible authority, marks a new

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-39; cf. *London Times*, Aug 14, 1909.

⁴² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 38-41; cf. *London Times*, July 27 and Aug. 3, 1909.

era in collective bargaining. The National Federation of Labor had not, until this moment, concerned itself with the various conflicts, save to pour out financial aid. In the previous negotiations, conducted by the two parties, or under the direction of an official conciliator, the Employers' Association had been represented, but not the Federation of Labor. That is, indeed, one reason why the Employers' Association had been able to make its opinions prevail, for it had shown itself better prepared to control and modify the policy of the groups under its direction, than had its labor opponents. Thus the National Federation of Labor was compelled, at the eleventh hour, to take part in a struggle wherein the positions of the two sides had already been established.⁴³

In explaining the reason for their drastic lock-out threat the Association complained that the workers were insisting on wage increases in spite of the business depression, and that they were not respecting established agreements, even when these agreements had been approved by their superior organizations. The Association claimed, in addition, that the employers must retain the right to manage and apportion the work and to choose their foremen without consultation with the unions. Wage questions and national agreements, then, seem to have been the prime cause of the employers' dispute. Underlying the ultimatum, of course, was the determination to try out the new gotten strength of organized capital against its old opponent, organized, socialistic, trade union labor. The Association felt itself in a position to make its point of view triumphant. The lock-out had been organized in the most favorable manner. Those industries which first came under the lock-out order were industries where suspension of production would be felt the least under the prevailing depression of business. Overproduction in the cellulose industry had sent prices below cost. In the saw-mills and forges prices had fallen far below those of recent years. In textiles the state of the market was a trifle better. The clothing makers were faced with overproduction. In all these branches of industry the employers could stand a brief period of suspension of production without grave inconvenience.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Les lock-out et la greve générale en Suède*, p. 42. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

After the lock-out declaration of the Association, on July 14, the conciliators redoubled their efforts to achieve a settlement. On many important points the opponents brought forward wholly irreconcilable data, making the task of the conciliators exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, after concerted action by the four authorized conciliators, a similar letter was sent to both the Federation of Labor and the Employers' Association, containing a scheme of conciliation applied to all the disputes in question, and demanding a reply on the following afternoon, July 25, in time to avoid an extension of the lock-out threatened for July 26. The contents of the letters showed that the conciliators leaned to the side of the employers, supporting the masters' plea that business conditions did not justify any wage increases.⁴⁵

Only in one case was the suggested scheme of settlement accepted by both sides. In the remaining cases the employers accepted six out of ten, and the workers accepted but two. Often this refusal was merely to provoke further small concessions, and was not final. As the conciliators leaned more to the employers' side than to that of labor, it was natural that the former were relatively more favorable to the suggested settlement. Where the employers rejected the scheme was in a matter of wages.⁴⁶

On July 26 the lock-out was extended to the textile and saw-milling industries, and on August 2 it took in the iron works and foundries, the total number of employers now concerned being nearly 400 and the workers locked out about 72,500. Of the employers, all were members of the Swedish Employers' Association, but of the workers 40,000 were unorganized and only 30,000 were members of the National Federation of Labor. Although the struggle of the Association was only against the National Federation of Labor the actual abandonment of work was almost universal, even in the textile factories, where very few were organized. The attack of the employers had provoked a general movement of solidarity among the workers, whether organized or not.⁴⁷

In the meantime the delegates of the Federation of Labor had been called together. The committees of the various con-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48; cf. *London Times*, July 26, 1909.

⁴⁷ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 45-46.

stituent federations were convoked to consider each one its own problem. The important decision, however, had to be taken by the executive committee of the National Federation. Unlike the employers, the workers were weakened by a series of preceding conflicts, and were in a less favorable condition to offer resistance than ordinarily. The Employers' Association was by no means ignorant of this fact, and had decided, on all points in which the conciliation scheme did not give sufficient satisfaction, to impose its own conditions, although the workers' press had already clearly given evidence as to the outcome of such an attitude. On July 25, when the conciliators communicated the answers to their letter, to the parties interested, it became very evident that the workers were growing more hostile, and that from that time every new attempt at conciliation would have less chance of success. Thus was the stage set, on both sides, for the fatal struggle that followed.⁴⁶

THE STRIKE IS CALLED

The era in which the employers were accustomed to assure peace in industry by concessions was now ended, along with the prolonged period of economic progress. Solidly organized and financially powerful employers' associations were now in a position to cut down costs, even at the risk of labor conflict. Among the ranks of the working class this vital change in the industrial balance was not recognized. Local unions continued their old policy of aggressive demands for wage increases. The federations of unions, whose executive committees were equally blind to the danger, upheld in many instances these excessive demands of the local unions. Fortified by the labor press in their opinion that when demands were not granted all that was necessary was an appeal to battle, in the last year or two before the great strike the workers exerted constant pressure on the executive of the National Federation of Labor.

Each time that a local union, or a whole federation, was compelled, by the wiser advice of the National Federation's executive, to make some concession in the interest of peace, there formed immediately a group of malcontents who considered their

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

interests badly defended by the Federation of Labor. This state of mind was exploited by the extremists of the Socialist party and by the anarchist elements outside the party. On many sides the central executive was accused of being a coterie of opportunists, who neglected the interests of the masses in order to feather their own political nests. The central executive saw clearly enough the growing power of the employers' associations, and that against this power the less centralized labor forces were utterly unprepared. The congress of the National Federation of Labor, scheduled for August, 1909, was to be asked by the Secretary's office to approve a complete reform in the interests of centralization, to become effective not later than 1913.⁴⁹

The reform plan, was, of course, considerably upset by the threat of the nation-wide lock-out, made by the Employers' Association on July 14. Once again the National Federation of Labor was placed in the dilemma of accepting a general struggle or of advocating the reduction of the labor demands. The rules of the Federation of Labor imposed the duty of paying out-of-work pay to those who were locked out by employers in conflicts due to cuts in wages. The workers' press and many of the labor organizations contended that the conflict had arisen this time through a protest against wage reductions, and that the Federation was therefore compelled by its regulations to uphold the workers' cause. For labor, as for capital, this struggle had become one of the prestige of their respective organizations.

The executive of the Federation of Labor was not so much influenced by the thought of the effect of the labor retreat on the outside public, as it was upon the internal consequences. If concessions were demanded of the federations once again, the more advanced elements would be yet more hostile to the central executive's plans for the reorganization of the trade union movement. Even had the delegates, called to discuss the situation, July 19 and 20, been willing to take the more conservative line of a temporary retreat, they would have had to face the psychology of the masses whom they represented. Every step of conservative wisdom which the delegates might be willing to take, which the masses would not understand and would, therefore,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

refuse to follow, would be positively dangerous in compromising the existing unity of the whole trade union army.⁵⁰

The workers in general were thoroughly persuaded that *Article 23* of the Employers' Association would entail a labor situation that would be insufferable for trade unionism. Slogans such as "Death rather than *Article 23*" were common at this time, even in the ranks of workers who had little to fear from the application of this Article. Moreover, had not battle always ended in victory in the past? Strangely enough this state of mind seemed to be common not only to the socialist trade union members but even to those who belonged to the non-socialist group, the Swedish Workers' Federation. The employers' scheme seemed to be to empty the coffers of the workers, by means of lock-outs in all branches of industry where disputes had arisen, and, by extension of that lock-out to other industrial groups, finally to aim a fatal blow at all organized labor. The only thing to do, under the circumstances, was to take the offensive, to extend the cessation of labor immediately to other groups of industries which would feel the blow more acutely, and would have no time to prepare themselves for the struggle. Such a step would possess certain poetic justice inasmuch as the Employers' Association had recently introduced provisions on conditions of solidarity into their collective agreements.⁵¹

The delegates of the special conference of July 19-20 gave particular consideration to the obligation of the Federation of Labor to pay out-of-work pay to its members in the case of lock-outs. They recognized that the Federation's own resources were inadequate to aid all who would be locked out on August 2, and that supplementary levies had been so much used in the recent past as to have strained the workers' resources. Only the Federation of Metal-Workers had funds for a long fight, owing to careful management, a policy of peaceful agreements and a pledge of international subventions. Otherwise both the National Federation and its constituent federations were well nigh drained of funds.⁵² In the face of these internal and external difficulties the delegates and the Executive of the Federa-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-54.

⁵¹ See *supra*, p. 113.

⁵² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 55-56.

tion decided it was better to meet defeat unitedly than to split the movement by further concessions, and, rather than lose still further their already waning popularity, to declare a national strike. To the general public the reasons given were, naturally, not those stated above. To the public the strike was termed "a battle undertaken to safeguard the right of the worker to consultation in matters concerning conditions of labor," and a "means of legitimate defense" destined to "shorten the crisis."⁵³

The resolution passed by the delegates contained the following provisions:

(1) Negotiations with the Employers' Association were to be continued with the hope of arriving at a satisfactory settlement.

(2) If no satisfactory settlement were achieved, and if the masters put into force their threat, of July 14, to extend the lock-out on July 26 and August 2, the General Secretary should issue a proclamation calling on all Federation of Labor members to cease work on August 4, 1909, in order to impose an acceptable settlement and hasten the end of the huge struggle.

(3) Work was *not* to cease where it concerned care of the sick, or the tending of animals, nor was work to stop in the sewerage, lighting and water services.

(4) All payments (for out-of-work benefit) were to cease from the date when the extension of the struggle began.

(5) The General Secretary was instructed to impose on all members remaining at work supplementary levies, such as should be judged necessary to ward off the consequences of the crisis.⁵⁴

When the conciliators failed to gain a settlement by agreement the National Federation of Labor called a general strike by a proclamation issued on July 24, and on the 26th of the month so informed the Employers' Association by letter. The die was cast. It remained to be seen which of the two great organized forces had misjudged its staying powers. The Swedish non-socialist press declared that the very threat of the general strike was a sign of weakness on the side of labor, and that the strike must collapse if properly met by both the authorities and the public.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60; cf. full proclamation of July 24 on pp. 164-67.

⁵⁵ *London Times*, July 28, 1909.

HOW THE STRIKE WAS ORGANIZED

Once the delegates of the Swedish trade unions, assembled by the National Federation of Labor, had cast their decision for a general strike, the whole organization of the workers' movement was modified, for the period of the struggle. According to the statutes of the various organizations, the National Federation of Labor was concerned only with the federations. The latter in their turn were concerned solely with their constituent trade union locals, and only the last dealt directly with the individual trade union worker. With the strike decided, however, the committee of delegates addressed its strike appeal directly to "the members of the National Federation," and the General Secretary invited the trade union local to issue a strike proclamation calling a special meeting, in order to obtain "a unanimity of votes on this question." In similar manner it was the National Federation, aided by the committee of delegates, which directed the army of strikers, made up as it was of a congeries of local groups.⁵⁵

The need for a single powerful control of the strike immediately reduced the autonomous powers of the various trade federations, which were the constituent parts of the National Federation of Labor. Their sole task was to have the strike decision approved by their trade union locals, which, from that moment forward until the general strike ended, were dependent for their orders upon the local strike committees and the General Secretary's office of the National Federation of Labor. The strike proclamation of July 24 was formally reported by the General Secretary to the respective federations and on July 25 the strike proclamation was sent to them in sufficient numbers to be immediately distributed to their locals. The General Secretary expressed the hope that the executive committees of these federations would "give the instructions required in each federation for the stoppage of work," instructions which would ultimately have to be cancelled by the same authority.⁵⁷

At the same time that the federations relinquished, in this manner, their active executive powers, the assessment of dues and the payment of benefits also ceased. Thus at a single blow the

⁵⁵ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

National Federation of Labor had assumed a degree of control never before attained; a degree of control that would have permitted the avoidance of the whole conflict, had it been in force earlier in the struggle.⁵⁸ Before the executive committees of the constituent federations ceased, temporarily, to function, they met and decided, with practical unanimity, to urge their members to take part in the strike. It was their task to examine the particular situation which had arisen for their union locals in view of any contracts that might limit their freedom of action at this moment. Scarcely one federation was absolutely free from contractual obstacles to an immediate general strike.

The most delicate problem of all was presented to those federations whose members were employed by concerns possessing the character of public utilities. Generally, in such a case, the contracts contained a clause expressly forbidding recourse to a strike. The Federation of Tramway Employees was in just such a quandary, and their circular showed the embarrassment of their executive committee. The circular pointed out the existence of the clause banning strikes and lock-outs and declared itself unable to advise the breaking of contracts. Each local was to decide for itself but the committee went so far as to declare that "the running of trams must cease if it appears to give occasion for public disturbance."⁵⁹ The Swedish Federation of Factory Laborers and Mechanics, to which belonged a portion of the municipal and the railroad employees, established, in their circular, a distinction between the various kinds of contracts. In the instances where the contracts contained a clause forbidding strikes "the union locals must decide themselves in what measure they have cause to go outside the contract." Otherwise it was understood that the federation executive was in favor of the strike. Where contracts required the superior labor organization to approve of the strike of solidarity before such action could be taken by the members, the federations did not hesitate to give that approval, an example in point being the Swedish Federation of Metal-Workers.⁶⁰ The federations included advice as to the method of carrying out the strike vote, and also the giving of requisite warning of the strike to the respective employers. That task concluded, the federations were

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

concerned neither with the organization nor the direction of the general strike.

Once the federations had been relieved of their immediate responsibility for control of their member unions, as each separate union had no direct connection with the National Federation of Labor, it became necessary to create a local governing body in each district, in direct contact with the central strike committee. As the support of non-socialist unions was also hoped for, the basis of these local governing bodies had to be as broad as possible. To expedite matters a circular was issued from the General Secretary's office on August 2, listing the following general rules to be observed during the strike:

(1) Work must continue for the transportation of the sick, and for doctors visiting the sick.

(2) If food supplies fall in the hospitals, transport for such purpose must be forthcoming upon request.

(3) Services for the dead must be carried on in the regular way; but union workers are not obligated to cooperate in burials save for the hearse and the carriage taking the family.

(4) Drivers will be furnished with special permits provided by the competent organization.

(5) Animals shall be cared for as usual.

(6) In each locality the trade union committees shall be called together immediately to establish a strike committee, entrusted with the direction of operations and the execution of decisions made by the General Secretary and the unions. Special duties of the strike committees shall be:

(a) To advise and inform strikers on strike questions.

(b) To organize and direct meetings which may be necessary.

(c) To deliver special exemption permits.

(d) To guard carefully over the maintenance of order.

(e) To keep in touch with the General Secretary's office and to transmit all necessary instructions to the parties concerned.

After the committees have been appointed the names and addresses of their secretaries shall be sent to the General Secretary.

(7) To maintain order, the strike committees shall choose a sufficient number of "special police"⁶¹ from the best qualified per-

⁶¹"Commissaires." This trade union police force was the outcome of a suggestion made by the Minister for the Interior to the President of the National Federation of Labor.

sons. The strike committee in each place shall coöperate with the police, and the "specials" shall be furnished with a card and shall bear insignia clearly showing their function. They shall conform scrupulously to the instruction of the police.⁶²

Where the local unions did not undertake the initiative to form a strike committee, the local branch of the Socialist party was asked to gather the union executives together for this purpose. In some small places where there was only one trade union, its executive committee constituted itself the local strike executive. In some places, locals or sections of the non-socialist Swedish Workers' Federation took part in these preparatory measures, which was a distinct innovation for this body. In the larger industrial centers the strike committees were subdivided, according to tasks, into commissions on finance, on organization, on the press, and other similar functions. In all 554 strike committees were established, 96 in cities and towns and 458 in the country districts.⁶³

The strike proclamation of July 24 included a serious and emphatic demand that the struggle be conducted under correct and legal forms. "We urge every trade unionist to keep calm. There must be no act of violence. On the day fixed, all shall cease work with perfect order: a strike of this type must by its intrinsic power produce so imposing an impression that anything whatever likely to compromise it must be carefully avoided."⁶⁴ These warnings were again renewed at the close of the proclamation, showing how clearly the central executive was aware of the danger to its cause of any violent episode. These warnings against violence were widely disseminated by the labor press and by all available propagandist methods, and they had a decisive influence on the whole course of the struggle.

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE STRIKE

It has been stated that, once the general strike started, it rapidly changed its nature from a struggle between organized labor and organized capital into an attack upon the whole community. The strikers, according to a writer in the London

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85, cf. full text of proclamation on pp. 167-68.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63; cf. full text of proclamation of July 24 on pp. 164-67.

Economic Journal, "assumed a hostile attitude towards society at large . . . all labor was withdrawn from industry and transport, from street traffic, from lighting and all other public services. Thus by an order from the *Volkshus*⁶⁶ the people of Stockholm were to be deprived of trams, cabs, and steamers, of gas and electric light, of wood and coal, and even of the necessaries of life. No vehicles were to be allowed in the streets unless a special permit or 'free card' were first obtained from the Strike Committee. There was no one even to bury the dead or carry the sick to hospitals."⁶⁶

Stated in these bald terms the case seems rather black against the unions, from the viewpoint of the general public. In point of fact, several qualifications must be made in the interests of truth. Stockholm had the worst of the strike fever, in that the humanitarian orders of the Federation of Labor were not all obeyed, even the sextons in the northern graveyard of that city joining the strike. The London *Times* correspondent telegraphing from Stockholm on August 4, reported that all the workers of the National Federation of Labor went on strike except those running the waterworks, public lighting plants, sanitation, and hospitals. He added that the gas and electric light plants were under military protection and that the workers in those plants threatened to strike if the military were not withdrawn. Two days later the same correspondent reported that those union workers had carried out their threat and the Government had at once filled their places with other workers under military protection.⁶⁷

There can be no question but that an appeal was made constantly to the feeling of class solidarity among the workers, for a strike confined to the unionized workers would never have possessed the influence which it was necessary to exercise. Moreover, in order that the instructions of the General Secretary's office should be followed by the ranks of organized labor they had to feel fairly certain that their non-union comrades would join the strike, and not undermine its effect by enabling many

⁶⁶ Workers' Institute.

⁶⁷ T. H. Penson, *loc cit.*

⁶⁸ *Times*, Aug. 5 and 7, 1909. The street cleaners and waterworks staff were still at work on Aug. 11, see *Times*, Aug. 12, 1909. Cf. *Les lock-out of la greve générale en Suède*, p. 67, where it is shown that the exemptions ordered by the National Federation of Labor were generally observed.

employers to carry on production with a reduced force. It was this hope of uniting the vast majority of the working class that inspired the Federation of Labor's appeal to all labor in its proclamation of August 2. "The issue of this formidable struggle," ran the appeal, "is not in doubt provided the whole working class keeps firmly united. It is on divisions in the ranks of the workers' army that the employers and capitalists count for carrying off the victory; without these divisions victory must rest with the workers."⁶⁸

The first proclamation of the Federation of Labor, on July 24, was couched in coldly reasonable terms, with a summary of the situation as it then appeared to the labor leaders. Only when the labor press began to expand upon the text of that official utterance did the fact that it was going to be on lines of the "class struggle" really appear. There were two excellent reasons for this emphasis on the class lines of the conflict. In the first place the Socialist party and the vast majority of the organized workers were in very close alliance, as has been shown above, and the movement on the economic field, when it once became widely extended, almost inevitably took on a semi-political significance. In the second place it would not be fitting for an impartial recorder to ignore the equally patent fact that the "class" element in the struggle was distinctly present in the attitude of the leading employers' associations. Their constant use of the lock-out in threat or practice, in the previous two or three years, with apparent indifference to its effect upon large portions of the public; the insertion in all new contracts, under pressure from the Employers' Association, of the "solidarity" clause permitting a general lock-out to take place at any moment, irrespective of the length of time the collective contracts still had to run; the stern discipline with which the ranks of the employers were kept in line, their individual labor contracts supervised, and their monetary deposits forfeited if strict obedience were not rendered; and finally the determination of the Swedish Employers' Association to impose their own terms wherever the conciliator's scheme did not favor their demands—all of these facts must be justly considered before the accusation of "a social war against the whole community" can be made solely

⁶⁸ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 62.

against the ranks of organized Swedish labor.

The facts of the case were that neither party cared for the outside public, except in so far as public opinion might be coerced or terrorized into supporting one side or other in the conflict.⁶⁹ This attitude could be seen clearly as the struggle developed. Three of the most vital groups of organized labor, the printers, the railroadmen, and the postal servants, belonging to federations not affiliated with the National Federation of Labor, were not affected by the strike proclamation of July 24 nor by the subsequent appeal of the Federation to non-union workers. These three groups of labor had not been touched by the employers' lock-outs and had no direct reason to take part in the struggle. The executive of the Federation of Swedish Typographers had stated on July 28 that the Federation must respect the contract with the General Union of Swedish Master-Printers, in virtue of which the strike was forbidden. Great pressure was brought to bear upon this pivotal group to join the general strike and close down the newspapers. A mass meeting held near Stockholm on August 6 passed a typical resolution, in which appeal was made to the railroadmen and the typographers to cease work, declaring that "The trains must stop! The newspapers must cease to appear! The general cause of the working class demands it!"⁷⁰

The result of this pressure was a request to the employers to suspend the non-strike clause for the moment, in line with the "solidarity" clauses of many other unions and employers' associations. The employers stood firm, whereupon the typographers in mass meeting decided to cease work on the evening of Monday, August 9.⁷¹ In a circular of August 7 the executive declared that they had been constrained to call on their members to cease work, with the exception that the National Federation of Labor was to print a national daily newspaper concerned solely with strike news. The reason for thus breaking their con-

⁶⁹ The president of the Socialist party in the journal *Tiden* stated that "the task of the workers was a double one. Against the aggressive power of the masters they had to act directly, seeking to paralyze all industrial production. With regard to the other social groups, they had to conduct themselves in such manner as to provoke their intervention and thereby assure themselves of a suitable settlement." See *Los lock-out et la greve générale en Suède*, p. 59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁷¹ *London Times*, Aug. 9, 1906.

tract was that they had no choice, inasmuch as it was now a question "for the labor movement of actual continued existence."⁷² To the employers they reported their regret that a temporary suspension of the non-strike clause had not been granted, and that a strike had nonetheless been called with the desire of "hastening the solution of the crisis."⁷³

But for the editorial staffs, who themselves did the work of setting up the type of the much reduced news-sheets, there would have been no newspapers published immediately thereafter, save the strike organ *Svaret* (The Answer). The surprise of two pickets outside the office of the *Stockholms Dagblad*, the morning after the printers had left work, when the editor presented them with a copy of the paper for that day, can well be imagined.⁷⁴ By August 13 most of the prominent newspapers resumed issue, having trained amateur compositors in sufficient quantity for their immediate needs.⁷⁵

Most of the railroadmen were Government servants whose wages and pensions were dependent upon length of service, and the Government lost no time in making it clear that any man who left work would forfeit his pension, and if reemployed would be taken on at the bottom of the ladder. After long hesitation and more than one public meeting, a secret ballot of the men was taken. Out of 24,500 organized railroad workers some 20,000 voted and of these only 4,000 voted in favor of a strike. The result of this refusal was an immediate decision by the Federation of Labor to make no strike call on the railroadmen, but to cover this virtual defeat by alleging that the rail workers could best help the strike by means of financial aid.⁷⁶ Incidentally the normal functioning of the railroads and the postal service enabled the Federation of Labor to keep in constant touch with its many local centers. But for this fact the strike would not have remained in line with the plans of the central executive for more than a few days, inasmuch as the isolated strike committees in different parts of the country would have been thrown upon their own resources, and individual defeats or violence might have occurred.⁷⁷

⁷² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 173-74.

⁷³ T. H. Penson, *loc. cit.* The *Times* of Aug. 11 asserts *Svaret* was the only paper issued on Aug. 10; cf. also *Times*, Aug. 17.

⁷⁴ *London Times*, Aug. 14, 1908.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 18, 20, 1908.

⁷⁶ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 72.

As far as local transport was concerned, great disturbance of the normal traffic resulted from the strike. Street traffic almost completely ceased, even the milk-cart drivers deciding to join the strike.⁷⁷ On the passenger steamers the sailors and stokers ceased work, and all motor boats, ferries, and tugboats ceased to ply.⁷⁸ By August 9 a few trams driven by the engineers and superior officials of the companies appeared on the streets of some of the towns,⁷⁹ and the following day a straggling number of cabs and autos reappeared.⁸⁰ The cabmen returned to their stands only because the chief of police threatened to withdraw their licenses if they persisted in striking, and a great majority of the cabs remained empty. While the trams were few, some of them carried a "stage army" of passengers, who were paid for their task!⁸¹

By their efforts, intended to paralyze completely all local means of communication, to reduce the press to silence, and above all to prevent all work in the factories, the central committee of the Federation of Labor sought to make manifest the power of the workers' organizations. The effect of a vast national strike of "crossed arms" was counted on to bring into the conflict outside bodies, even the Government itself, to intervene and wrest from the real enemy, the Swedish Employers' Association, conditions of just peace. At the first flush of the strike all these expectations appeared to be realized. A very large number of workers abandoned their work with the utmost discipline and good order. The great industrial centers changed their whole aspect, factories and workshops being plunged into silence. *Le paix de la rue* was no longer disturbed save by an occasional vehicle employed for the indispensable transportation of the sick or the dead, in which case the driver had taken care to be provided with a strike permit from the strike committee, or with a red-cross flag, lest there be even a suspicion of treachery on his part. Finally the newspapers seemed, in the first few days of the typographers' strike, to have been reduced to comparative impotence. Only the strike committee's national sheet, *Svaret*, spread its 150,000 daily copies all over the nation, providing the national labor executive a powerful means of main-

⁷⁷ *London Times*, Aug. 4 and 5, 1909.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Aug. 6, 1909.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1909.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Aug. 10, 1909.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1909.

taining unity among the workers.⁵²

Unlike the Belgian strikes, already described, the Swedish strike of 1909 was most carefully observed and recorded by the Government in power. A series of weekly census figures, based on the data of local authorities, is therefore available for students of the strike. The high peak of the strike was reached about August 10, when the typographers joined the strike. At that time the total number of workers on strike very nearly approached 300,000. At the end of the first month of the general strike the numbers out still remained as high as 240,000.⁵³ Of the 300,000 odd strikers some 22,000 were employees in enterprises having a public character, if not actually conducted by the public authorities. The tables given below show clearly the percentage of strikers in the various occupations.⁵⁴

⁵² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 72-73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89. The following are the weekly census figures:

Aug. 9, 1909	290,536
Aug. 18	278,637
Aug. 26	268,608
Sept. 2	252,833
Sept. 9	194,381
Sept. 16	105,481
Sept. 24	85,886
Oct. 1	65,620
Oct. 7	44,283

These figures are only approximate, especially for Aug. 9.

⁵⁴ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 90.

Strikes in Public Enterprises

	<i>No. of workers before the strike</i>	<i>No. on strike</i>
Stockholm Custom-house	71	55
Stockholm Telegraph Workshops	498	406
Military Workshops	718	418
Construction works directly undertaken by the State	1,800	1,600
Construction in hands of contractors	3,500	3,400

Strikes in undertakings of Public Importance

	<i>No. of work places</i>	<i>No. of work- ers before strike</i>	<i>No. of strik- ers</i>
Construction of houses	36	1,800	1,879
Bridges and roads, by municipalities	49	8,064	5,807

It has already been stated that large numbers of unorganized workers took part in the strike alongside their union fellows (the National Federation had, incidentally, promised all non-unionists who joined the unions before August 15 all advantages and aid assured to older union members) so that the failure of the railroadmen and the postal workers to join the strike was, at least in numbers, somewhat counterbalanced by the unexpectedly large numbers of unorganized workers who took part.⁵⁵ On the other hand, exceedingly few of the agricultural laborers ceased work, not more than one thousand all told, and their places were promptly taken by volunteers, so that the unusually good harvest of that autumn was not endangered.⁵⁶

It was, however, just this effort to extend the great strike to such workers as the agricultural laborers at harvest time, on the top of "pulling out" the typographers and other unions, at the expense of broken contracts and the cessation of certain public utilities, that roused the non-union public to action in direct opposition to the National Federation of Labor. Among a large part of the population which, as always, knew of the conflict only through its own petty inconveniences, the strike produced an instinctive movement of protest. This instinctively hostile feeling was aggravated by such relatively trifling facts as the strike decision of the gravediggers in the northern portion of Stockholm. Once the element of surprise was overcome,

Strikes in undertakings of Public importance—Continued

	<i>No. of work places</i>	<i>No. of work- ers before strike</i>	<i>No. of stri- ers</i>
Bridges and roads, by contractors . . .	9	279	266
Bridges and roads, private construction	35	1,800	1,670
Gas Companies	2	871	462
Electric power stations (public) . . .	5	559	407
Electric power stations (private) . .	9	667	548
Installation of water pipes	9	458	292
Carriages	202	2,592	2,020
Tramways (public)	2	741	457
Tramways (private)	3	1,264	1,167
City Commissioners	4	55	27
Ship-outfitters	24	867	297
Other enterprises	30	980	687
Total	417	20,587	15,896

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁶ *London Times*, Aug. 18, 1909.

the public rapidly recovered its calm and proceeded to organize a Public Security Brigade, for the purposes of community defense and for the actual running of the most essential public services if and when that step became necessary. "So efficient was this organization that a week after the strike began the streets presented very much their usual appearance. . . . It was something of an anomaly to see noblemen and officers of the highest rank driving cabs, merchants and stock-brokers doing ambulance work, civil engineers working in the stokehold of a steamer or attending to the gas, water, and electric lighting machinery, civil servants and undergraduates acting as tram conductors or unloading the ships bringing wood, coal, and provisions to the capital. . . ."⁸⁷

When the railroadmen decided not to join the strike it became evident that the labor forces could no longer expect a victory. The second blow fell the following day, August 17, when, at a meeting of the executive of the non-socialist Swedish Workers' Federation, it was decided to allow their workers to resume work on the following Monday, August 23. To justify their change of attitude they declared that the National Federation of Labor, by encouraging workers to break contracts, had changed the character of the conflict. Whereas it had been originally a legitimate campaign of protest against the employers' lock-outs and wage reductions, now it had become a violent attack upon the whole community. In point of fact the executive believed that the struggle could not end in victory, and that a rapid outcome, rendered necessary for them by a lack of resources, would better safeguard the future.⁸⁸ There is no question that the attempt to muzzle the press, to bring out the railroadmen and the agricultural laborers, had a good deal to do with this *volte face* on the part of the non-socialist workers, and the Employers' Association was by no means loath to make an inroad into the united ranks of labor, by offering easier terms to the non-socialist unions than to those of the National Federation.⁸⁹

Great efforts were made to stem the tide back to work after the second week. Considering the really severe state of want

⁸⁷ T. H. Penson, *loc. cit.* Cf. *London Times*, Sept. 1, 1909.

⁸⁸ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. Cf. T. H. Penson, *loc. cit.*

that began to show itself among the workers, and the justified fear of reprisals or actual loss of their jobs at the close of the strike, the defection of only 50,000 workers in a period of four weeks shows remarkable unity and discipline on the part of organized labor. As early as August 17 the *Times* Stockholm correspondent could telegraph: "Judging by all accounts the strikers are already at the last extremity. Many have left the towns and are living in the country, where life is easier, but those left in the towns have come to the end not only of their savings, but of their credit with the dealers. In Stockholm alone their indebtedness to local dealers is said to exceed a million kronor (about \$250,000), this debt being incurred within the fortnight the strike has lasted. The dealers have now stopped all sales on credit."⁹⁰ No distribution of aid from the National Federation of Labor had, as yet, been made. In spite of these facts the same correspondent could write, "So far the movement . . . back to work . . . has been anything but general, and where work has been resumed, it has been to a great extent with outside or unorganized labor."⁹¹

The National Federation of Labor, recognizing the need that there would be for relief funds towards the close of the struggle, and especially for those who were the victims of reprisals, paid out no regular benefits as long as the general strike lasted, but in the meantime made every effort to enlarge the funds at its disposal. Exceptional dues were laid on those union workers, members of the Federation, who remained at work, an appeal was issued to "all good citizens" on August 4, the day the strike started, and a wide appeal made to the foreign labor movements. Up to October 31, 1909, some 188,000 kronor were collected from Sweden itself, largely from the salaries of trade union officials presented to the fund, or from the wages of railroad employees and other workers who did not strike. Large sums came from the other Scandinavian lands and from countries still further removed, the Swedish emigrants and their friends in the United States sending over a hundred thousand kronor.⁹²

⁹⁰ *London Times*, Aug. 18, 1909.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1909.

⁹² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 83, quoting report presented by the General Secretary to congress of National Federation of Labor held Nov. 22-30, 1909. Denmark gave 438,000 kronor, Norway 846,000 and Germany as much as 1,050,000 kronor.

When the strike was declared it was not believed that it would last very long; hence the strikers were supposed to be able to support themselves, either from their savings or from supplies laid in beforehand. As soon as the crisis had passed the second week and many of the strikers had exhausted their own resources, demands for relief poured in on the local strike committees and were passed on to the central executive. As there was reason to fear that some of the strikers, if left wholly without aid, would be forced to resume work, the General Secretary announced on August 15 that the most necessitous cases would receive relief. Local committees were asked to make inquiries and to report only the minima necessary for each locality. In spite of this prudent formula their demands soon became so large that the General Secretary could only partially satisfy them.⁸³

As the days passed, more than one attempt was made to bring the two parties together for negotiations, although the Government itself definitely refused to intervene so long as the strike remained a general sympathetic strike. On August 24 the Liberal organ, *Tidningen*, suggested intervention in the interests of those workers originally concerned, but not with the contract breakers, who came out in sympathy. The public showed signs of becoming impatient with both parties, "whose claims were as far away as ever from compromise."⁸⁴ On the 29th of the same month Baron Theodore Adelsvård, formerly member of the Riksdag, member of the Employers' Association, and owner of large timber works, drew up a scheme for settlement. Individual contracts with the workers were out of the question, he believed, and he proposed a truce till April 1 of the following year, during which time the conditions of future contracts and the duties of the respective organizations were to be carefully considered by both groups. In the meantime, all workers for whom positions were still available were to return at once, but none of the workers engaged during the strike were to be dismissed to make room for the strikers. This was commonly felt to be merely a postponement of the conflict without settlement of the issues.⁸⁵ At the same period the former Liberal Prime

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

⁸⁴ *London Times*, Aug. 26, 1900.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 30, 1900.

Minister, Karl Staaff, presented a petition to the Government asking for its intervention to end the struggle.

Such acts were generally held to have prolonged the struggle by encouraging the labor leaders to hold out in the hope of public intervention. In point of fact, the very next day the executive of the Federation of Labor decided to continue the strike on the same lines as heretofore, a strong opposition to ending the strike coming from those who felt that nothing but complete victory could save the strikers, whose jobs were now being filled by non-union workers. The Government, replying to the Liberal petition, declared that the strike had been extended to spheres where it had become a danger to the life and functioning of society; that, by advocating the violation of contracts, the strike had destroyed faith in the sanctity of engagements; and that by calling on the railroadmen to join, the strikers had openly endeavored to force State officials to betray their trust. Under these circumstances the State was unable to interfere to obtain concessions in favor of the delinquents, who must learn that the interests of the State and of society were above those of any separate class in the community.³⁶

THE GENERAL STRIKE ENDS; THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

At the very close of August, propositions were made to the workers to cease the struggle against the heads of industry who were *not* members of the Swedish Employers' Association, by what was termed a "rational limitation" of the strike. This basis of partial settlement was adopted by the executive of the National Federation of Labor in the following form:

(1) The General Secretary's office, in the name of the National Federation of Labor, declares it is willing to order resumption of work as rapidly as possible, in all branches of industry, save where the employers are members of the Swedish Employers' Association.

(2) The Federation of Swedish Typographers is equally willing to decide upon the resumption of work as soon as possible.

(3) In answer to these declarations the Association of Swedish Workshops and the General Union of Swedish Master-Printers, and the Central Committee of the Central Federation of Master-Tailors state that, on their side, they are ready to permit resumption of work as quickly as possible, as far as that is feasible.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Aug. 31, 1909.

(4) The demands which have been presented, or may yet be presented, between the associations. . . with regard to the general strike and events relating to it, shall be the object of direct negotiations between the principal competent organisations as soon as possible after the resumption of work, unless these matters are already pending before the tribunals, or have been submitted to arbitration in view of regulations or of an understanding between the parties interested.

(5) If the parties concerned subscribe to paragraphs 1-4 above a decision in conformity will immediately be taken and published, and Monday, September 6, 1909, will be fixed as the latest limit for the resumption of work.⁸⁷

Many other organizations, not mentioned in the text above, also agreed to resume work on the same terms. After the two sides had signed the convention, the conciliator transmitted the text to the Government and insisted that there was now an opportunity for a new effort at intervention on the lines he had proposed on August 19 but which the Government had rejected at that time. Before the Government could make answer a dispute arose about the settlement which threatened to put everything in question once more. It had to do with those employers who had not signed the convention, especially in enterprises dependent upon the State or the municipalities, and the various tramway companies. According to the conciliator these concerns were not covered by paragraphs 3 and 4 of the convention, and consequently work had to be resumed unconditionally in those cases. The General Secretary declared the Federation was unable to order a general return to work unless the employers concerned agreed to paragraph 4, and agreement could not be reached on this point. The employers who had signed declared that this fact would have no effect on resumption of work in the branches of industry which they represented. Thus it happened that on September 5 work began under conditions fixed by the convention, and the first and important period of the struggle, having lasted a month, came to an end.⁸⁸

From the beginning to the end of this first period the conduct of the strikers had been admirable. "Picketing there was,

⁸⁷ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 94; cf. *London Times*, Sept. 4.

⁸⁸ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 95.

but it was peaceful in the strictest sense of the word. . . . even when savings were exhausted and hunger had in many instances become a daily experience, there was little open murmuring and no violence.¹⁰⁸ During the progress of the first month the *Times* reported that Stockholm was very quiet, "the cafés are nearly empty. There is no drunkenness, no brawling, and no noisy arguments. The quays, the river, the bays and the rocks are lined with fishermen."¹⁰⁹ Owing to the constant command of the labor leaders to keep order, to the excellent coöperation of the strike police with the regular police force, and to the almost complete cessation of liquor sales during the strike period,¹⁰¹ the public and the authorities could state that good order was less disturbed during the strike than in ordinary times, and that the attitude of the workers and their respect for social decencies were above all praise.¹⁰²

The efforts made to preserve order, by the leaders of labor, were strongly seconded by the Government and the public authorities. A sufficient quantity of troops was put at the disposal of the public authorities in case of need, especially for the protection of important points in the means of communication. The use of troops, however, unlike their use in the Belgian general strikes, was controlled by the principle that they must never be displayed needlessly and must intervene only in the case of necessity. Save in a very few cases the army did not have to intervene. No ordinary police use of the army was to be made, such as the eviction of tenants by employers.¹⁰³ A large number of areas were closed to the public during the strike, to make the preservation of order by the police the easier, and in many instances mass meetings were forbidden. Over 10,000 extra police were enrolled, but few of these were called upon to take duty. Finally, greatest precautions were taken to guard all establishments containing explosives, and the sale of explosives and fire-arms was closely regulated by the authorities.¹⁰⁴ When

¹⁰⁸ T. H. Penson, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ *London Times*, Aug. 17, 1909.

¹⁰¹ The sale of spirits was prohibited during the strike, by order of the authorities, with the strong support of labor and the public. No beer or wine could be sold by restaurants unless ten cents worth of food was purchased and consumed at the same time. See *Times*, Aug. 17, and *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 67.

¹⁰² *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 67.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 65, 121.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-24.

one considers that masses of people, accustomed to regular labor all their lives, remained unoccupied for week after week, with the impatience and agitation of their spirits enhanced by discussion and oratory, it is remarkable that the number of crimes and offences during the strike period was as little as it was. Out of some 1,150 cases of offences relating to the conflict only 800 went to prosecution. In 431 of these fines were inflicted and in but 61 instances was the offence serious enough to call for imprisonment.¹⁰⁸

In the meantime the unhappy conflict dragged on between the National Federation of Labor and the Swedish Employers' Association. After the general strike ended the numbers on strike dropped from 240,000, on September 2, to 124,351 on September 9. Of these no less than 96,000 were workers employed by the Swedish Employers' Association. Only 4,000 men had returned to the employ of members in the Employers' Association during the long five weeks of strike. Even by the 24th of September 69,000 out of the original 100,000 employed by members of the Employers' Association, were still holding out against the pledge demanded of them not to aid their striking comrades if they were reemployed.¹⁰⁹

Once the general sympathetic strike was called off, the Secretary of the Federation of Labor informed the various workers that the control of the remaining restricted strikes would now be returned from the hands of the local strike committees to that of the original trade federations, who had relinquished their task, temporarily, at the commencement of the great strike. At the same time the strike daily, *Socret*, ceased to appear, and the various local labor journals resumed their publication. Although the local strike committees now ceased to function as the authoritative units of strike control, the National Federation's General Secretary remained in chief control of the struggle, if only because the trade federations had totally inadequate funds to carry on the fight and had to resort to the special fund of the Federation of Labor. Thanks to the generous aid of the foreign labor organizations the Federation of Labor was able to give considerable aid.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

A second attempt at mediation was made between September 14 and 28, but without success. The Employers' Association demanded the contents of *Article 23* of their own statutes included in all new contracts. The workers held that such demands by the employers were not consonant with the principle of conciliation. They did, however, recognize the justice of obligatory arbitration in all conflicts over the right to strike or to use the lock-out during the validity of contracts.¹⁰⁸ In a telegram to the International Secretary's office in Berlin the Federation of Labor reported: "The negotiations failed definitely. The masters' conditions were unacceptable to the workers. . . . If the international solidarity hitherto rendered to us is continued, then we are afraid of nothing. Only hunger will be able to break our ranks."¹⁰⁹ The employers, recognizing the severe weakening of the labor organizations through the long struggle, maintained the lock-out long after the general strike was called off.¹¹⁰

The labor chiefs next abandoned many parts of the struggle in order to concentrate all their forces upon the iron mines and forges. Here the employers had put all their efforts to get work re-started, but without in any degree abating the lock-out against the Federation of Labor members. All new workers took their positions after pledging themselves not to take part in that organization nor pay any dues in support of dismissed workers.¹¹¹

Once again negotiations started on November 4, but by the 13th had once more failed. Finally, as it was remarked on all sides that the employers' lock-out tactics were a systematic attack on trade union liberties, it seemed wiser to the Employers' Association to put an end to the state of war and the lock-out was called off in the iron industry, including the particular foundry which had started the whole trouble. In point of fact the work had begun with an entirely new personnel and the lock-out was no longer needed. In the other industries the lock-out remained, in spite of public disapproval, until Decem-

¹⁰⁸ The Government had appointed a Commission of five to mediate. *London Times*, Sept. 14 and 20, 1909. Cf. *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, pp. 101-3.

¹⁰⁹ *Times*, Oct. 4, 1909.

¹¹⁰ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 120.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

ber 1, 1910, according to the Government report.¹¹³ These industries included clothing production, cellulose, road and bridge construction, saw mills and textiles. Even in the spring of 1912 harmony had not been achieved on the questions at issue, nor had negotiations been resumed. Membership of the National Federation of Labor fell off 33 per cent in 1909, and even in the course of 1910 did not fully recover.¹¹⁴ The employees of municipalities and the State had to sign personal contracts and lost the benefit of their past employment, even where the positions themselves were not forfeited. In some cases, as with the typographers, a deduction was made from their wages as a guarantee against further strikes and was forfeited if the worker ceased work irregularly.¹¹⁴ The workers lost nearly forty million kronor in wages during the strike, and the employers at least twenty-five million kronor in loss of trade, exclusive of heavy drafts upon their fighting reserve funds.¹¹⁵ In the middle of December, 1909, there were still 17,000 union workers out of employment receiving some aid from the National Federation of Labor.¹¹⁶

Thus ended, in very bitter failure, the second Swedish attempt to use the weapon of the general strike. Its failure was not due to lack of organization, for no strike up to 1909 had been so well organized. Nor was it due to oppression by the State, though the Government made no bones about its hostility to the breaking of contracts. "The central fact is that, unlike the strike of 1902 for political reform, this was a strike by the proletariat for economic purposes. As such, it lacked the large sympathetic support which had been accorded to the political strike of seven years before. Contrary to their expectations, the workers found that, after the first few days they grew weaker each day, and that regardless of the fact that their ranks remained practically unbroken by desertion."¹¹⁷ It has been shown that as time lapsed the public grew more calm, less likely to intervene, except to run

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129 f.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119. In August, 1909, private banks showed that savings accounts deposits fell off 52 per cent, and withdrawals increased 28 per cent over the same month of the previous year. Popular life insurance taken out from Aug 1 to Sept. 11, 1909, fell off in numbers by 89 per cent.—*Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹¹⁸ John Spargo, *Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism*, p. 128.

the essential services, whereas the strikers themselves grew ever nearer the breaking point with hunger and possible permanent loss of positions. Though the ranks of the organized workers stood firm with remarkable discipline and sacrifice, the many unorganized workers who were thrown out of employment during the struggle became more ready daily to take the places of the actual strikers.

It is doubtful if one can truthfully place any gain over against the most palpable losses occasioned by the general strike of 1909. The employers certainly do not seem to have gathered that the lock-out was as unsocial a weapon as the strike, and the workers plainly did not take to heart the lesson that the strike should have taught them. In the congress of the National Federation of Labor, held from the 22nd to the 30th of November, 1909, the separate federations again desired full control of their own affairs, as the General Secretary had expected, and the new plans came to nought. "Not only among the masses, but even in executive circles, there was still no clear comprehension that the whole union movement must be subordinated to a central power exercising effective control over every organization."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *Les lock-out et la grève générale en Suède*, p. 120.

CHAPTER V

HOLLAND IN 1903: THE PENALTY OF OVERCONFIDENCE

"The general strike in Holland has just ended by the defeat of the proletariat." So wrote the editor of *Het Volk*, a member of the strike committee, early in April, 1903, after the disastrous collapse of the general strike in that country.¹

The immediate cause of the Dutch strike was the passing of a severe anti-strike measure by both the House and the Senate, but the struggle had deeper roots than that immediate cause. It was due, in part, to the agitation of anarchist and syndicalist groups, and in part to a recent meretricious victory on the part of the transport workers. The story of this strike is worth the telling, as an instance of the almost inevitable manner in which economic demands of labor have their political reactions.

The trouble started, at the very beginning of 1903, with a dispute between a certain shipping firm employing 200 dockers, and the Dockers' Union, a member of the International Federation of Transport Workers. Contracts in regard to wages, the right to organize, the number of men required to load and unload each vessel, had been concluded with the various shipping firms as recently as 1900. Most of the large firms had respected the agreements so made, but this particular firm, the Society Blamvoedenweem, had recourse to workers who were not members of the Dockers' Union, at fixed wage rates, in place of the piece-rate method then in vogue. Many other firms proceeded to imitate this innovation. The union declared a strike against the erring firm and won a complete victory on the 15th of January.

A new struggle, however, grew out of this minor dispute. During the strike the Society Blamvoedenweem had moved merchandise by non-union labor. Workers on the Amsterdam-Singapore vessels had refused to receive such merchandise, and 56 of such recalcitrant workers had been dismissed. As they were not reinstated the union had to take up their case with Müller & Com-

¹ V. H. Vlieghe, "Les événements de Hollande," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 15, 1903, p. 629.

pany, who had shipped the offending merchandise. A certain number of its workers were non-union and did not come under the union agreement. A strike against the firm of Müller & Company would, therefore, have been inadequate; so the union declared a boycott against any of their goods.³ When any of the "yellow" (non-union) workers of Müller & Company showed up with goods, workers in the port warehouses at Amsterdam refused to handle such goods. When the warehouse management intervened the union men ceased work. By the close of January the strike of dockers in Amsterdam was almost general, some 2,500 men ceasing work.

Once again the trouble spread, in the most approved syndicalist fashion. The railroad employees in contact with non-strikers also threw up their work, and there resulted a great strike of the railroad personnel which upset social life for some 88 hours.⁴ In 1903, Holland possessed some 3,000 kilometers of railroads, and some 17,000 railroad employees, of whom 8,000 were organized in unions.⁵ The railroad system was run partly by the State itself and partly by the Dutch Railroad Company. On January 27, 1903, following the dock strike already described, 300 men from the freight depot of Rietlanden decided to refuse any further service for the firms whose men were on strike. As four men were dismissed for refusing to handle certain freight cars containing goods belonging to the boycotted firms, all the railroad workers at the Rietlanden depot ceased work. The railroad company declared that it was compelled by law to accept all goods offered for shipment. Other railroad workers were called upon to perform the work of those who had refused, and as a protest the decision was made by the railroad union to call out all the personnel of the central station at Amsterdam.⁶

On January 30 all trains arriving were received as usual, but the next morning no train left the station, and at the State railroad station in Amsterdam the situation was the same, except for the arrival of a train from Utrecht, bearing the executive of the railroad men's union. By order of the union leaders all trains were halted at the next town to Amsterdam. Thus the stations of Haarlem, Utrecht, and the Hague were drawn into the strike.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 630.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 631; cf. Georgi, *Theorie und Praxis der Generalstreiks*, p. 90.

⁵ V. H. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

The directors of the railroad company were compelled to travel by automobiles to the Hague, where they asked the Government to relieve them of the legal requirement of accepting all goods offered for shipment. The Government stated that it did not possess the power to suspend the law. In the meantime the mails did not arrive and the telephone and telegraph lines were overburdened. As January 31 was a Saturday there were thousands of would-be passengers at the stations. The newspapers had hired all available automobiles—there were none too many in those days—to transport their journals outside the city, but these autos were commandeered for the mails by the Government.

Panic developed as the strike threatened to become general. The men on the hydraulic cranes in the port had already refused to work with non-union workers. The municipal workers of Amsterdam—the gas workers, tramway employees, telephone workers, and even the firemen—had also held strike meetings. At this period almost any port strike threatened to become generalized, owing to the syndicalist and anti-parliamentary attitude of many of the unions, and the general strike was widely advocated as a better weapon than the use of Parliament, especially as barely a quarter of the workers possessed the right to vote.⁶

With the general strike threatening Holland, on January 31 the railroad companies yielded on all points. The personnel was not to be forced to work with "yellow" labor, and the rail administrations accepted the obligation to recognize the labor organizations and the right of the latter to represent the workers. This news spread and the railroad workers resumed work. Their triumph was widely celebrated in the labor press. A great movement of non-union workers to join the unions followed, and the syndicalists rejoiced in the success of their methods.⁷

The triumph was short-lived. A significant episode in Amsterdam labor affairs roused tremendous public opposition and brought the general hostility to a head. In Amsterdam almost all the public services were under the control of the city itself—gas and water supply, the telephones, the hydraulic cranes at the port, the public buildings—the city employing at least 8,000 workers. A large number of these were organized, either in sep-

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 636-37; cf. Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 396.

⁷ V. H. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 637, and May 1, 1908, p. 24.

arate unions or under the Federation of Municipal Workers, which had local branches in every important Dutch city. For some years the wages of the municipal workers had been fixed at a rate somewhat higher than that of workers in private firms. At this time, however, the wages of the city employees of Amsterdam were lower than those of workers in the other industries, which had recently been raised by union activity. For two and a half years the Amsterdam city employees had been asking for a wage increase, and at this moment, in fact, a commission was sitting to consider new wage scales.

It was at this juncture that the municipal workers, enthusiastic over the results of the railroad strike, delivered an ultimatum to the city. The gas and waterworks employees announced that the wage increase must be forthcoming on the following Monday or they would go on strike. The tramway men and the firemen declared that they were ready to strike if necessary.³ As the Dutch cities lost the right of collecting customs due at their gates in 1885 and had few other means of taxation except upon incomes, a demand of such a character was serious. Moreover, a large number of the propertied residents of Amsterdam had gone into the country to avoid taxation. The wage increase would have meant an increased expense for Amsterdam of one million florins. The situation, then, was propitious for a reaction against labor's demands. The workers had made the mistake of keeping their wage demands more or less to themselves for two years, instead of making the need for the increase a public agitation. The public knew nothing of the wage situation, and the strike menace was received with all the more annoyance. A great press campaign was inaugurated against "revolutionary dangers," and the middle classes were put into a suitably perturbed state of mind.

Pressure was put upon the Government to bring in immediately restrictive laws that would afford some protection to the public, particularly against strikes in public services.⁴ At the mere threat of such an eventuality the workers' organizations waxed defiant. The leaders of the railway men stated that they were ready to proclaim a general strike against such a law and to march, in protest, from the various large towns upon the

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28 f.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Hague. The Government retaliated by calling to arms two troops of soldiers on leave, by occupying the railroads as if in war, and by stationing 5,000 soldiers and a strong contingent of gendarmes in Amsterdam. The House was then called together and addressed by the Prime Minister, Dr. Kuyper. He recalled the recent transport strikes and proposed certain restrictive laws. These proposed laws prohibited all strikes among railroad workers and public service employees, with heavy prison sentences for infraction of the law; they forbade picketing, and put in the hands of the magistrates an exceedingly elastic power of punishment for strike offences.¹⁰

In the meantime the Amsterdam dispute had been settled by the appointment of a special commission to draw up as rapidly as possible a new scale of wages for municipal employees. The workers concerned had expressed themselves as satisfied with that conciliatory step.¹¹ The publication of the proposed laws, however, roused intense indignation among the union workers, and a Committee of Defense was formed, with the aim of organizing a national general strike if the Government forced the bills through Parliament. A wide campaign of meetings was undertaken by the labor forces, and once again called forth a counterstroke of a campaign by the party in power.¹² When the Government¹³ promised a certain degree of regulation of the railway companies, in place of the existing guaranties held by the trade unions, the Liberals, who had been somewhat hesitant till then, went over to the side of the Government.¹⁴

Indignation among the union ranks was widespread, and the more prudent voices of the Social-Democrats were not given a hearing, when they warned that the element of surprise in the January railroad victory would not again be present and that the forces of the railroad companies, of the clergy, of the press, and of the politicians would all be united against labor.¹⁵ Though a strike against the laws was threatened, very little was done to prepare for it—once again in excellent syndicalist form—for the successes of the Amsterdam dockers and the railroadmen

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80 f; cf. Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

¹¹ V. H. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³ The conservatives were in power, with strong support from the peasants, both Calvinist and Catholic, and distinctly anti-socialist in view.

¹⁴ *London Times*, April 4, 1908.

¹⁵ V. H. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

had rendered organized labor reckless. The anarchists had been preaching the infallible efficacy of the general strike, and labor generally overvalued its own powers. The Social-Democrats attempted more than once to have an enquiry into the justification of the proposed laws, before the House was called on to debate them, but the Government appeared to desire an explosion.¹⁶

On March 17 the central organ of the Social-Democrats, *Het Volk*, printed an editorial advising labor to give up the general strike project, a suggestion that roused bitter accusations of treason from the extremists. A referendum of the railroadmen proved unsatisfactory, for while the vote was in favor of a general strike the number actually voting was too small to be of value.¹⁷

On April 2 the Chamber met to discuss the new laws, and the unions to debate the general strike. The president of the railroad union warned his audience against unreflecting action, but the rest of the railroad delegates were partisans of the strike and the vote was unanimously in favor of a general strike of transport workers. In the early hours of April 6 the fatal decision was taken by the Committee of Defense, to call out all workers on the lines of communication by land and water, including the railroads, the canals, and the docks of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, and Zoondam. The president of the Committee of Defense declared the strike had been proclaimed primarily as a protest against the threatened anti-strike laws, and secondly to enable the railroadmen to gain better wages before the passing of the new laws would put them in a position where no agitation for a wage raise could be made. The railroad companies published a counter-manifesto ordering their men to return to work within twenty-four hours on pain of dismissal. All intercontinental lines were promptly occupied by the military.¹⁸

As the strike developed it was seen that not all the railroad personnel was obeying the strike order. Out of 1,400 men employed in the railroad workshops at Amsterdam some 900 went on strike. The strike was confined mainly to engine drivers on the main lines. Enough trains still ran to show that the strike

¹⁶ Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 288 f.; cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁷ V. H. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 f.

¹⁸ *London Times*, April 7, 1903. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

was not a success. As far as Amsterdam was concerned the strike was more complete than elsewhere. Only one train, under military escort, left the city on the morning of April 6, and all business was at a standstill on the quays, the mailboats not being unloaded. The staffs of the shipping companies running lines to London and Hull, went out in sympathy with the railroad men, and, strangely enough, did the diamond cutters of Amsterdam.¹⁹

The news of the partial failure of the railroad strike spread like wildfire. This news only excited the rest of the workers even more, and the dockers came out almost to a man, as did the employees of the tramway companies and the bakers.²⁰ The Committee of Defense was using its efforts to restrain other trades from joining the strike, but by April 8 the Committee felt forced by union pressure to call a general strike of all trades. The response was as unsatisfactory as had been the rail strike. All told, not more than 60,000 workers went on strike throughout Holland, and of those nearly 30,000 were in Amsterdam.²¹ The Government was well prepared, with warships concentrated in the ports, and all trains carrying military escorts. The middle class suffered very little; when the bakers struck they sent their domestic help to buy bread in the workers' quarters, and prices soon rose. To meet the exhaustion of the gas reserve the same class purchased stocks of candles and kerosene, and it was the workers who went without light.²²

On the following day, April 9, the United Federation of Railroad Servants expressed its readiness to end the strike if the men were reinstated, but neither the State administration nor the Dutch Railroad Company made any reply to their telegram. The Amsterdam municipality stated they would reinstate any of their employees who had gone on strike April 8 if they returned to work not later than April 10. On the same day (April 9) the House passed the hated bills by 81 to 14 and authorized the formation of a military brigade to work the railroads during strikes. Some 25,000 workers were now included in the lock-out

¹⁹ *London Times*, April 7, 1908.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, April 8, 1908; Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, f. Consisting of 7,000 diamond workers, 6,000 metal workers, 3,000 dockers, 1,800 railroad-men, 1,000 cigar-makers, 1,000 bakers, 3,000 municipal workers, 800 typographers, 3,000 building employees, and various petty trades.

²² Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 138; cf. *London Times*, April 8.

declared the previous day by the Central Shipping Federation.²³ The "Christian" (non-socialist) trade unions were carrying on a strong agitation against the general strike, and the Committee of Defense recognized that the general strike would be a fiasco without the effective aid of the railroadmen, and that the railroad strike would certainly be over in twenty-four hours.²⁴ The Senate had been convoked for the 11th of the month, and the Queen was at the Hague; so that no delay might be expected in the passage of the bills into law. Once passed, they would go into effect instantly. That would entail heavy prison sentences for all railroadmen who still refused to work, and for all strike leaders anything up to four years' imprisonment. On the night of April 9, therefore, the Committee of Defense decided unani- mously to declare the strike at an end.²⁵

A manifesto to this effect was issued early next day, to the great surprise and wrath of the 25,000 or 30,000 strikers in Amsterdam, who had gone to bed the previous night in the full belief that the strike was succeeding. The anarchist elements, who had been waiting, in vain, for the revolt of the soldiers, had been expressing themselves with extreme boldness, and the Social-Democrats had received little hearing. The press had aided the extremists by printing false news of the complete failure of the strike long before it really collapsed, and the workers thence- forward believed nothing the middle-class newspapers reported.²⁶ When the masses learned the truth on the morning of April 10, they believed they had been betrayed by the Committee of Defense and the Social-Democrats. A monster mass meeting held in Amsterdam that day repudiated the decision of the Committee of Defense and howled down any members of the Committee who desired to be heard. All the unions save the diamond cutters de- cided to remain on strike in spite of the Committee.²⁷ Fortunately the mayor of Amsterdam was wise enough to keep both soldiers and police in the background that day and thus allowed the popu- lar passions to vent themselves freely.²⁸

On the very next day, April 11, the anti-strike bills passed the Senate unani- mously and received royal assent, being promul-

²³ *Ibid.*, April 10, 1903.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, April 9, 1903; Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁵ Vliegen, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Vliegen, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40.

²⁷ *London Times*, April 11, 1903; cf. Geogrt., *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁸ Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

gated the same evening. The leader of the extreme syndicalist group, Domela Nieuwenhuis, decided upon the formation of a new Committee of Defense, but a day or two later the unions discovered the wisdom of the Social-Democrats and ceased to give further support to the prolongation of the strike. The anarchists made no further serious efforts to continue the struggle. On the 13th there were still some 10,000 workers who had not yet taken up work, or were still locked out.²⁹ Not till April 20 did the Masters' Association of the Amsterdam Transport Service withdraw the lock-out, and even then the men had to pledge themselves not to abandon work at the command of a third party. The State railroads reinstated the bulk of their striking workers at a reduced grade. The Dutch Railroad Company declared that previous service of their striking employees would no longer count toward pensions, thus making an even heavier penalty. In all some 4,000 workers were "victimized."³⁰

The experience was a bitter one. In attacking the whole concept of the general strike the following year, Van Kol, a Social-Democrat, could write: "It is not the possessing class that would be the first to be deprived of medical aid, or whose quarters would be in dangerously unhygienic condition. By its wealth the possessing class would have at its disposal all the accumulated reserves of the stores. The whole weight of want and misery would fall upon the working class without resources, whose very coöperatives the middle class would empty by force of arms."³¹ V. H. Vliegen, whom we have quoted at length in this chapter, himself a member of the strike committee and editor of the Social-Democrat journal, *Het Volk*, declared himself converted against the general strike method as a result of his experience.³² "Against a resolute adversary, which has behind it all the forces of the bourgeoisie, the general strike can do nothing. If," he adds, "the general strike renders life impossible for everyone, it is the proletariat whom death first menaces." And again, "The general strike can achieve nothing save temporarily to upset the economic life. Socialism can but suffer with such an economic disturbance."³³

²⁹ *London Times*, April 13 and 14, 1908. Vliegen, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³⁰ *London Times*, April 20, 1908; cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹ Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158, f.

On the other hand, a representative of the extreme anarchist-syndicalist group could still say, one year after the strike fiasco, "In my opinion the social revolution will be nothing other than the immediate outcome of a victorious general strike."⁸⁴ Just as the extreme parliamentarians among the Social-Democrats could see no possible use in the general strike as an economic weapon, so the syndicalist extremists saw no use whatever in a general strike for universal suffrage or for any other purely political object, *except* the social revolution!

If, however, the two extremes refused to learn by experience, the mass of the Dutch labor and socialist movement were willing to admit that the general strike "is the supreme means of demonstration, of protest, and of political pressure which remains to the workers when *ordinary means fail*."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Christian Cornelissen in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁸⁵ From the Report on the general strike presented by the Dutch Social-Democratic Party to the International Congress of Amsterdam in 1904, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

CHAPTER VI

THE GENERAL STRIKE AS A REVOLUTIONARY WEAPON

THE RUSSIAN STRIKES OF 1905

Sixty years after the Chartist efforts in support of a revolutionary general strike, history offers once again a remarkable example of a national strike, on a far vaster scale, for the purpose of forcing from an autocracy large measures of self-government and democratic liberty.

Strangely enough the financial aid of Republican France to this autocracy, and the new economic policy of the Russian bureaucrat, Count Witte, were the indirect causes of this revolt of the Russian masses. But for the forced growth of the Russian towns under the combined influence of the French loans and Count Witte's program of industrial development, there would have been no stage prepared for a national strike.

The rapidly developed industrial centers created hotbeds of revolutionary democracy and raised within the very system of Czardom an enemy more fatal to autocracy than even the victorious Japanese armies. The Russian Empire, moreover, had become knitted together by strategical railroads, mainly designed to serve the purposes of external war. These very railroad systems were fated to aid even more efficiently the strategy of internal revolution. It was these railroads that enabled the Russian workers to paralyze, for a brief period, the means of autocratic repression.¹

The year 1905 is, of course, the year of the great strikes, but even before that period there had been an immense strike agitation in Southern Russia. In 1903 over a quarter of a million of men ceased work, and transportation, industry, and trade were brought to a standstill. The strikers' aims were vague, and the result not at all clear.² That movement was characterized not

¹"Europe and the Russian Revolution," *The Fortnightly Review*, LXXXIV (Dec. 1905), 959-75.

²Georgi, *Theorie und Praxis der Generalstreiks*, pp. 95-96.

so much by its demands as by its revolutionary strike spirit. The environment was most unfavorable, the great distances between the cities and between the factories wherein the strikes took place, the lack of union organization, and the absence of a workers' press made its success almost impossible at that time. It was, in fact, brutally suppressed in the usual manner by the Russian Government, many workers' deaths resulting.³

Early in 1905 the strike agitation again came to a head, starting in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) on an economic plane but changing with phenomenal suddenness to a widespread national strike with political aims revolutionary in character, and directed against Czardom.⁴ The trouble started in the Putilov Ironworks, the scene of so many strike origins. Four workers had been dismissed, charged with belonging to a labor union. At that time it was as much as a man's position was worth to belong to a union, even if, as well as losing his job, he were not swiftly imprisoned or deported. The comrades of the four men ceased work on January 16, 1905, and demanded an eight-hour day and immunity from arrest for the strike committee. This movement was under the control of the Russian Workmen's Club, founded in 1903, numbering some 7,000 members.⁵ Two days later many other works had joined in the strike movement, most of them concerned with the production of war materials for the Government, which was then in the final throes of the war against Japan.

The refusal to consider the men's demands at the Putilov works on January 19, caused the strike swiftly to overstep the bounds of a peaceful movement of the Workers' Club and led to the drafting of a petition to the Czar himself. The workers' demands began at once to take on a political aspect.⁶ The Social-Democrat orators had made use of every strike meeting to rouse

³ B. Kritchewsky, "Le proletariat et la révolution en Russie," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, Feb. 1, 1905, pp. 148-80. A nine- or eight-hour day, and a wage increase of twenty to seventy per cent were among the demands. The cities concerned were as far apart as Baku, Tiflis, and Batum in Transcaucasia and Odessa or Kiev.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵ *London Times*, Jan. 17 and 18, 1905.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 20, 1905. On the 19th of January the manufacturers of St. Petersburg decided to reject the workers' general demands . . . the eight hour day, a share in the works—management by the workers themselves, wage paying during strikes . . . and to consider only those questions affecting individual factories, when the workers resumed work.—*Ibid.*, Jan. 21.

revolutionary feeling, and the appearance of one Father Gapon gave voice to the mass desires and a leader to the strikers. Gapon was the son of a peasant in the district of Poitava, himself a sheep tender when a boy, and at the time but thirty-five years of age. He was an indefatigable worker, had begun his education as a monk but had been dismissed for meddling with politics, and had become a priest. Always a diligent worker, he was known from the start as a radical in views.⁷ Father Gapon had interviewed the Minister of Justice on January 21 and had sought for the right to present a petition to the Czar himself on the following afternoon. This petition contained among other demands the calling of a Constituent Assembly of all Russia, elected by universal suffrage with the secret ballot—quite a step further than the original demands of the workers.⁸

The strike agitation had been carried on with remarkable absence of violence until the 21st of the month, the committee of the unions having issued instructions that no personal violence was to be offered to the police. The *Times* correspondent bore witness that the demonstrators who filled the streets politely made way for passing traffic. Although the strikers remained calm, they were quite "resolved not to resume work if their demands were not granted." In the meantime the strike had been spread by marching crowds of strikers. The printing shops and the smaller stores were closed at their demand, and many parts of the city were in darkness owing to the strike of workers at the electric-light plants. By January 21, 74 factories and workshops were closed and nearly 90,000 men on strike. The list of factories idle showed that every industry was involved, including railroad construction and electrical engineering.⁹

On the morning of the fatal Sunday, January 22, 1905, St. Petersburg awoke to find itself practically in a state of siege, with 100,000 troops held ready under orders to prevent disturbance at any cost. At eleven in the morning the military attempted to turn back thousands of strikers from the bridge connecting the industrial quarter with the city. The Cossacks used their knouts, then their sabres, and finally their rifles. The strikers fell on their knees, imploring the Cossacks to let them pass, protesting that they had no hostile intent. As blank cartridges did

⁷ *The Independent*, Jan. 26, 1905, p. 176. *London Times*, Jan. 23, 1905.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 21, 1905.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 21 and 23, 1905.

not terrify the workers, ball cartridges were resorted to. The scene became a regular shambles, the soldiers firing at the strikers as they lay flat on the ground.¹⁰

In the meantime, Father Gapon, clad in full ecclesiastical robes and carrying an ikon, led some 12,000 workers towards the Winter Palace. At the Narva Gate he told the colonel in command of the troops that he was bringing a petition from the people to the Czar. Refused passage he led the people on, and, as before that day, the military received orders to fire. At each volley men, women, and children fell. While the crowds still pleaded "You are Russians! Why play the part of bloodthirsty butchers?" the soldiers continued to fire wildly into the massed crowds.¹¹ The St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Paris Matin* declared that "the repression was terrible. There had been no disturbances to speak of. The whole crowd was unarmed and had not uttered a single threat. . . . the soldiers aimed at the people's heads." M. Bru, of the *Echo de Paris*, interviewing the Minister of the Interior, was assured that the strikers were not armed, did not possess ammunition, and, contrary to rumor, did not own an arms factory.¹²

It cannot be wondered at that, on the evening of that bloody day, the workers decided to resist to the bitter end, and that protests of moderate men against the looting of shops for food and the destruction of the Czar's portrait wherever found, were given no heed by the enraged crowds. The movement now spread rapidly to the professional classes, in protest against the unnecessary bloodshed. Students and merchants joined the ranks, and even the lawyers refused to plead in the courts, declaring their entire solidarity with the workers, and the druggists' assistants came out on strike along with the rest!¹³

The official report, endeavoring to pass the blame on to the Social-Democrats, declared that "the strike was being conducted without disturbance of order" when "the agitation of the workmen's association was soon joined by the agitation of revolutionary circles" and that on the 21st "Gapon drew up a petition from the workmen to the Czar, in which were contained, besides demands from the men, insolent demands of a political charac-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1905.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1905.

¹² *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1905.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, and 25, 1905.

ter," yet even the official report makes no suggestion of mass disturbances as the origin of the bloodshed.¹⁴ It has been definitely alleged that the police had received orders to interfere in no way with the growth and development of the strike but to stand aside and allow events to ripen for the action of the military.¹⁵

The events of the terrible Sunday, January 22, called forth an immediate widespread sympathy strike in most of the Russian cities and in Russian Poland. Places as far apart as Vilna, Moscow, Kharkov, Odessa, and Sevastopol felt the force of the strike agitation. The same methods were employed in each town to which the agitation spread; crowds of strikers would march from factory to factory, calling or forcing out the workers as they passed, precisely as the strikers had done in the great strike of 1842 in northern England.¹⁶

In Warsaw and Lodz, of Russian Poland, the strike reached greater proportions than elsewhere, over 100,000 workers coming out on strike in both cities, and in the case of Lodz, remaining out until the second week in February. In Lodz the strike was so persistent that twenty-five factories permanently closed down, 40,000 workers being thrown out of employment.¹⁷ In the Polish strikes a remarkable feature of the agitation was the refusal of students and pupils of the universities and schools to go to classes while the struggle lasted. This aspect of the sympathetic strike was common to many of the Russian cities also.¹⁸

The strike in St. Petersburg ended long before the sympathetic strikes elsewhere. On January 25 a notice was posted giving the strikers twenty-four hours in which to return to work, on pain of being deported to their native villages. The official proclamation informed the workers that the Czar had ordered the drafting of a law shortening the hours of labor and other measures making possible legal discussion of the workers' needs.¹⁹ By the 28th the city was almost normal, the strikers who had not returned at that time planning to resume work on the 30th, their decision being due largely to the Gov-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1905.

¹⁵ Berlin correspondent of *London Times*, Jan. 24, 1905.

¹⁶ *London Times*, Jan. 25, 1905.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1905; cf. Jan. 30, and Georghi, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁸ *London Times*, Feb. 6, 1905.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 28, 1905.

ernment's promises. This "rapid return to submissiveness on the part of the St. Petersburg strikers" after the bloodshed of the 22nd suggested to the *Times* correspondent that "the State machinery was too powerful for the existing unrest to culminate in a revolutionary upheaval." He believed the trouble to have been "purely a demonstration of widespread discontent, bred of long hours, small wages, and the hardships peculiar to the existing state of war," and adds, apropos the Sunday massacre, "it must be remembered that on no occasion on Sunday was the crowd in a hostile or riotous mood."²⁰

The St. Petersburg Manufacturers' Association resolved on February 1 that the points of the men's demands²¹ were not to be discussed, but were to be referred to the Ministry of Finance to be dealt with by legislation; that the separate demands at each works would be considered when the men returned; that the strike movement was due to external causes, not to economic ones, and that therefore the masters would meet their workers, not apply penalties for time lost, nor try to discover or punish the instigators, but would collect funds for the families of the victims of January 22; and that no pay for the strike period would be given, lest a bad precedent be formed.²²

In Warsaw the great strike resulted in "considerable general improvement in the situation of the workmen, who, in addition to shorter hours and other concessions, also obtained a general increase in wages averaging ten per cent." It is doubtful, however, if the situation was anything like as favorable at Lodz or in the other Russian cities where sympathetic strikes took place.²³

The origin of the strike was undoubtedly economic, and the demands originally put forward by the St. Petersburg strikers, and by those who struck in sympathy in Warsaw and Lodz, also largely economic, but there can be no question that the revolutionary orators and enthusiasts, both inside and outside the workers' organizations, made the utmost of the opportunity to try out the revolutionary strength of the Russian masses. That they were by no means dissatisfied with the result can be gleaned

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1906.

²¹ An eight-hour day, a share in the management and in fixing of piece rates, and the abolition of penalties for strikes.

²² *London Times*, Feb. 2, 1906.

²³ *Ibid.*, Feb. 11 and 20, 1906.

from the resort to the same weapon in October, 1905, with far greater, though temporary, success, and from the comment made subsequently by Trotsky. "After the bloody 22nd of January," wrote the Bolshevik leader, "a magnificent strike wave surged over the whole country, shaking it to its very foundations. The strike embraced some 122 cities and villages, some mines of the Donetz basin, and ten railroads. The proletarian masses were stirred to their depths. The strike drew nearly a million men into its ranks. Without plan, often without demands, constantly renewed, it controlled the land for almost two months. . . . One department after the other, one factory after the other laid down work. . . . Economic demands were made which were immediately granted, wholly or in part. But neither the beginning nor the end of the strike was dependent entirely on the character of the demands made and the manner in which these demands were satisfied." Trotsky seemed to believe that the strike was an almost involuntary expression of the revolutionary spirit. "The strikers themselves, those who sympathized with the strike and those who feared and hated it, all understood dimly that this furious strike. . . which raged from place to place, stopped, turned about, first left a place and then infested it again, and then swept on like a whirlwind . . . was not here of its own force but was merely carrying out the will of the Revolution."²⁴

THE "OCTOBER REVOLUTION" IN RUSSIA

After the two months of violent strike agitation described above, the spring and summer of 1905 passed with further vacillation and unfulfilled promises on the part of the Russian autocracy. Finally, on August 6, when the new law for the "Imperial Duma" was promulgated, it was seen that the long promised National Assembly was to be nothing more than a consultative body with no powers to legislate. The Duma was at the mercy of the government, since the law gave power to suspend the Duma members, or to deprive them of their mem-

²⁴Werner Sombart, *Der proletarische Sozialismus*, II, 238, quoting Trotsky.

In 1905 Trotsky was elected a member of the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies and was chairman of the meeting at which the whole Soviet was arrested, so that his comment is particularly apt. Cf. *Essays*, Brit. 13th ed., III, 829.

bership at any time.²⁵ This absurd shadow of popular liberties, whereby, for instance, the 1,400,000 inhabitants of St. Petersburg would have in their midst only 18,000 electors, simply roused the popular passions to fever heat.²⁶

The actual outbreak of the great general strike of October, 1905, was the immediate cause of the "October Revolution," but its occurrence was nonetheless accidental. Though unexpected, the revolutionary strike was not unprepared. After the more or less partial and unsuccessful strikes of the early months of 1905 the efforts at organization had redoubled. Leagues or unions of the principal professions had been formed and a League of Leagues or Union of Unions had been constituted, possessing a central committee invested with power to issue orders to all affiliated members.²⁷ This organization utilized strikes that began with economic demands and turned them with startling suddenness and completeness into widespread political strikes of more than one class.

The strike started somewhat prematurely, early in October, among the bakers and the compositors and printers in Moscow. Among the strikers' demands was that of the eight-hour day, but before many days had passed it became evident that the strike had as its object the participation of working men in the election of the new Imperial Duma.²⁸ The newspapers of Moscow had ceased from the outbreak of the strike, and ere long the supply of bread almost disappeared.²⁹ As hitherto, a strong minority of workers did not desire the strike, but bands of strikers marched from workshop to workshop and drove out the workers. A majority of the factories were thus compelled to join, and the tramways ceased to run.³⁰ On October 12 the bakers resumed work, but the factory strike spread and the students and school pupils threatened to "walk-out."³¹ The employers in the meantime had met and decided to refuse the workers' demands until they returned to work.³² On October 16 the printers' strike

²⁵ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XXIII, 909.

²⁶ *London Times*, Oct. 21, 1906; cf. P. Kropotkin in *The Living Age*, XXIX, (Dec. 30, 1905), 771-85.

²⁷ E. J. Dillon, "Russia in Revolution," *Contemporary Review*, LXXXVIII (Dec., 1906), 884.

²⁸ *London Times*, Oct. 12, 1905.

²⁹ *New York Tribune*, Oct. 10, 1905.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Oct. 11; *London Times*, Oct. 8, 1905.

³¹ *Tribune*, Oct. 12 and 13, 1905.

spread to St. Petersburg, where a three-day sympathy strike was declared, and the *Sviet* was the only journal to appear on the following morning, the strikers threatening to wreck its offices as a penalty for its appearance.⁵³

The strike epidemic began to widen its area. Under the engineering of the Social-Democrat and Social Revolutionary parties strikes broke out at Saratov, Kiev, Kharkov, and Warsaw.⁵² Then the fatal blow was struck, which made the political strike irresistible—The Empire's railroadmen began to quit work. Again the trouble started in Moscow. On October 20 strikers extinguished the fires in the locomotives at the engine house of the Moscow-Kazan railroad, overturning an engine that was about to take out the mail train, and wrecked the telegraph poles near Moscow, thus interrupting communication. The employees of the Moscow-St. Petersburg road followed suit, and by the following evening practically all rail communication had ceased, the Moscow-Kursk workers deserting their trains en route.⁵⁴

The Moscow railroadmen had sent a deputation to St. Petersburg to deliver an ultimatum to the Government, and a rumor that Prince Khilkov, Minister of Ways of Communication, had not seen them but that the deputation had been arrested, was the immediate cause for the Moscow outbreak. The Prince hurried down to Moscow and spent two hours endeavoring to persuade the men that they ought to resume work at once. The strikers demanded the release of comrades arrested by the police, and Prince Khilkov declared that such a request was outside his jurisdiction. In answer to their demand for a reduced working day, the Prince claimed that he had worked sixteen hours daily to earn his salary in England and the United States. The strikers asked how a man could gain any education with such working hours, and he replied that at least one hour a day could be taken from their remaining hours of leisure, but that education was an illusion in any case! He then proceeded to mount a locomotive and urged others to resume work as he himself was doing. But this time the princely example failed,

⁵³ *London Times*, Oct. 17 and 18. The Government's *Official Messenger* still appeared, as it generally did.—*Tribune*, Oct. 19, 1905.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1905.

⁵⁴ *London Times*, Oct. 21 and 22; *Tribune*, Oct. 21 and 22, 1905.

and but for one solitary striker, who helped the Prince drive himself back to St. Petersburg, the railroadmen refused to budge.⁸⁵

The National Association of Railroad Employees in Moscow adopted a resolution in favor of universal suffrage, political freedom, amnesty to all political prisoners, the right to organize strikes, the eight-hour day, the abolition of martial law on the railroads, and the release of all arrested strikers. In support of these demands they called for a general strike of the railroadmen upon all the roads of the Russian Empire. Already traffic across the central belt of European Russia was at a standstill.⁸⁶ By October 26 the Baltic and Polish railroads in the Russian Empire were completely tied up. Even the hospital trains bringing the wounded back from Manchuria were held up on the lines running into Moscow. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, vast crowds of would-be passengers thronged the platforms, being fed and housed as far as that was practicable by the Government, the first class passengers receiving the magnificent sum of one dollar a day, while the third class were valued at twenty-five cents per head.⁸⁷

In St. Petersburg a delegation of railroad strikers interviewed Count Witte, the Minister of the Interior, carrying with them an appeal for the prompt convocation of a Constituent Assembly elected by direct universal suffrage. The Minister of the Interior objected to universal suffrage as giving too much power to the rich, and declared that it was not an essential part of the railroadmen's demands. He confessed himself ignorant of the continued existence of martial law upon the railroads and promised that liberty of the press and of assembly would shortly be granted, but the strike must stop first. The delegates pointed out that the universal suffrage demand was essential, that all the bookshops were flooded with literature upon that subject, and that it had become one of the demands of almost the whole of the Russian people. Count Witte asserted that there was not a single cultivated man in the whole world who was in favor of universal suffrage, and with that dogmatic comment the delegation had to depart unsatisfied.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 24 and 25, 1905. Cf. E. J. Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 886.

⁸⁶ *London Times*, Oct. 23, 24, and 25; *Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1905.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1905.

⁸⁸ *London Times*, Oct. 26, 1905.

In the meantime the railroad and printing strikes had spread in most of the cities to the municipal workers, to the gas and electric light plants, to the bakeries, and to a great number of the factories, so that by October 26 the number of strikers throughout Russia exceeded one million. The Union of Unions was considering the proclamation of a nation-wide general strike to enforce political demands.⁵⁹ Doctors, lawyers, and druggists all agreed to join the strike until the Constituent Assembly was summoned.

By October 29 the railroads of the Caucasian and even of the Trans-Caspian territories had ceased to run. All over the Empire the same story was repeated; newspapers ceased to appear, trams stopped running, there were no mails delivered or accepted, even telegrams were inordinately delayed. Milk and meat grew scarcer in the cities, and prices of food rose to exorbitant heights; schools were closed and water and gas supplies ceased; engineers in factories, public buildings, and plants joined the strike; the streets were filled with crowds of strikers passing from place to place and forcing the closing of shops or factories where workers were still at work.

The full force of the Government's military railroad battalions was practically helpless against the tremendous task of running all of the Empire's railroads. The very officials in the Ministry of Ways of Communication went out on strike, as did the employees of the Caucasian Viceroy in far-away Tiflis. Only a single cable line still connected the capital city of the great Empire with the outer world, all the rest of the land lines having been cut. A strike started even in the St. Petersburg post office. Finally the telephone operators in St. Petersburg ceased work and the palace was cut off from all news.⁶⁰ "The nation is still in passive revolt," reported the *London Times* of October 30, "and the Government is incapable of enforcing even the semblance of authority. . . . The strike has enveloped every aspect of Russian life. . . . even the telegraph officials, whom the strike committee asked to continue work, insist upon joining the movement. Russia today is the scene of a phenomenon unprecedented in history, a nation on strike.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1905.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1905; cf. *N. Y. Tribune*, Oct. 29-30, 1905.

The people have stopped work in an overwhelming protest against misrule.⁴¹

With few exceptions the "revolt" still remained "passive" up to October 30, the workers' delegates being determined to carry on the strike without abatement and equally resolved to give no occasion for any violence, lest the Government should have an easy pretext for the use of arms. The very manufacturers themselves, in the city of Moscow, entreated the Government not to suppress the right of workers' meetings in the factories.⁴² Yet the strikers were suffering acutely from the loss of wages and the high prices of the necessaries of life. A deputation of thirty members of the St. Petersburg strike committee presented a list of demands to the Municipal Council on the 29th of October. These demands included the establishment of a Constitution and popular liberty; the city to cease providing funds for the police and the soldiers, but, on the contrary, to supply food for the strikers; the troops to be removed from the waterworks, on pain of a strike of the waterworks employees; and the immunity of the strike delegation from arrest. The president of the Workers' Union, representing half a million workers, who was the spokesman of this delegation, declared that the struggle of the workers against the bureaucrats had become so acute that the Municipality must take one side or the other at once. As the delegation left the meeting they were arrested by the police, but released at the urgent request of the Municipal authorities.⁴³

Russian Poland was already seething with a general strike of all railroads and industries. On October 30, Finland, also under dominion of the Russian autocracy, followed suit with a most complete general strike.⁴⁴ The St. Petersburg justices of the peace by a 50 to 2 vote decided to join the doctors and lawyers and refuse their services along with the rest of the nation.⁴⁵ There is an end to all things, even to the indecision of a vacillating autocrat. The strike of the telephone operators of the capital was the last straw; horrible possibilities were conjured up in the vivid imaginations of the Court, and at four o'clock on the afternoon of October 30, 1905, the Czar

⁴¹ *London Times*, Oct. 30, 1905.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1905.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1905.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 31; *Tribune*, Oct. 30, 1905.

⁴⁵ *London Times*, Oct. 31, 1905.

signed a proclamation giving a Constitution to the Russian nation.⁴⁶ This famous Manifesto pledged civic liberty, with inviolability of the person, freedom of speech and of association. It promised facilities for the coöperation of those classes in the population still deprived of electoral rights, leaving the details to the new Duma. Finally it agreed that no law would be enforceable without the approval of the State Duma. The elected representatives would be given participation in the supervision of the acts of those authorities appointed by the Czar.⁴⁷

Autocracy had moved at last, but it had moved too late. In the absence of newspapers and in view of the printers' refusal to work, the Manifesto could not be published to the people in the usual way. The employees of the Imperial Bank, who had struck work that very day, were informed of the news by the Minister of Finance, and resumed work at once. Otherwise the news had to reach the public by being posted in various public places. The foreign financiers, including J. Pierpont Morgan, who had been in St. Petersburg arranging a foreign loan but had finally decided to return to their respective countries in view of the Russian upheaval, decided to return to Russia two weeks later, upon hearing that a Constitution had been signed.⁴⁸ In some of the provinces the strike ceased as the news reached the workers, but in most cases that resumption of work was but temporary. Otherwise nobody seemed to be satisfied by the long delayed Manifesto.

The police, soldiers, and reactionaries in general all over the nation were aghast at the apparent loss of their power, and either ceased to protect the order of their cities or else actually stirred up the "black hundreds" to rioting and savage massacres of the Jews. In a majority of cases they actually partook of the plunder of the sacked houses and stores and hindered the citizens' militia and the armed students from interfering with the reactionary hooligan bands. In many instances the police would disarm the students and the citizens' militia and shoot them with their own weapons, after which event the plunder of the Jewish quarters would continue even more gaily than before. The indescribable "pogroms" at Odessa, Kiev, Rostov, Kazan,

⁴⁶ E. J. Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 888; cf. *London Times*, Oct. 31, 1905.

⁴⁷ *Tribune*, Oct. 31, 1905.

⁴⁸ *London Times*, Oct. 31, 1905.

Nijni Novgorod, and many another spot are an example of the weapon that a disgruntled reaction can unloose upon a people as little educated as was the Russian nation in 1905.⁴⁹

The revolutionaries declared that the strike must continue; mere promises from the Russian Government would no longer suffice. They demanded the dismissal of the master reactionary, General Trepov, head of the police and Cossacks in St. Petersburg; the removal of the troops twenty miles from the city; a general amnesty and the formation of a national citizens' militia.⁵⁰ The inhabitants of St. Petersburg, whose political education was far more advanced than that of most of the provincials, remained passively, if not actively, on the side of the revolutionaries. The central strike committee issued a manifesto of their own declaring that the Manifesto of October 30 was proclaimed without political amnesty, to the accompaniment of martial law and executions, and continued as follows:

The rights bought by the people at the price of countless lives can be assured and promulgated only by them, and the sole way effectually to give real appeasement to the land and the people lies in the immediate convocation of a Constitutional Assembly elected by the universal, equal, and direct, secret suffrages of all adult citizens without distinction of sex, creed or nationality; and by the provision of all guarantees of civic freedom. The political strike continues.⁵¹

Mass demonstrations took place before the Cathedral in St. Petersburg, where collisions occurred between the "reds" and the "whites." The "whites" or anti-revolutionaries, refused to join ranks with the "reds" and were forcibly dispersed by the latter.

The remarkable feature about the revolutionary gathering was its perfect organization. All the revolutionaries were formed into companies with officers. There were also four Red Cross detachments composed of medical students of both sexes, and several army surgeons. On the other hand the procession of the "whites" was a mere rabble of butchers' boys, shop-keepers, beadles and a few enthusiasts. The battle flag, an immense red banner with a broad

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1905.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 1; *Trüben*, Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 3, and 6, 1905.

⁵¹ *London Times*, Nov. 1, 1905.

white stripe signifying that the demonstration was peaceful, moved ahead, and the companies followed, rank on rank, arm in arm, singing the Russian *Marseillaise*, the refrain of which was taken up by the crowds. . . . The ranks were filled with the most heterogeneous assemblage imaginable. Young and old, rich and poor, students and workmen, priests and outcasts, all wore a brave and hopeful look as they sang of the days when their country would be rid of the oppressor and when the poor would have bread. . . . The speeches . . . may be summarized in one word, defiance, defiance in a pacific form, but the political strike to be followed, when the due time comes, by recourse to arms.⁵³

The change from a workers' strike for purely economic aims to this organized mass strike of all classes for a political aim could hardly be more vividly shown than in this St. Petersburg demonstration the day after the famous Manifesto had been signed.

Nevertheless the Manifesto had its effect. Though the railroad strike remained for some days, the industrial strike began to dwindle except in the Polish and Finnish cities. On November 2 the strike committee in St. Petersburg decided that the strike should end the following day.⁵⁴ The strike was to be renewed if the workers' demands were not granted. A secretly printed bulletin of the Council of Workers' Delegates contained the following significant and disillusioned paragraph:

We have freedom of meeting, but our meetings are surrounded by troops. Freedom of speech is given, but the censorship remains. Freedom of learning is given, but the University is occupied by troops. Inviolability of person is given, but the prisons are filled with the arrested. Witte is given, but Trepov remains. A Constitution is given, but the Autocracy remains. All is given and nothing is given.⁵⁴

It was true that hundreds of prisoners had been released, but that the principal sufferers had been sent to Siberia or were still incarcerated. Newspapers reappeared on November 4 presenting, in complete defiance of the censorship, details of the deeds of horror perpetrated by the police and reactionaries all over Russia.

On the same day the Union of Unions discussed the possibility of prolonging the national railroad strike, in order to help the

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1905.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1905.

Finns, but the idea was abandoned owing to the terrible distress prevailing among the strikers. That day, moreover, Count Witte received a deputation of railroad workers and empowered them to inform all the railroad strike committees by telegraph that their demands had been granted.⁵⁵ While Count Witte refused either to dismiss General Trepov, or to establish a national citizen's militia, he did agree to the following points of the railroadmen's demands:

(1) A wage increase. (2) A Commission, including elected representatives of the railroadmen, to consider improvements in their conditions. (3) A coöperative organization, based on western European models, for the railroad workers. (4) The abolition of military regulations applying to the railroads. (5) Freedom of meeting, for railroad workers to discuss strike questions, without notice of same being given to the police. (6) Inviolability of the strikers' persons. Re-employment of men dismissed for striking. (7) The cancellation of all circulars limiting the employment of Poles on the Polish railroads. The right of Polish railroadmen to use the Polish language in private life.⁵⁶

On November 4 a further manifesto was issued by the Czar, giving certain constitutional liberties to Finland. The Social-Democrats, who had organized a very complete national strike in that country on the last day in October, partly in sympathy with the Russian people, partly to win back their national constitutional rights, were dissatisfied with the half-way measures contained in the Czar's Manifesto to the Finnish People, and, as the railroads were in their control, they succeeded in prolonging the general strike until November 6. All forms of transportation had been suspended, as had all industry and all educational institutions. All shops had closed, and gas, electric light, and telephone services had ceased. Nevertheless, perfect order had been maintained, though the police had struck and the soldiers had informed the workers' committees that they would refuse to fire. The students and workmen had formed a temporary guard and had moved into the police quarters during the period of the strike.⁵⁷

When the Finnish strikers finally decided to declare the strike ended, it was with the proviso that a renewed strike would occur

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1905.

⁵⁶ *The Independent*, Nov. 3, 1905, p. 1077.

⁵⁷ *London Times*, Nov. 1, 1905.

to enforce their social demands if the latter were withheld. As the strike ended, it could be said that as far as Finland was concerned "not a single shot has been fired, not a drop of blood shed, not a window pane broken."⁵⁸ This was in part due to the much higher educational status of the Finnish people in general, and in no small degree to the fact that, by the complete strike on the Finnish and Russian railroads, no Cossack troops could be sent up to replace those Russian garrisons who had refused to fire upon the Finnish strikers. That peaceful and happy conclusion to the Finnish general strike cannot be claimed for the Polish and Russian conflict, which entailed countless arrests and deaths of the striking workers, and the lives of thousands of massacred Jewish men, women and children.

Thus ended the greatest political mass strike that the world had known, in an outward success for the seekers of Russian popular liberties, and for the railroadmen, but a success that became more and more of an illusion as the days passed. The general strike in Russian Poland dragged on with increasing brutality and repression on the part of the Russian Government, which had no intention of yielding any concessions such as had been given to Finland. Finally the repression of the workers in Warsaw, Lodz, and the other cities of Russian Poland became so blatant that once again the general strike threat was made by the Union of Unions, in protest against the palpable return to the arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy.⁵⁹

On November 15, 1905, the political strike broke out once more in St. Petersburg, in spite of the dissatisfaction of the workers at the frequent loss of wages through these constant calls to strike. Demand for an eight-hour day was combined with a protest against the Government's repressive measures in Russian Poland, and with an equally strong protest against the court-martial of the Kronstadt mutineers.⁶⁰ This new factor was perhaps the gravest element in the renewal of the strike, for it was a definite appeal for the support of the disaffected soldiers and sailors who had mutinied at Kronstadt earlier in the month, and had been sentenced to death. An officer of the Guards admitted to a *Times* correspondent, later in the month, that the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1905.

⁵⁹ *The Independent*, Nov. 23, 1905; cf. *London Times*, Nov. 15, 1905.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1905.

intervention of the strikers on behalf of the mutineers had had a "deplorable effect on the morale of the soldiers," the natural fear of the officers being that in any subsequent strike the soldiers would be far more friendly to the strikers. Even as it was many of the soldiers in the barracks were declaring that it was wrong to fire on workers who were espousing the cause of their mutineer comrades.⁶¹

A second characteristic of the strike of November 15 was the carrying of knives and revolvers by the strikers. They had learned their lesson from the massacres of the previous fortnight and were taking no risks, in St. Petersburg, of such an occurrence as had happened in Odessa. They were ready to use their weapons on any hooligan element that desired to start trouble.⁶² At the same time the strikers did not *seek* trouble. The *Times* correspondent could still say that this movement, like the recent strike, was "essentially a pacific revolt," though he doubted if the strike could last any length of time, since the previous struggle had so thoroughly exhausted the workers' organizations.⁶³

This second strike was neither as widespread nor as lengthy as the great October conflict. The very day it was declared in St. Petersburg, ten thousand workers on the Warsaw-Vienna railroad resolved to resume work and to communicate with the Union of Unions as to any further action. This decision was largely due to the proclamation of martial law on the Polish lines.⁶⁴ In St. Petersburg the following day saw the railroads and tramways stopped, and the appearance of no newspapers save the inevitable Government journal the *Official Messenger*. At the Moscow railroad station in St. Petersburg some two hundred strikers visited the various departments calling upon the officials to cease work and leave the station. When the officials declined to leave the strikers threatened to use force, and out walked the officials.

The managers of the various factories and works on strike declared that at least 80 per cent of their men did not want to strike but were terrorized into joining the movement. These same managers threatened to meet the eight-hour day demand by

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 20 and 22, 1906.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1906.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1906.

a reduced weekly wage, and, if that were not accepted by the workers, by a combined lock-out. The Social-Democrats replied with a threat to draw lots on the mills in question and to burn the particular mill whose lot was drawn. Evidently the unanimity of workers and of classes, so marked in the October strike, was not present in this second attempt. Nonetheless some hundred thousand workers were out on strike on the second day of the general strike in St. Petersburg, and by the 16th of the month the strike had extended to members of all trades in the city, even waiters and domestic servants being included.⁶⁵

The political strike in St. Petersburg might have ended on November 17, but for a communication to the strikers from Count Witte, in which he upbraided them for having no confidence in the Government's intentions as to industrial improvements, ignoring their definite political demands. Piqued at this disregard of the real nature of their strike the men determined to remain out. The bitter spirit of the strikers can be gathered from their murder of an engine driver who attempted to start a train from Czarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg. In reply to Count Witte's communication the Council of Workmen's Delegates declared that "the working classes do not need the benevolence of a Court favorite, but demand popular government on the basis of universal, direct, secret suffrage."⁶⁶

The police vainly attempted to arrest the members of the central committee of the strikers, but the strike continued unabated, the shop assistants joining the strike in order to win a Sunday-closing agreement. The gas supply had failed by the 18th of the month, and all railroads out of St. Petersburg were at a standstill except the line to Finland. But outside of the city there was no success. In the provinces the strike call was not answered, and at Moscow the railroadmen refused to strike. In St. Petersburg itself the electric light supply was cut off by the strikers, but the cables were connected up with the Admiralty plant, and the city was not in as complete darkness this time as it had been in the October strike.⁶⁷ The strike ended on November 20, "the Council of Workmen's Delegates holding it necessary to preserve the strength of the workmen for the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1906.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Nov. 18, 1906.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Nov. 17 and 20, 1906.

decisive struggle." The strikers were urged to join the workers' military organizations, "to prepare for the last general encounter of all Russia with the bloody Monarchy now living its last days." This order to resume work was only just in time to prevent great disorder, for the workers had already begun to set fire to shops that had evaded the strike order to close.⁶⁸

During the strike the workers seized the offices of the *Novoe Vremya*, threatened the editors with revolvers if they so much as warned the police, set up and printed 85,000 copies of their strike bulletin for Sunday, November 19, using the plant of the conservative paper for their purpose. For twelve hours the strikers were in control of the plant without being molested, and the police did not discover what had occurred until too late. When they finally raided the headquarters of the Printers' Union for copies of this strike bulletin, they discovered that all but 135 had been distributed and even these remaining copies were refused, for the police had no warrants and the strikers challenged them to take them by force! When the newspapers appeared, on the 21st, after four days of silence, the majority declared the November strike had been a mistake. They attributed its failure to the lack of support from the community at large, and the *Russ*, a Liberal journal, asserted that popular movements evidently could not be swayed solely by labor leaders.⁶⁹

Gradually the hard won liberties granted in the October Manifesto slipped away from the Russian people, as the autocracy felt its gathering strength and as the means of communication by rail once more were opened up for transportation of troops. As the Government became once more its old repressive self, so the masters hardened towards the eight-hour demands of their workers. By the end of November the lock-out in St. Petersburg affected over 40,000 workers.⁷⁰

A postal and telegraph strike next tied up commercial and governmental communication, spreading all over Russia, Finland and Poland by the first week of December. The unions were able to send their telegraphic instructions anywhere over the railroad telegraphs, but Government messages were sent only when the unions permitted them to go. The Government court-

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1905. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1905. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 26 and 29.

martialed a striking railroad engineer, whereupon the rail unions declared a national rail strike if Count Witte did not immediately rescind the sentence—one cannot condemn the men in such action, for the Government terms of settlement with the railroad strikers had expressly contained the proviso of the abolition of martial law upon the railroads. Whether or not Count Witte recognized the justice of the men's attitude is not known, but the sentence was rescinded at once.⁷¹

By the middle of December the Russian Government felt itself strong enough to take further drastic repressive measures. The whole executive committee of the St. Petersburg unions was arrested, and the dissolution of the national railroad union demanded. New anti-strike regulations were promulgated, in the old autocratic manner, with penalties of eight to sixteen months' imprisonment for any person inciting a strike on the railroads or in the telegraph service, and for any person who actually began such a strike.⁷²

For the last time in the fatal year 1905 the Union of Unions prepared for a general strike, in protest against the repressive measures of the Government. At noon on December 20 this strike broke out, this time in Moscow; the waterworks and certain provision dealers alone being exempted. The strikers were well armed, and the cessation of work was enforced with vigor. Trains, tramways, lighting plants, municipal services, and the principal factories in Moscow all ceased immediately. Violent means were taken to deal with the men who did not wish to strike. In St. Petersburg 175 factories and 125,000 men came out, the wholesale arrests of their leaders merely aggravating the situation. As the spirit and methods of the strikers became progressively more revolutionary, as compared with the first strike of 1905, so the demands of the strikers mounted up. The labor manifesto included several new and significant demands, many of them having to do with the satisfaction of grievances in the army and navy.⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 29 and Dec. 9, 1905.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, cf. *The Outlook*, Dec. 30, 1905, p. 1081.

⁷³ *London Times*, Dec. 20-22, 1905. The demands included: Constitutional Assembly elected by universal suffrage. Abolition of all repressive ordinances, and full guarantee of liberty for all citizens, soldiers and sailors. Full political amnesty, including suppressed newspapers. Settlement of

By December 23 the Council of Workers' Delegates in Moscow were exercising considerable control over the city, granting permits to bakers and banking firms, and to certain stores that sold provisions, and were printing their strike bulletin at one of the great printing offices which they had commandeered. No regular newspapers were allowed. In St. Petersburg, however, the strike was scarcely felt by the well-to-do classes, as the railroads, tramways, and electric light were all functioning, workers' meetings were strictly forbidden, and almost all the revolutionary leaders were under arrest. As the railroads in St. Petersburg did not join the strike the rest of the workers were depressed and divided in mind. Half of them had no wish to strike, the other half demanded rigorous measures to enforce the cessation of work.⁷⁴

By this time it was evident that the general strike could not succeed if used with such frequency, against a government determined to use the utmost repression available. This fact was recognized by the Moscow strike leaders on December 23, and in the early evening of that day the order was given for armed revolt. Now at last the revolutionary general strike saw its logical but fatal conclusion. For some days civil war raged in Moscow, the sympathy of the population being distinctly on the side of the revolutionaries, who were largely composed of workmen and students including many women and girls, and some of the insubordinate troops who were returning home from Manchuria through Moscow. On the 28th of the month, after a week of struggle, the revolutionary leaders in Moscow decided to abandon their armed conflict. Some escaped, but large numbers were killed and a certain number surrendered to the Government's troops in order to save from artillery destruction any further portion of the workers' districts in the city. In St. Petersburg the strike leaders decided to resume work on the first day of the new year, and to prepare for an armed rising in the near future.⁷⁵

From the early days of January to the last days of December, 1905, Russia had been in the toils of the general strike fever.

grievances of army and navy men, of railroad and telegraph employees. Transfer of land to the people. Recognition of the 8 hour law. Repeal of the racial and religious laws.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Dec. 23 and 27, 1905. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1905, and Jan. 1, 1906.

Beginning in most cases as economic strikes with demands for better conditions of wages or of working hours, or even for the right to organize, the ever prevalent revolutionary enthusiast was ready to seize upon the moment and turn the workers' strike into a political, and even a national, mass strike for a new régime. The labor movement of the Russian cities, its origin due in no small degree to the policy of industrial development of the bureaucracy, rapidly recognized the futility of claiming economic improvement when there was no vestige of political or personal liberty for workers of hand or of brain. Facing the "black hundreds," and the brutality of the Cossacks and police, with little enough education among their ranks, it is remarkable that the strikers remained as comparatively orderly and peaceful as they did up to the end of October.

Russia in 1905 is perhaps a good instance of the problematic worth of a general strike for revolutionary purposes. To win, it must have a large number of the professional classes upon its side. Even with that aid it is highly doubtful if the gains made will amount to anything, unless the troops and the police desert the autocratic government, whose end is sought by the strikers. A successful revolutionary general strike in Western Europe, seems therefore, a pipe dream of anarchists and philosophers. And a revolutionary general strike that fails, as Jaurès has shown, leaves capitalism in power, "armed with implacable fury. The fear of the governing classes, and even of a large proportion of the masses, will be given free course in a long succession of years of reaction, and for long years the proletariat will be disarmed, crushed down and fettered."¹⁶ That is precisely what occurred in Russia between 1905 and 1917, and the proletariat, when it finally had its revenge, possessed neither the means nor the desire to halt half way between the despotism of autocracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jaurès, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 102; cf. the same author in *Studies in Socialism*, chap. XII, p. 118.

¹⁷ On July 17, 1914 a local general strike of immense proportions broke out in St. Petersburg, in protest against bloodshed by Cossacks at the Putilov works. 300,000 workers took part, barricades sprang up and the strike took on a thoroughly revolutionary character. The strike only ended with the declaration of martial law on July 26, the day after the Austrian ultimatum to Servia. Cf. Walling, *The Socialists and the War*, pp. 114-17.

THE REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE IN CATALONIA

A discussion of the general strike used as a revolutionary weapon would not be complete if it dealt solely with the Russian episodes of 1905. In the Latin nations of Spain and Italy more than one attempt has been made, though never on the scale achieved in Russia, to use the general strike as a cloak to revolutionary movements. In the Latin countries, and in Spain even more than in Italy, revolutionary movements have been closely linked with anarchism. Inasmuch as "anarchism flourishes most where industrial injustice exists," it is not remarkable that the Catalonian province, containing Spain's largest industrial city, Barcelona, should have witnessed at least two important general strikes. In Barcelona industrial injustice had been only too apparent for some time.⁷⁴

The very first congresses of organized workers in Catalonia were known as "Socialist Revolutionaries," but they shortly changed their title, for greater clearness, to "Anarchist-Collectivists." In 1874 the Spanish Government declared their federation illegal, and the movement went underground. In 1876 at their congress in Fribourg, Switzerland, the anarchists voted in favor of the collective appropriation of social riches, the abolition of the State under all its forms, insurrectional and revolutionary action, and against the use of the ballot as "a mischievous instrument, incapable of realizing the sovereignty of the people."⁷⁵

From the beginning these principles have been carefully implanted in the Spanish labor federations. "They have been kept unmodified through all the orderly development of the Anarchist party in Spain and Italy, while in other countries anarchists have only coalesced in groups, ill defined, . . . overshadowed by organized Socialism. In Spain Anarchism, rather than Socialism, as the word is now used, has continued to absorb the chief energies of the Labor movements. It has been able to do this, first, by its clear lines of demarcation from all Socialism which admits even a Socialist State; and, secondly, by its retention of an organization highly efficient for negative and destructive work

⁷⁴ *London Times*, March 1, 1902.

⁷⁵ Stoddard Dewey, "The Anarchist Movement in Spain," *Contemporary Review*, LXXXI (May, 1902), 748-46.

among the discontented.⁵⁹ This peculiar type of organization was based upon the pattern of a wasp's nest, by cell, but with most effective communication between the different cells. A Federal Committee of correspondence possessing no executive powers kept the different groups in close and constant touch.⁶⁰

As early as 1878 *La Solidarité révolutionnaire*, a Barcelona anarchist journal, declared itself in favor of a general strike as a means of expropriation of property owners,⁶¹ and in the following year an attempt to put it into practice occurred at Alcoy, when ten thousand strikers seized the town's archives and civic registers of property, with the intention of setting up some kind of reconstructed society. The attempt ended in the usual manner by military suppression.⁶²

The two strikes that are worthy of any detailed notice took place in 1902 and 1909, both having their storm center in Barcelona, but spreading to many outlying towns. In 1902 the metal workers of Barcelona had been seeking a nine-hour day, and upon its refusal by their employers had gone out on strike, although it was a period of business depression and several thousands of workers were unemployed. After an eight-week strike of some ten thousand men,⁶³ the metal workers, feeling that their strike was about to fail, appealed to the Barcelona unions for a sympathetic strike. On February 15, 1903, some seventy-two meetings were held in that city, in all of which the general strike was unanimously approved, against the advice of the Social-Democratic party.⁶⁴

By the 18th of the month 80,000 men were on the streets, and the ordinary life of the city was completely paralyzed. Not a vehicle of any kind, trolley car, omnibus, or cab was visible. Banks, shops, and cafés were all closed. Servants on their way back from market were attacked by bands of strikers and robbed

⁵⁹ Stoddard Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 745-46.

⁶⁰ André Soulier, *La grève générale de Robert Owen à la doctrine syndicaliste*, pp. 40-41.

⁶¹ Arpold Roller, *The Social General Strike*, p. 24.

⁶² Georgi, *Theorie und Praxis der Generalstreiks*, p. 89, puts the figure at 100,000, which seems rather large even for a population of one million. Ketr Hardie, whose figures have been used, is probably more nearly correct.

⁶³ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 89; cf. Ketr Hardie, "Les causes des troubles," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, March 8, 1902.

of their purchases. On the previous day bands of women carrying red flags had paraded the streets compelling the shops to close. No newspapers appeared. As no goods were brought into the city there soon ensued a scarcity of meat and bread. The strikers seized the waterworks and the gas plant, robbed the bakeries, and prevented the butchers from slaughtering.⁸⁵

Up till the evening of the first day of the strike the strikers ruled the city. Then the military authorities declared a state of siege, and the national Chamber of Deputies authorized the Spanish Government to suspend constitutional guarantees for the city and province of Barcelona. Troops occupied the streets, attacked the strikers, closed all the meeting halls of the unions, and searched for all persons believed to be leaders of the movement. Several troops of infantry and cavalry proceeded to Barcelona and took action against the strikers, especially those who had attacked the bakeries, or had attempted to release the prisoners in the custody of the civic guard. Many of the strikers were killed and injured in the struggle.⁸⁶

The Captain-General of the province commanded the newspapers to resume and to send him the names of recalcitrant printers for prompt punishment, but the papers still remained unprinted. He then turned his attention to the cab drivers and threatened them with the loss of their licenses if they did not return promptly to the streets. Not until February 26 was there general resumption of work, and even then the metal workers remained out, with nothing gained. Many Socialists, who had little or nothing to do with the strike were arrested and imprisoned along with the anarchist leaders.

Many outlying towns and villages went through similar experiences,⁸⁷ but in Madrid, at Valladolid, San Sebastian, and Bilbao, where the Socialist party had the greatest number of adherents among the workers, no considerable cessation of work occurred. The workers of these cities and towns saw more clearly than those of Barcelona that violent general strike tactics would bring no result save disorganization and weakening of their

⁸⁵ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 89; *London Times*, Feb. 19-21, 1902.

⁸⁶ Pablo Iglesias, "La grève générale," *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, March 8, 1902; *London Times*, Feb. 19, 1902.

⁸⁷ The strike occurred at Sans, Sabadell, Tarrasa, at Tarragona and Reus, and in less degree at Saragossa and Valencia.

party.⁵⁰ In fact one of the bitter complaints of the anarchist revolutionaries was that the Spanish Socialist leader, Pablo Iglesias, requested his followers to aid in breaking the strike, because the "people were not ripe for emancipation."⁵¹

Writing three years later, Iglesias summed up the results of the 1902 strike with considerable heat. "The famous general strike at Barcelona," he wrote, "showed what such a headless movement was worth. Under the pretext of affirming solidarity with the metal workers on strike, all the workers of the Catalonian capital went on the streets, brought there by the anarchists, by means of lies, demagogism, and intimidation. Among those thousands of workers there was neither unity of thought, nor plan or direction. Having thoroughly disturbed the population for some days, they had nothing left to do but return to work, with nothing at all gained for the metal workers. The only result was bloodshed, in the several clashes between the workers and the civic guard, and many dead and great numbers imprisoned."⁵² The *London Times* correspondent, when the struggle was over, agreed that it was not just to attribute too much responsibility for the uprising to Socialism.

In Madrid the Socialist leaders strongly discouraged the idea of a general strike in Barcelona. Though the Socialist party are largely responsible for the organisation of the strike and labor movement in general, they neither countenanced nor contemplated the excesses to which it led. . . . Socialism inevitably serves as a cloak to the small but desperately earnest Anarchical minority which is always on the watch for an opportunity of carrying the extreme Socialist doctrine to its logical conclusion. . . . It is the curse of Spain that by violent deeds only is any practical result achieved.⁵³

The story of the second Catalonian general strike, in 1909, can be told with even greater brevity.⁵⁴ This time the strike arose as a protest against the prosecution of the Spanish-

⁵⁰ Pablo Iglesias, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Arnold Beller, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁵² Pablo Iglesias in Lagardelle, *Le grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 221.

⁵³ *London Times*, March 1, 1902.

⁵⁴ A brief strike of 155,000 workers belonging to the General Workers' Union and the Spanish Socialist party occurred in July, 1906, as a protest against the rise in the cost of the necessities of life. See Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 80, and cf. A. Chaboseau, "General Strike in Spain," *La Revue Socialiste*, Nov., 1906, pp. 605-7.

Moroccan war and the calling of the reservists to the colors. The strike was organized with secrecy and ability. On Friday, July 23, 1909, a meeting of union delegates met in Barcelona and decreed a general strike for Monday, the 26th, and agents were sent to near-by villages to gain their support. When, on the Monday morning groups of strikers went around the city closing down the workshops, the police were unprepared and useless. By noon work had entirely ceased, and strikers were patrolling the streets compelling the stores to close. Railroad service was interrupted by destruction of the railroad bridges and the permanent way, and by cutting the telegraph wires.⁸² Martial law was declared in the afternoon, but by five o'clock the general strike was an accomplished fact, and Barcelona was completely isolated.

The majority of the strikers were workers with a strong objection to the military campaign then being waged in Northern Africa, and for once the workers and the Catalonian republicans joined hands, thinking the rest of Spain was ready to follow them in their protest. Those whose intentions were limited to a peaceful general strike were quickly shown to be without influence. The anarchist elements gained the upper hand with a completeness and speed that caused the republicans to "fade out" of the scene as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. When the strike ended they were among the most vociferous of the groups declaring themselves in no way responsible for the outbreak.⁸⁴

Owing to the completeness of the isolation created, the wildest rumors filled the European press, turning the sack of many convents and ecclesiastical establishments, which actually took place, into the most brutal orgies of murder and robbery. In point of fact if anything has been fully proved of that wild Barcelona outbreak it is the care with which the persons of the monks, priests and nuns were treated by the rioting strikers.⁸⁵ The Government itself was largely to blame for this exaggeration of the facts in the European press, because of its unduly severe censorship of any news going out of Catalonia.

The strike ended on July 31, and the general strike alleged to have been organized throughout Spain for August 2 did not

⁸² *London Times*, July 27, 28 and 30, and August 10, 1909.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Aug. 7 and 10, 1909.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 10.

materialize, possibly because the Spanish Government arrested the leaders of the Socialist party, and partly, perhaps, because the rest of Spain did not seem willing to express their dislike of the African campaign in such a drastic and public manner. There can be no question that the strikers in Barcelona and the surrounding townships expected a revolution. Many little republics and public safety committees sprang up in the various towns that were isolated by the strike, and for the first three days the strikers waited with confident patience for a sign from Barcelona—a sign which never came. Crowds waited for hours outside the Barcelona Town Hall expecting a Republic to be declared. Great confusion seized upon the strikers and the republican enthusiasts when they learned that Madrid had not risen, that the army had not mutinied and that the country in general seemed content to prosecute the war.⁶⁶

This particular outbreak of a revolutionary general strike with its great destruction of ecclesiastical property, became famous throughout the world, not so much for its own sake, as for the fact that the Spanish Government chose, as its scapegoat, the apparently innocent person of Señor Ferrer, the philosophic anarchist and secular educationalist.⁶⁷ His unconstitutional trial with its swift death sentence was one of the causes of the subsequent fall of the contemporary Spanish Ministry. Otherwise the strike brought nothing but repression in its train.⁶⁸

REHEARSING THE REVOLUTION IN ITALY

With the opening of the twentieth century Italy began to show all the signs of a rapidly developing industrial nation. Strikes, which had been increasingly numerous as the old century closed, now became exceedingly frequent, especially in Northern Italy. The Socialist party, founded in 1893, had gained considerable influence among the industrial workers, and mutual benefit and coöperative organizations served the purpose of economic defense and offense against the employers. The establishment of "Chambers of Labor" dates from the beginning of the new

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 7, 1906.

⁶⁸ General strikes or riots followed in Italian, French and Argentine cities as a protest against Ferrer's death. Cf. Sir Arthur Clay, *Syndicalism and Labour*, p. 68. See Appendix F for strike of 1890.

century. These institutions, soon found in all the larger cities, looked after the technical education of the workmen, formed commissions of arbitration in case of strikes, acted as employment bureaus, and became increasingly the centers of political and economic propaganda. Their position was very similar to that of the *Bourses du Travail* in the French cities. In the country districts, particularly those of the center and north of Italy, "leagues of improvement" or of "resistance" spread rapidly, being common among the better educated laborers of Lombardy and Emilia.⁹⁹

With the coming of the new century and the growing strength of labor and Socialist organizations, the Socialists frequently took advantage of the genuine grievances of the industrial workers and peasants. Though many of the resultant strikes were orderly, the temperament of the Italian workers and their dislike of authority only too often converted peaceful strikes into violent disturbances in which the *teppisti*, or urban hooligans, found ample opportunity for riot. The "sympathy" strike became only too common, often developing into miniature local general strikes, as in Florence in 1902, in Rome in 1908, and in Milan in 1907 and 1913,¹⁰⁰ when it did not reach the proportions of a national general strike such as occurred in 1904 and 1914.

Before the outbreak of the first general strike of a national character the Socialists had been divided into the revolutionary group under Enrico Ferri, the Parliamentary deputy from Mantua, and the reformists led by Turati, the deputy for Milan. More radical than either of these groups, and having little respect for the Parliamentary method in general, were the syndicalists who favored direct revolutionary action through the *syndicati* or unions.¹⁰¹ According to the syndicalists their *syndicati* existed primarily for the purpose of organizing strikes, and it was a logical step for them to believe that the Federation of these individual *syndicati* had as its primary aim the organization of large-scale "sympathy," or general, strikes.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XV, 13, 80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61; cf. 13th ed., p. 659; *N. Y. Nation*, Aug. 29, 1902, pp. 241-43; May 14, 1908, p. 391.

¹⁰¹ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XV, 80-81.

¹⁰² Enrico Leone (editor of *Avanti!*), in Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 355.

The unexpectedly rapid development of workers' organizations and the mobilization of these "proletarian troops" in a long series of strikes gave too much self-confidence to these trade unions. The conviction became general that some more speedy method of action must be used in place of the slow, technical education of the workers, if the existing social order were to be transformed. In the eyes of the militants the labor organizations had reached a point where their numbers and unity would justify taking great risks against the other, bourgeois classes of Italy.¹⁰⁵

With this background it can be understood that the first national general strike in Italy, in 1904, proved to be one of the largest strikes in the history of the labor movement up to that time, over one million workers being involved at its height. The immediate pretext for the cessation of work was the use of the military against the workers in labor disputes. After 1901 the Italian Government had usually remained neutral in such disputes. The bitterness of the labor forces, was, therefore, all the greater when armed force was used and bloodshed resulted.¹⁰⁴ On September 5, 1904, troops were sent to maintain order in a miners' strike, for reduced working hours, at Buggerru in Sardinia. The strikers are alleged to have received the troops with showers of stones and revolver shots. When the soldiers replied with rifle fire, three of the miners were killed and several wounded.¹⁰⁶

A few days later further bloodshed took place at Castelluzzo in Sicily, where an allegedly "orderly meeting of an agricultural coöperative association" was fired upon by troops.¹⁰⁸ At a workers' demonstration of protest at Sestri Ponente in the province of Liguria, both the militia and the workers were injured.¹⁰⁷ An almost simultaneous cessation of work occurred in several places on the 15th of the month, as a mass protest against these acts of armed intervention. The Monza Chamber of Labor

¹⁰⁵ Étienne Buisson, *Le grève générale*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶ Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁰⁷ *London Times*, Sept. 6, 1904.

¹⁰⁸ *The Nation*, N. Y., Oct. 20, 1904, pp. 312-14; *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XV, 81, declares "troops were compelled to use their arms," but whether by the strikers or by the authorities is not stated.

¹⁰⁹ *Encyc. Brit.*, *loc. cit.*; cf. "The general strike in Italy," *International Socialist Review*, Nov., 1904.

seems to have taken the initiative of proclaiming a general strike throughout Italy, but the Chamber of Labor in Milan ran it a close second in taking similar action.¹⁰⁸ The Socialist party leaders and the editors of *Avanti* supported the general strike proclamation, and the syndicalists saw, in this fact, a confirmation of their theories as to the supreme usefulness of the general strike, a restoration of the party unity, and a fine opportunity for the overthrow of the Giolitti Ministry.¹⁰⁹

The strike spread to nearly all the industrial centers, some nine hundred places being affected. Milan, Genoa, and Venice were paralyzed. In Genoa, for example, work on the docks ceased, no ships left the quay for two days, no train moved for twenty-four hours; there were no trolleys or cabs running; the electric light ceased, and the shops closed. As the bakers refused to work, bread was unobtainable, and ships' biscuit was resorted to as a substitute. In Venice the train service was suspended, the steamers that plied on the Grand Canal and between Venice and the islands of the Lagoon, ceased to run. Even the gondoliers, who usually made a handsome harvest out of the visitors at that time of the year, joined the strike. No bread was baked and the city went without light.¹¹⁰

In Milan the strike was even more serious, lasting some days after work had resumed elsewhere. The only newspaper allowed to print was the strike organ, *Bollettino dello Sciopero*, and the only bakeries in action were those of the workers' coöperatives. No shops were allowed to sell bread to the middle classes, and the light and water supply ceased. About 100,000 workers went on strike in that city alone. Turin, Terni, Ancona, Bologna, and several other towns were in somewhat similar straits. In the province of Liguria 120,000 workers ceased work, and in the province of Mantua at least 120,000 agricultural workers joined the strikers' ranks. Naples, Florence, and Rome were less severely affected.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Encyc. Brit.*, *loc. cit.*; *The Nation*, *loc. cit.*; Salvatore Cortesi, "The Premier of Italy and the Subversive Elements," *Independent*, Dec. 18, 1904, pp. 1389-92, asserts that the strike "had origin and culmination in Milan."

¹⁰⁹ *Georgi*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹¹⁰ *London Times*, Sept. 19 and 28, 1904; cf. *Georgi*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹¹¹ Salvatore Cortesi, *op. cit.*; cf. *Georgi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 f.

No economic question was the cause of the strike. The workers informed their employers that they were abandoning their work as a protest against the killing of their fellow-workers, but that they had no cause of complaint against their masters. The employers in consequence offered no resistance, at least at the outset. In Milan some 30,000 citizens of all classes met in the arena to make their protest against the use of troops. The mayors of Milan and Turin expressed their sympathy with the strikers, and Barinetti of Milan set out in person to Rome, to carry the message of protest to the Prime Minister, Giolitti. Barinetti obtained a pledge from Giolitti that the Government would remain neutral wherever the labor dispute remained peaceful, and that the unfortunate incidents in the south were against the wish of the Government. Giolitti supplemented this pledge to the mayor of Milan by a letter to the Socialist councillors of that city assuring them that he had no intention of neutralizing labor's gains by "insane violence." The mayor of Milan telegraphed to his city that the pledges given had covered all points for which the strike had been called, and that he trusted all workers would resume at once. Deputy Turati gave the same advice but was not given a friendly hearing.

Had the strike ended after the first day, the demonstration might well have achieved much public notice and have remained comparatively orderly. As it was, the leaders had let loose forces beyond their control, and by the night of the 16th the *seppisti* had started their work of riot and violence.¹¹³ Window smashing, destruction of street lights, attempts to wreck the telegraphs and railroads, mob compulsion of storekeepers to close their doors, intimidation of non-strikers, obstructions of the trolley services, and even savage attacks on the person, were among the occurrences due largely to these city hooligans.¹¹⁴

Although the violence was less the work of the strikers than it was that of the rabble, there were enough instances of labor assumption of governmental prerogatives to irritate the middle classes and even the reformist Socialists. In Ravenna the Labor Chamber, by special decree, allowed the provision merchants to remain open until ten o'clock each morning, provided they did

¹¹³ *The Nation*, Oct. 20, 1904.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 84; and *Encyc. Brit.*, *loc. cit.*

not make their employees resume work. In Sampierdarena the Chamber of Labor advised the milk dealers to deliver milk to the children and the sick. In Milan the strike committee exempted the cooperative bakeries, but not those which supplied the middle classes; it organized a protective squad on cycles to patrol the streets and keep order after dark; and the *Bolletino dello Sciopero* proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat in the following announcement:

A great event has taken place in these days in Milan; the substitution of the power of the proletariat for that of the bourgeoisie. The Chamber of Labor, in the name of the Milanese proletariat, has virtually taken possession of public power, and now practically works the administrative and political mechanism of the town, which facts assume a profoundly revolutionary significance, showing the proletarian capacity to manage the proletarian commune. Milan resists, Milan is in the streets, Milan proclaims the cessation of work, Milan imposes the general strike on Italy. Milan is no more the town of *all*, but the town *only* of the proletariat.¹¹⁴

Thus did the Milan Chamber of Labor persuade the proletariat that it had become the "supreme mistress of the nation," and thus did it boast that for "five days Milan danced, and had to dance, to the pipe of the workers."¹¹⁵

Work was resumed, at the order of the various Chambers of Labor, on September 19, with the exception of Milan, where the resumption was delayed for two more days. As the railroadmen refused to join the strike in any numbers¹¹⁶ and as the irate citizens and business men began to take the law into their own hands, the Chambers of Labor found it wise to send "the supreme mistress of the nation" back home with the statement that the strike had won its aim and was in any case but a first attempt at mobilizing the proletariat.¹¹⁷ The Milan Chamber of Labor, firm to its demand that Giolitti resign, urged all the Parliamentary deputies of the "Left" to meet immediately at Rome, there to compel the Government to pass a law against armed

¹¹⁴ Salvatore Cortesi, *op. cit.*, p. 1890.

¹¹⁵ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹¹⁶ Through fear of being drafted as soldiers, and lest their own wage demands, then pending, should be endangered by joining the strike.—*Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

interference with labor disputes.¹¹⁸ Parliament did not even discuss such a measure, and the general strike, which had all the appearance of a revolution that had miscarried, only strengthened the reactionary forces in Italy. Giolitti promptly appealed to the electorate, which returned the "Right" in great power. The radicals split from the Socialists and a loss of seats resulted, though the Socialist vote very considerably increased.¹¹⁹

When the various municipal elections fell due, the cities where the "supreme mistress of the nation" had held rule, even for twenty-four hours, defeated the Socialist party and put into power more conservative councils. One of the first acts of the new municipal authorities was the suspension of financial support to the various Chambers of Labor, as a penalty for their part in the recent uprising. The price paid by the workers was a heavy one, at least six persons being killed, many wounded and several hundreds imprisoned.¹²⁰

The professed aim of the strike, to have the Ministry dismissed and to have a law placed on the statute books forbidding armed intervention in labor disputes, was not gained in any degree. On the contrary, in the following year both railroadmen and employees in public services lost the right to strike by an act of the national legislature, and the Socialists, who had up till that time successfully opposed such a measure, were left in a solitary and helpless minority by the other parties of the "Left."

The similarity in results between the great strike in Italy of 1904 and that of Holland in 1903 is significant. Needless to say the syndicalist groups did not view their lesson in that light, but still held to the belief that the proletariat could seize its rights on the economic field without any waste of time in the national legislature by Socialist deputies.¹²¹ On the other hand, Turati, the reformist, confirmed in his views, wrote in 1905, "The general strike, in violently disturbing the relations of economic life, cannot but end in a movement of reaction. If it became an habitual weapon the capitalists and bourgeoisie would certainly use their political power to force the government

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹¹⁹ Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-88.

¹²⁰ Étienne Buisson, *La grève générale*, p. 75.

¹²¹ Étienne Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

to pass coercive laws, and they would be supported by the majority of the nation.¹²²

The second general strike of any extension in time and place occurred shortly before the outbreak of the Great War. On June 7, 1914, in the course of the National festival of the *Statuto*, riots broke out at Ancona, because the authorities had forbidden the holding of an anti-militarist meeting. The police fired on the mob, killing two, and a general strike was proclaimed in protest. The trouble rapidly spread from the town of Ancona to other parts of the Marche, to Romagna and to most of the larger cities. The movement was mainly of a revolutionary character, one of its leaders being the Anarchist, Enrico Malatesta. Strangely enough one Benito Mussolini, then editor of *Avanti*, played a considerable part in the outbreak.¹²³ This general strike is of particular interest in that then, for the first time, the Italian non-socialist public at last roused itself to combined action against the revolutionaries.¹²⁴

The strike itself was more or less complete in most of the great cities of Italy,¹²⁵ more so perhaps in Rome than even in Milan or Genoa. Otherwise it differed little from the previous attempt of 1904, and the subsequent partial strikes against police "massacres." The Ancona incident really gave rise to three movements which otherwise had little relation one to the other. The executive committee of the Socialist party and the Federation of Labor proclaimed a general strike in the whole country immediately upon the arrival of the news from Ancona. Some hours earlier, and quite independently, a group of Republicans and Anarchists in Romagna called for a cessation of work, and achieved complete isolation from the rest of the country by stopping the railroad service, and by disabling the telephone and telegraph. This movement overflowed into the neighboring provinces. The third movement was the declaration of a national railroad strike to begin on the night of June 10.

¹²² Filippo Turati, in Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, p. 263.

¹²³ *London Times*, June 9 and 10, 1914; cf. *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 659.

¹²⁴ "It was on this occasion that Mussolini lost many illusions concerning his fellow Socialist leaders, whom he found ever ready to incite the mob to violence while taking good care for the safety of their own persons. He also realized that the masses were anything but ripe for revolution."—*Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 1009.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1009; cf. *London Times*, June 17, 1914.

This last movement was practically a failure. By the 10th of the month the strike had already ended in Venice, owing to the evident lack of sympathy from the rest of the citizens. On the evening of that day, the Socialist party and the Federation of Labor declared the general strike at an end, as far as they were concerned. They implied that work was resumed by their permission, but in point of fact public parades had been organized that day, led by the Nationalists, who used drastic methods on those who did not support the police and the army.¹²⁶

This time the Government had used the weapons of labor itself, cutting off the Socialist and Labor executives from access to the telegraph and telephone services. The lack of news from one town to another prevented simultaneous action. In Romagna the population was persuaded to proclaim a republic, believing that a similar proclamation had already been made everywhere else in Italy. The false news was not doubted, and no resistance was offered by the propertied classes. The red flag was substituted for the Italian emblem, the carabinieri were disarmed or shut up in their barracks, local governments were established, and acts of violence against property were frequent. The affair ended in a farce because the supposition that the revolution had occurred elsewhere turned out to be false.¹²⁷

During the close of the Great War and after it had ended, a perfect series of "sympathy" and general strikes turned Italy into a center of revolutionary disturbance against which, at last, the middle classes united in anger and disgust. The Fascisti, with all their excesses, were the inevitable answer to these syndicalist and anarchist campaigns.¹²⁸ Once again, in contemporary Italy, as in Russia after 1905, Jaurès' prophecy, as to the fatal effect of an unsuccessful revolutionary general strike, had been fulfilled with a completeness worthy of Cassandra.

¹²⁶ Mussolini in *Avanti* alleged that "two million proletarians obeyed the order of the Socialist Party." Cf. Walling, *The Socialists and the War*, p. 119.

¹²⁸ Oda Olberg in *Die Neue Zeit*, July 31, 1914, quoted in Walling, *Socialism of Today*, pp. 418-21. Cf. *London Times*, June 17.

¹²⁷ Walling, *Socialism of Today*, pp. 421-25. Cf. *Encyc. Brit.*, 12th ed., XXXI, 619. Mussolini, then editor of *Avanti*, declared that "churches were burned, railroad stations, town halls and headquarters of monarchists were sacked, requisitions were sent out for food, which was divided among the poor." Cf. Walling, *The Socialists and the War*, p. 119. Oda Olberg, *loc. cit.*, implies little useless damage was done and no attacks made on the person.

¹²⁸ *Encyc. Brit.*, 12th ed., XXXI, 629-37.

CHAPTER VII

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN THEORY FROM CHARTISM TO THE GREAT WAR

EUROPEAN THEORY

IT HAS been shown how interest in the general strike seemed to be transferred to France after the failure of the early Chartist experiments, the concept reappearing from time to time in the ideas of such men as Girardin, Auguste Comte, and, much later in the nineteenth century, Tortelier and Briand. Although France has undoubtedly appeared to be the home of general strike theory since the Chartist days, it would be but half of the story, were the other European theorists omitted.¹

Some fifty years after Mirabeau had warned the privileged against enraging the people, lest the common folk cease to produce, one Kaspar Schmidt, a German Anarchist, better known as Max Stirner, wrote in his book, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*: "The workmen have the most terrible power in their hands; and if once they would be aware of it and use it, nothing could resist them; all they would need to do would be to quit work and consider what they produced to be their own, and enjoy the benefit of it."²

By the visit of some French workmen to the International Exposition in London in 1862, interest in the international labor movement was aroused which resulted in 1864-66 in the formation of the International Association of Workingmen, more commonly known as the First International. At its very first congress, held in Geneva, 1866, the International had under discussion the question of a universal strike. This discussion arose at the suggestion of the English delegates, and the general strike intended was plainly that of the "reformist" rather than the "revolutionary" type.³

¹ Cf. *supra*, Chapter II.

² Arnold Roller, *The Social General Strike*, p. 22; cf. *Encyc. Brit.* 11th ed., I, 616.

³ André Sanlère, *La grève générale de Robert Owen à la doctrine syndicaliste*, pp. 18-21.

Two years later the Brussels congress of the International again debated the usefulness of the general strike, and rejected it, in so far as it was proposed as a complete means for the emancipation of the workers, but accepted it in principle as a protest against war, at the suggestion of Charles Longuet and the Belgian Anarchist, Caesar de Paep. Since "the social body could not live if production were to stop for a certain period, it would be sufficient for the producers to cease producing in order to render the enterprises of despotic governments impossible."⁴ The thought only touched upon at the congress was further developed by the Belgian section of the International Workers' Association, in the issue of *L'Internationale* for March, 1869. "When strikes spread from place to place," they wrote, "they are ripe for becoming a general strike; and a general strike, with the ideas of emancipation now current, can but end in a great catastrophe that will completely refashion society."⁵ It is evident that such a concept was not longer a "reformist" general strike.

Just before the Franco-Prussian war, many French Socialists supported Henri Rochefort's efforts in *La Lanterne*, and many German democrats sympathized with those of Dr. F. Goetz, to prevent an international conflict by means of a general strike in both lands. The strike came to nothing,⁶ but the idea of the general strike gained headway with the workers, and, as it spread to less phlegmatic people its character changed and it became more violent in its aspect. This was particularly true after the Bakunin group joined the International and suggested the collection of a battle fund and the federation of all trades as a prelude to a general strike of the revolutionary type. To this campaign for an anti-Parliamentary and revolutionary strike Karl Marx offered strong opposition.⁷

After the split between Bakunin and Marx that ultimately destroyed the First International, the Bakunin group at their congress in Geneva of 1873, officially declared, "Realizing that in the present state of the International there can be given

⁴ Terrail ("Mermet"), *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme*, p. 151. Cf. Saullère, *op. cit.*, p. 26; Rollier, *op. cit.*, p. 29; Georget, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 f.

⁵ Étienne Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 7; cf. Terrail, *op. cit.*, p. 131; Georget, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28. ⁷ Saullère, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28; cf. Georget, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

to the question of the general strike no complete solution, Congress recommends insistently to the workers the organization of an international *corps de métier*.⁹ As a matter of fact this meek resolution was contradicted by the views expressed in the secret session,⁹ which advocated the general strike as a method of expropriation of the propertied classes and as a method of agitation and reform.¹⁰ While the English delegate, Hales, treated that kind of general strike as an "absurdity," the commission appointed to study the matter reported that "the general strike is nothing other than the social revolution. It is sufficient to suspend all work for ten days, and the present order will be completely overturned." Naturally no public resolution of that type was passed, lest the violence of its viewpoint should disturb the public.¹¹

After 1874 the anti-Parliamentary idea and the use of the revolutionary general strike either died away until the Anarchist movement in Chicago revived it, or else, in the Latin nations, took the form simply of revolutionary violence. It is a moot point whether Tortelier, the Anarchist enthusiast for the general strike in the late eighties, knew anything of these decisions and debates of the Bakunin group, or whether he was not an "instinctive militant" who somewhere heard the phrase *grève générale* and at once became enamored of it.¹² This ignorance of the past, however, could not be predicated of French syndicalist leaders such as Émile Pouget, whose views on sabotage and the revolutionary general strike were unqualifiedly Anarchistic in origin.¹³

At the Geneva congress in 1873, the American delegates of the Federal Council of the International resolved that "if the workers, affiliated to the Association were to fix a certain day for the general strike, not only to win a reduction of hours and a diminution [*sic!*] of wages, but to find a means of living in coöperative workshops, by groups and colonies, we should not hesitate to lend them aid."¹⁴ Twelve years later, in 1885, American radicals sought to win an eight-hour day by means of the

⁹ Terrail, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁰ Not published till Guillaume wrote his book, *L'Internationale*.

¹¹ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹² Saulière, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-46.

¹³ Terrail, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁴ See *supra*, Chapter II.

¹⁵ Émile Pouget, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

general strike. Only a slight degree of success was obtained as a result of a demonstration on May 1, 1886, the Knights of Labor taking part most unwillingly, the Socialist party taking no part whatever, and the brunt of the fight falling upon the small but enthusiastic Anarchist group. What slight gain for the eight-hour day was made in publicity was more than offset by the subsequent Haymarket Riots in Chicago, with the fatal bomb, and the resultant railroading of four Anarchist leaders to the gallows.¹⁵

While causing reaction in America, the Haymarket tragedy and the subsequent hanging of the four leaders stirred many radical groups in Europe to their depths. In the years 1886-87 the agitation for a violent general strike with a reformist aim, the grant of universal suffrage, spread rapidly through the Walloon section of Belgium. In a lively discussion at a special congress of the Belgian Labor party, held at Mons in August of 1887, considerable difference of opinion developed over the character of the general strike that was to be waged. The final vote approved the general strike method but declared that no success was possible unless the strike was well planned.¹⁶ At the same time the general strike, for the purpose of expropriation, was widely advocated in France by Tortelier and Louise Michel.¹⁷

The hundredth anniversary of the taking of the Bastille saw the first congress of the New (Socialist) International at Paris. A resolution in favor of the general strike was rejected after a brief speech by Wilhelm Liebknecht, who held that the working class would never reach sufficient solidarity or organization for such an effort.¹⁸ In May of the following year an international congress of coal miners was held at Jolimont, in Belgium. Keir Hardie, the English militant laborite, proposed "the principle of the general strike to assure the triumph of the eight-hour day," and the congress accepted the proposal, instructing the next congress to settle the date for such an international mine strike. It was this form of the general strike which the politically minded Guesdist party, in France, was willing to support, as the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42; cf. *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., I, 917; and Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, pp. 243-52.

¹⁶ Saullère, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁷ Cf. *supra*, Chapter II.

¹⁸ Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 889; cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

only kind of general strike that would not prove illusory.¹⁹

The second congress of the New International, held at Brussels, in 1891, was confronted with a resolution in favor of the international strike against war, proposed by the leader of the Dutch Socialists, Domela Nieuwenhuis, subsequently to become an anti-Parliamentary syndicalist. "This Congress," ran his proposal, "declares that the Socialists of all countries will reply to the proposition of a war by an appeal to the people to declare a general strike." Congress rejected this resolution, not because it was anti-nationalist, but because the general strike was in bad odor among the Socialist parties from the patronage that the Anarchists had given to it. French, English, and Dutch support it gained, but the Germans and the rest of the delegates were hostile, the consensus of opinion being that the "general strike was general nonsense."²⁰

Nieuwenhuis, refusing to be discouraged by his previous failure, brought up the same proposition at the next International congress, at Zurich, in 1893. To the idea of the general strike he added the conception of the strike of the military also. The sole delegate from Russia attacked these propositions on the ground that they would deliver the most socialistic nation (which would strike) into the hands of the most reactionary (which would not strike) and the result would be the rule of the Cossack all over Europe. Wilhelm Liebknecht again took up the cudgels for the German Social-Democrats, denying that they favored militarism. Barracks insurrections, in Germany at any rate, would merely deliver to the Moloch of militarism a few more unfortunate victims. The only way to end war was to win the masses over to Socialism. Once again the Dutch motion was defeated, this time France alone supporting. For fourteen years more the International seemed satisfied that the international

¹⁹ Fonget, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45; cf. *supra*, Chapter II.

²⁰ Walling, *The Socialists and the War* (citing Jean Longuet,) p. 44; cf. Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 100; Roller, *op. cit.*, p. 23. The official German leaders, such as Auer, who was responsible for the "general strike, general nonsense" phrase, had their own troubles in 1890, when their left wing, known as "die Jungen," declared for a violent revolutionary general strike to crush the political and economic mastery of the bourgeoisie. These views were defeated in the Erfurt congress of 1891. Fifteen years later the political mass strike was generally supported by the German Socialist Democrats.—Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

general strike against war was not an available preventive.²¹

The first really serious consideration of the general strike, for purposes other than the prevention of war, was given by the International at the Amsterdam congress of 1904. By this time Socialist circles had begun seriously to consider the general strike weapon, partly because of pressure from the syndicalists and partly because more than one actual attempt at a general strike had already been made. To the Amsterdam congress was presented a special report from the Social-Democratic party of Holland,²² at the request of the International Socialist Bureau. Henriette Roland-Holst, shortly afterward the author of a treatise upon the general strike, defended the special report before congress. The report first dealt carefully with the two general strikes in Belgium of 1893 and 1902,²³ with the Swedish strike of 1902,²⁴ and finally with the disastrous failure of the general strike effort in Holland of the previous year.²⁵ In drawing conclusions from these four instances the special report proceeded:

The political general strike is a dangerous method, but Belgium and Sweden have shown that dangerous is not exactly synonymous with harmful, even when it has no direct result. The method is not infallible . . . which of the methods of the workers is, or can be, as long as their power is less than that of their adversaries? But it is the supreme means of demonstration, of protest, and of pressure, which remains to the workers when ordinary means fail. It is possible to refuse the suffrage to the workers, or to take it away from them, or render it illusory by other measures. But it is not possible to prevent the workers from trying to intimidate and disorganise a hostile government, or to exercise pressure on public opinion by more or less seriously arresting production and transportation. The proletariat

²¹ Walling, *The Socialists and the War*, pp. 46-47. The International congress of 1896 in London voted that "Congress . . . does not believe in the present possibility of an international general strike." The French Alleanists, dissatisfied with this result, demanded that the Paris congress of 1900 should discuss the class strike, but all it did was to repeat the resolution of 1896.—Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 101; cf. Walling, *Socialism of Today*, p. 288.

²² In which country a general strike had been attempted and had failed, in 1893; cf. *supra*, Chapter V.

²³ See *supra*, Chapter III.

²⁴ See *supra*, Chapter IV.

²⁵ Report, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-400.

possesses no other means of manifesting its social power in extreme cases. Refusal to pay taxes, many times applied in bourgeois revolutions, is not possible for the workers. Armed revolt of the people is no longer possible against the army, nor refusal to serve (in the army) . . . What else remains?²⁶

This conception of the general strike is quite clearly distinct from that of the French syndicalist movement. It is not a strike to achieve the social revolution, but a reformist or protest strike of a political character. This report roused much feeling among the different delegates, but after considerable debate congress passed the following resolution by 38 votes to 4, with three abstaining:

The International Socialist Congress declares

Since it is desirable that Social Democracy should make an announcement on the general strike,

And since the conditions necessary for the success of a wide-spread strike are a strong organisation and voluntary discipline of the proletariat,

That the general strike, if by that term is meant the complete cessation of all work at a given moment, can not be carried out, because such a strike would render impossible all existence, whether proletarian or otherwise.

And since the emancipation of the working class cannot be the result of such a sudden effort,

That it is possible, nonetheless, for a strike which extends either to a great number of trades, or to the most important trades in the functioning of economic life, to be the supreme means for achieving social changes of great importance, or for defense against reactionary attacks on the rights of the workers.

The International Socialist Congress warns the workers not to allow themselves to be influenced by the propaganda for the general strike used by the Anarchists to divert the workers from the real, incessant struggle, that of political, trade union and cooperative action;

And invites the workers to increase their power and strengthen their unity by developing their class organizations, inasmuch as upon these conditions will depend the success of the political strike, if the latter should be, some day, both usable and necessary.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

²⁷ Report, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

Holland possessed many of these much condemned Anarchists, among them a frequent delegate to the International congresses, Domela Nieuwenhuis, who had been influential in bringing up the subject of the general strike for discussion at previous congresses. This time, however, it was a newcomer, one Dr. Friedeberg, a German delegate, who opposed the resolution in the interests of the revolutionary general strike of anti-Parliamentary character, and it was this same Dr. Friedeberg, and others of his view, who forced the German Social-Democrats once more to consider the possibility of the general strike in their own land.

The German Social-Democrats had not forgotten the long reactionary campaign against all their civic rights waged by Bismarck, and after the electoral law of Saxony had been altered in 1897, "with the express purpose of excluding the Socialists from the Saxon Landtag,"²⁸ political conditions gradually began to force the discussion of alternative methods of protest, if the electoral weapon were taken away. As the intent to restrict even the suffrage rights to the Reichstag was more openly discussed, the Social-Democratic party leaders became the more anxious to withstand any further such encroachments upon their electoral liberties. It was even hinted that if the Reichstag rights were limited, there would be further restriction of the right to combine in workers' organizations.²⁹

As it became evident that the party's possession of over three million votes, in 1903, was not giving to the proletariat anything like the influence in politics proportionate to their numbers, agitation grew for consideration of the mass strike as a political weapon. No one in authority among the Social-Democrats had thought of the general strike when the Saxony suffrage rights were limited, but now the situation was altered, and a revision of party tactics seemed essential. There appeared to be two ways of retrieving their power. Had the party leaders attributed their relative powerlessness in politics to their doctrinaire isola-

²⁸ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed., XI, 881. Suffrage rights in the cities of Hamburg and Lubeck, and the communal suffrage rights in several other towns had also been severely limited, with the same anti-Socialist aim in view.—*Georgi, op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁹ Kautsky, in foreword to Roland-Holst, *Generalstreik und Sozialdemokratie*, p. 4.

tion from all other parties, they could have refashioned their policy in such guise as to cooperate with other groups. On the other hand if the leaders had felt their lack of influence to be due to an overemphasis on the Parliamentary method, it would have been open to them to retain their political isolation, while they sought for other methods to add to, or to substitute for, that of Parliamentarism. It was this second course that German Social-Democracy chose for a brief period, the result being the "bridling of the general strike nag."⁶⁰

Practical attempts at the political mass strike, of one type or another, had already occurred in other countries, and had exercised considerable influence upon German Social-Democracy. The discussion of the problem at the Amsterdam congress of the International added fuel to the flames of debate. The literary discussion of the strike method carried on by such leaders as Kautsky, Bernstein, and Parvus, in the previous decade had possessed more academic importance than practical effect, and little echo to the sentiments expressed had been found in the ranks of the labor unions.⁶¹ With the second Belgian suffrage strike of 1902 the literary debate broke out afresh, but this time with more effect. Bernstein, while opposing the anarchistic conception of the revolutionary general strike, expressed his belief that a peaceful mass demonstration in favor of reform in the Prussian suffrage was not only possible but positively desirable. Kautsky held that the mass strike, at that time, was inapplicable to Germany, but this view was largely due to his interpretation of the mass strike as a revolutionary and violent method.⁶² He did believe that its full discussion was most desirable.⁶³

Henriette Roland-Holst, who had made the report on the general strike to the Amsterdam congress the previous year, now published her book on *The General Strike and Social Democracy*, originally undertaken at Kautsky's suggestion that some such careful study of actual theory and practice was seriously needed in Germany, and the study rapidly ran through a second

⁶⁰ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁶¹ As early as 1891 Kautsky had admitted that a wide cessation of work could cause great political effect. Bernstein, after the Belgian strike of 1888, favored the strike as a political method of mass demonstration.—Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶³ Roland-Holst, *op. cit.*, Foreword.

edition.⁵⁴ Her book pretty clearly distinguished certain types of the mass strike; the "social general strike," advocated by the anarchistic groups as a decisive struggle against the capitalist system, in short, the social revolution; the economic general strike, with political bearing, such as a widespread strike of railroadmen, miners and other vital trades; and the political mass strike, the workers' weapon of offense and defense against the bourgeois state. The author had little use for the *revolutionary* general strike; that concept "has the same influence on the working masses as the reading of adventure stories has upon children. It exalts them, closes their minds to the realities of social development, destroys in them all interest for daily life and labor."⁵⁵

An exhaustive study of the conditions necessary for success of the *economic* general strike in the various industries showed the need for each *corps de métier* to look into the details for their own trade, and not rest content with vague generalizations. No economic general strike could escape certain political results, often not foreseen by the workers concerned at the outset, hence the need for political organization of the workers combined in common action with the unions. This lesson had undoubtedly been learned from the bitter experience of the Dutch failure in 1903. Finally there was but a step from the economic general strike to the *political* mass strike. To this last form Roland-Holst gave her approval. "The political strike directs its effort against the State; by its pressure, it does not seek to transform society, but rather to make the political masters yield." There was no contradiction between the political mass strike and the Parliamentary method. The latter was the slow and continuous method of reform, while the strike must be used only rarely, under special circumstances. Belief in reformism to the exclusion of the general strike, or in the strike to the exclusion of reform methods, was equally biased.⁵⁶

In 1905, the same year in which Roland-Holst's book appeared, Bernstein addressed a conference at Breslau, called to consider the means available for gaining political rights for the workers. The German suffrage system, he held, made a

⁵⁴ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 621.

⁵⁵ Cf. review by Etienne Buisson in *La Revue Socialiste*, Sept., 1905, pp. 285-89.

struggle necessary to gain such rights, or even to hold those already won. The time had passed for the use of barricades, but the economic life was now so complex that a new means was at the disposal of the workers—the large-scale strike. It was true that the political mass strike was not infallible, and that great numbers of workers must join if it were to be a success. Such masses of workers could only be unanimous when stirred by a profound emotion. It was clear, therefore, that a hasty general strike was as foolish and led to as useless sacrifices as hasty barricades. Small and unsuccessful political strikes did not “educate” the workers for larger ones, as was often alleged. Their failure merely terrified all concerned.⁸⁴ It was equally mistaken to look upon the political mass strike as a means to social revolution.⁸⁷ Indeed, in a large strike the danger of labor masses upon the streets being attacked by better disciplined soldiery made a non-violent strike an absolute essential—a strike to gain concessions, not to destroy the enemy. Bernstein’s speech, like Roland-Holst’s book, showed little in common with the French revolutionary syndicalists, with their anti-Parliamentary ideals.⁸⁶

Yet, even in the midst of the German Social-Democracy, there was a minority movement in sympathy with the anarchist-syndicalist views of the French labor groups. A band of anarchist enthusiasts, known as the Berlin *Lokalisten*,⁸⁹ numbering perhaps as many as 17,000, were in constant feud with the more right-wing trade unions and Social-Democrats, just as in 1890-91 the *Jungen* had opposed the Socialist leaders. As

⁸⁴ In this view he agrees with Kautsky, who held that the defeat of a political strike would result in the crushing of all workers’ organizations for many a year. Cf. Kautsky in Legardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

⁸⁵ Favus, editor of *Aus der Weltpolitik*, had declared the political strike to be the proletarian revolution, a revolution without weapons. See Legardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁸⁶ Eugène Fournière in *La Revue Socialiste*, Sept., 1905, pp. 328-31.

⁸⁷ *Die Lokalisten* was the name given to the members of the *Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften*, whose main peculiarities as compared with the centralized trade unions consisted in the following points: power of the local union group over their own money and their right to strike; their belief in “solidarity” or sympathetic strikes; their propaganda in favor of the general strike; their objection to trade unions collecting funds for any purpose except strike pay. Cf. A. D. Lewis, *Syndicalism and the General Strike*, p. 163.

their leader, Dr. Friedeberg had stood for a change in tactics by organized labor after the episode of the limitation of the suffrage right in Saxony. His group published, with the usual unconscious irony of such rebellious enthusiasts, a journal called *Einigkeit*⁴⁰ and carried on an incessant campaign for the use of the general strike weapon.

Dr. Friedeberg spoke at more than one mass meeting in Berlin, attacking the Parliamentary method and expounding the general strike as the means for labor's liberation. At the party congress in Dresden in 1903 he endeavored to have this topic placed upon the order of the day of the next year's party congress, but received the support of only a very few, Kautsky himself being among them.⁴¹ At the Bremen congress in the following year, however, a change of view on the class strike had become evident, and Liebknecht, Bernstein, and Zetkin all supported his plea for discussion of the general strike at the next party congress in Jena. In the meantime Dr. Friedeberg had presented his anti-Parliamentary general strike views to the Congress of Amsterdam.⁴²

While the class strike, in one form or another, was rapidly gaining support in the Social-Democratic party, the Trade Union movement was anxious for its rejection, irrespective of its purpose. The Trade Union Congress of Cologne in May, 1905, took up the discussion of the class strike, fearing that the party congress at Jena, later in the year, would make decisions on that topic that would be hostile to current trade union tendencies. Most of the union leaders thought the discussion of the general strike was a superfluous disturbance of organic trade union development. The majority, moreover, felt that they had already lived through periods of Anti-Socialist laws without having to resort to mass strikes in protest, and they did not see wherein the contemporary situation was any

⁴⁰ "Unity" or "harmony"!

⁴¹ Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

⁴² To Friedeberg the State was the quintessence of middle class domination. The Parliamentarians thought the State would give them the means to destroy it, if not at one blow, then little by little. Friedeberg had no such illusion. To him the general strike, far from being utopian, was the sole means of overthrowing the bourgeois State. Since the army would stand in the way, anti-militarist propaganda must be used by the trade unions. See Legardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-83.

more critical. The result was the rejection of the mass strike by all but a very few of the trade union delegates.⁴³ Two of the most emphatic paragraphs in the Cologne resolution ran as follows:

The Congress therefore considers, that all attempts to set up a definite line of tactics by preaching the political general strike should be repudiated; it recommends the organized workers to resist such attempts energetically.

The Congress regards the general strike, as it is represented by Anarchists and people without any experience in the sphere of economic struggle, as beneath consideration; it warns the workers not to let the acceptance and circulation of such ideas distract them from the detailed daily work of strengthening their trade organizations.⁴⁴

The possible future utility of the general strike, however, was not to be dismissed so cavalierly. The trade unions had hoped to check the general strike discussions, but had in reality merely added to their heat. The highest point of enthusiasm was reached at the Congress of Jena in the fall of 1905, when the class strike became the center of interest. On the position of the Social-Democratic party to this question depended its future relations with the trade unions. A small minority at the congress advocated moderation, but "in a frenzy of enthusiasm and indiscretion" congress approved Bebel's resolution, by 287 votes against only 14.⁴⁵

This famous "Jena resolution" opened with a reference to the efforts, made by the ruling classes of Germany, to withhold from the working class a legitimate influence upon the affairs of the nation, or even to limit that influence which the workers already possessed. In view of that fact Congress thought it was "the bounden duty of the entire working class to resist with every means at their disposal every attack on their rights as men and citizens."⁴⁶ After a summary of the actual instances of limitation of electoral rights that had already occurred, and in

⁴³ Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁴ R. C. K. Ensor, *Modern Socialism*, p. 195.

⁴⁵ Georgi, *op. cit.*, p. 65, note 6.

⁴⁶ Spargo, *Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism*, Appendix 3, p. 314.

view of the importance of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage, Congress declared that:

In case of an attack on universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage, or on the right of combination, it is the duty of the entire working class to employ vigorously every weapon of defense that seems appropriate.

As one of the most effective weapons to repel such a political crime against the working class, or to capture an important right as a basis for its emancipation, the congress recommends, in the case given

*The most comprehensive application of the general refusal to work.*⁴⁷

In order to render the use of the general strike weapon possible the resolution proceeded to urge the greatest expansion of organization on the part of the workers, both in their political party and in their trade unions. The resolution closed by asserting that

Every member of the party is bound to join a trade union, if one exists or can be founded in his trade or calling, and he is bound to support the aims and objects of the trade unions. But it is also the duty of every class-conscious member of a trade union to adhere to the political organization of his class, the Social Democratic Party, and to promote the circulation of Social Democratic literature.⁴⁸

The Jena resolution was hailed by the party press as a "world event" and there resulted a most lively agitation, in the press and in public meetings, in favor of a general strike in the near future. The Marxians saw the inclusion of the class strike in the workers' arsenal with much satisfaction; Bernstein's followers, and the Revisionists in general claimed Bebel's resolution as a victory for their efforts; the anti-Parliamentarians and the anarchistic groups saw in the Jena decision a distinct move to the "left." The various theorists now thought that the mass demonstrations prophesied for the spring of 1906 would signify but a prologue, and that the agitation would continue to increase and culminate in a mass strike.⁴⁹ In the public meet-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix 8, p. 217.

⁴⁹ *Georgi, op. cit.*, p. 66.

ings reference was actually made to the Russian revolutionary general strikes of October, 1905.

After a short time, however, a reaction set in. Many who had originally advocated the mass strike idea began to oppose what they felt was most untimely propaganda for a revolution. Bernstein complained that this agitation for a revolution was seriously compromising the peaceful demonstration strikes, which in themselves were perfectly legitimate. A change in the attitude of the party leaders put an effective check upon the agitation for an immediate general strike. In the summer of 1906 it came to be generally recognized that in February an exchange of views had taken place between the Social-Democratic party leaders and the General Commission of the trade unions. A formula drawn up by Bebel had been accepted by both sides, but was said to involve a surrender of the Jena resolution. Whether or not this were true, the fact seems to be that there was very little real difference between the leaders of the trade unions and of the party. Neither side intended to resort to the mass strike if in any manner it could be avoided. The party congress of 1906 held at Mannheim endeavored to smooth over the alleged "surrender" of the Jena resolution to the pressure of the official trade unions, by declaring that the Jena resolution and Bebel's formula of understanding with the trade union leaders were not contradictory.⁵⁰

Bebel himself made a long speech of explanation; how he escaped from the difficulty can be seen in a few sentences from that speech:

Although at Jena I enthusiastically recommended the general strike as a weapon in the last resort, no word of mine can be taken to mean that I recommended one for the coming year.

I regard the general strike as the *ultima ratio*, the final, and, remember, the bloodless instrument of our party, the weapon which

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 67-68. The two sentences dealing with the general strike were phrased as follows:

"The Congress confirms the resolution of the Jena Congress upon the political general strike, and after declaring that the resolution of the trade-union congress at Cologne does not contradict the Jena resolution, regards all disputes over the meaning of the Cologne resolution as settled.

"As soon as the Party Council deems a political general strike to be necessary, it must put itself in communication with the General Committee of the trade unions, and take all requisite measures to carry out its course successfully." Cf. R. C. E. Esser, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

we need all our strength and discipline and self-restraint so to employ, as we think the interests of the party and the people demand. That is a hazard, which as yet, with our present organization, we cannot entertain.

To me it appears beyond question, that we must win over the trade unions to the idea of the general strike. I think so just because without the cooperation of the trade unions the general strike is impracticable.

The talk is not merely of demonstrations, but in most cases also of general strikes. According to that, they are represented as a means of agitation applicable at any moment. Today we start one general strike, tomorrow another, and the day after tomorrow a third. Conceptions of this kind we must reject with decision.²¹

Even on the proposal made by the Muhlhausen delegates, asking for intervention by a mass strike if the Prussian Government attempted to march troops into Russia to suppress a workers' revolution in that country, Bebel was hostile.

What else does the proposal of the Muhlhausen comrades mean, but what Nieuwenhuis advocated at the Zurich Congress, the general strike on behalf of peace in the event of an outbreak of war? . . . who believes that at such a moment it is possible to institute a general strike? The idea is puerile. From the first day of the outbreak of such a war there march under arms in Germany five million men, with many hundreds of thousands of Socialists included among them . . . is it credible that at such a moment, when each is thinking only of himself, one could institute a general strike?²²

The Mannheim resolution stamped the general strike as the last and supreme defensive weapon of the workers, and by that fact relegated it to the political background. There may have been no formal difference between the Jena resolution and the formula drawn up by Bebel for the trade union leaders in February, but there is no question that the party leaders had undergone a change of view on the mass strike, consequent upon their recognition that the trade unions would continue to reject any suggestion of the class strike, and that the Jena resolution had really put the Social-Democratic Party into a *cul-de-sac*, from which the only way out was retreat. The evident change of front and the exposure of the real meaning of the leaders'

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

strike agitation brought disillusion to the ranks of the party and taught them the wisdom of using the phrase "mass strike" with less readiness, at least so long as the trade union forces remained hostile.⁵³

How completely the official German Socialist attitude was hostile to any kind of class strike as understood by the French syndicalists, can be seen from the discussion at the International congress at Stuttgart in 1907. At that congress Kautsky made the following criticism of the French advocacy of the general strike as an economic weapon:

The resolution of the French comrades is unacceptable to us. First because it presents a general strike as a means of acquiring power in the labor-union struggle, while the German comrades regard it as only a fundamental weapon in the political struggle. . . . *The general strike must not be regarded as a means of economic struggle.*⁵⁴

On the use of the general strike as a preventive of international war, the delegates of the two nations again came into conflict. The French delegates had insisted that it was the duty of the International Socialist Bureau to assist in preventing war "by national and international Socialist action of the working class by every means, from Parliamentary intervention to public agitation and the general strike and insurrection." Bebel strongly opposed that view, maintaining that if a general strike were attempted in time of war in Germany, serious consequences for labor would follow. He pointed to Karl Liebknecht's trial for high treason, merely for quoting Hervé's anti-militarist views.

Jaurès attacked Bebel's attitude, stating that on no problem were the French delegates "content with Parliamentary action alone" and that to prevent war the proletariat must put forth all the power it possessed in its great masses. Bebel was adamant. He would give no support to the French resolution.

⁵³ Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-72.

⁵⁴ Walling, *Socialism of Today*, p. 391. The passage in the French resolution, previously passed at the Socialist congress of Nancy, which roused the ire of Kautsky, ran as follows: "The Congress is convinced that the working class will achieve its full emancipation only by the combined power of political action and labor-union action, extending even to the general strike. . . ." Cf. p. 376.

For the sake of nothing at all, for something that we do not know would even be carried out in a crisis, we are not willing to prepare trouble for ourselves and to seriously cripple our movement.⁵⁴

The resolution ultimately adopted at Stuttgart merely admitted the general strike as a possible weapon against war, the phrase *general strike* itself not even being mentioned; the working classes of the various nations being urged to "take every step possible in order to avoid the occurrence of war."⁵⁵

The use of the general strike against war was a topic that would not be smothered by German opposition. Once again, in 1910, at the International congress at Copenhagen, it came up for debate on an amendment moved by the English delegate Keir Hardie and the French delegate Vaillant. The amendment, to the official resolution on militarism, declared that:

Among the means to be used in order to prevent and hinder war, the Congress considers as particularly efficacious the general strike, especially in the industries that supply war with its implements, (arms and ammunition, transport, etc.), as well as propaganda and popular action in their most active forms.

Ledebour of Germany opposed Hardie's amendment and Ramsay MacDonald gave it his support, but it was not carried. Vandervelde solved the difficulty, for the time being, by suggesting the reference of Hardie's amendment to the International Socialist Bureau for further study, and a report upon it to the next International congress, at Vienna, in 1913. This suggestion was accepted by Congress, but the great war prevented the Vienna meeting. Keir Hardie, explaining his stand in favor of the general strike made it clear that he was not supporting an anti-war strike as an alternative to political action, but merely as a last resort where political action was not yet sufficiently developed to prevent war.⁵⁷

Although the Vienna International congress never met because of the outbreak of war, at the last of the various pre-war national Socialist congresses, that of the French, called specially to instruct the French delegates as to their action at

⁵⁴ Laidler, *Socialism in Thought and Action*, pp. 254-55.

⁵⁵ Walling, *The Socialists and the War*, p. 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Vienna, the general strike against war was the center of discussion. Held only two weeks before the outbreak of the great war the attitude of this congress is of particular interest. The Seine Federation proposed a resolution in favor of an international general strike, and received the support of Vaillant and Jaurès. The resolution as finally passed was brief and to the point:

The French Party considers the spontaneous general strike of the workers of all countries, combined with anti-war propaganda among the masses, as the most workable of all means in the hands of the workers to prevent war and to force international arbitration of the dispute.

Speaking in support of the resolution, which was not limited to certain industries, as was Keir Hardie's amendment of 1910, Jaurès admitted that a strike would be particularly difficult in lands such as France and Germany, but he asked

If the systematic general strike is used in all countries for the purpose of fighting economic dangers, shall we not use it to fight against the danger of war? It is impossible that we should fail to do this. We have seen the spontaneous uprising of the Spanish workers, and that of the Russians—in spite of all old theories. But it is not a question of deciding whether the general strike will break out in case of war, but whether this movement shall break forth in confusion and anarchy, first here and then there, and too late, after war is already begun, or whether it shall be accomplished through a voluntary and international understanding, as a general strike before the war, for the purpose of preventing it. . . . In the period for preparation of war, the period of press agitation, the general strike may break out in both of the contending countries, and the International may declare, 'We shall allow the strike to end first in that country which offers arbitration to the other.'

If we have left out the special mention of certain industries we have done it to emphasize the fact that the whole working class must be set in movement.⁵⁸

Jaurès was careful to state that the general strike must be simultaneous in all countries concerned, and before hostilities commenced. Guesde, who was the principal opponent, believed

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

that Germany would certainly defeat the resolution for that very reason. The general strike would be a real danger for the Socialist movement of the more progressive countries, for it would lay them open to attack by the less organized nations. How would the International be able to make the general strike simultaneous? Even supposing that difficulty overcome, there would remain the difference in strength of the labor organizations in the respective lands, and that would end in the country whose strike was most successful being crushed by the nation where the strike was relatively a failure.⁵⁸

In the previous year, 1913, the German Socialists had held another full dress debate on the political general strike, the use of which was again under consideration as a weapon of protest against the three-class suffrage system in Prussia. The executive committee of the Social-Democratic Party offered for discussion a long resolution, referring to the Prussian suffrage situation, and the need for tireless action in organization on the political and industrial planes. The first and fourth paragraphs ran as follows:

According to a resolution passed by the Party Convention at Jena (1905) and endorsed at Mannheim (1906), the widest use of the general strike may, under given conditions, be considered one of the most effective weapons of the working class, not only in the defence of rights it already possesses, but in the struggle for new popular rights and privileges.

While the Party Congress of Jena (1913) condemns the promiscuous, anarchistic use of the general strike, as an unfailling weapon in working class struggles, it is, on the other hand of the opinion that the proletariat must use every means, must use its whole strength, to secure political freedom. A political general strike can be carried out with a fair certainty of success only if all parts of the working class movement are wholly united, if it is fought by a mass of workers filled with the enthusiasm of Socialist ideals, by an army of men and women ready to sacrifice everything to the success of the fight.⁵⁹

This resolution was not radical enough for Rosa Luxemburg and others of the "left," and they sought to amend the committee's wording in such manner as to declare for a mass strike on the Prussian situation. Scheidemann, supporting the execu-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Walling, *Socialism of Today*, p. 404.

tive's resolution, admitted that in spite of one million votes cast for the party only seven representatives had been returned to the Prussian Landtag. Nonetheless, he claimed, the working masses were not yet ready for a general strike. Germany was not in the same position as Sweden and Belgium to wage such a fight, for in their struggles Germany was the "big brother" who sent considerable financial aid. If the German workers were to strike to whom could they look for any comparable support? Bebel's view of the political strike as the *ultima ratio* was still true, for the Social-Democratic party was still a minority, and it would be undemocratic to force the hands of the majority by a mass strike. Even a special propaganda for the general strike was wrong. Once the masses understood the need to be class conscious everything else would take care of itself.⁶¹

Bernstein refused to admit the time ripe for a political strike. If Germany were to do as well, proportionately, as Belgium in her last strike of 1913, nearly three million workers must strike. He doubted if such a strike could be accomplished without violent uprisings and great slumps after the first few days of enthusiasm. Sweden had lost from its trade unions nearly half of their membership as a result of the strike of 1909, and that experience ought to teach caution to German labor. Where, moreover, would the general strike end, once it had started? If the strikers were to wait until universal suffrage was granted, they might as well wait until the red flag flew over Berlin.⁶²

When Rosa Luxemburg had complained of the lifelessness of the party leaders in the face of a crying need for new methods of action, and Bauer had declared that the trade union movement had no desire for any revolutionary movement, Karl Liebknecht accused the majority leaders of really opposing the general strike method.

The resolution purports to be a renewed declaration in favor of the general strike. There is no need of such a declaration. We have given it at Jena and at Mannheim. But the resolution contains something that makes it thoroughly unpalatable, the reference I mean to a complete harmony of all parts of the working class movement. Such harmony is well nigh impossible. If that were a necessary condition there would never have been a general strike.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 405-8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 409.

Bauer makes a mistake when he says: "Why do we speak of these things? We will call the general strike when the moment for it has come." No, in order to call a strike in this sense, if we wish to avoid a wild, uncontrolled uprising, the idea must first be understood by the people. They must know its whole meaning, realise its whole responsibility.⁶⁵

The debate closed with a vote of 335 to 142, in favor of the executive's resolution. The *Vorwärts*, in an editorial on the discussion, agreed with Liebknecht to the extent of seeing the need for ample discussion, that the people might become more fully prepared for the political strike, if and when it finally was declared.⁶⁶

The great war interrupted further active discussion of the general strike as a working class weapon against the state, as far as German labor was concerned. It is interesting, however, to note that as the years passed during the present century, French labor, which had most frequently and loudly advocated the general strike for both economic and political purposes, presented to the world no single effective instance of a general strike properly so called; whereas organized labor in Germany, so hostile even to the political mass strike up to the outbreak of the great war, was the one national labor group that could claim a really successful general strike, the strike of 1920 that wrecked the *Kapp-Putsch* and preserved the newly won Republic.⁶⁷

THEORY IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA

During all this slow growth of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Europe, and alongside of it the gradual adoption, by the orthodox labor and Socialist groups, of the non-revolutionary political mass strike, it must not be thought that the English-speaking nations had been wholly exempt from the lure of the general strike theory. British Socialism of the first decade of the twentieth century was anything but doctrinaire. Outside of a tiny band of Marxians, it had little use for the extremer class-struggle theories of Marx. A new political movement under the efforts of Keir Hardie, the Independent Labor

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 417-18.

⁶⁷ *Cf. infra*, Chapter XIV.

party and the Fabian Society, resulted in the formation of the Labor Representation Committee, ultimately to become the Labor party. As the first secretary of this Committee James Ramsay MacDonald showed his mettle to the general public, in the masterly manner with which he steered the infant organization through its early difficulties. As an outcome of this new political effort of labor a definite group of labor representatives sat in the British House of Commons from 1906 onwards.⁶³

In the first flush of the new political movement, and with certain legal difficulties facing the trade union bodies,⁶⁴ the industrial strike assumed a relatively unimportant position in the labor movement. The actual general strikes of 1902 and 1903 in Belgium, Sweden, and Holland seem to have stirred less interest in Britain than might have been expected; far less, in fact, than was roused in Germany and France. By the close of the first decade, however, the situation was changing rapidly. The British Labor party was becoming rather too interested in the tactics of keeping the Conservatives out of power to exercise as much influence on new legislation as it had done in 1906-08. As political labor became steadily more "reformist" in attitude, industrial labor in general seemed to be seeking for new gods to worship. In 1910 Tom Mann, one of the Dockworkers' leaders in the great strike of 1889, returned from a long sojourn in Australia and South Africa. In Australia he had come under the influence of the Industrial Workers of the World, which organization had considerably affected the miners and transport workers of that continent.

On his return to Britain Tom Mann, discovering that syndicalism was being actively preached among the trade union ranks, threw all his efforts into the task of combining the French syndicalist teaching, with its emphasis upon the fighting nature of the *syndicat* or trade union, and the I. W. W. idea of the One Big Union. Amalgamation of the many separate "craft" unions was urged, and organization of the workers by industry

⁶³ Cf. G. D. H. Cole, *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement*, III, 17-27. "Labor" members had sat in the House before that date, but not hitherto in any effective numbers, nor as members of a distinct party group.

⁶⁴ Specifically the Taff Vale decision and the Osborne Judgment; cf. S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 600-6 and 806-11.

rather than by occupation. "Direct action" journals sprang up over night and both political action and the State itself were attacked. Frequent strikes were advocated, in order that the large industries should become so unprofitable to capitalism that the workers in each industry would ultimately take over control.⁵⁸

From 1910 to the year of the great war a perfect epidemic of strikes, sympathy strikes, and "generalized" strikes swept over Great Britain and Ireland. The miners' strike of 1912 brought out more workers than any previous strike in British history, close on a million men ceasing work; in the preceding year a national rail strike had seen nearly 150,000 railroadmen "down tools"; while in the fall of the following year, 1913, the city of Dublin was held in the throes of labor strife, at times approaching a pretty complete local general strike, by James Larkin and James Connolly. The latter provided one more link with the I. W. W., inasmuch as he had spent some seven years in the United States between 1905 and 1910, being pretty closely associated with the I. W. W. and the Irish Republican movements, and had returned imbued with the One Big Union idea.⁵⁹

From its inception at the first convention in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World had carried as one of its major aims the "Social General Strike" as the final solution of the class struggle.⁶⁰ When William D. Haywood and two other radical labor leaders were on trial charged with the murder of ex-Governor Steunenberg of Idaho, the delegates of the second convention of the I. W. W., in 1906, discussed the calling of a general strike as a protest against any delay in trial or the possible unjust sentencing of the three accused men. The convention, however, turned the proposal down, declaring that "a protracted general strike would be no less than an insane act on the part of the working class" although they went on record as believing that the general strike could be "employed tem-

⁵⁸ An anonymous pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*, suggested this method for the coal mines, and much was heard of the "railroads for the railroadmen." Cf. Beer, *History of British Socialism*, II, 308-89.

⁵⁹ G. D. H. Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-109; cf. Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 302; and S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 685-66.

⁶⁰ F. F. Brissenden, *The I. W. W.*, p. 91.

porarily, as a means to wring concessions from the capitalist class from time to time."⁷¹ Six years later the I. W. W. were fully prepared to call for a localized general strike in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, in support of the striking textile workers of that city. William D. Haywood, in the first speech he made in Lawrence after his arrival, said, "If we prevail on other workers who handle your goods to help you out by going on strike, we will tie up the railroads, put the city in darkness, and starve the soldiers out."⁷²

That this childish conception of the easy success that would follow a general strike was no temporary aberration on the part of the I. W. W. leader can be seen from a speech delivered by him in New York City, on March 16, 1911. In this oration Haywood lumped together as general strikes, the Paris Commune of 1871, the revolutionary strikes in Spain and Russia, the political mass strikes in Belgium, and the economic general strike in Sweden, along with the merely "generalized" strikes on the French and Italian railroads. In almost the next breath Haywood analyzed the mass strike as of three types; a general strike in a single industry, a general strike in a community, and a general national strike; then, in complete contradiction of the first part of his speech, he said, "the conditions for any of these three (general strikes) have never existed!" He closed with his comfortable theory of the facile success of a general strike as *the* anti-capitalist weapon: "If the workers are organized, all they have got to do, is to put their hands in their pockets, and they have got the capitalist class whipped. The working class can stand it a week without anything to eat. . . . If I didn't think that the general strike was leading on to the great revolution which will emancipate the working class, I wouldn't be here."⁷³

How closely the view of the I. W. W. leader was echoed by the British syndicalists under Tom Mann can be seen from the following sentences in an article written by Mann himself.

We most certainly favor strikes; we shall always do our best to help strikes to be successful, and shall prepare the way as rapidly as possible for THE GENERAL STRIKE of national proportions. This will be the actual Social and Industrial Revolution. The workers

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-75.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 287-88.

⁷³ William D. Haywood, *The General Strike*.

will refuse to any longer manipulate the machinery of production in the interest of the capitalist class, and there will be no power on earth able to compel them to work when they thus refuse. . . . When the capitalists get tired of running industries, the workers will cheerfully invite them to abdicate, and through and by their industrial organisations will run the industries themselves in the interests of the whole community.⁷⁴

It may be true that the greater crudities of the general strike theory as seen in the I. W. W. were not so evident in British syndicalism, yet there was enough of the revolutionary and anti-political content in syndicalist writings and speeches to rouse bitter comment and opposition from the older type of trade union and political leaders in Britain. As early as 1904 the Marxian leader, H. M. Hyndman, had dismissed the general strike "as a sentimental attempt to hasten arbitrarily the development of humanity," while the general strike for revolutionary purposes simply underestimated the intelligence of the bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ The less doctrinaire Socialist leaders, Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald, were both sufficiently disturbed about the temporary syndicalist flutter in British labor ranks to write a book on the subject.

Ramsay MacDonald, who, in 1926, was to see his country swept into the maelstrom of a general strike while he stood practically helpless to prevent or to guide it, writing in 1912, objected to the basic dogma of the syndicalist position, the class struggle, inasmuch as "only by a process of 'touching up,' of repression of fact and of exaggeration, can society be divided into two classes." He admitted that the class war could not be carried on in politics, but contended that that fact did not invalidate political action so much as prove that the idea of the class war was no guide for constructive work.⁷⁶ As to the general strike as visualized by the syndicalist,

It empties markets, it raises prices, it stifles consumption throughout the whole community. It hits the poor people heaviest, the middle

⁷⁴ Tom Mann, in *The Industrial Syndicalist*, March, 1911, cited by S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 688.

⁷⁵ H. M. Hyndman, in Lagardelle, *La grève générale et le Socialisme*, pp. 182 f.

⁷⁶ J. R. MacDonald, *Syndicalism, a Critical Examination*, pp. 46, 82.

classes next, and the rich least of all. If surrender is therefore to come by social pressure the program works from exactly the wrong end, for the class that must surrender first is the poor, and the surrender of the poor does not mean the triumph of the revolution, but the collapse of the strike.

The Syndicalists assume that when the general strike comes, time will be on their side. Exactly the opposite is true. Time will be against them. As the days go, Society will organize itself against them, because Society, as well as the individual, is moved by the will to live. The assumption of a progressive paralysis is false.⁷⁷

The general strike would bring the poor to starvation, but they would not face starvation peaceably:

The strike cannot be indefinitely prolonged; mere standing idly by when your program is being slowly circumvented becomes impossible. Society will certainly, and properly, mobilize its troops and use them and you must reply.⁷⁸

Philip Snowden took the same attitude toward the revolutionary syndicalist general strike. To his mind, it was quite false to assume that the strike movement then current in British trade unionism, had anything at all to do with the syndicalist aim of organizing a "social" general strike for the overthrow of the capitalist system.⁷⁹ "It is difficult," he wrote, "to treat the idea of achieving the emancipation of the workers by such a method as a general strike at all seriously." Because it was hard to rouse the workers' interest in politics the Syndicalist seemed to think it would be simple to gain the united support of labor in industrial action.

The advocates of the general strike have never shown a proper appreciation of the enormous difficulties in the way of such a strike being successful. They have assumed a working class unity for which there is no support either in experience or probability. They have never measured the strength of resistance of the middle and upper classes. They have counted too much on the public inconvenience which would immediately result from a general stoppage of work.

Experience does not support the Syndicalist contention that the special strike encourages the workers' faith in that method and increases their revolutionary zeal. The very opposite is the fact.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Syndicalism*, p. 222.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-236.

While Snowden seemed to have nothing but criticism for the general strike weapon, MacDonald was willing to admit, with Jaurès, Bernstein, and other political Socialists, that it has a use under certain restricted circumstances.

It can be used to secure some specific demand, say an extension of the franchise, the resignation of a Government, or the defeat of a war party, if used for political purposes, as it well may be; or increased wages or any other trade union claim if used for industrial purposes; or it can be used to make revolutionary changes in social relations. It may succeed in the first two instances; it never can in the third. In the first instances everybody understands its purpose, and, in the nature of things, before the strike can be successfully declared the grievance which it is aimed to remove must have become intolerable. As a last resort, as a *coup de grâce*, it may be justifiable, and need not be unsuccessful.²¹

In the light of subsequent events MacDonald's inclusion of "the resignation of a Government" among the legitimate aims of a possibly successful political general strike, is of considerable interest; but, in view of the frequent journalistic perversion of the definite aims of the Belgian, Swedish, and British political and economic general strikes, the statement that "everybody understands its purpose," seems unjustifiably optimistic.

Over against MacDonald's belief that the general strike was a last resort, and Snowden's practical repudiation of the weapon, can be placed the expression of the *New York Call*, at that time organ of the Socialists in the eastern section of the United States. Far from holding Snowden's views on the depressing effect of a strike that fails, the *Call* declared in 1911:

The failure of one general strike, or any attempt to carry out a general strike, does not bankrupt or destroy the working class. . . . Nor does such failure help capitalism. . . . On the contrary, it helps disintegrate it, and the failure itself is merely the necessary prelude to a still stronger assault by the same method.

The *Call* confessed that it hardly expected to see the capitalists paralyzed by even the most general of general strikes, that there was, indeed, more flexibility in the capitalist system than Socialists usually imagined. Yet the method would ultimately bring success.

²¹ J. E. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

General strikes will succeed one another intermittently, each becoming more general, the method finally establishing itself as a settled policy of the workers in enforcing their demands. Some may fail, but from time to time they will grow more general and more powerful, and will wrest more concessions from the owners until the point is reached where (the railroad) business will return practically no profits to its owners.

When this point is reached private capitalism will be faced with an alternative: the wide use of armed force, or the government ownership of the businesses concerned, and the prohibition of all strikes in the government service. Then prohibition would, in the long run, fail in its desired effect, for ultimately the "general strike would still be utilized to assail the capitalist State and its property."⁸²

It is not clear how long an interval the *Call* considered necessary between an unsuccessful general strike and the next attempt to use the same weapon, nor is there any evidence offered to show why each successive strike *should* be "more general and more powerful." The *Call* appears to have ignored the fact that the bourgeois forces themselves will learn some lessons of self-defense from each general strike effort, and that every renewal will find capital and the non-union public more prepared and more determined not to be caught napping. If British labor, with a strong political minority in the House of Commons, found it impossible to block retaliatory legislation after the first real attempt at a general strike, one wonders how American labor, with its persistent refusal to elect any definitely pledged labor representatives to Congress, could possibly ward off the most repressive type of anti-strike legislation that an hysterically angered public would certainly demand.

A very different view as to the feasibility of the general strike in such a country as the United States is that of John Spargo. From the example of Sweden he drew the conclusion that a voluntary organization to defeat the general strike, if it were called, could be most easily formed in countries such as Britain or the United States, from farmers, professional men, super-

⁸² *New York Call*, October 31, 1911, cited by Walling, *Socialism As It Is*, pp. 399-400.

intendents of industry, technical students—a great number of whom have either earned their living in their younger days in the shops or factories, or have at some time received enough technical training to perform many of the more necessary functions in modern society. “Modern society is less helpless to defend itself against a ‘motionless’ working class than any other form of society the world has ever known.” Spargo comes, therefore, to the rather logical conclusion that a general strike in the United States, intended to paralyze society, would have to take the form of a desperate revolution.⁵³

CONCLUSIONS AND CRITICISMS

The preceding chapters have sketched the history of general strike theory from Mirabeau and William Benbow through its Chartist and Anarchist vicissitudes to modern Syndicalist and Socialist thought. They have, at far greater length, followed the *practice* of the general strike from the days of the Lancashire laborer, Richard Pilling, to the great political strike in Belgium of 1913 and the revolutionary general strike fiasco in Italy in 1914. With the exception of the first two chapters, on the early theory and practice in Great Britain, and on France, the home of modern syndicalist theory, the theoretical aspect of the general strike has purposely been held in the background until the description of the actual strike efforts up to the Great War was complete. With the details of actual strikes in the mind of the reader, the discussion of theory, it would seem, becomes more fitting, and its criticism the more effective.

A great number of writers, from the Spanish Socialist, Pablo Iglesias, to the German Social Economist, Werner Sombart, have endeavored to list the *kinds* of general strike practised and theorized upon.⁵⁴ Sombart is content with a triple analysis of the *political* strike, the demonstration strike, the pressure strike, and the revolutionary strike.⁵⁵ The demonstration strike contains a threat. Its purpose is to bring to the attention of the authorities the power that the organized proletariat possesses, and is ready to wield, to gain certain definite political

⁵³ John Spargo, *op. cit.*, p. 128-29.

⁵⁴ Iglesias mentions as many as six; cf. Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 520.

⁵⁵ Werner Sombart, *Der Proletarische Sozialismus* (1924), II, 240.

demands. Evidently a demonstration strike could but last for a brief period of time, as in the case of the May 1 labor demonstrations. The pressure strike is but an intensified form of the first, exerting actual pressure upon the authorities by causing disturbance of social life. To both of these forms one thought is common, the effect produced upon the general public that stands between the proletariat and the great employing corporations.⁸⁶

Both Sombart and Bernstein see the third form, that of the revolutionary strike, develop out of the first two, at a moment "when the ruling classes and the authorities grow confused, when deep seated discontent prevails among the people, either from industrial crises or as a result of false political economy,"⁸⁷ and when a tendency to make concessions is seen on the part of those in power. At such a time the political strike can accomplish what the barricades achieved in the past.⁸⁷ Sombart, however, desires to distinguish the revolutionary general strike more clearly from the two previous types. To Sombart the leaders of a revolutionary strike aim consciously from the outset to introduce confusion into the life of the State and thereupon to overthrow the existing order by means of violence.⁸⁸

In this view of the revolutionary strike Sombart follows both Trotsky and Roland-Holst. "The revolutionary effect of the political mass strike," writes the former, "consists in the fact that it disorganizes the authority of the State. The greater and more general the anarchy produced, the nearer to victory is the strike."⁸⁹ Trotsky was evidently thinking of the cessation of work and the subsequent isolation of the separate parts of Russia by means of the railroad strike of October, 1905.⁹⁰ Roland-Holst sees in a revolutionary strike a more violent and decisive form of the demonstration and pressure strikes.

For the struggling workers everything is at stake in a revolutionary strike; they risk freedom and life to gain a new regulation of the State. In such a case the strike is a new form of civil war adapted to the method of capitalistic production.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, citing Bernstein.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241; cf. I, 418-19.

⁸⁹ Trotsky, *Russland in der Revolution*, p. 228, cited by Sombart, p. 241.

⁹⁰ See *supra*, Chapter VI.

The revolutionary political strike by no means signifies exclusively the methods of passivity, the "revolution of folded arms," but rather the application of the economic power of the working class. . . . to the disorganisation of society and the State.²¹

Sombart's analysis of the types of general strike seems hardly adequate to the writer. To his mind Buisson is fully justified in seeing no value in the distinction between "demonstration" and "pressure" strikes, even though the former be but one-day strikes. If a demonstration strike has no result upon State action it is not merely useless, but it even tends to weaken the general strike weapon in the eyes of the workers and the authorities.²² On the other hand Sombart makes little of the general strike with a distinctly economic aim, such as the second Swedish strike of 1909. While it may be true that no economic general strike can avoid political implications, if there be any benefit gained by distinguishing between different types, there would seem to be a case for holding the purely political mass strike (such as those in Belgium), to be of a different character from the economic general strike (such as that in Sweden in 1909). The writer would, therefore, prefer the division made by Terrail and Roland-Holst, of the political mass strike, the economic general strike, and the revolutionary general strike,²³ though even Terrail falls into the error of speaking of an economic general strike as if it were merely the generalized strike of one single industry. That error, indeed, is so common among French syndicalists, and in fact syndicalists the world over, that much of the discussion between syndicalist and socialist groups over the general strike simply misses fire completely, because neither party will define its terms in a common manner.

Emile Vandervelde, writing in 1908, attempted to avoid this pitfall by making a different analysis of the general strike types. He wrote of "*La grève générale corporative*," the professional or occupational strike confined to the workers of one industry, or as the writer has preferred to call it, the "generalized" strike, of railroadmen, of miners, of building workers. . . . in no proper sense a general strike of trades. Over against this "occupational" or "generalized" strike, Vandervelde set the general strike

²¹ Roland-Holst, *Generalstreik und Sozialdemokratie*, 2nd rev. ed., p. 84.

²² Cf. Etienne Buisson, *La grève générale*, pp. 12-13.

²³ Terrail ("Mermetz"), *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme*, pp. 136-54.

properly so-called, a strike of the workers in all industries, for motives interesting the whole proletariat; a strike less against the employers than against the Government. Such a strike could be peaceful or violent. He mentions the Russian, Italian and Belgian strikes as examples of the latter, but writing before the occurrence of the Belgian example of 1913 he did not have so clear an instance of the peaceful type.

This general strike "properly so-called" Vandervelde terms *la grève générale politique*, the political general strike, and subdivides it again into the reformist and revolutionary strikes, according as their aim is to gain immediate concessions or to overthrow the existing system of government. Once again the analysis seems inadequate, in that Vandervelde ignores the economic general strike that is *not* aimed primarily against the State, but rather against the organized forces of the employers. This omission, however, is the more easily understood when it is remembered that the Swedish strike of 1909 had not yet occurred, and that most Parliamentary Socialists did not favor such an industrial general strike for non-political aims.⁵⁴

Accepting, then, for the moment, this tentative division of general strikes into three kinds, the political, the economic, and the revolutionary; and admitting freely enough that any one of the three may change slowly, or suddenly, into one of the other types; it is of interest to notice the great variety of views among Socialist leaders the world over upon these three types. Naturally enough most Socialists who look with any favor upon the general strike weapon, support the political rather than the economic or revolutionary type. A very few remain actively hostile to any kind of general strike, even as a last resort. Of these Van Kol of Holland, perhaps unduly embittered by the failure of 1903, declares that the general strike is an Anarchist utopia, a "dangerous fantasy of ill organized workers," which must "imperatively end in violent revolution, and that in the most evil conditions imaginable."⁵⁵ The contempt for the general strike weapon shown by the English Marxian, H. M. Hyndman, has already been referred to.⁵⁶ So too, with Guesde, who believed

⁵⁴ Vandervelde, "La grève générale," *Le Revue du Mois*, May 10, 1906, pp. 229-49.

⁵⁵ Van Kol, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20.

⁵⁶ *Supra*, p. 217.

that the general strike and Socialism were incompatible, unless the proletariat were completely deprived of political rights.⁹⁷ Vliegen, the editor of *Het Volk*, member of the strike committee in the fiasco of 1903 in Holland, changed his views after the Dutch failure to such a point that he asserted that "against a resolute adversary, which has behind it all the forces of the bourgeoisie, the general strike can do nothing."⁹⁸

Those who speak favorably, even if with many reservations, of the political mass strike, generally have grave doubts as to the utility of the economic strike. To Turati of Italy the economic strike was "by definition an absurdity."⁹⁹ Professor Louis de Broeckère of Belgium also believed that the general strike could not be advantageously used on the economic field, because "the only questions on which all the proletariat is equally interested are political questions."¹⁰⁰ More often the Socialists completely ignore the possibility of a purely economic general strike, either because such a strike seems to them a matter for the trade unions, or because, before 1909, no such attempt had been made on any large scale, and after 1909 the sad experience of Sweden seemed sufficient answer in itself, without further argument.

The bitterest condemnation and the most enthusiastic approval is reserved for the political mass strike and the revolutionary general strike. Vandervelde, whose experience should entitle him to a hearing, considered that a general strike must fail if all the middle class groups combined against it, as they most certainly would in almost every revolutionary general strike. The ineffectiveness of the revolutionary strike to achieve the aim it seeks was clearly seen by Étienne Buisson. "If the general strike remains the revolution of folded arms, if it does not degenerate into a violent insurrection, one cannot see how a cessation of work of fifteen, thirty, or even sixty days could bring into the industrial régime and into the present social system changes great enough to determine their fall."¹⁰¹

On the other hand, syndicalist revolutionaries have little use for the political mass strike run by the Socialist parties.

⁹⁷ *Supra*, Chapter II; cf. Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁹⁹ Turati, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

¹⁰⁰ Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁰¹ Buisson, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Christian Cornelissen of Holland doubts if the workers could be stirred to wage a successful general strike for any purely political purpose, such as the gaining of universal suffrage, whereas "the social revolution will be the immediate outcome of a victorious general strike."¹⁰² William Haywood of the I. W. W. evidently thought one short week of starvation by the workers would suffice to shake capitalism to its roots.¹⁰³ Arnold Roller held that the ruling class would yield from hunger, whereas the workers would obtain their food by plunder of stores and of the servants of the rich as they took back food to their employers!¹⁰⁴

It is, perhaps, because such extremists are apt to underestimate the difficulties facing a general strike, that several writers assert, as does Sombart, that the more immature the particular proletariat happens to be, the more pleasure it takes in "harmless, childish tricks, such as the demonstration strike of May 1st," while the more influenced it is by revolutionary whims the more it will favor the political mass strike idea. Sombart expects, therefore, to find such movements more common in the early development of labor organizations, and points to British Chartism and to Russia. He takes a friendly tilt at the more temperamental nations, such as France, "in which prevails a strong tendency to the theatrical," where love of such a modern form of combat as the mass strike is likely to be more common. Sombart's general conclusion as to the mass strike is somewhat too sweeping to convince the present writer, especially in view of the great strikes in Belgium, Sweden, and post-war Germany and Britain:

The popularity of the general strike idea stands in inverse ratio to the development of the trade union organization. It shows a very slight grasp of the nature of the trade union movement when French syndicalists in particular constantly assert that the general strike results, of inherent necessity, from the trade union movement. . . . The opposite is true: trade union discipline and full union treasuries are likely to hinder the development of sympathy for the general strike.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59.

¹⁰³ *Supra*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁴ Arnold Roller, *The Social General Strike*, pp. 6, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Sombart, *Der proletarische Sozialismus*, pp. 243-44; cf. also Georgi, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9.

There is considerable difference of opinion among Socialist and Syndicalist leaders as to the preparation necessary for a successful general strike. Kautsky closely approached the Syndicalist viewpoint when he wrote, "The political general strike succeeds more frequently if it be sudden and unexpected, brought about spontaneously by some plainly outrageous act of the bourgeois government." Max Quarck, writing on *Political Strikes* more recently than Kautsky, could still say "the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the political mass strike are the chief requisites to its success."¹⁰⁸ Such views are possibly justified to the extent that the *first* general strike often finds the governmental authorities and the bourgeoisie comparatively unprepared, and somewhat inclined to be overawed by the unknown. Once, however, a general strike has occurred in any country, such an attitude is not found again. In modern industrial society sufficient instances of the various types of general strike have occurred, and their procedure and results been recorded, to render it almost impossible to take any government completely by surprise.

Against such a view can be placed the belief of the majority of Socialist and trade union leaders in all lands. That the general strike cannot come into being by "spontaneous generation," with little or no preparation in funds or in trade union organization, was the evident idea of the Belgian leaders in 1912-1913, as it was of Enrico Ferri,¹⁰⁷ the Italian Socialist deputy, and Van Kol of Holland. The latter, indeed was most emphatic:

An economic general strike demands a powerful class organ, an indestructible solidarity, an invincible discipline, along with powerful unions having at their disposal large sums of money and the numerous resources of rich coöperatives.¹⁰⁸

The less prepared and organized are the workers, the more likely it is, when they are suddenly called upon to effect a general strike, that the strike will degenerate into riot and violence. That this is generally recognized is shown by the intense campaign for a peaceable strike carried on for many months before

¹⁰⁷ Max Quarck, *Streik (Politischer)*, in *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, 6th ed., VII, 1145-49; cf. Kautsky, in Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

¹⁰⁸ Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

the Belgian stoppage of 1913, by the urgent propaganda against liquor in the Swedish and Belgian strikes, by the frequent formation of special workers' police forces; and on the side of the Anarchist-Syndicalist groups by their evident hope that such violence *would* result from their frequent "spontaneous" strikes.¹⁰⁰

To hope for success the leaders of a general strike must make the aim simple, clear to all, and as far as possible one that will not isolate the striking proletariat completely from all the remaining groups in society. For that reason a political mass strike for such a demand as universal suffrage is more likely to gain its end than an economic general strike with demands such as an increase in wages for certain groups of workers. The definite class strike of a revolutionary character, with the aim of superseding the present capitalist form of society, will rouse all the latent antagonism and powers of resistance of the non-proletarian classes, and under any normally conceivable situation in the western nations seems to be condemned to failure from the very start.

Even a short general strike, with an aim clear and single, cannot today be sure of even temporary success. This is true, moreover, even where the labor ranks are excellently organized, show remarkable solidarity, and possess considerable financial resources. The reason for this uncertainty of success is not far to seek. Beginning with the Swedish economic general strike of 1909, and becoming markedly more powerful since the war, the forces of the non-striking citizens of each nation have shown themselves capable of preventing the complete paralysis of social life. While the growth of the machine has undoubtedly created a vast problem of the semi-skilled proletariat, it has in the last few years made it possible for the partially-trained citizen to run a great deal of the necessary social machinery, for at least a long enough period to break the spirit of the strike. The experience of the various citizens' committees, com-

¹⁰⁰ Even the Chartist Convention asked the people if they were ready to refrain from liquor during the period of a "sacred month"; the Italian Chambers of Labor urged dealers to close their liquor stores during the strikes. In Russian Poland the strikers often vented their anger upon thieves who were using the strike for an opportunity to plunder. Cf. Geogrt, *op cit.*, p. 131.

bined with the smaller groups of technically trained professional men, has demonstrated that the most essential social work is not necessarily the most complicated. Ample evidence of this fact will be given when the British strike of 1926 is discussed, and when the *Technische Nothilfe*, or the technical emergency corps, of modern Germany is described.

It may be thought that the writer sees nothing but harm in the general strike, no matter what type it is or what aim it seeks. That would be incorrect. Admitting all the uncertainty of success attached even to the best led and most carefully organized mass strike; admitting, too, the most probable reaction that is likely to occur in legislation or in industry, where organized labor carries the strike to the point of self-exhaustion; there remains the fact that, under certain circumstances of entrenched reaction, the mass strike may well be the sole effective weapon in the hands of organized labor. The mass strike may not be the creative and constructive instrument that the Syndicalist theory would claim, but an instrument it remains, though one of destruction; a permanent warning to governments and classes that are incapable of recognizing a sentient and intelligent humanity under the myriad overalls of the working class.

PART II

AFTER THE WORLD WAR

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

NOTICE

The Railway Companies announce that arrangements are being made to increase their train services at the earliest practicable moment, but the injury to trade is believed to be so serious that for some time full pre-strike services will not be required. All men who can be employed immediately are being accepted for duty and others will be accepted as soon as possible, subject to two conditions:—

- (1) Every man who left his work without notice has broken his contract of service and the Companies feel they must reserve any rights they possess in this matter.
- (2) A number of men in positions of trust have gone on strike, and others have been guilty of acts of violence and intimidation.

The Companies propose to examine these cases individually and meanwhile they reserve their decision in regard to them.

The Companies feel compelled to make these reservations in regard to the reinstatement of staff in the interests of the public and to safeguard future peace and discipline on the Railways.

The Companies take the opportunity to state that rumours that have been circulated to the effect that they are refusing to take men back except at wage reductions are absolutely incorrect.

FELIX J. C. POLE
General Manager

Paddington Station,
May 15th, 1926

(See page 443.)

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE AND THE COUNCIL OF ACTION

LABOR'S SACRIFICES FOR THE GREAT WAR

THE BRITISH general strike of 1926 may have taken the public by surprise and seems to have found even the leaders of labor very unprepared, but it was no surprise to the British Government, nor, to impartial historians, can it be said to have burst upon the world out of a clear sky. Ten years of labor history can claim the making of the great strike, and without the story of that decade a mere description of the actual stoppage would be as futile as it would be unintelligible.

The few years preceding the Great War had seen some of the greatest strikes in British history. A temporary ebb in labor enthusiasm for the political method, and a flood tide of interest in the newer forms of trade unionism and mass action marked that period. Out of those years came a trade union movement stronger alike in numbers and in morale, with a greater readiness to admit the use and necessity of more concerted action and more centralized control than heretofore.

One sign of this change in trade union spirit could be seen in the formation, in 1914, of the so-called Triple Alliance of the Miners, the Railroadmen, and the Transport Workers, ratified by its constituent parts in the following year. In *theory* the Triple Alliance was created for the purpose of drawing up national programs of labor conditions for each of the three groups; the simultaneous termination of existent contracts; the presentation of the triple program to the respective groups of employers; and, if necessary, the ultimate simultaneous withdrawal of labor by all three groups if those national demands were not forthcoming.

Such a plan required ample time to materialize, particularly with regard to the termination of all contracts on one and the same date, an aim which the employers' groups would undoubtedly obstruct to the best of their ability. In actual fact the Triple

Alliance never attained this principle of joint program and common action, but the possibility hung like the sword of Damocles over British industry for a decade.¹ The attempt to gain the full benefits of common action by three such powerful labor organizations, without the willingness first to seek common counsel, was responsible to no little degree for the failure of that new weapon.

The war found British labor unprepared for the vast changes that modern warfare demands. An acute American observer was not far wrong when he asserted that "in general, British labor has no philosophy, no general outlook, but deals in piecemeal gains by compromise and opportunism, with floundering sureness, like the land progress of a seal."² A small minority preserved an attitude of passive hostility to the war up to the end, but the vast mass of British trade unionists, immediately presented evidences of a sacrificial, if conventional, national patriotism that might well have shamed certain war profiteers. As impartial a reporter as Sir Richard Redmayne, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Mines, and during the war technical adviser to the British Controller of Coal Mines, could write of the miners' response to Lord Kitchener's appeal for men:

From no class in the community did this call on their patriotism meet with a more spontaneous and conspicuous answer than from the coal miners. Forty per cent of the miners of military age were absorbed into military service, and by far the greater number left the mines in the early weeks of the war, that is, in the autumn of 1914.³

The same authority admits that Robert Smillie, president of the British Miners' Federation, declared in December, 1916, and again in June, 1918, that the miners "had no desire to force up wages at the expense of the nation" unless there were a rise in the cost of living making it impossible for the men to continue.⁴

¹ G. D. H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement*, III, 111-13; cf. Frank Hodges, *My Adversity as a Labour Leader*, p. 88. Hodges was delegated by the South Wales Miners' Federation to propose the Triple Alliance to a Miners' Congress at Scarborough just before the war.

² Arthur Gleason, *What the Workers Want*, p. 18.

³ Sir R. A. S. Redmayne, *The British Coal-Mining Industry during the War*, pp. 12-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

The miners were no exception. "From every industry workmen flocked to the colors, with the utmost encouragement and assistance from their Trade Unions; until the miners, the railwaymen and the engineers, in particular, had to be refused as recruits, exempted from conscription, and even returned from the army, in order that the indispensable industrial services might be maintained."⁶ The workers' enlistment, however, was not the whole story of their readiness to sacrifice. The various trade union rules, regulations and "restrictions" gained through long years of struggle, were surrendered by practically all the Trade Unions.⁷

This abandonment of the recognized trade union customs was made in March, 1915, at a conference between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, and the representatives of some thirty-three leading trade unions. With this surrender, of course, went the right to strike. In return for this wholesale sacrifice, the Government solemnly pledged itself that

Any departure during the war from the practice and rolling in the workshops, shipyards, and other industries prior to the war shall be only for the period of the war and must be absolutely and completely reinstated when the war is over.⁸

This pledge was subsequently embodied in the Munitions Act of that year. The surrender implied even more. No worker could leave one employer and seek higher wages from another, without a "leaving certificate," or the risk of six weeks of idleness before he might be reemployed. While the employer was permitted to receive an advance of twenty per cent over the profits of the preceding three years, there was not always guaranteed an average rise in the rate of wages sufficient to meet the increase in the cost of living.⁹

⁶ S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 631.

⁷ H. L. Gray, *War-time Control of Industry*, pp. 74-75, asserts that the Miners' Federation had given a pledge that there would be no strike in the coal fields during the war, but Arthur Gleason, "The Shop Stewards and Their Significance," in *The Survey*, Jan. 4, 1913, twice categorically asserts that the miners remained outside the Treasury Agreement and refused to give up their strike-right, cf. pp. 417 and 420.

⁸ "The Shop Stewards' Movement," *The Nation* (N. Y.), Feb. 23, 1913, p. 278.

⁹ Arthur Gleason, "The Shop Stewards and Their Significance," *The Survey*, Jan. 4, 1913, pp. 417-22; cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 629.

Save for a serious strike in the South Wales coal mines in 1915,⁹ which was met by Government intervention, and the ultimate assumption of the financial responsibility for the coal mines, there was no serious stoppage of labor by any of the official unions, during the period of the war. A strike organized from the ranks, by the "shop stewards" of the Clyde engineering industry, gave the Government some trouble, but the official trade union leaders were about as hostile to it as was the Government.¹⁰ Further outbreaks of this character occurred in 1917, and a distinct tendency to protest against the growing irksomeness of labor conditions became evident as the war drew to an end, and as the Russian Revolution made itself felt in western nations.

When the Lloyd George Government came into power late in 1916, it proceeded to take over the control of all vital industries not already so treated. The railroads and some shipping had been put under State control at the very outset of the war, the munitions factories in 1915 and the South Wales coal fields in 1916. With the new Premier all the coal mines, practically all the remaining tonnage of British shipping and cotton, wool, and wheat and food production in general, came under pretty strict governmental regulation. The rationing and price fixing that followed were carried out by Government departments, in close coöperation with the employers concerned. The natural result was a very considerable increase in the amount and intensity of organization among the employing class.¹¹ The famous "F. B. I." the Federation of British Industries, was an instance of this, being founded during the war and comprising over 800 individual manufacturing firms and about 170 trade organizations, representing over 16,000 firms in many trades.¹²

REVOLUTIONARY UNEASINESS

The solemnly pledged restoration of the surrendered rights and customs of the Trade Unions was very imperfectly carried out by the Government. Far from intervening to obtain the actual restoration of the rules, the Government after much delay passed the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act,¹³ which

⁹ *Labour Gazette*, 1915, p. 256.

¹⁰ H. L. Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ G. D. H. Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-55.

¹² Arthur Gleason, *What The Workers Want*, p. 72.

¹³ 9 and 10 George V. c. 42.

enabled a worker to proceed in the law courts against any employer who failed to restore the old conditions. Such a restoration in any case was made obligatory only for one year! As it happened, very little, if any, use was made of this Act, because the temporary boom in trade after the Armistice prevented any immediate reduction in the number of skilled workers employed.¹⁴

At the same time most of the workers found that the actual purchasing power of their wages, was, if anything, lower in 1919 than in 1913. Only the fact that more than one member of the family was now employed, made this situation bearable. As the post-war boom passed, and unemployment rapidly increased, the pressure of economic want, and the weariness of war years, whether in the trenches or in the Government-controlled factories, began to have its inevitable effect in widespread, almost revolutionary, unrest. One of the most disturbing aspects of this growing labor unrest was the sudden and very popular revival of interest in the weapon of the general strike, both for economic and for political purposes. Thus, the means of struggle which had been tried and found wanting in the Chartist days, and which had just begun to creep back into British labor thought in the years immediately preceding the war, now came to be accepted by large numbers of British trade unionists of the younger generation as the invincible industrial weapon.

Immediately after the Armistice the first step in the long tragedy of errors that reached its culmination in the great strike of 1926, was taken by the Coalition Government of Lloyd George and Bonar Law. Against the advice of older statesmen such as Herbert Asquith, Lloyd George cast the nation into the cauldron of a general election. This "khaki election" of December, 1918, called to obtain a mandate to "hang the Kaiser," was extremely unwise. The English war aims were clearly enough known not to require a mandate for the peace. The injustice of appealing to the people for a "reconstruction" Government when so many soldiers would be unable to go to the polls embittered large numbers of the fighting forces and of their labor comrades at

¹⁴ S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 642-43. Cole points out that the boom of 1919-20 was a price boom, that Britain was prospering by selling her reduced quantity of exports at enormous prices, and that, while industry was readjusting itself after its war-time dislocation, output per worker was abnormally low.—*Op. cit.*, pp. 146-49.

home. Special resentment was felt at the manner in which the Coalition Ministry (Liberal and Conservative) undertook to dictate official candidacies for Parliament. The sole test was past or expected support of the Government in everything. Independent Liberals and Conservatives, who would have been possible thorns in the side of the new Lloyd George-Bonar Law Cabinet, saw little chance of Governmental support in the constituencies. The Labor party refused to be a party to such a scheme and put up 361 candidates of its own. There were hopes of winning a hundred seats, and perhaps almost double that number, had the election taken place after the treaty of peace had been signed, after the soldiers had returned, and after the country had been given a breathing space in which to consider carefully the future domestic situation.¹⁵

From the point of view of a peaceful reconstruction of the industrial situation, the result of the general election was disastrous. The Coalition Government was returned to office with a *three to one* majority in the House of Commons, but this majority was based upon an electoral vote that really should have given a five to four ratio, had any kind of proportional representation been in practice. The Labor party polled 22 per cent of the votes cast, but received only about 10 per cent of the members elected.¹⁶ At the very outset, therefore, of the post-war period, organized labor felt it had been given a very "raw" deal in return for the trade union sacrifices of the war. This feeling deepened during the following year, as it became evident that the new House of Commons was predominantly conservative in its views on every form of industrial reconstruction.

Far more than 1926, the year 1919 was one of revolt in industry and politics the world over. General strikes in Germany, in Seattle and Winnipeg; a bloody "May Day" in Paris; an epidemic of police unrest and strikes in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States; the general discontent of the demobilized soldier, aggravated as it was in Britain by Lloyd George's pledge of "a land fit for heroes," all these factors made the British industrial situation distinctly volcanic in its possibilities.

¹⁵ *New York Evening Post*, Dec. 13 and 16, 1919; cf. G. D. H. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, Jan. 1, 1919.

The question of working hours brought the first trouble. In January, 1919, there occurred in Belfast and on the Clyde, an epidemic of local general strikes, unauthorized by the official trade unions, and ending in much display of armed force by the Government.¹⁷ Early in the year the railroadmen, the workers in the engineering and shipbuilding trades, in the iron and steel industry, and the cotton operatives gained the eight-hour day or its equivalent, by negotiation. The miners, more ambitious, put forward again the demand for State ownership and democratic control of the coal mines, as well as higher wages and shorter hours.¹⁸ A strike, with the probability that the Triple Alliance would be involved, was threatened unless these demands were granted by the new Government. A ballot of the miners on February 13, 1919, gave a strike majority of over 500,000 votes. The Government countered by the offer of a Royal Commission, and an Act for its establishment became law, under the strike threat, on February 26.

The miners were in a distinctly strategic position. London had but three days' supply of coal, and the national stocks were at a minimum. It took all of the persuasive powers of Secretary Frank Hodges and President Robert Smillie of the Miners' Federation to postpone the strike for three weeks, till such time as the Royal Commission had issued an interim report.¹⁹ In the meantime the miners nominated three representatives on the Commission.

The interim report of the chairman, Mr. Justice Sankey, recommended the seven-hour day and a two shilling per shift wage-increase immediately, and added that, upon the evidence already presented, nationalization of the mines or some method of unification by national purchase must be substituted for the

¹⁷ Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167; cf. resolution in favor of nationalisation and democratic control of mines passed by Annual Conference of Miners' Federation in 1918, and Frank Hodges' speech, quoted by S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 663, 674-75. At the Southport Conference of the Miners' Federation on the 14th of January, 1919, the resolution was reaffirmed, and demands for the demobilization of all miners still in the fighting forces, the six-hour day, and a thirty per cent increase in wages were added to the nationalisation program. The six-hour day was the method the miners suggested for absorbing the demobilised miners.—Lubin and Everett, *The British Coal Dilemma*, p. 36.

¹⁹ Frank Hodges, *op. cit.*, p. 80; cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 618.

existing system.²⁰ On the same day Mr. Bonar Law, speaking for the Government, declared unequivocally that

The Government is 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.

A further categorical pledge that the Commission, if allowed to continue, should publish further interim reports, and that these interim reports would be carried into effect by the Government, was given five days later by Mr. Bonar Law to the miners themselves, and the latter, balloting once more, agreed to abide by the Commission's recommendations.²¹ Thus, for the moment, the great strike threat was withdrawn.

On June 23 that same year, Justice Sankey recommended that Parliament immediately legislate to acquire the coal royalties for the State, and that the principle of State ownership of the mines be accepted. Now that the immediate pressure of the miners had been removed, the Government took no steps to enact the Sankey recommendations. On the contrary, Mr. Lloyd George announced in the House of Commons on August 18 that Justice Sankey's recommendation of State ownership could not be accepted by the Government!²² How large a part that refusal to fulfil a solemn pledge played in the later coal chaos, and ultimately in the costly failure of the general strike and mine stoppage of 1926, can be realized only by those who have followed the British labor movement closely in recent years.²³

THE "SECRET CIRCULAR"

Long before August, however, the specter of the general strike had appeared again. On the 16th of April, 1919, a conference of the Triple Alliance urged the Parliamentary Committee of the

²⁰ *Coal Industry Commission, Interim Report*, by Mr. Justice Sankey, et al., March 20, 1919, pp. viii, x-xi.

²¹ W. A. Orton, *Laborer in Transition*, pp. 218-19. ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

²³ The miners demanded nationalization in the belief that unification would make possible a more equal payment of labor in the different coal-fields, and that it would end a system under which surplus profits of good pits were retained by individuals, though due almost entirely to natural conditions. Under Justice Sankey's scheme the surplus profits of the good pits would have become the property of the community, available for wage increases or price reductions.—*Cf. J. W. F. Rose, Wages in the Coal Industry*, p. 131.

Trades Union Congress²⁴ to convene a special conference of trade unions, in order to decide what action should be taken to "compel the Government to comply" with any or all of the following labor demands: (a) the withdrawal of the Bill before the House for the continuation of Conscription, (b) the withdrawal of all British troops from Russia, (c) the release of all Conscientious Objectors from prison, (d) the raising of the blockade against the "enemy" countries, and (e) the repudiation of the famous "secret military circular."²⁵ The first four demands are self-explanatory, and all five are quite definitely *political* in their nature; yet the evident intention on the part of militant labor groups was to use the general strike weapon to enforce these demands, if they were not otherwise granted.

The secret military circular, which had roused so much feeling, was not known to the public at this meeting of the Triple Alliance, but its repudiation was added to the list of demands by the Alliance as soon as it came to the notice of labor. The radical labor organ, *The Daily Herald*, into whose possession a copy of the twofold circular had come, published it in full on May 18. The disclosure roused intense feeling among the trade union ranks, and the speeches of Winston Churchill and Bonar Law, "explaining" the origin of the circular, did nothing to appease that feeling. The circular in question was sent, early in 1919, by the War Office to the commanding officers of troops stationed in Great Britain. Under the heading "Secret and Urgent," this circular requested that information on the troops in the area under each commanding officer be sent weekly to the War Office, in order that an efficient Intelligence Service might be established where the Army Council could "keep its finger on the pulse of the troops." The circular added that the data desired were for the information of the Secretary of State.

The particular information requested that gave the most offense to the labor ranks, was contained in the following paragraphs:

Will troops in the various areas respond to orders for assistance to reserve the public peace?

²⁴ The Parliamentary Committee was the predecessor of the present General Council, but not nearly as representative or authoritative.

²⁵ Gerald Gould, *The Coming Revolution in Great Britain*, p. 248.

Will they assist in strike breaking?
 Will they parade for draft overseas, especially to Russia?

The various station commanders were also requested to provide information on the following points, in regard to the troops under their command:

Whether there is any growth of trade unionism among them.
 The effect outside trade unions have upon them.
 Whether any agitation from internal or external sources is affecting them.
 Whether any soldiers' councils have been formed.
 Whether any demobilization troubles are occurring. . . .

Interviewed by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress in connection with the resolution passed by the Triple Alliance, Mr. Bonar Law declared:

With reference to the Secret Order we said in the House of Commons, that, in the event of a real conflict between the Government and a great power in the Trade Unions, we must use all the forces of the State to put it down. There was never any intention in our mind of using soldiers in ordinary conflict between Capital and Labor.²⁶

Mr. Bonar Law evidently referred to the Triple Alliance, when he spoke of "a great power in the Trade Unions." This is shown in a speech delivered by the Secretary of War, Mr. Winston Churchill, wherein he admitted that the circular was sent out at the end of January, that it had been drafted by the military authorities, but that it had no political significance.

The situation then was extraordinarily difficult. We had a considerable number of mutinies in the Army, one at least of a very serious character, in which grave loss of life was happily averted by the tact and courage of all concerned. We had a number of strikes and a great many threats of strikes. There was a threatened railroad strike, and the actual strike which took place all over the tube railways in London. There was a threatened strike of electricians, which was averted only at the last moment. There were serious riots in Glasgow which required the presence of a large number of troops. There was the threatened strike of the Triple Alliance, which was averted by the good sense of all concerned. . . .

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

After explaining that the phraseology of the circular was plainly military, Mr. Churchill continued:

The expression *strike breaking*, for instance, was bound to give offense, and moreover it was not what the military authorities meant. Strike breaking means using soldiers or sailors to take the place of workmen who are carrying on an industrial dispute with their employers, in order to improve their wages or the conditions of their trade. No one ever thought of doing that. It would be entirely contrary to the law of the land, and to the whole custom and practice of the country. . . . To use soldiers or sailors, kept up at the expense of the taxpayer, to take sides with the employer, in an ordinary trade dispute, to employ them as what are called *blacklegs*, would be a monstrous invasion of the liberty of the subject. . . . But the case is different where vital services affecting the health, life and safety of large cities or great concentrations of people are concerned. . . . Light, water, electric power, transport, the distribution of food, all these are indispensable to the existence 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 whose lives are in danger, by every means in its power, including the use of military and naval forces, so as to avoid a general catastrophe.²⁷

THE UNREST INCREASES

On June 25, two days after Justice Sankey's remarkable report had been issued, Labor's political army met at Southport for the first annual conference of the British Labor party since the armistice. Two fighting issues were placed before the delegates: the nationalization of the coal mines, and the end of armed intervention in Russia. The chairman in his opening address alluded to the growing advocacy of the general strike with considerable disapproval:

A movement is afoot to employ the strike weapon for political purposes. This would be an innovation in this country which few responsible leaders would welcome. . . . It is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn around and demand that we should substitute industrial action.²⁸

²⁷ *London Times*, May 20, 1919.

²⁸ Arthur Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 85, quoting Chairman McGurk.

The Executive Committee of the Party, in its annual report, had expressed the opinion that if British labor was initiating a general strike for political objects, then the trade unions, whose members would have to carry out the strike, and whose finances would be involved, should themselves determine the plan of any campaign. Robert Williams, secretary of the Transport Workers, wished the party to take up the Government's challenge and decide whether or not to use direct action. Smillie, president of the Miners' Federation, the one important trade union group that had refused to surrender its rights during the war, regretted that the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress had not granted an opportunity for the whole trade union movement to meet and discuss the question. Failing that opportunity the Triple Alliance had called a meeting of its own constituent bodies. Bromley, of the Locomotive Engineers, complimented the Triple Alliance on their action, and asked if the breaking of every Government pledge to labor was to be taken "lying down."²⁹

On the closing day of the party conference the more conservative labor view was voiced by Clynes. He refused to use the strike weapon for so obvious a political purpose as the stopping of armed intervention in Russia by direct action. Before long the Labor Party itself would be in power, and the other classes might object to the actions of the Labor Government. For labor to resort to the general strike method in 1919 would be to encourage chaos when a Labor Government ruled. Such action would be a blow at democracy. "There would be millions of men in the street, with riot and bloodshed." Despite Clynes' logical and masterly appeal a "card vote" of the conference gave a majority in favor of direct action in the Russian situation, of some 935,000 votes.³⁰

In July the Triple Alliance met once again, as Smillie had announced at Southport, passed a vote of censure upon the Parliamentary Committee of the T. U. C. for its inaction on the Alliance demands formulated in April, and recommended a strike ballot of all its two million members. Within a week of this meeting Secretary of War Churchill announced that all British troops

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3; cf. Gerald Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

would be withdrawn from Russia by the end of the summer. A further promise was also given that all compulsory military service would end not later than the close of the financial year then running. With these concessions the Alliance agreed to forego a strike ballot.²¹

The summer of 1919 saw no abatement in the labor unrest. No sooner had the Sankey Commission issued its final report than trouble arose in the Yorkshire coal field through a patent blunder by the Coal Controller;²² troops were hurried to the coalfield, and naval ratings for the mine pumps, in direct contradiction of the principle expressed in Churchill's speech, quoted above. In the same month, July, occurred an unsuccessful strike of the Metropolitan Police, in protest against the Government bill prohibiting trade unionism in the police forces.²³ August saw half of the Liverpool police on strike, and that city the scene of wholesale riot and looting. In the Scotland Road, for instance, gangs of men went from store to store, broke in, switched on the lights, the better to pursue their object, and dragged pianos out into the street, utterly indifferent to the presence of soldiers, to volleys fired in the air, and even to direct rifle fire.²⁴ Railroad workers in Liverpool and London declared themselves ready and eager to strike in support of the police, whether or not their union executives approved of their action, believing that the Government bill against police unions was merely the "thin end of the wedge" against unions in general. On the most important of Britain's four "bank holidays," that in early August, "lightning strikes" took place on one of the London subways and on a railroad serving the south of England.²⁵

With this state of disturbed labor, and facing the definite refusal by Lloyd George's Government to abide by Justice Sankey's recommendations, the forces of the trade unions met for their regular annual congress at Glasgow, early in September. At that time the trade union movement included some 50 per cent of the "adult male manual-working wage earners"

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246; cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 687.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 232; cf. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²³ *London Times*, Aug. 4, 1919.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 5 and 6, 1919. The motormen on the City and South London Railway and more than five hundred locomotive engineers and firemen on the London and South Western struck work.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

of Britain, and the trade union funds amounted to nearly fifty million dollars. What seemed most lacking was energetic leadership, a leadership not sufficiently supplied by the existing Parliamentary Committee of the T. U. C.²⁵ That this was recognized by the delegates was evidenced by the reference back of that portion of the annual report which excused the inaction of the Parliamentary Committee. This Committee had steadily refused to call a special congress to decide what action should be taken on the demands of the Triple Alliance. This virtual vote of censure was carried by over 700,000 votes.²⁷

The miners appealed to the Trades Union Congress to support their demand for immediate nationalization of the mines on the basis of the Sankey report. Congress answered their appeal by pledging fullest cooperation with the miners in their efforts to compel the Government to adopt the scheme of national ownership, and agreed to call a special congress some two months later to decide upon drastic action, if the Government had not in the meantime yielded on this matter. The vote was overwhelming, a majority of nearly four and one-half million votes being cast in its favor.²⁸

In view of subsequent events in the railroad world, a speech by J. H. Thomas of the National Union of Railwaymen is of special interest. After congratulating the miners for their excellent showing during the hearings of the Sankey Commission, Thomas continued:

They have shown themselves statesmen in coming to the congress, because, had they attempted to take action "on their own," I should have been the first to condemn them.²⁹

Congress refused to pass a resolution condemning resort to "direct action," though Mr. Clynes again uttered his conservative warning:

It is far easier to get your men out than to get them back, and all the time your Government and the other remaining parts of the

²⁵ *The New Statesman*, August 30, 1919.

²⁶ Gerald Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 248; cf. Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 117. The vote was 2,586,000 to 1,876,000 in favor of reference back.

²⁷ *London Times*, Sept. 11, 1919; cf. Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

community, you imagine, will be doing nothing. . . Surely all experience is against all such lame and impotent conclusions as that. You cannot bring millions of men out to begin a great struggle like this without anticipating a condition of civil war.⁴⁰

THE RAILROAD STRIKE

The month of September ended with a bombshell, coming ironically enough from the very union whose secretary had just deprecated the possibility of the miners' taking action "on their own," without first appealing to their fellow unions. A sudden and drastic cessation of labor occurred on all the British railroads, that had an indirect but very important relation to the great strike of 1926. The actions of the railroad unions in 1926 were to no small degree motivated and controlled by the conclusions their leaders appear to have drawn from the experiences of the 1919 strike. On the other hand, a number of the lessons learned in the earlier strike by the Lloyd George Government were well utilized by the Baldwin Cabinet in 1926.

At the outbreak of the war the British Government had taken over some 130 British railroads under war emergency powers. The staffs of each line continued to take orders from their own companies, but a coordinating force was obtained by the establishment of a Railroad Executive Committee consisting of some twelve general managers. In September, 1919, the control of the railroads was transferred from the Board of Trade to the newly created Ministry of Transport. In actual fact that merely meant the transfer from the hands of Sir Auckland Geddes, President of the Board of Trade, to those of Sir Eric Geddes, his brother, who became the Minister for Transport.⁴¹ It was, therefore, with Government departments that the railroadmen had been conducting their negotiations for wage standardization on a post-war basis. This process of negotiation had been dragging on without any satisfactory settlement from the beginning of the year. It is doubtful if the Government intended to settle it satisfactorily to the unions,⁴² but the railroadmen's leaders

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴¹ *London Times*, Sept. 23, 1919; cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 836.

⁴² Sidney Webb suggests that the Government had made extensive preparations from early in February to break the rail strike which they felt sure would occur, once the men learned of the unfavorable wage terms.—*Cf.*

fully expected that the rates would be ultimately "standardized upwards," since the cost of living had not fallen, and since they had suspended their wage campaign just before the outbreak of the war.

On the principle of "divide and rule," the Government had, in August, made satisfactory terms with the most essential railroad workers, the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. In their case the war-bonus had been included in the new wage rates. The National Union of Railwaymen, the union of which J. H. Thomas was secretary, itself a recent amalgamation of several smaller unions, expected that ultimately the other grades would be treated at least on the same principle. The actual offer, termed "definitive" by Sir Auckland Geddes, provided a new wage scale, to become effective from the first day of the new year, in which every grade was to receive a wage reduction, varying from two to sixteen shillings a week. No hint was given, until the strike was in progress, that this "definitive" offer would not go into effect unless the cost of living had fallen to 110 per cent in excess of pre-war costs, nor was any intimation made that it would be a sliding scale, capable of rising if the living costs rose.⁴³

The railroad unions felt strongly that this threat of a wage reduction was but a forerunner of a wage cutting war in all the other industries.⁴⁴ The other unions believed that the railroadmen were bearing the brunt of this coming attack, and Smillie declared that "the Government were not fighting merely railwaymen in this matter." Considerable basis for this common belief was provided by Lloyd George's remark that "whatever we lay down with regard to the railwaymen, is going to be claimed throughout the country. Therefore we have to consider the cases of all the other trades."⁴⁵ In this particular aspect, then, the parallel between the railroadmen in 1919 and the coal miners in 1926, is surprisingly close.

The details of negotiations between the Ministry of Transport and the railroadmen's executives do not concern this study. So far as the general public was concerned, in the morning papers *op. cit.*, p. 238. "Standardization" implied the inclusion of the war-bonus in the regular wage.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ *The New Republic*, Nov. 19, 1919. Cf. Gerald Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁵ *London Times*, Sept. 29, 1919.

of September 24 there came, out of the blue sky, a warning from J. H. Thomas, of the National Union of Railwaymen, that there was trouble in the railroad world, and that a crisis was imminent. That the crisis was "news" to the miners and the Locomotive Engineers was admitted by Bromley and Smilie, who were quite unaware of the gravity of the situation until Thomas's statement appeared in the press.⁴⁶

Further negotiations failing, the members of the N. U. R. were called upon to cease work at midnight, Friday, September 26. Their membership in 1918 exceeded 400,000 men. The union of locomotive engineers and firemen—the A. S. L. E. and F—immediately joined the N. U. R. strikers, though they had just received a good wage settlement and expected to gain nothing for themselves. This meant an additional 50,000 men.⁴⁷ Trains ceased to run at the nearest convenient station for their engineers. A few long-distance trains which had started before the zero hour, struggled through to their destinations, by the aid of relays of drivers who themselves desired to reach a town somewhere along the route. Often the locomotives were uncoupled, driven to the roundhouse, and train and passengers left to fend for themselves at the stations. In many cases they converted the compartments into temporary homes, or else flooded the local hotels in search of board and lodging. Railroad gatemen left their charges, and the few remaining engineers and firemen had to stop at each crossing and attend to their own gates. A train from London to Liverpool turned up, off its route, at Wigan, whither it had been diverted by railroad employees intent on reaching home. Not even the Americans on board could obtain rail transport to the docks. One courageous man, bound for a South African boat, commandeered a trolley car for himself and his baggage, and traveled therein all the rest of the way to Liverpool.⁴⁸

So sudden was the strike and so little expected by industry and the general public that industrial coal supplies were totally inadequate, unlike 1926.⁴⁹ In the Clyde area, for example, stocks of coal never had been lower, and unemployment on a large scale

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Sept. 24, Oct. 2, 1919.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1918.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1918.

⁴⁹ Export of coal was temporarily prohibited.—*Cf. Times*, Sept. 29, 1918.

was the immediate result. As bunker coals were lacking, the congestion at the docks, already considerable, threatened to become most serious, unless ships could leave when their cargoes were discharged. In Liverpool the men at the Mersey Tunnel pumping station were called out, and their places were ultimately taken by naval men.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS

As already suggested, the strike did not find the Government nearly so unprepared as the general public. The secret circular referred to above is but one indication of this. Winston Churchill's inclusion of "transport" among those vital services for the preservation of which the Government was prepared "to intervene by every means in its power, including the use of military and naval forces,"⁵⁰ demonstrated the official attitude. Another indication was the Mansion House speech of Lloyd George, immediately after the strike ended, wherein he admitted that he concluded this trouble was coming as far back as February, and that his Home Secretary at once built up an organization to meet just such a crisis.⁵¹

The Government's preparations showed themselves in action the moment the strike broke out. All leave and all demobilization were instantly stopped, naval officers and men being brought back to their quarters by automobile wherever necessary.⁵² As the Defense of the Realm Act was still in force the Government retained control of food supplies and food rationing. Through its 11,000 officials the Ministry of Food was well aware of the food requirements in the various parts of Britain. The distribution of food by road, by means of the large number of Government-owned trucks and vehicles, manned by an abundant supply of army-trained drivers, was a simple enough process.⁵³ The whole scheme of road distribution had been worked out long before the strike occurred. Britain had been divided into divisional areas,

⁵⁰ At Mansion House Oct. 7; cf. *Daily Herald*, Oct. 8, 1919, and Lloyd George's preface to George Glasgow, *General Strikes and Road Transport*, p. 10.

⁵¹ *London Times*, Sept. 27 and 29, 1919.

⁵² George Glasgow, *General Strikes and Road Transport*, p. 20. The sale of Government trucks, through the Ministry of Munitions, was suspended and all available vehicles placed at the disposal of the Food Ministry.

each under its own Commissioner and staff. All that was required to start the machinery in motion was a single code-word telegram to each Commissioner.

Mr. G. H. Roberts, one-time labor M. P. for Norwich, then Food Controller, declared a state of emergency to exist, and by so doing enabled his officials to requisition any vehicle required, in addition to the Government-owned trucks remaining from the war. Most of the important food commodities were at once strictly rationed, hoarding prohibited, and even the quantities served at restaurant and hotel meals strictly regulated. Each Divisional Food Commissioner was given power to fix maximum prices for food, where that had not already been done.⁵³

As in 1926, so in 1919, London's milk supply was one of the most urgent problems. A milk "pool" in Hyde Park, served wholly by road transport in the first few days, was immediately established in accordance with previous plans. Over one thousand Government trucks were engaged in this work, covering daily some 72,000 miles. The farmers took their milk churns to pre-arranged centers and the Government trucks collected them. Nine thousand churns daily were so collected. The distant milk supply, from such counties as Cheshire, was, of course, completely cut off, and London had to rely upon neighboring counties for fresh milk, and upon large stores of canned milk.

The trucks returning to the country with the empty milk churns carried food supplies to those districts, as far as space permitted. These food supplies had been moved from the docks to Hyde Park by horse transport.⁵⁴ (This aspect of the conflict was not seen in 1926, when other forms of transport besides the railroads ceased to function, and the London Docks were tightly closed until the fifth day of the strike.) Similar milk pools were organized in other large cities, five thousand Government trucks being put into this service.

Other vital food supplies besides that of milk were planned. Yeast, of which over seven hundred tons weekly was used by bakeries and housewives, was an essential and had to be fresh. Most of it was produced in distilleries in Scotland and Ireland, and in normal times was distributed by the Irish mail and the fast trains. During the strike of 1919 this supply was brought

⁵³ *London Times*, Sept. 27, 1919.

⁵⁴ *London Times*, Sept. 28, 1919.

by Admiralty vessels, landed at convenient ports, thence conveyed in bulk to distribution centers, and finally distributed in small Ford delivery vans to the doors of those who had need of it.

Of other foodstuffs, the Ministry of Food had been carefully laying in stocks at certain inland centers, both for their own use and for the trade, so that the strain on road transport would be lightened if, or when, a strike occurred.⁵⁴ Large supplies of fresh fish, live poultry, vegetables, and similar perishable commodities were held up on the rails when the strike broke out. Some of the wholesalers endeavored to manage their own unloading of these goods, and to some extent the Government motor trucks to and from the countryside, and from Grimsby fish docks, eked out the stocks on hand.⁵⁵

Through the press an official appeal to the citizens was issued, asking for abstention from all unnecessary use of the telephone, telegraph, and postal services; for aid in lodging, protection, food, and repairs for motor truck drivers; for actual trained locomotive engineers, firemen, signalmen, and other rail workers; for volunteers experienced in the organization and control of steam and gasoline road transport; for extreme economy in gasoline, since "every gallon used needlessly means less food for the people"; and finally an appeal for wireless operators and special constables. The official notice ended with the characteristic phrase "Fight for the Life of the Community."⁵⁷

This was, indeed, the keynote struck by almost all the official and semi-official utterances on the railroadmen's strike. "The issue," declared the *London Times*, "raised by the Railwaymen's Executive . . . is perfectly clear. It is whether we are to be governed by the Government and by Parliament or by the executive of a trade union. . . . The strike is . . . an attack on the community, an attempt to starve them into surrender. . . . If successful it would mean the end of representative government and the power of Parliament."⁵⁸

Those who have studied the comments of the press and politicians upon the general strike of 1926, will recognize the familiar

⁵⁴ *London Times*, Sept. 28, 1919. These food reserves cost the Government some \$800,000, and the Emergency Food Organisation some \$2,800,000. Cf. George Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Editorials in the *London Times*, Sept. 28, 1919.

ring of this argument, applied in this case, however, to a very much smaller section of the organized working class. Premier Lloyd George, in a telegram to his Carnarvon Constituency, complained of the absence of at least a week's notice by the striking rail workers, and alluded to "this anarchist conspiracy"—a phrase so utterly inapplicable to leaders such as J. H. Thomas, and to the history of the railroad unions' long negotiations, as to be in itself one of the bitterest causes of continued refusal to work by the railwaymen.

Further provocative utterance was forthcoming from the *Times* on the first Monday after the outbreak of the strike. Commenting, with evident intention, upon the arrest of the Winnipeg general strike leaders in June of the same year, the *Times* declared that when the ten leaders were apprehended "the strike collapsed as a bubble pricked."⁵⁹ The editorial recalled these facts because they showed "the risks in which labor leaders who defy the State necessarily involved themselves." Therein lay a plain suggestion to the Government to arrest Thomas, Cramp, Bromley, and the rest of the railroadmen's leaders, to whom it alluded as "this junta of unknown and irresponsible men called an Executive Committee."

There was considerable fear of actual revolution at this time. Letters to the *Times* suggested it,⁶⁰ the *Times* itself spoke of "an effort to stampede all Trade Unionism into a general strike" in order to have Parliament dissolved, and J. H. Thomas admitted that he was conducting the strike himself because he knew the dangers of a revolution, and that at the start he had been most unwilling to have other unions drawn into the conflict.⁶¹ Later he asserted that the nation was nearer a civil war than it ever had been before.⁶²

The *Times* voiced something of the unspoken feeling of the public when it said, "the anxiety of the public has been aroused by the seditious Bolshevik propaganda, by advocacy of 'direct action,' and by the revolutionary schemes associated with the names of Mr. Cramp, Mr. Smillie, and other misleaders of

⁵⁹ A letter from Sir West Ridgway in the *Times*, Oct. 1, suggested that "there was grave danger of a revolution."

⁶⁰ *London Times*, Oct. 1, 1919.

⁶¹ Arthur Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

labor."⁵² Lloyd George's refusal at the outset to negotiate with the railroadmen until the strike had been called off, was similar to the Government attitude in 1926, but Lloyd George changed his mind as the strike continued, whereas the Baldwin Cabinet remained adamant. It was the Government's call, on October 3, for a Citizens' Guard, foreshadowed by a *Times* editorial on Labor Volunteers,⁵³ that really drove the iron into the public soul. Here, it seemed, *White Guard* and *Red Guard* were forming under their very eyes, and the extra show of good humor hitherto adopted by the public, to hide their unspoken fears, became rather weak and unreal.

In point of fact what little possibility of revolution there was, arose from the provocative attitude of the Government,⁵⁴ and the bias shown by the press, which freely repeated the myth about the "anarchist conspiracy." In spite of press exaggeration there was practically no disorder and no attempt to injure property. The Government was allowed, without any obstruction, to bring into force its elaborate plan for road transport and food distribution. The attitude of the press and the Government merely hardened the railroadmen's determination, and at the close of the struggle a larger number of men were signing the strike roll than at the start.⁵⁵

Unlike a coal mine strike, a railroad strike weakens as it progresses, and in this it closely resembles any general strike. On the evening of the first day, Saturday, September 27, the Government admitted that the stoppage of the train service was practically complete. How complete was the response to union orders can be seen in the story of the midnight express from Manchester to London, Friday night, and from the following comment of the *Times*:

⁵² *London Times*, Oct. 2, 1919. Mr. Cramp, of the National Union of Railwaymen, had been an advocate of "direct action" in the recent congresses.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1919. Cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

⁵⁴ The Government ordered the companies to withhold a week's pay for service already rendered by the railroadmen. The campaign of attack on the men in the press was personally directed by one of the Prime Minister's secretaries. Cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 541. The *Times*, Oct. 3, spoke of the Government's order to withhold pay as a "capital blunder" showing "a deplorable inability to understand the situation."

⁵⁵ S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

subways a very brief training sufficed to pass the Board of Trade examiner.⁷⁰ As far as the union locomotive engineers were concerned, there was little defection. John Bromley, leader of the A. S. L. E. and F. expressed his belief "that this is going to be a very long and severe struggle. As far as we are concerned, as trade unions go, we are among the wealthiest, and consequently we ourselves can hold out a long while. . . . I think I am not too optimistic in saying that we should really not feel a six weeks' strike."⁷¹ Bromley was the most outspoken critic of the miners in 1926 for expecting the railroadmen to stay out on strike for even a few days. Whether the 1919 conflict taught him that his "optimism" was too great, or whether the length of time that his union could "stay out" depended upon the cause for which it was fighting, is likely to be a matter of controversy for some time to come.

Happily, nothing approaching a six weeks' strike was necessary. The strike had started at midnight on Friday, September 27, and on Tuesday, September 30, J. H. Thomas declared that he would no longer hold out against allowing other unions to strike in sympathy. The Transport Workers' Federation called a gathering of delegates from unions likely to be affected if the strike should spread. A deputation from this conference to Mr. Lloyd George met with no success. There ensued two more days of futile negotiation on the part of this committee of fourteen men, appointed by the conference from unions not yet involved and from the Parliamentary Labor party. It was then decided to call a general conference of trade unions for Tuesday, October 7, to consider the whole position.

Immediately it was widely assumed by the press that this conference was to be a preliminary to a general strike of all trades, and it was then that the Government countered with the proposition of a Citizens' Guard.⁷² In point of fact the committee of fourteen was far more of a conciliation committee than a strike body. By every means within its power it sought to avoid a spread of the strike, and on Sunday, October 5, it succeeded in achieving a settlement. The terms of settlement were a distinct victory for the railroadmen and for labor in general.⁷³ The strike

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Oct. 1 and 3, 1919.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1919.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1919.

ended, the conference of all the unions was cancelled. Had it met there can be little doubt but that its vote would have been for a general strike. As it was the union executives had experienced greatest difficulty in keeping many other transport groups from joining the railroadmen.⁷⁴

THE EFFECT OF THE STRIKE

The primary lesson of the strike learned by the public and the Government was the fact that neither railroads nor railroadmen were as indispensable as had been supposed. Slow as the civil development of road transport had been in Britain down to the war, it had, nonetheless, been amply sufficient to show what could be done in an emergency; but, up till the actual strike, few people had realized the extent to which changed methods of transport had made possible this temporary displacement of the railroads in the national economy. London, and all large cities, had faced the problem of cessation of suburban trains by mobilizing every available mode of road transport, in addition to the trolley and bus services, which were, of course, still running as usual, unlike 1926. A large number of employees were kept upon the premises in temporary barracks, and lodged and fed at their actual places of work.⁷⁵ The Government had made its plans with a completeness not suspected by the public, which was almost panic-stricken in the first day or two of the stoppage. The railroadmen had certainly little inkling of the degree of preparation so made.

In the second place, the importance of the skilled mechanic was shown to be less than had been believed. A few properly trained men, with the aid of numerous willing volunteers, were

⁷⁴ Wages were stabilized at their existing level until September 20, 1920. (A gain of nine months on the existing agreement.) All withheld back pay was to be paid upon resumption of work. No adult railroadman was to receive less than 51 shillings a week as long as the cost of living exceeded 110 per cent above pre-war levels. No victimizing either by the men or the rail executives was to be permitted. This last pledge was received unwillingly by the strikers, who had no desire to work alongside "blacklegs."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1919.

⁷⁶ *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1919. The advertising columns of the press carried many announcements similar to the following: "Conveyance required for one passenger from London to Nottingham, Oct. 3rd, or soon after, commercial or private." "90 h.p. landaulette leaves London for Norwich, Sat. Oct. 4, four vacant seats at three pounds each." Cf. *London Times*, Oct. 2, 1919.

The passengers were on board, trusting to the promise of the driver to go as far as Derby. The signal remained obstinately at danger, and the response to the engine's whistle was the darkening of the signal-box, the signalmen having gone on strike punctually to the minute.⁶⁵

The suddenness of the strike and the action of the men in leaving their work without the statutory notice took the railway companies completely by surprise and brought the Government railway systems of the country to a complete standstill. Large numbers of passengers were stranded far from their destination and innumerable freight trains were left standing on the lines, their fires still burning. To effect this *coup* the leaders of the men had laid their plans deep and well. Motor-cars were waiting at pre-arranged points to take engine drivers, firemen and guards off the trains and convey them back to their homes; and engine drivers who had brought trains to London from remote parts of the country were induced to refuse to take the trains back by the promise of being sent back to their homes by motor-car.⁶⁷

On the last complete day of the strike, however, Friday, October 3, the total number of passenger trains run exceeded four thousand, excluding some nine hundred run on the London subway systems. By the same date nearly six hundred freight trains were run, and much perishable freight was carried on passenger trains.⁶⁸

That the walk-out of the two great railroad unions concerned was complete can be gathered from the comment of the *Times*. "Had it not been for the loyalty of the clerical staffs it would have been impossible to overcome the difficulties of resuming a train service."⁶⁹ This "clerical staff," in so far as it was organized in a union, belonged to the Railway Clerks' Association, which had enjoined its members to remain strictly neutral and not to undertake any labor performed normally by other grades. That this neutrality was not kept, or that the membership of the union was by no means as large as it was in 1926, must be evident from the *Times* comment.

By a process of lengthening the signal "blocks" very considerably, a few available signalmen were spread thinly over the required areas and some skeleton service was attained. A few volunteer engine drivers were pressed into service, and on the

⁶⁵ *London Times*, Sept. 26, 1919.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1919.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1919.

able to run at least skeleton services and handle the necessary machinery without undue damage or accident, for at least a brief period of time. And time, of course, is the essential factor of victory in transport or general strikes.

A further lesson learned from the strike was the possibility of a national transport stoppage without rioting or loss of life. Save for the increased number of street accidents, for one or two attempts to damage trains by displacing signals or greasing the tracks, and a few court cases of over-enthusiastic pickets, there was nothing even approaching the civil disturbance that had marked the occasion of the Liverpool Police strike earlier in the year.⁷⁸

On the labor side the most important lesson learned was the urgent need for more complete *industrial* action on the railroads. The "white collar men," clerks, supervisors, inspectors, and stationmasters, had been the weak spot of the railroad labor army. They had enabled the railroad companies to put on skeleton services more rapidly and completely than would otherwise have been possible. At the same time the amount of unity of action shown by the skilled crafts in the A. S. L. E. and F. with the less skilled grades which largely composed the N. U. R., was a sign of the possibility of coöperation between erstwhile rival unions. The evident gain for the railroadmen in the settlement, and the no less evident yielding to pressure on the part of the Government, taught labor another lesson. It seemed to prove anew to leaders and ranks that, given stubborn and united action by labor on the industrial field, the Government must yield to their demands. There can be no question that this idea, and the further experience of the effect of general strike threats in 1920 and 1925, had a great deal to do with the ultimate struggle of 1926.

In the year or two preceding 1919 an insurgent movement had been growing in the ranks of the National Union of Railwaymen, trying perpetually to influence the policy of the union executive. Local "vigilance committees" had been set up, in various parts of the country, by the union branches. The most ardent, and usually the most extreme, of the local leaders would get appointed to these committees, which became fruitful grounds for

⁷⁸ *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1919.

extremist views and agitation. Distinct from these "vigilance committees," and with the sanction of the Union's Executive, were the *district councils*, formed by the branches, limited to propaganda work and consultation, and linked together by periodic national conferences. In actual practice the more advanced minds in railroadmen's ranks found their channel of expression through these two organizations, the "vigilance committees" and the "district councils." Movements for higher wages and shorter hours would be initiated in one or more of these groups.

It was, perhaps, pressure from this quarter that explained the plea of J. H. Thomas that his Executive were forced to act by the rank and file of his union, whereas the general public seemed to find comparatively little enthusiasm for the strike among the majority of the railroadmen. It may even throw some light upon the most significant terms of settlement after the great strike of 1926, wherein the railroad unions undertook:

8a. Not again to instruct their members to strike without previous negotiations with the Companies.

8b. To give no support of any kind to their members who take any unauthorized action.

The general strike of 1926 in effect put a power in the hands of the railroad union Executive not hitherto possessed. Those two provisions completely centralized the strike-calling and strike-approving powers in the Executive of the N. U. R., and placed that Executive in a more strategic position to refuse advice and resist pressure from the extreme voices on the "vigilance committees" and the "district councils" than was the case before the 1919 outbreak.

This theory receives further support from a speech of J. H. Thomas delivered at the annual conference of the National Union of Railwaymen at Weymouth, immediately after the general strike of 1926. Thomas was referring to the settlement terms signed by the railroadmen's leaders:

They had signed a clause to the effect that never again would there be a railway strike until a discussion and negotiations had taken place with the Railway Companies. Such a clause had never previously appeared in any agreement they had made, but they believed

it was necessary and fair, and they intended to give effect to it. They had even gone beyond that, and had given an assurance that they would pledge themselves not to support unofficial strikes.¹⁷

In view of Thomas's most unequivocal approval of the Miners' reference of their case to the Trades Union Congress before resorting to any form of direct action, a speech delivered but two weeks before this most uncoöperative act on the part of his own railroad union, one is forced to certain conclusions. Either Mr. Thomas, wise statesman that he was, foresaw an appeal to strike action by the Triple Alliance or by the Special Congress that was shortly to meet, for the enforcement of mine nationalization and the other demands of the Triple Alliance; or else, against his will, he was forced into a strike to avoid complete anarchy among the more urgent of his own ranks.

In the former case Mr. Thomas's union would have been called into the thick of the battle for the miners and would have gained nothing for itself but would have risked a great deal and have lost vast sums from the union treasury, as was the case in 1926. Feeling that such a struggle was all but inevitable in the superheated labor atmosphere of that year, Thomas would prefer to seek the battle on his own terms and for his own union, with possibly a subconscious thought that one good strike would either wring a victory from the Government and make it easier to gain the other demands without the perilous resort to a national general strike, or, if a failure, would again prevent a general strike by providing a warning to labor of their opponents' unexpected strength. The writer is inclined to believe that the pressure of the extremists in the N. U. R. ranks gave Mr. Thomas an opportunity and an excuse that he was not gravely averse to taking, for the reasons already stated.

Contemporary comment and subsequent events seem to bear out this conclusion. The *London Times* remarked editorially.

Since January the threat of the Triple Alliance has been hanging continuously over our heads, reinforced from time to time by the particular threat of one or other of its component sections. That of the miners is still hanging in the air, and this very month they secured the formal backing of the Trades Union Congress. *Now the railwaymen have anticipated them, probably to the annoyance of the willier*

¹⁷J. H. THOMAS, speaking at the annual conference of the N. U. R. at Weymouth, July 4, 1926.—*The Railway Review*, July 16, 1926, p. 2.

*strategists behind the scenes. The actual crisis has come very suddenly, and has evidently taken the other unions as well as most railwaymen by surprise.*⁷⁸

It is significant that the new wage scale contained in the Government offer was not, *in any case*, to come into effect until January 1, 1920, or three months later.⁷⁹ If there had not been unbearable pressure from below, or if the N. U. R. Executive had not possessed the gravest distaste to participating in a general strike with the other parties of the Triple Alliance, the normal process to have followed would have been to place their own case before the special meeting of Congress along with the demand for the nationalization of the mines, and to have withheld the actual strike until nearer the New Year. As it was, nearly 350,000 other workers were thrown out of employment, gaining nothing from the strike, and the loss to the nation approximated \$250,000,000, while the railroad unions spent some \$1,500,000 in strike pay. Furthermore, this demonstration that national control of the railroads afforded no remedy for industrial unrest, was turned in argument against the miners in their demand for nationalization.⁸⁰

Two minor lessons of the railroad strike that had considerable subsequent effect, especially at the time of the general strike, are worthy of notice here. The press, with scarcely an exception, took an attitude toward the demands and the acts of the railroadmen that seemed extremely unfair to organized labor. Before the end of the strike this attitude had been changed to some degree, partly because the Labor Research Department promptly counteracted the Government "strike news" bulletin, supplied daily to the press, with an effective stream of informative publicity to which the press gave space; partly to the actual full page, paid advertisements in the *London Times* and other papers, issued by the railroadmen, stating their case and forcing the Government to make similar statements in return; and partly to a revolt of compositors and printers' assistants, who threatened to strike and stop the newspapers completely unless the railroadmen were allowed to present their case in the press, and

⁷⁸ Sept. 27, 1919. Italics ours.

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1919.

⁸⁰ W. A. Orton, *Labour in Transition*, p. 221.

unless abusive posters were abandoned.⁵¹ It was largely the experience with the press during this railroad strike of 1919 that made the General Council decide to stop all the newspapers in the general strike of 1926. One may understand that decision, even while disagreeing with its wisdom.

The other lesson learned was the absolute necessity of a "central executive empowered to act for the whole body of Trade Unionism in negotiating with the Government."⁵² Such was the view of Mr. Harry Gosling, President of the National Federation of Transport Workers:

At present each unit of labor has a substantial head, but there is no head at all for the whole Labor Movement when it comes to the matter of industrial action. This new body would be similar in constitution to the executive of the Trades Union Congress but more closely knit, more powerful and more readily brought into action. You may argue that such a body would be a danger to the State, because it would be a rival to the executive of Parliament, which is the Cabinet. . . . *The time has come when the political Cabinet must take an industrial partner.*⁵³

Already at the Trades Union Congress just closed, at Glasgow, a resolution had been passed, with little discussion, instructing the Parliamentary Committee to prepare a scheme "whereby the trade unions in the future will, on all questions of national and international importance, adopt a common policy and speak with a united voice."⁵⁴ Pressed by the urgent need shown by the railroad strike and its mediation and settlement by an *ad hoc* trade union committee, the Parliamentary Committee presented to the special meeting of Congress, held in December, 1919, a report in which the case for the creation of a permanent and effective central body for the whole industrial labor movement was stated. The ultimate outcome of this report was the formation of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.⁵⁴

At this same special gathering of the Trades Union Congress in December, it was further decided to carry on an intensive

⁵¹ S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 542; for typical advertisements see *London Times*, Oct. 2 and 3, 1919. The parallel advertisements of strikers and Government brought progressively better offers from the Government!

⁵² *London Daily News*, Oct. 7 and 8, 1919. ⁵³ Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁵⁴ *The Story of the T. U. C.* (General Council pamphlet, No. 1), p. 10; cf. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 573-75.

educational campaign for the nationalization of the mines, and for two months every effort was made to rouse political interest in the matter. The complete lack of success was only too evident at the re-convened Congress on March 11, 1920, when, faced with the definite question of a general strike for the enforcement of nationalization, the assembled unions rejected the proposal by 3,870,000 votes to 1,050,000.²⁴ The lightning strike of the railroadmen in 1919 had done its work most effectively, and the miners were left stranded with nothing but their own forces for any battle that might be forthcoming. It was natural enough that, failing to get unity of industrial action on the national program, the miners "followed the crowd" and henceforth proceeded to agitate for mere wage increases, a futile circular policy that their young secretary, Frank Hodges, had bitterly fought, so long as any chance remained for a more thorough reconstruction of the whole coal industry.

Not until the summer of 1920 did the possibility of a general strike come once again before the labor councils, and, when it came, it was on a matter of more than national importance. Not content with many special Trades Union Congresses since the armistice, two more were to be held before the regular annual meeting in September. The first was called for July 13 in the Central Hall, Westminster, to consider the critical situation in Ireland. Once again Frank Hodges and Smillie of the Miners' Federation were the moving spirits for direct action. The resolution presented by the miners protested against British military domination of Ireland, demanded the withdrawal of the troops from that country, and the cessation of production of munitions intended for use against Ireland and Russia. In case the Government refused these demands a general strike was recommended. The delegates passed this resolution by 2,760,000 to 1,636,000.²⁵

THE "COUNCIL OF ACTION"

A threat of large-scale military action by Britain in support of Poland in the Russo-Polish war then in progress, was the cause of the next gathering of the union forces. On August 4 and 5

²⁴ W. A. Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-23; cf. Felix Morley, "Behind the British Coal Crisis," *The Nation* (N. Y.), Oct. 13, 1920, p. 403.

²⁵ H. W. L. Dana, "Three Revolutionary Trades Union Congresses," *Socialist Review* (N. Y.), Nov. 1920, p. 161.

Arthur Henderson had appealed to the local Labor parties and the trade unions to organize demonstrations against a possible war. This was not felt to be adequate pressure against the forces that were making for war, so a joint conference was called at the House of Commons, August 9, representing the Labor members in Parliament, the Labor party, and the Trades Union Congress.⁸⁷ At this joint conference the following resolution was adopted:

That this Joint Conference feels certain that war is being engineered between the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia on the issue of Poland, and declares that such a war would be an intolerable crime against humanity; it therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organized workers will be used to defeat this war; that the Executive Committee of affiliated organizations throughout the country be summoned to hold themselves ready to proceed immediately to London for a National Conference; that they be advised to instruct their members to "down tools" on instructions from that National Conference; that a Council of Action be immediately constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect.

This Council of Action consisted of five representatives from each of the three groups, the Trades Union Congress, the Labor members in the House, and the Labor party, and some nine other co-opted members. The Triple Alliance was well represented on the Council of Action, but a much wider constituency was covered in its membership.⁸⁸ Local Councils of Action were hastily formed throughout the country, and on Friday, August 13, there met at Westminster over one thousand delegates, in response to the call issued four days previously by the Joint Conference.⁸⁹

Chairman Adamson, himself a Member of Parliament, opened the special Congress by declaring that the labor movement would take whatever steps were necessary to prevent war between Britain and Russia. Ernest Bevin, of the Transport and General

⁸⁷ *The Council of Action, Report of the Special Conference on Labour and the Russian-Polish War, in the Central Hall, Westminster, on Friday, August 13, 1920*, p. 7. Hereafter referred to as *The Council of Action*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Among the members were Smilie and Hodges; Cramp, Thomas, and Bromley; Gosling, Robert Williams, and Bevin; Clynes, Lansbury, and Wedgwood.

⁸⁹ Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 178; cf. W. A. Ortem, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

Workers' Union, reported on the formation and deeds of the Council of Action, their telegram to French and Italian Socialists, their interview with Lloyd George, and their telegraphic interchange with Russia. To the Government they had made it clear that labor was as interested in Polish independence as any member of the Cabinet, but that British labor opposed direct or indirect war with Russia, even to the point of refusing munitions and materials of war to other nations who would prolong the conflict. Speaking of the organized trade union movement in general, Bevin concluded in a sentence that showed he was fully conscious of the proposed political use of industrial power:

Our great work in life until now has been mainly wages . . . but this question you are called upon to decide today . . . the willingness to take any action to win world peace . . . transcends any claim in connection with wages or hours of labor.⁵⁰

The surprising unanimity of feeling at this gathering of delegates can be seen in the speeches of conservative men like J. R. Clynes and J. H. Thomas. Clynes, who at the previous debates on direct action and the general strike had been one of its most masterly opponents, had now swung into line:

No Parliamentary or political measure, we felt, could be effective in themselves to save the country from being committed to war against its will. We felt that, as statesmen, contrary to their promises, had failed to establish an effective League of Nations to save us from war, we must be saved from war by an effective League of Labor action working upon lines to make it impossible to send a ship, a gun, a man, to send material or money for this nefarious purpose.⁵¹

J. H. Thomas, general secretary of the N. U. R. and president for that year of the Trades Union Congress, moved the resolution "That this Congress approves and endorses the action of the three national bodies in forming a Council of Action to deal with the present situation, arising from the policy of the Government towards the Russo-Polish War."⁵² He continued:

You are here as executive representatives. The carrying of this resolution means that you transfer your executive responsibility if need be to this Council. . . . This question is too important to be deter-

⁵⁰ *The Council of Action*, p. 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

mined by the Railwaymen, the Miners, the Transport Workers, or any other section. It is one to be determined by the whole British Trade Union Movement. The justification for transferring and delegating your executive responsibility is that the movement must act as a whole and not by sections.⁵³

Thomas declared that he had always opposed direct action where the same result could be obtained at the ballot box, but that:

No Parliamentary effort could do what we are asking you to do, and desperate as are our measures, dangerous as they are, we believe that the disease is so desperate and dangerous that it is only desperate and dangerous methods that can provide a remedy.⁵⁴

I do not want you to be under any misapprehension that giving effect to this resolution means a mere strike. When you vote for this resolution do not do so on the assumption that you are merely voting for a simple down-tools policy. It is nothing of the kind. If this resolution is to be given effect to, it means a challenge to the whole Constitution of the country.⁵⁵ (Cheers)

The chairman of the Labor Party's Executive Committee, Mr. A. G. Cameron, followed with another speech, that showed as clearly as did Thomas's how far the Council of Action was prepared to go with its "direct action."

Constitutionalism can only exist as long as it does not outrage the conscience of the community. . . . This is a serious moment in the history of this country. Never in that history has there been recognition of a Council of Action by the Government in power, and that is more significant still when you remember that Lloyd George told the Miners and the Railwaymen that all the resources of the State would be brought to bear against any section of the community that dared to use its strength against the State. . . . At the meeting on Monday, we were convinced that the position was so serious that even constitutions of Trade Unions had to be elastic enough to give permission to a united Council to declare action at a given moment. (Cheers). It is that power that is being asked for today. . . .⁵⁶

If the day should come when we do take this action, and if the powers that be, endeavor to interfere too much, we may be compelled to do things that will cause them to abdicate, and to tell them that if they cannot run the country in a peaceful and humane manner without

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16. Italics ours.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

interfering with the lives of other nations, we will be compelled, even against all constitutions, to chance whether we cannot do something to take the country into our own hands for our own people."¹⁰⁷

J. H. Thomas's resolution was carried unanimously, by the 689 delegates representing trade unions, and the 355 delegates from local Labor party branches or Trades Councils. As the vote was taken the delegates rose to cheer and sang the "Red Flag" and the "Internationale."¹⁰⁸ W. H. Hutchinson, of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, then moved a long resolution pledging the conference to "resist any and every form of military and naval intervention against the Soviet Government of Russia"; instructing the Council of Action to remain in being until (a) an absolute guarantee had been gained from the Government not to use British armed forces in any manner against Russia, (b) the blockade on Russia had been withdrawn, and (c) the Soviet Government had been recognized and commercial relationships reestablished; and authorizing the Council of Action to "call for any and every form of withdrawal of labor which circumstances may require to give effect to the foregoing policy."¹⁰⁹ After further oratory, in which Robert Williams of the Transport Workers warned the audience that they might have to be summoned "to sit regularly as a Committee of National Security," this resolution also was carried unanimously.¹¹⁰

The labor press carried headlines "All power to the Council of Action," as the revolutionists had said, in Russia, "All power to the Soviets." The *Morning Post*, organ of the ultra-conservatives, declared that "The dreaded Soviet has come at last," and *Punch*, never in recent years at all friendly to Labor's more extreme aims, published a cartoon showing a British working man standing on the ruins of the Houses of Parliament.¹¹¹ While general opinion was doubtful if a general strike could actually have been invoked successfully,¹¹² it remains true that no war occurred. On the following Monday, August 16, Mr. Lloyd George stated in the House of Commons that "The policy of the Government in regard to Poland and Russia would

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Italics ours.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. Italics ours.

¹⁰⁹ H. W. L. Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹² Cf. W. A. Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

appear to differ in no way from that enunciated at the Labor Conference." The press immediately began to speak as if the Government had never even thought of a serious war.¹⁰³

But for a curiously interesting little item in the *New York Times* the whole matter might have seemed a storm in a teacup. Under a diminutive headline "Reds' terms please Lloyd George" a copyright cable from Paris reported that France was more anxious over a Russo-German scheme to "establish a common frontier," than over the possible defeat of the Poles. "In fact," continued this very informative cable, "it is now possible to state that the matter was judged so grave here last week that the question of striking a sudden blow from the Rhine bridge-heads at Germany was seriously considered."¹⁰⁴ When it is borne in mind that the whole trouble had come to a head on the 8th of August, when Mr. Lloyd George had met the French Governmental and military representatives and had subsequently stated that war between Britain and Russia was imminent, the matter takes on a different aspect.¹⁰⁵ The *London Times*, at any rate, believed that the situation was grave enough on August 6 to assert:

It is a terrible truth that once more we stand upon the edge of a crisis, fraught with possibilities only less tragic than those that lowered over us in the first week of August six years ago. Mr. Henderson and his friends will do themselves no good service with the nation by summoning meetings of protest at such a time. . . .

It may be true that the general public of Great Britain was hostile to any further adventures in warfare on the part of their Government, and that organized labor merely brought that feeling to a head and gave it voice. Yet there is evidence that the Government more than once hesitated to take action lest by so doing it should bring trouble upon itself from the labor ranks. In a letter sent by Robert Williams, secretary of the National Transport Workers' Federation on February 18, 1921, to the other two groups in the *Triple Alliance*, it was stated that in May of 1919 the ex-Czarist General Golovin met with the British Secretary of State for War, Mr. Winston Churchill. General Golovin's comment on this interview follows:

¹⁰³ Dana, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1920, p. 2. Italics ours.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

Churchill was all the time very careful to avoid meeting Russian war representatives, being afraid of criticism on the part of the Left elements . . . Churchill told me the question of giving armed support was, for him, the most difficult; the reason for this was the opposition of the British working class to armed intervention.¹⁰⁶

If that reluctance, to give aid to anti-Soviet Russian generals in 1919, was due to the "British working class," which, at that time, meant the active groups of the Triple Alliance, how much more likely it was that the Lloyd George Government should hesitate to engage in actual direct warfare against Soviet Russia when a Council of Action, representing all the organized labor groups, had received such sudden and complete power for drastic and direct action on the matter. The writer is content to leave it at that.

As for the Council of Action, instructed to remain in existence until the blockade was withdrawn, and the Soviet Government recognized, as well as to gain guarantees against war with Russia, its very success in obtaining its major object seemed to destroy all its momentum, and all the impetus from labor ranks behind it. "The Council of Action was not dissolved; it ceased to exist. It was the last national rallying of the Labor forces before the slump."¹⁰⁷ The regular annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress, held at Portsmouth, during the second week in September, had no such dramatic purpose to fulfill as the two preceding special congresses. It did, however, take a very important step in the organization of a Trades Union "general staff," by adopting the scheme for a General Council of the Trades Union Congress.¹⁰⁸

By a vote of 4,800,000 to 1,700,000 Congress approved the dissolution of the old Parliamentary Committee and the substitution in its place of a general council of thirty-two members,¹⁰⁹ two of these being women, representing some eighteen trade groups. The first three groups, Mining and quarrying, Railroads, and Transport (other than railroad), were the con-

¹⁰⁶ National Transport Workers' Federation, *Report of the Eleventh Annual General Council Meeting, Edinburgh, 1921*, Appendix I, p. 192. Hereafter referred to as *Nat. Transport Workers' Fed. Report*.

¹⁰⁷ Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ *The General Council of the Trades Union Congress, Its Powers, Functions and Work*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Dana, *loc. cit.*; cf. Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

stituent parts of the Triple Alliance. When, as will be described below, the Triple Alliance met its fatal blow on "Black Friday," the larger and far more inclusive grouping of the new General Council of the T. U. C. gradually assumed the rôle of leader in industrial action.

The year was not to pass without more trouble both for the Government and the Triple Alliance. This time it was not an international problem but the perennial difficulty of the coal mines. In July the miners had claimed an increase in wage and a cut in the price of coal to the consumer, urging that the surplus on hand from coal profits should be so used. The Government had refused the double claim. The regular strike ballot was taken and strike notices were handed in, the strike to begin on the 25th of September. The other two partners of the Triple Alliance were called upon, after the decision, but after some days of discussion decided they could not declare for a stoppage in their own industries. When it became clear that the Miners would have to strike alone, they postponed their strike notices, dropped their proposition as to price reduction and drew up a new wage demand. A further strike ballot was taken and the stoppage began on October 16, 1920, lasting till November 3, when a five months' peace was patched up. An important outcome of this strike and the fear of the Triple Alliance taking part, was the passing of the Emergency Powers Act of 1920, which was so much used in the general strike of 1926.¹¹⁰

THE FAILURE OF THE "TRIPLE ALLIANCE"

The patent failure of the Triple Alliance was vividly recognized by all parties concerned. The National Transport Workers' Federation sent a communication to the other partners of the Alliance asking for a meeting to consider the question of reorganization. The Transport Workers' Executive recognized that the struggle by the miners was but postponed, and that the organization of the Government, used against the Railwaymen, had been developing ever since. When the renewed dispute was actually in progress in 1921, and the date of the stoppage had been fixed, the Miners were reminded by the

¹¹⁰ Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-77; cf. *Nat. Transport Workers' Fed. Report*, Appendix I, pp. 189, 192; cf. also p. 30.

Transport Workers that they had refused to help create the necessary machinery of common action in the intervening months. The significant answer given by the Miners was that they had thought they would never want the Triple Alliance again!¹¹¹

The crux of the difficulty in 1920, as in 1921, lay in the different methods by which the three constituent bodies decided upon a strike, and also on the very different conditions facing the mine workers and the rail and transport workers, in the event of a strike. In theory the three bodies composing the Alliance were to draw up their own demands and place them before their respective employers at one and the same time. Save for the accidental unanimity on reduction of hours this concerted action had never been practised. The Railwaymen and the Transport Workers were compelled to realize that if their organizations had suddenly to fight for their lives no material help could come to them from the Miners, until the latter organization had taken a ballot of members and obtained a two-thirds majority in support of a sympathetic strike. On the other hand, the two transport organizations, having the power to declare strike action through their respective Executives and delegate conferences, whenever circumstances required, were supposed to be in duty bound to declare a sympathetic strike immediately, if and when the Miners chose to take a satisfactory strike ballot.¹¹²

A transport strike, the unions pointed out to the Miners, to be at all successful, must be swift and overwhelming. To give a lengthy notice to the employers in railroad and transport undertakings enables them and the Government to make preparations to defeat the strike even before it commences. A transport strike must succeed in bringing its greatest pressure to bear in its first few days, upon the employers, the Government, or the community; otherwise the case of the transport workers is lost. This does not hold with a mine strike, where strike-breaking labor has never been contemplated. The Executives of the transport unions very justly argued that all the Governmental preparations, in road transport, in volunteers, in the Emergency Powers Act, were aimed, not directly at the coal miners,

¹¹¹ Ernest Bevin (Dockers' Union), at Annual meeting of National Transport Workers in Edinburgh, June, 1921, reported in *Reports of same*, pp. 50-51.

¹¹² *Nat. Transport Workers' Fed. Report*, Appendix I, pp. 195-96.

but at the railwaymen and the workers in the other transport unions. They complained bitterly enough that the Miners' Executive never seemed to recognize these difficulties that were peculiar to the transport trades.¹¹² It will be seen in the subsequent discussion of "Black Friday," and of the great strike of 1926, that the miners appeared to be constitutionally unable to grasp that difference in situation between themselves and their two partners in the Triple Alliance.

The Government was itself largely to blame for the next coal dispute. Negotiations had been carried on between the owners and the miners for some little while, when, quite suddenly, the Government announced that it intended to end Government control of the coal mines five months earlier than the date fixed in the Coal Mines Act of 1920. This brought the date of "decontrol" of the mines back to March 31. The fall in exports and the serious depression in trade had hastened the Government action. The public announcement of this change of mind was made on February 15, and at once the mine owners announced grave reductions in wages, thus imitating the Government method of shirking the financial responsibility. While the Decontrol Bill was still before Parliament and was meeting with strong opposition from the Labor party, the owners posted lock-out notices throughout the coalfields.¹¹⁴ The miners were nicely caught. Having abandoned their original strike of 1919 in exchange for a Royal Commission, accompanied with a solemn pledge of legal enactment of that Commission's recommendations, and having failed to bring in the Triple Alliance in October, 1920, the miners had steadily lost strategic power as the post-war boom flared up and died.

The signing of the Armistice had averted a very serious coal famine in the United Kingdom, and many months had to pass before the returned soldiers, even where not disabled, could be re-trained for work at their old task of coal mining.¹¹⁵ All of Europe was coal-hungry. In the false boom that followed the end of the war, there seemed to be no limit to which it would not go to gain its fuel. But the output was still severely re-

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Appendix I, *passim*.

¹¹³ Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

¹¹⁴ Sir R. A. S. Redmayne, *The British Coal-Mining Industry during the War*, p. 198.

stricted. The returning miners found difficulty in getting back the "habitude" of mining that had been theirs. Many pits were in poor condition as a result of war-time exploitation. The fear of nationalization possibly deterred some owners from further developing their property. Export prices rose out of sight, though domestic prices, under Government control, did not vary so violently. Through 1919 and most of 1920 this meretricious prosperity continued. Coal exports in 1920, though ten million tons less in amount, brought in twenty-eight million pounds sterling more in value than the previous year.¹¹⁶ The Government had guaranteed the coal industry an export price of 72 shillings per ton and the wages of miners had risen after the short October strike.¹¹⁷

At the close of 1920, suddenly and unexpectedly, the crash came. French and Belgian mines were recovering from a six-year idleness. German reparations in coal found their way to France. The United States, finding European high prices profitable added its quota, and the combined result brought British export prices down with a run. The Government was threatened with heavy losses, unless it could swiftly shift the burden to the shoulders of the mine owners. As the owners strongly objected to being made the scapegoat, there was nothing left but to take the loss out of the miners' wages.

This study is not concerned with the details of the coal mine problem, except in so far as that problem gave occasion for threatened or actual recourse to the general strike weapon. The trouble in the spring of 1921 did very closely relate to the possible use of the general strike in that year and, even more, form the basis of the difficulties out of which came the great national strike of 1926.

In answer to the Government's *fait accompli* of decontrol, and to the proposed severe wage reduction by the employers, the Miners placed their demands of a national system of wage regulation, which had been obtained under State control, as against the old method of a district wage basis; and the establishment of a national "Pool." The Pool would draw on the financial surplus in one coalfield in order to maintain wages in another field at the level fixed by a national wages board. The owners

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

refused both pleas and set the lock-out date for April 1, the day after the mines left the Government control. Frank Hodges, secretary of the Miners' Federation, describes the scene:

The fatal April 1st arrived. The day was appropriate. Every miner in the country, every so-called "safety man," every surface worker, had received notice from his employers to terminate his contract of employment by that date. . . . never before had there been anything in the nature of a national lock-out. The new lock-out involved all the workmen, including those whose business it was to look after the safety of the mines. Immediately this happened the coal owners and the Government realised their mistake. They began to ask for the "safety men" at least to be kept on. . . . but it was too late, for the miners had decided that the notices should take their course.¹¹⁸

Not until March 31, 1921, was there a meeting of the three Executives of the partners in the Triple Alliance.¹¹⁹ The Miners stated the situation and, officially and formally as required by the constitution of the Triple Alliance, asked for the assistance of the other two bodies. The National Transport Workers' Federation could not pledge itself then and there, but informed the Miners that a special Conference of the Executive Councils of all the Federation's affiliated unions was to be held on April 5, and that the Miners' appeal would be placed before that conference. The N. U. R. had arranged a special delegate meeting for the following day.¹²⁰

The Conference of affiliated unions of the Transport Workers' Federation sat for three days, April 5 to 7, and unanimously decided "to give all the assistance in their power to whatever extent was necessary" to help the Miners. The N. U. R. delegates resolved, at their conference, that

The conditions offered to the Miners are such that they are justified in refusing to accept; they feel that if such conditions are accepted it would be only the beginning of a general attack upon working class conditions, and an attempt to bring about a pre-war standard of life.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Frank Hodges, *My Adventures as a Labor Leader*, pp. 121-22. Herbert Smith admitted subsequently that in this matter the miners' leaders had yielded to majority pressure against their better judgment. Cf. John R. Raynes, *Coal and Its Conflicts*, p. 101.

¹¹⁹ At Unity House, headquarters of the N. U. R.

¹²⁰ *Nat. Transport Workers' Fed. Report*, p. 198. ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 201.

The Transport Workers' Executive was meanwhile authorized to expend some two thousand pounds in press advertising, so that the need of the Miners and the urgency of coöperation by the affiliated unions of the Transport Workers might be clearly understood by all their rank and file.

A long and detailed statement of the Miners' case was the result, published in the advertising pages of the principal daily newspapers. The Executive of the Transport Workers' Federation pointed out the peril to all unions if the Miners were defeated; that the domestic coal consumer had been protected by Government control from the forces of demand and supply; that some seven hundred and fifty million pounds sterling had been provided in financial assessment to the domestic consumers in this way; and that, logically, it was not fair to throw the coal producers suddenly upon the mercies of the law of supply and demand, now that the coal supplies were adequate for the domestic demand at reasonable prices. The advertisement continued:

Be ready! Within a short period you may be called upon to render all the assistance at your disposal to the Miners' Federation and to the Triple Alliance, of which you are a part. The mine workers and the Miners' Federation must be encouraged and supported, even to the extent of the withdrawal of the labor of every Transport Worker in the country.

The Transport Workers were warned not to be deceived by press reports as to the wilful damage occurring in the mines due to the cessation of work of all the safety men:

The damage, if any, up to the present is negligible, and for such damage as there may be the employers, who tendered notices to all and sundry, are entirely responsible.¹²²

On Friday, April 8, a full conference of the three Executives of the Triple Alliance was held, at which the Transport Workers and the N. U. R. agreed upon the following resolution:

That this joint meeting of the Executives of the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Workers' Federation gives notice to their several employers and to the Government that unless negotiations are reopened between the Miners' Federation, the mine owners, and the Government, the full strike power of the Triple

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 200-2.

Alliance shall be put into operation as and from Tuesday next at midnight.

This resolution was reported to the Miners' Federation, who answered with the following resolve:

That we welcome the fullest assistance from our joint colleagues to secure an unconditional conference with owners and Government so as to effect an early settlement.

To do this effectively our colleagues should fix the date of their stoppage and acquaint us of it before any steps are taken in the above direction.

As to the distribution of foodstuffs, we leave that matter entirely with the N. U. R. and Transport Workers with the fullest co-operation we can render.¹²³

The Transport Workers' Executive had determined that, in the event of any strike being necessary, a written undertaking should be entered into between the three organizations, guaranteeing no resumption of work by any group until a complete resumption of work by all concerned, without "victimization," had been secured.¹²⁴

On Saturday, April 9, delegates from the Executives of the Railwaymen and the Transport Workers met the Prime Minister and other members of the Government, with the approval of the Miners. The Government had declared that no resumption of negotiations of any kind could be made until the safety men and the pump men had returned to work, though they had been locked out by the employers' notices. The joint delegation succeeded in getting the Government to summon a meeting of mine owners and the Miners' Federation on Monday, April 11, if the Miners immediately issued notices to their branches "urging their members to abstain from all action which will interfere with the measures necessary for securing the safety of the mines or will necessitate the using of force by the Government."¹²⁵ This ambiguous condition would seem to have implied the actual return of the safety men to work, for the Railwaymen and Transport Workers now put pressure upon the Miners to yield at once on this point. The Miners finally agreed to accept the condition, rather than lose the support of their Triple Alliance

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

partners, and met the owners and the Government on Monday, the 11th.¹²⁶

As the negotiations were prolonged into Tuesday, J. H. Thomas announced through the press that all Transport Workers must continue their work until further instructions were received. The Prime Minister stated to both Miners and owners that the Government considered the National Pool impracticable, that it "was not feasible without the resumption of complete and permanent control, by the State, of the mining industry." The Government offer, including a pledge of financial assistance to "mitigate the rapid reduction in wages in the districts most severely affected," was rejected by the Miners as offering no solution to the dispute. Negotiations had thus been reopened and broken off because of the unsatisfactory nature of the offers made to the Miners' Federation.

According to the special report of the Transport Workers, "only one honorable course remained open to the Alliance." As the Railwaymen had postponed the strike there was nothing else to do but fix another date, as soon as practicable, for the commencement of a general and decisive strike movement in support of the Miners' Federation. The sub-committee of the Alliance recommended Thursday midnight, but the whole of the Alliance committee amended the suggestion to Friday at 10:00 P.M. in view of the fact that large numbers of workers concerned were paid on a Friday night, and that if the strike started Thursday that pay might be withheld.¹²⁷

It must not be forgotten that unemployment at the docks, in the road-transport system, and amongst sea-going workers was at a higher level than at any time in the memory of the Transport Workers' Executive, and that a strike at such a juncture meant the gravest kind of risk to all the workers taking part.¹²⁸ This weakness facing the Alliance was recognized and the fact that the two transport partners would expect to gain nothing at all from a strike, except possibly the postponement of a wage-reduction campaign in all industries, if the Miners were completely successful. A further weakness of the Triple Alliance, inherent in its constitution, was the existence outside its ranks of a large number of key men in the railroad in-

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

dustry, the members of the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. The Transport Workers' Executive succeeded in persuading the N. U. R. to ask for coöperation from this other railroad union in the strike. The A. S. L. E. and F. replied that they regretted they had not sooner been called into consultation, but that the Executive would instruct their members to stop work simultaneously with the other sections of the Triple Alliance. The Executive of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen were asked to coöperate with the other three Executives, and the Triple Alliance now became, for the purposes of this strike, the Quadruple Alliance.¹²⁹

Thursday, the 14th, was a day of meetings and conferences. An interview with the Prime Minister by a deputation from the Triple Alliance, in which Mr. Gosling for the Transport Workers explained that they felt the "Government was leaning too heavily towards the mine owners," brought matters no nearer solution. A long cross-examination of the sub-committee of the Alliance (Hodges, Gosling and Thomas) in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons on Thursday afternoon, carried out by the three groups who had set up the Council of Action the previous year,¹³⁰ led to no weakening on the part of the Triple Alliance partners. On the contrary it resulted in the unanimous passing of the following resolution by the groups gathered in the Committee Room:

This Conference is convinced of the justice of the claims put forward, and pledges its support to the Miners, Railwaymen and Transport Workers. It appeals to all sections of the Labor movement, to every citizen who cares for the welfare of the people, to stand solidly against this attack upon the workers' position. This Conference condemns the action of the Government throughout, and particularly that with regard to the military during the past week, as being calculated to provoke public feeling and to create disorder.¹³¹

This resolution implied that not merely the Triple Alliance, but all the forces of organized labor, on the industrial and political fields, were at one in giving their support to the Miners.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-11.

¹³⁰ The Parliamentary committee of the Trades Union Congress, shortly to yield place to the new General Council; the Executive of the National Labor Party, and the Labor Party members in the House of Commons.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Had the strike occurred Thursday night, as first suggested by the sub-committee, there can be no question it would have been one of the greatest labor struggles Britain had seen. The Electricians had offered their aid; there had been promises to the sub-committee from various workers on the newspapers, that fair play in the press would be enforced by the workers themselves; discussions with the coöperative movement had taken place with regard to food distribution; local strike committees had been set up, and generally things were as favorable for the strike as they well could be under a condition of general unemployment in the transport trades.¹²²

"BLACK FRIDAY"

As it was, the delay of one more day proved utterly fatal to the unity of the labor movement, brought about a split between the Miners and the Transport unions, and left a memory of "Black Friday" that affected even the general strike of 1926. On the evening of Thursday, unknown to the Triple Alliance, Mr. Vernon Hartshorn, a Miners' M. P., had arranged a meeting of private members of the House of Commons interested in the solution of the dispute. Mr. Hodges, the Miners' secretary, addressed this meeting, held in the Grand Committee Room, packed to suffocation with private members. Questions followed in great number, showing a general doubt about the wisdom of the demand for a National Pool. The Pool was a political demand, whereas the wage problem was industrial—so they argued. Mr. Hodges describes the fatal question and answer:

Then came the vital question: "If we can get you a satisfactory wages settlement, will you agree temporarily to abandon your Pool?" Here was a question for decision. If I had said "No," then their assumption about the Pool would have been confirmed. If I said "Yes," it would have been entirely on my own responsibility, and contrary to the decision of the Miners' Executive. In a moment my mind was made up, and in the presence of my two colleagues, and without audible opposition from them, I said: "Whilst I cannot see at the moment how a satisfactory wages settlement can be arrived at in the absence of the national pool, if you can induce your Government to propose such a settlement as you suggest, I have no doubt

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 47, 218.

whatsoever that such a proposition will be favorably considered by my Executive Committee."¹²⁸

The press seized upon this answer with avidity, and during the night special editions were run off in many provincial towns announcing that the strike was called off. Indescribable confusion followed among the ranks of the Triple Alliance. Rumors of Mr. Hodges' resignation as secretary of the Miners' Federation, of division within the Miners' Executive, brought shoals of telegrams and telephones to the perplexed Triple Alliance Executives. The Miners' Executive read the press reports over their breakfast, the first news they had, and met Hodges with "iron in their hearts and fury in their faces" on the morning of Black Friday.¹²⁴ In the meantime Premier Lloyd George had heard of Hodges' answer and had sent an invitation, through Hodges, to the Miners' Executive, to meet the owners at eleven that morning "to consider the best method of examining the question of wages."

In this atmosphere of uncertainty the Triple Alliance met on Friday morning. The Miners at once withdrew to discuss the situation; and after ninety minutes' absence informed the Conference that they had refused the Government invitation. This refusal was carried by but one vote, and that with three members of the Miners' Executive absent. Mr. Herbert Smith, president of the Miners' Federation, then declared that they, the Miners, were going to their own offices in Russell Square to draft the answer to Lloyd George. The Transport unions, with a strike call out for that very night, were horrified at the situation, and especially at the manner in which the Miners were completely ignoring the position in which they had placed their three partners. Herbert Smith had told them bluntly enough to "Get on t'field. That's t'place," and left it at that.¹²⁵

After a further but futile effort¹²⁶ to get common consultation on the part of the Miners and the remaining Executives of the Alliance, the Transport unions decided to call off the strike.

¹²⁴ Frank Hodges, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-53.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150; cf. *Nat. Transport Workers' Fed. Report*, p. 217.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 43, 215-17; cf. Hodges, p. 157.

¹²⁷ The Transport Workers failed to get the Railwaymen to agree to urge the Miners' return. *Report*, pp. 221-46.

The official reason given at the time for this final cancellation of the great sympathy strike was as follows: "In consequence of the changed position which confronted the Conference on Friday morning, no reasonable hope remained of securing the spontaneous and united action of the three bodies which was so essential to give to the Miners' Federation the assistance they sought." The basic reasons for the complete debacle, with the ultimate destruction of the Triple Alliance that it implied, were deeper than the events of that moment.

In the first place, the Triple Alliance had never acted as one body. At the most vital moments, such as that on "Black Friday" morning, the different sections sat in different rooms, as distinct organizations, taking their own decisions, and yet apparently expecting that they could keep their Alliance intact to fight the organized power of the Government and the employers. In 1919 the Railwaymen had created a bad precedent of independent action, by declaring their strike imminent before they even informed the other two partners of the Alliance. A similar action had been taken by the Miners in October, 1920, and in March, 1921.

The character of the coal mine industry, which makes strike-breaking an almost impossible task for Government or employers, but which makes for intense solidarity among the members of that trade, gathered as they are in rather densely populated mining centers, seems to have built up a stubborn inability to recognize the difficulties that face the workers of all transport trades. The railroad workers, the road transport employees, and the sailors are in many ways far worse off than the miners when it comes to a large-scale strike. The nature of their work keeps them apart in very small groups, if not as lone individuals. It is difficult to reach them for encouragement or instructions in the comparatively simple manner in which the miners can be approached. The homes of the transport workers are scattered widely among those of other citizens, union and non-union, again unlike the situation holding in mining towns and villages. The strike-breaker can in most cases be easily supplied, and yet more easily protected, in the transport trades; and because of the vital importance to society of those trades, the Governmental forces are likely to be concentrated

against those trades in particular, whenever any large sympathetic strike takes place. Finally, the transport trades cannot stay out for long at a time, lest their very positions be permanently lost. None of these awkward facts seems to have penetrated the minds of the various Miners' Executives in the past, least of all when they have been in dire need of sympathetic industrial action by their fellow unions.

Glib condemnation of the Transport Workers and Railwaymen, in 1921 and in 1926, by Miners' speakers and by many of the left-wing ranks, because of their apparent unwillingness to plunge into a mass strike for others' ends, when looked at in the calmer seclusion of the study, is seen to be largely unwarranted. Yet the term "Black Friday," and the bitter implications of treachery within the labor movement that the term carried, have not even now been allowed to die. The events of May, 1926, and especially the end of the great strike, will remain to a large number of men in the labor movement but "Black Friday" writ large, with the General Council in the place of the Triple Alliance, and the Miners still playing the rôle of the deserted and injured party, left to fight a losing battle with their backs against the wall. It will be the task of the following chapters to show that this view is not wholly justified by the facts.

CHAPTER IX

PREPARING FOR THE GREAT BRITISH STRIKE

THE SHADOW OF COAL

IF EVER in the future Britain has to face the horror of revolution, somewhere among the more important causes will be found the trail of the coal industry. Few problems in British social life have been more obtrusive or insistent than the chaos of coal production. No question has been handled more ineffectually or with less economic common sense. In no other industry has history piled up such a tale of embittered feelings, of long and stubborn conflicts, of irreconcilable viewpoints, between employers and employed.

In the last decade in particular the coal industry has to its record more official inquiries into its problems of management, or mismanagement, than most of the other trades combined. The famous Royal Commission of 1919, under the chairmanship of Justice Sankey; the Commission of Inquiry, under Lord Buckmaster's chairmanship in 1924; the Court of Inquiry headed by the Right Honorable H. P. Macmillan in July, 1925; and finally the most recent "Samuel Commission," of 1925-26—all of these are still vivid memories in the minds of the organized miners of Britain. To these miners they spell, almost without exception, delayed demands, if not postponed strikes, and in the case of the Sankey Commission in particular, the breaking of a British Government's word of honor to carry into law the Commission's recommendations. Something of the price that was paid, in labor unrest and industrial chaos, as a result of the Lloyd George Government's refusal to keep its solemn pledge on the Sankey Commission, has been told in the previous chapter. But the cost of that unfulfilled pledge did not end with the fall of the Triple Alliance. It was being paid all through 1926, and the end is not yet.

The withdrawal of the Triple Alliance on "Black Friday," April 16, 1921, left the Miners' Federation to fight alone. After it became evident that they were losing their battle, and the

Government offer of a subsidy for the industry had lapsed, the Miners appealed to other industries affected by wage disputes, and sought to get national action "to secure their mutual demands." The other unions saw nothing gained and much lost by linking their demands with those of the Miners, who were now so evidently failing, and refused the Miners' request.¹ Left utterly to their own resources the Miners were forced to negotiate. The outcome was the first national agreement between the Mining Association of Great Britain and the Miners' Federation. Broadly speaking, the agreement regulated the wages in accordance with the "ascertained profits" of the industry, wages varying with profits, but with the safeguard of certain minimum rates below which the wages might not fall. The Government gave a subsidy to ease the rapid fall in wages.²

In this 1921 agreement the miners were given a direct interest in the profits of the coal industry. The occupation by allied troops of the Ruhr coalfield delayed the full resumption of European coal production and aided the British export market. The miners declared the poorer districts were not gaining adequate living wages in spite of the increase in exports, and the Buckmaster Inquiry largely supported their plea, finding that practically every class of day wage worker was worse off in 1923, in terms of real wages, than in 1914, whereas the rate of output per man per hour was higher than in 1913. The Inquiry also came to the conclusion that though the 1921 agreement gave the worker less than pre-war real wages, it allowed the owners profits substantially in excess of pre-war profits. It was their opinion that the provision of a minimum wage should have precedence over distribution of profits.³ The outcome was an increase in the amounts going to wages and a decrease in those going to profits.

The Ruhr occupation ended, German output was restored, and other European coal competed in neutral markets with that from British coalfields. By 1925 economic conditions in the coal

¹ G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in the Coal Mining Industry*, p. 233.

² See full terms of Agreement in 1921 reprinted in *Socialist Annual*, 1926, pp. 287-89.

³ *British Labour Gazette* summary, quoted in *Socialist Annual*, 1926, pp. 94-96. Cf. Lord Buckmaster, "The Mine Strike: a Plain Statement," *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept., 1926, pp. 410-11.

industry were again going from bad to worse. The Mining Association and Miners' Federation formed a joint committee to investigate the situation, and considered first the comparative costs of coal mining in Britain and Germany. The Miners desired to continue the investigation in order to find how far the British costs were justified, and whether these costs could not be reduced without lowering wages or lengthening hours.⁴

A disagreement developed as to how far this inquiry might properly be carried. The Miners desired to discuss (a) the facts, (b) the causes, and (c) the remedies of the depressed condition of the industry. The first stage was well considered. The second stage merged into the third, and here the deadlock occurred. The Mining Association expressed the view that the main cause of the depressed condition of the industry lay in the high cost of the production of coal. This high cost the Mining Association attributed in large measure to the reduction in the working day to seven hours under the Coal Mines Act of 1919. They urged that if Parliament sanctioned a reversion to the eight-hour day costs would be reduced. Furthermore, high costs were attributed to the existing Wages Agreement. The two parties never reached a discussion of causes and remedies owing to this plain statement of the owners' views.⁵

On June 30, 1925, the owners gave formal notice of termination of the agreement on July 31, and presented a statement of the new terms on which they were prepared to make a new agreement.⁶ These terms involved a total change in the existing method of wage fixing. Local wage agreements covering each area were to be substituted for the national wage agreement. More serious even than this reversion to pre-war methods was the suggested complete reversal of the relative importance of wages and profits as a first charge on the industry. Whereas hitherto, in the 1921 and 1924 agreements, a minimum wage

⁴ A joint statement issued to the *London Times*, May 15, 1925, by the secretaries of the Miners' Federation and the Mining Association, declared "The miners' representatives have held eight meetings with the owners, and have shown no reluctance whatever to investigate to the full the conditions of the mining industry." Cf. *Report of Macmillan Court of Inquiry* (Cmd. 2478), p. 6. Hereafter referred to as *Macmillan Report*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁶ *New York Times*, July 1, 1925, and June 24, 1925; cf. *Macmillan Report*, p. 6.

had been guaranteed even if profits were entirely absorbed in the payment, the proposed arrangement involved the surrender of the minimum wage and the possibility that wages might sink to any figure the workers of any given locality might be forced to accept. The actual wage rates offered in the new terms would have entailed a reduction, varying in the districts, from 13 to almost 48 per cent on the standard rates.⁷

The Miners immediately and unanimously turned down the new offer,⁸ and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress supported their refusal in the following statement:

The terms put forward by the Mining Association for a revised agreement propose drastic reductions in the already meager wages paid to the miners, abolish the principle of the minimum wage, destroy the principle of national agreements, make the national unification of the industry an impossibility, and would, if carried to their logical conclusion, eventually lead to settlements between individual companies and their workers and cause chaos within the industry.⁹

In spite of the men's refusal even to discuss such terms, there was at first a general belief that the miners would yield, or that a strike would be but short-lived, for one quarter of their number were unemployed and their treasury was almost empty, while thousands of them were depending on unemployment insurance or poor relief for their daily existence.¹⁰ It is but fair to state that at a meeting of the Miners' delegates in May, A. J. Cook, secretary of their Federation, had reported the grave condition of the British industry and the similar plight of the German coal trade. The delegates had been sufficiently impressed by the facts of the situation to resist a demand for a higher wage claim put forward at the meeting by the South Wales, Lancashire and Forest of Dean delegates. The Miners' Executive had strongly dissuaded the delegates from making

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18 and Appendix III. *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept., 1926, pp. 179-81.

⁸ *New York Times*, June 25, 1925; the Miners' Federation refused to meet the owners for discussion of the terms unless the notices were first withdrawn.—*New York Times*, July 12, 1925; cf. *Macmillan Report*, pp. 6-7.

⁹ *New York Times*, July 12, 1925; cf. *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept. 1925, p. 181.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Support for the belief that there would be no strike had been given by a speech of A. J. Cook to the miners' delegates in May, in which he said the experience of 1921 had proved that with all the courage in the world the miners could not take the offensive again alone. *London Times*, May 22, 1925.

such a demand and had advised further inquiry and a reorganization of the industry.¹¹

Premier Baldwin, in accordance with his belief that the Government should interfere as little as possible in industrial disputes, had contented himself with deputing the First Lord of the Admiralty, William Clive Bridgeman, one-time Secretary of Mines, to interview both sides. Rumors of a possible Government subsidy persisted but were as often denied.¹² Two days later Mr. Baldwin announced the appointment of the Court of Inquiry, consisting of H. P. Macmillan, Sir Josiah Stamp, and W. Sherwood. The owners gave evidence before this Court but the Miners refused, contending that the Sankey and Buckmaster inquiries had amply shown the need for reconstruction in the industry.¹³

The owners claimed that the coal industry could not pay the existing wage rates, with transport charges at their high level, and compete successfully with coal produced more cheaply in foreign lands where labor conditions were more lenient and currencies depreciated.¹⁴ Since June, 1924, the depression in the coal export trade had been so severe that over five hundred mines, employing over 100,000 workers, had been closed down, unable to continue their losses. The owners saw no way out of the impasse save by longer hours of labor and a wage reduction. Reorganization schemes left them skeptical.¹⁵

The Miners did not appear before the Court of Inquiry, but through the press had already stated their position. Higher, not lower, wages were needed, inasmuch as the cost of living was over 70 per cent higher than in 1914, whereas the guaranteed minimum wage was but 88 per cent above the 1914 rates. They admitted the parlous state of the industry but showed that wages costs had not risen as much as other production costs. They claimed that previous inquiries had proved the existence of unnecessary wastes in mining, transportation, marketing, and use of coal, and that these matters should be tackled before the reduction of wages.¹⁶

¹¹ *Ibid.*, May 21 and 22, 1925.

¹² *New York Times*, July 10, 1925.

¹³ *Macmillan Report*, p. 4; cf. *New York Times*, July 14 and 16, 1925.

¹⁴ *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept., 1925, p. 182.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183; cf. *Macmillan Report*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept., 1925, pp. 183-84.

The inadequacy of the owners' sole solution can be seen when conditions in other coal producing countries are examined. As early as the middle of May the Belgian Federation of Collieries estimated that two million tons of coal were on hand at the pit-heads in Belgium, "owing to the price of Belgian coal being higher than the foreign product!" A Brussels dispatch to the *London Times* declared that the situation in the Belgian coal industry was becoming daily more critical, and that if the employers were again "compelled to make a 5 per cent reduction in wages" on June 1, there would be a strike of the miners.¹⁷ A similar situation was true of the German mine fields in the Ruhr. Ten million tons of coal were lying at the Ruhr pitheads in July, quite "unmarketable, owing to excessive world production and high German prices." The German mine owners desired the aid of the German Government "to reduce the costs of production by increasing the miner's working hours without raising his wages." Violent opposition from the German mine workers was naturally forthcoming, and the Luther Cabinet decided to avoid trouble by giving a rebate on transport costs of 50 per cent.¹⁸

The determined opposition of the British Miners to any lengthening in hours of labor, both in 1925 and 1926, against the pressure of ex-cabinet ministers, mine owners, the Conservative Party, and finally the British Government itself, must be conceded to have had sound economic basis.¹⁹ Greater output was not the essential in a world already gravely overstocked with surplus coal, quite apart from the inevitable increase of unemployment among miners that such a step would have entailed.²⁰

¹⁷ *London Times*, May 13, 1925.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, July 27, 1925.

¹⁹ Sir Robert Horne, one-time Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the *Sunday Times* (London) for July 19, 1926, alleged that the return to the eight-hour day would "cheapen the cost of production of coal two or three shillings a ton"; the owners had suggested an eight-hour day as early as June 23, 1925 (*New York Times*, July 24, 1925); the Conservative Party office issued a private communication to the press on April 26, 1926, drawing attention to the serious economic condition of the coal industry and suggesting that public attention be concentrated on the question of hours of labor in the mines (cf. Hansard, vol. 195, No. 58, May 8, 1926, col. 78, speech of J. H. Thomas).

²⁰ Cf. Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, 1925 (Cmd. 2600), p. 174.

As the precious days slipped past, the atmosphere became more tense. The Northumberland Miners proposed that the Miners' Executive, or else a national conference of Miners' delegates, should be empowered to call a strike without a ballot of miners. Delegates from Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Scotland protested against such power over the fortunes of a million workers being given to anyone.²¹ The Miners' Executive advised all mine workers to cease work on the 31st of July, consequent upon the posting of notices by the owners, terminating the old agreement. The Miners' case was then placed in the hands of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.²² Attempts had previously been made to reestablish the Triple Alliance in yet stronger form, as the Industrial Alliance. Miners, railwaymen, engineers (machinists), shipbuilders, and transport workers were to be the constituent parts of this new body.²³ The official constitution of this proposed body ran as follows:

To create by means of an alliance of the specified organisations a means of mutual support to assist any or all allied organisations in defending hours of labor, wage standards and the securing of advancement in the standard of living, or to take action to insure acceptance or to defend any principle of an industrial character which may be deemed vital by the allied organisations.²⁴

Considerable fear was rife that this new Alliance would function immediately if the mine dispute resulted in an actual cessation of work.²⁵ In point of fact the whole scheme still required the approval of the separate unions or Federations, and this approval had not been forthcoming by the end of July. One of the constituent parts, the N. U. R., was hesitant as to joining such an organization until the unions within each industry were better able to compose their difficulties. A further source of delay was the habit of Mr. A. J. Cook of attacking the N. U. R. secretary, J. H. Thomas, in his public speeches.²⁶ Failing the completion of the Industrial Alliance, the natural body representing the remaining labor organizations was the General Council, and to them, therefore, the Miners had turned.

²¹ *New York Times*, July 18, 1925.

²² *Ibid.*, July 24, 1925.

²³ *Ibid.*, July 22, 1925.

²⁴ *London Times*, May 15, 1925, and *New York Times*, Sept. 2, 1925.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1925.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1925.

On July 25 the specially appointed committee²⁷ of the General Council decided that, in the event of a coal stoppage, neither railroad nor transport workers should handle coal. C. T. Cramp, industrial general secretary of the N. U. R., speaking at Woodford on the following day, gave warning that if any railroad worker were suspended or dismissed for refusing to handle coal after July 31, all of the railwaymen would be embroiled. Such a condition would be "the nearest approach they had seen to a general industrial upheaval, and no man could say what would be the ultimate outcome."²⁸

The London *Times*, which had viewed the situation for some days with the deepest gloom, declared on the 24th of July: "The country is threatened with a disaster wholly unprecedented in its history, and one from which it could not recover for a generation, if ever." J. H. Thomas, the secretary of the N. U. R., informed an interviewer that the refusal to handle coal had been a unanimous decision of the railroad unions' executives, and that this refusal meant, in his judgment, absolute paralysis. He added an urgent plea to the mine owners to withdraw their notices unconditionally so that negotiations might be resumed. In this demand Thomas was supported by a large part of the public, their views being voiced by the press and by many public men.²⁹

At this critical moment the report of the Macmillan Court of Inquiry was made public, and was found to indorse the Miners' claim to a minimum wage; and to declare the need for improving the industry's efficiency.

We are satisfied on one point, that the workers are justified in claiming that any wages agreement which they can be asked to accept should provide for a minimum wage. What that minimum should be is a matter for negotiation between the parties. We do not think that a method of fixing wages which allows of their indefinite diminution can be regarded as satisfactory. We venture to think that there is considerable room for improving the efficiency of the industry as a whole, and in this way affording some aid to its economic position. . . . We cannot believe that there is no room for improvement in

²⁷ See T. U. C. General Council. *Report to Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions*, July 25, 1926, p. 5.

²⁸ *New York Times*, July 26 and 27, 1926.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 28, 1926.

the management, organization, and development of the industry, or that no alleviation is to be found in these directions.⁸⁰

Other opportunities for improvement were transportation costs and methods of distribution.

Far from settling the dispute the report merely added fuel to the flames. A series of conferences between Premier Baldwin and the two disputing parties took up the whole of the next day, July 29, but led nowhere; nor did an interview with the General Council late that evening. On the contrary the various parties concerned seemed more "pig-headed" than ever.⁸¹ On the morning of the 29th Mr. Baldwin told the Miners that the Government would grant no subsidy to the coal industry, but that it must stand on its own economic foundations.⁸² The owners' Association deeply resented the references in the Report to the room for improvement in the industry and refused to abide by the report.⁸³ On the part of labor, definite and detailed instructions were issued to the railway and transport workers, to move no coal cars after midnight, July 31, but to work all coal in transit to the nearest suitable siding for storage; to cease all work on import or export of coal at the docks and wharves; and to stop all road delivery to industrial or domestic consumers.⁸⁴ Obedience to such orders on the part of the railroad employees would certainly have led at once to their dismissal and the filling of their positions by the companies.⁸⁵

The public now looked to the Government for action, even the *Spectator* declaring that the Government must put the Macmillan Report into effect, that there could be no lock-out, and that if the owners still refused to withdraw their notices the Government must take control of the coal industry as in war time.⁸⁶ There seemed every possibility that not only would there be a refusal to handle coal by the transport unions but that those unions, including even the Railway Clerks' Association,

⁸⁰ *Macmillan Report*, pp. 16, 19.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, July 30, 1925.

⁸² Page Arnot, *The General Strike, May, 1926*, p. 34.

⁸³ *New York Times*, July 30 and Aug. 1, 1925.

⁸⁴ See full text in Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ See comments of Sir Felix Fole, General Manager of the Great Western Railway, in the *Financial News* (London), Sept. 3, 1925.

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, July 31, 1925.

might quit work in sympathy. This was the more likely as both the railroad workers and the engineers (machinists) were threatened with wage reductions at the time.⁵⁷ Despite conferences with both sides all day July 30, the Prime Minister failed utterly to change their attitude. The owners agreed to a very low minimum wage, but demanded longer working hours. The Miners refused either longer hours or lower wages. The Secretary of the Mining Association admitted that only a miracle could prevent a stoppage.⁵⁸

AN ELEVENTH-HOUR SETTLEMENT

The miracle was forthcoming. "A general strike in a time of such industrial depression and widespread unrest had too many dangerous possibilities to be permitted, and the Government felt at any cost that it must be prevented."⁵⁹ At two o'clock in the morning of the last day of grace, July 31, the London correspondent of the *New York Times*, was able to wire the official Government statement:

Following a meeting of the Cabinet this evening (July 30) at which full consideration was given to the whole of the circumstances surrounding the threatened dispute, the Prime Minister had further conversations with the representatives of the miners and the owners. The miners' representatives explained to the Prime Minister that it was their desire to cooperate in the inquiry proposed by the Prime Minister, with a view to full investigation into methods of improving the productive efficiency of the industry, for the purpose of increasing its competitive power in world markets. They intimated that they thought it was not fair to require a reduction of wages with the present cost of living, before any attempt had been made by means of an inquiry to secure a contribution toward meeting the difficult situation with which the industry is confronted.

The Prime Minister announced that in the circumstances the Government was prepared to render assistance to the industry until the Spring, by which time the inquiry would be completed. The Prime Minister requested the coal owners to suspend their notices for a fortnight in order that the necessary discussions could proceed as to the way in which temporary assistance could be afforded.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1925; cf. *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept. 1925, p. 186.

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, July 31, 1925.

⁵⁹ *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept. 1925, p. 188.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, July 31, 1925.

With such perfect official circumlocution did the Baldwin Government proclaim its temporary surrender to the clamor of the public, the miners, and the mine owners. The notices were to become effective at midnight, July 31. At four o'clock that afternoon Mr. Baldwin announced in the House of Commons that an arrangement had been made with the mine owners to withdraw their notices for two weeks, during which time a permanent agreement was to be formulated.⁴¹

As the world knows, this eleventh-hour settlement was achieved by means of a Government subsidy to run to May 1, 1926, and yet one more Royal Commission. That inquiry was to be completed in good time before May, 1926, and, in the interim, the Government subsidy was to fill "the gap" that existed "between the level of wages provided by the minimum provisions of the national wages agreement of 1924, and the lower level of wages which would result from the colliery owners' proposals of the 1st of July." The wages actually paid under this arrangement were to be "not less than the minimum provided under the 1924 agreement."⁴²

Once the public disaster of a general cessation of labor had been averted a perfect storm of criticism and debate ensued. The *Daily Mail*, true to its character, charged the Premier with changing his mind on the grant of a subsidy, under the threats of a band of conspirators who had planned to blockade the nation.⁴³ It is part of the irony of British politics that it should have been a strike on this journal that caused Mr. Baldwin, in May, 1926, to break off all negotiations and let the general strike run its course. Mr. Lloyd George, whose broken pledges over the Sankey Commission did not seem to trouble his political conscience, asserted in the House of Commons that the Premier's settlement of the dispute had been a surrender to "a very successful hold-up of the community."⁴⁴ Mr. Baldwin's critics accused him, not only of surrender to the Miners and the Trades Union Congress, but to coercion on the part of the mine owners. It was disclosed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill, during the final negotiations with the coal

⁴¹ *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Sept., 1925, p. 188.

⁴² *Explanatory Memorandum of the Terms of Settlement, etc.* (Cmd. 2488), p. 5.

⁴³ *New York Times*, Aug. 1, 1925.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1925.

owners, started by agreeing that they should retain fourpence per ton profit, and ended by yielding to their stubborn demand for no less than fifteen pence per ton.⁴⁵

The effect of the "surrender" on the Miners and on the labor ranks in general is described by the *New York Times*:

The miners are elated at what they regard as a great victory, and their elation is shared by the entire labor world, which hails the great solidarity displayed by the trade union movement in supporting the miners in the present situation. This is the first time in the history of the labor movement in Great Britain that such an effective union has been secured.

The *Times* report continues by giving the reason for the Baldwin Government's last-moment change of mind:

It was undoubtedly this exhibition of solidarity that finally broke down the Government's reluctance to adopt the policy of State assistance.⁴⁶

Mr. Baldwin's two leading opponents in the House of Commons took the same view. Mr. Lloyd George declared that "the Government was taken by surprise. No plan, no proposals, no suggestions. *Even the strike emergency organization was not ready.*"⁴⁷ Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labor party and Prime Minister in the Labor Government of 1924, wrote to the *New York Nation*:

Had the lockout taken place the industries of our country would have been paralyzed within a week. The railways would have been involved from the first hour; the other sections of the transport trades would have followed quickly; gas and electrical works were included in the trade union scheme of united action. . . . The prospect was undoubtedly appalling, and the sections which believe that governments only yield to force, and that direct action against society offers great prospects for improvement in working class conditions naturally feel that they have scored a fine triumph. They are now

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Aug. 1, 1925.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 1925. The organization referred to had been started by Mr. Lloyd George himself immediately after the Armistice and was put to the test in the Railroad strike of 1919, as described in the preceding chapter. Cf. Lloyd George's preface to George Glasgow, *General Strikes and Road Transport*.

able to say that a threat of direct action wrung £10,000,000 from the tax-payers . . . the mishandling of the Government . . . handed over the honors of war to those who may be inclined to toy with revolution."⁴⁸

That such a fear was not ungrounded can be seen from the manner in which the Miners' Federation Secretary treated the Baldwin settlement. Speaking in Durham on August 9, Mr. Cook asserted that the lesson of the great labor victory was "that labor could get only what it was strong enough to take."⁴⁹ Somewhat later in the same month, in a yet more dogmatic speech, he stated:

Next May we shall be faced with the greatest crisis and the greatest struggle we have ever known, and we are preparing for it. We shall prepare a Commissariat department. I am going to get a fund, if I can, that will buy grub so that when the struggle comes we shall have that grub distributed in the homes of our people.

I don't care a hang for any government, or army or navy. They can come along with their bayonets. Bayonets don't cut coal. *We have already beaten, not only the employers, but the strongest Government in modern times.*⁵⁰

With the lapse of time Mr. Cook's visions grew yet more lurid, and by the middle of September, 1925, he was declaring at Stapleford that "Black Friday" had gone forever. The workers now possessed the power, as could be seen by the action of the Prime Minister in climbing down and granting a coal subsidy. That action on the part of Mr. Baldwin represented a revolution. "Take it from me," he added, "There would otherwise have been a revolution. I fear there will be trouble next May."⁵¹ In similar manner the six hundred delegates of the National Minority Movement (the Communist group), at their conference on August 29, expressed the belief that the next spring, coincident with the reappearance of the coal crisis, would see all of Britain in the throes of a workers' revolution.⁵²

All the union leaders who had pledged united action on the 1st of August were not as pleased with their success as was A. J. Cook. J. H. Thomas, of the Railwaymen, expressed himself as

⁴⁸ *The Nation* (N. Y.), vol. 121, No. 3138, Aug. 26, 1925, p. 225.

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, August 10, 1925. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Aug. 24, 1925.

⁵¹ *London Times*, Sept. 14, 1925. ⁵² *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1925.

"very far from happy" over the "magnificent victory" of the Miners. He considered nothing more dangerous for the future of the country than that employers and Government were compelled to concede through force, what they refused to concede through reason.⁶³

Something of this thought was even admitted by the Government itself. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the debate in the House on August 6, pointed out that:

There was a growing disposition among the trade unionists to use the exceptional immunities they possessed under the law, not for the purposes of ordinary trade disputes, but in the pursuit of far-reaching political and economic aims. An attempt to hold up the whole community by a threat to cut off vital supply services and the employment of such a threat as a political weapon, which had been increasingly apparent of recent years, was a grave fact which would require profound and continuous attention by Parliament.⁶⁴

In October Mr. Churchill, irritated by the many threats of future trouble made by Mr. A. J. Cook, made answer in similar manner:

Mr. Cook had said openly that he would force a general election in the spring by means of a strike, or that he would force nationalization by means of a strike. If those were the counsels which were to prevail they had to be fought to the fullest extent.⁶⁵

By December, 1925, Mr. Churchill was even more explicit as to the cause of the subsidy and the attitude of the Government. Speaking on the subsidy and the unpreparedness of the public in July he said: "We decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not of averting it, of coping effectually with it when the time came."⁶⁶

The Prime Minister himself did not deny the use of *force majeure* during that last week in July:

We were confronted last week with a great alliance of trade unions who had the power and the will to inflict enormous and irreparable damage on the country. Apparently they had some deliberate and avowed policy to force a stoppage of this kind regardless of suffering.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1925.

⁶⁴ *London Times*, Oct. 28, 1925.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 7, 1925.

⁶⁶ *Arnot, op. cit.*, p. 69.

To those who had suggested that he would now yield to any other industry that put sufficient pressure upon him a similar subsidy to that granted to the coal industry, provided the threat of a general strike were repeated, Mr. Baldwin uttered a warning:

If the time should come when the community has to protect itself with the full strength of the Government behind it, the community will do so, and the response of the community will astonish the forces of anarchy throughout the world.⁵⁷

It has been asserted by Mr. Wickham Steed that the idea of the subsidy had long existed in Mr. Baldwin's mind as "a disagreeable but perhaps inevitable alternative to a prolonged and disastrous coal strike."⁵⁸ This may be true enough and not invalidate the general claim, supported by Mr. George Glasgow, that the subsidy was granted in August, 1925, because the Government's machinery for dealing with a great strike was not ready.⁵⁹ The Earl of Scarborough, writing some six months after the settlement, bears out this claim of unpreparedness, even of the emergency organization:

It is an open secret today that in August last year, When Mr. A. J. Cook, the Miners' Secretary, threatened the Government with a strike, in which many of the other unions were prepared to down tools, it was discovered that even if foodstuffs were forthcoming, and the transport, the provision of *efficient personnel* at a moment's notice would have been extremely difficult.⁶⁰

This view was put, baldly enough, by the *Revue de Paris* immediately after the great strike of May, 1926. "Had the trade unions ordered the general strike at the date, originally fixed by the Soviets, of the 1st of August, 1925, the British Government would have been conquered." Public opinion would have been with the Government but would have been insufficiently organized. "Mr. Baldwin, recognizing the disproportion between the forces of order and of revolution, played for time."⁶¹ After discounting

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 1925; *Hansard*, 6 Aug., 1925, cols. 1591-1592.

⁵⁸ "The Story of a Blunder," *Review of Reviews* (London), LXXIII, 421.

⁵⁹ See *General Strikes and Road Transport*, p. 101.

⁶⁰ "Maintaining Supplies in a General Strike," *English Review*, March, 1926, p. 228.

⁶¹ "La préparation Bolcheviste de la grève Anglaise," *La Revue de Paris*, May 15, 1926, p. 675.

the excessive emphasis on the importance of the Communists in 1925 and the French notion that all large-scale industrial disturbances must mean revolution, the comment is probably not far from the facts.

A leading American newspaper evidently drew the same conclusions from the affair:

When the report is ready next spring, the Government ought to be in a position to drop make-shifts and press forward with a definite and permanent policy. Moreover, it must seek to arm itself with legal power to deal with a nation-wide strike not only in coal mining, but in transportation and engineering services, in shipbuilding and the textile trades. For, behind the immediate threat of a coal strike, there stood visible to the eyes of Mr. Baldwin the menace of the one big union quitting work and paralyzing the industrial and commercial life of England. *The Government has been, and is now, without weapons to meet such an emergency. They surely ought to be provided before another emergency of the same kind lifts its head.*⁶⁵

Suggestion of new laws, making it a penal offense to strike in any basic industry before submitting the case to arbitration, and laying all the facts before the general public, was offered by the same editorial. Two weeks later the journal returned to the same theme, urging not merely legal protection against future general strikes, but the formation of a citizens' volunteer brigade such as Sweden had established during the great strike of 1909.⁶⁶ How far these suggestions were even noticed by British statesmen is not of great importance to this study, but that they did resort to both methods of protection, either before or after the great strike of 1926, is significant.

PREPARATIONS BY THE AUTHORITIES

On the side of the public and the Government some three lines of preparation proceeded, during the months succeeding the subsidy settlement. On the extreme "right" there developed the "British Fascists," a group already existent before the threatened strike. A night raid on the headquarters of the Communists in London which resulted in the theft of certain financial registers and documents, but not of any money; and the kidnapping

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1926.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1926.

of Harry Pollitt, prominent member of the "Minority Movement," with similar seizure of documents in his possession, were put down to this body. Pollitt's alleged assailants were arrested but acquitted. "Black shirt" gangs in Hyde Park and Glasgow assailed Communist meetings.⁵⁴ These groups declared they would "remain constitutional" (!) as long as the Government did its duty.

The British Fascists, recruited from various organizations more patriotic than discreet, admitted the fact that they were armed, and that they were submitted to weekly drill, against the possibility of civil strife. They are said to have obtained their resources from various national leagues and citizens' unions federated as a Central Council of Economic Leagues, including some five hundred leading industrial firms in Britain, and directed by a triumvirate of Messrs. Armstrong, Allan N. Smith, and Evan Williams.⁵⁵ Although this organization of British Fascists was generally looked upon as an extreme band of extra-constitutionalists, not unlike the militant communists on the labor side, occasionally they were able to persuade local authorities to accept their aid. In Liverpool, for example, the Chief Constable enrolled local Fascists as special constables, who were to act as a separate body, under their own officers, in the event of trouble.⁵⁶

A far more responsible organization, less bitterly partisan in aims than the Fascists, was established late in September, 1925, under the title "The Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies, or the 'O. M. S.'"⁵⁷ It was a voluntary body, did not receive a penny of public funds, and existed solely to register volunteers, investigate their bona fides, and where necessary, train them for specific tasks, in the event of a large-scale cessation of public services.⁵⁸ It professed to be non-political, with the same purposes as the French Civic Unions, and did not aim to intervene in purely economic disputes between employers

⁵⁴ "La préparation Bolcheviste de la grève Anglaise," *Le Nouv. de Paris*, May 15, 1924, p. 672.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 678. This article is written from a violently anti-communist viewpoint.

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1925.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1925.

⁵⁸ The Earl of Scarborough, "Maintaining Supplies in a General Strike," *English Review*, XLII (March, 1926), 328.

and their employees. Its *raison d'être* was to provide the British government with the necessary personnel to carry on the important public services, postal and telegraph and telephone services, whenever those services were in peril of stoppage.⁶⁹

Unlike the Fascist group, the O. M. S. refused to have at its head any great industrial magnates, and had on its central committee only public men who were not financially interested in metallurgic, mining, or shipping concerns. Lord Hardinge, the president, was at one time Viceroy of India, while Admiral Jellicoe and Sir Rennell Rodd, once ambassador to Italy, were vice-presidents. Other members of its council were Major General Lord Scarborough, Lord Faulkland, Lieut. General Sir Francis Lloyd, and Admiral Sir Alexander Duff, a notable preponderance of naval and military men. After seven months of energetic work in recruiting and training volunteers the O. M. S. was able to present the Government with a register of some one hundred thousand available volunteers on the very first day of the great strike.⁷⁰

The manner in which the O. M. S. overcame certain very serious difficulties in the way of training these volunteers is of particular interest, the more so as little of this aspect of the matter was allowed to reach the public eye in Britain, for most obvious reasons. The great transportation companies naturally enough refused to admit volunteers into their service, though requested by the O. M. S., lest the suspicions of their regular personnel be aroused and discontent and reprisals be provoked.⁷¹ Ultimately certain factories possessing private railroads placed some of their locomotives at the disposal of the O. M. S., but at long intervals, and always in secret, for the purpose of training drivers. For auto-truck transport the problem was not so difficult. A strong contingent of skilled auto-drivers enrolled at specially designated private residences. Many of these were from the ranks of the unemployed. To give these men further instruction the O. M. S. asked aid of the omnibus companies, but the

⁶⁹ Colonel Romain, "La lutte contre la grève générale en Angleterre," in *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, Nov. 6, 1926, p. 77; cf. *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1926.

⁷⁰ Colonel Romain, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79; cf. *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1926.

⁷¹ Colonel Romain, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

after flatly refused even to loan their instruction grounds for this purpose.⁷²

The O. M. S. solved that problem by purchasing some auto-trucks of its own and made use of certain factory testing grounds during the week-ends. As high walls surrounded these grounds, and as the regular workers were absent over the week-end this training process again proceeded in secret. Similar training, in private establishments during periods when the regular workers were away, was given to volunteer telephone and telegraph operators. When the strike finally broke out the O. M. S. effaced itself as an organization and turned over its trained personnel to the Government, but retained its registers and its framework ready for future use.⁷³

The relationship between the two voluntary organizations, the British Fascists and the O. M. S., may be gathered from the official statement of Lord Hardinge, president of the O. M. S., called forth late in April, 1926, by the resignation of Brigadier General Blakeney, then president of the British Fascists, together with four members of his council. Lord Hardinge stated:

It is desirable that the position of the O. M. S. in regard to the British Fascists should be clearly defined. Our organization has announced that we welcome the coöperation of other patriotic societies in promoting the particular aims of O. M. S. We were, however, unable to entertain any proposals for coöperation with the British Fascists so long as they adhered to their existing constitution. Only if they abandoned their quasi-military formation and made it clear that they would act under authority as citizens, and only then on requisition by a Constitutional Government, were we prepared to coöperate.⁷⁴

Brigadier General Blakeney, and Rear Admiral Armstrong, president and vice-president of the British Fascists, thus announced their reasons for resigning from that organization:

It was inevitable that a division of opinion must arise between the militant section, who believe that they can stand alone, maintain military titles, and consider themselves free to resort to unconstitu-

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

⁷³ *London Times*, April 28, 1926.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

tional action, and the other more steady-going section who believe that the resources of the British Constitution are by no means exhausted. The difference in point of view became acute when the Home Secretary informed the president that he could not recognize them in any work for the State so long as they maintained their semi-military organization and so long as they claimed to act in any sense in contradistinction to the work of the Executive Government. The majority of the council considered that it was their duty to comply with this, and further to give an earnest . . . of their law-abiding propensities by taking a name less likely to be associated with unconstitutional action. . . . They consider that at the present moment effective assistance to the State can best be given in seconding the efforts of the O. M. S.⁷⁵

These seceding Fascists, still believing in the possibilities of constitutional action, took the safe name of Loyalists and planned to "form a league of workers of all classes." Evidently the Fascists themselves were not all for "direct action!"

Secret as it kept its methods of training, the O. M. S., was, of course, not able to recruit members without publicity. Some of this was promptly forthcoming from the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks.⁷⁶ In a letter to a correspondent soon after the inception of the O. M. S. the Home Secretary stated that the Government considered it its duty to maintain supplies at such a crisis and had made plans long since to do so, but that there was no harm in such a private organization and that he would be glad to use its services.⁷⁷ This official support called forth a strong protest from the Labor party leader, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who drew attention to the Labor scheme for feeding the nation in case of a strike.⁷⁸ To such protests the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Sir William, when plain Mr. Joynson Hicks, M. P., had been an ardent supporter of the Ulster fire-eaters under Sir Edward Carson, whose gun-running exploits and open military training of the "Ulster Volunteers" were an imperial scandal during the last years of the pre-war Asquith Government. Sir William, speaking at Warrington on December 6, 1913, defied the Asquith Cabinet: "The people of Ulster have behind them the Unionist Party; behind them is the Lord God of Battles. In his name and your name I say to the Prime Minister—Let your armies and batteries fire. Fire if you dare; fire and be damned." Cf. *A Handbook for Rebels*, compiled by Thomas Johnson, p. 23.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1925.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1925. As shown later, no effective labor plans existed.

Home Secretary declared that a "community is entitled to protect itself against the effects of a general strike":

Is the community prepared to leave the very existence of the country in the event of a general strike, to the Trades Union Congress? Quite definitely I am not. I am prepared to say that Government plans are there. They are ready to be put into operation. I have not called for half a million men because I know well that when a strike takes place there will be two or three millions.⁷⁹

Later in the year the Home Secretary, answering a question by a Labor member of the House of Commons, admitted freely that the Government had its own distinct organization for the maintenance of supplies, that such an organization had been in existence under more than one preceding Government, but had, up to that time, been kept an official secret.⁸⁰

In point of fact, though the plans for the emergency organization might have been ready in October, as the Home Secretary had claimed, it was not until February of the next year that he could say, in rather boastful fashion, referring of course to a great strike: "If the emergency arises the Privy Council will be called. We are ready. Appeals for volunteers to help the nation will be issued. We are ready, and if necessary the control of the transport of the country will be taken over by the Government."⁸¹

What, then, was this Government organization, which formed the third line of preparation made by the public and the Government? Something of the story of its origin has already been told, in connection with the Railroad strike of 1919.⁸² The Coalition Government under Lloyd George and Bonar Law not only created the scheme but made use of it during that strike. The same organization was completely ready in April, 1921, in case of need. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Labor Government took it over and would have used it had certain strike threats materialized.⁸³

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1926.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1926. The question referred to "Circular 656" described below.

⁸¹ *London Times*, Feb. 9, 1926, speech at Ipswich.

⁸² See previous chapter.

⁸³ When the Ministry of Food was disbanded, and transferred, as the Food Department, to the Board of Trade, there was a period when the whole scheme was in danger of complete abolition. Cf. Glasgow, *General Strikes and Road Transport*, p. 22.

Nevertheless the original Lloyd George scheme of 1919 was considerably changed by 1925-26. In 1919 the War had left the Government in a strategic position as far as special powers for food rationing were concerned. The Government, moreover, still possessed large numbers of Army trucks, and the group of R. A. S. C. drivers had but recently been demobilized. In addition, the Government had its own supplies of flour, meat, and other food essentials. None of this was true of 1926 when war-time powers and conditions had largely vanished and business was back again on a competitive basis.⁸⁴

By 1926 the great reserve of Army trucks had been sold to private firms, or had worn out. The Ministry of Food no longer existed, and food rationing had long since ceased. The Baldwin Government had, therefore, to rely almost wholly upon voluntary haulage, and voluntary business men's committees. The hauling contractors of the nation were organized into 150 haulage committees, with the result that the total expense to the Government for carrying on the emergency road transport, during the great strike in May, 1926, did not exceed \$100,000.⁸⁵ The consumers and not the Government paid the price of the emergency transport—milk, for example, rose four cents a quart.⁸⁶ The Government merely relieved the various haulage contractors of all existing contracts during the period of the strike by declaring legal priority in the transport of essential commodities.⁸⁷

The alternative method would have been to use the wide powers of requisition under the Emergency Powers Act of 1920, but the Government was especially anxious not to undertake any expense or responsibility that could be avoided. In a "confidential" memorandum for the use of Road Officers under this emergency scheme, issued by the Ministry of Transport, paragraph five included the following significant statement:

It is emphasized that requisitioning should only be resorted to when essential transport cannot otherwise be obtained. It is proposed to leave the supply and distribution of food stuffs and other essential

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ The Ministry of Transport listed as "essential commodities" the following: Bacon, butter, cheese, coal, flour, lard, meat, medical and surgical requisites, bread, milk, millers' offals, newspapers, gasoline, sugar, tea, vegetables, wheat, and yeast. It is significant that fish and fruit were not included.

commodities to be carried out, as far as possible, under ordinary commercial arrangements and only to resort to requisitioning when the supply of transport cannot be arranged on a commercial basis.⁴⁸

The powers of requisitioning any required vehicles, that were vested in the Road Commissioners, and, through them, also conferred upon their subordinates, the Road Officers, were expected to provide ample leverage upon any unwilling contractor, without actual recourse to requisition.⁴⁹

If requisition had to be used, wherever possible the endeavor was to be made to have the requisitioned vehicle remain under the commercial direction of its owner, "who would continue to operate it under the usual commercial arrangements, either by his own drivers or by volunteers supplied by the Volunteer Service Committee, and obtain payment direct from the firm on whose behalf the vehicle⁵⁰ was used. If such arrangements were impossible then the actual operation of the requisitioned vehicle was to be handled by one of the regular haulage contractors along with his own vehicles. In every instance the Government itself endeavored to keep out of the actual business of transport,⁵⁰ the Government's responsibility and expense in this aspect of the matter being merely the training and holding in reserve of a supply of drivers. Once the reserve volunteer had a position his expense was immediately shifted on to the shoulders of the contractor and the consumer.⁵¹

The country was divided into ten "divisions" and Headquarters, each with its own Civil and Road Commissioners, Coal, Finance and Food Officers, appointed by the Ministry of Transport. To the ten divisional Road Commissioners were responsible the 150 Road Officers, stationed at the local centers. In each of these 150 local centers was established one of the Haulage Committees already mentioned.⁵² The London and Home Counties Division was, of course, a vitally important area. As in other divisions much of the wartime skeleton organization was used again. The Food Officer for the London Division had been in

⁴⁸ *Memorandum for the Use of Road Officers*, marked "secret and confidential," issued by the Ministry of Transport.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 8, 9, 10.

⁵¹ *Glasgow*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32

the Ministry of Food during the war.⁸² As his local assistants he had some 102 Divisional Food Officers, again, in many cases, possessing war-time experience in food rationing and food distribution problems. The Food Officer had power to appoint anyone he deemed fit as his local representatives. Generally, however, the local food officer was a Borough or Council official, often the Medical officer of Health or a Town Clerk. When coöperation was likely to be refused, as in some boroughs controlled by a Labor majority on the council, the Food Officer proceeded to appoint his local representative without the coöperation of that particular borough.

The London Food Officer simplified his task to some degree by delegating his authority to three special emergency committees for Flour, Meat, and Milk, while he gave the major portion of his own time to a committee controlling the activities of all the Divisional Officers. Each of the other food trades (provisions, tea, sugar, etc.) had its own liaison officer. As London is the distributing center for England each trade normally has its own Exchange. To these Exchanges belong all the important firms in the particular trade. Each exchange appointed a committee of ten, and one of the ten became the liaison officer for that trade. When the strike was in process each liaison officer kept in telephonic communication with the main Divisional Committee, which sat daily at 9:00 A. M. and again from 10 P. M. to midnight. If special need arose the particular liaison officer would "sit in" at the succeeding meeting of the Divisional Committee.

Difficulties, requests, and requirements of each trade would be reported by the Exchange members, to the Divisional Committee, through the particular liaison officer for that trade. Some provision merchant, for instance, desired to ship two tons of bacon from London to Birmingham by rail. He would inform his Exchange committee or else his liaison officer. The latter would report to the Divisional Committee the need of transport facilities for two tons of bacon to Birmingham. Similar demands would meanwhile have come in from the liaison officers of other trades. The Railroad representatives sitting on the Divisional

⁸²The Hon. Horace Woodhouse, C. B. E., to whom the writer is very deeply indebted for much of the description of the London Division. The writer holds himself wholly responsible for any error that may, unwittingly, have entered this description.

Committee would then know exactly what demand there was for a food freight to Birmingham.

In return, problems of price-fixing, or violations of price agreements already made, would be handed to the respective trade Exchanges through their own liaison officer, and would be dealt with by the trade Exchange itself in its own way. When the strike broke out in May, 1926, prices were stabilized as of April 30, 1926, with extra charge for transport. This was accomplished by the voluntary agreement of the various trades, and the agreement was well kept.

The Divisional Officers had at their disposal the full powers of the Emergency Powers Act, described below, and could requisition, fix prices, order a police constable to make an arrest, even ruin a trader who refused their orders. With such powers at their disposal it is noteworthy that those powers were not used. The local food officer had the most difficult position. All the local grievances of his borough would come to him for solution. Committees of the food trades in his borough were formed just as they were for the whole of the London Divisional area, and the local officer acted as their liaison officer to Headquarters.

It may justly be asked at what time in the period between the grant of the subsidy and the actual outbreak of the strike the Government schemes of road transport and food distribution were completed. If the description of preparations in one of the ten Divisions given by Mr. George Glasgow is at all typical, the Civil Commissioners were appointed by the Ministry of Transport in September, 1925, and went to their respective scenes of action to obtain the necessary local men as Road Officers and chairmen of the Haulage Committees, of which, as already stated, there were in all some one hundred and fifty.⁶⁴ In the Division described the Civil Commissioner had completed this part of the organization by the end of November. That this seems to have been general is evident from the circular sent out on November 20, 1925, from the Ministry of Health to the Town Councils, Metropolitan Borough Councils (Greater London), Urban and Rural District Councils, informing them of the Government

⁶⁴ Glasgow, *op. cit.*, chap. III. The Chief Civil Commissioner was the Postmaster General, and the other Civil Commissioners were all members of Mr. Baldwin's Government, generally important Parliamentary or Under Secretaries of the different Ministries.

organization that would be put into action in case a state of emergency existed.

This "Circular 696" laid emphasis on the responsibility of all local Authorities for keeping essential services going in their own areas, and stated that the Government organization was intended merely to supplement and assist such local efforts. The Circular continued:

A Minister will in such an emergency act as Civil Commissioner on behalf of the Government in each of ten Divisions covering the whole of England and Wales. He will be assisted by a staff consisting mainly of representatives of the Departments of Government concerned and dealing with the following subjects: Transport; Food; Postal Services; Coal. It will be the duty of the Civil Commissioner and his staff during the emergency to keep in touch with the Local Authorities in each Division and to be available for consultation by them; and he will be empowered to give decisions on behalf of the Government.⁹⁵

Paragraphs two to four of the same circular proceeded to outline the Food, Road, and Haulage arrangements already described in greater detail above. Regulations for consumption or restriction of coal, gas and electricity in the local areas followed. For the preservation of law and order the local authorities were requested to cooperate with the police by "securing able-bodied citizens of good character to serve as special constables."⁹⁶ The allocation of duties between the local and the national authorities ran as follows:

Local Authorities are expected to undertake responsibility for the maintenance of local public utility services; in addition they are asked to cooperate with the national organization in regard to local transport and the local distribution of coal. In the absence of further directions they are not expected to undertake responsibility for the local distribution of food, nor are they asked to accept responsibility for shipping, railway or postal communications, or docks and harbors except where the local Authority are[*sic*] also the Port Authority.⁹⁷

In Mr. Glasgow's "typical provincial Division" further conferences were held in December, 1925, and January,

⁹⁵ Circular 696 (England and Wales), Ministry of Health, Nov. 20, 1925, paragraph 1, in Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Italics ours.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 6, in Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 7, in Glasgow, pp. 106-8. Italics ours.

1926. At the latter the problem of safe conduct of transport was taken up and the general principle enunciated that "convoys were an unwise method of transport during a strike, because they would provide a concentrated target for the attention of strikers," but that if a single vehicle in a diffused system of transport were held up, the matter would be of less importance. A second point emphasized was the need to move transport *from the very first day of the strike*, and the necessity of holding ready mobile squads of police for instant duty in threatened areas.⁵⁵ Route maps of the roads that the transport would frequent were drawn up and circulated to all police constables in the Division Conferences held early in March, attended by all the important officers of the organization, and the whole scheme was discussed and the remaining details improved. Road Officers and Haulage Committee Chairmen were asked to hold themselves free for conference on April 27 and 28, and, as events transpired, actually met on those days for the final touches. During the last week in April the Commissioners were established in their headquarters, and everything was ready for the final "Action" telegram from London which implied that the crisis was inevitable.⁵⁶

Such was the preparation of the emergency organization made by Mr. Baldwin's Government in the nine-month truce obtained by the coal subsidy. Many months of forethought, of organization and of meetings in London and the Provinces was the price of this preparedness, and while, as an official in the Ministry of Transport informed the writer, the scheme was ready in 1925 had it been absolutely necessary to use it, it was not nearly so complete as in 1926. The wisdom of avoiding Governmental responsibility for the running of the transport will be recognized when it is stated that during the 1919 Railroad strike, when the Government requisitioned in wholesale manner, the expense was excessive and the result most inefficient. The writer was informed that volunteer drivers came into service, took out Government-owned or Government-requisitioned trucks, took them to distant destinations and were never seen afterwards. Indeed, more than once the driver would vanish and his truck-load of goods would vanish with him! In 1926 the local contractor was himself responsible for the oversight of such

⁵⁵ Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-59.

matters. The manner in which this national emergency organization actually functioned during the great strike, and the degree to which its efforts were seconded by the extensive civil use of the Navy, will be told later in this study.

It has been shown in some detail how the Government and certain sections of the public made preparations for the possible eventuality of a general strike when the subsidy period should finally end. Some, at least, of this preparation must have become known to the leaders of the labor movement. Certain members of the Labor Cabinet of 1924, such as Mr. J. H. Thomas, Mr. Frank Hodges, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, to mention but three, may have been somewhat affected in their attitude toward the strike by their knowledge of the existence of Government plans for an emergency organization.¹⁰⁰ Yet, even so, the completeness of the preparation does not seem to have been at all vividly understood by the majority of the trade union executives, or else the apparent success of July 31, 1925, blinded them to the merely temporary nature of that Government surrender. The least one would have expected of union executives and labor leaders generally would have been some serious discussion of the machinery necessary for the successful running of a general stoppage. Evidence of such preparation is, however, almost entirely lacking.

LABOR'S REFUSAL TO PREPARE

The annual Trades Union Congress of 1925, held at Scarborough from the 7th to the 12th of September, spoke with a very "left wing" tone, but when it came to a resolution granting more power to the General Council, Congress suddenly became distinctly cautious. This hotly debated resolution proposed to empower the General Council of the Trades Union Congress to call for a stoppage of work by an affiliated organization, or any part thereof, in support of a trade union which was "defending a vital trade union principle" and to arrange with the Coöper-

¹⁰⁰ In the official *Report of the Conference of Trade Union Executives*, held on January 20 and 21, 1927, to discuss the General Council's actions before, during, and after the general strike, Mr. Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, admitted that "It was known that preparations had been made so elaborately by the Government as to make the possibilities of success much less than in 1926." Cf. *Report*, p. 48.

ative Wholesale Society to make provision for the distribution of food in the event of a strike. In the second place the resolution called on all affiliated organizations to make such changes in their own rules or constitutions as would regularize the grant of such power to the General Council.¹⁰¹

The recent crisis was still vivid in the memory of the delegates, and the effectiveness of the recent voluntary surrender by the most important unions, of their authority to the General Council, had been proved by the Cabinet's *volte face* at the last moment. Nevertheless it was another matter to hand over permanently and without qualification such vast powers to the joint executive of the trade union movement, and the miners did not succeed in getting Congress' consent for the resolution. A. J. Cook characteristically declared: "It is only power that counts. No union ought to fight alone. The time has gone by. You will be smashed. In the trade union movement we must have centralized power." Just as typical of the other kind of trade union leader was J. H. Thomas's reply: "Power is essential, but common sense is sometimes necessary. The power already held by the General Council is sufficient."¹⁰² When the great strike finally occurred it was A. J. Cook's Federation that withheld its complete surrender of powers to the General Council!

Perhaps the most complete admission that no preparations had been made in the least degree comparable to those of the Government and the O. M. S., by the trade unions or the General Council, is contained in the speech of Mr. Ernest Bevin, member of the General Council, to the Conference of Executives in January, 1927:

With regard to the preparations for the strike, there were no preparations until April 27 (1926), and I do not want anyone to go away from this conference under the impression that the General Council had any particular plan to run this movement. In fact the General Council did not sit down to draft the plans until they were called together on April 27th, and it is better for everybody to know the task was thrown upon us from April 27th to May 1st, and when

¹⁰¹ *Labor Gazette* (London), Sept., 1925; cf. *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1925.

¹⁰² Scott Nearing, "British Labor Turns to the Left," *The Nation* (N. Y.), Oct. 14, 1925, p. 408.

that task is understood you will be able to appreciate, not the little difficulties, but the wonderful response and organisation we had.¹⁰²

Mr. J. H. Thomas in the same Conference of Executives asked a pointed question as to trade union preparation for a general strike:

Is there anyone in this audience, reviewing the situation calmly today that would dare say, that if you set out for nine months and deliberately and calculatedly decided that you were going to prepare for a general strike, that anyone in his senses believes you could do it?

The reasons for this alleged impossibility Mr. Thomas offered immediately:

You know perfectly well that two things would follow. First you could not get into any negotiations that would be likely to bring peace; and secondly, the other side would anticipate every move. You cannot, in these matters, assume that the other people are taking no notice.¹⁰³

Mr. Thomas does not seem to have considered the interesting example of the Belgian general strike of 1913, when long preparations were openly made, but no strike called until every other method had been attempted.

Mr. Citrine, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, showed something of the difficulty that would have faced the trade union movement, had it endeavored to imitate the Government in magnitude of preparations, when he suggested that any long time attempt to get united strike action from all unions would have resulted in union members seeking injunctions against their Executive Councils, or at least in their demanding a ballot, and raising a movement to defeat the General Council within the unions themselves.¹⁰⁴

A delegate on the floor of the Hall at this Conference of Executives had asked if it were not true that Mr. Citrine, as a result of a certain provocative speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had not thought it was "absolutely necessary for the Council to do something by way of preparation" and had, therefore, drafted a memorandum to that end. The Chairman of the gathering, Mr.

¹⁰² T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings at a Special Conference of Executives*, Jan. 20, 1927, p. 10. *Italics ours.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 20, 1927, p. 43.

George Hicks, admitted that this was true, that the memorandum in question was considered, but that it was not thought desirable at that stage to adopt Mr. Citrine's suggestion.¹⁰⁸ In the official statement of the Miners' Federation made to the same Executives, occurred the following questions:

Did the General Council foresee the General Strike? If so, did it prepare? In August, 1925, the words were written that promised preparedness. Actually at the beginning of February, 1926, it was clear to the General Council that another crisis was inevitable. What preparations were made between August and January to meet the possible crisis? What after January when the possible had become the inevitable?¹⁰⁹

To both of these important questions Mr. Citrine made answer. The memorandum he had drawn up never went to the General Council, but to the Negotiating Committee.¹⁰⁸ The latter decided to send it to the Miners' Federation, and it was sent thither on February 3. At a joint meeting with the Miners' Federation Executive on the 12th of that month Mr. Herbert Smith, president of the Federation, expressed his belief that it would be wise to wait till the Royal Commission had made its report. Mr. Cook repeated that request on February 19.¹⁰⁹

Mr. Citrine suggested that there were three broad divisions of the labor movement that could have been better coördinated in preparation for the possible crisis; the political, the coöperative, and the industrial, but that the Miners "consistently, bitterly and jealously kept the political side out of the dispute right from the beginning,"¹¹⁰ not even approaching the Labor party in the House of Commons until the coal stoppage had dragged on for sixteen weeks.¹¹⁰ As to the Coöperative Movement, discussions with the Coöperative Union had taken place in 1925 during which the coöperative representatives had referred to their experience in the Miners' strike of 1921, when heavy financial advances had been made that had not been repaid up to December, 1925. While

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Statement of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain* (presented to conference of trade union executives Jan. 30, 1927), p. 5, paragraph X.

¹¹⁰ Presumably the Special Industrial Committee of the General Council.

¹¹¹ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, etc., Jan. 30, 1927, p. 41.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

those discussions were proceeding Mr. Cook had asserted in South Wales:

In the coming struggle there would be a new trinity . . . a linking up of the miners' cause with the political, industrial and coöperative movements. The coöperative movement would be the victualling movement for the fighting forces of labor.

That speech, declared Mr. Citrine, had caused great indignation among the Coöperative organizations, and the secretary of the Coöperative Union had immediately written the following letter:

It is a great pity that Mr. Cook cannot be "muzzled." See his statement again this week that an arrangement has been come to for the Coöperative Movement to deal with the question in case of a crisis. This is causing a lot of discussion in the Coöperative Movement, *because no such arrangement has been come to*, and I think he ought to be a little more guarded in his statements, as it is making our position more difficult every time statements like that appear in the Press.¹¹¹

A joint meeting with the Coöperative Union at which representatives of the Miners' Federation were present was held on February 26, 1926, but nothing came of the General Council's hopes in that direction, because the Coöperative Movement required a pledge of the assets of the whole Trade Union movement. As the General Council had no power to make such a pledge, and as the Miner's Federation could not suggest any way out of the difficulty, that aspect of coördination of the labor movement came to an end.¹¹² Something of the difficulties that faced the General Council in attempting to make any preparation for an eventual strike can now be understood. To no little degree the unrestrained oratory of the Miners' Secretary at one and the same time stirred up the hostility of the conservative classes, and threw grave obstacles into the way of possible beginnings of coördination among the various branches of the labor movement. In admitting this, the writer is not attempting to palliate the fact that the General Council did permit a great strike to be called with scarcely any previous planning or organization.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42. Italics ours.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43; cf. T. U. C. General Council, *Report to the Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions*, June 25, 1926, p. 4.

THE SAMUEL COMMISSION

In the meantime, the cause of all this preparation, the British coal industry, had not allowed itself to be forgotten. Immediately after the Cabinet's surrender Mr. Cook diligently stirred the Fascist pot of reactionary fears by his threats of trouble to come. Whether or not at this time the Miners' Secretary had delved into British labor history of the Chartist period, the fact remains that on August 18, 1925, Mr. Cook produced a re-vamped scheme of a "month's holiday" for all workers, after the manner of William Benbow of Chartist memory. Plans would be made, he implied, to feed the workers while at their month's play. Such a nation-wide holiday would prove who really formed the community.¹¹³ Such speeches, and the feeling roused in labor circles when the mine owners, now recipients of the subsidy, proceeded to cut wages by manipulating the basis rates, supported in this by Mr. Baldwin, kept the coal situation from calming down to any degree.¹¹⁴ After a whole month's delay, due to the reluctance among public men to accept the task of Royal Commissioners, the Samuel Commission was finally appointed, "to enquire into and report upon the economic position of the coal industry and the conditions affecting it, and to make any recommendations for the improvement thereof."¹¹⁵

The Sankey Commission had consisted of a chairman, three miners, and three mine owners' representatives, and six members ostensibly representing the general public. Of these, three were eminent members of the Fabian Society, and the remaining three important business leaders not directly interested in the coal mining industry. The complete failure of the Government to carry out the basic suggestions of that commission in reorganization of the industry has already been mentioned. The attitude to the Sankey Commission in general shown by the officials of the Mining Association can be seen in the remark of Mr. Evan Williams, president of the Association, before the Samuel Commission. "As to the Sankey Commission, I regard that as one of the greatest disasters that ever happened to the coal industry

¹¹³ *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 1925.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1925; cf. Amy Hewes, "The Task of the English Coal Commission," *Journal of Political Economy*, Feb., 1926.

¹¹⁵ On Sept. 3, 1925; cf. *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1925.

of this country.¹¹⁴ In the Buckmaster and Macmillan inquiries of 1924 and 1925, again employers and labor were represented in the personnel of the Courts. On the Samuel Commission, however, no one of the four Commissioners was either a mine owner or a miner; nor, save with considerable stretch of imagination, could any one of the four members have been looked upon as representatives of labor.¹¹⁷

The Chairman, Sir Herbert Samuel, had been at various times Postmaster General, President of the Local Government Board, and Secretary of State for Home Affairs ("Home Secretary"), and since 1920 High Commissioner of Palestine. He was, incidentally, known as an opponent of nationalization. Sir William Beveridge, at one time leader writer for the very conservative *Morning Post*, was later largely responsible for the establishment of the British labor exchanges, was author of a famous book on Unemployment, served during the war on the Ministry of Munitions and the Ministry of Food, and ultimately held the Directorship of the London School of Economics. General Sir Herbert Lawrence was at the time of his appointment managing partner of the banking house of Glyn Mills and Company, and member of the Boards of several important concerns, including the London, Midland and Scottish Railway and the armament firm of Vickers, Ltd. Mr. Kenneth Lee, the fourth member, was chairman of Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee & Co., an important textile firm.¹¹⁸

The Commission visited in person some twenty-five, and, by deputy, over forty, coal mines, and examined some seventy-six witnesses. While no representative of miners or owners sat upon the Commission, the Prime Minister had pledged that both of those parties should be represented at meetings where witnesses were examined and should have the right to put questions to those witnesses. No other interested parties were given such a privilege.¹¹⁹ The Commission's labors were completed and the Report

¹¹⁴ *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1925)*, vol. II, 16, 543.

¹¹⁵ Cf. S. K. Ratcliffe, "The British Coal Commission Reports," *Survey*, April 15, 1926, p. 72. For a bitter, partisan, criticism of the Commission's personnel see Arthur Horner, "The Coal Report and After," *Labour Monthly*, May, 1926.

¹¹⁶ *Arundel, op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

¹¹⁷ *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1925)*, vol. II, 1-2; cf. I, 1-2.

signed on March 6, 1926, but the report was not made public until the 11th of that month, and even two weeks later the press and the public bitterly complained of their inability to obtain adequate supplies of the report.¹²⁰ The report was an excellent summary of the general conditions in the coal industry, but could hardly be said to provide an easy basis for legislation by the Baldwin Government. Although the Commission itself was unanimous in its report, unlike the Sankey Commission, it had an almost impossible task to face, inasmuch as there was practically no common ground between the two contending parties of miners and owners.¹²¹

The president of the Mining Association, Mr. Evan Williams, summed up the average owners' views as to the cause of trouble in the industry:

The unrest in the Mining Industry has not been the spontaneous expression of dissatisfaction on the part of the mass of the workers themselves, whose wages have been higher and employment more regular than those of workers in the other heavy industries; but it has been the result of a deliberately planned attempt on the part of the miners' leaders to prevent the reconstruction of the industry under private enterprise after de-control, in order to force upon the nation the political policy summed up in the phrase "The Mines for the Miners."¹²²

The charge of inefficiency on the part of the mines' management, made by the Sankey Commission and the Macmillan Court of Inquiry, was indignantly rejected by Mr. Evan Williams as an unsubstantiated slander.¹²³ Among the more important proposals for meeting the existing depression in the coal industry Mr. Williams offered, on behalf of the Mining Association, a cut of some thirty-three million pounds sterling in the railroad labor wage bill, in order that a 25 per cent reduction might be made on transport and dock charges for coal.¹²⁴ "a return to the hours of work in operation prior to 1919," which would benefit the worker by giving "steadier employment and larger earnings" and the country by "stimulating the consumption of coal in the large dependent industries";¹²⁵ and a reduction in

¹²⁰ Cf. *London Times*, March 11, 14, 18, 1926. ¹²¹ Cf. Batcliffe, *op. cit.*, 78.

¹²² *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry* (1926), II, 830, paragraph 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 831, paragraphs 10, 11.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 833, paragraphs 23-26.

wages costs.¹²⁶ Mr. Williams emphasized the "utter impossibility" of dealing with the problem "on a national footing," the problem being one that "called for an intimate knowledge of local conditions on the part of the negotiating bodies," but he offered, on behalf of the mine owners, to meet the Miners' Federation and enter into district negotiations.¹²⁷ It is a matter of somewhat more than academic interest that, with the exception of the cut in railroad wages, every one of those demands put forward by Mr. Evan Williams in his evidence before the Samuel Commission, was finally forced from the Miners before the close of 1926, either with the aid of the Baldwin Government, or with its acquiescence.¹²⁸

On the side of the Miners extensive proposals were put forward for the unification of all the processes of coal producing, of by-product utilization, of coal distribution and export. That such unification would imply powers too large for any but a public body was admitted, and the national ownership of such a unified industry was proposed.¹²⁹ Further proposals were offered for the undertaking, by the nationally unified coal industry, of the production of electrical power, of gas and smokeless fuel. To this end a National Power and Transport Commission was suggested, the details of which do not concern this study.¹³⁰ The Miners' demands also included a national minimum scale of wages, lest cut-throat competition in prices set in between different districts at the expense of wages.¹³¹ The Miners' demand for fundamental reorganization of the industry was bitterly attacked by the Mining Association throughout the hearings of the Commission, as in all previous inquiries.

As the owners offered nothing in the line of remedial measures save the negative ones of lengthened hours and wage cuts in the coal and railroad industries; and as the majority of the Com-

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 284, paragraph 81.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 83, 86.

¹²⁸ Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike*, pp. 9, 121.

¹²⁹ *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1926)*, II, 1021, paragraph 3.

¹³⁰ See, for whole scheme, Memorandum of Evidence by Mr. Tawney on behalf of the Miners' Federation, in above Government publication, II, 1020-25.

¹³¹ *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1926)*, II, 1035, question 17,088.

missioners were known opponents of nationalization, the problem facing the Commission was no easy one.¹³² The Commission rejected the nationalization of the industry, but advocated national purchase of the mineral. Despite the denials of the Mining Association the Commission recognized the need for changes in the industry, in the methods of utilizing coal, in the selling organization and methods of transport.

The important section of the Report for the purposes of this study, was, however, that dealing with hours, wages, and the subsidy. The Commission was emphatic that the subsidy should stop, and should never be repeated.¹³³ The Commission declared that they had come reluctantly but unhesitatingly to the conclusion that the costs of production, with hours and wages as then existing, were greater than the industry could bear. They were unable to recommend the Mining Association's proposals of longer hours, which would involve a lowering of the standard of life and leisure that would tend to become permanent.¹³⁴ The Commission was further strongly of the opinion that national wage agreements should continue to rule, as was the custom in all the other British industries of importance.¹³⁵ Evidently wages remained as the sole source of immediate retrenchment, and on this the Commission stated:

What we contemplate is not a permanent lowering of wage standards but a temporary sacrifice by the men in the industry, other than the worst paid, in order to avoid the possible unemployment of hundreds of thousands of them.

Any material fall in wages will, we fully recognize, on the facts presented elsewhere in this Report, bring real wages at the present cost of living, below pre-war level for a large proportion of the miners.¹³⁶

The method proposed was the revision of the "minimum percentage." The Commission alleged that this method would not reduce the man on subsistence allowance of around forty-five shillings a week, but would affect the higher paid men who were said to be earning nearer eighty shillings a week.¹³⁷ Finally the

¹³² *Ibid.*, chap. VI, for criticism of the Miners' scheme.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 236.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 234-35.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Commission uttered the pious belief, so much quoted in the subsequent conflict:

Before any sacrifices are asked from those engaged in the industry, it shall be definitely agreed between them that all practicable means for improving its organization and increasing its efficiency should be adopted, as speedily as circumstances in each case allow.

In our view, revision of the minimum percentage should depend upon acceptance by all parties of such measures of reorganization as will secure to the industry a new lease of prosperity leading to higher wages.¹³⁸

The Coal Commission's Report was received with very mixed feelings. In the first place neither Government, owners nor miners made any official comment for a short period after the Report was issued, by special request of both the Prime Minister and the General Council. The rest of the public, however, was not so bound to silence, and on the whole probably agreed with the comment of the *Times*, which believed that the Government must "see difficulties and feel objections; but to pick and choose among a multitude of recommendations" was "simply to reopen all the floodgates of controversy." The *Times*, therefore, recommended that they "accept the Report as a whole and get to work upon it."¹³⁹ While no official utterance was made by the Miners' Federation or the Mining Association, on the 14th of March Sir Adam Nimmo of the Association and Mr. A. J. Cook of the Federation could not resist taking a tilt at the recommendations. Both comments showed the way the wind would blow, and could have been no surprise to those who had followed some of the public hearings of the Samuel Commission. Mr. Cook speaking at Mardy, in South Wales showed that the Report implied wage reductions, and clearly declared against any wage cut whatsoever. Sir Adam talking at Leven, at the annual meeting of the Fife Coal Company, declared that the one practical suggestion in the Report was that, with the subsidy withdrawn, wages must be reduced.¹⁴⁰

Lord Melchett, then Sir Alfred Mond, prominent employer in the chemical industry, speaking at the Northern Conservative Club, at Newcastle, in the heart of the Northumberland

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, March 15, 1926.

¹⁴⁰ *London Times*, March 11 and 12, 1926.

coalfield, expressed the attitude of the more progressive forces in large-scale industry. He did not think it practical

that in six weeks they could suddenly cut off a subsidy with a knife, as if it had never been given. If that had been the intention the Coal Commission ought to have reported at least three months ago, or there ought not to have been a Coal Commission, and the owners and the miners' representatives ought to have known this was going to happen and have sat down weeks ago. That not being the case, they certainly could not make it a question of weeks.¹⁴¹

Something of this feeling must have been present at the Cabinet meeting held on March 17, for the *Times* reported a preliminary discussion "whether the lopping off of the subsidy in its entirety at so early a date was feasible from the political point of view." To carry out the Report, legislation in great quantity would be required, and the greatest optimist did not believe that such legislation could be effected in the remaining weeks of the subsidy.¹⁴²

If the owners and miners made no official comment at the outset, the coal merchants exhibited no such hesitation. The Coal Merchants' Federation called a meeting in London to organize a national campaign against the Commission's recommendation that powers be given municipalities to distribute coal in competition with the retail merchants. The chairman could not see why the Commission had condemned in strongest possible terms the subsidy to the miners, but had brought forward a proposal wherein the distribution of coal to the consumer might be subsidized from the local taxes, where losses occurred.¹⁴³

The general comment by the "intellectuals" of the labor movement may be gathered from statements made by Mr. Harold J. Laski and Mr. Page Arnot, representatives respectively of the "right" and the "left" wings. Mr. Laski, referring to the Commission's report, thinks that "broadly, it is not unfair to characterize the report as an impressive economic analysis which is void of any constructive plan for the immediate crisis and is amazingly timid in the long-term views it is prepared to take."¹⁴⁴ Page Arnot of the Labour Research De-

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1926.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, March 18, 1926.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, March 25, 1926.

¹⁴⁴ "The Coal Strike and Beyond," *The Nation* (N. Y.), May 28, 1926, p. 678.

partment sees a far more sinister purpose behind the Commission.

The parties to the report wished to divide the Labor movement, to convince those who were ready to be convinced, as well as those who were less ready, that the miners should suffer a reduction in wages and that the other Trade Unions would not be justified in repeating their action of the previous July. In its purpose of weakening the Trade Union morale the report was completely successful.¹⁴⁵

On the 24th of March Mr. Baldwin broke the silence by presenting in person to the representatives of the Federation and the Association the Cabinet statement of attitude toward the Commission's recommendations. On its face an acceptance of the Report, and claimed as such ever afterward, in reality it was as studiously considered an evasion of direct statement as any Delphic oracle. No member of the Commission could have expected agreement with the totality of their recommendations by either owners or miners, and the Government could scarcely have remained in ignorance of the basic difference of opinion, on almost every matter existing between the two contesting parties before the Commission. Yet the Government's every pledge with regard to the report predicated agreement by owners and miners alike. The pledge ran thus:

The Government have considered with great care the Report and conclusions of the Royal Commission. The conclusions reached by the Commission do not in all respects accord with views held by the Government, and some of the recommendations contain proposals to which, taken by themselves, the Government are known to be opposed. Nevertheless, in the face of the unanimous report of the Commission and for the sake of a general settlement, the Government for their part will be prepared to undertake such measures as may be required of the State to give the recommendations effect, provided that those engaged in this industry—with whom the decision primarily rests—agree to accept the Report and to carry on the industry on the basis of its recommendations.

Mr. Baldwin summed up the Government's statement in a sentence: "We accept the Report, provided the other parties do so."¹⁴⁶ Mr. Herbert Smith for the miners then asked Mr.

¹⁴⁵ *The General Strike*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ *London Times*, March 25, 1926.

Baldwin if that meant that the owners and miners would be left to settle in any way they could, and that the Government would give no further financial aid to the industry. To this vital question the Prime Minister made a long reply, the trend of which was that the subsidy must end on the 30th of April, but that, if an agreement was reached by May 1, the Government would be willing to consider temporary assistance, possibly for as long as three months, to "ease the position" in those districts where, if a settlement were to be arrived at, "the sacrifice required must be heavy."¹⁴⁷ All of which meant one thing only to the miners, a reduction of wage and that immediately.

The Prime Minister left with the miners' and owners' representatives a list of some fourteen recommendations of the Commission that would require Government action, if and when the other two parties agreed upon the Report. Among the "fourteen points" were the establishment of a National Fuel and Power Council, a large extension of the provision for research, the State purchase of royalties on coal, the grant of powers to local authorities to undertake the retail sale of coal, and the establishment of joint pit committees. Perhaps the most significant point, in view of the subsequent Eight Hours Act, was the tenth—"the Government to make such modification in the law governing hours as the owners and men may agree."¹⁴⁸

The owners and miners withdrew without making any pronouncement as to their own position, but that very evening Mr. A. J. Cook made the following statement in a public speech in London:

We have made arrangements that not one ton of coal will be hauled in this country unless the Government's decision is satisfactory to us miners. We have also made sure that no coal will enter this country from America or Germany. We are going to be slaves no longer and our men will starve before they accept any reductions in wages.¹⁴⁹

It is just within the realm of possibility that the miners might have been persuaded to yield certain concessions in wage rates for the better paid men, had the Government publicly adopted the Commission's Report, and pledged itself to put through all the necessary legislation without delay, *irrespective of the atti-*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

tude of owners or men toward the recommendations. Nothing short of immediate and determined action of that kind could have prevented a coal stoppage on the 1st of May.¹²⁰ The leaders of the miners had publicly opposed the least reduction in wages so long and so strenuously that no Commission's report would have justified their change of position before their men, quite apart from the fact that a cut in wages would have brought great numbers of miners well below the standard of living of 1914. Whether the Commission's Report would have averted a general strike in support of the miners, had the Government played its cards in a less belligerent manner on that fatal Sunday night, May 2, is quite another matter, as will be seen in the next chapter.

The Royal Commission's Report failed to avert a struggle, and "it failed primarily because it had made no recommendation as to ways and means for putting its suggested reforms into effect. The Commission could not but have been aware that both sides would be opposed to some of its proposals. It knew, too, that the reigning ministry would look askance upon some of its suggestions. Yet it left the question of administrative machinery almost untouched."¹²¹ When the critical moment arrived, therefore, all the emphasis was shifted from the most vital need of reorganization of the industry itself, to the temporary but burning issue of wage reductions. With that result nothing had been gained by the nation from the subsidy expense, save the rather doubtful benefit of a governmental and industrial preparation that permitted a crushing defeat of the trade union movement, and the ultimate starvation surrender of the coal miners of Great Britain.

¹²⁰ Kingsley Martin, *op. cit.*, asserts that Mr. Cook at a private meeting immediately after the publication of the Report admitted that wage concessions might be made under such conditions. Cf. pp. 47-48.

¹²¹ Labin and Everett, *The British Coal Dilemma*, p. 91.

CHAPTER X

THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT FAILED

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN 1919 AND 1926

WHEN THE coal miners of Great Britain agreed to accept the Sankey Commission in 1919, instead of forcing the issue of wages and of national ownership of the mines at the point of a great national strike, they gave evidence of more patience than of selfish strategic wisdom. If ever there was a period in the history of Britain during this century when a bold and perhaps a revolutionary appeal to all the other workers would have been answered with almost instant support, 1919 was the year. War weariness and an almost equal disgust with the new peace, as far as it affected labor, together with a universal desire to take a rest from high pressure production in industry and a disinclination on the part of the returned soldiers to plunge immediately into the routine of machine labor, all made for a readiness to resort to direct action on the industrial field. The temporary trade boom after the war played into the hands of rebellious labor, and the Government itself at the opening of 1919 was most anxiously feeling the pulse of unrest among soldiers and workers alike.

It would be hard to find a situation more different in almost every way from that which characterized the beginning of 1926. A long period of poor trade and falling wages, with even more drastic cuts feared; a prolonged use of the misnamed "dole" of the unemployment insurance scheme by scores of thousands of workers, and a steady fall of trade union membership from the peak year of 1920;¹ a brief but enlightening experience of political office by the Labor party, and an extremely Conservative Government in power with an immense Parliamentary majority—none of these factors made for an enthusiastic adoption of a militant policy by the majority of labor executives. The apparent victory of the labor forces over the dis-

¹ From 5,337,000 to 5,206,000 members; cf. *British Ministry of Labor Gazette*, Nov., 1927, cited in *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Jan. 1928, p. 106.

tinctly anti-labor Government during the previous summer had not appeared to strengthen any wavering faith in the practical utility of a general strike among most of the trade union leaders. The few left-wing representatives on the General Council like Swales, Parcell, and Hicks, whose influence had been rather noticeable at the Scarborough Trades Union Congress in September, 1925, in the ensuing elections were outnumbered by right-wing men such as Thomas and Pugh.

Pressure from the "left," and especially from the small but vocal Communist party, to have extensive preparations for a possible general industrial struggle initiated, had, if anything, only a contrary effect upon the General Council. The resolution to give more power to the General Council² had been shelved at the Scarborough Congress in favor of a recommendation that the General Council "examine the problem in all its bearings, with power to consult the executives of the affiliated unions" and report its findings to a special conference of the executives.³ No such special conference of union executives was called during the nine months of the subsidy, in spite of, perhaps partly because of, insistent demands for such action by the Communist press and manifestoes.⁴

In similar fashion the urgent plea of the Minority Movement inspired by the Communist party, that a Workers' Defense Corps be formed as a counterstroke to the Fascists and the O. M. S., met with nothing but condemnation from the General Council and the Labor party; the argument being that such an organization would provoke the other side to similar schemes.⁵ As already shown, in the previous chapter, the "other

² Section (b) empowered the General Council to call for a stoppage of work by an affiliated organization in order to assist a fellow trade union, and to arrange with the Coöperative Wholesale Society to make provision for food distribution in the event of a strike. *Labour Year Book, 1927*, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ E.g., manifesto issued by the executive committee of the Communist Party after a meeting early in January, 1926, calling upon the General Council to summon a special conference of the union executives to give wider powers to the General Council, and to make a working agreement between the General Council and the Coöperative Wholesale Society. Cf. J. T. Murphy, *The Political Meaning of the Great Strike*, pp. 52-53.

⁵ Cf. H. N. Brailsford, in the *New Leader*, May 21, 1926, p. 6. "When the General Council, after the July crisis, faced the probability that it would recur in May, it failed to realize the need for cool preparation and clear

side" had not waited to be "provoked" but had most promptly inaugurated the O. M. S. after the subsidy surrender of 1925.

During the sessions of the Royal Commission, however, the General Council had not been idle. Coöperating with the Miners' Federation and the Executive Committee of the Labor party, it had been a party to the proposals for a complete reconstruction of the coal industry laid before that Commission. The reception given to these proposals by the Commissioners, described in the preceding chapter, made it evident, long before the Report was issued, that the labor method of solving the problem was not going to be acceptable to the Commission. It was already clear enough that neither mine owners nor Government would have any use for those proposals. "The General Council had, therefore, to consider its responsibilities to the movement, and to look ahead with a view to coördinating its forces so that a satisfactory settlement of the dispute might be reached."⁶ Part of this process of "coördination" consisted in joint meetings for the formulation of policy by the Miners' Executive and the T. U. C. Special Industrial Committee, with Mr. Pugh as its new chairman.⁷ A further, but unsuccessful, step was the consultation with the Coöperative Movement, described in the preceding chapter.

At one such joint meeting, held on February 12, Mr. Herbert Smith restated the position of the Miners' Federation, stressing the three points that they considered to be fundamental: (a) No wage reduction, (b) no lengthening of hours, and (c) no interference with the principle of national agreements.⁸ A week later the joint body decided to make no new declaration of policy before the publication of the Royal Commission's Report, but merely to reaffirm previous declarations supporting the miners. On the 26th a further joint meeting approved the issue of a circular to all affiliated unions, summarizing the General Council's policy, at that time, in the following paragraph:

thinking. The creation of O. M. S. was enough to remind it of that duty. A sub-committee was, indeed, set up; plans for maintaining food supplies and creating a defense corps were discussed, but in the end it reported to the effect that preparation was impossible. . . ."

⁶ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, June 25, 1926, p. 3.

⁷ Mr. Swales had been chairman during the July crisis.—*Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The Industrial Committee has been in regular consultation with the Miners' Federation, and while it would be premature at the present stage to attempt to formulate any detailed policy which may have to be pursued, the Committee has already affirmed the attitude of the Trade Union movement as expressed in July last, namely, that it would stand firmly and unitedly against any attempt to degrade further the standard of life in the coalfields. *There was to be no reduction in wages, no increase in working hours, and no interference with the principle of national agreements.*⁹

As far as the meaning of words is concerned, there is no shade of difference between the view of the Miners' Federation expressed by Mr. Herbert Smith, two weeks earlier, and this public announcement of the General Council's policy.

The temporary silence on the part of owners, miners, the Government, and the General Council, immediately following the publication of the Royal Commission's Report on March 11, has already been described at the close of the preceding chapter, together with the main features of the Report itself. The Minority Movement, however, was not content to keep silent. With the aid of the energetic Communist party it organized a "National Conference of Action" for March 21. Some 888 delegates, representing 547 organizations inclusive of 52 Trades Councils, attended the conference, and among other acts resolved to "urge each Trades Council to constitute itself a Council of Action," by mobilizing all the forces of the working class movement in its locality, including the trade union branches, the organized unemployed, the Coöperative Guilds, and the workers' political organizations; and to urge upon the General Council the immediate convention of a National Congress of Action.¹⁰ The chairman of this Conference of the Minority Movement, Tom Mann of syndicalist fame in pre-war days, gave the left-wing diagnosis of the Commission's Report:

The policy of splitting the workers is very cunningly continued. The Commission has recommended some changes, aimed at splitting the Labor Movement, such as the family wage, municipal selling

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Italics ours.

¹⁰ J. T. Murphy, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55. The purpose of such Congress being the closer participation of trade unions, labor political bodies, and the coöperative organizations; and the coöperation of the International Trade Union Movement.

agencies, and the nationalisation of minerals. They hope the reformist elements in the Labor Movement will concur with their recommendations and lose sight of the attacks upon living standards contained in the Report—which the Trade Unions must fight.¹¹

The General Council, in its Report to the affiliated Executives, stated that, upon the publication of the Commission's Report, "it was at once recognized that this must greatly influence the whole situation."¹² Just why there occurred this sudden belief that the Report would make so great a difference in the situation was not made clear, especially in view of the emphatic reaffirmation of policy issued by the General Council on February 26. Frank Hodges, secretary of the International Miners' Federation, and at the time of "Black Friday" secretary of the British Miners' Federation, had expressed general approval of the Commission's Report as early as March 15, four days after its publication, but his views in no sense represented the existing policy of the British Miners' Federation.¹³

Nonetheless there was a widespread fear that the organization proposals of the Commission would take second place in the dispute and be totally obscured by the question of wages, unless care was taken to concentrate attention on the reform of the industry. Perhaps the clearest expression of this fear, in the days immediately succeeding the issue of the Report, can be found in Lord Melchett's further communication to the press on March 31, excerpts from which follow:

It still seems to be insufficiently realized that a large part of the difficulty of securing either profits to owners or wages to workmen is due to the economic fact of over-production and excessive slaughtering of prices. The Government subsidy has been largely utilized in creating artificially cheap coal for the consumer at home and abroad. . . . The general ascertainties of prices in a district may produce figures of loss or microscopic profits per ton. The actual results obtained by individual enterprises present a very different picture. The margin between modern economic collieries and old and uneconomic ones, is so large that the former can afford to pass on the subsidy to the consumer, while still making a profit, leaving their economic competitors in as desperate a position as they were before.¹⁴

¹¹ Page Arnot, *The General Strike*, p. 113.

¹² *Report to Executives*, June 28, 1926, p. 5.

¹³ *London Times*, March 16, 1926.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1, 1926.

Lord Melchett saw no reason to believe that increased output and lowered wages, so much in demand by the owners, would alter that state of affairs either at home or abroad. On the contrary some regularizing of the sale of coal, by the creation of a British Fuel Federation, with representation of the miners on its control boards, was as necessary and would be as practicable as similar organizations in the markets for sulphate of ammonia or rubber. It was obvious to this operator in the chemical industry that any concessions demanded of the Miners' Federation, in regard to wages, hours, or output, should carry with them "the reasonable expectation of a better position of the industry as a whole."¹⁵

THE WAGE ISSUE BECOMES PARAMOUNT

On April 1 the owners through the Mining Association made detailed answer to the various recommendations of the Commission. In many of the recommendations the owners declared it was not a question of acceptance on their part but a matter for Parliament and legislation. On the vital question of wages the owners proposed immediate national negotiations to settle the general principles to be incorporated in a new agreement, but held that the determination of the minimum percentage payable on the district basis be left to the district associations.¹⁶

The Miners' Federation felt that the owners' views on the Report in general were "of an indefinite character," but that

The refusal of the owners to consider the fixation of a national minimum percentage, and their insistence upon all wages being the concern of the districts themselves, has constituted an almost insurmountable obstacle to an amicable settlement.

In the absence of any definite wage proposals by the owners the Federation assumed that the terms would be similar to July, 1926, which would have entailed wage reductions from one to five shillings a day.¹⁷

A delegate conference of the Miners' Federation was due on April 9, and preceding that meeting the Executive of the Federation endeavored to gain from the Industrial Committee of the General Council a further affirmation of the Miners' three points, no wage cuts, no lengthening of hours, and no departure from

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, April 3, 10, 1926.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

national agreements. It was generally rumored that the General Council no longer supported the Miners, and for this reason the Federation Executive desired a plain statement for their delegates.¹⁸ After full consideration the Industrial Committee of the General Council, instead of reaffirming support of the Miners' three demands, passed the following resolution:

That having discussed with the representatives of the Miners' Federation the present position in the mining industry, with special reference to the views of the miners on the coal-owners' statements of their attitude in regard to the Report of the Royal Commission, this Committee reaffirms its previous declarations in support of the miners' efforts to obtain an equitable settlement of outstanding difficulties. This Committee is of the opinion that negotiations between the Mining Association and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain should be continued without delay in order to obtain a clear understanding with regard to the Report of the Royal Commission, and to reduce points of difference to the smallest possible dimensions.

That this Committee hold itself available to assist in any way possible to reach a satisfactory settlement.¹⁹

The General Council's Report proceeded most significantly to make comment:

It was recognized that this did not go so far as the miners desired, but it was felt that the appearance of the Commission's Report and its acceptance by the Government changed the situation, and rendered a declaration of purely negative policy unwise.²⁰

In the debate on this Report, held on January 20-21, 1927, J. H. Thomas explained the resolution further by declaring that all the negotiating experience of the Committee would have been useless had they bound themselves with a definite pledge to the Miners at that date. Thomas admitted that, to make no mistake as to what message was put before the Miners' delegates next day, a letter was written by Secretary Citrine and given to Herbert Smith, the contents of which were profoundly contrary to the opinions of Smith himself.²¹ The letter in question, referring to the Miners' three points, continued thus:

¹⁸ *Arnot, op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹⁹ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, June 23, 1926, p. 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²¹ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 24. Thomas's comment "On the first occasion when the General Council were

The Committee fully realize the seriousness of the present position, but they are of the opinion that matters have not yet reached a stage when any final declaration of the General Council's policy can be made.

The letter urged that further efforts should be made to discover how far the points of difference between the owners and men could be reduced, and requested the Federation to present the General Council with a detailed statement of the Miners' views on the various recommendations offered by the Royal Commission.²⁵

On the following day, April 9, the Miners' delegates in conference passed a resolution in which they recommended to the district:

- (a) That no assent be given to any proposals for increasing the length of the working day.
- (b) That the principle of a national wages agreement with a national minimum percentage be firmly adhered to.
- (c) That inasmuch as wages are already too low, we cannot assent to any proposals for reduced wages.²⁶

Comment upon this action, in the General Council's Report, is critical:

It will be clear that while the miners' conference were fully aware that the Industrial Committee declined to tie the hands of the General Council and the Trade Union movement in regard to negotiations on the Report, their conference bound its officials to refuse any consideration of the possibility of revision of wages and working conditions.²⁷

That the Industrial Committee was not as firmly convinced as to the impossibility of a readjustment in wages and hours ("working conditions") is clearly implied in that comment, in the hesitancy of the previous announcement, and in the letter to Herbert Smith.

asked to commit themselves" to the miners' position "prior to the delegate meeting they said 'No.'" is quite incorrect, as will be seen by reference to the categorical statement made by the Industrial Committee of the General Council on February 26, 1926, quoted in full above. This decision by the Industrial Committee on April 8, was a vitally important change in policy.

²⁵ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, June 26, 1926, p. 7.

²⁶ *Statement of the Miners' Federation to the T. U. C. Executives*, p. 7.

²⁷ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, June 26, 1926, p. 6.

By this apparently definitive resolution, however, passed by the Miners' delegates, the Miners' Executive had averted an irrevocable decision on the Commission's Report. The Lancashire delegates to the conference had come prepared to move, not only rejection of the owners' proposals, *but of the Commission's recommendations also*. It was generally feared by the national Executive that if the Lancashire motion had been put to the vote a majority of delegates would have supported it, as the feeling in the districts was very strong. Frank Hodges in a speech at Nottingham had shown the danger of letting the mine owners gain public support by their acceptance of the Report, while the miners either rejected or postponed decision on the Commission's recommendations. There is no question that the militant members of the Miners' Federation hoped that the owners, by posting up notices of new wage terms, would precipitate a struggle before any pledge was given on the Report.²⁵

INFLUENCE OF THE "MINORITY MOVEMENT"

One, at least, of the reasons that caused the emphatic pronouncement by the Miners' delegates which "tied the hands of their officials," can be found in the efforts of the Minority Movement in the coalfields. A week after the National Conference of Action had met, on March 20, there gathered a special conference of the Minority Movement from the various coalfields. The terms of the resolution passed by this group will give some hint of what was proceeding in those areas.

This conference of militant miners from every coalfield in Britain, resolves to work *vigorously and perseveringly for the full and complete rejection of the Royal Coal Commission Report*. We recognise the Report to be a subtle manoeuvre on the part of British Capitalism to be relieved of the subsidy to the mining industry, through the lowering of the wages and working conditions of the miners. . . .

The resolution concluded by recognizing that the nationalization of the mining industry *without compensation and with workers' control* was the only way to obtain a guaranteed weekly minimum wage.²⁶ A. J. Cook, himself an ardent sympathizer with

²⁵ *London Times*, April 16, 1925.

²⁶ *Arnot, op cit.*, p. 118. *Italics ours.*

the Minority Movement, speaking at Cardiff, March 27, echoed these views:

The Government, no doubt, would consider longer hours with pleasure, but that pleasure will never be theirs. We have got to prepare ourselves for the control of this industry. I will not accept joint responsibility for private ownership. There can be no co-operation with capitalism so far as I am personally concerned.²⁷

The basic unit of the coal industry from the trade union end is the Miners' Lodge. The county associations are built up from these Lodges, and the Miners' Federation is a federation of a score of county or district trade unions built up from the Miners' Lodges. The Executive Committee is responsible to the Delegate Conference, consisting of nearly 200 delegates, elected from the county associations. For purposes of policy the Delegate Conference is the sovereign governing body, save that the declaration or the termination of a strike is determined by the ballot-vote of the individual members.²⁸

The present writer, in an extended tour of some three thousand miles through the industrial districts of Great Britain, in the four months immediately succeeding the Great Strike, heard similar comment on the determination of policy through the Miners' Lodges, from mine engineers, large-scale coal exporters, and active miners, in as different areas as Northumberland, Lancashire, and South Wales. In many cases the Checkweighman, often the local union secretary, would collect the ballots at the pithead, "in two hats." If the vote were taken in the Lodges it was more often than not a vote by show of hands. The younger enthusiasts, often Minority Movement members, would run the meetings, and the rest of the men, always easy-going, preferring peace, did not risk the effect of attending or of making protest.

²⁷ *London Times*, March 29, 1926. For Cook's connection with the Minority Movement, see J. T. Murphy, *The Political Meaning of the Great Strike* (written from the Communist viewpoint), p. 41, where it is stated that "on the initiative of the bureau of the Red International of Labor Unions, A. J. Cook, S. O. Davies, Noah Ablett, and a few other leaders of the South Wales Miners, began the organization of a Miners' Minority Movement. . . . By 1924, through the combined efforts of the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, A. J. Cook was elected secretary of the Miners in place of F. Hodges." *Italics ours*. Cf. also W. M. Citrine's articles, "Democracy or Disruption," in the *Labour Magazine*, Dec., 1927-April, 1928.

²⁸ Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

Hence the decisions would more frequently than not be of the "left" variety.

Without desiring to lay too much emphasis upon this factor of minority control of the miners' movement, the writer finds close resemblance between the left-wing influence in the Miners' Lodges and the effect of the insurgents in the Vigilance Committees and District Councils of the railroad unions, described in a previous chapter.⁵⁰ The difference between the railroad unions and the miners' movement, however, lay to a considerable extent in the personalities and the powers of the two executives. Had a J. H. Thomas been at the head of the Miners—a ludicrous thought!—it is possible that some of the decisions taken in 1926 would have been very different.

An interesting scene occurred at the Trades Union Congress at Edinburgh in 1927. Congress was discussing that section of the General Council's annual report which referred to the Minority Movement. The General Council had expressed its view that any Trades Councils⁵¹ which had affiliated with the Minority Movement should not be officially recognized by the General Council. A motion to refer back this part of the Report was seconded by a Miners' delegate, Mr. W. Allan, of Hamilton. Immediately the delegate had sat down, Herbert Smith was on his feet exclaiming "Allan is not speaking for the miners." Smith then proceeded to give his opinion of the Minority Movement, hotly declaring that he objected to the abuse which the Movement dealt out to trade union leaders, that he saw no difference between the Minority Movement and the Communists, that they both received their orders from Moscow, and that he, Herbert Smith, was not prepared to be dictated to or to take his orders from Moscow through the Minority Movement. From his tone and the emotion in his voice it was evident that the Miners' president had suffered much from that Minority.⁵²

It has just been stated that the difference between the miners' and the railroadmen's movements was due partly to a difference in the personalities of the respective executives. It was due, per-

⁵⁰ See Chapter VIII.

⁵¹ Regional groups of trade union branches, and sometimes of local Labor Parties, in specified towns or urban districts, without a great deal of power or authority up to 1920. Cf. S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 525-61.

⁵² *The Scotsman*, Sept. 7, 1927; cf. *Daily Herald*, Sept. 7, 1927, and W. H. Crook, "British Labor Speaks for Itself," *Sunday*, Nov. 15, 1927, p. 214.

haps even more, to the extreme intransigence of the employers' organizations in the coal industry. A certain editor of one of Lord Beaverbrook's journals admitted, in an interview, that the "mine owners were old fashioned idiots." Their next step in the negotiations certainly supported this aspersion and offered a sample of the attitude that drove even indifferent men among the miners to give ear to the Minority Movement. On the 13th of April miners' and owners' Executives met for the presentation and discussion of the Miners' attitude toward the Commission's Report. The Miners' Federation statement "did not rule out the possibility of acceptance of a reduction in wages," but as the Delegates' Conference resolution was also appended it was plain that the miners' Executive was not free to negotiate on that matter.⁸²

The owners at once stressed this failure to abide by the Commission's Report, forgetting that the Commission clearly declared that such sacrifices should not be asked until definite agreement had been reached between the two parties as to measures for improvement of the industry. The owners then proceeded to give notice that they would approach the various district Miners' Associations for wage negotiations, knowing only too well that the answer they would get from the districts would be "national agreements only." The *Times* concluded that in that matter the owners "were acting upon their own interpretation of the Report and setting aside" for the moment at any rate "the possibility of proceeding on the other lines to which the Report refers."⁸³

The immediate effect of abandonment by the owners of national negotiations on wages, was to bring the Industrial Committee definitely into line behind the miners, on an issue which it regarded as "of fundamental importance." The following resolution was passed and carried immediately to the Prime Minister by the Committee itself:

This Committee protests against the action of the mine owners in abandoning national negotiations and in attempting to open

⁸² *London Times*, April 14, 1926.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, The subsequent allusion, by the parliamentary mouthpiece of the Mine owners, to the reorganization proposals in the Report as "sentimental eyewash" gives some strength to the labor feeling that the wage issue was all the owners really intended to settle.

negotiations with the districts, this, in the opinion of the Committee, being calculated to create ill-feeling and suspicion at a critical time, and a course of action contrary to the spirit of conciliation and the expressed views of the Royal Commission, and prejudicial to the prospects of an amicable settlement. This Committee reiterates its previous declaration to render the miners the fullest support in resisting a degradation of the standard of life and to obtain an equitable settlement of their case with regard to wages, hours and national agreements.⁵⁴

This reference to the views of the Royal Commission was taken by the press to imply that the Industrial Committee, at any rate, was favorable to acceptance of the Commission's recommendations.⁵⁵

How far apart these two parties, the Industrial Committee and the Miners' Federation, still remained can be seen from two very typical speeches made on Sunday, April 19, by J. H. Thomas and A. J. Cook. Mr. Thomas, speaking in Monmouthshire, referred to the current talk of industrial war:

To talk at this stage as if in a few days all the workers of the country were to be called out was not only letting loose passions that might be difficult to control, but it was not rendering the best service either to the miners or anyone else . . . instead of organising, mobilising, and encouraging the feeling that war was inevitable, let them concentrate on finding a solution honorable and satisfactory to all sides.⁵⁶

The Miners' Secretary, just back from a meeting of the International Miners' Federation in Brussels, declared that there would be no help for the miners from the British Government, who would certainly back the owners. The coming struggle must involve not merely the miners but the whole of the working classes:

They had got the whole trade union movement in the country pledged to defend the miners' hours, wages and national agreements.

Abroad they had made arrangements that no coal should come into this country. The Government and the owners knew they had got the organisation that could fight and win. "My last word to the Gov-

⁵⁴ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, June 26, 1926, p. 7; cf. *London Times*, April 18, *Italics ours*.

⁵⁵ *London Times*, April 16, 1926.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, April 19, 1926.

ernment is Count the cost. *The cost of a strike of the miners would mean the end of capitalism.*"

"Let me warn the Government that there is a new mentality in the police, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. Ninety-seven per cent of the recruits for the past two years have come from the working classes, and thousands of them miners, who will not shoot against their kith and kin, when the order comes, and we shall not be afraid to advise them. This is a war to the death, and it is your death they are after."²⁷

Comment on the last paragraph of the above quotation, taken from a speech addressed to miners in South Wales, would be superfluous. The first part of the quotation, from a speech delivered in London the previous day, is, however, so full of inaccuracies, that attention must be drawn to them. The international Miners' Federation had *not* pledged itself to stop export of coal to Britain, for the miners' unions had no such power over transport. Export was a matter for the various transport unions. As to an international mine strike in support of the British miners, great hesitance was shown by the European delegates. Resentment among the European miners against the British mine workers for accepting a Government subsidy without even considering the effect of that subsidy on the working conditions of their European comrades, was manifest. A vital qualification, moreover, that Mr. Cook never mentioned to his British audiences, was the concession made by the British delegates. In the event of an international sympathetic strike of miners, the direction of the *British* mine strike was to pass from the hands of the British mine leaders to those of the International Committee, and Mr. Frank Hodges, its secretary would, in that case, have played a very important part.²⁸ Mr. Hodges' views on the Royal Commission have already been stated. Mr. Cook, in short, intentionally, or as part of his natural optimism, had gravely misled his hearers as to the actual amount of support assured from domestic and from international sources. And that speech was no exception. For months after the coal stoppage began, the same tenor of message characterized the Miners' Secretary's speeches to his men.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *London Times*, April 16 and 17, 1926.

The possibility of a solution without a great strike was in reality becoming less daily. On April 15 the owners had posted notices terminating the current agreement on April 30, but had not stated the new terms on which the men would be re-employed.³⁹ On the 20th of the same month the Mining Association had issued the following laconic announcement:

There is not the slightest foundation for the rumors that the coal owners have decided, or are prepared, to agree to the principle of a national minimum wage.⁴⁰

On April 22 the Executives of the Federation and the Association met to consider the owners' draft agreement. No progress was made, inasmuch as the Association remained adamant on the settlement of wages by district negotiations. Mr. Evan Williams admitted that many of the district wage offers that would shortly be made were undoubtedly low, but that if the workers would agree to longer hours, "all of the districts would be in a position to offer wages of which no reasonable complaint could be made."⁴¹ After the intervention of the Prime Minister in the dispute on the 23rd of April the owners drew up a series of wage offers based on an eight-hour day, and submitted them to the Premier, with, it is alleged, a suggestion that he should propose such an extension of hours to the miners, for that period necessary to carry out the reorganization of the industry.⁴²

The Industrial Committee had pressed upon the Prime Minister the urgent need for his personal intervention, and had issued a call to the Executives of all unions affiliated to the T. U. C. to meet in conference on Thursday, April 29, as a precautionary, not an aggressive move. The Miners' Executive likewise called a meeting of their national Delegates' Conference for Wednesday, April 28.⁴³ In the meantime, many efforts were being made to estimate, from the hints offered by the owners and from terms actually posted in the South Wales district, how serious would be the wage reduction proposed by the mine owners after the 1st of May. In Northumberland it was found

³⁹ *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, Dec., 1926, p. 32.

⁴⁰ *London Times*, April 21, 1926.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1926; cf. *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, April 29-May 1, 1926, p. 7.

⁴² *London Times*, April 26, 1926.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, April 24 and 26, 1926.

that rates would be those in force in July, 1914, in Durham and South Wales even below that level. And this despite the rise in the cost of living as compared with that of 1914.⁴⁴

The Industrial Committee attached greater importance to the Report of the Commission taken as a whole, than did the Miners, and recognized the tactical need for the Miners to have a clearer policy in regard to the Report, as a whole, if they wished to hold the enthusiastic support of their fellow trade unionists. In later discussions, after the great strike was over, the Miners' leaders implied that this was not known. It certainly was realized by the more responsible members of the press, even if not by the Miners' Executive.⁴⁵ The Industrial Committee was asked to meet the Premier on Monday, the 28th, and requested by the latter to aid in getting a resumption of negotiations. To that end the Premier suggested the inclusion of some members of the Industrial Committee on the Miners' negotiating body. Once again both the labor groups gladly agreed to this suggestion, but the mine owners refused the presence of a third party in the joint negotiations, and the Baldwin Government let that useful plan go by default in the face of the owners' opposition.⁴⁶

The principal advantage that might have been hoped from the addition to the negotiating body of members of the General Council, and perhaps of the Parliamentary Labor party, "would have been a broader consideration of the Commission's Report, and the laying of a greater amount of emphasis on the carrying out of the scheme of reorganization as a condition of 'temporary sacrifices' by the miners."⁴⁷ The Prime Minister did, however, persuade the owners to meet the miners for discussion of a national agreement, but they still refused to agree to any national minimum percentage. A new difficulty promptly arose with the presentation by the owners of proposals for a reversion to the 48 hour week, and the joint conference ended, on April 28, with no progress.⁴⁸

In the midst of this deadlock, more than one expert voice was appealing to the Government and the public for drastic re-

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1928.

⁴⁵ *Cf. Ibid.*, April 27, 1928.

⁴⁶ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, April 28-May 1, 1928, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *London Times*, April 26, 1928.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, April 29, 1928.

organization of the whole coal industry as the only permanently satisfactory solution. Perhaps the weightiest of all such advice was that given by Sir Richard Redmayne, technical adviser to the British Controller of Coal Mines during the war, and at one time Chief Inspector of Mines. Speaking at the Mansion House on April 29, Sir Richard declared:

In the coal trade wages may be temporarily lowered, hours of work may be temporarily increased, but not for long, and not to the extent necessary to bridge the gap between cost of production per ton and selling price per ton.

I personally am firmly convinced that the coal mining industry of Great Britain can be placed on a profitable basis, and that in the not distant future, but to accomplish this, drastic reorganisation will be required, the first move being in the direction of the combination of the collieries into groups of like natural conditions and of conditions of trade.

The adoption of such a scheme would render the cutting of wages or lengthening of hours unnecessary save for a short period, and a Government loan at nominal interest to tide over the transition period would be all that was required. The subsidy was pernicious and not to be considered, as it did not even secure the end for which it was given.⁴⁸

It must not be forgotten that the definite wage offers from the owners' side had not as yet been forthcoming on any national scale, and as late as the day before the "lock-out" Mr. Baldwin had to call upon the Mining Association for more precise figures. Mr. Evan Williams admitted that the wages which some of the districts would be able to pay, on the seven-hour day and without the subsidy would be "miserable."⁴⁹

GATHERING OF THE LABOR EXECUTIVES

Thursday, April 29, saw the postponed meetings of the Miners' Delegates and the first session of Executives of the T. U. C. affiliated unions. Arthur Pugh, chairman for the year of the General Council, took the chair at the Memorial Hall meeting of Executives at two o'clock in the afternoon, and made a survey of the situation before the trade unions. He warned

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

his audience that the position was not identical with that which faced the movement in July, 1925, that the Commission's Report was a new factor.⁵¹ Negotiations should have started from the Commission's own condition that no sacrifices should be asked from the workers until all practical means for improving the industry had been agreed upon. Any hope for such action had been destroyed by the isolation of the wages question, and the concentration by the mine owners upon the proposal to reduce wages.⁵²

After a survey of events which have already been recorded above, Mr. Pugh declared: "We do not appear to be up against a blank wall to quite the same extent as was the case a week ago." Nonetheless he admitted that the General Council might have to call on the affiliated unions "to take part in a struggle" which would test the resources, loyalty and spirit of all concerned. The chairman continued by reading the recommendations of the Royal Commission, commenting that those proposals would not provide a solution for the immediate difficulties which would arise on the 1st of May:

In our view the wages and working conditions of mine workers are already so depressed as to render it imperative to seek for remedies other than a further degradation in their standards of life, or the abrogation of the present standard hours, a course which the Commission declared would not provide a remedy.⁵³

A further summary of the General Council's proposals for settlement followed, including the statement that the maintenance of national negotiations was imperative, and the continuance of a National Wages Board.⁵⁴

Mr. Thomas then moved the resolutions endorsing the "efforts of the General Council to secure an honorable settlement of the differences in the coal mining industry," and instructing the Industrial Committee to continue their efforts, *provided the impending lock-out of the mine-workers was not enforced*. The resolution closed by an agreement to adjourn till the next day, when the General Council were to make a further report.⁵⁵ Mr. Thomas was far less optimistic than the chairman:

⁵¹ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees, April 29-May 1, 1926, pp. 4-5.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

There never was such an attempt to mislead and blind the public to the real situation. If you were to judge by the press reports of the last two days, you would imagine that, not only was the atmosphere clearing, but that there was every sign of an amicable settlement being arrived at. I do not believe there is a vestige of evidence in our experience to warrant any such assumption.

It may be that these negotiations may be prolonged over tomorrow night. If they are it will be useless; they will break down. They cannot be honorable if . . . the lock-out notices are overhanging one side. In other words the negotiations must be free and unfettered. . . . We want you to say . . . that you believe that this threat must be removed if there is to be the right atmosphere to get an honorable peace.⁶⁴

Mr. Ernest Bevin seconded the resolution with a suggestion that in twenty-four hours all the separate unions present might have to become "one union with no autonomy."

The miners will have to throw their lot and cause into the cause of the general movement and the general movement will have to take the responsibility for seeing it through.

Then, referring to the whole of the Executives before him he added:

You are to be our Parliament, you are to be our assembly, our constituent assembly, an assembly where we will place the facts and the figures and the proposals and the problems that have to be submitted for calm judgment, and at the end to take your instructions.⁶⁵

A long speech by Mr. Cook followed, in which he interpreted the resolution before the conference as a confirmation of the General Council's statement sent out on February 26, with regard to wages, hours, and national agreements of the miners. Even at this moment he found it impossible to close without declaring that "nationalization is the remedy." The resolution was carried with but two dissentients.⁶⁶

The conference is said to have been not nearly as enthusiastic as the similar one of July, 1925, and attention was actually drawn to this fact by W. J. Brown of the Civil Service Clerical Association, who declared that the atmosphere of the current

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-22.

assembly was "chilly," and accused the Parliamentary Labor party of being inactive in this crisis.⁵⁹ To this allegation Mr. Thomas had made reply that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had offered the Miners assistance in Parliament and the Miners' Federation had replied, "We will tell you when we think it is necessary, but up to now keep clear of it. We do not want you."⁶⁰ Even at such a moment it seemed impossible for the hostility between the more conservative members of the General Council and the Labor party on the one side and the Miners' Federation on the other to be kept out of the picture.

Friday, April 30, found the mine owners ready at last to withdraw their opposition to a national wage agreement. Their new offer, made for the first time on the day that all notices were actually terminating, was transmitted through the Prime Minister to Mr. Herbert Smith. When examined, this offer of a national settlement entailed a reversion to *the wages of 1921, and the eight-hour day*; that involved a uniform national reduction of 13½ per cent of the standard wages of the miners, with an extra hour's labor. The Prime Minister offered temporary legislation permitting the extra hour to be worked, without the permanent removal of the seven-hour act from the Statute Book. The Government expressed itself as still willing to give effect to "such of the proposals in the Report as we believe will be of benefit to the industry" and announced its intention of arranging an "authoritative inquiry" into the best method of following up the Commission's recommendations with regard to amalgamations and selling organizations.⁶¹

It is difficult to feel that the Government was acting in a completely impartial manner at this moment. The Report was emphatically hostile to longer working hours. Men as experienced in mining, in trade, and in economic theory as Sir Richard Redmayne, the four Commissioners, and Mr. Keynes had all pointed out that longer hours would merely aggravate the condition of overproduction of coal and unemployment of miners.⁶² On the other hand, a concerted campaign for longer

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21; cf. Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-26.

⁶⁰ *Report of Special Conference of Executives Committees*, p. 22.

⁶¹ *London Times*, May 1, 1926.

⁶² *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry (1926)* pp. 173-74, showed extension of hours would result in thirty million tons larger output,

hours and greater output was evident among the supporters of the Baldwin Government. Sir Robert Horne, Chancellor of the Exchequer during 1921-22, had published an attack upon the Commission's Report in the *Sunday Times* for April 25, while the most critical negotiations were proceeding. Sir Robert demanded a return to the eight-hour day in order to reduce coal costs to a point where effective competition could be secured in the world markets. He belittled the fear that no markets could be found for the extra tonnage. More serious perhaps because emanating from the central office of the Conservative party was the confidential document sent to the press on Monday, April 26. This document requested the recipient, presumably the editor, to pass on "the enclosed to your Labor Correspondent," and continued:

The Government are particularly anxious to draw the attention of the public to the serious economic position of the coal industry as disclosed in the statistical table given in the House of Commons last week, showing the percentage of coal which is raised at a loss. 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.²⁸

The Miners' Executive, and subsequently the Delegates' Conference rejected the owners' proposals, forwarded by the Prime Minister, giving as reasons against the longer hours arguments similar to those adduced by Keynes and the Commissioners. That their refusal of the owners' eleventh hour offer should not merely be a *non possumus*, the Miners' Executive forwarded to the Prime Minister with their reply a copy of the General Council's own proposals, with which they, the Miners, expressed themselves fully in accord. Significantly enough, as part of those General Council proposals was the "revision of the minimum percentage," but it was in its proper place as *one*, and not the

for which a market was not likely to be found, or else the unemployment of 180,000 more miners, which would throw the costs of their keep upon the nation. Keynes held the eight-hour day as a temporary policy for aiding existing overproduction to the "half-witted." Cf. *New Republic*, May 18, 1926, p. 385. For Redmayne, see *supra*, p. 341.

²⁸ Cf. speech of J. H. Thomas to Executives, Friday, April 30, in *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, p. 21. Mr. Thomas drew Premier Baldwin's attention to this document, and the latter repudiated responsibility for it.

first, of the steps to be taken in reorganizing the industry. This fact has, the writer believes, been consistently ignored by the press in its report of the negotiations, and by many "left-wing" writers who subsequently endeavored to prove that the Miners never under any circumstances would have agreed to wage reductions.⁶⁴ The closing sentence of the Miners' reply, with an extraordinary lack of logic, result perhaps of a weariness in body and mind due to the strain of continuous negotiation, claimed that:

*Until such reorganization brings greater prosperity to the industry the miners should not be called upon to surrender any of their present inadequate wages and conditions.*⁶⁵

Presumably, once the industry had been put on its feet, such a reduction in "inadequate wages and conditions" was in order! Plainly "something is wrong with that picture."

The Industrial Committee of the General Council next endeavored to obtain a temporary withdrawal of the owners' notices, by the continuation of the subsidy for a short period. Before making answer to this request, "it was felt by the Government that it was really necessary to make sure as far as possible that if any extension was granted the Miners would accept the recommendation of the Royal Commission that reorganization should be got on with, and that, pending such reorganization, the Miners should consent to a reduction of wages."⁶⁶ A letter was sent to Mr. Pugh asking if the Industrial Committee would obtain assurances that the miners would so consent, were the additional time for negotiation given. The answer of the Miners' Federation follows:

The miners state they are not prepared to accept a reduction in wages as a preliminary to the reorganization of the industry, but they reiterate that they will be prepared to give full consideration to all the difficulties connected with the industry when the schemes for such reorganization will have been initiated by the Government.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ For General Council's proposal, see *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committee*, pp. 9-12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28. Italics ours.

⁶⁶ Statement of the Minister of Labor, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, in *London Times*, May 1, 1928.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Further objection was raised by the Cabinet to the term "initiated," which the Miners had inserted at the request of the Industrial Committee, and part of the Cabinet then met the Industrial Committee and certain of the Miners' Executive. A definition of the word "initiated" was asked for. Lord Birkenhead desired Mr. Smith to state if he would accept page 286 of the Report (which considered a revision of the minimum percentage addition to standard rates of wages as indispensable). Mr. Smith "made it perfectly clear that he would not accept any idea of any reduction at all in the interim period. So the proceedings terminated."⁶⁸

"Practically," wrote Mr. Harold Laski of this stalemate, "Mr. Baldwin in the last stages of negotiation, sided, or was driven by his colleagues to side, with the owners. He asked the Miners to accept an increase in hours which the Commission itself said had no point; a decrease in wages without any guaranty that the next three or four years would see any benefit to the trade; without even the assurance that the timid suggestions of the Commission would be adopted in any thoroughgoing fashion; with the knowledge that this assault on Miners' wages would be the beginning of a general attack on the workers' standard of life."⁶⁹

All this while, for twelve long hours, the Executives of the affiliated Trades Unions had been patiently awaiting news of the negotiations. After three adjournments the conference "sat tight" from 8:30 p.m. until 11:25 when the Industrial Committee returned to the hall and shortly afterwards made their report to the assembled executives. Chairman Pugh reported the day's futile efforts at settlement and closed by asserting that negotiations had not broken down on any important or vital question but on "a mere phrase in the terms upon which we should enter into negotiations."⁷⁰

Mr. Thomas added a few dramatic touches to the story of the last few hours. Reporting the Prime Minister's question whether

⁶⁸ *London Times*; cf. Herbert Smith's speech to the Conference of Executives on Thursday afternoon, Jan. 20, 1927, in *Report of Proceedings, at Special Conference of Executives, Jan. 20-21, 1927*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ H. J. Laski, "The Coal Strike and Beyond," *The Nation* (N. Y.), May 26, p. 878.

⁷⁰ *Report of Special Conference of Executives Committee*, p. 28.

the "Miners were immediately prepared to agree to a reduction of wages" he asked his audience:

Is there any man worthy of the name of a leader or a negotiator who would so betray his trust, so ruin his case in advance by saying to the people "Yes, come and negotiate with me, and in advance I promise you that I will accept a reduction?"

They had asked the Government, Mr. Thomas continued, merely for free negotiations in an atmosphere not hampered by the "lock-out" notices, which were at that moment already taking effect. When the Premier in return asked for an assurance that if the notices were suspended a genuine attempt would be made to get an agreement,

Again the Miners' Federation met that magnificently, and at our request—and we put to them specifically the paragraph of the Royal Commission dealing with an interference with the minimum—the Miners' Federation through their president, said, "Yes, we will agree to discuss it from end to end and consider anything, even if it involves a reduction in wages, but we refuse, and shall refuse, to say in advance that we are going to accept a reduction."⁷¹

Then the railroadmen's leader, ex-Cabinet Minister and consummate negotiator confessed to what lengths of pleading he had gone to get the Cabinet to suspend the owners' notices, and to his complete failure.

But we failed. The Cabinet was summoned—such additional members as had not previously been in the negotiations, a number of whom had heard nothing of what had taken place, were called in to give their final decision, and their final decision was a refusal to accede to your request.

Please observe, not to effect a settlement, but a refusal to accede to your request for a suspension of the notices so that negotiations could continue.

Mr. Thomas then produced the private communication sent to the press from the central office of the Conservative party, in regard to lengthening of mine hours, described above, and also a document running as follows:

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

O. M. S. The Government has proclaimed a state of emergency. All loyal citizens who are able and willing to undertake any public service should register at once at the local office of the O. M. S.

The Prime Minister had been shown that document also and had said that permission for its publication had been refused. Thomas made comment:

We said, "Where is it leading to? Whilst we have been striving for peace, whilst we have been pleading for peace, whilst we have laid all our cards on the table and played cricket, what can be said of that kind of thing and all that it means?"⁷²

How far Mr. Thomas was actually and justifiably shocked at this evident preparation ahead of time for a possible crisis, will perhaps never be known. That he knew of the preparation that the Government had been making for months no one can doubt; he was too astute a statesman himself to forget his own Governmental experience of 1924. More than that; speaking after the strike ended, on July 8, 1926, Mr. Thomas declared that the Government "would have been unworthy of office and unfit for their job if . . . they had not prepared for a struggle."⁷³

The general secretaries of the different unions were presented with a printed statement for a coördinated policy in relation to the dispute, and were requested to call their Executives together on Saturday morning, in order to come to a definite decision on that proposed policy. The conference then adjourned until noon on Saturday, May 1.⁷⁴ Next morning the Executives assembled for the third successive day. Chairman Pugh at once proceeded to read the roll of the affiliated unions, to see if the respective Executives approved or disapproved of the coördinated proposals placed in their hands the previous evening. Before reading the roll Mr. Pugh made a most important statement:

I want to make it clear from the start that there are two important things involved in this scheme. The one relates specifically or

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷³ *Railway Review* (organ of the N. U. R.), July 15, 1926, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Report of Special Conference of Executives Committee*, p. 52. For actual proposals laid before the Executives see Appendix A.

more directly to our friends the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. *The scheme requires that the Miners' Federation hand over to the General Council the conduct of the dispute.* On that we have heard from the Miners' Federation through their President, Mr. Smith, and their Secretary, Mr. Cook, that that condition of the document is accepted by the Miners' Federation.⁷⁵

The second thing involved in the scheme was the reply of the affiliated unions, granting or withholding their surrender of powers to the General Council.

THE STRIKE DECISION

As the roll was read by the Chairman the responsible member of each affiliated union Executive gave answer, Yes, No, or undecided. The roll was called alphabetically, and as luck would have it the first on the list was the Union of the (Insane) Asylum Workers. As their representative rose and answered "Yes," there was some laughter, as there was again later when the Tax Collectors' Union gave the same answer, but otherwise the roll call was an exceedingly solemn affair. The General Council retired, for brief consideration of the replies, and on its return announced that the unions who definitely declared themselves as fully supporting the General Council policy of co-ordination represented 3,653,527 members. Those in the negative had a membership of 49,911, and unions not represented at the conference or unions from whom word had not been received, a membership of 319,000.⁷⁶ The news of these figures was heard with great enthusiasm by vast crowds who had been conducting "May Day" labor parades through London.⁷⁷

A few speeches from the platform followed the announcement of the votes. Ernest Bevin on behalf of the General Council made it clear that "with a view to doing nothing at all which would aggravate the position" the proposals handed to the union secretaries the previous evening had not been printed until after the General Council had received news that the Emergency Powers Act proclamation had been signed and the O. M. S. literature had been put upon the printing presses. "We looked

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Raymond W. Postgate, "Inner History of the General Strike," *The Locomotive Engineers' Journal* (U. S. A.), July, 1926, p. 492.

upon that," said Mr. Bevin, "as indicating that the Government, behind the scenes, was mobilizing the forces of war." Then, referring to the Instructions handed to the Executives, Bevin continued:

You will note on this document that we have deliberately determined to arrange for a volunteer service, notwithstanding that we are stopping vital services such as transport and the staple industries, we are prepared to arrange for, at least, the food of the people.

We are not declaring war upon the people. War has been declared by the Government . . . We have said that there is no need for the O. M. S. We are prepared to distribute essential foodstuffs. We offer to do it under a volunteer arrangement organized by the Trade Unions involved, and to see to it that that distribution, however long the struggle lasts, is an equitable one . . . As to any of our members who are told to operate in a volunteer service in that way, it must be understood it is our declared policy and it must not be interfered with.⁷⁵

This decision of the General Council, well intended as it was, and aimed to show the public that the conflict was not fundamentally anti-social, caused grave trouble to the strike committees at the outset, and was in any case almost completely ignored by the Government, as might have been expected. Even at that moment possibilities of trouble were foreseen by another speaker, Mr. John Bromley of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen:

You know that the document here deals with the running of trains for foodstuffs and so forth. We intend to abide by the instructions of this Conference and the General Council without equivocation, but circumstances may arise, which I can see, in which we do not wish to be misjudged. . . . We shall be working certain trains for milk and other foods, etc., but if the O. M. S. tries to work troops or material, naturally my people will feel that we are doing damage by working food, and thereby setting them free to work troops.⁷⁶

Mr. Bevin made a public offer to the Government on behalf of the General Council, that the Council was ready, from the moment the unions placed the power in its hands, not only to handle the dispute, but to help find a solution and be responsible

⁷⁵ *Report of Special Conferences of Executive Committees*, p. 34.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

for putting the solution into operation. In the meantime, if a settlement were not found, no person in the first category⁵⁰ was to go to work after starting time on Tuesday, May 4:

Railwaymen will work their train services to get home and so on, but within that scope the Transport Workers—at the docks and the rest of it—will not start work on Tuesday morning.⁵¹

Herbert Smith then took up the story for the Miners. If a solution of the problem meant that he and his colleagues had to give a bond to agree to a reduction of wages at the outset, he refused to do it:

We have got to remember that it was in 1919 that we first began to drift towards destruction, when that Commission's Report was not accepted. There has been no attempt on behalf of the owners to make that Commission's Report a success.

As to the Samuel Commission's Report Mr. Smith declared:

I agreed to take it from page one to the end of that report, and go thoroughly into it and inquire into it, and accept the findings when we had gone through it. But I was asked to say that I was prepared to take my revolver and to let the other man shoot first at me, which meant a reduction in wages. . . . I hope that the Government will find it has made a mistake and send for the Committee to come back, and say to them, "We are prepared to go through this book from start to finish and accept its findings."⁵²

The position taken by the Miners' Federation with regard to its surrender of powers, is so important and has been so seriously disputed, that the full case must be stated. The vital question put to all the executives of unions who might be called on to take part in the strike, was contained in the printed proposals placed in the hands of each general secretary late on Friday evening, and ran as follows:

⁵⁰ The "first grade" included all those unions called on to cease work at the beginning of the strike; viz., all transport, iron and steel, metal and heavy chemicals, and building trades. Electricity and gas workers were in a less definite position as efforts were made to distinguish between lighting supplies and power. See Appendix A.

⁵¹ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, p. 35.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

These proposals shall be immediately considered by the executives of the trade unions concerned in the stoppage, who will at once report as to whether they will place their powers in the hands of the General Council and carry out the instructions which the General Council may issue from time to time concerning the necessary action and conduct of the dispute.⁸³

Mr. A. J. Cook, in his pamphlet "The Nine Days," which was published almost immediately after the end of the General Strike, reported the situation thus:

Prior to the Conference of May 1, the miners met the General Council in the Memorial Hall, and there it was made clear by our President and myself that we handed over our case to the General Council to defend our present position, on the understanding that they would adhere to their decisions of February 26, and that we should act in conjunction with the General Council in all negotiations. In the words of our President, Herbert Smith, "*We shall not surrender our revolvers—our tongues—to make our own declarations, our opinions on every movement.*"⁸⁴

What Mr. Herbert Smith said at the public conference of the Executives was not quite so simple:

You have acted conscientiously with us up to now, and we have handed this thing over to you, of course, functioning in this business along with you. *We are offering nothing except the revolver and the revolver in this instance is the tongue.* We want to be able to give advice and to take advice, and mind that there is no mistake either from our side or the other side. We could not ask you people to come in with us unless we asked you to share in these negotiations. When we asked for assistance, and when we accepted that assistance, we realised that you would have to take the responsibility of helping us in the negotiations, and we did so because we are quite clear on this; that in regard to going back to an 8 hour day, you people will say, "No," each time it is put to you.⁸⁵

Strangely enough the *Times*' report of Mr. Smith's speech makes him say "*We are offering everything except our revolvers, etc.*"⁸⁶ A matter of a single word, "everything" or "nothing," but an

⁸³ *London Times*, May 3, 1926. Italics ours.

⁸⁴ A. J. Cook, *The Nine Days*, p. 8. Italics ours.

⁸⁵ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

important matter when some two hundred other unions were concerned. Was the Official T. U. C. Report correct and the *Times* wrong? Or was the official Report "doctored"? The same issue of the *Times* reports Mr. Smith's statement to the Miners' Delegates on Saturday afternoon, May 1:

With regard to the crisis, everything will be done to arrive at a settlement, but we are not going to have peace at any price. We have got a clear understanding with the General Council of the T. U. C., that, although we are handing this matter over to them, we must function with them from time to time. Any negotiation must be joint negotiation, and any advice from either side must be considered jointly. We said we are prepared to give everything over, except that we are not going to give you our revolver—in other words our tongue—we are going to keep that free.⁵⁷

Mr. Ernest Bevin of the Transport Workers, who had gone through the experience of "Black Friday" as described in an earlier chapter, and whose union was one of the hardest hit by the general strike, nearly a year later, at the meeting of Executives on January 20 and 21, 1927, summed up the relations between the miners and the General Council:

It has been said by Mr. Smith and Mr. Cook that they did not hand their powers over. If they did not, then their statements to the rest of us were very ambiguous. Everybody in that conference believed that the Trade Unions affiliated to Congress became for the purposes of that dispute one union.

I venture to suggest that every Executive agreed simply to put their power into our hands as the members of the unions put their power into yours, and in that you trusted us come weal or woe, and agreed to accept our decisions in the conduct and settlement of that dispute.

If you accept the position taken up by Herbert Smith . . . it means this, that you in fact handed your powers over to the Miners' Federation and not to the General Council at all.⁵⁸

That something not so far removed from this thought was at the back of Herbert Smith's mind, albeit unconsciously, can be

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Italics ours.

⁵⁸ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings at Special Conference of Executives*, Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 46. Italics ours.

seen from his opening sentence Saturday afternoon, May 1, 1926, to the assembled Miners' Delegate Conference:

This is one of the most important moments in my life. *We have got handed over to us today guaranteed help* which means that 3,668,627 of our colleagues are going to stand by us.⁵⁰

It is a little ironical that a union whose secretary was so urgent in advocating more power to the General Council in the Scarborough Trades Union Congress of 1925, should, when the shoe pinched, hesitate to render up those powers which other unions on the firing line had so completely surrendered.

Before the Conference of Executives terminated, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald spoke for the Labor party promising to raise a debate in the House of Commons on the Monday, May 3, but intimating that he hoped and believed that something would happen before that time, presumably of a character to avert the strike.⁵¹ As the result of a word from a friend of Mr. Smith's, not, however, Mr. A. J. Cook, the Miners' president again rose and made a further explanation.

I just want to make it clear that *I did not mean to say in my speech that I agreed to accept the Report*. What I did intend to imply was that I am prepared to examine that Report from page one to the last page, and to stand by the result of the inquiry.⁵²

That correction of his speech to the delegates, if it really contained any basically different meaning from the pledge already given in the speech, and to the Industrial Committee of the General Council on the previous day, was made too late for the delegates to alter their views, even had they desired to do so, for the Chairman had already asked Conference to endorse the vote of the Executives. There was a great shout of "Aye," and no vote was raised against the proposals. The Conference closed with the singing of "The Red Flag."⁵³

Thus ended, so far as the ranks of the workers were concerned, the nine months' delay for negotiations, permitted by the Gov-

⁵⁰ *London Times*, May 3, 1926. Italics ours.

⁵¹ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, p. 40.

⁵² *Ibid.* Italics ours.

⁵³ *Report of Special Conference of Executive Committees*, p. 40.; cf. *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

ernment subsidy. The subsidy had cost the Government over one hundred million dollars, and at the end there faced the nation a general stoppage of labor that was likely to crush any reviving trade for many months. Those nine months of expense had not been used by the Government to reconstruct the coal industry. It was, in fact, more pauperized at the close than at the start. In the meantime, the Government had prepared its weapons against possible industrial warfare; the railroads and the large industrial firms had laid in vast stocks of coal; and the output at the mines had been immense in the last few weeks.³³

THE REPORT'S RECEPTION

It is highly doubtful if any one of the three parties to the dispute, owners, Miners, or Government really intended to give whole-hearted acceptance of the Commission's Report. The owners' view of the Sankey Commission has already been quoted, and their bitter comment on the Macmillan Inquiry of 1925. Mr. Austin Hopkinson, looked upon as one of the owners' strongest sympathizers in the House of Commons, made no bones about his and their contempt for the whole Report, outside of the suggested reduction in coal costs by means of wage cuts. Mr. Hopkinson's speech in the House on June 1 is evidence of this attitude, an attitude clearly forecasted by the volumes of evidence of the Samuel Commission, and fully understood by the Miners' Federation, who suspected the unwilling concessions of the Mining Association. In answer to an interruption Mr. Hopkinson said:

Does the Hon. Gentleman really imagine that the coalowners of Great Britain would have swallowed all that sloppy eye-wash that the Commission calls its "Recommendations for reorganisation" for any other reason than that their undertaking to put into operation these silly obligations might, at any rate, preserve peace in the industry? This, I may say here and now, is the only reason which induced the coalowners to put their names to and to support some of these most foolish and ignorant recommendations.³⁴

³³ In the week ending April 17, for example, coal output in Great Britain was 5,609,000 tons contrasted with 3,696,300 the previous week, and 3,373,000 in the same week of the previous year.—*London Times*, April 26, 1926.

³⁴ *Hansard*, June 1, 1926, col. 825.

As to the Miners' Federation the whole truth will never be known until both Mr. Smith and Mr. Cook publish their autobiographies—if ever! Something of the pulling and hauling that was undoubtedly going on within the Federation itself may be gathered from the preceding pages. Mr. Cook without question, as a warm sympathizer of the Minority Movement, co-author with Noah Ablett of the much quoted and much feared pamphlet, *The Miner's Next Step*,⁶⁸ did not have much use for the Report. Previous pages have given more than one quotation showing his attitude toward the recommendations. Theoretically less radical, but in practice as stubbornly class conscious, Herbert Smith, Yorkshireman and President of the Miners' Federation, might conceivably have been willing to discuss some wage adjustment, had a tactful Mining Association and a friendly Government had the handling of negotiations. It was, however, his firm belief, often reiterated, that were the reorganization proposals of the Commission properly put into effect, little if any wage reductions would be required; and most assuredly no hectoring Lord, in or out of the Cabinet, and no domineering mine owner, was going to make Herbert Smith pledge himself to a wage reduction before he had seen the fair words of his political and industrial rules put into practice.⁶⁹

With two such leaders at the head of the Federation, with the ranks largely isolated from their industrial comrades, and daily facing dangers and hardships of a kind comparable in few other industries, and with a bitter memory of a previous Government's broken word of honor, it is little wonder that the Miners' Federation did not immediately and with fervor accept all the findings of the Samuel Commission. Perhaps their official attitude to that Commission's Report can best be gathered from the critical

⁶⁸ See Part I, Chapter seven, footnote 66, and cf. John Strachey, "Who A. J. Cook Is," *Socialist Review*, Sept., 1926, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Mr. Baldwin put the question bluntly on Friday night, April 30. "Will you accept the Report, Mr. Smith?" To which point blank question Herbert Smith replied "When we see what the re-organization is going to be, and what the amalgamations and selling agencies are going to be, all provided in the Report, we shall be prepared then to discuss the whole thing. If the policy of re-organization is worked out properly, we are bound to enter into a discussion but I am not prepared to accept a reduction in wages in advance. I want to tell you that I want to see the horses I am going to mount."
—*Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 97.

paragraph contained in their *Statement to the Executives of the Trade Unions* presented, in rebuttal, along with the General Council's Report on January 20, 1927, when the full measure of the miners' defeat had become visible.

The acceptance of the Report of the Royal Commission meant not only lower wages, but, through lower wages, the ultimate acceptance of longer hours. The principle of the Royal Commission's Report—stripped of its flummery—was that the workers should pay for the inefficiency of the mineowners. But there is a limit to cutting of wages, a limit at which the pressure from the employers is convertible into longer hours of labor. Once the principle of the workers paying for the inefficiency of the mineowners was accepted, longer hours would become inevitable. Again, acceptance of lowered standards without a struggle would have meant not only ruin for the miners, but for all the other workers as well.⁹⁷

With respect to the Government's attitude toward the Report the case is somewhat more difficult. It is true enough that the Prime Minister did make the Government offer, on the 24th of March "to undertake such measures as may be required of the State to give the Recommendations effect," but the immediately succeeding qualification practically nullified any value in that pledge—"provided that those engaged in this industry agree to accept the Report and carry on the industry on the bases of its recommendations." The other parties to the dispute did not express general acceptance, and the Government, according to Mr. Baldwin himself, attempted thereafter "to obtain the assent of both parties."⁹⁸ The manner in which this "attempt" was made has already been fully described.

In a situation where the owners as well as the men remained obstinately addicted to their own views there were but two possibilities of action for the Government. The one was to let things slowly drift to the destructive end, with intermittent, well meaning but vacillatory gestures of intervention. The other was to stand by the recommendations of their own Commission, made up of public men who were neither miners nor mine owners; to introduce the necessary legislation into the House of Commons, and to rely confidently upon their Governmental

⁹⁷ Paragraph XXII, p. 10 of *Statement*.

⁹⁸ *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 64.

prestige with the British public to see the owners and men brought to a reasonable willingness to negotiate on the Commission's Plan.

There can be no question that the vast majority of the nation's employers, outside of the Mining Association, would have given their support.⁹⁹ There can be even less question, judging by the actions of the General Council before and after the strike, that the trade union leaders, outside the Miners' Federation, would enthusiastically have assisted the Baldwin Government in such open and prompt proof of its genuine desire to reform the coal industry. It is even probable that certain mine owners who felt themselves ill-represented by the recalcitrant attitude of the Mining Association, and a respectable minority of the miners' leaders would have thrown their influence to the side of agreement with the report.¹⁰⁰ Such action would have entailed on the part of Government a further expense for a limited period of time, not necessarily as a subsidy, for the loan method might have been used as suggested by Lord Melchett. Such action would, moreover, have been in close agreement with the expert advice of such men as Sir Richard Redmayne. Incidentally the much despised "ethical" aspect of the case, put forward by various educators and churchmen in the days of the great strike and afterwards, would have received recognition.

Such action by the Baldwin Government, would, however, have required the suppression of the "hot heads" in the Cabinet and the Conservative party, would have rendered useless all the long preparation for a general stoppage made by the Government and the O. M. S., and would undoubtedly have brought

⁹⁹ "All sane public opinion," said Lord Melchett in a public statement to the press on April 30, 1926, "would stand behind the Prime Minister if he lays down his conditions and compels their acceptance." These "conditions" included "reorganisation of the industry for more efficient production"; "regulation of output to meet consumption" through cooperative selling organizations; "fair reduction of wages, not based on the worst collieries, but based on the necessities of medium collieries in the industry"; assistance from the Government in the form of loans, and the subsidy on a restricted and scientific basis for some three months further. Cf. *London Times*, May 1, 1926.

¹⁰⁰ There is ample documentary evidence of this in the subsequent long coal dispute, and the writer has had further expression of it made to him in person by mine-owners and miners.

upon the Prime Minister charges, from the extremists, of further "surrender." In point of historical fact, Mr. Baldwin's Government was unready to take this risk. As a result its support was thrown progressively further and further toward the extremists among the mine owners, either by such legislation as the Eight-Hour Act, or by the failure of Mr. Winston Churchill and the Prime Minister to compel negotiation even on a district basis, later in the dispute.

No pressure of ineluctable fate can be claimed as an excuse by a Government that possessed such an overwhelming Parliamentary majority. The "good will" may have been there on the part of the Prime Minister, who possibly was more inclined to lean towards the miners' case than were his colleagues, just because he was himself deeply interested financially in the coal and steel industry and was possessed by the desire to be impartial; but of his Cabinet that assertion cannot be made and in all the critical moments when vital decisions had to be made it was the Cabinet, and not Mr. Baldwin, who determined the issue.¹⁰¹

How far removed from a desire to fight the situation out on the industrial battlefield were the members of the General Council can be seen from their actions, immediately after the adjournment of the Conference of Union Executives. The Miners' representatives evidently regarded that final conference as definitive, as "setting a gulf between the workers and the capitalists,"¹⁰² for they separated to their respective districts, Mr. Smith himself leaving the Federation office shortly before six on Saturday evening for his own home in Barnsley, Yorkshire.¹⁰³ In most cases the members of the Miners' Executive were needed in their respective districts to organize the mine stoppage, and, in the few areas where notices had not been posted, to see that their men came out along with the rest.

¹⁰¹ "The men of peace have been defeated by the hot heads," Mr. Baldwin. *Hansard*, May 5, 1926, col. 418. Cf. the final decision on Friday evening, April 30, and that at midnight Sunday, May 2, when the incident of the *Daily Mail* was used by the Cabinet to force Mr. Baldwin's hands.

¹⁰² Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁰³ Mr. Smith had been away from Yorkshire for two weeks, and was due to report to the Yorkshire Miners' Association on the events of the previous week. Cf. *London Times*, May 3, 1926; and T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, etc. Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 17.

Mr. Cook and Mr. Smillie remained in London over the weekend.

The General Council, however, looked upon the powers given to them by the constituent unions as a means to bridge the existing gulf between men and masters, and Mr. Citrine, the Secretary, sent two letters to the Prime Minister that same Saturday afternoon, one expressing the Council's willingness to aid in the distribution of essential foodstuffs, and the other stating that the Council held itself ready to discuss the dispute with the Government, inasmuch as the negotiations would now be undertaken by the Council itself.¹⁰⁴ "The Miners' Federation were at once informed by telephone and the letter read over to them and a copy dispatched by hand immediately after."¹⁰⁵ Mr. Citrine avers that copies of these two letters were in the possession of the Miners' Federation by four o'clock Saturday,¹⁰⁶ and he evidently expected such letters would involve further interviews with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Baldwin requested the Negotiating Committee to meet him that evening, and by 8:30 they were again discussing the situation. At Mr. Baldwin's suggestion two small sub-committees

¹⁰⁴ The letter to Mr. Baldwin on foodstuffs ran as follows: "1st May, 1926. MINING LOCK OUT. ESSENTIAL FOOD STUFFS. Dear Sir, I am directed to inform you that in the event of the strike of unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress taking place in support of the miners who have been locked out, the General Council is prepared to enter into arrangements for the distribution of essential foodstuffs. Should the Government desire to discuss the matter with the General Council they are available for that purpose. The General Council will be glad to learn your wishes in this respect. Yours faithfully, Walter M. Citrine." Cf. A. J. Cook, *The Nine Days*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ The communication with regard to the continuation of negotiations, also to Mr. Baldwin, follows: "1st May, 1926. MINING LOCK-OUT. Dear Sir, I have to advise you that the Executive Committee of the Trade Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, including the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, have decided to hand over to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress the conduct of the dispute—and the negotiations in connection therewith will be undertaken by the General Council. I am directed to say that the General Council will hold themselves available at any moment should the Government desire to discuss the matter further. Yours faithfully, Walter M. Citrine. (Acting Secretary)." Cf. T. U. C. General Council, *Report of the General Council to the Conference of Executives*, June 26, 1926, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings, etc.*, Jan. 30-31, 1927, p. 97.

were selected, from the General Council and the Cabinet, any conclusions arrived at by the sub-committees to be reported back to the larger bodies, and to be entirely non-committal to either side.¹⁰⁷ By one o'clock Sunday morning the Cabinet sub-committee drew up a statement for the General Council and the Miners to discuss, and the two committees separated. The Statement in question declared that:

The Prime Minister has satisfied himself, as a result of the conversations he has had with the representatives of the Trades Union Council that if negotiations are continued, it being understood that the notices cease to operate, the representatives of the Trades Union Council are confident that a settlement can be reached on the lines of the Report within a fortnight.¹⁰⁸

In the meantime, Mr. Cook had become aware of the meeting with the Premier, and next morning was called before the Negotiating Committee, and shown the formula just quoted. Mr. Cook has a double version of the story. In the one, written shortly after the end of the strike, he says the formula shown him was the one just cited, but adds "this formula meant a reduction of wages and district agreements."¹⁰⁹ In the second version, contained in his speech of explanation of the Miners' case before the assembled Executives January 20, 1927, he definitely asserts that the formula ran thus:

We will urge the miners to authorize us to enter upon a discussion with the understanding that they and we accept the Report as a basis of settlement, and we approach it with the knowledge that it may involve some reduction in wages.¹¹⁰

That second formula, known as the Birkenhead formula, according to Mr. Citrine, was seen neither by Mr. Cook on Sunday morning, May 2, nor by the General Council. Sir Douglas Hogg, Attorney General, had accused the Council of agreeing to that formula in the *British Gazette*, but Mr. Fugh had categorically denied that statement in the following issue of the

¹⁰⁷ T. U. C. General Council, *Report, etc., to Executives*, June 25, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Hansard*, May 5, 1926, col. 411.

¹⁰⁹ *The Nine Days*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings, etc., Jan. 20, 1927*, p. 32. Italics ours.

British Worker.¹¹¹ The Miners' Federation must have been aware of this repudiation but had nonetheless published that assertion in their Report to the assembled Executives as if it had never been denied.¹¹²

The vital difference between those two formulas, was, of course, the definite admission in the "Birkenhead formula" that the T. U. C. General Council approved of the Report, *knowing it might involve a wage cut*. To such an admission both their Chairman and their Secretary gave definite denial; the former within a week, the latter nearly a year later at the Conference of Executives. On May 5 in the House of Commons Mr. Baldwin himself referred to the Birkenhead statement; he was describing the discussion on Sunday evening, and stated:

After long discussion it was manifest that the uttermost point to which the representatives could go was indicated in a formula which was written down in consultation with those gentlemen we were meeting by Lord Birkenhead in his writing. . . . The formula to which I now allude is as follows: "We will urge the miners," etc.

Mr. Baldwin then stated that late on Sunday night "The Trade Union Council were taking that second formula to discuss with the miners."¹¹³ There is, therefore, directly contradictory evidence offered by the Prime Minister of the British Government, on the one side, and the Chairman of the General Council, on the other. The only certain fact forthcoming is that Mr. Cook did not see that Birkenhead formula in the morning of Sunday, May 2, but the very different formula expressing the belief that a settlement could be reached in a fortnight on the lines of the Report if the lock-out notices were suspended.

The Miners' Executive had been hurriedly recalled to London by telegraph, by request of the General Council, but did

¹¹¹ Sir Douglas Hogg, in *British Gazette*, May 11, 1926, p. 4. Mr. Fugh, in the *British Worker*, May 11, 1926, p. 4, answered: "No such formula was ever dictated by the Trade Union representatives, nor assented to by them, or in their possession. The only formula written was the one first cited above, beginning 'The Prime Minister has satisfied himself,' and it was that formula upon which the Council were making progress on Sunday night when the Prime Minister finally broke off all negotiations."

¹¹² See *Statement of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain*, p. 9, footnote, and for Mr. Citrine's emphatic statement see *Report of Proceedings*, etc., Jan. 20-21, 1927, pp. 38-39.

¹¹³ *Hansard*, May 5, 1926, col. 412.

not arrive until late on Sunday evening. The Negotiating Committee of the T. U. C. promptly went up to interview them and lay before them a formula, presumably that commencing "The Prime Minister has satisfied himself . . ." While they were interviewing the Miners, word came from the Premier asking for the immediate return of the Negotiators. Surprised at this interruption, Mr. Thomas and his fellows descended to the Prime Minister's room. Mr. Baldwin handed a letter to Mr. Thomas, with words of regret that their negotiations had broken down. That letter, as the world knows, was in reference to the stoppage on the *Daily Mail*, where the machine men ("Natsopas") had refused, quite without union authorization, to print a leading article describing all who sympathized actively with the Miners as revolutionaries.¹¹⁴ The incident had occurred that Sunday evening and the Cabinet had been informed by telephone. They did not wait to discover whether the General Council was either responsible for, or aware of it, but declaring that the "overt act" had actually occurred, refused any further negotiations until the general strike, dated for Tuesday morning, was called off unconditionally.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ An otherwise innocuous piece of journalistic writing of the kind expected from the *Daily Mail* contained the following sentences that roused the anger of the machine men. "The general strike is not an industrial dispute; it is a revolutionary movement, intended to inflict suffering upon the great mass of innocent persons in the community and thereby put forcible constraint upon the Government. It is a movement that can only succeed by destroying Government and subverting the rights and liberties of the people. This being the case it cannot be tolerated by any civilized Government and it must be dealt with by every resource at the disposal of the community . . . We call upon all law-abiding men and women to hold themselves at the service of King and country." See Scott Nearing, *The British General Strike*, Appendix II.

The "Natsopas" (members of the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants) had demanded that the editor should alter the editorial quoted above. The Editor refused to comply. The "Natsopas" were supported by the machine managers, the stereotypers, and the packers. On the other hand, several unions, including the compositors, the process workers, and the telegraphists, declared that it was not "within their province to discuss the policy of the newspaper" and they resolved to carry on their work. The "Natsopas" and those supporting them quit work, and consequently there was no issue of the *Daily Mail* for May 2 from the London office. Cf. *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

¹¹⁵ The text of the "ultimatum" handed to Mr. Thomas was worded as follows: "His Majesty's Government believe that no solution of the difficulties in the coal industry which is both practicable and honorable to all concerned can be reached except by sincere acceptance of the Report of

This ultimatum was received with the greatest consternation by the General Council and the Committee were sent to the Prime Minister to repudiate the affair of the *Daily Mail*. They found the Premier had retired to bed and were politely told that the further presence of the General Council and the Miners' Executives was no longer desirable. "Furious at this insult from England's leading gentlemen, the trade Unionists left 10 Downing Street. On the steps Mr. Thomas told a waiting pressman that the Government had declared war."¹¹⁸

"It is impossible," wrote a brilliant English student of history, "not to feel that during the evening of May 2 the diehards in the Tory Government were bringing pressure to bear upon Mr. Baldwin to break off negotiations, and that the isolated incident of the *Daily Mail* was simply a pretext. . . . Somewhere, it seems, there had been a will to conflict in the Government, a desire, also, to screen the long list of its errors in the mining negotiations. The threat of a general strike must, to men like Churchill and Birkenhead and Joynson-Hicks, have been the chance for which they had been seeking."¹¹⁷

the Commission. In the expression 'acceptance of the report' it included both the recognition of the industry which should be put in hand immediately, and pending the results of the reorganization being attained such interim adjustment of wages or hours of work as will make it economically possible to carry on the industry in the meantime. If the miners or the Trade Union Committee on their behalf were prepared to say plainly that they accept this proposal the Government would have been ready to resume the negotiations and to continue the subsidy for a fortnight. But since the discussions which have taken place between Ministers and members of the Trade Union Committee it has come to the knowledge of the Government not only that specific instructions have been sent (under the authority of the Executives of the Trade Unions represented at the Conference convened by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress) directing their members in several of the most vital industries and services of the country to carry out a general strike on Tuesday next, but that overt acts have already taken place, including gross interference with the freedom of the Press. Such action involves a challenge to the constitutional rights and freedoms of the nation.

"His Majesty's Government, therefore, before it can continue negotiations must require from the Trade Union Committee both the repudiation of the actions referred to that have already taken place and an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the instructions for a general strike." See T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Executives*, pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁸ Postgate, Wilkinson and Horrabin, *A Workers' History of the Great Strike*, p. 76.

¹¹⁷ H. J. Laeki, "The Coal Strike and Beyond," *The Nation* (N. Y.), May 26, 1926, p. 572.

"The Government was not Baldwin's," claims another English writer, "it was armed and intended to act. It believed it could win. The T. U. C. was beaten before the strike began. It had been bluffing, and, as an opponent of the T. U. C. has since remarked, 'You can't get the same concessions twice from the same bluff.' *The T. U. C. stood as a combatant in a war which had been forced upon it and which it feared to win.*"¹¹³

¹¹³ Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike*, p. 68
Italics ours.

CHAPTER XI

THE BRITISH "NATIONAL" STRIKE OF 1926

UNPREPARED AND PROUD OF IT

THE GREAT majority of the General Council did not desire the great strike, would have gone to almost any lengths to avoid it, and deprecated even to the end any talk of "war."¹ They were, in short, unprepared, and proud of it. Nothing but the insistent determination of the more extreme members of the Government to force a preliminary pledge of wage reductions from the Miners, together with the presentation of the "ultimatum" of Sunday night, May 2, prevented some last moment attempt to find a settlement "formula" that would have permitted the cancellation of the strike orders.

Even on Monday, May 3, after the final "ultimatum" from the Government, efforts were made in the House of Commons to come to some agreement, following speeches by Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Thomas. Immediately after the Chancellor of the Exchequer had finished his speech, Mr. Thomas had a meeting with the Attorney General (Sir Douglas Hogg) in the latter's room. Later Mr. Thomas came out and had a brief interview with the members of the Miners' Executive, who were meeting in the Committee corridor, and afterwards he returned to the Attorney General's room. For two hours representatives of the T. U. C. sat with the Prime Minister and "pointed out to him various ways by which it was possible, if he gave the indication, that the strike might be called off." Just about eleven

¹ President T. H. Gill of the Railway Clerks' Association, speaking at the annual meeting of his union at Morcombe on June 6, 1926, bore out this contention. "The Executives of the unions affiliated to the Congress met on Thursday, April 29, and at that meeting there was a strong feeling that the Council had given no lead. The reply of the Council was to the effect that they did not want any talk about the 'big stick' and that they considered negotiations with the Government ought to be resumed." Mr. Gill referred to the Council reporting on Friday night, April 30, and said that again they failed to "press for an immediate decision by the Conference" but recommended consideration by the respective union executives and a report the next morning.—*Cf. Railway Service Journal*, July, 1926.

o'clock on Monday night, Mr. Cook hurried along and indicated that the negotiations had broken down and that the strike would proceed. The Miners' Executive had then been waiting in the corridor for over two hours.²

In similar manner the workers themselves were unprepared for a strike of a general character, and did not expect such a declaration by the General Council, until very close to the end of the negotiations. Manifold evidence of this can be found in the pages of the various union journals just before the strike, and particularly in those of the railroadmen; further evidence can be found in a quarter least likely to be suspected of such views, the Communist party itself.³ Movements for separate strikes of craft unions were on foot, such, for example, as that in the engineering trades, even as late as April 29, 1926, in apparent ignorance of the imminent approach of a wholesale stoppage of labor.⁴

On the railroads a series of local disputes were occurring over the questions of wages, promotions, or non-union workers. In place of the customary method of the walk-out, the workers were using the "stay-in strike," and the "working to rule" method. At Crewe, for instance, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway workers on freight traffic made use of the second form of annoyance. For years it had been the practice to uncouple freight cars, while the trains were in motion. Now the men were insisting upon every train coming to a complete stop before any attempt was made to uncouple a car, and no train was allowed to move more than four miles an hour in the freight yards. By such strict enforcement of the printed letter of the

² *The Scotsman*, May 4, 1926.

³ "As a matter of fact the Communist Party itself was caught by surprise. It had not expected so great a decision from such a conference." See J. T. Murphy, himself a Communist, *The Political Meaning of the Great Strike*, p. 86, where he shows that the most the Communists hoped for from the General Council and the Executive Conference was a repetition of the July, 1926, decision—the refusal to handle coal by the transport unions. A manifesto sent to the *Sunday Worker* (Communist) on Friday, April 30, 1926, called for an embargo on coal and a stoppage of the "lying capitalist press." Cf. *Sunday Worker*, May 2, 1926.

⁴ *London Times*, April 30, 1926, reports a London meeting of delegates from engineering trades in that city. Strike action was strongly advocated in reply to the "inimicable proposals submitted by the National Engineering Employers' Association."

railroad instructions conditions rapidly became chaotic. "Instead of normal hurry and bustle, men and engines were moving about the huge sidings in a manner almost uncanny."⁶

In the same company's wagon works at Newton Heath a "stay-in" strike occurred. "Card parties and other forms of amusement" were indulged in and no work was performed. In spite of Mr. C. T. Cramp's warning of union discipline if they continued, the local strike leaders were "staying put" as late as April 29, and sporadic "sympathy" strikes broke out at other places.⁶ A similar "stay-in" strike occurred at Hull in protest against the official removal by the London and North Eastern Railway, of certain labor posters dealing with non-union workers.⁷ In all of these cases there seemed no shadow of a suspicion by the strikers themselves that a general strike was upon them.

This studied attitude of unpreparedness, on the part of the labor leaders, although motivated by social and patriotic reasons, had results upon the labor forces in the actual struggle that were nothing short of disastrous. Even if the experience of the long organization by the Belgian Labor party, for its strike of 1913, had not been utilized by the British leaders, common sense should have dictated some modicum of preparation. The instructions finally issued by the separate Union Executives, after the Conference of May 1, were confused in their purport even where not positively conflicting with those of other unions in the same industry.⁸ The vast problem of exempting certain sections of the union movement for the distribution of food under the General Council's offer to the Government, was never raised in its entirety, owing to the Government's haughty refusal to have any "partnership with a rival Government."⁹ It did, however, cause great uncertainty among

⁶ *Ibid.*, March 7, 1926.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 30, 1926.

⁷ *Ibid.*, April 30 and May 1, 1926.

⁸ Cf. Postgate, Wilkinson, and Horrabin, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-24.

⁹ Mr. Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons on May 3, 1926, declared, "I readily recognize the offer which was made to convey food and necessities by the Trade Union Committee. . . . It may have been a wise thing for the trade unions to have done, but. . . what Government in the World could enter into partnership with a rival Government, against which it is endeavoring to defend itself and society, and allow that rival Government to sit in judgment on every train that runs and on every lorry on the road?" *Harvard*, May 3, 1926, col. 123.

both the trade unionists and the authorities immediately before the strike, as witness for instance the situation in Manchester. In that city as late as Monday, May 3, the secretary of the Trades and Labor Council, Councillor W. Mellor, declared:

I anticipate that we shall act as the food distributors under the voluntary system agreed upon by the trade unions, but we have no definite instructions on the point yet. It may be that the railway workers and the transport workers will carry out the distribution under their own direction.¹⁰

A crucial problem as to the partial cessation of electric power and gas supply was only discovered when the technical difficulties of separating power supplied to industrial units from power provided for lighting and domestic use, forced themselves upon the attention of local committees and the T. U. C.¹¹ A further vital question was the withdrawal of labor from the public press. As it worked out, there was the greatest difficulty in the world even to get strike bulletins printed, as the Editor and staff of the *British Worker* have reason enough to remember, so rigid and uncoordinated were the orders to the respective unions of compositors and machine men.¹²

This almost complete absence of forethought, even by a small inner council of responsible leaders, was only too evident to the writer in his interviews with local strike-committee members throughout industrial Britain shortly after the strike ended. Repeatedly their remarks showed that local machinery for the coordination of the various unions had to be improvised as the

¹⁰ *London Times*, May 4, 1926.

¹¹ Cf. *British Worker*, May 7, p. 3, where the General Council made announcement: "Local strike organizations are authorized to offer to meet employers immediately and offer to supply light and power for such services as house, street and shop lighting, social services, power for food, bakeries, laundries and domestic purposes"—An impossible selective process; and this on the fourth day of the strike! The London section of the Electrical Trades Union had made plans for a complete stoppage, and pointed out that the division between power and light was a technical impossibility. The General Council thereupon sent them back to work! Cf. Postgate, "Inner History of the General Strike," *Locomotive Engineers' Journal*, July, 1926, p. 498.

¹² Cf. Hamilton Fyfe, then Editor of the *Daily Herald*, and later of the *British Worker*, in *Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike*, pp. 28, 27, 31, and W. Mellor, subsequent editor of the *Daily Herald*, on "The *British Worker*," in *The Labour Magazine*, July, 1926, p. 111.

strike proceeded, and that not until the lapse of three or four days of the strike was this machinery really functioning at its best. In the city of Leeds, for example, *four* different "committees of action" attempted to function, and ultimately the Trade Union Disputes Committee took the lead, originally consisting of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

At Newcastle, center of the industrial life of North-Eastern England, the "Joint Strike Committee" met for the first time on Tuesday evening, May 4. The records of that Committee vividly describe the unavoidable delay.

Nearly everybody present had a set of telegraphic instructions issued from the various Trade Union head offices which had to be co-ordinated with the sometimes conflicting instructions from other head offices. *So far was it from being a question of putting previously prepared plans into action that the Committee were forced to spend the evening in problems of simple coördination.* In short, for that Tuesday evening the improvised machinery had not yet begun to function as far as the conduct of the general strike was concerned.¹³

Very few centers had anticipated trouble or had held any preliminary meetings of trade unions concerned. In this, Liverpool and Coventry were exceptions.¹⁴ In a struggle where time was the very essence of victory this delay and confusion at the outset was almost enough in itself to deal a fatal blow at the effectiveness of the strike weapon. Under the circumstances the marvel is that the local labor groups coördinated as quickly and effectively as they did.

THE AUTHORITIES FULLY PREPARED

Before the breakdown of the negotiations on the night of April 30, the Ministry of Health had already addressed an official letter to the clerks of county, town, Metropolitan borough, urban and district councils, referring to the famous

¹³ Charles R. Flynn, *An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee*, p. 3. Italics ours. For additional light on the situation in Leeds see Postgate, Wilkinson, and Horrabin, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁴ In Liverpool a meeting had been held in June, 1925, but consisted mostly of "left wing" members and had possessed little authority. In March, 1926, however, some 14 unions were represented at a meeting in the office

Circular 636 (of November 20, 1925) described in a previous chapter.¹⁵ This official letter expressed the hope that the negotiations would have a successful issue but lest such should not be the case the Government considered it necessary that part of the organization referred to in Circular 636 should be set in readiness to operate. A list of the Civil Commissioners, their staffs, and addresses were appended. These officers were to function immediately upon the issue of a Proclamation under the Emergency Powers Act, of 1920. Should the coal stoppage extend to other industries a further list of local representatives of the Government would be forthcoming, together with the names of the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the Volunteer Service Committees with whom it would be the duty of the Local Authorities to coöperate.¹⁶

On the same day, April 30, the King signed the Proclamation of a "state of emergency," which was published next day in the *London Gazette*.¹⁷ This "emergency" was the "threat of cessation of work in Coal Mines," and not, at any rate in the Proclamation, the possible general strike. Far more than a mere stoppage in the Coal Industry was actually expected, however, as can be seen from *Emergency Regulations*, dated April 30, 1926:

If any person injures, or does any act calculated to injure or to prevent the proper use or working of, any public building, railway,

of the Liverpool Trades and Labor Council. The Secretary of this Council was appointed secretary of the "Council of Action," which, when the strike broke out, enlarged its membership and became the "Mersey-side Council of Action." For Coventry see Emile Buras, *The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action*, p. 112.

¹⁵ See *supra*, p. 308.

¹⁶ *London Times*, May 1, 1926.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1926. The Proclamation declared, "Whereas by the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, it is enacted that if it appears to Us that any action has been taken or is immediately threatened by any persons or body of persons of such a nature and on so extensive a scale as to be calculated, by interfering with the supply and distribution of food, water, fuel, or light, or with the means of locomotion, to deprive the community or any substantial portion of the community, of the essentials of life, We may, by Proclamation, declare that a state of emergency exists; And whereas the present immediate threat of cessation of work in Coal Mines does, in Our opinion, constitute a state of emergency within the meaning of the said Act; Now, therefore, in pursuance of the said Act, We do, by and with the advice of Our Privy Council, hereby declare that a state of emergency exists."—*Statutory Rules and Orders, 1926*, No. 450.

canal, bridge, road, tramway vehicle, telegraph or telephone line, cable or plant, mine, shop, factory, waterworks, gasworks, electric generating station, or any works or plant used or adapted for use for the production, supply, storage or transport of food, fuel, munitions, water, light, heat or power, he shall be guilty of an offence against these regulations.¹⁸

Even if any person "approaches or is in the neighborhood of or enters any such place as aforesaid with intent to do injury thereto he shall be guilty of an offence against these regulations; and notwithstanding that no such act or injury is committed by him, he shall be deemed to be guilty of such an offence . . . if it appears that his purpose was to do such injury."¹⁹ The Civil Commissioners were established in their respective headquarters during the last week in April, and they received the "Action" telegram from London on the night of Sunday, May 2. The Road Commissioner in each area immediately sent out his "Action" telegrams to his divisional Road Officers and Haulage Committee Chairmen, and by Monday, May 8, the organization was ready for action.²⁰

LABOR PREPARES AT LAST

On the side of Labor the orders from the General Council were included in the proposals laid before the general secretaries of the unions late on Friday night, April 30. They became effective, automatically, when the vast majority of those unions' Executives gave their support to the General Council in the Memorial Hall meeting on Saturday morning, May 1. The full proposals are contained in Appendix A, but the little paragraph 2 (a) contained perhaps the most important of the recommendations inasmuch as they removed from the shoulders of the General Council the responsibility for ordering the cessation of work. In this paragraph the General Council recommended "that the actual calling out of the workers should be left to the unions." Instructions were only to be issued "by the accredited representatives of the unions participating in the dispute." In para-

¹⁸ *Emergency Regulations* dated April 30, 1926, 90 (1).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 (2) These two paragraphs, and two others, were printed on large posters and placed on all railroad stations.

²⁰ George Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

graph (a) of the same section on "Trade Union Discipline," the General Council directed that, in the event of trade unionists being called upon to cease work, the trade unions concerned should "keep a daily register to account for every one of their members," and that no workers called on to cease work should leave their district and blackleg their fellow workers by taking up the same type of work or some other type of work in another district.²¹

Evidently aware, to some degree, of the difficulties that might arise through the clashing of union orders, the General Council continued, in its instructions, to suggest the functions of the Trades Councils during the strike. Section 3 of the proposals declared:

The work of the Trades Councils, in conjunction with the local officers of the trade unions actually participating in the dispute, shall be to assist in carrying out the foregoing provisions, and they shall be charged with the responsibility of organizing the trade unionists in dispute in the most effective manner for the preservation of peace and order.

After a solemn warning against spies and *agents provocateurs* who would endeavor to incite the workers to disorder or violence, the General Council proceeded to Section 5, a section that had much to do with the readiness of the union Executives to give power into the hands of the General Council. This proposal declared that in the event of any action being taken and trade union agreements being placed in jeopardy, it be definitely agreed that there would be *no general resumption of work until those agreements were fully recognized*.²² The absolute failure to ensure any such assurance when the strike was called off, and the subsequent plight of thousands of workers, was one of the heaviest indictments against the General Council for its handling of the dispute.²³

²¹ *London Times*, May 3, 1926; cf. Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²² *London Times*, May 3, 1926; cf. Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²³ Charged by delegates with lack of observance of this Section, Mr. Pugh, at the meeting of Executives, Jan. 30, 1927, answered that such a principle could "only be practicable if the stoppage terminated by an arrangement to which both the miners and the General Council were parties," that such full resumption of work could not be expected if the

The "shock troops" of the General Council were, of course, the transport unions, whether by rail, road, sea, or air.²⁴ Only the natural feeling that the transport unions were "always the goat" in such large sympathy movements had led the trade union leaders to add certain other important industries such as Iron and Steel (Mr. Pugh's union), Metal and Heavy Chemicals, and, with qualifications, the Building Trades and the Gas and Electric Supply Services. On Saturday morning, May 1, therefore, the Executive of the National Union of Railwaymen, having been in continuous session, decided that their members should coöperate with the other unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in the manner suggested by the General Council on the previous evening. The Executive determined, in conjunction with the other unions affected, to instruct their own members to "cease work in order to assist the miners to secure a satisfactory agreement." Mr. C. T. Cramp, the industrial secretary of the N. U. R. issued the following telegram to the branch secretaries throughout the Kingdom on Saturday morning, May 1:

Negotiations with Government on miners' dispute having broken down, Executive Committee now considering our attitude along with other unions. Circular letter in post outlining position, meantime our members must continue their ordinary work. Spasmodic action can only defeat our object. *Prepare your members for action, but only on instructions from this office.* CRAMP.²⁵

On the afternoon of the same day, May 1, the following supplementary wire was sent out to all the branches:

Executive instructs all our members not to take duty after Monday next. Arrangements to be made locally, so that all men will finish their turn of duty at their home station on Tuesday morning. Circular in post. CRAMP.²⁶

coal industry had not resumed. Mr. Pugh gave as example his own industry (iron and steel) where some 88 per cent of his union members could not start work owing to the mine dispute still running. This answer did not seem to satisfy the delegates.—Cf. T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, etc., Jan. 20, 1927, p. 6.

²⁴ See Appendix A, for list of trades called out.

²⁵ *Railway Review* (organ of the N. U. R.), May 14, 1926. Italics ours.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Reference has already been made to the plan of the General Council to distribute food and essentials, notwithstanding the strike call. It has also been stated that Mr. Bromley, speaking for the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen's Union, had at once foreseen difficulty over this proposal. The N. U. R. appointed their Assistant General Secretary, Mr. Marchbank, and their Executive Committee member, Mr. Bayne, to coöperate with the General Council Special Committee dealing with the problem of foodstuffs. Further consideration of the General Council plans led the N. U. R. Executive to declare itself "satisfied that the acceptance of such a policy would lead to difficulties and complications." It was, therefore, decided to request the General Council to review the position, the Executive of the N. U. R. being of the strong opinion "*that all rail and transport workers should effect a complete stoppage.*"²⁷

On Sunday morning this view of the N. U. R. was laid before the Executives of the other two railroad unions in joint meeting at Unity House, the N. U. R. headquarters. At this meeting complete agreement was reached that *no movement of traffic of any kind should be made by railroadmen during the strike.* This decision was conveyed by the joint committee of the three railroad unions to the General Council, and the matter was "*left entirely to the unions concerned,*" a rapid and remarkable *volte face* on the part of the General Council that is one more proof of the utterly inadequate manner in which the problem had been considered.²⁸

At the joint meeting of the three railroad unions on Sunday morning it had also been decided that, during the strike, the three rail unions would work in common agreement, both at headquarters and in the districts. This decision was most loyally obeyed throughout Great Britain, and this united action of formerly rival or mutually suspicious unions, was, perhaps, one of the few real gains of the general strike.

In Mr. Cramp's circular to the branches of May 2, he makes it clear that in giving its support to the miners in this crisis the N. U. R. did not place itself unreservedly in the hands of the General Council, as the Executive "were aware that many points arise on railways which the General Council could not be ex-

²⁷ *Ibid.* Italics ours.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Italics ours.

pected to understand.⁸⁹ On Monday morning, May 3, the following telegram was sent to all branch secretaries:

Stoppage appears inevitable. Unless we advise otherwise every man must act on instructions already given. *No trains of any kind must be worked by our members.* Acting in full agreement with Associated (Locomotive Engineers) and Railway Clerks' unions. You must do likewise in districts. Allow no disorderly or subversive elements to interfere in any way, maintain perfect order, and have confidence in your own representatives. Perfect loyalty will ensure success. CRAMP.⁹⁰

In the N. U. R. circular sent out on the same day the joint action between the three rail unions was broadened to include the Transport Workers' Union. The circular stated that agreement had been reached Monday afternoon with the Transport Workers' Union that "*all traffic by road or rail must be stopped.*" This agreement had not been reached before, owing to certain points that had to be considered with the General Council. Evidently the food service plan was still showing signs of life! This circular of May 3 ended with strict orders to act jointly with the two other rail unions and with the Transport Workers in each locality in order to "*achieve the object of an absolute stoppage of traffic of every kind.*"⁹¹

On the 1st of May the N. U. R., through its industrial secretary, had informed the various railroad companies of the strike decision. This intimation was phrased as follows:

Arising out of the dispute in the Coal Industry this Union, in common with others affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, has agreed to give its support to the Miners and further, in accordance with the decision arrived at, at a Conference of Trades Union Executive Committees conveyed by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, it has been agreed to take steps in conjunction with the Transport Workers' Unions, to call upon our members to cease work on Monday next, the 3rd instant. I am conveying this intimation to you in order that you may be cognizant of the fact that in ceasing work the men are acting upon the instructions of the National Union of Railwaymen. C. T. CRAMP.⁹²

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Italics ours.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* Italics ours.

⁹² Reproduced in full on large Great Western Railway poster headed "Whom do you Serve?"

THE RAILROAD COMPANIES TAKE ACTION

In answer to all this activity on the part of the railroad unions the rail companies had not been idle. On Sunday, May 2, Sir Felix Pole, General Manager of the Great Western Railway issued the following "Notice to the Staff":

The National Union of Railwaymen have intimated that railwaymen have been asked to strike without notice tomorrow night. Each Great Western man has to decide his course of action, but I appeal to all of you to hesitate before you break your contracts of service with the old Company, before you inflict grave injury upon the Railway industry, and before you arouse ill feeling in the Railway service which will take years to remove.

Railway Companies and Railwaymen have demonstrated that they can settle their disputes by direct negotiations. The Mining Industry should be advised to do the same.

Remember that your means of living and your personal interests are involved, and that Great Western men are trusted to be loyal to their conditions of service in the same manner as they expect the Company to carry out their obligations and agreements. Felix J. C. Pole, General Manager.

The contrast between this clever and persuasive use of all the arts of psychological appeal, with the crude methods of the mine owners is worthy of notice.²³

In similar manner, on May 3, the Chief General Manager of the London and North Eastern Railway, Sir Ralph Wedgwood, issued the following notice—also printed in poster form and posted in all the stations of that Company:

Threatened Strike of Railwaymen. Notice to the Staff: The Company have received an intimation that a number of their staff have been instructed by their Trade Union to cease work today, Monday 3rd May. The Company desire to impress upon the staff that if they leave work in the manner indicated they will be breaking their contract of service. The staff are reminded that they cannot legally terminate such contract except by giving proper notice in accordance with the terms of their engagement.²⁴

²³ *London Times*, May 3, 1926. This "Notice to the Staff" was placed side by side with Mr. Cramp's letter, just quoted above, on the Poster "Whom do You Serve," with no further comment by the Railway Company—a piece of sporting propaganda that can scarcely be equalled anywhere.

²⁴ From poster in question.

At the same time this Company issued a further poster appealing for volunteers prepared to act "as engine drivers, firemen, cleaners, motormen, guards, signalmen, shunters, carters, vanmen and stablemen, porters, general labor and despatch riders." Simultaneously the Company announced to the public through the press, that in view of the threat of a strike "the Company cannot at present undertake responsibility for the carriage of passengers and merchandise traffic, and will not be liable for any loss which may arise."²⁵ As the impression got abroad on Monday, the 3rd, that the Railroad Companies would be unable to provide the usual facilities for the transport of milk and food, the Companies announced that whatever happened milk and food trains would run as usual.²⁶ In point of fact that promise was not fulfilled for some days.

The Railway Companies' Association warned the public through the press that a curtailment of services might occur as a result of a general strike; that only such traffic would be accepted as could be dealt with; that all cheap tickets would be cancelled forthwith, and that tickets between points served by more than one railroad would be valid for any part of the journey by any route available.²⁷ On Monday, May 3, Lord Ashfield, chairman of the London Underground Railways, and the London General Omnibus Company issued to their respective staffs a notice appealing for loyalty of their members to the public, rather than to the narrower group of the miners, and stating that the Companies would, in any case, do their utmost to provide passenger service for the public.²⁸ The Pullman Car Company, through its chairman, the late Sir Davison Dalziel, announced to its employees (non-union men), that they would receive full pay during the stoppage, being in no way responsible for the strike, but that they would be required to report daily for duty at their regular times and places, and to be ready for such work, or other assistance, as might be desired in the Company's interests.²⁹

²⁵ *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1926.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, May 3 and 4, 1926.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1926. The administrative staff of the Underground Railways were invited to volunteer for emergency service, in the event of a strike.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

One natural result of the threatened transport stoppage became evident on Monday, May 3, in the abnormally heavy passenger traffic, particularly on the North of England trains, and in the unusually large bookings on the Channel steamers by those who were cutting short their continental holidays in order to reach home before the strike broke out. Atlantic passengers were advised to proceed at once to their respective ports and to embark on such liners as were already docked, as, for example, the White Star liner *Majestic*, which was due to sail from Southampton on May 5. Liners due to arrive at English ports were, in many cases, diverted to the nearest port in order that their passengers might reach their destinations at once, before rail services ceased.⁴⁰

THE BARRAGE OF PROPAGANDA

As the actual strike drew momentarily nearer, and as the Government closed down on negotiations before daybreak on Monday, May 3, the barrage of propaganda from all sides redoubled. On Saturday afternoon Mr. Lloyd George delivered a speech at the Guildhall, Cambridge, in which he said he had just seen a newspaper placard with the headlines "Zinovieff Wins."⁴¹ "That," he declared "was dishonest slosh. It had nothing to do with Zinovieff or Bolshevism. It was an honest trade dispute where the parties had been unable to come to an agreement." That such comment should be made by the same man, who, when Prime Minister in 1919, had called the railroad union leaders "anarchists" is part of the irony of "truth in politics." Mr. Lloyd George continued by stating that the Government had become a party to the dispute by its payment of a subsidy and the appointment of a Commission. That Commission's recommendations constituted a basis for negotiations, but the Government had delayed on these to the last moment. He

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *The Morning Post*, from the office of which the *British Gazette* was issued during the strike, had the honor of this "terminological inexactitude." Cf. Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike*, p. 64. The same author, describing the ownership of the various journals, declares "*The Morning Post* speaks with the voice of the Duke of Northumberland."—p. 59. The Duke of Northumberland is a coal owner.

had never seen the working classes in a mood where they were less inclined for revolution. He could not resist a tilt at the Emergency organization of the Government, conveniently forgetting that it was he who had originated the scheme in 1919, by referring to the "melodramatic party of under-secretaries ready to distribute the morning milk from Hyde Park with the forces of the Crown behind the cans."⁴³

The General Council replied to the Government's ultimatum⁴³ of late Sunday night "with surprise and regret." The orders to the unions to cease work which the Prime Minister had mentioned among his reasons for ending negotiations, were explained thus:

It is nothing unusual for workmen to cease work in defence of their interests as wage earners . . . the specific reason for the decision in this case is to secure for the mine workers the same right from the employers as is insisted upon by employers from workers—namely, that negotiations shall be conducted free from the atmosphere of strike or lock-out.

With regard to the incident on the *Daily Mail*, the "overt act" which had evoked the Governmental ultimatum, the General Council had no knowledge of any such acts having occurred, and the decisions taken by them definitely forbade "any such independent and unauthorized action." The Council closed by deploring the Government's precipitate action in breaking off the "peace discussions" which were proceeding.⁴⁴

The Prime Minister countered, in the House of Commons next afternoon, May 3, by stating:

I tried to coöperate with Mr. Pugh and his colleagues in the search for an agreement to the last possible moment, but I became convinced last night that Mr. Pugh and those with him who sought peace were not in control of the situation, and that it would be wrong and dangerous for the Government to continue talking unless we got an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the instructions for the general strike.⁴⁵

What was the position in which the Government found itself? It found itself challenged with an alternative Government, and that

⁴³ *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

⁴⁴ *London Times*, May 6, 1926.

⁴⁵ See *supra*, p. 100.

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 71.

Government ignorant of the way in which its commands were being carried out, and incapable of arresting disobedience to them.⁴³

That the "overt act" of which the Cabinet complained, was *not* national in its scope but a purely local phenomenon can be seen in the fact that the North of England edition of the *Daily Mail*, printed and published from its Manchester office, was published as usual, including the editorial "For King and Country." In fact, over 750,000 copies were printed and circulated in the normal manner throughout Scotland, Ireland, Northern England, and the Midlands. Fifty thousand copies were conveyed to London. No attempt was made by any of the unions concerned to interfere in any way.⁴⁴ Had the Government really desired peace it could have learned this fact without difficulty.

On the other hand, in London, the General Council and the Executives of the unions at fault in the *Daily Mail* incident, had apparently lost control of their members, as Mr. Baldwin suggested. This can be gathered from the events connected with the suppression of certain evening journals on Monday, May 3. The *Evening News* attempted to quote the offending editorial of the morning's *Daily Mail*. The compositors set up the type and the stereotypers cast the plates but when the plate reached the machine room the "Natsopa" members informed the editor that they could not print the paper unless the editorial was removed. The deputation was told of the General Council's repudiation of the action at the *Daily Mail* office and referred the question to their Executive. Later in the day the "Natsopa" members declared that their Executive had answered them that they could give no guidance—a plain case of surrender of control. Thereupon the members of the "Natsopa" in the *Evening News* met once more and took their own decision to refuse to print the paper. Hence four successive editions of that paper failed to appear.⁴⁵

Even less justifiable acts occurred on the *Evening Standard* and the *Star*. In this case it was not the attempted reprint of the offending editorial that caused the trouble, but four separate unions in the office of the *Evening Standard* refused to handle the lunch and afternoon editions if an account of recruiting

⁴³ *Ibid.*, col. 70.

⁴⁴ *London Times*, May 4, 1926.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* "Natsopa" is the short title for National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants.

scenes in Whitehall (presumably of volunteer workers and police) were not deleted. The management refused such dictation, and the paper ceased to issue. In the case of the *Star*, no interference occurred until the last afternoon edition, when the machine minders demanded the deletion of an item of news relating to the Government's request for volunteers. Again this meant the cancellation of all later editions.⁴⁹ The *Daily Mail* was once more prevented from publishing its London edition on Monday night May 3 (May 4th issue), "because it called for the immediate arrest of the principals in the conspiracy against the liberty of the British nation."⁵⁰ Whatever may be the views on the *official* strike called on all the newspapers of the country for May 4 onward, this wholly sporadic and unauthorized interference with the editorial policy deserved far more serious treatment than it received from labor circles either at the time, or after the strike was over.

The General Council late on Sunday evening had issued a public manifesto disclaiming all responsibility for the "calamity" that was threatened, and definitely declaring that their action was not directed against the public. Their plea was that no proposals for a national settlement had been made by the mine owners until within a few hours of the time fixed for the expiration of the lock-out notices. They added that even with a general stoppage of transport and productive industry in sight, an honorable settlement could be reached, provided the notices were withdrawn and the demand for a preliminary pledge from the miners, on wage reductions, were not insisted upon by the Government.⁵¹

THE CRY OF "CIVIL WAR"

The speakers for the Government, in the House on Monday, and particularly after the strike actually started, raised the cry of an attack on the Constitution and of civil war. Mr. Baldwin himself asserted on Monday:

I do not think all the leaders when they assented to ordering a general strike, fully realized that they were threatening the basis

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1926.

⁵⁰ Editorial from the Paris edition of the *Daily Mail* for May 8, 1926, cited by Kingsley Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁵¹ *London Times*, May 3, 1926; cf. Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68.

of ordered Government, and going nearer proclaiming civil war than we have been for centuries past.⁵²

Such comment, from the leader of a Cabinet in which there was more than one member who had, during 1913-14, actively and openly abetted the organization of armed insurrection in Northern Ireland, against the Asquith Government, could only be classed as a "smoke screen"; unless it implied that the Baldwin Government was more ready to use its armed forces upon unarmed workers than was the Asquith Government to call upon the Army to suppress wholesale gun-running and drilling by the Carson-Birkenhead group in Northern Ireland.⁵³

The Chancellor of the Exchequer believed that the action of the labor leaders in deciding to call a general strike would "inevitably lead to the erection of some Soviet of trade unions on which, whether under Parliamentary forms or without them, the really effective control of the economic and political life of the country" would devolve.⁵⁴ Sir Robert Horne, once Chancellor of the Exchequer, embellished this idea of a rival Government:

... a junta of men may, without consultation with their constituents, decide to bring the country to a standstill. . . . They could, if they chose, having an organization of that kind, use it for political purposes just as easily as industrial purposes. They could, for example, say, "Unless you give nationalization to the mines we will hold up the country."⁵⁵

⁵² *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 71.

⁵³ "Civil war" was infinitely nearer in 1913-14, had the Asquith Government dared to enforce the law, than in 1926, when none but a handful of Communists even suggested revolution, or thought of it. In the *Northern Whig* (Belfast, Ireland) for December 30, 1914, is a "Review of the Year," in which the whole story of the landing at Larne, Bangor, and Donaghadee of a cargo of 36,000 magazine rifles and 2,500,000 rounds of ammunition, is told. This armament "had been purchased on the Continent" and had been smuggled in "under cover of a general mobilization of the Ulster Volunteer Force." Lord Birkenhead, then Sir F. E. Smith, speaking of this Ulster Volunteer movement at Armagh, Oct. 4, 1913, said, "We shall make England realize that it (the establishment of a Home Rule Parliament) can never be done, the more easily the more swiftly, and the more triumphantly your Volunteer movement advances. I hope to see at an early date those men who have undergone the necessary discipline and drill armed with real rifles." The writer, living in England at that time, and having visited all the Belfast area, is perhaps in some position to compare the feeling existing at that time with that in 1926, when he again was in England for over four months.

⁵⁴ *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 124.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 103.

Against such emphatic assertions of his Majesty's Ministers the cold facts of colossal unpreparedness on the part of the British Labor movement, politically and industrially, for any such struggle as a general strike, much less a revolutionary civil war, made no headway in the House of Commons; but in the country at large the bulk of the public refused to be unduly distressed with the Bolshevist Bogy. The weak and distressed answers of Mr. Thomas and other members of the Labor Front Bench were far less effective than those of the arch-politician, Mr. Lloyd George. Mr. Thomas's plea, "I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Government won," deserved the sarcastic comment of the Labor ranks in subsequent days. His claim that "this is not only not a revolution . . . it is merely a plain, economic, industrial dispute," carried a trifle more conviction.⁵⁶

Mr. Lloyd George, less afraid of the bombardment from the Government benches, and knowing it better for what it was, could assure the House that:

I know a great many of the people responsible. They are as little revolutionary as any member of this House. They have fought the rebellious ones in their own party. . . . This is not a threat directed by people using it merely for revolutionary propaganda.⁵⁷

He begged the Government to continue negotiations without thought of its prestige and warned them that a victory to either party would be disastrous to the State.

A victory to those who are organizing a general strike will soon get out of their control. That is the history of every movement of that kind. A victory for the Government against the trade unions will also get out of their control.⁵⁸

Apart from this almost solitary appeal by one who, for the moment at any rate, was on the "side lines," there was little expression of unbiased opinion in the House on the last night before the great strike.⁵⁹ In the wider world outside the House

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 81.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 84.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, col. 91.

⁵⁹ Sir Harry Hope, for 15 years "loyal supporter" of the Conservative party in the House, expressed most briefly the belief that a settlement could be obtained "if the coalmasters' stoppage notices were withdrawn on the one hand, and the general strike order were countermanded on the other." Cf. *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 133.

there were, however, last moment appeals to common sense. The Bishops of Southwark and Winchester, in a joint communication to the *London Times*, contended that "to ordinary citizens like ourselves it would seem commonsense that the subsidy, instead of being abruptly terminated, should continue for the present, though lessening *pari passu* with the process of reconstruction." Otherwise the "support of the subsidy being suddenly knocked away, the burden of sustaining the structure" was to be "laid first on those who are least able to bear it"; that it "would obviously be cheaper and surely wiser for the nation to shoulder it for a while longer at an expense that would be infinitesimal as compared with the expense of a general strike." In a plea for the "Christian point of view" they deplored the fact that England was "suffering a national humiliation comparable to a defeat in war. We preach peace among the nations but we fail to attain it at home."⁶⁰

A somewhat similar plea, but for the *unconditional* acceptance of the Samuel Report by the Government and the enforcement of the full recommendations of that Report as far as Governmental legislation could ensure it, was addressed to the public through the columns of the same issue of the *Times* by such well known Oxford men as A. D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol, Professor Gilbert Murray, M. E. Sadler, A. J. Carlyle, G. N. Clark, and G. D. H. Cole.⁶¹ The one great national loss entailed by the almost complete suppression of the London and provincial press was the difficulty for such intermediate opinion to find adequate channels for public expression in the next nine days.

THE EVE OF THE STRIKE

The strike rolled nearer, and preparations on both sides proceeded hourly. The Government, through the Customs, stopped all export of coal. Ships that had sailed from South Wales ports with coal cargoes were ordered by wireless to return to port. Emergency regulations with regard to fuel were issued restricting coal for private consumers to one hundred-weight a week, and limiting the amount that might be used by

⁶⁰ *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

industries, businesses and public buildings.⁶² Lights for display or advertising were forbidden, and gas-works were permitted to reduce pressure during the hours when demand was low.⁶³ An appeal for volunteers was broadcast on the radio on Sunday night warning the public that a general strike was likely within twenty-four hours.⁶⁴ The Electrical Power Engineers' Association instructed its members to "coöperate in the Government scheme for the maintenance" of essential public services, but deprecated the introduction of volunteers into the industry, and advised the Government that supply of power should not be given to industrial works where non-essential work was being performed.⁶⁵ This action of the Association was looked upon as "blacklegging" by the labor ranks.⁶⁶

On Monday night the Metropolitan Commissioner of Police issued an appeal for able-bodied citizens under forty-five years of age to enroll as special constables for the protection of the Metropolis during the crisis. In the appeal the grim pledge was made that:

Special constables who sustain injuries in the execution of their duty and widows and children in case of death, will be granted according to circumstances, pension, allowances, or gratuities.⁶⁷

All leave in the Army was stopped, and troops were moved to Lancashire, Wales, and Scotland, where they were "placed at the disposal of the police, to be called upon only in emergency to preserve public order" in the same manner as special constables. It was alleged that the troops were not being used in the running of any essential services.⁶⁸ In fact, outside of the Metropolitan area, where the "tanks" paraded to the Docks on Saturday, May 8, and on subsequent days there was ex-

⁶² *Ibid.* Written consent of the local authority was required before new supplies could be obtained. Cf. also *The Scotsman*, May 3, 1926.

⁶³ Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁶⁴ *London Times*, May 3, 1926.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, May 3 and 4, 1926.

⁶⁶ Postgate, et al., *A Workers' History of the Great Strike*, p. 18, says, "Among eleven hundred odd unions of Great Britain there were three black-leg unions. The Electrical Power Engineers' Association had offered its services to the Government. . . ." The others referred to were the Nat. Union of Journalists and Mr. Havelock Wilson's Nat. Sailors' and Firemen's Union.

⁶⁷ *London Times*, May 4, 1926.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, cf. *The Scotsman*, May 4, 1926.

ceedingly little public show of the troops. If they were not used for running essential services, it was largely because the Naval ratings were even more "handy men" at that task, as will be shown shortly.

The Postmaster-General gave notice to the public that no foreign or Colonial parcels would be accepted, that parcels within the United Kingdom must not exceed eight ounces in weight, and that there would be no delivery of parcels within the London postal area. The Government appealed to the public to avoid sending telegrams, making telephone calls or using the postal service unless it was urgently necessary to do so.⁶⁹ Further Government action on Monday resulted in the closing of Hyde Park to the public, in preparation for its use as a milk distributing center for the London district. All gates were locked and guarded by police, and only officials with special passes were allowed to enter.⁷⁰ The Park had already been used, from Friday night, as center for a vast collection of motor trucks, furniture vans, and milk carts.⁷¹

The O. M. S., having lived for and unto this day, proceeded to sink its official and separate existence in that of the Government by placing all its committees and registered personnel at the disposal of the Volunteer Service Committees in the various localities. On Sunday and Monday queues of professional men, artisans, laborers, and college students lined up in Whitehall, desirous of being registered for volunteer service.⁷²

On the part of the public, despite urgent exhortations by the Government not to hoard food or necessaries, there were signs of a sudden realization of unpreparedness. In the Scottish capital a rush on the coal merchants for household supplies occurred, and in London a great demand developed for such articles as bicycles, oil stoves, and camp beds. The last item was for large commercial firms, who were arranging to accommodate their employees who lived in the more distant suburbs. Housewives in certain districts cleaned out the dealers' supplies of canned meat, milk, and other food.⁷³ Large crowds gathered about the Houses of Parliament and in Whitehall as midnight approached,

⁶⁹ *London Times*, May 4, 1926.

⁷⁰ *The Scotsman*, May 4, 1926.

⁷¹ *Boston Transcript*, May 1, 1926.

⁷² *London Times*, May 4, 1926.

⁷³ *The Scotsman*, May 3; *Boston Transcript*, May 3, 1926.

but, save for opposing groups singing "God Save the King" and "The Red Flag," the waiting crowds were orderly enough. Big Ben boomed the hour of midnight, and a rather hysterical enthusiast yelled hoarsely "Comrades, the hour has struck." The Nine Days had begun.¹⁴

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE WALK-OUT

The strike of 1926 was far more seriously a transport stoppage than the railroad strike of 1919. In 1919, despite much unrest and a desire to strike in sympathy, the road transport workers, on omnibus, trolley, and auto-truck did not cease work. Nor did the workers on the docks and wharves, nor the staffs of the power stations. In 1926 all of these were out, along with the other, less immediately necessary trades, such as steel and iron, building, and heavy chemicals. There was, therefore, a far more acute problem for the Local Authorities to handle. Not only were the main, long distance routes tied up by the railroadmen's call to cease work, but the retail distribution of everything save milk and bread was seriously hampered by the road transport strike. The sources of supply were suddenly dried up, by the closing down of London Docks and wharves, and of many provincial docks and harbors. Suburban traffic, handled with some difficulty in 1919, now became one of the crucial battle points, especially in London and the larger cities.

Tuesday, May 4, 1926, brought London and the great provincial cities as near to chaos as they are ever likely to be. With very few exceptions, the country over, the trolleys were not running. In London this was providential, for even without these clumsy vehicles blocking the traffic's flow, as they are apt to do in the narrow suburban streets, London's bridges and the main routes into the Metropolis were crowded beyond description with every imaginable makeshift for locomotion. Traffic conditions in Trafalgar Square, Parliament Square, Piccadilly Circus, and the Embankment soon became hopeless. Government services, including the Post Office, tried to move their employees by motor coaches, but they too were caught helplessly in the jam. By afternoon of the first day of the strike the traffic

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1926.

could move about *one mile an hour*, so complete was the congestion.⁷⁵

Practically all London passenger services ceased on the first day of the strike, though it is alleged that some three hundred busses kept running, out of a normal 4,400.⁷⁶ These three hundred busses, owned by "independent" companies, and known as "pirate busses," dropped to forty by the third day of the strike owing to severe picketing by the strikers. The largest bus company, the London General Omnibus Company, responsible in normal times for 3,300 of the 4,400 busses, did not move a single vehicle on the first day of the strike. It was found impossible to get the busses out of their garages with volunteer drivers, so complete was the picketing. Police were finally used to clear the streets around the garages and the busses were taken to Regent's Park, which henceforth was closed to the public and used as an open-air bus garage.⁷⁷ After the first day, therefore, except for Sunday, May 9, when no bus ran, the L. G. O. C. steadily increased the numbers running each day, but even on the day the strike was called off, May 12, only 1,272 of the 4,400 were on the streets, and those with volunteer drivers, under police protection.⁷⁸

On the London "Underground" out of a normal number of train units of 815, only 15 were running on the first day of the strike, and those few with volunteer labor. This service also improved slowly, until on May 12, 105 train units were functioning.⁷⁹ Ninety-nine per cent of the employees of the Underground railroad ceased work on the first day, the remaining one per cent being members of the supervisory staff or ex-flying corps men.⁸⁰

On the lines of the four great railroad companies of Britain the walkout was surprisingly complete. Even the supervisory staffs and the railroad clerks came out in large numbers. At the close of the strike, sidings were still choked with loaded freight trains, many left—with their engines—at places near

⁷⁵ George Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 48. Cf. *Boston Transcript*, May 4, 1926.

⁷⁶ *London Times*, May 22, 1926; cf. Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁷⁷ *London Times*, May 22, 1926.

⁷⁸ Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁰ This, with much subsequent data, was obtained by the writer through the courtesy of the Ministry of Transport, from daily reports on conditions of transport, hereafter referred to as "Ministry of Transport reports."

the drivers' homes, and not at their regular depots.⁸¹ The London, Midland and Scottish Railroad reported that "the working lines, shunting yards, sidings, etc., had to be cleared of the engines and trains which had been left standing when the men discontinued work." The problem before this company was "the manning and operating of a system comprising about 7,000 miles of railroad, and nearly 5,000 goods (freight) and passenger stations with a total staff of 44,973 employees, or about *one-sixth* only of the persons employed under normal conditions. Of these nearly 24,000, or 53.5 per cent, were members of the salaried or clerical classes, unaccustomed to manual traffic operating work." The real seriousness of the situation was seen in the fact that "out of every two hundred trained engine drivers normally employed by the company only three remained at their posts."⁸² On this railroad 85 per cent of the wages' grades and 41 per cent of the salaried staff left their work.⁸³

On the London and North Eastern Railroad, the largest carrier of mineral traffic in Britain,⁸⁴ the great majority of the staff were staunch trade unionists. Only 12 per cent of the personnel stayed at their posts, and again the majority of these were of the clerical or salaried staff. Only 76 locomotive engineers out of a total of 11,500 remained "loyal" to the Company, and only 18 firemen out of a similar total of 11,500; 87 shunters out of 5,300 reported for duty. The Company was, therefore, desperately short of men whose services were essential for traffic movement. Even the signalmen came out on strike 94.5 per cent strong, only 508 remaining at work on the whole system.⁸⁵

Owing to a change in the methods of record after the first day of the strike, the statistical data of the Ministry of Transport rendered it somewhat difficult to gauge the precise gravity

⁸¹ London Times, May 13, 1926.

⁸² *The General Strike and its effects on the L. M. S.*, statement issued by the General Manager's office on June 2, 1926.

⁸³ The above sources give these data as referring to the first day of the strike, but the Ministry of Transport reports show that they were for May 5, the third day of the strike, and that the situation was even worse on May 5.

⁸⁴ In 1925 some 87 million tons of coal and coke were carried by the L. N. E.

⁸⁵ *The General Strike in Great Britain, Experiences of the L. N. E. Railways*, memorandum issued by the publicity department of the L. N. E.

of the strike after the first day.⁸⁶ As the available figures stand it would appear that the strike became even more complete on the railroads during the *second* day of the strike than on the first.⁸⁷ That this is quite possible can be gathered from an item of news recorded in the Ministry of Transport files;⁸⁸ the report for the Northern division of the London, Midland and Scottish Railroad states that only 104 signal boxes were manned and working on May 5 as against 176 boxes on May 4, implying that a number of signalmen had ceased work after the first day of the strike. This hypothesis is strongly supported when the data on the actual number of trains run per day are analyzed. May 5 was, in the case of the two railroads for which a report was obtainable for the whole strike period, by far the worst day of the whole stoppage.⁸⁹ Freight service practically ceased on the second day of the strike, the few trains that started on May 4 being worked through to destination in most cases, but not starting afresh.

Passenger trains run on the L. M. S. Railroad on the last full day of the strike, May 11, had increased from the lowest ebb of 3.8 per cent of normal to 12.2 per cent, a considerable but by no means phenomenal increase. On the Great Western Railroad these figures were 3.7 per cent of normal on May 5 up to 19.2

⁸⁶ The number of men on strike was given for the first day, May 4, thereafter the number of men available for duty. (Those sick, or absent, on the first day may not have been strikers. Volunteers may be included in subsequent days.)

⁸⁷ For example, the percentage of employees of the Great Western Railroad who were on strike May 4 was 72, whereas the percentage available for duty next day, May 5, was but 18, a discrepancy of 10 per cent. Similarly the London, Midland and Scottish gave 81 per cent on strike May 4, but only 18 per cent available for duty May 5—Ministry of Transport reports.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Transport Daily report of May 6.

⁸⁹ The G. W. R. showed a passenger train mileage 11 per cent of normal on May 4. On May 5 this had dropped to 7.1 per cent. The number of passenger trains run May 4 was 7 per cent of normal, whereas on May 5 it had dropped to 3.7 per cent. Freight mileage was even more marked; on May 4 it was but 6 per cent of normal, but on the next day had fallen below 1 per cent.

The L. M. S. showed passenger train mileage on May 4 of 6 per cent of normal, dropping to 4.5 per cent on May 5, and number of passenger trains run 8.0 per cent on May 4, falling to 3.8 per cent on May 5. The freight train mileage dropped from 12.0 per cent to less than 1 per cent, and the number of trains run from 9.0 per cent to under 1. Either the few trains that still ran were made to do extra mileage, or else the short trip trains were eliminated more completely than the long trip.

per cent on May 11. The Southern Railroad gave data of an increase from 5.1 per cent of normal on May 5 to 19.1 per cent on May 11, and the London and North Eastern road very similar figures to those of the L. M. S., viz., an increase from 3.4 per cent of normal to 12.8 per cent. The daily figures show the greatest improvement on Monday, May 10, which is easily understandable when one remembers that May 9 was a Sunday, on which no passenger services were run, thus leaving the management free to concentrate all their efforts on the next day, in the line of expansion of traffic. Freight service lagged far behind passenger traffic, as might have been expected, especially as the more immediate necessities, such as milk, were often shipped by the passenger trains. What few freights ran, were utilized for the most essential commodities. The freight train service figures of the L. M. S. and G. W. R. are typical. The L. M. S. increased the number of its freight trains from less than 1 per cent of normal on May 5 to 3 per cent on May 11, and the G. W. R. from the same low figure on May 5 to 8.4 per cent of normal on May 11. The London and North Eastern only attained 2.2 per cent of normal even on May 11, in spite of running a larger volume of long distance milk traffic than normal at the close of the strike period.⁵⁰

THE MYTHICAL "WEAKENING"

Much was made, in such journals as the *British Gazette*, of the eagerness of strikers to return to work. Analysis of the Ministry of Transport figures reporting the number of railroad employees actually available for duty, from day to day as the strike proceeded, does not bear out such assertion. It becomes evident that the most essential railroad workers, the skilled men,

⁵⁰ From Ministry of Transport daily reports. By May 14, the day the railroad strike was finally settled, the L. N. E. freight services had reached 5.5 per cent of normal and the passenger trains run 15.5 per cent. (Memorandum issued by the L. N. E. Publicity Department.)

The L. N. E. carried more milk than in normal times, and the Government could not use all the supply, giving orders not to collect milk outside a radius of 100 miles. The Company ignored this order, inasmuch as the long haul milk paid better than the short haul. Finally the Government reached the farmers and stopped the supply at its source. (Interview with the General Manager, May 29, 1926.)

scarcely weakened in numbers on strike even towards the end. Locomotive engineers, for instance, "available for duty" on the Great Western Railroad increased from 79 on May 5 to 104 on May 12, the day the general strike was called off, a return of 25 men in a total normal staff of 6,206. On the London, Midland and Scottish the number available for duty increased from 93 to 273, a return of 180 men out of a total normal staff of locomotive engineers of 14,671. On the L. N. E. Railroad the number of engineers available was 94 on May 6 and 127 on May 12, out of a total force of 11,500.²¹ On the Southern Railroad on May 12, the last day of the general strike, only 238 engineers and firemen were available for service out of a normal force of 7,044.²² The number of firemen available in each of the first three cases was even less than that of the locomotive engineers.

Among the most vital men on the railroads the signalmen were, perhaps, the weakest in their strike showing. On the Great Western road, as early as May 5, 384 signalmen were available, this number increasing to 584 on the 12th of the month, out of a total force of 4,843. The London, Midland and Scottish had 901 available on the 5th, and 1,152 on the 12th, out of a staff of 11,871. The Southern Railroad showed the largest percentage of signalmen available, having no less than 534 out of 2,940 ready for duty on the 12th.

Possibly the most unexpected aspect of the general strike, as far as it concerned the railroads, was the large response to the strike call by the clerical and supervisory staffs, or the "white collar" men. The Great Western showed the least defection from "loyalty" to the railroad, over 12,000 out of a staff of some 16,000 being available on May 12. On the London, Midland and Scottish over 34,000 were available out of some 43,000, but on the London and North Eastern only some 18,000 out of a total force of 33,000.

It must be remembered that the members of the Railway Clerks' Association had never hitherto aligned themselves actively with organized labor, and that numbers of the "white collar"

²¹ Figures from the daily reports of the Ministry of Transport files. If data on the L. M. S. be taken from *The General Strike and its effects on the L. M. S.*, issued by the General Manager's office June 2, 1926, the increase of men available is even less, viz., 207 to 273.

²² The Southern did not separate engineers from firemen in their data.

men were not members even of the Association. On the other hand, many of the supervisory staffs and station masters belonged to the R. C. A. and came out on strike at the imminent risk of losing their jobs, their seniority privileges and their pensions, with nothing whatever to gain for themselves. Under these circumstances the figures provided by strike bulletins in several railroad centers, even if taken at a liberal discount, show an unexpected turn-out of membership. From Goole with its 100 per cent record, Sheffield and Liverpool with 95 per cent, Crewe with 90, Birmingham, Rugby, Manchester district and Bristol with 80, down the line to Bath, with its 65, and York, where but 50 per cent went out on strike, the union reports were surprising to those who had expected a complete fiasco among that group of railroadmen.⁵³ The smaller and more isolated towns seem to have answered the strike call, if anything, even better than the cities.⁵⁴ These striking R. C. A. members proved to be invaluable to the strikers, serving on the various joint committees, taking minutes of meetings, editing and mimeographing strike bulletins, with an efficiency due to their clerical experience on the railroad.

When all types of railroad workers are included in one general total, the increase in the number available, over the period from May 5 to May 12, amounted to but 1 per cent of the total normal force as far as the Great Western road was concerned, and only a fraction above 1 per cent on the London, Midland and Scottish. In the light of this analysis the broadcasted news of "one thousand more L. M. S. men available on May 11 than at the start of the strike" assumes its rightful proportion, as a very meager figure in view of the pressure put upon the railroadmen to return.⁵⁵

It has been asserted on the side of the railroad companies that the fear of a break in the ranks of the railroadmen brought about the ending of the general strike. There was, indeed, some regret on the part of the companies that the end of the strike

⁵³ Data collected by the writer from interviews with railroad union local officials, and from a series of strike bulletins published during the strike, and collected by the secretary of the joint strike committee of the Reading railroad unions.

⁵⁴ Cf. *The Railway Service Journal*, June, 1926, district reports, pp. 198-203, and the *British Worker*, May 8 and 9, 1926.

⁵⁵ *London Times*, May 12, 1926.

came before that "break" in the ranks was more than incipient.⁹⁴ A more rapid defection from the strikers had certainly been expected and at least one of the companies issued a poster on the last day of the strike to "hurry up the rot" within the ranks, by offering to take on those men who returned immediately and give them permanent jobs; implying that the others would receive far less lenient treatment.⁹⁵ That the break in the ranks was not of any serious importance can be seen from several pieces of evidence; the daily data of the Ministry of Transport reports analyzed above; a series of reports from over 140 Trades Councils, in answer to a questionnaire, specifically stating in over half the cases that there was no "weakening" whatever, in further instances, where weakening occurred in certain unions the railwaymen were specifically named as "solid" up to the end, and in only four instances were any rail union members mentioned as returning;⁹⁶ the writer's own investigations shortly after the strike ended, which yielded monotonously unanimous replies as to the continued solidarity of the railroadmen who had come out on strike;⁹⁷ the final refusal of the railroad union members to return to work, after the general strike had been declared at an end, until less humiliating terms had been obtained; and the constant allusion of the British Broadcasting Company during the last few days of the strike to the continued lack of any sign of "collapse" among the strikers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Interview with the Chief General Manager of the London and North Eastern, May 29, 1926.

⁹⁵ The sentence in question ran as follows: "The Company wish it to be understood that at the conclusion of the Strike they will give preference for employment to those of their staff who have remained at work or who offer themselves for re-employment without delay." This poster was signed by the Chief General Manager of the L. N. E. Railroad.

⁹⁶ Emile Burns, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101.

⁹⁷ The President of the Scottish T. U. C. declared to the writer that in his opinion the strike was called off at the right moment, as the morale of the striking railroadmen might have broken when the road transport became more general. Miss Margaret Bondfield, of the General Council, on the other hand, would not admit to the writer that any "leakage" (return of strikers) had occurred. She stated that the railroadmen's positions were being slowly filled by men who might have become permanent employees, and that in such cases as the Locomotive Engineers' and Firemen's union, where almost every man was out, the drain on the union funds was disastrous.

¹⁰⁰ Tuesday afternoon, May 11, the B. B. C. broadcasted "Still no sign of relaxation of the strike situation as a whole," and again, "There is as yet little sign of a general collapse of the strike." Even after the strike was

The only piece of evidence of a contrary nature from trade union quarters, that would imply a *general* weakening among the railroad union ranks towards the close of the strike, comes from a source that may possibly be discounted. Mr. A. J. Cook, speaking on January 20, 1927, at the special conference of trade union executives gathered at Central Hall, Westminster, to hear the final report of the General Council upon the conduct of the great strike of 1926, alleged that John Bromley, of the locomotive and firemen's union, had confessed imminent failure on the part of the railroad unions on the evening of May 10, 1926. Mr. Cook's picturesque story of this episode follows:

Let me here say to you men, on the Monday night friend Bromley told us that his men were all going back, trains were running, and unless we would consider this situation he would have to call his men back on Tuesday night. . . . They did not argue that the Samuel Memorandum contained splendid terms for the miners; that it would give peace in the interval; that there was a possibility of it being accepted as a basis for negotiations, but "unless the general strike is called off now there will be thousands of trains running. The result will be that there will be a debacle. It is no good. We cannot go on any longer." My friend Bromley said "We are busted."¹⁰¹

Mr. Bromley did not answer A. J. Cook's allegations, and there may have been a change of heart on the part of the union leaders, who, like John Bromley, had hitherto been known as "left-wing" men, during the actual experience of the general strike itself.¹⁰² But that the ranks of his union were showing general signs of weakening the writer can find no evidence. It is true that a failure to pay strike pay, due to the drain on the

officially ended the B. B. C. could say, at ten o'clock on Thursday morning, May 13, "As far as London was concerned, the calling off of the General Strike seemed to have made little difference to traffic this morning. Few of the strikers have returned to work, and the strike service of trains and busses is still in force, volunteers acting as drivers and conductors. No trams were running in the early morning and the scramble to get to work was as bad as ever." Cf. Emile Burns, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-7, 292. The northern and industrial provinces were always more solid in the strike than was London, and this assertion of B. B. C. holds even more true of them.

¹⁰¹ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings, etc.*, Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 84.

¹⁰² Mr. Rhys Davies, M. P., told the writer that many "left wing" leaders such as Mr. Bromley turned more "right" during the strike than the original "right-wing" leaders such as J. H. Thomas.

union's funds, might have changed the situation, had the strike continued; and such considerations must, of course, have been in the minds of responsible union officials. Mr. Herbert Smith, president of the Miners' Federation, supported this allegation of Mr. Cook, by stating that at the final appeal made to the Miners' Executive on Wednesday morning, May 12, by the deputation from the General Council, Mr. Ben Turner had declared that the general strike was "on the slippery slope" and many trade unions that could not get strike pay would return to work in "dribblets," and so ruin the strike's effect.¹⁰³

It seems more likely that the pressing reason for the eagerness with which the railroad leaders accepted the Samuel Memorandum, as a method of ending the strike, was not so much the fear of immediate weakening among the ranks as a constant fear, with some leaders amounting almost to a nightmare, that, as the strike prolonged its days, the ranks would get out of hand, become disorderly and bring a highly hypothetical civil war into the realm of actuality. That this factor in the decision is not merely a figment of the writer's imagination can be seen from J. H. Thomas's speech in the House of Commons the day after the strike had been declared ended, May 13, 1926. Mr. Thomas, answering the conciliatory speech of the Prime Minister with most damaging evidence that the employers, the country over, were far from following the Prime Minister's lead of "no reprisals," contrasted the attitude of the dock worker and miner with that of the railroadman.

The miner is unlike the railwayman in his attitude toward disputes. When I hear my mining friends talk about 12 weeks', 18 weeks', or 20 weeks' stoppage, I get horrified, but they calmly accept the situation. I deplore that attitude. To me it is horrible, because I know the consequences. But there is something even worse than that. What I dreaded about this strike more than anything else was this: If by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened. I thank God it never did. That is why I believe that the decision yesterday was such a big decision, and that is why that danger, that fear, was always in our minds, because we wanted at least, even in this struggle, to direct a disciplined army.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ *Hansard*, May 13, 1926, col. 1058.

Even franker admission of this situation was given by Mr. Dukes of the General and Municipal Workers, at the special conference of Executives held in January, 1927. Seconding the adoption of the General Council's report upon the general strike, Mr. Dukes alleged that the Council attempted to produce a general strike with but one-third of the workers organized. Moreover, there was the difficulty of knowing how the strike was proceeding, because the unions had "adopted methods that prevented information being sent from one locality to another." Far more serious, however, was his final claim:

Every day that the strike proceeded the control and the authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible Executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control, and was (sic) wrecking the movement from one end to the other.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings*, etc., Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 88. Whether this was a reference to the Communist minority or merely to untried local individual trade unionists is not made clear. It is sufficient, however, to show what was the feeling of the official Executives.

CHAPTER XII

THE BRITISH "NATIONAL" STRIKE OF 1926 (Continued)

THE DUAL GOVERNMENT

FROM THE moment that the general strike actually started the cry was raised of an attack upon the Constitution. The first issue of the official Government newspaper, for which the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill, was largely responsible, contained such a statement in the baldest terms. Under a headline, *Hold-up of the Nation*, the *British Gazette* declared: "The general strike is in operation, expressing in no uncertain terms a direct challenge to ordered government. . . . an effort to force upon some 42,000,000 British citizens the will of less than 4,000,000 others engaged in the vital services of the country."¹ The Prime Minister, speaking in the House of Commons on the eve of the strike took much the same view:

I do not think all the leaders, when they assented to ordering a general strike, fully realized that they were threatening the basis of ordered government, and going nearer to proclaiming civil war than we have been for centuries past.²

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, later in the same debate, returned to the threat of a rival government:

It is a conflict which, if it is fought out to a conclusion, can only end in the overthrow of Parliamentary Government or in its decisive victory. . . . Either the Parliamentary institutions of the country will emerge triumphant . . . or else, on the other hand, the existing constitution will be fatally injured, and, however unwilling Hon. Members opposite may be to produce that result, the consequences of their action will inevitably lead to the erection of some Soviet of trade unions, on which, whether under Parliamentary forms or without them, the real effective control of the economic and political life of the country will devolve. Such a transference could only mean the effectual subversion of the State. . . .³

¹ *British Gazette*, May 5, 1926.

² *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 71.

³ *Ibid.*, col. 124.

That much the same view of the general strike was held by leading Liberty party members can be seen from the controversial speeches of Sir John Simon on the legality of the great strike. In his address to his constituents immediately after the end of the strike, explaining his attitude in Parliament during the process of the dispute, Sir John stated:

The question really is whether the success of the General Strike, if it succeeded, does not necessarily involve a substitution of the strikers' will for the will of Parliament. That is the point. In this world people have to be judged not by noble sentiments and strong sympathies but by the perfectly obvious consequences of what they deliberately do. If the strike really meant the substitution of the strikers' will for the will of Parliament, it would have meant the overthrow of Constitutional government, and I should be doing no service to those whom I try to serve if I were for a moment to pretend that it meant anything else.⁴

This attitude toward the general strike was emphasized, in the subsequent issues of the *British Gazette*, by Lord Oxford and Asquith, by the Prime Minister in a further statement to the nation, and by Lord Balfour, in addition to constant editorial comment.⁵

The T. U. C. General Council made just as constant assertion, through their representatives in the House of Commons and in the columns of the *British Worker*, that the dispute was industrial and not political. They protested at every opportunity that it was in no sense an attack upon the community and that nothing was further from their intention or desire than an overturn of the Constitution or the Government. Mr. J. H. Thomas went so far as to declare in the House of Commons: "I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Government won." This dispute, he contended, "was merely a plain, economic, industrial dispute."⁶

In this attitude toward the general strike as a labor weapon, Mr. Thomas took a very different stand from that which he had occupied during the critical moments in 1920, when the Council

⁴ Sir John Simon, *Three Speeches on the General Strike*, p. 47.

⁵ *British Gazette*, May 8, 9, and 10, 1926.

⁶ *Hansard*, May 3, 1926, col. 81. The *British Worker* each day from May 5 to May 11 denied that the struggle was political, or that the issue was a constitutional one.

of Action was endeavoring to prevent a threatened war with Russia. At that time a vote by the assembled trade union executives in favor of a general cessation of work meant, in Mr. Thomas's eyes, "a challenge to the whole Constitution of the country."⁷ It must be admitted, in justice to Mr. Thomas's apparent change of position, that in 1920 the resolutions, in support of which a general strike was threatened, *did* most specifically deal with national and international politics, and had practically nothing to do with purely industrial matters.

There can be little question to anyone who seeks without bias to consider the data offered, that the vast majority of the trade union leaders and the Labor members of Parliament had not the slightest intention of overthrowing the Government, even by peaceful means. There can be just as little question that the *orders* of the General Council, as interpreted by the various strike committees throughout the nation and as put into practice by them, *did* logically constitute an attempt to set up a rival authority to that of the local and national governing bodies. This is particularly evident in the matter of *permits*. The General Council had apparently intended that the workers themselves should carry on, if not actually organize, the distribution of food and absolute essentials of life. This plan died hard, as shown above.⁸ The railroadmen's leaders had seen the difficulties involved at the very start and had opposed the notion of only a partial cessation of work on the railroads. The Government, through Mr. Churchill, had tendered an emphatic refusal to enter "into partnership with a rival Government."⁹ The railroad companies had taken a similar position when the men had offered to run certain kinds of traffic; declining to admit the right of the union men to select their traffic in such manner. "All men who declined to perform any part of their normal duty were dealt with as on strike."¹⁰

This official governmental and managerial attitude at once strengthened the hands of the transport union leaders. Mr. C. T. Cramp announced to the members of his union that "no trains of any kind must be worked." This telegram, as mentioned above,

⁷ See *supra*, p. 266.

⁸ See *supra*, pp. 361, 370.

⁹ See *Hansard*, May 3, 1920, col. 123, and *supra*, p. 369.

¹⁰ Memorandum of the London and North Eastern Railway publicity department.

was followed with definite instructions that no traffic whatever was to be allowed by road or rail.¹¹ Whether this implied absolutely rigid picketing or merely abstention of all union men from any aid in working traffic is not clear. In practice the latter was the interpretation given at first. The *British Worker* reported that "food supplies, in accordance with the orders of the T. U. C., are being carried. Food trains are being allowed to run." The same issue declared: "All the essential industries and all the transport services have been brought to a standstill. The only exception is that the distribution of milk and food has been permitted to continue."¹²

PERMITS

Permits to move special traffic, by road of course, were issued at the outset by national and local strike bodies. In the second number of the *British Worker* Ernest Bevin signed a notice, stating that no permits could be issued by any union or Trades Council, not even by his own union, the Transport and General Workers, but that the "only competent authority to deal with permits" was the Joint Transport Committee composed of representatives elected by the transport unions, including the National Union of Railwaymen, the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and the Railway Clerks Association. Bevin ordered the prompt establishment of such a joint committee in any district where that had not already been accomplished, and added, "all existing permits must be reviewed by the Transportation Committee at once."¹³

A further notice issued by the Trades Union Congress General Council declared that:

All questions of policy dealing with the release of all classes of foodstuffs are now placed in the hands of a National Committee, consisting of representatives of all the Transport Unions, with Mr. J. Marcbanks, Unity House, London, as Secretary. . . . This Committee is authorised and is the sole Committee to issue all advice,

¹¹ *Edinburg Review*, May 14, 1926, quoting Mr. Cramp's wires and letters to his branches.

¹² *British Worker*, May 3, 1926. Italics ours.

¹³ *British Worker*, May 6, 1926. Mr. Ernest Bevin, with Mr. A. A. Purcell, M.P., was responsible for the most important committee on the General Council during the General Strike, that known as the "Strike Organisation Committee," which drew up the plan of action and dealt with the general conduct of the strike. Cf. *British Worker*, May 11, 1926.

procedure, instructions and permits nationally, and directions with regard to local permits for the removal of all foodstuffs. This applies to all other forms of transport. Finally, all permits are at present under review.¹⁴

The reasons given for this important step, of a complete review of all permits already issued, were threefold: the Government's refusal to accept trade union coöperation in the conveyance and distribution of food; the gross abuse of permits already issued by various strike committees; and the attitude adopted by certain police authorities that those permits already issued were illegal. A later statement to the same effect on May 10, seemed to show that the T. U. C. General Council still retained ultimate power over permits, in spite of its delegation of the task to a National Committee.¹⁵

The minutes of the various strike committees or "Councils of Action," wherever these are available, offer invaluable evidence of the supreme muddle in which the local strike bodies found themselves on the problem of permits. A few examples will suffice. In Birmingham the question of permits arose on the very first day of the strike. At the afternoon meeting of the Emergency Committee (the strike committee) on May 4, the secretary requested that, before the minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed, the Committee should discuss the question of issuing permits for the release of foodstuffs, inasmuch as "a considerable number of people were awaiting an interview on the matter." A motion that the Committee accept responsibility for the issue of permits was carried, and instructions were given for a card to be issued, endorsed by the chairman and secretary of the Committee. A further motion declared that "permits should be issued only to trade union labor to load and unload and distribute goods and foodstuffs."¹⁶ A permit officer, Mr. George

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1926. Some confusion was caused by the belief, in London, that all local permits for London were to be issued by this National Transport Committee at Unity House. A "never ending stream of applications of every character" to Unity House was thus very seriously augmented by those desiring local London permits. An advertisement in the *British Worker* for May 7 made it clear that all London permits were to be obtained solely from the London Transport Committee with its headquarters at Headland House, 308 Gray's Inn Road.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 7 and 10, 1926.

¹⁶ This action was directly contrary to the instructions of Ernest Bevin and the General Council, that permits should only be issued by Joint Committees

Haynes, a local magistrate, was appointed by the Committee, and he was immediately released from the strike committee to undertake his duties in the granting of permits.

Permits for goods other than food then came up for discussion by the Emergency Committee. One such request was made for a permit to transfer drain pipes from the freight yard to a contract housing job. The Emergency Committee refused the permit unless all labor concerned were trade union labor. On May 5 permits were given to the Transport Workers for the release of coal for hospitals and infirmaries. The great firm of Cadbury, whose chocolate works had been given a permit to transport cocoa and chocolate, had this permit withdrawn when it was heard that some of their staff were "blacklegging" in the Electrical Department, where the union men had already been called out on strike. Further permit troubles arose on May 6, when it was decided that every vehicle with a permit must carry a poster certifying the same to the world. The local Coöperative Society was given permission to move one thousand tons of coal, ten men being allowed for that work. Permission for the release of cement for the Charles Nelson Company was held up for a week. Similar demand for removal of fifteen hundredweights of brass dressing was refused, but the British Soap Company was allowed to move one hundred gross to the Corporation Public Baths! The ridiculous and anomalous position in which the Emergency Committee was placed by this process of granting and withholding permits reached its height when permission was given on May 7 to a theatrical company to be carried to *Manchester*, and a permit was issued to the Coöperative Society to move twelve tons of soap to the same city, an assumption of power to grant *long distance permits* which was certainly not intended by the T. U. C. General Council.

At the committee meeting held on May 10 a report was read from a deputation, sent by the local committee to the T. U. C. General Council in London for a definite ruling on the problem of permits. The deputation reported that the National Committee of Transport at Unity House were of the opinion

of the Transport Unions. (*Supra*, p. 408.) On the following day the local Joint Committee on Transport applied for the right of a representative to sit with the Permit Office, and this request was granted by the Emergency Committee.

that "the Government should be responsible for the removal of all food in bulk, and that the decision at the moment was that no permit should be issued for food in bulk." Finally, in the afternoon of May 10, a telegram from Bevin was read in committee, ordering all transport workers to be called out on strike except the employees of the coöperative stores who were delivering bread and milk to their members. On the next day, therefore, all permits were withdrawn save for bread and milk deliveries by the coöperatives. It is possible that few other cities of the size of Birmingham presented the problem of permits in quite so vivid a light. A careful analysis of those granted and those withheld in that city shows an actual, if not a purposeful, assumption by the strike committee of a dictator's powers, even in details, regarding what transport should or should not run. It was the logical outcome of the General Council's attempt to run a trade union food distribution, and just as logically it was a substitution of the Strike Committee for the elected government of the city.

The police authorities of Birmingham recognized this aspect of the case, the Chief Constable publicly announcing that persons had a right to go to the railroad or any other premises to withdraw their goods; that strike committee permits were quite unnecessary, constituting a form of intimidation. "For pickets at railway gates and other places to demand permits and refuse admission, as they have done, to persons not having permits, is quite illegal." The police authorities were determined that "the town should not be held up by any unauthorized body of men."¹⁷

At Newcastle-on-Tyne, the great industrial city in northern England, on the very first day of the strike one transport union had called out on strike all of its members concerned with the transportation of food, but had granted permits for the carriage of building materials. Another transport union had rigidly stopped all transportation of building material but was continuing to give a certain number of permits for the distribution of food!

As applications for permits began to pour in to each separate union's District Office, to each local body (Council of Action, Trades Council, Local Transportation Sub-committee) the position became

¹⁷ *Birmingham Post*, May 10, 1926.

more and more complicated. Unscrupulous contractors and employers were conveying any and every sort of goods under the *segis* of *Food Only* or *Housing Materials Only*. On Wednesday evening (May 5), therefore, it was decided on the reports received from the Transport Unions that all permits for transportation of building materials should be withdrawn and no new ones issued. . . . The effect on the mind of the working class 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.¹⁸

The question of permits in Newcastle-on-Tyne was closely linked with the problem of non-union or volunteer labor, and indeed gave rise to one of the most interesting situations of the whole strike, because of its logical implications. The first notice of an unusual situation in Newcastle was contained in a speech by Mr. M. Connolly, a Labor member of Parliament from that city, delivered in the House of Commons on May 6. Mr. Connolly alleged that the O. M. S. had broken down in Newcastle, that the authorities had approached the trade unions and asked them to take over the essential services of the city, and that the unions had consented so to act provided that all extra police, soldiers and O. M. S. volunteers be withdrawn.¹⁹ The Attorney General, Sir Douglas Hogg, speaking shortly afterwards in the House, declared that the Government had communicated with Newcastle and discovered that there was no truth whatever in the suggestion that the Government's emergency organization in that city had broken down.²⁰ The matter came up once again in the House of Commons on the following Monday, May 10, when Sir Harry Barnston, speaking officially for the Government, declared that all statements about the situation in Newcastle made by Mr. Connolly were "absolutely untrue."²¹

The *Account of Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee* gives the labor side of the matter in so circumstantial a manner that it is hard to believe there was not some fire behind all the smoke, even if this

¹⁸ For this and much of the following data the writer is indebted to *An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee*, drawn up by Mr. Charles R. Flynn, northern divisional officer of the N. U. D. A. W., from minutes of the meetings. Mr. Flynn acted as secretary of the Joint Strike Committee.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, May 6, 1926, col. 498.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, cols. 498-99.

²¹ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1926, cols. 886-87.

report was exaggerated. The *Account* declares that on the evening of the second day of the strike (May 5),

Mr. Tarbit of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers informed the Committee that the O. M. S. had been brought on to the Newcastle quayside for the discharge of Foodships; whereupon the Trade Union labour already employed there *under permit* abandoned their work, because of the O. M. S. and because of the presence of two Destroyers and a Submarine moored alongside the Foodship in the river.²²

The *Account* then proceeds to report the visit of Sir Kingsley Wood, the Government's Civil Commissioner in the Northern Division, himself Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, to the headquarters of the Joint Strike Committee, for conference with Messrs. Tarbit, White, and Flynn (secretary of the Joint Strike Committee). The report made by the three men, White, Tarbit, and Flynn, to their Joint Strike Committee follows:

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 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.

The question of unloading ships, of which part of the cargo was foodstuffs, was broached by Tarbit, who declared that his men would be just as opposed to working with the Emergency Organization (once the O. M. S.) if they unloaded those portions of the cargo that were *not* foodstuffs. Sir Kingsley Wood inquired what proposal the unions had to meet the difficulty, and was met with the suggestion that the ships should anchor in the river with their non-food cargoes till the end of the dispute, or should return to their ports of origin, and that the naval vessels should be moved back to the regular naval anchorage, inasmuch

²² P. 7. Italics ours.

as it was impossible for the union leaders to agree to their men being forced to work under the shadow of the naval guns.²⁸ Sir Kingsley Wood replied that he had no authority over the Admiralty, asked for time to consider the matter with his officers, and suggested a further consultation with the deputation the following day at 12:30, when he would be accompanied by Major-General Sir Kerr Montgomery (formerly local regional head of the O. M. S.), the Food Controller, and Mr. R. S. Moon, the Road Commissioner.

The minutes of the Joint Strike Committee for Thursday, May 6, contain the further report of Messrs. Tarbit, White, and Flynn concerning this second conference:

Wood stated 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 suggestion 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. . . . The 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 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.²⁹

The trade union trio asked time to place the situation before the whole Strike Committee, which was then in session, Secretary Flynn declaring himself personally hostile to such a suggestion

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9; cf. *Hansard*, May 20, 1926, col. 540.

²⁹ *Account*, etc., quoting Minutes of Strike Committee, pp. 9-10. Italics ours. Cf. *Hansard*, May 20, 1926, col. 541.

of dual control, but agreeing to place the proposals fairly before the Committee.

The outcome was not long in doubt. After hearing the report of the three union delegates the whole Strike Committee resolved that, as their men could not and would not work with the O. M. S. volunteers, a refusal to accept the proposed dual control be given to the Government conferees; that the T. U. C. General Council be strongly urged to empower the regional Strike Committee "*to withdraw all permits for the transport of food and everything else for which permits had been issued*"; and finally that the Committee use the discretionary powers vested in them by the T. U. C. and immediately withdraw *all* permits. The *Account* proceeds to state that this decision to withdraw all permits "*was loyally accepted and operated; in place after place the miners aided the transport workers in peaceful picketing and the aid they gave was of an extremely effective nature!*"²⁵ In other words, as far as the Joint Strike Committee were concerned, all transportation of food or other goods was to be held up in the Northern Division, because they did not agree to union men working in conjunction with the Government organization or under the eyes of the Naval crews. All that resulted, on subsequent days, from this decision to withdraw permits, was the placing of the ordinary trader, who relied upon volunteer aid and Government protection, in a position of superiority to that of the Coöperative Societies, who could hardly appeal for Government aid and "blackleg" labor. So serious was this equivocal position that the Strike Committee was forced to issue short-time special permits to the Coöperative Societies for delivery of bread and milk.

Further discussion of the Newcastle incident occurred in the House of Commons on May 20 when Sir Kingsley Wood himself admitted that he had interviewed the three Strike Committee delegates, but denied emphatically that any kind of dual control had been offered to the trade unions. He added that when the decision of the Strike Committee reached him he cleared the docks of "ill-disposed people"; that "voluntary labor 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

²⁵ *Account*, etc., p. 10. Italics ours.

district was carried out by voluntary labor under police protection.²⁶ The writer is not concerned with the actual truth of the two statements, but solely with showing, from the comments and minutes of the Strike Committee and its secretary, that *as far as they were concerned* they certainly intended to act as the governing authorities in the matter of what transport should or should not run in their region. In so far as their power was effective it quickly began to damage their own side through the lack of transport facilities offered to the local Coöperative Societies.

In the capital city of Edinburgh the strike bulletins report the formation of a "complete system of food permits covering East and West Lothian."

The new Food Permit system of the Strike Committee is working admirably. There has been a constant stream of applicants at the offices and many business firms have been on the doorstep. All kinds of businesses are represented. The Committee insist, however, upon certain conditions which many firms find irksome. Permits are only issued to those men who are members of Transport Unions and no departure is made from this rule. The Committee believe that in a few days practical control of road traffic will be in their hand, and that the O. M. S. . . . will find their occupation gone.²⁷

A further reference to the food permit system occurs in a later issue:

Under the food permit system which has been adopted by the General Strike Committees throughout the country to protect the Transport and other workers now on strike, it is not permissible to move foodstuffs from docks or railway sidings. The rumor has been circulated that the Permit Committee has been granting to Capitalist firms permits to move foodstuffs from such places, and has at the same time refused permits to coöperative societies. This statement is totally untrue. No permits whatever have been given to remove foodstuffs from docks or railway terminal.

An unconscious touch of humor is contained in the simultaneous announcement that in Perth "the picket system is working efficiently; drivers without permits have been successfully

²⁶ *Hansard*, May 20, 1926, cols. 544-50.

²⁷ Edinburgh and District Strike Committee, *Official Strike Bulletin*, May 7 and 8, 1926.

held up," and the complaint that in the Lothians the police have interfered with "peaceful picketing," although the "police have no legal power to intimidate strikers!"²⁸ A final sample from Edinburgh district will suffice:

At Langercroft the road picket is so effective that the football park is full of vehicles of all descriptions, impounded until a permit and a union driver are produced.²⁹

In the majority of cases the local strike committees had withdrawn all permits, save for the delivery of bread and milk by the Coöperative Societies, before the close of the strike. In Liverpool, for example, the Council of Action announced that decision on May 8, giving as their reason "the blackleg labor utilized by the authorities" . . . one more instance of the granting of permits, *not* for essentials as such, but for essentials *only when transported by trade union members*. The subconscious recognition by the strikers that this granting and withholding of permits was tantamount to the temporary assumption of governing powers can not be better expressed than in a letter from a sheet-metal worker on the Ashton strike committee.

Employers of labour were coming, cap in hand, begging for permission to do certain things, or, to be more correct, to allow their workers to return to perform certain customary operations. "Please can I move a quantity of coal from such and such a place" or "Please can my transport workers move certain foodstuffs in this or that direction." Most of them turned empty away after a most humiliating experience, for one and all were put through a stern questioning, *just to make them realize that we and not they were the salt of the earth.*³⁰

Two samples of permits in the writer's possession may be of interest. The "Liverpool Trades Council, Council of Action" printed a dark red card with the above heading, and beneath the title ran:

Mining Crisis May 1926. *Permit*. The bearer employed by is authorised by this union to continue working during the present dispute. By order of the Executive Committee Secretary.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1926.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, May 11, 1926.

³⁰ "B. W." in the *Sheetmetal Workers' Quarterly*, Oct., 1926, quoted by Postgate, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35. Italics ours.

The address given is 7 Spekeland Buildings, Canning Place, Liverpool, and in this instance the individual union secretary had to sign the permit. In Bradford a more general permit ran as follows:

Miners' Lockout 1926. Emergency Committee. This is to certify that.....has received sanction to.....Signed on behalf of the Emergency Committee, Walter Barber, Secretary.

In both instances the instructions of the General Council as to the precise organization that had power to issue permits had been ignored.

In addition to the granting or withholding of permits a further instance of the attempted selection, by the General Council or the local strike committees, of what services should be permitted to continue, was seen in the provision of electric light and power. The proposals laid before the assembled trade union executives on Friday and Saturday (April 30-May 1) immediately preceding the strike, contained the following paragraph:

ELECTRICITY AND GAS. The General Council recommend that the trade unions connected with the supply of electricity and gas shall cooperate with the object of *ceasing to supply power*. The Council requests that the executives of the trade unions concerned shall meet at once with a view to formulating common policy.²¹

In the *British Worker* for May 6 the General Council made special appeal to local strike committees, the wording of which seemed to imply a desire that certain kinds of electrical light and power services should *not* cease. The appeal in question stated that:

Local strike organisations are authorised to offer to meet employers immediately, and offer to supply light and power for such services as house, street and shop lighting, social services, power for food, bakeries, laundries, and domestic purposes.

There was in that authorization the same peculiar difficulty for the unions that was presented in the General Council's desire to keep the food services running; a selection of particular kinds of service that would necessarily require much consideration by each local strike committee, and an order that might run up against technical difficulties that would render its observation

²¹ *London Times*, May 3, 1926. Italics ours.

impossible. In effect, moreover, it was a definite assumption of the rôle of local and national government, for the time being, that would not have been true of a complete cessation of labor in those services.

Perhaps the issue of a dual government, or of the conflict between the Trade Union Congress and the Baldwin Government, can be seen in its true light in two quotations from labor sources. A report sent in to the Labour Research Department, London, from the Dartford Divisional Labor Party discusses the attitude of the average striker during the process of the dispute:

On the revolutionary issue they were cold. (The English are not imaginative enough to produce revolutions.) After the third day of the strike if you spoke about the coalowners the audience would listen with a polite indifference, but if you attacked the Government, or even mentioned the word, you had the audience with you and that with cheers and wild enthusiasm. The issue was the T. U. C. and the Government—the miners and the owners were secondary to this issue.²²

Lest it be thought that this remark is an isolated comment of some left-wing and anonymous extremist, it is well to place with that quotation another, from one of the trade union secretaries most responsible for the cessation of transport, Mr. C. T. Cramp of the National Union of Railwaymen. The latter, speaking after the strike had ended at an open air demonstration of trade unionists and labor party supporters at Melton Constable, in Norfolk, declared in the course of a long speech:

We have just been engaged in the greatest industrial struggle that this country, or indeed the world, has ever known. Let us not trifle with the facts. Although denials were made to the charge that this was a struggle against the Government, it obviously was such a struggle. A moment's reflection is sufficient to reveal this. The only other set of persons against whom a general strike should be directed in this case were the mineowners. The mineowners were not affected by a strike of men other than miners any more than were employers in any other industry. It therefore was a struggle to compel the Government to take action, and we had better face right up to that fact at once.²³

²² Emile Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²³ Full report of his speech from the official N. U. R. organ, the *Railway Review*, June 18, 1926, p. 3.

THE WEAPONS OF CIVIL WAR

In an "Official Communique" dated May 7, published in the *British Gazette* for May 8, the following sentences occur:

The situation is becoming more intense and the climax is not yet reached. Orders have been sent by the leaders of the Railway and Transport Trade Unions to do their utmost to paralyse and break down the supply of food and the necessaries of life.

An organised attempt is being made to starve the people and to wreck the State, and the legal and constitutional aspects are entering upon a new phase.

The General Council countered by a long statement in the *British Worker* of May 9, in the course of which ran the significant sentence, "The General Council has done nothing to imperil the food supplies; on the contrary, its members were instructed to coöperate with the Government in maintaining them." Barring a few instances of actual interference with unloading or distribution of food supplies by Government agencies, the unions had either obeyed this request, or had at least left a certain loophole for the Government to move food supplies by road.²⁴ To this policy, however, there were distinct limits, which one hardly believes the General Council can have ignored. Of these the gravest were the orders, mentioned by the Official Communique, of Mr. C. T. Cramp to his members in the National Union of Railwaymen, phrased in the following most unequivocal fashion:

Members of our union **MUST HANDLE NO TRAFFIC OF ANY KIND** foodstuffs or otherwise.²⁵

²⁴ Practically all docks in Britain were closed by the strike until opened by Government forces and volunteer workers. At Hull and Swansea strikers refused to discharge fish trawlers. At Hull pickets attempted to prevent the release of apples and oranges from the fruit market, on the plea that they were not essential foods. At Glasgow poultry, eggs, and bacon were held up on the docks and all efforts to have them released had failed up to the end of the second day of the strike. The Mersey flour-milling industry was at a standstill up to May 8. Food supplies by road between Glasgow and Edinburgh experienced difficulties with heavy picketing, as elsewhere in Scotland and northern England. See *British Worker*, May 8, *London Times*, May 6 and 7, *The Scotsman*, May 6, etc.

²⁵ *British Worker*, May 6, large advertisement, repeating same statement of C. T. Cramp which had appeared in issue of previous day in smaller form.

The other distinct limits to the General Council's apparently generous offer were the very general use of permits described immediately above; and the resort to mass picketing in many parts of the country, a process of selection of "essentials" by the unions that severely restricted even the road transport of necessities, at least for the first few days of the strike.⁴⁶ An American reporter put a series of questions to the General Council's representatives at the press conference on May 8:

"What have you to say in reply to the Government allegations that you are trying to stop the country's food supplies?" I asked.

"We are still willing to carry food supplies—under proper conditions," was the reply.

"Will your men run food trains?" was asked. "No." "Will they unload food from ocean vessels which bring it to British ports?"

"No, that's also transport and we have called a strike of the transport unions."

"Then how can you assert that you are willing to assist in forwarding food supplies?" "We mean only home food supplies," was the answer.

"But home food supplies of, for instance, wheat, are insufficient to feed the country," was urged. "We don't know that," was the answer, with a smile.⁴⁷

A few samples of the method of "mass picketing" are worth recording. On the last day of the strike in the Doncaster district it was stated that a crowd of a thousand odd, mostly miners, armed with sticks, interfered with vehicular traffic. Mounted and foot police made several baton charges to clear the roads, the mob resisting violently. A news agent stated, in the trial of those accused, that his "car was turned over and the tyres ripped with knives. He thought he was going to be murdered."⁴⁸ Among the difficulties which the distributors of the non-union newspaper *The Scotsman* had to face during the strike was mass picketing on some of the highroads. At Falkirk the driver of the news car

⁴⁶ *Bser* was very frequently declared to be a non-essential, and actually held up in transit or refused permits. . . . often to the grievance of the miners! Cf. *An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland and Durham General Council Joint Strike Committee*, p. 3; interviews by the writer with strike leaders in the Potteries and in Liverpool.

⁴⁷ Correspondent Yberra in the *Boston Herald* for May 9, 1926. .

⁴⁸ *The Scotsman*, May 14, 1926, reporting court trials of accused ringleaders.

was formally "arrested" by a red-badged picket, and taken up an alley-way where other drivers were discovered. The driver, at first fearing personal violence was relieved to find that all he was required to do was to return to headquarters without unloading his cargo of newspapers! On another occasion "some three hundred miners stopped one of the drivers outside Fauldhouse, and threatened that if he returned, the car would be burned and the driver would be severely dealt with."⁴⁰

As London is the distributing center for a great portion of England the complete failure to move goods from the London docks and wharves during the first few days of the strike seemed to threaten a food shortage. Practically all dock workers were out from the start, and the narrow streets around the wharves were packed with strikers. No vehicle could have gotten through without imminent peril of running over some striker, thus starting reprisals and bloodshed.⁴¹ Individual traders did not dare to send in their trucks for meat or flour. When urged to send their workers for the goods by the Food Officer the employers replied there was no chance of success, that there were too many pickets and that their drivers would be thrown into the river. The London Food Officer, like the officials of the Ministry of Transport, believed that the armored convoy which was used on Saturday, May 8, was an absolute necessity, simply to show the crowds of strikers that there was no use or possibility of making any effort to prevent its passage. The Food Officer believed that the London police would have done their best, but that in such crowds and such narrow streets there would inevitably have been many broken heads on both sides, if nothing worse. The *London Times*, considerably more restrained in its statements than the Government's official sheet, the *British Gazette*, described the need for the convoy thus:

The authorities, reluctant as they have been to use the services of the troops, had no alternative if London was to get the flour it needed.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, May 13, 1926.

⁴¹ Ministry of Transport daily reports show that scarcely forty men were available on the docks out of a normal force of some 14,000. Sixty-three ships were held up, 28 of which contained perishable cargoes. The Hon. Horace Woodhouse (Food Officer for London and Home Counties) is authority for statement as to condition of the wharves.

Ever since the first day of the strike the strikers have concentrated their efforts upon preventing access to the docks. Officials and volunteer workers have been intimidated by a formidable array of pickets; the police themselves have suffered many fierce attacks, and lorries have been stopped by obstinate crowds that have stood across the roadway and made progress impossible. The result has been that, although there was an ample supply of flour lying at the docks and any number of willing volunteers ready to move it, to all intents it was locked up as far as London was concerned.⁴¹

The tale of the armored cars is too well known to need repetition in detail. Over a thousand volunteers were transported by water to the London docks on Friday night and Saturday, and housed on the ships that had to be unloaded, ready for the arrival of the convoy. Long before dawn Saturday, May 8, Hyde Park was astir with the formation of a convoy of over one hundred lorries, together with twenty armored cars manned by crews from the Tank Corps, and with men of the Welsh Guards and the Coldstream Guards as escort. Considerable fear had been felt that the reception of the column on its arrival in dockland would be actively hostile, but to the relief of the volunteer drivers and crew of loaders nothing untoward occurred. Even the fire-eating *British Gazette*, which spoke of fellow Englishmen in the dock area as "the enemy" had to admit that

Curiously enough there were few expressions of hostility from the crowd and no open demonstration against the soldiers.⁴²

Near the docks detachments of the crack regiments and the police kept the roadways clear of strikers and onlookers. The volunteers worked with exceptional speed and the convoy was on its way back to Hyde Park by noon. The procession had a pretty grim side to it, which was made light of in the press and Parliament by Government supporters, but noticed in typically vivid American fashion by the correspondent of the *New York World*. Speaking of the volunteer dockers, brought up to the docks by water the previous night to unload the flour, the report continues:

⁴¹ *London Times*, May 10, 1926.

⁴² The *Gazette* stated, "Troops had descended on their objective before the enemy had time to realise that they were there," issue of May 10, 1926.

At the zero hour these volunteers debarked and marched to the Rankes and Vernon mills through streets lined with soldiers. Machine guns had been placed in position, and armored cars stationed at strategic points, but the sullen masses of strikers who congregated after dawn were awed by the military and permitted most of the "moving on" to be done by the mounted police, unarmed as always, but backed this time by enough artillery to kill every living thing in every street in the neighborhood of the mills.⁴⁸

That the Government, or at least a militant section within the Government, looked upon the problem as one of civil war, even if it did not hope to provoke an untimely violence that would have been pitilessly suppressed, can be seen in many small items of evidence. The *World* reporter declares that

The original orders contemplated dividing the procession into several sections, each with cavalry, infantry and armored cars, and parading them through the various sections of the West End in triumph, but this plan was cancelled . . .

either because the aristocratic officers of the Guards disliked "the spectacle of the proudest regiments in the world exulting over moving flour lorries" or for other reasons of state.

The *New York World* reported an interesting crisis that occurred about midnight Friday, May 7:

The crisis, which threatened to throw the strike into the hands of the extremists . . . was precipitated by an "official communique" in the *British Gazette*. Possible disaster was averted when Premier Baldwin promptly repudiated the communique.

The fatal phrase, already quoted above, declared that "the legal and constitutional aspects are entering upon a new phase."

This came off the press just as the General Council of the Trades Union Congress was receiving reports of extensive troop movements and the converging of tanks and armored cars in London.

Just at midnight the *World* office was called on the telephone from general strike headquarters and informed that a vitally important

⁴⁸ *New York World*, May 8, 1926. The officers in command of the convoy had received orders to get through at any cost, according to a Ministry of Transport official's statement to the writer, so that the American reporter was not too imaginative. Luckily no force had to be used.

communication was to be made. Arthur E. Mann of the *World* staff was received alone ten minutes later by the official spokesman of the Parliamentary Labor Party and told that if the communique meant a declaration of war the moderate leaders would stand aside and let the extremists fight it out.

The offending "communique," written by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, according to the *World*, was disavowed. Word was privately conveyed to the General Council that it was unauthorized and did not represent the Prime Minister's views.

It is clear the Premier's prompt action against the "knockout blow" section of his own cabinet prevented possible disastrous consequences.⁴⁴

The actual size of the armed forces will probably not be divulged to the public, but that it was considerably greater than was generally known, can be judged from certain remarks of Alfred Murray, staff correspondent of the *New York World*. Describing how the armed forces had been brought into London, and quartered in Victoria Park near the docks, and in Regent and Hyde Parks in the West End, his cable continued:

Business men driving from suburban homes to town this morning (May 8) relate how they became entangled in long files of armored cars that choked some of the country roads in Surrey. . . . Meanwhile troops continue to pour into town. The ordinary barracks and different quarters of the city are gorged with soldiers in service uniforms. Thousands of marines are packed into the Duke of York Barracks. The sentries guarding the King's residence, Buckingham Palace, are now in Khaki like those at the Horse Guards and carry pouches which seem to contain 150 rounds of ammunition. Small squads from the army medical corps are also on duty.⁴⁵

The militant group in the Cabinet, under the leadership of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, voiced their opinions in the *British Gazette*. Writers in this official news sheet spoke of the strikers as "the enemy." They seized with avidity upon Sir John Simon's rather questionable legal *obiter dicta* as to the personal liability of every trade union leader who had advised or promoted the general strike, and made the most of his views in

⁴⁴ *New York World*, May 10, 1926.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, May 9, 1926.

thinly veiled threats of arrests.⁴⁶ A sentence in the issues of May 6 and 7 is typical of their attitude.

His Majesty's Government will not flinch from the issue, and will use all the resources at their disposal and whatever measures may be necessary to secure in a decisive manner the authority of Parliamentary government.

On Saturday morning, May 8, the morning on which the great armored-car parade to the docks had taken London by surprise, in the same issue of the *British Gazette* in which was printed the provocative phrase "the legal and constitutional aspects are entering upon a new phase," appeared the following front page announcement:

All ranks of the Armed Forces of the Crown are hereby notified that any action which they may find it necessary to take in an honest endeavor to aid the Civil Power will receive, both now and afterwards, the full support of his Majesty's Government.

Still further threats of action against the T. U. C. General Council were made in Monday's issue of the *British Gazette*, May 10, under the headlines "General Strike Illegal. Liability of Promoters. Government Considering Action."

An interesting sidelight upon the attitude of the more militant group in the Cabinet may be gained from a little book, printed for private circulation only, entitled *Strike Nights in Printing House Square*, containing the interesting record of the struggle to keep publication going, during the strike period, by the management of the *London Times*. The *British Gazette* competed with the *Times* by taking available compositors and later by the seizure of one quarter of the *Times'* supply of paper. In protest against this action the Manager of the *Times* wrote a personal appeal to the Prime Minister, who handed it over to Mr. Winston Churchill. The latter in a lengthy reply made the following significant comment:

I do not at all agree with your idea that the T. U. C. have as much right as the Government to publish their side of the case and exhort their followers to combined action . . . large numbers of

⁴⁶ Sir John declared that each union leader who had "advised and promoted this course of action is liable in damages to the uttermost farthing of his personal possession."—*Harvard*, May 6, 1926, col. 585.

working people feel quite detached from the conflict; they are waiting, as if they were spectators at a football match, to see whether the Government or the trades union is the stronger.⁴⁷

There can be little doubt that the Chancellor himself took much the same view of the dispute, and that he bent every effort to convince those disinterested and neutral "spectators" that the Government was the victor in the civil conflict from the outset. To this end important efforts at mediation and common sense, such for example as the Archbishop of Canterbury's proposal, on behalf of the Christian Churches of Britain, were either suppressed by the *British Gazette*, or printed so much later in the strike than their actual promulgation as to be of little effect upon the situation.⁴⁸

That all the resources of the Government would have been used in subsequent days, had the strike not suddenly ended, can be gleaned from the very evident tightening up of the police measures throughout Great Britain during the last week-end. Wholesale arrests, mounted- and foot-police charges, and a general increase in severity of sentence dealt out to those brought into court, in the last few days of the strike, all pointed to more than accidental or local action by the authorities. From the outset of the strike, moreover, the Government made full use of the Navy. Ironically enough, the suppression of the press, of which so much capital was made by the Government in its own publication, "contributed to the success with which the Naval Staff was able to despatch naval forces to various points on the coast, which it was thought desirable to protect, and to land men to perform other duties essential to the well-being of the nation." During the period of the strike the Navy manned power stations, operated docks and cold storage plants, maintained the mail service across the Irish Sea, protected and distributed gasoline supplies, carried the essential commodity of yeast to

⁴⁷ *Strike Nights in Printing House Square*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ The conference in question took place at Lambeth Palace on Friday, May 7, but the resolutions adopted by the leaders of the various denominations there met, with the Archbishop as chairman, were not printed in the official Government daily until the day on which the strike was called off, May 12. Even this publication was the result of bitter complaint in the House of Commons on Monday, May 10, by Mr. Lloyd George and other members. The *London Times* and the *Scotsman* had managed to publish it the very next day, May 8; cf. *Hansard*, May 10, 1926, cols. 708-9 for Mr. Lloyd George's speech.

English ports (to the amount of 250 tons daily), and provided war vessels of different sizes in the various ports, canals and harbors, for aid to the civil powers if required.⁴⁹

"UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER"

On the morning of Wednesday, May 12, the last morning of the general strike, the Government's *British Gazette*, admitted, under a hopeful headline "Increasing Numbers of Men Returning to Work," that

As regards the strike position generally, it can be said that the number of individuals returning to work is increasing, and in some cases considerable bodies of strikers have applied for reinstatement. On the other hand, there is as yet little sign of a general collapse of the strike, and the Trade Union Committee is believed to be making efforts to call out certain trades still at work.

All available data from strike sources, gathered by the writer himself or by others, would seem to indicate that this governmental statement erred on the side of optimism as to the actual "numbers" returning to work. What the end of the second week might have seen in defections from the striking ranks can never be known, but on the Tuesday night when the fatal decision was being reached to call off the strike the ranks were practically as solid as at the start. In fact what defections there had been, had in many instances been balanced, so far as numbers were concerned, by newcomers joining the strike as it persisted.

It was at this juncture that the "second line" of the strikers had been called into action. The engineers, who would, perhaps, be more often termed *machinists* in the United States, had expected a call to join the ranks of the strikers as the strike persisted, and along with them were to have gone the shipbuilding workers. It is a moot point if the General Council actually gave the call for this "second line" on Tuesday night, May 11. Mr. Poulton, spokesman for the Council, told press representatives that no such call had been made, and any such action was being initiated by the unions locally, without any instructions from the T. U. C.⁵⁰ On the other hand, there is the unequivocal assertion

⁴⁹ Archibald Hurd, "The Navy on Active Service," in *Fortnightly*, July, 1926, pp. 87-101.

⁵⁰ *London Times*, May 12, 1926.

of the Labor Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*:

There is good reason for saying that the instruction to the engineers and shipyard workers was addressed yesterday from Eccleston Square (the T. U. C. headquarters), and this is confirmed by reports . . . from all the chief centres.

The secret instructions sent to the unions are as follows: "The Trade Union Congress Strike Organisation Committee has decided that the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades shall, unless otherwise ordered, refrain from starting work on Wednesday, May 12. This applies to all unions. This order does not apply to men engaged in H. M. Dockyards, Admiralty shipyards, and Government engineering establishments."

The Amalgamated Engineering Union has sent out a similar order, saying: "The Executive Council requests all members to give effect to the General Council's instructions."⁵¹

The *British Worker* for Tuesday evening, May 11, also bears witness that the "second line" were expected out the next morning, but carefully omits to say by whom they were called out:

Tomorrow another section of the Movement will be called into action, the order having gone forth that the engineering shops and shipyards are to stop tonight.

In heavy black type under the headline "More Unions Out" the official T. U. C. journal then states, "The Amalgamated Moulders, Shipyard Workers, and members of the Amalgamated Engineering Unions will not start work tomorrow." In the next issue of the *British Worker*, which announced the end of the strike, occurred a long list of towns reporting withdrawal of these trades from work with the comment:

The call to all unions in the engineering and shipbuilding trades affiliated to the Trades Union Congress to reinforce the gallant "first line" had already been magnificently answered before the news came of the calling off of the strike.⁵²

The *Scottish Worker* made no bones about the origin of the order to cease work:

The engineering and shipbuilding trade unions have arranged for their employed members to stop work tonight at 5:30 p.m., as per

⁵¹ Issue of May 12, 1926.

⁵² *British Worker*, No. 8, Thursday, May 13, 1926.

instructions of the T. U. C. . . . At least 100,000 Scottish tradesmen are expected to stop work tonight in response to the call of the T. U. C.⁵³

Some feeling of bitterness was expressed at the final meeting of the assembled Trades Union Executives, in January, 1927, that the Executive of the Amalgamated Engineering Union was not aware that the general strike was being called off when they were calling their men out "as the last line of attack."⁵⁴

The official sheet of the General Council on Tuesday evening, May 11, asserted in black type on its front page

The number of strikers has not diminished; it is increasing. There are more workers out today than there have been at any moment since the strike began.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding this assertion, an assertion that at least received some support from the guarded statement of the *British Gazette* next morning, the fact remains that shortly after midday on Wednesday, May 12, the General Council announced to the Prime Minister that the general strike had been called off. The development of this decision and the reasons that led to it must be told, in so far as the data are available.

It has been shown in previous chapters how eager the General Council had been to avoid the calling of an actual strike. Mr. George Lansbury's weekly, a left-wing but not a Communist organ, states the case vividly:

The T. U. C. General Council had an almost overwhelming desire for peace. This must not be thought of as betrayal, or selling the pass. In principle and in practice they were against a general strike, and they had said so again and again. They were doing their utmost to avoid the necessity of a stoppage. They would have been content with any reason, perhaps even with any excuse, to turn back.

Not even an excuse was offered them. . . . Mr. Arthur Henderson and others visited Cabinet ministers in a last effort to "find a formula." As they entered Churchill asked "Have you come to say that the strike notices are withdrawn?" "No, we—." "Then there is no reason to continue this discussion." "Do you think this is

⁵³ May 11, 1926.

⁵⁴ T. U. C. General Council, *Report of Proceedings, etc.*, Jan. 20-21, 1927, p. 60, Mr. J. T. Brownlie's speech.

⁵⁵ *British Worker*, May 11, 1926.

Sydney Street again?" said Mr. Henderson vehemently. "I have told you that we do not propose to continue the discussion."⁶⁵

Mr. J. H. Thomas's self-styled "grovelling" to obtain peace has been described, as also its complete lack of success. The Government was adamant, compelled by its militant minority, against any kind of discussion of peace terms until the strike had been unconditionally called off. Neither the Archbishop's plan, nor the resolutions from large City Councils such as Newcastle-on-Tyne, nor appeals from groups of Oxford and Cambridge professors, all in favor of simultaneous cancellation of the mine lock-out notices and the general strike orders, received any attention or approval from the Cabinet. The Prime Minister, if he had any leanings in that direction, merely kept his militant colleagues from resorting to the most extreme of civil war methods.

The General Council recognized, as soon as the strike actually occurred, that the position taken up by the Government spokesman, of treating a sympathetic strike as a constitutional and political upheaval, left but two alternatives, "the capitulation of the Government, or the termination of the strike by a process of attrition." The latter alternative the General Council "could not contemplate, for the reason that such an end would disorganize the Trade Union movement" and "would completely establish the reactionary elements in the country." With such a view as to the end of the struggle, the General Council on May 8 "advised the miners' representatives who were in daily attendance at the Council meetings, that they proposed to take steps to cooperate with influential members of the public who were known to be endeavouring to find means of reestablishing negotiations in the mining dispute."⁶⁷

It is significant to note that on the preceding evening, May 7, the *British Worker* had made the following unequivocal statement as to reported negotiations for peace:

⁶⁵ *Lansbury's Labour Weekly*, May 22, 1926, p. 2. "Sydney Street," of Mr. Henderson's "vehement" question, had been a spectacular use of machine guns and the army against two Russians in Stepney who had resisted arrest by the police, in pre-war days. Mr. Churchill had been prominent at that time in using extreme methods to capture the two resisters.

⁶⁷ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions*, June 26, 1926, p. 16. (Not published until Jan., 1927.)

It is being persistently stated that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Herbert Smith, Mr. Arthur Cook, and other Trade Union leaders have been engaged in an attempt to reopen negotiations with a view to ending the General Stoppage.

The General Council wish it to be clearly understood that there is no truth in this assertion.

No official or unofficial overtures have been made to the Government by any individual or group of individuals, either with or without the sanction of the General Council.

Over against that statement can be set the cabled report of the *New York World* from its London bureau on May 8. According to this cable Mr. MacDonald gave reporters in the House of Commons "an interview wherein he stated he was keeping in continual touch with the Government side and was hourly in conference regarding settlement of the strike." This report reached the *British Worker*, and caused "immediate and profound consternation" in the censorship committee (appointed by the General Council), which forbade its publication. The General Council, upon learning of this interview, is then said to have sent a "stern rebuke" to the Labor Party leader.²⁸

Before the strike actually started most of the fears of the General Council were undoubtedly that the response to a strike call would not be adequate; that workers would not cease work in many districts, at least not in overwhelming numbers. The *World* cable from London on the first Sunday of the strike implied as much.

Trades Union Congress officials were astonished by the completeness of labor's response to its call. All its calculations were too pessimistic. But on the other hand no man could have foreseen or thought possible the speed and efficiency of the Government's counter measures.

The same cable, summing up the general situation at the end of the first week of the strike, continued:

The strike solidarity is held to be astonishing. Some men are trickling back to work, but these are an insignificant percentage. Intimidation of the weaker brethren is practised everywhere ruthlessly. But one Tory M. P. declares no intimidation could have any

²⁸ *New York World*, May 9, 1926.

effect unless at least 80 per cent of the workers were solid. He thinks even a larger percentage of the men in this case are for sticking it out.⁵⁰

With such confirmation of the solidarity of the strikers' ranks from a member of the Government's own party, it is evident that the original fear of the General Council, that the strike would be a fiasco, was far from justified.

As the reports from the provinces recorded daily, with monotonous similarity, the steadiness of the ranks, and as it grew harder for the local strike committees to hold at work the men and women workers who had not already been called out, or who were under special exemption, the fears of the General Council changed. Now, the possibility was seen of a *political* objective taking the place of the General Council's own intention of keeping the struggle a purely industrial dispute. Hence the growing emphasis placed, in each issue of the *British Worker*, upon the industrial aspect of the struggle, and the frequent appeals for the most complete and unswerving good order and lawful behavior by the ranks.⁵¹

With the passing of the days the Government's offensive grew, and added to it came the bombshell of Sir John Simon's speech in the House of Commons, alleging that every striker and every strike leader was liable to a heavy penalty, even, in the case of the leaders, to the utmost of their personal possessions. Such a threat to the ranks meant very little, for they had little to lose and had faced possible prison sentences before in the course of industrial disputes. For their leaders the situation was far more serious. Not only were the strike funds felt to be in jeopardy, but the very savings, homes, and incomes of the General Council members were no longer safe.⁵² The attempts at mediation were turned down point-blank by the Government; the British Broadcasting Company refused the right of broadcast to the Archbishop's scheme of settlement; armored cars paraded to and from the London docks, breaking the blockade; veiled threats

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1926.

⁵¹ Cf. *Lansbury's Labour Weekly*, May 22, 1926, and *British Worker*, May 4 to 9, 1926, inclusive.

⁵² *Punch*, always hostile to organized labor, carried a "secret history of a great fiasco" under the title "Der Tag" in the issue of June 2 with the definite implication that "Comrade Thomas" and others were influenced in their decision to call off the strike by this fear of personal loss.

of arrest of the leaders appeared in the *British Gazette* for May 10, and on the following day was delivered Justice Astbury's judgment that the "so-called general strike called by the T. U. C. is illegal."

The cumulative pressure of these swiftly following events, and the fast emptying strike funds of the great unions had an effect on the General Council that no loyalty to their orders, by the rank and file, could overcome. At the same time the unqualified demands of the miners for no wage cuts of any kind and no lengthening of hours made the possibility of renewal of negotiations still more remote. As early as Sunday, May 9, Mr. J. H. Thomas was saying in a public meeting at Hammer-smith that "he had never disguised and did not disguise now that he had never been in favour of the principle of a general strike."⁶² Such a statement was all the Government sought. The *British Gazette* carried the fatal sentence in heavy black type in each subsequent issue, to the confusion of the striking ranks who read it. Nothing, perhaps, could better show the unwillingness of many of the General Council, from start to finish, to be responsible for a general strike, much less a revolution against the Government in power.

Thus it happened that the arrival posthaste from Italy of Sir Herbert Samuel, Chairman of the recent Royal Commission, was eagerly accepted by the General Council as an opportunity for reopening negotiations on the mining situation. The Negotiating Committee of the General Council met Sir Herbert "at his request." A number of questions were put to the Commission Chairman and his answers showed that it was the Commission's intention to "maintain the supremacy of national negotiations and agreements, to preserve the seven-hour day, and to protect the wages of the lower-paid workers." A second meeting with Sir Herbert Samuel followed, wherein he agreed to prepare a statement for the consideration of the General Council. This statement of Sir Herbert's was then discussed by the Miners' Executive and the Industrial Committee of the General Council, on Sunday, May 9, but ultimately rejected by the Miners' Executive.⁶³

⁶² *London Times*, May 10, 1926.

⁶³ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions, June 26, 1926*, pp. 19-20. Sir Herbert's plan for the ending of

On Monday night, May 10, a further meeting of the General Council and the Miners' Executive was held to discuss yet another formula suggested by Sir Herbert Samuel. The General Council intimated that they were satisfied with the formula as a basis for the reopening of negotiations, but the Miners' Executive, after a three hours' adjournment declared that as it stood without serious amendment it was unacceptable to them. The General Council then declared that the obligation to produce constructive proposals now lay with the Miners' Executive.⁵⁴ The breaking point had evidently been reached, and the members of the General Council, feeling vividly the growing pressure of the Government's actions and threats, and fearing far more than the Miners' leaders a rank and file breakaway, or, what to them was even worse, a rapid change of the orderly strike into a guerilla warfare, determined that the time had come to call off the general strike.

The fact was . . . borne upon the Council from the attitude of the miners' Executive that no matter what provisions might be made to obtain a basis for reopening negotiations and enabling a settlement to be reached, they were not prepared to agree to consider, as a part of such negotiations, anything which indicated possible wage adjustments for any section or grade of mine workers in any district.

Having regard to the impossibility of excluding the wages question from consideration in dealing with the Commission's Report, and the enormous responsibility involved in carrying on the strike, the Council felt the position was too grave to justify their being tied to a mere slogan. They felt the objects of the strike would be achieved and a practical basis for reopening negotiations on the lines of the Royal Commission's Report would be secured if the miners joined with the General Council in submitting reasoned and constructive proposals.⁵⁵

As the Miners did not seem willing so to act, the Council instructed its Industrial Committee to obtain a full draft of Sir Herbert's proposals.

the general dispute was (a) the termination of the general strike by the General Council; (b) Negotiations to be resumed on the following basis: Renewal of the subsidy to June 1, 1926; immediate withdrawal of the lock-out notices; and restarting of mine work on old terms; if settlement is being achieved, subsidy to be extended to June 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Tuesday night, May 11, saw the Council and Miners' Executive once more in session.

The Council intimated to the miners' Executive that they regarded the proposals as a fair basis for negotiating a settlement in the mining industry and that they had unanimously come to the conclusion the Samuel Memorandum should be adopted and the strike brought to an end so that negotiations could proceed.

The Miners' Executive objected to the meeting that had been held between the Industrial Committee of the General Council and Sir Herbert, at which their representatives had not been present, and they protested at the Council's decision on the Memorandum, but to no avail. The General Council requested them to examine the Samuel Memorandum and come to a decision upon it themselves. The Miners' Executive adjourned for a two hours' discussion, and then "intimated that they rejected the Memorandum, and that if the Council decided to submit it as a ground for terminating the strike, they must do so on their own responsibility."⁶⁶

Had the Miners' Executive accepted the Memorandum the General Council had planned to see the Prime Minister that very evening, Tuesday, May 11, and to terminate the general strike immediately. Their expectation was to renew negotiations on the mining situation at once, with the simultaneous withdrawal of the lock-out notices. The rejection of the Memorandum by the Miners' Executive blocked this plan, the interview with the Premier was deferred, and a deputation was appointed to interview the Miners' leaders next morning, "with a view to obtaining a reconsideration of their attitude." As the world knows, this final interview was as fruitless as the previous ones; the Miners' Executive remained hostile to the Memorandum, pleading that it was wholly unofficial and carried no kind of guarantee that the Government would abide by its terms, were the general strike called off. Under these circumstances "the Council unanimously adhered to the decision arrived at, that in the circumstances they were not justified in continuing the sacrifices and risks of the sympathetic strike."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23. For text of the Samuel Memorandum see Appendix B.

⁶⁷ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions, June 26, 1926*, p. 23. The Miners' side of the case is presented

The actual ending was hurried, the cancellation of the general strike was unconditional, if not positively humiliating to those who carried the word to the Government, whatever subsequent glosses may have been put upon the story by those concerned. When the General Council's deputation reached Downing Street, at noon on Wednesday, May 12, "the Prime Minister refused to see them until he had ascertained the object of their visit. In the first place, therefore, the deputation was met by Sir Horace Wilson, the Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, who was informed that the General Council had decided to terminate the General Strike. It was after this definite announcement had been made, without any reservation or condition, that Mr. Baldwin saw the deputation."⁸³

At twenty minutes past twelve on Wednesday, May 12, the representatives of the two conflicting sides in the gravest industrial stoppage Great Britain had ever experienced, met at No. 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence. Although the Premier may have taken all precautions to adhere to the letter of his pledge that no negotiations could be reopened till the general strike had been called off, as we have been told by the *Times* correspondent, he was far from being unprepared for the visit. Gathered with him to receive the General Council's deputation were the War Minister, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Minister of Labour, the Secretary for Mines, and Earl Birkenhead, the Secretary for India, among other members of the Cabinet. Mr. Arthur Pugh as chairman of the General Council was asked by the Prime Minister to make his statement. Mr. Pugh replied with a rather lengthy and involved introduction, but the gist of his statement lay in the sentence "... we are here today, sir, to say that this general strike is to be terminated forthwith in order that negotiations may proceed. . . ."⁸⁴

in a *Statement* to the conference of trade union executives held on Jan. 20-21, 1927. The *Statement* expressed the opinion that the Council, in "accepting the proposals in advance of any decision of the miners," was presenting "an ultimatum" to the miners. The Miners' Executive "felt very strongly, and their fears were afterwards simply justified, that there was no real guarantee behind the terms and no warrant that they would be accepted by the Government and the mineowners." In short "The General Council, whether they knew it or not, were leading the miners into a trap."—pp. 11-13.

⁸³ Parliamentary Correspondent's report in *London Times*, May 13, 1926.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, quoting official stenographic report of the meeting.

Mr. J. H. Thomas, in a brief speech following the Premier's acceptance of the message, made an appeal for aid:

We ask you to assist us in the way you only can assist us by asking employers and all others to make the position as easy and smooth as possible, because the one thing we must not have is guerilla warfare. That must be avoided and in that both sides have to contribute immediately.

Only Mr. Bevin, however, stood out as long as possible for some definite pledge of such assistance, asking the Prime Minister for some message which the General Council might add to their telegrams, to the various trade union headquarters throughout Great Britain, calling off the strike. Only Mr. Bevin, moreover, asked point-blank whether there was to be a resumption of mining operations along with the rest of labor, or whether all the negotiations had to be carried on while the miners still remained out. The Premier gave no definite pledge, despite Mr. Bevin's persistence, not even as to the date on which he would actually give an answer to these questions, and with such a highly unsatisfactory conclusion the deputation had to depart to face its loyal cohorts of strikers, who were still expecting and believing in complete victory for the miners' cause.⁷⁰ A large assembly of journalists was awaiting news at 10 Downing Street.

While they were waiting Mr. J. H. Thomas came out with the look of a man both bewildered and depressed. He walked in complete silence through the journalists and departed, no one venturing to ask him a question. Soon afterwards all the T. U. C. leaders came out in a body. They too all seemed very depressed, and obviously in no mood for saying anything.

At ten minutes past one a Government official came out with the laconic news that Mr. Pugh had just announced the immediate cancellation of the general strike. "Is it unconditional?" asked a foreign journalist, but the official made no reply, and the reporters made a rush for the door.⁷¹ Before one-thirty that day, the press bulletins and the British Broadcasting Company had announced to the nation that the struggle was over.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* For full stenographic report of the meeting see Appendix C.

⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*, May 13, 1926.

Whatever may be the views as to the courage it required, on the part of the General Council, to come to this unanimous decision to call off the strike, there can be no question that they were taking a good deal for granted in their action on Wednesday noon. Before their deputation visited the Prime Minister that day, there had been an interchange of letters with Sir Herbert Samuel, in which the latter, enclosing a draft of his Memorandum, declared

I have made it clear to your committee from the outset that I have been acting entirely on my own initiative, have received no authority from the Government, and can give no assurances on their behalf.

Nonetheless he held that his proposals offered a means of settlement and promised that he would "strongly recommend their acceptance by the Government when the negotiations" were renewed. To this clear statement of the situation Chairman Pugh and the Acting Secretary of the General Council (Mr. Walter Citrine) made written reply concurring in the opinion that the Memorandum offered a means of settlement, and closing with the statement that

The General Council are taking the necessary measures to terminate the General Strike, relying upon the public assurances of the Prime Minister as to the steps that would follow. *They assume that during the resumed negotiations the subsidy will be renewed and that the lock-out notices to the miners will be immediately withdrawn.*⁷²

It is always an easy matter to be wise after the event, and many of the General Council's critics have spared no pains in showing that their rather large assumptions, just enumerated, had no basis in fact as events proved. It must, however, be recognized that the very refusal of the Miners' Executive to have anything to do with the Samuel Memorandum at that critical moment was one of the vital factors in moulding events into the course they actually took. A close student of English political and labor affairs sums up the difficult situation succinctly:

The miners forget that their refusal to accept the Council's view meant that the latter had nothing to build upon. They were bound to appear in the guise of defeated combatants; and Mr. Baldwin took

⁷² *London Times*, May 18, 1926. Italics ours.

care so to represent them. Had they been able to inform him of an accepted settlement with Sir Herbert Samuel, the situation here would have been quite different.

That there is a penumbra of mystery about the Samuel Memorandum is undeniable. It is true: (1) that the document was unofficial; (2) that Sir Herbert Samuel told the General Council it was unofficial; (3) that the Government would have been greatly embarrassed had the miners accepted it. But it must also be remembered (1) that the Minister of Labor knew of each stage of Sir Herbert Samuel's effort; (2) that the Prime Minister knew of its inception and general outline; (3) that unofficial negotiators other than Sir Herbert Samuel were informed by unimpeachable authority . . . that such intervention on such lines would be acceptable to the Government; (4) that the embarrassment caused to Mr. Baldwin by an acceptance of the Memorandum would have lain in two facts: (a) that its terms were an overwhelming defeat of the owners and (b) that public opinion was so definitely pro-miner and anti-owner at that stage that the Government would have been compelled to implement them.⁷⁸

Mr. Laski suggests that had the miners accepted the Memorandum, and had Mr. Baldwin attempted to enforce the terms that it contained, he would have had to face certain resignations from his Cabinet. On the other hand acceptance of the Memorandum *without* enforcement of the terms by the Government would have meant the resignation of another member of the Cabinet, a resignation that would have brought the Government to an end. In other words Mr. Laski implies that the Premier himself would have resigned. Such a possibility was actually discussed in a special cable to the *New York World* on Friday, May 18, 1926. As it happened, however, the miners saved Mr. Baldwin from that awkward predicament.

CHAOS

For twenty-four hours after the broadcasted announcement of the strike's ending, the confusion in trade union ranks was indescribable. What had been done, why it had been done, who was responsible, were questions on the lips of every striker, and even the majority of the union officials were as bewildered as

⁷⁸ Harold J. Laski, "The Trade Unions Survey the General Strike," *New Republic*, March 2, 1927.

their followers. The news first reached the labor ranks from the side of their opponents, either through the wireless, or from hasty bulletins affixed on the boards outside newspaper offices. The strike committee in one northern town gained its first intimation of the end from a piece of the ticker tape from the local Conservative Club, which had been spirited over to strike headquarters for a brief moment and then returned without the Club's members being aware of its absence! In some districts use was made of the long distance 'phone of some union, but even here no details were forthcoming for many hours. Not a few centers held victory meetings in the fond belief that the end had been declared only because the miners' demands had been granted.⁷⁴

In the early afternoon of Wednesday, May 12, the Miners' Executive resumed their conference. Telegrams were sent to their districts ordering the miners not to resume work until the decision of the National Delegates' Conference, called for Friday, May 14, had been arrived at. In the meantime Mr. Cook intimated that the Miners' Federation was "no party in any shape or form" to the T. U. C. decision to end the general strike.⁷⁵

The General Council itself seems to have been far from clear as to what was actually being accomplished by the sudden cancellation. Mr. J. H. Thomas averred, in a meeting of the Parliamentary Labor Party, that the Government was bound by the Samuel Memorandum and would carry it out. Mr. George Hicks of the opposite "wing," questioned on the telephone, explicitly asserted "that the strike had been called off on this binding understanding."⁷⁶ In answer to criticism by an inde-

⁷⁴ The broadcast message of the strike's end ran as follows: "At a meeting with the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, Mr. Fugh announced on behalf of the Trades Union Congress General Council that the General Strike is being terminated today. We are requested to broadcast the following announcement on behalf of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress—'In order to resume negotiations the General Council of the T. U. C. has decided to terminate the General Strike today, and telegrams of instructions are being sent to the General Secretaries of all affiliated unions. Members before acting must await the definite instructions from their own Executive Councils.' (Signed) FROX, Chairman. CRAWF, Secretary." Cf. Page Arnot, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-16.

⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, May 13, 1926.

⁷⁶ Postgate, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

pendent Labor weekly, Mr. Ben Turner, member of the Council, and more recently one of the leaders in the rapprochement between capital and labor known as the Mond Scheme, wrote indignantly:

The decision to call off the general strike was unanimous. . . . It was decided not from fear of arrest (I never heard of the rumour until May 20 and I don't think many of my colleagues did), nor because the strike wasn't a success. It was a bigger success than any of us dreamt it would be. The strike was called off because we were convinced that simultaneously the miner's lock-out notices would be withdrawn, the miners resuming work at the old wages and hours, and negotiations on the subject be re-opened. It was ended because we were led to believe "Samuel could deliver the goods" and that men of honour would honour promises.¹⁷

A similar view is found in the General Council's manifesto, drawn up at an afternoon meeting shortly after their announcement to the Prime Minister. This manifesto was issued as a statement to all the affiliated unions, Trades Councils, and strike committees and published in the *British Worker* for Thursday morning, May 13. The quoted sentences are either naïve in their trustfulness or else subtle in their suppression of the vital facts:

The General Council, through the magnificent support and solidarity of the Trade Union Movement, has obtained assurances that a settlement of the Mining problem can be secured which justifies them in bringing the general stoppage to an end. . . . The Government had declared that under no circumstances could negotiations take place until the general strike had been terminated, but the General Council feels, as a result of the conversations with Sir Herbert Samuel and which are enclosed, that sufficient assurances had been obtained as to the lines upon which a settlement could be reached to justify them in terminating the General Strike.

The General Council accordingly decided at their meeting today to terminate the general stoppage, in order that negotiations could be resumed to secure a settlement in the coal mining industry, free and unfettered from either strike or lock-out.

A very different aspect is put upon the sudden cancellation by the official report drawn up by the General Council, to have

¹⁷The *New Leader*, May 28, 1926.

been presented to the trade union Executives, June 25, 1926.¹⁸ In this official report it is perfectly clear that the General Council knew, at the time they issued the statement to the unions through the *British Worker*, that the Miners' Executive was immovably hostile to the Samuel Memorandum, and that such hostility would make the Samuel Memorandum useless as a means of settlement. The following sentences from the *Report* suffice:

The General Council could not . . . follow the Miners' Executive in a policy of mere negation. Such a course would have been to permit the splendid response of the sympathetic strike to evaporate by a process of attrition, which would have brought the unions to a position of bankruptcy, would have undermined the morale of their membership, and thus have destroyed their capacity to resist attempts that might be made to impose adverse conditions and general discrimination against the active membership when the industries directly engaged in the strike resumed operations.

The Council were satisfied that, *however long they continued the strike, they would still be in the same position so far as the attitude of the miners' Executive was concerned*, and consequently the Council were not justified in permitting the unions to continue the sacrifice for another day.

The strike was terminated for one sufficient reason only, namely, *that in view of the attitude of the Miners' Federation its continuance would have rendered its purpose futile.*¹⁹

On Wednesday evening a message from the Prime Minister was broadcasted to the nation. The sentences that refer to the settlement conditions follow:

The General Strike . . . has ended, as I made it plain in my speech a few nights ago that it must end, without conditions entered into by the Government. No Government, confronted by such a menace, could enter into a conditional negotiation, the very undertaking of which would involve treachery to the accepted basis of our democratic Constitution. Having said this, I must make it plain that I

¹⁸ Not officially published until January of the following year, owing to the prolongation of the Mine dispute. The greater part of the report, however, was given to the public by Mr. John Bromley, of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, in the *Locomotive Journal* for July, 1926.

¹⁹ T. U. C. General Council, *Report to the Conference of Executives of Affiliated Unions, June 25, 1926*, pp. 26-26. Italics ours.

adhere both to the spirit and the letter of the speech which I delivered to the nation a few days ago. Our business is not to triumph over those who have failed in a mistaken attempt. It is rather to rally them together with the population as a whole in an attempt to restore the well-being of the nation.

Mr. Baldwin then pledged himself to enter negotiations without delay with the object of adjusting the differences between the mine owners and men, and emphasized the need for immediate meetings between the unions and the employers of the nation, who were called upon to act with generosity.⁸⁰ The King had issued a brief appeal to the nation for coöperation of all in the creation of a peace that would be lasting, in much the same tenor as the Premier's, but with no comment on the unconditional nature of the strike's ending. A similar statement and appeal, extremely brief, was made in the House of Commons Wednesday afternoon by Mr. Baldwin, declaring that the "victory" was one of "the common sense of the best part of the whole of the United Kingdom."⁸¹

The first issue of the *British Worker* published after the strike was called off, dated Thursday, May 13, though it contained the text of the Samuel Memorandum, the letters to and from Sir Herbert Samuel of May 12, already quoted, and the statement of the case by the chairman and secretary of the General Council, carried no word whatsoever of the disagreement between the Miners' Executive and the General Council. The only notice regarding the miners was the telegram from Secretary Cook to his branches calling for a delegate conference Friday, and ordering no resumption of work until that conference had met, and alongside that telegram the single sentence:

The Miners have expressed to the T. U. C. their "profound admiration of the wonderful demonstration of loyalty as displayed by all workers who promptly withdrew their labour in support of the Miners' standards."

In point of fact this statement of the Miners to the General Council was part of a longer resolution beginning:

⁸⁰ *London Times*, May 13, 1926.

⁸¹ *Hansard*, May 13, 1926, cols. 877-78.

After hearing the report of the representatives of the T. U. C., we re-affirm our resolution of May 11th, and express our profound admiration, etc.

The resolution referred to was the protest of the Miners' Executive against the Samuel Memorandum draft, as it had been presented to them on the evening of May 11. This resolution of protest had declared that the Memorandum implied a reduction of wage rates for a large number of mine workers, and had unequivocally stated that if such Memorandum were submitted as a means for terminating the general strike such action must be taken entirely on the responsibility of the General Council, since it was rejected by the Miners' Executive.⁸²

The suppression of all these uncomfortable facts in the official T. U. C. newspaper, and the insertion of just so much as would suggest that all was satisfactory between the Miners' Executive and the General Council, must have been intentional, however good or plausible were the reasons for such serious suppression. The *Scottish Worker*, organ of the Scottish T. U. C., printed a whole page on Thursday, May 13, sent direct from the British General Council, explaining "How the Peace Came," but once again not a word or hint was included as to the complete refusal of the Miners to accept the Memorandum. This omission was at once noticed by the readers of the *Scottish Worker*, and the issue of Friday, May 14, printed in black type the following significant reply to criticism:

In the message supplied to us there was no hint of any kind that the miners were not an assenting party.

The effect of the completely unconditional cancellation of the general strike was swiftly forthcoming. A Government statement was issued on Wednesday, May 12, commencing: "His Majesty's Government have no power to compel employers to take back every man who has been on strike, nor have they entered into any obligation of any kind on this matter." A pious wish was expressed later in the statement that the Premier's plea in the House of Commons would be observed, to the effect that work should be resumed in a spirit of coöperation, putting aside "all malice and all vindictiveness."⁸³ The *British Gazette*

⁸² London Times, May 13, 1926.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

ning of Thursday, May 13, announced in large type
ditional Withdrawal of Notices by the T. U. C. . . .

Received by the Premier." The Government state-
d immediately above, was printed under the most
headline "Reinstatement, No Obligations Incurred,"
the page, a large-type notice "To All Workers in
s. Additional Guarantees. Official," ran as follows:

an who has done his duty by the country and has remained
has returned to work during the crisis which ended at
May 12 will be protected by the State from loss of trade
fits, superannuation allowance, or pension. His Majesty's
it will take whatever steps are necessary in Parliament
e for this purpose. STANLEY BALDWIN.

Mail, even more militant than the Government organ,
l the end of the strike in its issue for May 13 with
headline, "Surrender of the Revolutionaries." Under
eadings "For King and Country" and "Revolution
t declared that the T. U. C. which was a "barely dis-
viet" was now hurriedly effacing itself."⁸⁴

n attitude was reflected in many employing circles
it Great Britain on the night of Wednesday and
he following day. Taking the General Council's act
e value as a complete surrender, and forgetting that,
general strike was officially called off, they had now to
the individual unions and the ranks of the strikers,
in many industries attempted a counter attack upon
rs and their organizations.⁸⁵ Before the week was out
nials had been issued that any attack on labor stand-
intended, but by that time it had become evident that
ender" of the leaders was not tantamount to a rout
ks. There can, however, be no question but that re-
a widespread nature *were* intended, and would have
tised save for the strikers' refusal to submit, and,
but for the action and words of Premier Baldwin after

ther press comment cf. Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and
Strike*, pp. 81-82.

ork *Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1926, spoke of it as "British Em-
r on Unions." The *New York World* for the same date, and the
Times carried cables from their own correspondents confirming

the strike was called off. There are too many evidences of this attempt to treat the returning strikers as criminal contract breakers, who possessed no further rights of collective bargaining, to consider the movement a purely sporadic one. A few samples of the masses of data under this head must suffice.

The *Scotsman*, one of the few provincial papers that continued to publish as usual throughout the duration of the strike, itself a non-union paper for many decades, carried many news items in its issue of May 14 that bear upon this point. The report from Glasgow declared that

The end of the general strike has seen only a partial resumption of work in Glasgow. To some extent this has been due to a disinclination on the part of the strikers to follow the advice of the Trade Union Council. In much greater degree, however, the attitude of employers in insisting on individual application for reinstatement has delayed the return to normal. . . . The men who went on strike in the shipyards and marine engine shops found in many cases to their cost that their one day holiday had made a difference in their conditions of employment, and that individual application for reinstatement was necessary.

In Edinburgh the railroadmen received official notice that none would be reemployed unless there was work immediately available for them, and in such case "first come" would be "first served"; that all men returning would be served with a notice "reserving the Company's rights for breach of contract," and that none of the "stationmasters, goods agents, or clerks . . . who have held specially responsible positions" and none of the supervisory staff who had been on strike, would be taken back at that time, as their cases were under consideration. On the Glasgow docks the shipowners "held out for a modification in the method of remuneration," making four hours' pay the minimum rate, whereas eight hours' had been the rule hitherto. The *Scotsman's* editorial plainly encouraged such action by the employers, as its comment showed. Speaking of staffs on the railroads, the editorial asserted, "the strikers have dismissed themselves. By breaking their contracts they have exonerated the employers from any obligation to engage them if they are redundant to actual needs"; and their London correspondence column believed that the railroadmen "can hardly be surprised

if railway directors, like other employers, are asking themselves whether the concession they granted (recognition of the trade union) was justified or should be continued."⁸⁶

The *London Times* for May 14 carried the same story of the employers' attitude to returning workers in Glasgow:

Railwaymen who presented themselves today found, to their consternation, that a return to work is no simple matter. Each case is being considered on its merits. The result was that in certain districts of Glasgow this morning (May 13) there were processions of men carrying placards bearing the words "Down with Thomas."

At Leeds "the railways . . . took back very few men. Many applied for reinstatement and their names were taken."

They were told they would be called upon in their grades, in the order in which their applications had been received. . . . There is much uneasiness among railwaymen over the threatened reduction in the staff and the belief that their superannuation has been endangered.

In some of the small towns in South Wales the railwaymen who presented themselves for duty on the morning of the 13th were not accepted. In the large centers the men refused to resume work "until the conditions imposed by the companies" were withdrawn. Great Western Railroad employees who returned on May 13 were asked to sign the following statement:

You are hereby engaged on the understanding that you are not relieved of the consequences of having broken your service with the Company.⁸⁷

The situation in general was summed up by Raymond Swing's wireless report to his New York paper on May 14:

The strikers, who had expected on the basis of the surrender to find the factory and shop doors opened to them in the atmosphere of harmony and cooperation that Prime Minister Baldwin had been preaching were rudely surprised. In many cases they were offered re-employment only on the condition that they tore up the union cards and accepted a substantial reduction in wages. In many others they were asked to agree to terms of reemployment which would enable

⁸⁶ *The Scotsman*, May 14, 1926, from which all quotations in the above paragraph have been taken.

⁸⁷ *London Times*, May 14, 1926.

the employers to single out the strike ringleaders and penalize them.⁸⁸

T. R. Ybarra, in a special cable to the *New York Times*, confirmed Swing's assertion by stating "the strike is over, but the lock-out has begun . . . it is now the turn of the employers to strike."⁸⁹ Harold Scarborough of the *New York Herald Tribune* cabled from London on the evening of May 13 that despite the Premier's lead for generosity made in the House of Commons that day, "well informed business men," whom he had interviewed, "still showed considerable unanimity in declaring in effect that 'the trade unionists left work on their own conditions. They must come back on our conditions.' . . . They displayed a distinct spirit of determination . . . to force through their own viewpoint and leave its repercussions to be dealt with later." The same cable stated that the London General Omnibus Company, the subway systems and the street car lines were "refusing to recognize the seniority of the returning strikers on the ground that they broke their contracts, which in the case of the senior men" meant "an automatic wage reduction."⁹⁰

Further data of the same kind could be adduced but would be redundant. The fact is clear that there was a definite intention to penalize the strikers upon their return in a manner and to a degree that the King and the Prime Minister strongly deprecated. Mr. Baldwin himself announced in the House on May 13 that he would not countenance any attempt on the part of any employers to use the existing occasion to get lower wages or longer hours than before the strike.⁹¹ An interesting comment on this pledge by the Prime Minister was made by the

⁸⁸ *New York Evening Post*, May 14, 1926.

⁸⁹ *New York Times*, May 14, 1926.

⁹⁰ *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1926. The Prime Minister, speaking in the House of Commons May 13, denied that either the railroads or the L. G. O. Co. had threatened to take on their striking employees as new entrants, thus causing them to lose their seniority privileges. Mr. J. H. Thomas, who followed, showed that Mr. Baldwin was ignorant even of his own Government's action, viz: Admiralty and War Office orders "that all awards under the Superannuation Acts are subject to the condition that discharge at a person's own desire, or due to his own default, forfeits all previous service." Such orders had not been withdrawn at the moment Mr. Thomas was speaking. Cf. *Hansard*, May 13, 1926, cols. 1049-54.

⁹¹ *Hansard*, May 13, 1926, col. 1048.

American representative of the New York *Evening Post*. Mr. Baldwin "pledged his word and pledged his authority unequivocally,"

But it was easy to see that the Government itself was in the same chaos and of the same divided mind as the employers and the workers. There have been two irreconcilable groups in the Government throughout the crisis, and they remain irreconcilable. Mr. Baldwin, as he spoke, reaffirming his pledges, was addressing his own party almost exclusively and the Labor Party was merely sitting by to see whether he could drive it into submission.⁹²

That "submission" would, in all probability, not have been forthcoming on any recognizable scale, but for the extraordinary solidarity of the ranks in the first twenty-four hours after the official "surrender," and the accompanying change of feeling on the part of the volunteer workers, who refused to be made the tools for a general attack upon trade union standards, once the general strike had been cancelled.⁹³ Even as it was, the amount of "submission" actually shown by the party and followers of Premier Baldwin, as the days passed into months, can best be judged from their actions, and the restrictive legislation passed by the Baldwin Government during and after the mine dispute of 1926. That is a story only a part of which belongs in this study, but what evidence is pertinent is contained in the following chapter on the settlement and cost of the general strike.

⁹² Raymond Swing in New York *Evening Post*, May 14, 1926.

⁹³ The "London Correspondence" in the *Manchester Guardian* for May 14, dealing with the aftermath of the great strike, and referring to the widespread rumor of the refusal to take back men save as beginners on the part of the London tramways and bus companies, stated: "It got general credence and at once affected many volunteers, who made it clear that they would not continue their work if it was not the straightforward settlement that everyone expected. 'We will not take part in a pursuit' was how one of the ex-soldier volunteers put it."

CHAPTER XIII

THE SETTLEMENT AND THE COST

THE BATTLE OF THE RANKS

ON WEDNESDAY night, and even more on Thursday, May 12 and 13, "anger swept over the labor ranks for the first time since the strike began."

There was a dramatic scene in many strike committee rooms, as at Nottingham, when the committee members, while they could hear their sellers shouting their own "victory bulletins" in the street, slowly realised that the true story was one of ignominious defeat. As soon as the knowledge became general it was greeted with an outburst of fury. Unfortunate representatives of the *British Worker* were pinned into corners and ordered to give information that they did not possess. Swansea forbade the distribution of Friday's issue; numbers of the voluntary motor drivers in London threw their parcels back into the officials' faces. In the vale of Leven the T. U. C. wires were greeted with furious boos and hissings. "Alarm—fear—despair—a victorious army disarmed and handed over to its enemies," reads the Hull report.¹

Mr. J. H. Thomas stated in the House of Commons on Thursday that at least one hundred thousand more workers were out at the moment of his speaking than had been the case when the General Council cancelled the strike twenty-four hours before, and this despite the fact that the strikers had returned to some degree in the interval.²

The story of the strikers' stand for united reinstatement or for a continuation of the strike, was the most interesting and surprising evidence offered to the writer in his study of the available documents, and on his travels through the strike areas. For nearly twenty-four hours the ranks, suddenly leaderless, save for their local officials, met the news of the strike's end,

¹ *New York Evening Post*, May 14, 1926. Second quotation from Postgate, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 87.

² *Hansard*, May 13, 1926, col. 1065.

and the subsequent widespread attempt by employers to make capital out of the broken contracts, first with incredulity and bewilderment, then with consternation, and finally with a grim indignation that boded ill for a continuance of the orderly discipline that had characterized the vast majority of the strikers throughout the strike itself.

Up to Wednesday noon the strike had been an exhibition of loyalty to their comrades in the mines, with no hope of gaining any advantage in wages or hours for themselves, but with plentiful possibility of heavy losses in union funds, in their own wages and in the ultimate peril to their own jobs. The ranks had come out, as ordered, with united numbers that had astonished their own leaders, and had stayed out from day to day with an unexpected solidarity. They expected to be led back with a united front, in accord with the definite proviso in the original scheme laid before the union Executives on the Friday preceding the great strike. The strike committees in large cities such as Cardiff and Liverpool had reiterated this pledge (of united return as a protection against victimization), in their strike bulletins. The only reason given by the General Council for an action contrary to the original understanding, was contained in the official manifesto issued on the Wednesday evening and published in the *British Worker* for Thursday, May 18:

The General Council considered the practicability of securing a resumption of work by the members in dispute at a uniform time and date, but it was felt, having regard to the varying circumstances and practices in each industry, that it would be better for each Executive Council itself to make arrangements for the resumption of work of its own members.

Now, therefore, without warning, the strikers were thrown upon the resources of their own individual unions, with the dreadful suspicion, growing hourly into certainty, that the Miners' Executive had not consented to the termination of the strike, and that their own sacrifices and solidarity had apparently been rendered for nothing. It would have been an unenviable task at best to get such men and women back to work on the old terms, with their comrades the miners still "locked out," even had no reprisals been attempted. The sight, therefore, of the little paper slips

which so many men received on their return to duty, requiring their individual signature to a statement whose full significance was by no means clear, was like a red rag to a bull. Angry men refused to sign, took these provocative forms back to their local leaders, and gathered anew in strike meetings, pledging themselves not to return until all strikers in their own groups were unconditionally reinstated.

Least this summary of the situation be deemed exaggerated, examples of reports from different localities will be cited. The Cardiff strike committee issued a bulletin at 4:15 in the afternoon of Thursday, May 18, stating that the following telegram had been dispatched to the T. U. C. General Council:

The Central Strike Committee, representing the workers of Cardiff, deeply deplore the action taken by the General Council in calling off the strike before securing guarantees that the Miners are satisfied and all workers responding to the strike call are to be reinstated in the positions they occupied prior to the stoppage. They therefore call upon the General Council to immediately order a resumption of the general stoppage until such guarantees are obtained.

The Manchester tramway men had been invited to present themselves for duty by noon Wednesday. At the hour required fifteen men and fourteen boys out of a force of five thousand, turned up at the depots. The others went to Hyde Road in full strength, not to report for duty, but to march in procession to the center of the city, headed by their band and carrying banners declaring their determination to support the miners. Many of the strikers were wearing war medals. As they marched they were joined by contingents of other trades on strike, until the procession, marching four abreast, was nearly half a mile long.² To this mass meeting came the first news of the end (reported in good faith by a Labor City Councillor), as the acceptance by the Government of the Samuel Memorandum. When the more correct terms of settlement came through later the indignation was great.³

Fortunately for the Manchester tramway men the Municipality attempted no reprisals, so that their return was a simple

² *Manchester Guardian*, May 18, 1926.

³ Interview with Councillor Mellor.

matter. In the adjoining city of Salford, however, 100 out of the force of 1,600 men were not taken on, ostensibly because trolley cars were not available for them. The whole of the force thereupon refused to return until all were reinstated. Fear was expressed that if a settlement were not reached promptly the Manchester tramway men would be called out again in sympathy. Even as it was the Manchester trolleys were stopped by pickets at the boundaries of the city abutting the towns of Stockport, Ashton, and Hyde, where the tramway men were still out on strike. Of the other trades on strike in Manchester only the building workers and the engineers resumed work on the old terms on Thursday, May 13. The railroadmen, the dock and canal workers and the men in the printing and flour milling trades were still out, the majority refusing to return without assurances of reinstatement all round.⁵

In Liverpool men in the affected trades decided to remain out unless employers would agree to take them back in a body. In South Wales the railroadmen took the same attitude. Cardiff tramway men stood out along with the railroadmen, since the Cardiff Corporation refused to re-employ some forty of the strikers. In Plymouth "the main body of the railwaymen did not resume work" on the 13th, their attitude being "that all or none must be re-engaged."⁶

The Edinburgh strike committee appeared to have looked upon the news of the strike's end as unfounded. A bulletin of the Central Strike Committee of that city bearing a "stop press" item timed 2:30 p.m., May 12, announced that

The following wire has just been received from London: "Every-one standing firm. All keep together. Believe no rumours: await further instructions." All strikers must therefore pay no attention to newspaper special editions or wireless news stating that the strike has finished. Please spread this information with all rapidity. Official word of any ending of the strike will be sent from here, or will be received by Unions by wire.⁷

The Associated Press cables to the United States gave a long list of cases where the men had refused to accept new terms of

⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, May 14, 1926.

⁶ *London Times*, May 14, 1926.

⁷ *The Scotsman*, May 13, 1926.

individual reinstatement, on May 12 and 13. At Doncaster and Sheffield this was true of the railroadmen; at Hull all the transport workers stood out for unconditional reinstatement; the Southampton and Portsmouth strikers took a similar line because the tramways committee had refused to re-employ all the men. In the most ancient city of York the strike committee had messengers go round the city on Wednesday night, calling up all the railroad and transport workers, bidding them remain out until all were reinstated.⁶

After announcing the end of the strike to the Prime Minister, the General Council had sent individual telegrams to the headquarters of each union concerned. The National Union of Railwaymen, with its headquarters at Unity House, London, did not receive its official wire until 3:20 Wednesday afternoon. Four minutes later Mr. C. T. Cramp had sent out the following telegram to the branches:

Trades Union Congress notify strike called off. Members must present themselves for duty at once. Keep me advised if necessary.

To the Railroad Companies he sent a letter quoting the above telegram and adding "under the circumstances I am asking that you will make the necessary arrangements for the immediate resumption of their duties." In a message to his union branches published in the official N. U. R. journal for May 14, Mr. Cramp wrote: "At the time of writing *I do not know the terms of settlement*. These are decided by the General Council of the T. U. C."⁷

Within a very short while telephonic messages blocked the wires to Unity House, and telegrams arrived by the hundred, stating that the men had been called upon to sign certain incriminating forms before reinstatement or else that men had been refused work, and that as a consequence men at nearly every station had refused to sign on for duty. The *Gloucester Strike Bulletin* for May 13 has told the story of its own district, story that could be paralleled in scores of other towns:

Early last evening [May 12] the men reported to their own departmental chiefs. The union officials gave the local railway chiefs

⁶ New York *Evening Tribune*, May 14, 1926, and interview by the writer with O. G. Willey of York Labor Party.

⁷ *Railway Review*, May 14, 1926.

to understand that the men would only return to work absolutely unconditionally. They were informed that in some departments individuals would be selected for dismissal. They were also told that men would only be taken on, on condition that they lost all their previous privileges of service. The men were liable to be shifted from grade to grade and from place to place as the Company desired. Toward midnight these conditions were withdrawn, but a form was shown to the union officials which men were expected to sign, making them personally liable for breach of contract.

The Bristol strike bulletin for May 14 summed up the stand of the railroadmen in one concise sentence: "Position splendid; all out: all in together." This was the position which faced the N. U. R. Executive when they met on Thursday morning, May 13.¹⁰

The N. U. R. Executive, through Mr. Cramp, telegraphed their branches on Thursday morning that no N. U. R. member was to sign any form of reengagement, but that all should resume duty under the old conditions only. The branches were informed that a joint Executive meeting of the three railroad unions was to be held that day and their decision would be telegraphed immediately after the meeting. That joint meeting of the three Executives met at two o'clock, when the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen's secretary, Mr. John Bromley, announced that his union's Executive had already called upon their members to remain on strike in order to insure united reinstatement. After a very brief discussion the following wire was sent out under the joint signatures of Bromley, Cramp, and Walkden:

In view difficulties concerning reinstatement Joint Executives call upon all railwaymen continue strike until we receive satisfactory assurances.¹¹

A very curious comment on this joint decision is contained in the issue of the *Railway Review* for May 21, implying as it does

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The London and North Eastern Railroad had asked each man returning to sign a statement that he understood the Company was reserving any rights it possessed in consequence of the worker having broken his contract of service. These rights included the power of legal action against each striker, with damages, if successful, of sums not exceeding ten pounds sterling from each delinquent.—*Manchester Guardian*, May 14, 1923.

¹¹ *Railway Review*, May 14, 1923.

that the union leaders were forced to declare a new strike by this action of the ranks:

The meeting was hurriedly arranged between the three railway Trade Union Executives at 2:00 P. M. on Thursday, when it was known that everywhere the men had refused to accept the conditions offered them when reporting for duty, left no option but to call a further strike and to offer negotiations to the Companies.¹³

Announcement of this action was sent to the press, to which the Companies' managers countered that all men who could be employed immediately were being accepted for duty, and that others would be taken on as soon as possible subject to two conditions: (1) the reservation of the Companies' rights in the matter of broken contracts, and (2) the supervisory staffs who had struck and the individuals who had been guilty of violence and intimidation would have their cases examined individually, and that in the meantime the Companies' decision with regard to them would be reserved.¹⁴

These terms were held to be somewhat severe by many of the public. The *Manchester Guardian* commented editorially, doubting the wisdom of the railroad companies in reserving the right to take action against men who had been guilty of acts of violence or intimidation. Such acts, it was held, should have been dealt with in the courts immediately; to bring them up after the strike was ended was "needlessly severe." The conditions which the managers sought to impose appeared to the editorial writer to be "harsh, and to leave the door open to the victimization which the King and Mr. Baldwin" alike had deprecated.¹⁵

Thursday evening, May 13, saw the commencement of negotiations between the various railroad managements and the unions, first with the London Underground, and later with the four great railroads. The first meetings were "somewhat electric" and the parties adjourned without settlement. General Secretary Walkden of the Railway Clerks' Association, at the annual meeting of his Association "gave a vivid description of the attitude adopted by the General Managers when they first met them."

¹³ The curious syntax of this sentence occurs in the original.

¹⁴ The *Scotsman*, May 14, 1926.

¹⁵ Issue of May 14, 1926.

Nothing the Trade Union representatives could say moved them in the slightest degree; they . . . were determined that some R. C. A. strikers at any rate should not go back again into the Service, and that severe penalties should be enforced. . . . the Managers of the big railways were even worse the next morning. . . . they demanded even heavier penalties both from the unions and from individual members.¹⁵

Allowing for a possible exaggeration of the stubborn stand of the managers, the better to appease discontented members of the R. C. A., the story bears out the *Herald Tribune's* cable quoted above.¹⁶

Thursday, May 13, therefore, was a black day, not only for the strikers and their leaders, who had met grave obstacles to reinstatement, but also to the general public, which had retired to bed on Wednesday with a sense of relief not hitherto experienced for many days. Cabling on Thursday night John Balderston could state:

When the strike was actually called off, the whole Government publicity machinery, which was not under the direct control of the Prime Minister, and almost all the newspapers able to print at all, set up a howl of joy over labor's defeat.

The result was immediate. The strike went on. It got worse, and it is worse now than when it started ten day ago.¹⁷

On Thursday morning the "railways still maintained a skeleton service and the only local transport available was that manned by volunteers, while the dearth of newspapers was still as marked as ever."¹⁸ London trolleys were still nowhere to be seen. Only the taxicabs operated as before the strike, having reappeared as suddenly as they had vanished in the previous week.¹⁹

Two rather ugly incidents showed the London public that tempers were more on edge than during the strike itself. On Thursday afternoon a large food convoy passed through Central London from the docks, "accompanied by armored cars and steel-helmeted soldiers with rifles at the 'ready,'" giving evidence that

¹⁵ *Railway Service Journal*, July, 1926 (official organ of the R. C. A.).

¹⁶ *Spectator*, p. 444.

¹⁷ *New York World*, May 14, 1926.

¹⁸ *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1926.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, May 14, 1926.

the Government were still in the grip of civil-war psychosis, though twenty-four hours had lapsed since the General Council had officially ended the conflict.²⁰

The other incident was more fully noticed in the American press, at the time of occurrence, than even in the *British Worker*. The story is told in the New York *Evening Post*, and gives a vivid indication of what might have happened more generally but for the moderate section of the Government and the conservative General Council.

Poplar, the dock section of London, was being patrolled today (May 14) by armored cars, posses of mounted policemen and hundreds of constables in groups of not less than three. . . . The shops are closed and the shutters have been drawn by the terrified people. Policemen are lining the streets keeping back mobs of cursing men, whose anger is at the boiling point. Dozens of their comrades are under arrest, and many are in hospitals, including the Mayor of Poplar and a Catholic priest, who are nursing wounds inflicted by the police.

This was all the outcome of "peace" celebrations, but the beginning was a mystery, though eyewitnesses, including the Vicar of St. Michael's Church, declared that it was the police who opened the hostilities.

A meeting was going on in front of the Poplar Town Hall, when a motor lorry full of policemen, followed by mounted men, drove straight through the crowd. To quiet the men the Vicar, Father Grose, took charge of the meeting. . . . Then a squad of policemen issued from the neighboring police station and charged the crowd with nightsticks, chasing some a quarter of a mile toward the docks. When the priest, upholding a crucifix, approached the police and tried to explain that the meeting was peaceful, he was struck down.

A stampede followed, and in the mêlée the police raided the headquarters of the N. U. R. branch adjoining, where a crowd headed by Mayor Hammond, were singing at a piano or playing games.

About thirty policemen drew their sticks, and when Hammond, saying he was the Mayor, tried to explain, he was struck on the head,

²⁰ The *Scotsman*, May 14, 1926.

while the police swept on and cleared the place.²¹

In the meantime the General Council, which was remaining in permanent session to review the situation, had issued a further statement to the unions, in an evening edition of the *British Worker*, Thursday, May 13. The same half-truth as put forward in the morning issue was reiterated, with considerably less justification now that time enough had elapsed for the General Council to recognize what really had happened. The statement, under the heading "Stand together," ran as follows:

Fellow Trade Unionists,

The General Strike has ended. It has not failed. It has made possible the resumption of negotiations in the coal industry, and the continuance, during negotiations, of the financial assistance given by the Government. You came out together, in accordance with the instructions of the Executives of your Unions. Return together on their instructions, as and when they are given.

Some employers will approach you as individuals, with the demand that you should accept conditions different from those obtaining before the stoppage began.

Sign no individual agreement. Consult your Union officials and stand by their instructions. Your Union will protect you, and will insist that all agreements previously in force shall be maintained intact.

The Trade Union Movement has demonstrated its unity. That unity remains unimpaired. Stick to your Unions.

—GENERAL COUNCIL, TRADES UNION CONGRESS.

The mockery of the confident assertions in the first and fourth paragraphs became more evident as the hours passed and the "satisfactory" settlements in the various trades were signed. The very implication of the general strike itself seems to have been completely lost to sight, for the whole purpose of the united walkout of *so many* unions was to give a bargaining force to the greatest individual trade union in Britain, that of the Miners, which had been quite unable to "protect" its own members by its unaided powers. Mr. Cramp admitted that when the call-off came the railroadmen "found themselves left in the air. They had to fight for their own hand, and for their very existence."²²

²¹ *New York Evening Post*, May 14, 1926. Cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1926.

²² *Railway Review*, July 8, 1926. Italics ours.

THE SETTLEMENT TERMS

Not until four o'clock on Friday morning, May 14, was the first settlement made between the railroad companies and the unions. The London Underground came to an agreement at that hour and the negotiators retired to bed, to meet again with the trunk line managers at 10:30 that same morning. On the Underground the whole of the men who had been on strike were to be reinstated under pre-strike conditions, although no pledge was made that every man could be taken on at once, owing to traffic dislocation. Men were to be reemployed in the order of seniority as soon as work could be found. The trade unions, on the other hand, had to "admit that in calling a strike they had committed a wrongful act" and they had to agree that the Underground did not surrender their legal right to claim damages by the mere fact of reinstatement of strikers. Moreover, the settlement did not extend to those who had been guilty of violence or intimidation. These provisions in the Underground settlement were largely duplicated in the terms of agreement signed later in the week by the unions and the great trunk line railroad companies.²⁹

This agreement on the Underground railroads was a comparatively simple matter, inasmuch as their main traffic was short distance passenger traffic, which would not be materially different in amount after the strike than it had been before the outbreak of the dispute. On the great trunk railroads the situation was far more serious. The coal dispute, even had it ended immediately, had gravely upset the production of the nation and for some time a lower rate of traffic was expected. If, on the other hand, the coal dispute were to drag on, as, in fact, it did, the hope for normal traffic volume would fade rapidly. Under these circumstances the companies planned a very serious cut in the services, both freight and passenger, in order to cut their financial losses, and to conserve their coal reserves. These reasons played no small part in the settlement difficulties.

As Friday dragged on and the negotiations had not reached completion, Mr. J. H. Thomas joined the negotiating committee. At four o'clock on Friday afternoon the settlement terms on the railroads were agreed upon and signed by the respective

²⁹London Times, May 17, 1926.

General Managers and union Secretaries.²⁴ These terms showed a real advance from the strikers' viewpoint over those offered by the Companies on the previous day, although on the surface the Companies drove a very hard bargain, by obtaining a complete apology and admission of Union wrongdoing. In addition the Companies gained the Unions' pledge that there should be no more lightning strikes without previous negotiations, and that henceforth supervisory employees should not be encouraged to strike. The Companies gained the right to consider the cases of supervisory men who had left work, and the right to shift their locations, but not to reduce their pay. This was a concession by the Companies over the previous day, when no such understanding as to pay had been given. Moreover, it was agreed that the unions should be notified within one week of the names of all such men liable to transfer.

As with the London Underground, so with the trunk railroads, immediate reinstatement of redundant employees was not gained by the unions, but ultimate reemployment of the men on a seniority basis was promised, save in the case of those who had been guilty of "violence and intimidation"—a pretty broad loophole for further discrimination. In the settlement no mention was made of the volunteer workers, but Mr. Cramp in a speech at Plymouth on May 16 asserted that those who "came in from outside" were to be dismissed.²⁵ Another point not mentioned in the settlement, but of great importance to the strikers, was the agreement on the part of the Companies to pay the wages which the Companies had previously refused to pay out when the men left work without due notice.²⁶ Mr. Bromley, of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen's union, made it clear that the admission of wrongdoing in the settlement terms saved over "two million pounds in wages to the railwaymen, which were being withheld," the payment of which the unions could not legally have enforced.²⁷

²⁴ For the terms of settlement see Appendix D.

²⁵ *Railway Review*, May 21, 1926.

²⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, May 15, 1926. When London, Midland and Scottish Railroad employees had presented themselves for the broken week, it had been made clear to them that it was the general policy of the Companies to withhold that pay until the legal position had been defined. Cf. *Birmingham Post*, May 10, 1926.

²⁷ *Locomotive Journal*, July, 1926, p. 519.

A telegram was despatched to the branches of the N. U. R. with the incorrect assertion, "Complete reinstatement secured without penalties. All members should report for duty immediately. Full details to follow." In the letter that followed Mr. Cramp claimed that "in the circumstances with which we were faced, the settlement must be regarded as highly satisfactory. It safeguards the position of the whole of the men who were on strike and assures their return to duty."²⁸ Mr. J. H. Thomas in a statement to the press also declared that "having regard to all the circumstances I consider it an eminently satisfactory settlement." John Bromley and A. G. Walkden of the other two unions concurred that the settlement was satisfactory. Only the ranks demurred.²⁹

The criticism with which the full terms of the railroad settlement were received by the men makes it seem likely that had the complete terms been in the hands of the ranks, rather than the misleading wires as to complete reinstatement without penalties, the men would still have refused to return.³⁰ Among the members of Mr. Bromley's union, the engineers and firemen, much discontent with the settlement was shown. One organizing secretary of that union, after visits to Manchester and Liverpool, reported regret and disappointment at the strike's end "at a time when everything pointed to almost certain success." From Wimbledon branch came the question why the men had been forced to strike again to protect their own positions, after the general strike was over. Still another organizing secretary reported from Leeds and Doncaster that meetings for explanation of the settlement terms were "lively," and that explanations given "were very reluctantly accepted by the vast audiences." One writer declared that "what was really a great victory for the rank and file was

²⁸ *Railway Review*, May 21, 1926.

²⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, May 16, 1926.

³⁰ A mass demonstration of railroad workers in Manchester was held as late as Thursday, May 16, over 30,000 parading to show their determination to stand out for complete reinstatement. At Doncaster the men stayed out till May 15. In Hull the railroadmen, tramwaymen and dockers stood together and refused to return on May 14 owing to threatened dismissal of 150 tramway employees. At Pontypool Road, an important Great Western Railroad center, a bitter feeling was expressed at the settlement, the men refused to return and doubled the pickets in the surrounding district.—*Manchester Guardian*, May 15, 1926; and interviews with strike committee members at Doncaster, Manchester, etc.

translated into a defeat by sheer desperation" on the part of the leaders.³¹

In like manner the official journal of the N. U. R. for weeks contained branch reports, full of bitter comment on the settlement terms. From Paddington, Richmond, Glasgow, Leeds, and many other centers came the same expressions of disgust. Two such resolutions must suffice as examples. The District Council in Manchester declared that their men in the north were "very seriously dissatisfied. After holding the fort and completely tying up the railways we are convinced that a complete and satisfactory settlement could have been obtained."³² The Bristol and South-West England District Council called for a special general meeting of members to discover why the Executive had handed over negotiations to the General Council without "satisfactory assurances as to the members well-being," and why, when the men refused to return on the Companies' terms, "a misleading telegram was sent, signed by the Industrial General Secretary, saying completed reinstatement and no penalties, when terms of the most humiliating character had been agreed to."³³

How far from "satisfactory" the railroad terms proved to be, can be seen from a further statement dated May 18, signed by Cramp, Bromley, and Walkden:

Further trouble has arisen in the railway world in consequence of the failure on the part of the Railway Companies to reinstate large numbers of their employees under the terms of settlement reached with the Railway Companies and the Trade Unions last Friday afternoon. The unions have received very strong complaints from their branches in all parts of the country, particularly on the northern lines; and this evening a joint meeting of the Executive Committees of the three Railway Unions was held, at which it was decided to approach the Railway Companies asking for an immediate meeting in order to go into the whole of the difficulties.³⁴

Meetings with the Railroad Managers took place on the 20th and 21st of May. A hitch occurred when it was found that the

³¹ These and many other similar comments contained in the *Locomotive Journal* for July, 1926.

³² *Railway Review*, June 11, July 8, 1926.

³³ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1926.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1926.

written terms did not include the *salariéd* men, and not until Saturday, May 22, was the final settlement achieved.

The important change made by this supplementary settlement had to do with the suspension of the "guaranteed week."²⁷ On the original settlement terms only some 40 per cent of the strikers had been reinstated. It was alleged that there were no immediate jobs for the remainder, owing to the 50 per cent reduction in normal rail services, due to the continuation of the coal dispute. By the suspension of the "guaranteed week" all men were to be reinstated and given work for 40 per cent of the working week, and paid 40 per cent of their normal wages. This implied a sharing of all available work in each of the grades, in such manner as to equalize the earnings, as far as possible, of the men in the respective grades.²⁸ In case the work at any center did not provide three days' work each week for each man, then whatever work was available was to be shared by rotation; some men would receive the three days' work one week, and the following week the work would go to those who had received no work in the week preceding.²⁹

The Railroad Companies would rather have employed 40 per cent of their men at full time, but they yielded in order to obtain a more contented staff; such at least was their claim.³⁰ The Union leaders, on the other hand, implied that this suspension of the "guaranteed week" had been under discussion by the Companies the day the general strike was called, to meet the coal situation, and that the strike was not responsible for a number of men being left out of the service for the time being.³¹ This ex-

²⁷ The guaranteed week was an agreement to pay men a full normal week's wage whenever employed for a portion of that week. In times of poor trade and less than normal traffic this "guaranteed week" had occasionally been suspended by mutual agreement. The full guaranteed week was not restored until the early spring of 1927, when the coal and other industries had again become more normal. Cf. *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, May, 1927, p. 212.

²⁸ *Railway Review*, May 23, 1926. For final settlement terms see Appendix D.

²⁹ Interview with Chief General Manager of L. N. E. Railroad, May 29, 1926.

³⁰ The *Scotsman* for May 14, 1926, stated that "the railway managers had decided, even before the general strike began, that so long as the stoppage in the coal trade lasted, it would be impossible to run more than half the normal service. . . moreover, long before the strike, the Companies were employing a large number of men who were surplus to the requirements of the available traffic. These, too, will be thrown idle. . . ." Cf. also the *Railway Review*, May 26, 1926.

planation does not meet the fact that the so-called "loyal" employees who had not gone on strike were not included in the part-time work plan of the suspended week, but were still allowed to work on full time.

Even this "final" settlement did not work out to the satisfaction of the unions, as is evident from the very bitter tone of the Industrial General Secretary's speech at the annual meeting of the N. U. R. in July. Mr. Cramp

could not speak without intense bitterness when he considered the violation of the settlement which had been made and signed with the Railway Companies. When that settlement was made, after long and anxious negotiations, it was only finally agreed to by the three Railway Unions on assurances given by the Railway Companies, which had since been flagrantly broken. They were assured, not once but half a dozen times, that no penalization was intended. Every time the word was used on the Union side it was repudiated with indignation on the other. Yet men occupying supervisory positions had not merely been transferred to other positions but had been humiliated by the Railway Companies by their endeavoring to force them into lower classes.³⁹

The most striking comment upon the allegedly "satisfactory" terms of settlement on the railroads was made by Mr. J. H. Thomas himself, at the annual conference of the Labor Party on October 12, five full months after the general strike had ended. Mr. Thomas was speaking against the proposal to place an embargo on coal by the Railroad Unions, and against a levy on union funds in aid of the coal miners, who were still out at that time. He wished, he said, to tell the Conference why his own union, the N. U. R., the biggest transport union of all, could not pay any levy. "*They had 45,000 men out who had not gone back to work since May 1, and 200,000 who were working three days a week.*"⁴⁰ Further comment would be superfluous.

There were points of resemblance between the terms of settlement signed by the Underground and the trunk line railroads and those drawn up for the dock workers of the port of London.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, July 16, 1926.

⁴⁰ *London Times*, Oct. 13, 1926. The *Times* for May 6, 1926, gave the membership of Mr. Thomas's union as 327,374. If correct, those figures would show that about 75 per cent of the N. U. R. members had not received a "satisfactory" settlement. Italics ours.

The Transport and General Workers' Union (for the dock workers) admitted that they had broken their agreement, and agreed in the future not to instruct their members to strike, nationally, sectionally or locally, for any reason, without at first exhausting the conciliation machinery of the National Agreement. The Union further agreed to give no support to any of their members who took individual action contrary to that understanding, and, finally, consented to instruct their members not to encourage or influence men in supervisory positions to take strike action.⁴¹ The other major ports followed suit with very similar terms of settlement though there was temporary trouble at some of the provincial ports over the continued employment of volunteer labor. At Salford, for example, the regular dock workers went on strike again when they found that the numbers of the casually employed workers had been increased to the detriment of the regular men.⁴² The road transport members of the Transport and General Workers' Union returned to work in general on the old terms, according to Mr. Bevin, their secretary. As will be shown below, however, a great number of the Transport workers found no jobs available in view of the continuance of the coal stoppage and the consequent closing down of many industrial plants. At the London Docks when the regular workers resumed work, the Guards regiments, which had been on duty, or held in reserve in Victoria Park during the strike, marched out with *sife* and drum and paraded, almost in the guise of victors, through the business center of London, on their way to entrain for Aldershot.⁴³

On the London County Council tramways, which had practically stopped all service from the outbreak of the strike, the men returned to work with a guarantee that all would be reinstated, but not necessarily in their old positions. The men's representatives agreed that there would be no interference with volunteers remaining in the service of the Council, whereas the Council gave no pledge that men who had been convicted during the strike would be re-employed.⁴⁴

Settlement terms in connection with the strike on the press were, perhaps, more serious in the losses to the unions than in

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, May 17, 1926. For full terms see Appendix D.

⁴² *London Times*, May 18, 1926.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, May 19, 1926.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

many of the other trades. In Glasgow the whole of the Outram Press, controlling four daily newspapers, turned "non-union," enforcing its decision so strictly that its journalistic staff were forbidden to meet their union colleagues at a dinner. In Manchester the *Manchester Guardian*, famed for its tolerance, changed its habit of years and formed a "company union."⁴⁵ In general, however, the settlement made between the Newspaper Proprietors' Association and the unions concerned, for the London press, was largely copied in other provincial cities, with occasional local additions or alterations. The London terms included an agreement by the unions that there should be "no interference with the contents of the newspapers" or with any of the members of the staffs who remained at work or returned to work during the period of the strike. No union interference was to be tolerated with the process of employment or discharge of members of the staff, nor were private secretaries or managers of departments necessarily to be union members. No "chapel" meetings (meetings of the local union members in the newspaper office) were to be held during working hours, and strictest observance of agreements was henceforth to be "a matter of honour affecting each individual employer or employee."⁴⁶

The London newspapers agreed to unite for the purpose of resisting lightning strikes in the future, pledging themselves to lock out all union men if any further attempt were made to break contracts by strikes without notice. If any newspaper were to fail to keep this pledge in such an event, and were to yield to the union demands, a hundred thousand pound penalty was to be the punishment. Under that agreement the editors and proprietors believed that they had at last achieved some kind of security.⁴⁷

The Government's own printing plant posted a notice declaring that His Majesty's Stationery Office would henceforth include non-union workers alongside union employees, and that any unionist returning to work must recognize that the plant would not be a union shop thereafter.⁴⁸ Two large newspaper

⁴⁵ Postgate, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ *London Times*, May 17, 1926. Cf. for Glasgow press, *Manchester Guardian*, May 16, 1926.

⁴⁷ Interview with the Editor of the *Daily Express*, May 28, 1926.

⁴⁸ *London Times*, May 17, 1926.

distributors in the London district also declared that their establishments would become "open shop." For a while there was delay in the distribution of the papers as a result of the Paper Workers' Union refusing to accept such terms, but the employers were adamant and threatened to take on non-union workers wherever the union men refused to return to work.⁴⁹

The various sporadic strikes in the flour mills dragged on for some days before settlement was reached. Once again the terms were very similar to those signed by the unions for railroad and other workers, with an admission of guilt by the unions as regards the breaking of contracts, the retention of legal rights by the employers for strike damage claims, and a pledge given by the union in the future not to instruct their members to strike without at first using the dispute procedure adopted by the National Industrial Council for the flour milling industry on November 24, 1921. Retention of volunteer labor where the employers so desired was also agreed to by the unions.⁵⁰

The city of Brighton seems to have been a particularly bad spot for the unions after the strike. The omnibus services compelled their employees to leave their unions, on pain of dismissal, the municipality withdrew recognition of the union, and some 350 tramwaymen had to leave it, while union officials in the employ of the municipality were discharged for refusing to resign their positions. Active members of the Typographical Association were victimized and no "Natsopa" member could get work in the city.⁵¹

Another group of workers who went on strike found that their return was to be visited with penalties. The transport workers of the Bradford Dyers' Association had been called out at the beginning of the general strike. Two days later they had returned to work, whereupon the whole of the operative dyers in the Bradford district had been called out, seriously dislocating the local worsted piece-goods industry. When the strike ended the dyers found they would not be allowed to resume work when they saw fit, and as a result dyers employed by other firms remained out on sympathetic strike to the number of some six or seven thousand men. Negotiations enabled the whole of the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, May 19, 1926.

⁵⁰ Postgate, et al, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1926.

dyers to return on May 18, 1926, but with the proviso that the Bradford Dyers' Association would immediately take action under the law for breach of the agreement by the operatives in question. While possessing the right to claim one pound sterling from each employee who left work, the Bradford Dyers' Association intimated that they would consent to a declaration in open court by the operatives' union, the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, that the agreement was binding until lawfully terminated. If such a public declaration were made by the union the company was willing to forego all claims except one hundred pounds damages and costs. As in other cases already enumerated the company was willing to reinstate their men in so far as work was available.⁵³

Engineers (machinists), who had been called out on the very last day of the great strike, found in many instances that there was difficulty in getting reinstatement, both on account of their broken contracts and even more because of the continued coal dispute making continuance of their industries less and less feasible. The miners themselves, however, the original cause of all the grave industrial disturbance of the great strike, received in the end the worst and most humiliating settlement terms. If there is anything related to the great strike and its aftermath which shows more clearly the poverty of leadership in that great industry and the cold-blooded refusal of the Government to force both parties to a settlement, it is the miserable story of the final starvation surrender of the British miners.

It is not within the scope of this study to describe in detail the successive attempts made by outside mediators to bring about a mine settlement strictly on the basis of the Samuel Commission's Report and the subsequent Samuel Memorandum, but certain comments upon the Government's attitude, as the long dispute dragged to its close, by editorial columns not affiliated either with the trade unions or the Labor Party, will be adduced in support of the statement made immediately above.

Commenting upon the Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons on July 26, 1926, a speech called forth by the proposal on the part of sundry English Churchmen of note that a settlement be achieved on the basis of the Samuel Commission's Re-

⁵³ *London Times*, May 17, 1926.

port, the *Manchester Guardian* made scathing allegations of Government connivance with the mine owners' aims:

The immense advance made by the Miners' Federation (acceptance of the Report) has gone unrecognised by the Government, and there is no hint of any alternative solution in Mr. Baldwin's speech, save a slow wearing down of the miners' resistance until they are forced by sheer exhaustion to accept terms which probably few people outside the Mining Association believe to be just or necessary. . . . And if it is said that we cannot afford now what we could have afforded three months ago, the answer is that every four days of the stoppage costs the nation as much as the whole of the propable subsidy. The whole impression one derives from the Prime Minister's speech is that the Government has made up its mind to take no active part whatever in helping towards a settlement. The miners can negotiate with the owners when they want to, but the Government will not move a hand to get the negotiations started or to keep them, when they are started, to the lines of the Report. . . . To the ordinary person this seems like saying that the miners must be beaten into acceptance of the coal-owners' terms. . . . one would like to know what exactly is the present significance of Mr. Baldwin's undertaking that he could be trusted to see "a square deal." Did anybody at the time understand him to mean that the owners and the miners should be left to fight it out?⁵³

The *London Daily News*, in asserting that the Government were not even indirectly standing by the report of their own Commission, pointed out that "recommendation after recommendation" had been "jettisoned" by the Government, and that Mr. Baldwin was "deliberately choosing a policy of a fight to a finish."⁵⁴

Whether the Prime Minister's choice was "deliberate" or not, the effect upon the final settlement was the same. As the weeks drew to months and starvation faced district after district, the miners' leaders showed on more than one occasion a belated willingness to accept terms of settlement that at the end of the general strike they had definitely refused. Simultaneously the Government and the mine owners would declare for stiffer terms and that any return to original schemes of settlement, offered earlier in the dispute, would be out of the question. Ultimately

⁵³ *Manchester Guardian*, July 27, 1926.

⁵⁴ *Daily News*, July 26, 1926.

the men accepted district settlements in place of a national agreement, longer hours—sometimes a 49-hour week exclusive of meal times—and wage rates either absolutely or relatively lower than under the previously existing seven hour day. With such a "settlement" there went the certainty of a vast and permanent body of totally unemployed miners, as a result of the increase in production and cut-throat competition that necessarily ensued between the European coal-producing nations, even where one British district did not under-cut another in the coal market. All agreements were for long periods of time, some of the districts signing up for as long as five years.²⁴

As far, therefore, as the Miners' Federation was concerned the great struggle ended in the most abysmal defeat for a generation, with a cost in the impoverishment of families and districts impossible to reckon wholly in terms of lost wages, savings expended and debts incurred. As early as August the *Westminster Gazette's* Labor correspondent estimated that over six million pounds had been lost to the miners through the lapse of insurance policies, and that a further six million pounds of debt to the storekeepers had already been incurred. The social price of the dispute will have to be paid for a generation to come, in the damaged physique of the new generation, and in the bitterness of spirit that will make the miner as a class even harder to handle than hitherto. How much of this price will be laid at the doors of the original Lloyd George Government for its broken pledges with regard to the Sankey Commission, and how much to the Baldwin Cabinet for its refusal to use its great political majority as a weapon of considerable power in enforcing a settlement, remain questions for future historians to decide, but the preceding study may have shown something of the guilt that lies at the doors of both Governments.

THE COST OF THE STRIKE

If the miners lost all for which they fought, in that fact rendering futile the whole sacrifice of their comrades, the cost of the great strike and the subsequent period of distressed trade to

²⁴ For an excellent summary of the long dispute see *U. S. Monthly Labor Review*, December, 1926, pp. 37-43, and February, 1927, pp. 22-23. Cf. "Settling the Mining Industry," in the *Labour Magazine*, V, 426-27.

the other unions was extremely severe. Mr. Citrine, Secretary of the General Council, in a letter to the Secretary of the International Federation of Trades Unions, stated that the funds of the unions had been depleted by a sum which could not be much less than five million pounds sterling.⁵⁵ Reference has already been made to Mr. J. H. Thomas's assertion that up to October 45,000 railroadmen members of the N. U. R. had never returned to work since May 1, and that some 200,000 more were still working but three days a week. Something of the monetary cost of this disastrous result of the general strike and the coal dispute can be seen in Mr. Thomas's report, as early as the first week in July, that the strike had cost the N. U. R. no less than eleven hundred thousand pounds.⁵⁷

Mr. Ben Tillett, speaking for the Transport and General Workers' Union at the annual conference of the Labor party, in October, stated that his own union had up to that month already spent a million pounds sterling on the general strike and the coal dispute, that they had sunk all their funds in the dispute, and were then half a million pounds in debt. In addition they still had 80,000 members unemployed and another 100,000 under-employed. The boilermakers union had at that time some 45 per cent of their members out of work, as a result of the coal dispute and the general strike, and the union was struggling to get a levy for them from the wages of those members who were at work.⁵⁶ As for the engineers (machinists), the Amalgamated Engineering Union indefinitely postponed a demand for an increase of a pound a week in the wages of their members, inasmuch as the general strike had inflicted a loss on the engineering industry of over two and one-half million pounds.⁵⁹ The full cost of the general strike to the trade unions can only be adequately gauged when the legislative aftermath of the strike, discussed below, is taken into consideration.

On the side of the large industries other than engineering similar heavy losses were occasioned by the general strike and the

⁵⁵ In December, 1928, nearly 200,000 miners were still unemployed, and whole districts were in abject distress. Cf. *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Dec. 21, 1928.

⁵⁶ *London Daily Herald*, Sept. 18, 1926.

⁵⁷ *London Times*, Oct. 13, 1926, and *Railway Review*, July 16, 1926.

⁵⁸ *London Times*, Oct. 13, 1926.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, July 21, 1926.

mine dispute. At the close of July the aggregate receipts for the four great trunk line railroads in the period from the commencement of the year showed a total loss of fifteen and one-half million pounds, a decline in receipts that was added to at the rate of one million pounds a week during the summer of 1926.⁶⁰ The actual cost of the general strike to the Government itself did not amount to half a million pounds,⁶¹ but the expense to the nation in general as the strike ended and the coal dispute continued was well nigh incalculable. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald placed the cost of the coal dispute and the general strike up to the beginning of October at no less than half a billion pounds sterling.⁶²

THE LEGALITY OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

Among the many-sided methods of attack upon the general strike pressed into action by the Government and the general public, one of the most effective at the moment of crisis was the heavy bombardment of legal opinion, declaring that both individual trade union leaders and their massed ranks of followers were alike illegal, unconstitutional, and liable to severe penalties before the Law. The official *British Gazette* ran several articles by statesmen and lawyers on this very point. Lord Balfour, in his column of comment, declared that "neither in fact, nor, I believe, in law, is the course advocated by the trade unions a strike in the proper sense of the term. It is what I have called it . . . an attempted revolution."⁶³ Lord Oxford, of the opposite political camp to Lord Balfour, largely agreed with such a view:

⁶⁰ *London Daily News*, July 30, 1926.

⁶¹ The precise sum was £438,000 made up as follows:

Civil Commissioner Organisation, etc.	£ 78,000
Food Organisations (net)	119,000
Transport Organisations	20,000
Coal Organisations	35,000
<i>British Gazette</i> (net)	18,000
Civil Constabulary Reserve	65,000
Grants in respect of police expenditure	160,000

—*London Times*, July 6, 1926.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1926.

Mr. Winston Churchill declared that the general strike and coal dispute had entailed a loss to the Revenue of \$400,000,000—*London Times*, Feb. 7, 1926.

⁶³ *British Gazette*, May 10, 1926.

Strikes and lock-outs, though they always inflict a certain amount of inconvenience on the public, may be, and often are, in the last resort justifiable and even necessary. But the challenge which has now been thrown down and taken up is of a totally different kind. A General Strike such as that which it is being sought to enforce, is directly aimed at the daily life of the whole community.⁵⁴

The Prime Minister himself had not hesitated even earlier in the dispute to call the strike an attack on the Constitution:

Constitutional Government is being attacked. . . . The General Strike is a challenge to Parliament and is the road to anarchy and ruin.⁵⁵

By far the most striking assertion of the illegality of the general strike, however, was made by Sir John Simon in a dramatic manner in the House of Commons, late in the evening of Thursday, May 6, the third day of the strike. Sir John, as a former attorney general and as a famous leader of the Bar, carried considerable weight by the fact that he was not a member of the Government in power, nor an adherent of the Conservative Party. His speech on May 6 and his second speech, in reply to Sir Henry Slessor, also delivered in the House, on May 11, brought consternation into the ranks of the General Council. Distinguishing between an ordinary strike in pursuit of a trade dispute from the general strike, Sir John contended that:

The Resolution which was arrived at at the Memorial Hall last week, or, at any rate, the decision of the Council of the Trade Union Executive, to call out everybody, regardless of the contracts which those workmen had made, was not a lawful act at all. Every workman who was bound by a contract to give notice before he left work, and who, in view of that decision, has either chosen of his own free will or has felt compelled to come out by leaving his employment without proper notice, has broken the law . . . it would be lamentable if the working classes of this country go on with this business without understanding that they are taking part in a novel and an utterly illegal proceeding. It is this feature of the General Strike that constitutes its novelty.⁵⁶

The former attorney general continued by taking the case of the railroadmen, showing that every man who left his work

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1926.

⁵⁵ *Hansard*, May 6, 1926, col. 684.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1926.

by breach of contract was liable in the County Court for damages, and that every Trade Union leader who had advised and promoted this course of action was liable "to the uttermost farthing of his personal possessions."⁶⁷ Such a statement from such an unquestioned leader of the Law was a very serious threat to the General Council, even if its author disclaimed any such purpose.⁶⁸

Carrying his argument further, Sir John Simon held that no penalty imposed upon a member of a trade union who refused to obey the strike orders, would be upheld by any court in the land, inasmuch as the order to strike was in this case "an unlawful order." Moreover the Trade Disputes Act of 1906, which was held by the supporters of the general strike to protect them from legal action, was not so intended when it was passed by Parliament.⁶⁹ On May 11, Sir John made reply to certain criticisms of Sir Henry Slessor, Solicitor General in the MacDonald Labor Cabinet of 1924, and considerably elaborated his views on the illegality of a general strike.

Once you proclaim a General Strike, you are as a matter of fact starting a movement of a perfectly different and of a wholly unconstitutional and unlawful character. . . . Once you get the proclamation of a General Strike such as this is, it is not, properly understood, a strike at all because a strike is a strike against employers to compel employers to do something, but a General Strike is a strike against the general public to make the public, Parliament and the Government do something.⁷⁰

After reading several passages from the judgment just delivered by Justice Astbury, as to the illegality of the general strike, Sir John returned to his assertion that the general strike was unlike all other trade disputes.

The proclaiming of this General Strike was a fearful mistake. It is not that the people who did it were a set of revolutionaries who wanted to break the country to pieces. It is that it has been done under some, I think, confused, but at any rate quite mistaken impression, that this was a lawful exercise of the rights of organised labour. It is nothing of the sort. . . .⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, cols. 584-85.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, May 11, 1926, cols. 861-63.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 585-86.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 868.

After the strike was over, presumably when men's minds were able to make calmer and less prejudiced judgments, Sir John Simon went to his constituency and delivered a speech defending his views on the illegality of a general strike and emphasizing that aspect of such a strike as an "unconstitutional" means of making "the Government do something, Parliament do something, the community do something" simply because the people would be put to such inconvenience that they would proceed to grumble, protest, and finally force the hands of their members of Parliament.⁷¹

In support of Sir John Simon's views came the judgment delivered by Mr. Justice Astbury in the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice on May 11, the last full day of the strike. This judgment was rendered upon an action brought by the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union against a number of their officers in the Tower Hill (London) branch of that union. That action sought an injunction restraining the London officials from calling the London members of the union out on strike without the authority of the Executive Council of the union. The Tower Hill branch had passed a resolution supporting the general strike call of the T. U. C. General Council. The General President of that union, Mr. Havelock Wilson, never a radical trade unionist, had opposed such action on the plea that it would cause the breaking of contracts and would interfere with the nation's food supply.

A two-thirds majority of the union members ashore was required for a strike call. Hence Mr. Havelock Wilson's plea for an injunction was based on contravention of the union rules, and, presumably, of the laws of the country.⁷²

Mr. Justice Astbury stated the situation as regards the legality of the General Strike in the following manner:

The so-called general strike called by the Trades Union Congress is illegal and contrary to law, and those persons inciting or taking part in it are not protected by the Trade Disputes Act of 1906. No trade dispute has been alleged or shown to exist in any of the Unions affected, except in the miners' case, and no trade dispute does or can exist between the Trades Union Congress on the one hand

⁷¹ Sir John Simon, *Three Speeches on the General Strike*, p. 46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Appendix II, being Mr. Justice Astbury's judgment.

and the Government and the nation on the other. The orders of the Trades Union Council above referred to are therefore unlawful, and the Defendants are at law acting illegally in obeying them and can be restrained by their own Union from doing so.

In the remaining portion of the judgment Mr. Justice Astbury dealt with the fact that the union members were acting contrary to their union's rules in going on strike at that time, without their Executive's orders, and that on that ground also they were liable to be restrained by injunction. Incidentally those on strike would not be entitled to receive strike pay during the continuance of the strike.⁷³

The combined effect of the Astbury Judgment and the speeches of Sir John Simon upon trade union leaders and the General Council were considerable, even if they did not prove to be the deciding factor in calling off the general strike. At the same time it must be admitted at once that the bulk of legal opinion upon both the speeches and the judgment was adverse. As early as the issue of May 15, 1926, the *Solicitors' Journal* had expressed the view that there was a trade dispute in the mining industry and that the general strike might fairly be argued to have been "in furtherance" of that dispute. Dr. David Harrison, writing in the June number of the *English Review*, a popular journal of distinctly conservative tone in labor matters, came to the same conclusion independently. Dr. Harrison could see no difference, as far as the criminal law was concerned, between such a general strike as that just passed, and the great railroad strike of 1919, which was never regarded as illegal. In view of this doubt as to the precise sense in which the general strike could be regarded as "illegal" Dr. Harrison claimed that "the matter should be made perfectly plain by further legislation," pleading that the only remedy was to make the calling of a strike "in any vital industry on a national scale a criminal offence."⁷⁴

Sir Henry Slesser, to whose criticism Sir John Simon made reply with his second House of Commons speech, had declared in the House on May 10 that the general strike was not more illegal than any other strike merely because there was a breach

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ David Harrison, "The General Strike and the Law," *English Review*, June, 1926.

of contract, provided that such breach of contract occurred in the "contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute."⁷⁵ Mr. Harold Laski, of the London School of Economics, held similar views to those of Sir Henry Slesser. "It is elementary," he wrote, "that under sections (3) and (5) (3) of the Trade Disputes Act a sympathetic strike is legal. The general strike was simply a sympathetic strike on a massive scale. It had definite industrial ends; it did not seek any other than industrial ends."⁷⁶ Mr. Kingsley Martin has suggested that even if the general strike had possessed a purely political aim, which it assuredly did not, then the case of one Thomas Cooper, Chartist leader and agitator, would have held true. Cooper was tried for seditious language, but in pronouncing judgment Mr. Justice Erskine declared that "honestly and peaceably to advise the working classes to agree to cease from working for the purpose of obtaining the Charter is not in itself criminal."⁷⁷

The most scholarly and complete analysis of Sir John Simon's allegations of illegality and the similar *obiter dicta* of Mr. Justice Astbury, has been made by A. L. Goodhart, editor of *The Law Quarterly Review*, and it leaves Sir John with little ground to stand upon.⁷⁸ Mr. Justice Astbury's decision was an "off-hand judgment given in a case where the defendants were not represented by counsel," and not "a single authority is cited to support a view which would revolutionize the law relating to strikes if carried to its logical extent." The comment on the illegality of the general strike was really extra-judicial, inasmuch as the defendants were clearly acting contrary to the rules of their own union, and it was, therefore, unnecessary for the judge to consider the point as to the legality of the general strike itself. After discussing at some length the statutes of 1871 and 1875 concerning trade unions and conspiracy, Goodhart concluded that:

Taking part in a strike is not a criminal offense if (a) the act is done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute as defined

⁷⁵ *Hansard*, May 10, 1926, col. 791.

⁷⁶ H. J. Laski, "The General Strike and the Constitution," *Labour Magazine*, July, 1926.

⁷⁷ Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike*, p. 105.

⁷⁸ "The Legality of the General Strike in England," *Yale Law Journal*, Feb. 1927, to which the writer is indebted for the remaining comment on this topic.

by the Trade Disputes Act, 1906, and (b) if such act committed by one person would not be punishable as a crime, with particular reference to the exceptions set out in the Conspiracy, and Protection of Property Act, 1875 (riot, sedition, any offense against the State or sovereign etc.)

The questions to be answered were, then, whether the General Strike was in furtherance of a trade dispute, and whether, in the second place, such a strike was an offense against the State; two questions that Sir John Simon confused.

In answer to the first question Mr. Goodhart showed from various previous legal pronouncements that "sympathetic strikes have been in practice for over fifty years, and to hold them illegal at the present time would constitute a revolution in what has been universally held to be the law. . . . The important point to remember is that the sympathetic striker is protected even though he himself has no quarrel either with the employer originally struck against or with his own immediate employer."¹² Furthermore, in answer to Sir John Simon's contention that the strike was illegal in that it brought unconstitutional pressure to bear upon the Government and Parliament, Mr. Goodhart held that "the purpose of a sympathetic strike must always be to bring pressure to bear upon some third party. Can a distinction be drawn because the third party is the government? Such pressure may, perhaps, be an offense against the State, but it is nevertheless in furtherance of a trade dispute."

The suggestion that the general strike was merely a cloak for revolution was scouted by Mr. Goodhart, in agreement with Dr. Harrison that the "coercion of the Government was merely incidental." He concluded, therefore, that the general strike was in furtherance of a trade dispute. Before he could answer the second question raised—whether the strike was an offense against the State—Mr. Goodhart pointed out that no man can be convicted of "illegality." A specific crime is required. Three different crimes may have been committed by those who called the general strike, Treason (or treason felony), Seditious Conspiracy (or Seditious Libel), or Criminal Conspiracy. There is no treason unless "the intention is to effect a purpose by warlike violence." No evidence has been forthcoming that the leaders of

¹² *Ibid.*

the general strike ever intended to use force against the Government, whereas there is ample data to the contrary, in their constant refusal to accept any suggestions for militant organization from the small Communist minority. Merely "inconveniencing the community to however great an extent by refusing to work does not constitute levying war." If the General Council were guilty because they attempted to bring moral pressure upon Parliament so too were the Miners' leaders, for the purpose of the Coal dispute was certainly to force some action from Parliament, even if it were but the extension of the subsidy. "To force Parliament by peaceable means, however effective they may be, to pass a certain Act, or to compel the government to take a certain course does not amount to treason in English law."⁸⁰

As to the possibility of Seditious Conspiracy, Mr. Goodhart believed that there was no evidence that the purpose of the general strike was to provoke tumults or the use of force against the government. Further, a lawful act, however injurious to the State, cannot be seditious. Even the breaking of contracts, save in the special cases of gas, water and electricity undertakings, is not a crime if it is "committed by one person," and therefore, under the 1875 Act is not a crime when committed by two or more persons. Finally the general strike could not be held by any fair minded person to be "an attempt to incite any person to commit a crime in disturbance of the peace," in view of the monotonous repetition of the warning to preserve order issued by the General Council and its subordinate committees.

The General Strike, therefore, does not come under any of the various kinds of seditious intention. It is only because there is a mistaken idea that all acts which are harmful to the State must be seditious, that it is possible to suggest that the leaders of the General Strike were guilty of this crime.⁸¹

Mr. Goodhart found that the general strike could not come under the title of Criminal Conspiracy, and concluded his long and careful analysis by asserting that "it is impossible to say that it was illegal." In this conclusion he found strong support

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

from the very fact that the Emergency Powers Act of 1920 implied that a general strike was legal, and that because it was legal the government required the additional powers that such an Act placed in their hands.

The Baldwin Government and the more conservative elements in industry and politics evidently agreed with this view as to the legality of the general strike, even though in public speeches they may have accepted, gladly enough, the useful accusation of illegality against the trade union leaders and their followers. Once the strike was over, however, the cry for immediate enactment of far more stringent and restrictive laws against sympathetic strikes gave evidence that Sir John Simon's speeches and Mr. Justice Astbury's judgment were not sufficient to lull them into a comfortable slumber until such time as another general strike should threaten. They were determined that the government in the future should be well armed with legal weapons against such an eventuality. The most important, and to the trade union world the most serious, outcome of this agitation was the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927.

THE LEGISLATIVE AFTERMATH

It may be asked why the problem of the strike's legality has been wrested from its rather natural position, in the midst of the struggle itself, and relegated to this chapter on the settlement and the costs of the strike. Such a position was purposeful, in view of the very close relationship between the question whether the strike was illegal and the subsequent actions of the Baldwin Government to ensure that future industrial disputes of any size should be definitely outlawed. To the student, moreover, the passing into law of the "Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927" was so evidently the heaviest and most permanent penalty of the great strike, that its position among the "costs" was the most logical place.

The introduction of the severely restrictive Act in question can not be treated as a sudden decision on the part of the Baldwin Government for as early as March, 1925, a bill had been introduced into Parliament with the definite purpose of restricting the powers of the trade unions, but had been put aside

by the Prime Minister with the suggestion that the time was not ripe for such action.⁸² The failure of the general strike and the long and ultimately completely disastrous mine dispute implied the overwhelming victory, at least for the time, of the more extreme elements in conservative politics and industry. Presumably such victory merely whetted the appetite for reprisals on the part of the victors.

The late C. F. G. Masterman, brilliant publicist and one-time Liberal Cabinet Minister, has stated the situation in one of the last articles he penned:

The general strike had been so completely broken as to make it likely never to be heard of again, unless it carried revolution in its train. And, has been proved by history, against revolution all legal enactments and Parliaments are in vain. The miners' strike had been so completely broken that the men were working for miserable pittance with despair and bitterness in their hearts. The great working-class organizations were inspired by a sense of impotence and a sense of humiliation, with their membership depleted and their money gone.

This was a time for statesmanship and a willingness to meet the union leaders half way with proposals of coöperative reconstruction of industry and the achievement of a more permanent industrial peace.

Instead of this, after three months of waiting, without a word of conciliation, without a suggestion of any better way, the Government suddenly threw on the table of the House of Commons, without explanation or discussion, the Trades-Union Bill. . . . It represents to all organized Labor in England a determination to do anything that Parliament is capable of doing to batten down, to discourage, and to destroy.⁸³

It is no secret that once again in 1927, as during the fatal months of the coal dispute in 1926, the "extremists of the Cabinet and the party" had "swept Mr. Baldwin and the moderates away," in spite of the fact that "big Conservative employers of labour had already, before the bill was produced, suggested to the Government that they should let the thing alone, at any rate

⁸² Ernest Remant, "The Lesson of the Strike," *English Review*, June, 1926.

⁸³ C. F. G. Masterman, "The Trades Union War in England," *Atlantic Monthly*, Oct., 1927.

for the time being, because workers after the late disturbances were settling down to work and trade was reviving.¹⁸⁴ The attitude taken by that extremist section of the party and the Cabinet toward the lessons of the great strike can be seen in a particularly vivid statement attributed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill, just before the Trade Disputes bill was tabled in the House of Commons.

The speech in question arose out of an interview between the Chancellor and the Civil Service Civil Rights Defense Committee. During the great strike the Civil Servants' unions, affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, had given financial support to the miners and sympathetic support to the T. U. C. but had not possessed the power to call upon their members to strike, and had not asked or expected them to do so. They had, however, advised their members not to volunteer for work other than their own. This qualified neutrality on the part of the Civil Servants' unions had roused much hostility in the Conservative party and the Government. The Defense Committee were interviewing the Chancellor on behalf of their own members. In reply to that Committee Mr. Churchill made some observations as to the origin of the general strike that illuminate subsequent Governmental action on the Trade Disputes bill. Mr. Churchill remarked:

We have to consider what happened last May. Reference has been made to that event, or series of events, as if they were a mere movement of spontaneous sympathy with the mining population; but I think that is a very mild and inadequate way of describing what actually took place. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress may have had the power to call out this or that particular union—the technical power—but they were authorized by their constituent body to act on behalf of the whole Congress of Trade Unions, and they made their plans with the utmost detail. *A regular plan of campaign was developed over months of preparation deciding which services were to be paralyzed on which day, who were the first line troops, and who were the shock troops . . . all this was worked out by the general staff. A vast plan was set up similar to the mobilization that takes place for the defence of a country against a foreign enemy, and the object of this plan was to paralyse the whole of the services*

¹⁸⁴ Parliamentary Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, Weekly edition, April 6, 1927.

of the community, their food, their fuel, their locomotion, everything on which their lives and their health depends; to paralyse them completely, with a view to intimidating Parliament (newly elected) into doing what, according to its sovereign and paramount right, it was not prepared to do.⁸⁵

Any reader who has considered the evidence offered in the four chapters immediately preceding, must recognize the extraordinary thoroughness with which Mr. Churchill had either remained utterly ignorant of the actual facts respecting the alleged "long preparation" by Labor for the great strike, or else had conveniently allowed himself to forget those facts in a surprisingly short period of time. The picture of the great strike as painted by the Chancellor would certainly imply that the civil-war psychosis, so evident in the columns of the *British Gazette* in May, 1926, was still existent in the Cabinet and was largely responsible for the form and stringency of their Trade Disputes Bill as it first appeared to the world, in April, 1927.

Before proceeding to the actual text of the bill itself, it is of interest to notice the activities of an organization not directly connected either with the Government or with Labor. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce had carried on a long campaign for the amendment of the Trade Disputes Act of 1906, which had, in their opinion, by authorizing "peaceful picketing," made possible intimidation and violence. More than once that Association had endeavored to obtain from the Government of the day at least a special commission of inquiry as to the effect of that Act of 1906. In the fall of 1926 the Association compiled a report of its Special Committee on the subject of industrial unrest, and sent a copy of this report to the Prime Minister drawing his "special attention to the recommendations for new legislation." Among many suggestions contained in that report were the following:

It should be unlawful for a trade union to expel a member or deprive him of benefits for which he has already subscribed on the sole ground that he has refused to withhold his labour. The right of peacefully inviting any person to work or abstain from working should be confined to a limited number of persons, visibly identifiable,

⁸⁵ J. W. Bowen (Gen. Sec. of the Union of Post Office Workers), "Civil Service Unions and the Bill," *Labour Magazine*, May, 1927, p. 13. Italics ours.

and be exercised only at the entrances to the premises where the trade dispute exists, and in no other place.

The first provision would permit a man to share in all the benefits of his trade union as regards wage improvement, while leaving him free to work as a "strike-breaker" when his fellows were risking their positions and future in a trade dispute. The second provision would prevent any argument or persuasion save at the very gates of the factory or workshop where the dispute was occurring.

Further suggestions for legislative reform of trade union rules were the complete "renunciation of the right to strike or lock-out" in certain essential services, provided an efficient substitute were given "whereby all disputes and complaints" could be dealt with equitably. Any Civil Servant who gave physical or financial assistance to a trade union or employers' association for the purposes of a strike or a lock-out should by that act cease forthwith to be a Civil Servant. Only funds definitely contributed for the support of a political party by union members should be applied by the trade union in support of any political party.⁸⁸ These suggestions were held to be both justifiable and necessary in many employing circles, as witness a constant press comment in editorials, special articles and correspondence, during the months succeeding the general strike.

Ostensibly a bill drawn up to prevent by law any repetition of the general strike of 1926, and definitely defended on such grounds by the members of the Cabinet when its vague definitions and phrases were riddled by hostile criticism, the actual Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill of 1927, in its original form, was an astounding piece of clumsy class-warfare that bade fair to reopen the industrial wounds for years to come. Even as amended the Act stands today as the most reactionary sample of British labor legislation placed on the statute book since the evil Combination Laws of 1799-1800. During the bill's passage through the House of Lords, Lord Reading, once head of the English Bar, Lord Chief Justice of England, Ambassador to America, and for many years Viceroy of India, could condemn its form and purpose by saying it "offered not a single ray of

⁸⁸ John Hamilton, "The Legal Attack on Trade Unions," *The People*, April, 1927.

light for the workingmen⁸⁶ of Britain, and by the assertion:

When I take the bill as a whole and look through it as I have done with great care, consider it clause by clause, I say without hesitation that it is a bill which in the language it uses is more vague, more indefinite, more lacking in precision in respect of the crimes which it indicates and the penalties which follow upon them, than any bill I have ever seen or any Act of Parliament I have had to construe either as a law officer or as a judge.⁸⁷

The Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act of 1927 consists of eight sections. The first section declares that "*any strike is illegal if it has any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in which the strikers are engaged.*" Further, any strike is illegal "if it is a strike designed or calculated to coerce the Government *either directly or by inflicting hardship upon the community.*" It is illegal "to commence, or continue, or to apply any sums in furtherance or support of, any such illegal strike."⁸⁸ The penalty for any person who "declares, instigates, incites others to take part in or otherwise acts in furtherance of a strike" declared by the Act to be illegal, is a fine not exceeding ten pounds (\$50) or imprisonment not exceeding three months, and this upon "summary conviction" before any two justices of the peace, or any one stipendiary magistrate! If convicted on indictment, however, the prison penalty may be as long as two years.⁸⁹ In the event of a strike being illegal, the first section of the Act also renders liable the trade union funds in respect of civil damages which may be awarded to employers or others; thus definitely taking away from the unions rights that were given to them deliberately when the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 was made law. Besides declaring certain types of strikes illegal, as detailed above, the first section of the Act, as finally passed, placed certain types of lock-outs in the same category of illegal acts, provided they too were calculated to coerce the Government, or for other than the furtherance of a trade dispute.

⁸⁶ C. F. G. Masterman, *op. cit.*, p. 541. Cf. *Hesard (Lords)*, July 4, 1927, col. 79.

⁸⁷ 17 & 18 Geo. 5. Ch. 22. Section 1, (1) For full text of this Act see Appendix E. *Italics ours.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Section 1, (2).

As the bill had first reached the House of Commons the phrasing of the first section was even more lacking in precision, declaring that any strike was illegal which "was designed or calculated to coerce the Government, or to intimidate the community or any substantial portion of the community."⁹⁰ All that was necessary to render strikers and union officials conspirators in a criminal undertaking, in the case of a sympathetic strike, was the judgment of two magistrates that such a dispute was "calculated" to "intimidate . . . any substantial portion of the community." Obviously under such a law the individual workman would be constantly in the dark as to whether or not he was committing an illegal act by obeying his official's orders to strike. In the original bill, moreover, there was no parallel inclusion of illegal lock-outs. This omission was admittedly intentional on the part of the Government, the Attorney General, Sir Douglas Hogg, declaring in the Second Reading debate that the inclusion of lock-outs in the bill would be "inept and useless."⁹¹

The agreement to put lock-outs on the same plane as strikes placed the Government in an awkward situation. Their definition of a strike was a concerted refusal of employees "to continue to work or to accept employment." Such a definition made any stoppage of work a "strike." "The Government evidently intended in their original Bill that all stoppages should be classifiable as strikes, and that was probably the reason why they deliberately, as the Attorney General said, refrained from extending it to cover lock-outs."⁹²

The injustice that such a one-sided bill would have created was evident. A refusal to accept a reduction in wages, (such as was offered the miners in May, 1926), would have been a "strike," and had the effect of such a "strike" been to "coerce the Government" or to "intimidate any substantial portion of the community," or even had there been additional ends besides the furtherance of the trade dispute (such as the continuance of a subsidy, or the enforcement of the Samuel Report), then such "strikers" would at once have become criminal offenders and

⁹⁰ Text of the Bill as first issued, in *The Labour Year Book*, 1927, p. 21.

⁹¹ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 6, 1927.

⁹² *Manchester Guardian*, May 12, 1927.

their officials "investigators" of crime. When the Government agreed to include lock-outs in their bill alongside of strikes and to define when such lock-outs would be illegal, they were faced with the difficulty of saying what was left that could be called a lock-out, since all refusal "to continue work or accept employment" had already been termed a *strike*! This was but one instance of the manner in which the Government's bill was exposed section by section as a crudely framed piece of restrictive class legislation.

The most serious aspect of the first section is the rendering illegal of any effective sympathetic strike, no matter how strictly it may be industrial in its aims, no matter how plainly it may be in the furtherance of a trade dispute. Sir Douglas Hogg admitted that under the bill transport workers would have to handle "black-leg" coal, in the event of a mining stoppage. If they refused to handle such coal, even if they gave due and legal notice to end their contracts and though their handling of coal might well ruin the miners' chances of a successful strike, the transport workers' leaders would be liable for criminal prosecution. In view of the outcry against broken contracts during the general strike the complete omission of such a factor from the section defining illegal strike is significant. Furthermore, under this first section, a strike need not be of a sympathetic nature, but may be confined strictly to one industry or trade, yet will be illegal provided only it be calculated to coerce the Government, or have any object other than the furtherance of a trade dispute. Thus a large-scale strike in the mining industry would be illegal were it at all clear that some semi-political object were also among the aims of the strikers, such as the enforcement of some change in the legal limit of hours which the mine workers might be permitted to labor.²²

Having rendered illegal, or at the best extremely precarious, any sympathetic strike and many other strikes strictly confined to one single industry or trade, the Act continues in its second

²² "According to the Attorney General a miners' strike to enforce the repeal of the Eight Hours Act would not be illegal. But we have only his word for that, and the plain language of the Bill, which is all a Judge would consider, suggests that such a strike might be held to be illegal because it has an object "in addition to" the furtherance of a trade dispute and is certainly likely to bring pressure upon the Government.—*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 20, 1927.

section to protect "persons refusing to take part in illegal strikes or lock-outs." Members of a trade union who disobey a strike call, in a strike that ultimately may be declared illegal under the Act, and who are expelled from the union as punishment for this disobedience, may claim damages payable out of the union funds, in lieu of restoration to membership in the union. In view of the complete lack of certainty, in the future, as to what particular strike would or would not be strictly legal, this second section lays the unions open to grave risk of serious damage claims, or to the alternative of considerable "black-legging" by union members who dare not risk the possibility of partaking in a criminal act.

A final clause in this section makes the Act retroactive to May 1, 1926, thus protecting the mine owners whose "lock-out" began on the last day of April, but including the general strike, which did not begin until the fourth of May! The subtlety of this date is not revealed unless the text of the original bill is compared with the Act. In the original bill the right to claim for expulsion from a union, under this section, was made effective for *any* strike in the near or distant past which would have been illegal had the Act then been in force. But in the original bill there were no such things as *lock-outs!*

The third section of the Act concerns the "prevention of intimidation," an excellent aim, but concealing a wholesale attack upon the rights hitherto possessed by union members to picket in a dispute. The right to picket is severely curtailed, and what is prohibited is so vague as to render almost all forms of picketing dangerous and the pickets liable to prosecution. In the original bill the term "intimidate" implied to create "in the mind of a person a reasonable apprehension of injury to him or to any member of his family," and the expression "injury" included *other than physical or material injury*. Apprehension of boycott, or "of exposure to hatred, ridicule, or contempt" would thus have come under the terms of the bill. This clause of the bill was so palpably ridiculous that it was finally laughed out of court. But even in the Act as it became law the effect of this section is virtually to take the union pickets back to the days of 1876, which permitted peaceful communication, but not peaceful persuasion.

So far the Act deals with strikes and lock-outs that are illegal under the Act, and with certain union rules and customs for conducting strikes. In the fourth section the Act betrays completely the ulterior motives behind this legislation. Under no stretch of the imagination can section four be held to have anything remotely to do with the prevention of general strikes in the future. Having severely restricted the industrial rights and powers of the unions, the Act next attacks the political levy by which funds may be raised for the political representation of trade union interests in the House of Commons.

The statutory right granted in 1913 to trade unions to use their funds for political purposes, in other words for the furtherance of the political Labor party, is very seriously curtailed. Hitherto any trade union member who objected to have his membership fees used for political purposes could "contract out" by signing a document to that effect. Under the 1927 Act this is reversed, so that only those union members may be levied for political ends who have previously signed a document definitely expressing a wish to be contributors. No funds of any union may be used for political purposes save only such contributions made by members after they have signified their desire in the manner stated above. "The proposal to alter the law to the detriment of the Labour Party at this moment," says the *Manchester Guardian* editorially, "at the instance of a party which is rich in political funds and depends upon rich men, can only create the worst impression."⁴

Sections five and six of the Act have only indirect relation to the prevention of a general strike, or even of an "illegal" strike. Section five prohibits civil servants from joining or remaining members of any union unless such union is "confined to persons employed by or under the Crown." Any such union must be completely independent of any federation of other unions, must not include political objects in its aims, nor be associated even indirectly with any political organization or party. Any established civil servant who contravenes the regulations made under this section is henceforth disqualified from remaining a member of the civil service. This section caused the separation of the many civil service unions from the Trades

⁴ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, April 8, 1927.

Union Congress and the Labor party, and left them to the tender mercies of the particular government in power, as far as wages, hours and general conditions were concerned. Moreover this, like the three preceding sections, was in direct line with the legislative proposals drawn up and submitted to the "special attention" of the Prime Minister, by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce in the fall of 1926.⁵⁵

Under section six municipal employees, or employees of any public authority (such as the Port of London Authority) are made liable for breach of contract of their employment not only to civil action for damages but to criminal prosecution with a penalty of a fine not exceeding ten pounds (\$50) or imprisonment for three months, on summary conviction by two magistrates or a stipendiary magistrate. Section six, in addition, makes it illegal for a local or public authority to require trade union membership as a condition of employment. By amendment of the original bill the Act even prohibits such authorities from exacting in any contract the condition that all persons employed by the contractors shall be union members.⁵⁶

Section seven of the Act returns to illegal strikes, by giving the Attorney General the right to obtain an injunction against a trade union, restraining such a union from applying its funds in contravention of section one of the Act—a provision that "puts the Government of the day in a position to determine what strikes it will allow and what it will not."⁵⁷ Such an action taken by the Attorney General would very quickly dry up all sources of continuing a strike, and would cause its collapse by financial if not by physical starvation.

The final section of the Act contains, perhaps, the gem of the whole restrictive program:

For the purposes of this Act—the expression "strike" means the cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any trade or industry acting in combination, or a concerted refusal, or a refusal

⁵⁵ Cf. *supra*, pp. 486f.

⁵⁶ The precise words of the Act are "shall or shall not be a member of a trade union," but in practice that enactment simply prevents the large number of municipalities, who aim at a trade union standard of working conditions for their workers, from ensuring that such shall be the case in work undertaken by contractors.

⁵⁷ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 6, 1927.

under a common understanding of any number of persons who are, or have been, so employed, to continue to work or to accept employment.⁹⁸

"Never yet," comments Mr. Sidney Webb, "in the whole history of English law, unless, indeed, such a provision can be supposed to have existed in the Middle Ages, has it been sought to make it a criminal offence for persons not actually in employment to refuse 'under a common understanding' to accept employment on the employer's terms." Mr. Webb shows that under the Act, in the case of an "illegal strike," it would be a criminal act by such men who had recently been in the employ of the employers in the dispute, and might indeed have been discharged by the employers, to refuse to continue in their employ, "under a common understanding" with those workers who were, at the moment the strike commenced, actually in the employ of the masters in question.⁹⁹ Mr. Arthur Pugh, President of the General Council during the period of the general strike, speaking at the annual convention of the American Federation of Labor at Los Angeles, declared that

The Act actually lays it down that a worker who refuses to accept employment under a common understanding with other workers in any strike which under its provisions may be deemed to be illegal becomes guilty of a criminal offence. It is almost unthinkable that a British Government should go so far in the direction of re-establishing industrial serfdom.¹⁰⁰

The stubborn battle in the House of Commons against the passage into law of the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act of 1927, is of minor interest to this study, except to show the determination with which the two groups fought out the finale of the general strike battle on the political field. The "Closure," not used since 1921, was called into service by Premier Baldwin, and the bill pushed through by sheer weight of his overwhelming party majority.¹⁰¹ The Liberal party was divided in its opinion

⁹⁸ 17 & 18 Geo. 5. Ch. 22, §. (2) (a). Italics ours.

⁹⁹ Rt. Hon. Sidney Webb (now Lord Passfield), "Towards Industrial Conscrition," *Labour Magazine*, May, 1927, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Labour Magazine*, Jan., 1928, pp. 403-4.

¹⁰¹ The Bill passed its third reading in the Commons on June 23 by a majority of 215, and became law on the 29th of July, 1927. Certain of its provisions, however, did not go into effect until Jan. 1, 1928.

on the Act, but the Labor movement as a whole, right and left wings alike, were united in opposition to the measure. A vast campaign was organized to take the fight to the country and countless meetings and articles, leaflets and discussions resulted during and after the passage of the bill into law. The total result of the campaign was distinctly disappointing to the union leaders, and the general depression and lassitude of the labor ranks was as great a contrast to the unanimity and universality of the response during the period of the general strike as could well be imagined. The lack of any violent or mass protest to this Act on the industrial field, however, should not lead one to the belief that the ranks of the trade union movement were permanently crushed. The history of British Labor is against any such conclusion. For the time being the leaders and the ranks tacitly admitted their inability to do more than mark time. But it is common knowledge that no Labor Government *independent of the Liberal party* would be long in office before it repealed or drastically amended the Act of 1927.¹⁰² In the meantime, *pace* the demands of the small but noisy Communist minority, the hope of the trade unions in the immediate future lies in the return to power of a Labor Government, with a sufficient Parliamentary majority to effect such amendment.

THE "MOND SCHEME"

With the passage of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927, the organized labor movement was faced with a very grave situation legally, with little hope of redress unless and until some government came into power willing and able to repeal or amend that Act. This situation was fully realized in the speech of Mr. George Hicks, president of the British Trades Union Congress at its 59th annual meeting in Edinburgh, September, 1927.

In that speech appeared the first intimation that organized labor was prepared to make overtures of cooperation with the organized employers if any group of the latter were prepared to meet labor in a similar spirit. Considering the vindictive character of the Trade Disputes Bill as first introduced into Parliament and the long campaign against its proposals in the

¹⁰² Cf. Sir Henry Slesser, "Some Sidights on the Trade Disputes Bill," *Labour Magazine*, May 1927, p. 10.

country, such an offer from labor was surprisingly magnanimous to say the least, even if it were partly motivated by the wisdom of accepting a situation of temporary defeat. Referring to the transitional period through which industry was passing Mr. Hicks declared:

Much fuller use can be made under these conditions of the machinery for joint consultation and negotiation between employers and employed. We have not reached the limits of possible development in this direction. It is more than doubtful whether we have seen the fullest possible development of machinery for joint consultation in particular industries. And practically nothing has yet been done to establish effective machinery of joint conference between the representative organisations entitled to speak for industry as a whole.

Discussion on these lines would bring both sides face to face with the hard realities of the present economic situation, and might yield useful results in showing how far and upon what terms coöperation is possible in a common endeavor to improve the efficiency of industry and to raise the workers' standard of life.¹⁰³

Considerable attention was given to this passage by the press, but for a while nothing appeared to come of it. In October the Federation of Employers' Organizations issued a statement expressing the view that their aims could best be achieved by the utilization of machinery already in existence. The Engineering Employers' Federation shortly afterwards declared that the problems of industry could best be treated by discussion in the workshop and through the industrial machinery in the shops. Not until November 23, 1927, did the General Council receive any indication that this tentative offer of coöperative inquiry had borne any fruit. On that date a letter signed by some twenty leading industrialists, headed by Sir Alfred Mond, now Lord Melchett, was received by Mr. Citrine, secretary of the General Council.¹⁰⁴ Part of the now famous letter ran as follows:

As there appears to us, after investigation, to be no single existing organisation of employers which can take the initiative in inviting discussions to cover the entire field of industrial reorganisation and industrial relations, we desire, as a representative group of employers,

¹⁰³ British T. U. C. *President's Address*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Herald*, Sept. 7, 1928, reporting speech of Mr. Citrine at the annual meeting of the Trades Union Congress at Swansea.

to extend to the General Council of the T. U. C. an invitation to meet us to consider questions relating to these matters.

We realise that industrial reconstruction can be undertaken only in conjunction with and with the coöperation of those entitled and empowered to speak for organised labour.

The prosperity of industry can, in our view, be fully attained only by full and frank recognition of facts as they exist, and an equally full and frank determination to increase the competitive power of British industries in the world's markets, coupled with free discussion of the essentials upon which that can be based.¹⁰⁶

The General Council accepted the invitation, and appointed a sub-committee to consider the most suitable subjects for such joint discussion. The Council made it perfectly clear that they entered into such discussions "without prejudice" and without "surrendering principles which they held to be fundamental." Lord Melchett (then Sir Alfred Mond) as chairman of the employers' group assured the General Council that the function of the joint discussion would be investigation, not negotiation. The question immediately arose as to the extent to which that employers' group might be held to represent employers as a whole. It was found that they represented directorships in nearly 100 companies, chairmanships of nearly 90 of those companies, and capital of over one billion pounds sterling. Among them, moreover, was the chairman of the National Federation of Employers' Organizations, the president of the Association of Chambers of Commerce, and five members of the Executive of the Federation of British Industries. This group of men, gathered together by Lord Melchett, contained men "notoriously more sympathetic to an approach to industrial problems in a new spirit" than some of the existing heads of the various employers' organizations.¹⁰⁶

In the General Council's annual report to the Trades Union Congress for 1928 the reasons for acceptance of such an investigation were clearly stated.

Broadly speaking there were three possible lines of policy open to the Trade Union Movement. The first was to say frankly that the unions will do everything possible to bring the industrial machine to a standstill, to ensure by all possible means the breakdown of the entire system, in the hope of creating a revolutionary situation on the

¹⁰⁶ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Dec. 25, 1927.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. also *Daily Herald*, Sept. 7, 1928, Citrine's speech.

assumption that this might be turned to the advantage of the workers and to the abolition of Capitalism. *That policy the Trade Union Movement has decisively rejected as futile, certain to fail, and sure to lead to bloodshed and misery.*

The second course open to the movement was to stand aside and tell the employers to "get on with their own job" while the unions remained purely sectional and fighting instruments. Such a course would be "inconsistent with the modern demand for a completely altered status of the workers in industry" and a confession of failure on the part of the unions themselves.

The third course is for the Trade Union Movement to say boldly that not only is it concerned with the prosperity of industry, but that it is going to have a voice as to the way industry is carried on, so that it can influence the new developments that are taking place. The ultimate policy of the Movement can find more use for an efficient industry than for a derelict one, and the unions can use their power to promote and guide the scientific reorganisation of industry as well as to obtain material advantages from the reorganisation.¹⁰⁷

The General Council had the more readily entered such discussions inasmuch as the employers' group, representing officially no organization, were the more able to discuss matters frankly and informally.¹⁰⁸

The sub-committee on the subjects to be discussed at the joint conferences considered the list offered by the employers, and added further topics of their own.¹⁰⁹ The most important outcome of the first six months' discussions between the sub-committees of the T. U. C. and the Mond groups was the proposal for a National Industrial Council. Such a Council would consist on the

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Herald*, Aug. 27, 1928.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 7, 1928.

¹⁰⁹ The list proposed by the Employers' groups follows: Rationalization and amalgamation. Security and status of the workers. Housing, health and unemployment insurance. Education and industry. Effects of taxation and rates. Works councils. Financial participation by the workers. Investigation into the causes of disputes. Creation of a permanent standing committee.

The additional list proposed by the T. U. C. sub-committee included the following topics, among others: Trade union recognition. Collective bargaining. Participation of labor in the benefits of increased production. Minimum wage principles. Organization, technique and control of industry. Technical education. Industrial finance, including banking and credit systems and policy. Publicity for the facts of industry. International agreements and conventions.

trade union side of the full membership of the General Council, and on the other of an equal number of employers nominated by the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations and the Federation of British Industries. One of the functions of such a joint Council would be the establishment of conciliation boards for investigation into such trade disputes as might be referred to them by the parties engaging in a dispute, before the dispute had actually arrived at the point of a strike or a lock-out. Such machinery would be entirely voluntary and would involve no element of compulsion. This and other proposals of the T. U. C. sub-committee were adopted at a session of the General Council on June 26, 1928, by eighteen votes to four. Among the absentees from that meeting were four other strong supporters of the scheme.¹¹⁰

Opposition developed to the joint discussions almost from the start, on the part of Mr. A. J. Cook, within the General Council itself, and by various trade unions, including the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and the South Wales Miners. The reasons for opposition varied, from Mr. Cook's distrust of any action that smacked even of discussion with Capitalism, to those of Mr. Brownlie (of the Engineers) who held that the employers' groups represented no official authority, whereas discussions with them might well involve compromise of union principles that would be dangerous.¹¹¹ On the side of the employers the ship-building employers held that their own industry was best able to settle its own affairs, and the engineering employers gave utterance to much the same view. At the same time, as the scheme progressed, it appeared that the two chief employers' organizations might find themselves in some difficulty if they refused point blank to consider favorably the Melchett-T. U. C. proposals for a National Industrial Council.¹¹² The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, in spite of herculean efforts to prevent it by their Secretary, A. J. Cook, passed a resolution in support of the Mond-T. U. C. discussion by a card vote of 809,000 to 192,000, and their president, Mr. Herbert Smith, stated their official attitude at the Swansea Trades Union Congress in September, 1928,

¹¹⁰ *London Times*, June 27, 1928.

¹¹¹ *Daily Herald*, May 23 and 26, and June 27, 1928. Cf. *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Jan. 20, June 22 and 29, 1928.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Dec. 23, 1927, and June 29, 1928.

strongly condemning his own colleague's intransigent attitude.¹¹³

The final and overwhelming vindication of the attitude taken by President Ben Turner of the General Council, and the majority of his colleagues on the Council, towards the Mond conferences, was seen in the annual meeting of the T. U. C. at Swansea in September, 1928, when a report of progress was made to the delegates and a long and thorough debate upon the whole question held. The opposition in its various forms was represented by Messrs. Cook; Brownlie and Swales (of the engineers); and Mr. George Hicks, president of the General Council in the previous congress, and himself the originator of the suggestion that joint discussions should be held. Mr. Brownlie moved to refer the whole report to the unions, the joint discussions to be suspended in the meantime, but his motion was defeated by 2,920,000 votes to 768,000. The Council's report and recommendations that the joint discussions be continued was carried by a vote of 3,075,000 to 566,000.¹¹⁴

Ten years after the end of the Great War, with the memory of many threatened and one actual general strike to their record, organized British labor in its annual parliament thus decided that coöperation in industrial reconstruction was preferable to industrial warfare, provided the great organizations of capital were willing on their side to attempt the more rational method.¹¹⁵ The interesting situation that may yet arise from any really successful experiment of coöperation between the great national organizations of labor and capital will be the position of the public in relation to the combined decisions of the two bodies.

¹¹³ *Daily Herald*, July 21, and Sept. 7, 1928.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Herald*, Sept. 7, 1928. *London Times*, Sept. 7, 1928.

¹¹⁵ The reception of the Mond-Turner scheme by the two national organizations of employers was in the nature of a refusal, in so far as the definite proposals of the Mond-Turner Conference were concerned. The Federation of British Industries and the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations did express their willingness to meet with the General Council of the T. U. C. for the further promotion of industrial peace.

Despite the widespread feeling that the employers' organizations would have been glad to have the trade union group drop all further discussion the General Council of the T. U. C. accepted this invitation. Late in December, 1928, a rather innocuous agreement was arrived at by the three bodies for methods of further discussion of important industrial problems. This agreement was still far from adopting the more effective National Industrial Council suggested by the Mond-Turner Conference. Cf. *London Times*, Feb. 14, and March 1, 1929, and *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Dec. 27, 1929.

The position that such a body as a National Industrial Council might ultimately occupy, while not easy to forecast, is one that in purely industrial matters might well come to acquire an authority that Parliament itself would find it difficult to resist. Whether Mr. Winston Churchill and his more extreme colleagues in the Baldwin Cabinet would view that eventuality with as much alarm as they viewed the mythical "Soviet Government" of the General Council of the T. U. C., during the great strike of 1926, is a matter for philosophical and skeptical speculation.

CHAPTER XIV

GERMANY IN 1920: THE GENERAL STRIKE THAT SAVED THE REPUBLIC

It is one of the ironies of history that the one really successful general strike should have taken place, not in France, the home of general strike theory, nor in England, where both the earliest and the greatest general strikes were staged, nor even in the lands of more revolutionary tradition, Spain, Italy, and Russia. It is even more ironical that the successful strike should have been conducted, not to destroy a government, but to save it. How nearly even this general strike in the German cities in 1920 approached failure can be seen only as the story is told.

As might have been expected from the history of general strike theory in Germany, outlined in Part I, Chapter VII, when the Great War threatened the German nation few if any of the Social-Democrats were ready to oppose the war actively, and no agitation was raised for a general strike against the war. Entering the war with a mentality not greatly different from that of the militarists, the Social-Democrats were, however, the first to come to a more rational view. A small but growing section, under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht, the arch-enemy of militarism, within a few months of the war's outbreak, began to vote against fresh war credits and in favor of a general strike against war.¹ Opposition to the war was itself divided. The more extreme group under Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg began in 1916 to issue a secret organ called *Spartacus*, coming into close touch with Lenin, Trotsky, and Radek, who were at that time still political exiles in Switzerland. By the time the revolution broke loose in Germany in November, 1918, the Liebknecht group had become the *Spartacists* or German Communists.

Another and larger group of German socialists broke away from the Majority Social-Democrats in 1916 over the question of submarine warfare, and, under the leadership of Haase,

¹ *Enq. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 210. Cf. H. G. Daniels, *The Rise of the German Republic*, pp. 2-4.

Kautsky, and Bernstein, formed the party of the Independent Social-Democrats. Liebknecht gained some support from the trade unions in Berlin owing to the fact that Richard Müller, leader of the Metal Workers' Union, was one of his adherents. Except for the cities of Leipzig and Munich the workers in the provinces remained supporters of the Majority Social-Democrats, not even going as far as the Independents in their attitude toward the war.²

THE COMING OF THE REVOLUTION

The success of the Russian Soviets in seizing power in November, 1917, stirred the Spartacist and Independent groups to their depths, but found the Majority Social-Democrats distinctly hostile to any proletarian dictatorship. In January and February, 1918, a series of munitions strikes occurred in Germany that almost reached the scale of a revolution. Though not begun or organized by the Majority Social-Democrats, these strikes were promptly taken over and controlled by them, and thus kept in check and out of the hands of the extremists. This method of seizing the reins, whenever a movement among the workers came too near to revolution, was used more than once in the mass risings of the next two years.³

In September, 1918, the German general staff at last admitted the possibility of defeat, a possibility that many a civilian had seen some years before but had not dared make public. Now, with almost the same suddenness as the on-coming of the War, its collapse threatened the German people. The revolution that followed so swiftly was more the longing of soldiers and workers to be rid of the intolerable burden of a militaristic and bureaucratic state, than an intelligent seeking after the rule of the proletariat or even of the Socialists. The largest organized party of the workers, the Majority Social-Democrats, was, indeed, as unready for the revolution as were the British labor leaders for

² When Liebknecht was tried for treason and sentenced to penal servitude for over four years, in 1918, an unauthorized strike of the metal workers caused grave disorders in Berlin and Spandau. The main result of this strike was the "preventive" arrest of Rosa Luxemburg, and her imprisonment until the revolution of 1918.—*New York Evening Post*, Jan. 17, 1919. Cf. Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

the general strike of 1926. "Power fell out of the hands of the ruling classes in Germany, not because the masses were ready or even anxious to take that power, but because the old régime was exhausted . . . The would-be new Germany won a cheap victory, not through its own intrinsic strength, but through its opponents' weakness."⁴ Not, indeed, until the defeat of the monarchist attempt to seize power in the *Kapp-Putsch*, did it become at all clear that the German workers were really determined to retain the republican form of government.

The proclamation of a republic and the abdication of the Hohenzollern dynasty, was the immediate outcome of two major factors, the sudden and complete loss of nerve on the part of Ludendorff and the general staff and the outbreak of mutiny among sections of the armed forces and of a general strike among the civilian workers.⁵ The most serious mutiny occurred at Wilhelmshaven, Kiel, and Hamburg late in October and early in November, as a result of the refusal of certain battleship crews to obey orders to put to sea. The men fully recognized that such an order meant a last desperate effort to save the military situation, at the expense of the men themselves and of the possible peace negotiations, and flatly disobeyed the orders, the stokers drawing the fires. The mutiny was not a revolution, in its first stages, but a spontaneous expression of mass exasperation.

The new cabinet of Prince Max of Baden, recently created Chancellor, was in power. Prince Max appointed his Secretary of State to investigate the mutiny on the spot. The latter demanded that he be accompanied by a Majority Social-Democrat deputy from the Reichstag, and the choice fell on Gustav Noske, who had done much during the war to voice the complaints of soldiers in the Reichstag. Noske, who loomed large in the events preceding the *Kapp-Putsch*, was accustomed to masses of men in labor strikes and he treated the mutinous sailors of Kiel as merely another kind of strikers.⁶ The naval authorities supported him and Noske recommended that all the demands of the Sailors' Council, which was already in full control, should be granted. Noske remained in Kiel as Governor until he was called upon to undertake the organization of an armed force for the

⁴ M. Phillips Price, *Germany in Transition*, p. 3.

⁵ Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-28.

⁶ Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel, bis Kapp*, pp. 10-24.

protection of the Republic, and was appointed Minister of National Defense.⁷

The flight of the Kaiser to Spa on October 29 disheartened the monarchists and gave courage to the extremists. The Spartacist group was the only party actively agitating for revolution. The Independents wished to see a completely Socialist government, but the Majority Social-Democrats were still anxious, even at the beginning of November, not to break with the bourgeois parties, so little did they relish the unpleasant task of picking up the pieces of the defeated German Empire. The swift march of events outside Berlin finally forced the Majority Social-Democrats to formulate an ultimatum to Prince Max, wherein they demanded the abdication of the Kaiser and Crown Prince under threat of withdrawing their own members from the Max Government and of proclaiming a general strike.⁸ As late as November 6 the Majority Social-Democrat organ, *Vorwärts*, was appealing to its readers and warning them against the use of Russian methods and revolution, so little was the subsequent republican landslide desired by the orthodox Social-Democrats.⁹

The ultimatum was to expire at midday Friday, November 8, 1918, but the time was extended to Friday midnight. Events, however, moved too swiftly. When, in the early hours of Saturday morning, November 9, the Kaiser agreed to retire into Holland, the revolution had started. On Saturday morning many workers ceased work spontaneously, and at one o'clock the following fliersheet, calling for a general strike was issued from the offices of *Vorwärts*:

GENERAL STRIKE. The Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin has decided to call the General Strike. All factories are to stop. The necessary feeding of the population will continue. A large part of the garrison has put itself at the disposal of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in units armed with machine guns and rifles. The movement is to be led jointly by the Social-Democratic party of Germany and the Independent party. Workers and soldiers! See to

⁷ *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 216, 1900.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211. On Nov. 7 a vast meeting in Munich had demanded the Kaiser's abdication, and next day had proclaimed a Bavarian Free State. A "dictatorship of the proletariat" had been proclaimed in Lübeck, Bremen, Hanover, Brunswick, and Cologne by Nov. 7. Cf. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99.

⁹ "The Documentary History of the German Revolution," *The Living Age*, March 1, 1918.

it that quiet and order are maintained! Long live the Socialist Republic!
—THE WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' COUNCIL.¹⁰

How quickly the Majority Social-Democrats managed to gain control of the situation and once again suppress the general strike can be seen in a further flysheet issued that same afternoon in Berlin, announcing the success of the "revolution." The announcement commenced floridly enough: "Workers, Soldiers, Fellow Citizens! The Free State has come! Emperor and Crown Prince have abdicated! Fritz Ebert, the chairman of the Social-Democratic Party, has become Imperial Chancellor. . . ." A paragraph further along contained the significant statement:

The victory of the people has been won; it must not be dishonored by thoughtlessness. *Economic life and transport must be maintained at all costs. . . . Obey all the recommendations of the people's government and its representatives. It is acting in the closest union with the workers and soldiers. . . .*

The signatories were now two, and in this order—"The Executive of the Social-Democracy of Germany. The Workers' and Soldiers' Council."¹¹

It appears that the Spartacists were behind the movement for the general strike, and that they discovered at an early moment that a successful general strike required the full coöperation of the trade unions. As most of the trade union officers were controlled by Majority Social-Democrats this coöperation was not forthcoming. On the contrary the trade union agents on November 8 appear to have been instructed to prevent the strike. Proclamations were issued calling upon the workers to remain in their factories and to have nothing to do with the strikes. Such proclamations were not wholly successful, but they probably reduced the chances of a thoroughgoing general strike at that period.¹²

On Saturday, November 9, Chancellor Ebert, later to become the first President of the German Republic, issued a personal statement to the public in the form of yet another flysheet, informing the citizens of his efforts to form a people's government. In the course of this announcement Ebert made no direct mention

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

of the general strike but the following paragraph quite evidently had that disturbance in mind:

The political revolution must not disturb the feeding of the population. It must remain the first duty of all in town and in country not to hinder but to further the production of food and its transport into the towns. Want of food supplies means plunder and robbery, with misery for all. The poorest would suffer most, the industrial workers would be hit most hardy. *Whoever interferes with the supplies of food or other objects of necessity, or with the means of transport necessary to their distribution commits the heaviest sin against the community.* Fellow citizens! I beg you all most earnestly; Leave the streets. See that peace and order are maintained.¹⁸

THE THREAT OF PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP

Liebknecht, released from prison at the outbreak of the revolution, refused a seat in the coalition government, and with Rosa Luxemburg and Radek, the Russian Soviet representative, "worked furiously to proclaim a Soviet dictatorship on the spot." Workers' and soldiers' councils were spontaneously springing up everywhere, now that all wartime censorship of meetings and opinion was removed. On the first day of December a national executive committee of these councils was formed under the leadership of the Independent Däumig. As the councils excluded any middle or upper class individual this organization was looked upon by the Spartacists as the supreme authority in Germany. The Majority Social-Democrats held that all classes and parties should be represented in a republican parliament, and considered themselves only trustees of power until a Constituent Assembly should declare the will of the whole people.

On December 16 the Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils met in Berlin and after a stormy three day session were prevailed upon to accept the Majority Social-Democrats' view. Elections for the Constituent Assembly, which was to decide the future form of government for the German nation, were set for January 19. The Independents dubbed this decision "social treachery," and shortly afterwards the Spartacists appealed to arms against the acting government of Ebert. The government

¹⁸ "The Documentary History of the German Revolution," *The Living Age*, March 1, 1919. Italics ours.

used troops to suppress the Spartacist uprising, and the Independents thereupon resigned from the temporary government, leaving the Majority Social-Democrats in sole control.¹⁴

Early in January, 1919, both Spartacists and the Majority Social-Democrats again toyed with the weapon of the general strike, for reasons that must be briefly stated. The struggle between the Majority Social-Democrats and the Independent-Spartacist groups had centered around the formation of a drilled force of police and soldiers to keep order in Berlin. The extremists, with Eichhorn, the Independent Socialist Chief of Police, as their spokesman, desired to see a combination of a proletarian militia and the "People's Marine Division" (itself a mixed band of sailors on leave, of deserters and of unemployed) with control in the hands of the Berlin Workmen's Council.¹⁵ The Majority Social-Democrats, disturbed by the presence of such organizations, saw the need for some armed force that would be responsible to the government and not to the radical Workers' Council of Berlin. Hence a "Republican Soldiers' Corps" was organized by Commandant Wels from among the demobilized soldiers, with funds from foreign and "bourgeois" sources.¹⁶

Trouble arose when the Berlin Commandant, Wels, ordered the disarming of the People's Marine Division on the plea of disorderly conduct. The Majority members of the Government refused to deliver the pay due to the Marine Division until this disarmament was accomplished. Armed conflict resulted, in which the Government ordered a former general in the Kaiser's army to undertake the disarming of the Marine Division.¹⁷ As it happened, only 1,000 of the available soldiers obeyed General Lequis' orders to march against the Marine Division, and the latter were finally able to march out from their headquarters with their arms. As Chief of Police Eichhorn had been largely responsible for this failure, the Government proceeded to remove him from his office. Eichhorn declared he owed his position to the

¹⁴ *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 211. Cf. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53, and 62-72.

¹⁵ M. Phillips Price, *Germany in Transition*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27, citing Anton Fisher (Wels' colleague), *Die Revolutions-Kommandatur Berlin*, pp. 8-9. Cf. also Heinrich Ströbel, *Die deutsche Revolution, ihr Unglück und ihre Rettung*, 4th ed. p. 67.

¹⁷ M. Phillips Price, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

workers of Berlin and would not surrender to any other authority. Backed by his own forces, the ranks of the Independents, and the whole Spartacist party, he mobilized the streets in his own behalf.¹⁸

The actual revolutionary outbreak did not occur until January 5 and 6, 1919, but the events of the Christmas Eve debacle were its immediate cause. The more basic reasons for armed hostility between the two camps lay in the belief of the Spartacists and the ranks of the Independents that the revolution was not really complete until the proletariat was in command, as in Russia. The Ebert Government and the Majority Social-Democrats in general held that the revolution had ended when they came to power. The Government had felt that the majority of the German nation were behind them in opposing any proletarian dictatorship—and such proved to be the case when the Constituent Assembly was elected later in January. At the moment, however, the forces behind the extremists were greater than even the Spartacist leaders themselves were aware. In the great street demonstration on Sunday, January 5, "the Spartacist leaders themselves were surprised by the powerful response which their call to protest had elicited."¹⁹

When I heard Ledebour, Eichhorn, and Liebknecht haranguing the people from the balcony of the Police Headquarters in Alexanderplatz on Sunday afternoon the leaders manifestly did not suspect how strong was the feeling of their own audience and to what lengths they were already prepared to go. The seizures of the Wolff Bureau, *Vorwärts*, and other newspapers, and the chief telegraph office, which followed in the evening and during the night, were the work of the rank and file without the participation of any well-known leader. Late on Sunday night the excitement and tension reached such a pitch that there was no mistake about graver events following the next morning. *Both the revolutionaries and the Government proclaimed a general strike and called upon their followers to display their forces in the streets.*²⁰

The Government had presumably called for a general strike in the hope that the masses of their supporters in the streets

¹⁸ Berlin correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian*, issue of January 10, 1919. Cf. Daniels, *op cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, Jan. 10, 1919. Italics ours.

would overawe the extremists. As it was, Monday morning, January 6, saw the shops all closed and all work at a standstill. The vast crowds increased hourly; armed and unarmed soldiers and sailors, professional men, women and children thronged the streets, carrying placards declaring their stand, measuring the strength of their opponents, and massing before their respective headquarters. Noske, who had just returned from Kiel, describes how the Government's supporters clamored from the Wilhelmstrasse for arms to fight the extremists, while the People's Commissaries themselves stood undecided in Ebert's room in the Chancellor's Palace. Noske demanded a decision as to the use of armed force. Someone replied: "Then do the job yourself." Noske agreed, saying: "Very well, if you like. One of us must be the bloodhound. I shall not shirk the responsibility." He was promptly created Commander-in-Chief by Colonel Reinhardt, Prussian Minister of War, withdrew with General Maercker and other officers to a suburb of Berlin, and there organized six corps of volunteer rifles, foot and horse, under the command of General von Lüttwitz, a Prussian of the old school.²⁰

Noske had previously gone out among the two hundred thousand Spartacist supporters in the *Siegessäle* and the *Tiergarten* and had been much impressed. "If the throng had had determined leaders with clearly defined aims, in the place of a set of swashbucklers, Berlin would have been in their hands by noon."²¹ In this Noske agreed with the *Manchester Guardian* correspondent, already quoted, and strangely enough with one of the extremist leaders, Ledebour himself, who wrote a year later to the Berlin Communist paper, *Die Rote Fahne*, of the anxious and feverish excitement of the masses, waiting in the fog and cold, with rifles in their hands, for a lead in word or deed from their leaders. None was forthcoming, for their leaders were within doors "deliberating and deliberating" all Sunday and Monday. Finally announcement was made that the Ebert Government had been superseded by one consisting of Ledebour, Liebknecht, and Scholze.²²

The remainder of the tragic story of the attempted revolution by the Spartacists and their ultimate complete overthrow by the

²⁰ Noske, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-72.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²² Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Noske troops on and after January 10, with the brutal reprisals that followed when Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were killed while prisoners in the hands of the soldiers, does not directly concern this study, save in so far as it throws light upon the events of 1920. That the Volunteer Rifle Corps raised by General Maercker and Gustav Noske gravely misused their power is evident from the report of General Maercker himself, written on January 25, and published in his book, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr*. Machine gun fire went on, he reported, from the roofs of the houses in many of the main thoroughfares, in his opinion, not from the Spartacists but from the rank and file of his own corps! "In actual fact the population of Berlin was kept for ten days in terror of their lives by irresponsible elements of the *Freikorps*" (the Volunteers).²³

In two short months after the revolution had "succeeded," the old militaristic army officers were in control, put there by the actions of Noske and his Majority Social-Democrat Government. The thoroughgoing "socialization of industry" desired by the Independents and the dictatorship of the proletarian class urgently sought by the Spartacists, had both come to nothing. When, in February, the Constituent Assembly met at Weimar, a new government was formed of Majority Social-Democrats and two of the middle class German parties, the so-called Center and the Democrats, Ebert became president of the Republic, Scheidemann the Chancellor, and all left-wing socialists were left completely in the cold.²⁴

The more radical forces, even of the Majority Social-Democrats, did not relish this situation. Early in March, 1919, a final effort was made to force from the government some effective materialization of the original People's Commissaries' pledge to socialize the greater industries. Once again the weapon of the general strike was used, and once again it failed miserably before the governmental use of armed force and brutal reprisals. Although the Majority Social-Democrats were in a majority on the Berlin Workers' Council, discontent had become so general that Independents and Spartacists on the Council were able to carry their resolution for a general strike. The officials of the

²³ E. Phillips Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93, quoting General Maercker, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²⁴ *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed., II, 212.

Majority Social-Democrats brought further opprobrium upon themselves when they issued an appeal against the general strike under the head "Against Tyranny." On the same day, Monday, March 3, the Berlin Workers' Council met to discuss the strike declaration, and after a four-hour debate decided that it should commence that very evening. The demands were mainly of a political nature, including the liberation of political prisoners, the abolition of court martial, the reopening of diplomatic relations with Russia, the dissolution of Noske's volunteer corps, and the trial before a revolutionary tribunal of the Hohenzollerns, Ludendorff and Hindenburg. A further motion of the Spartacists, that Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske be similarly brought to trial was defeated but remained one of the aims of the strike leaders.²⁰

The prelude for the general strike was a walk-out of the Berlin printers, decided upon over the heads of the union officials. Most of the important newspapers ceased to appear. The moment the general strike was declared the means of communication in the city were paralyzed; trolleys, subways and elevators ceased to run. "On Tuesday morning the entire industry of the city stood still, the banks were closed, and the stores were emptied, their curtains pulled down. Every wheel had stopped." The Government attempted to compromise, pledging a bill to socialize industry and the recognition of the soviets as industrial parliaments. At the same time Noske started from Weimar and government troops under General Lüttwitz occupied all the important buildings in Berlin. Spartacist leaders were arrested and their printing presses seized. The People's Marine Division, bone of contention in the January trouble, and the Republican Guard, formed by Commandant Wels but now turned radical, joined the strikers against the troops.²¹

On the morning of March 5 the executive of the German Federation of Labor, hitherto always controlled by government socialists, declared themselves in favor of the strike. That day the strike committee decided to extend the strike to the electric, gas and water plants, a decision fatal to the unity of the com-

²⁰ Sidney Zimand, "The German General Strike," *Socialist Review* (N. Y.), March, 1920.

²¹ *Ibid.*

mittee, for the Majority Social-Democrat members thereupon resigned, rather than take part in what they deemed a criminal decision. From that moment the strike declined. Meanwhile the government troops were reinforced and for the first time every weapon of modern warfare was used from artillery to aeroplane bombs. By Saturday, March 8, the defeat both of the general strike and of the revolution was complete, and the reprisals began in good earnest. Every worker's house was searched for weapons and without even the summary method of the court martial fifteen hundred men, women, and boys were executed in a single week in Berlin, the majority by machine gun fire against handcuffed, massed prisoners.²⁷

For this unspeakably brutal aftermath Noske himself was responsible. The troops, using war methods on civilians and finding resistance to their rough methods when they attempted house to house visitations, appealed to Noske for support. The latter issued his infamous decree of March 9, illegal even under the Prussian law, which declared: "The atrocities and bestiality of the Spartacists fighting against us compel me to issue the following order: Any person encountered fighting with weapons in his hands against Government troops is to be shot at once." The military placed the widest possible interpretation upon Noske's decree, one officer so far losing his head as to seize twenty-nine sailors who had just come off guard with their arms and were drawing their pay, place them against a wall and blow them to pieces with a machine gun. If this could occur even to troops, the chances of the mere worker-civilian were slim indeed. As far as the general strike was concerned, it carried the germs of its own defeat. "In every instance the lack of food became acute immediately; there were no local reserves, and the strike thus proved to be a strike against the strikers themselves."²⁸

The struggle of the Spartacist group to bring a soviet form of government into Germany met final defeat in the Munich struggle under Kurt Eisner and, after his assassination, under more violent revolutionaries. A Red Army was raised in that city, a general strike declared, plundering instituted under the guise of requisitioning, and a revolutionary tribunal set up. For

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8. Cf. Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

nearly a month Munich, cut off from the rest of the world, was terrorized. The Bavarian Peasants' Union declared a blockade against the city, refusing to send any food until the revolutionary government retired. On April 29 the German government troops completely surrounded Munich, and by the first of May the city was taken, with excesses on both sides similar to those which had occurred earlier in the year in Berlin. Thenceforward Munich was the center of such reactionary activity as might have been expected.²⁹

REACTION TRIES ITS HAND: THE KAPP-PUTSCH

The political and industrial reactionaries in Germany, like their kind elsewhere, seemed to learn little or nothing from the experience of the war and the revolution. In their contempt for their working class opponents they seriously underestimated their actual power. Unkind fate had forced the Socialists into the position of being the signatories to the treaty of peace and it was, therefore, easy enough for the ultra-patriots to associate them with national treachery. Because discredited leaders such as Ludendorff had escaped direct penalty for their deeds they failed to recognize how deeply the hatred of their militarism had entered the souls of the majority of the workers. Hence it happened that early in 1920 the first overt attempt of the reactionaries was made, hastened as it was by the provision, contained in the Versailles Treaty, for the reduction of the German Army to 100,000 by March 31.³⁰

Ludendorff himself was kept in the background and a fanatical patriot, Dr. Wolfgang Kapp, was used as the immediate leader. Curiously enough Kapp was born in New York, the grandson of a republican refugee from the 1848 debacle. He had been one of the advocates of unrestricted submarine warfare. With him was associated von Jagow, Police President in Berlin from 1909 to the revolution, another apostle of ruthlessness. The senior military member of the group, apart from Ludendorff, was General von Lüttwitz, who had been instrumental in raising the government troops with whose aid Noske had suppressed the Spartacists. Colonel Bauer, who had been Ludendorff's Chief of

²⁹ *Boston Herald*, April 10, 1919, and Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-17.

³⁰ Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 186. Cf. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20.

Staff, and Captain Pabst, who missed promotion by a matter of weeks, due to the outbreak of the revolution, were two other military leaders of the subsequent *Kapp-Putsch*. At one time these conservatives were willing to see even Noske himself as a dictator, with military power, had he been willing to succumb to their veiled suggestions.²¹

Heinrich Ströbel, author of *Die Deutsche Revolution* and a bitter critic of Noske from the Independent Socialist viewpoint, has asserted that the Kappist outbreak was far from unexpected. The troops encroached upon the civilian population constantly, and the officers killed their political opponents and escaped with little or no punishment. Even the new insignia and the new Republican colors could not be enforced, much less the new attitude of mind.

The officers struggled for their privileges, for the privileges of caste and property, for all that had constituted their outlook on life, and finally for bare existence, since the Republic had been too blind and sordid to satisfy the destroyed caste of the nobility by a round sum, to be rid of them. The sergeant-majors and non-commissioned officers also struggled for their existence; . . . so long as democracy was at the helm, the reduction of troops and of military apparatus, demanded by the Entente and the Socialists, was unavoidable. Only if democracy was overthrown . . . and a military dictatorship established, could the restoration of the old capitalistic feudal class-state and the preservation of a strong militarism be hoped for.

As early as July, 1919, the military shock-troops, led by Captain Pabst and Colonel Bauer, had been eager to make the attack. The *coup*, planned for August, was postponed at the advice of the officers of von Lüttwitz' staff. At the beginning of the following March they felt that they had reached a point where they could safely risk a test of strength with confidence of success.²²

The reasons behind the attempted overthrow of the Ebert Republican Government were many. The primary aim of the military section was the prevention of further reduction in the

²¹ Noske, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-97, tells of a pamphlet being laid upon his desk with a very definite appeal for a *civilian* dictator, Noske himself being plainly indicated. For Captain Pabst's bitter feelings about non-promotion by the Republican Government see Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

²² Heinrich Ströbel, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-83.

armed forces of Germany, with the disbanding of vast numbers of professional officers that such reduction implied. The officer class had little if any alternative profession to seek; their personal incomes were mostly drawn from investments in state bonds. The rapid and continuous drop in the value of money at that time had rendered their incomes from such sources practically valueless. At the same time they saw certain elements in the nation making vast profit out of corrupt practices by illicit sales of food and raw materials. Not being versed in either business or economics they found it easy to believe that all the economic evils of the prolonged war period were due solely to the amateurish handling of the nation's affairs by democratically elected ministers and parliament and they desired to see these replaced by "experts" in no wise responsible to the masses.

The immediate bone of contention was the order by the Allies that the Baltic troops should be disbanded. Mr. Daniels describes these troops as "self-contained units formed of the toughest fighting material brought by severity to a high pitch of internal discipline, but with habits of the most truculent militarism towards the public, acquired in their Baltic, Silesian, and anti-Bolshevist campaigns." General von Lüttwitz was particularly emphatic that he would be no party to such disbanding, having a set idea that in the spring of 1920 the Russian army would overrun Poland, and ultimately Germany itself. The powerful Baltic brigade under Captain Ehrhardt was in camp at Döberitz, near Berlin, while the other Baltic corps under Löwenfeld were shortly to return from Silesia to their camp at Lockstedt, also an easy march from Berlin.²⁸

On March 10, 1920, General von Lüttwitz called in person upon President Ebert to present the military program, virtually in the form of an ultimatum. New Reichstag elections, a presidential election by plebiscite, a Cabinet of experts, and the immediate cessation of troop disbandment were all demanded. Lüttwitz assumed a blustering tone, whereupon Noske, who was present, declared that if orders were disobeyed and force used the Government would proclaim a general strike. This warning seemed to have little effect. Lüttwitz did not offer his resignation, as the Cabinet had expected, and this in itself forced the Min-

²⁸ Noske, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-3; cf. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-31.

isters to realize that the reactionary *coup* must be imminent.⁵⁴

In all probability the Ebert Government actually forced the hands of the Kappist group of conspirators, compelling them to act before they were fully prepared with plans for the civil government. Noske appointed General von Oven in the place of Lüttwitz, ordering the latter to be removed from his post as head of the Berlin Reichswehr. This sudden order was given the day after the Lüttwitz-Ebert interview. Reports reached the Government that the "Baltic" brigades of Captain Ehrhardt were ready to march on Berlin from their camp at Döberitz. Admiral von Trotha, Chief of the Admiralty Staff, was promptly dispatched to the camp to discover what was the actual situation. The Admiral, caring little for the Republican Government, telephoned to the camp that he was coming to inspect it, and when he arrived all was quiet. Furthermore, arrest warrants were issued for Kapp himself and his chief associates, but all kinds of official obstacles were placed in the way of their execution by the police; yet another sign that the reactionary movement was well organized and united. Nonetheless these sudden steps by the Government did force the Kappists into immediate action.⁵⁵

Friday, March 12, saw the Kappists actually starting their march on Berlin. The Government made a preliminary gesture of surrounding the government quarters with troops and machine guns and with warning placards that whosoever passed within the cordon would be shot.⁵⁶ The new commander of the Reichswehr, however, gave the Cabinet no hope that the local troops would fire upon the Baltic Brigades, and news was also brought that certain of the police officers were already siding with the Kappists. Under these circumstances Ebert and his Cabinet decided that the troops might as well be withdrawn. They determined, further, that there was no purpose served in staying in Berlin and being arrested, when a rapid move to Dresden or elsewhere might enable them to organize opposition to the reactionaries with success. Thus it happened that, when the Ehrhardt Brigade with Kapp and his associates at its head marched into Berlin at six o'clock on Saturday morning, March

⁵⁴ Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-53; cf. Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁵⁵ Noske, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁵⁶ *London Times*, March 17, 1920.

13, with the band playing and the war flags of the Navy flying, the Government which they came to depose had flown, barely an hour before.³⁷

By Saturday forenoon the stage-government of Wolfgang Kapp and von Lüttwitz had issued a proclamation declaring that "a new government of order, liberty, and action" would be formed; that the Ebert Government no longer existed, and that Kapp had assumed the rôle of Chancellor and Prime Minister of Prussia, with von Lüttwitz as Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief.³⁸ From the safer position of Dresden the Ebert Government, over the signatures of President Ebert, Chancellor Bauer (not the Kappist Colonel of that name), Noske, Müller, and others, issued a telegraphic counter-proclamation.

Irresponsible adventurers' intrigues, not supported by responsible politicians, have induced us to leave Berlin to prevent bloodshed. Dresden is now the seat of the only government which can prevent chaos. Communication with us must be maintained and relations with the revolutionaries be broken off.³⁹

How irresponsible were the "adventurers" can be seen from some of their immediate actions. The National Assembly was declared dissolved. A joint cabinet of Kappists and Ebert nominees was suggested, only to be flatly rejected by the Ebert Government. A temporary cabinet of nonentities was formed and printed appeals spread throughout Berlin by hand and by aeroplane, asking for public forbearance towards a government of inexperienced men—an ironic confession on the part of those who had made a revolution to put *experts* in the government! Because of lack of funds to pay the revolutionary army a band of officers was sent by the Kapp Cabinet to the Reichsbank to demand funds at the revolver point! The University was appealed to for aid, many of the students became members of the Emergency Technical Corps, and the old monarchist German flag was hoisted over the University buildings.⁴⁰

³⁷ Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 136; cf. *London Times*, March 15, 1920.

³⁸ *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 24, 1920.

³⁹ Special edition of the Berlin *Vormärz*, March 15, 1920, printed and published while the *Vormärz* building was occupied with Kappist troops! Cf. also Karl Brammer, *Fünf Tage Militärdiktatur*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁰ Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-38; cf. *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 24.

The Ebert Government shortly moved on to Stuttgart, whence it issued a call for an emergency meeting of the National Assembly on March 16. At the same time a call for a general strike against the Kapp usurpers went forth from the Ebert Cabinet and the Executive of the Social-Democrat Party (The Majority Social-Democrats), the closing paragraph running as follows:

Strike! Lay down your work and strangle this military dictatorship! Fight with every weapon to preserve the Republic. Lay aside every division. There is but one means to prevent the return of Wilhelm II; the paralysis of all economic life. Not a hand must stir, not a worker give aid to the military dictatorship. General Strike all along the line. Proletarians, unite!⁴¹

The surprising unity of the nation's workers against the *Kapp-Putsch* was evident in the support of the strike call offered even by the non-Socialist parties of the "Center" and the Democrats. This meant that the Catholic trade unions of the Rhineland and the so-called "yellow" unions of the Democrats were for once united in common purpose with the two Socialist parties and the Communists.⁴²

The official call for a general strike from the trade union side was given by Legien, on behalf of the General Federation of German Trade Unions, and by Aufhäuser, for the General Federation of Free Employees. Every trade and group was called upon to do its duty to combat the reactionary *coup*, the sole exemptions being the waterworks, hospitals, and administration of the workers' sick-funds. The Federation of Civil-Service Employees took a similar stand, as did the "Hirsch-Duncker" trade unions.⁴³

⁴¹ Karl Brummer, *op. cit.*, p. 65; cf. *London Times*, March 15, 1920.

⁴² *Berlin Vorwärts*, March 16, 1920.

⁴³ Karl Brummer, *op. cit.*, p. 67; cf. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, March 15, 1920. The German trade-union movement has been linked up with the various political parties. Hence the many varieties of trade association. The largest groups were those whose members were mainly Social Democrats (Socialists), of which Legien was the president in 1920. Aufhäuser's group of (salaried) employees was also Social Democratic in its connections, whereas the Hirsch-Duncker unions were founded by the Liberals of the Democratic Party (non-Socialist). The Center, or Catholic Party had its own unions, called the Christian Trade Unions, developing mostly in Catholic districts such as Rhineland-Westphalia. It was an unusual thing for all these varieties of labor organization to combine in common action. Cf. for details of German

Even before the official calls for the general strike had reached the workers of Berlin, scores of thousands of workers had already spontaneously ceased work. Many factories were closed even by Saturday noon, and by Sunday, March 14, the general strike was in full swing. There were no trams, and by noon the bus and subway services ceased. In the evening the city was dark, and all hotels and restaurants were closed. Gas, electricity, and even water supplies were lacking; newspapers did not appear, and only the telephone service remained. The whole of the Wilhelmstrasse was one large camp, "men wearing steel helmets and hung with bombs parading up and down, with every courtyard full of troops," the streets bristling with machine guns, and field guns unlimbered in the principal squares.⁴⁴

The attempt to run industry and cow the populace merely by an overwhelming show of brute force, was already palpably failing in its aim. Even on Sunday, the 14th, conflict within the Kapp Government was reported. Colonel Bauer recognized that the counter-revolution was as yet upheld only by the military, and advocated negotiation with the workers' committees. The younger militarists called for ruthless action against the strikers. This section of opinion was strengthened by the support offered to Kapp by General Maercker. This extremist pressure had its effect in a Kappist decree issued on Monday, the 15th:

The ringleaders who are guilty of acts specified in the decree for safe-guarding important economic services, and in the decree for the protection of labor peace, *as well as the strike pickets*, will be punished with death. This decree enters into force tomorrow afternoon.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, despite the threats of dire punishment, the strike spread until practically all rail traffic was paralyzed, and even the mail was stopped. The railroad stations were surrounded by barbed wire entanglements. Clashes took place between groups of the Technical Emergency Corps and the populace as the former went to and from their work at the water and light

unions U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 280* ("Post-war Labor Conditions in Germany," by R. R. Kuczynski), chap. IV.

⁴⁴ Berlin *Vorwärts*, March 15; *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 24; London *Times*, March 16, 17, and 18, 1920.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1920, and Karl Brammer, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Italics ours.

plants. The military were stoned in more than one district and replied with rifle fire, killing several.⁴⁶ Kapp, already doubting the wisdom of his *coup* and looking anxiously around for a simple way of escape from his dilemma, made use of General Maercker as emissary to the Ebert Government at Stuttgart, with "compromise" terms that seemed far more like those of a victor. Among these "terms" were the old demands for "experts," for an immediate election of both the President of the Republic and the Reichstag, and certain new demands, including the creation of a Second Chamber which should be industrial in its make-up, amnesty for all political acts from November 9, 1918, and especially for those committed on and after March 18, 1920. The most significant demand, however, was that both sides alike should condemn the general strike and emphasize the need for a resumption of production!⁴⁷

Fortunately for the German workers Ebert was absolutely adamant in refusing even to consider such a "compromise," and Maercker had to report that talking to the Ebert Government was like talking to a wall. Kapp was now most anxious to resign, but his military advisers persuaded him to delay his act. The strike situation was becoming momentarily more serious. In districts where no troops were present, such as Chemnitz, the Communists had already set up Soviets. Transport had ceased and the food supply was hourly more precarious. Immediate excesses of a Bolshevist nature were feared by the Kapp Cabinet, and Colonel Bauer actually appealed to Great Britain for pressure upon the Ebert Government!⁴⁸

By this time the German Democratic Party (Liberals) had issued a proclamation ordering all their supporters to cease all save indispensable work so long as "the traitor Kapp and his lieutenants" usurped power. Many of the officials in the Government bureaus refused to assist the Kapp régime and those in the Government grain bureau threatened to join the strike unless Kapp retired. The Kappists distributed handbills declaring that the flour reserved for the Jewish Passover had been confiscated and would be distributed to the workers—endeavoring to start

⁴⁶ *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 26, 1920.

⁴⁷ *London Times*, March 18, 1920.

⁴⁸ Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

an anti-Jewish pogrom as a means of distracting attention from themselves.⁴⁹

All these efforts availed little. On Wednesday, March 17, at one o'clock in the afternoon Wolfgang Kapp resigned, leaving General von Lüttwitz still clinging to his post. Kapp himself ignominiously fled to Sweden. In characteristic style he announced his departure as follows:

The Bauer Government having decided of itself to fulfill the most essential of the political demands addressed to it, the rejection of which on the 18th inst. led to the establishment of the Kapp Government, the Imperial Chancellor, Dr. Kapp, regards his mission as fulfilled and retires, resigning the executive power again into the hands of the military Commander-in-Chief. In this he is moved by the conviction that the extreme necessity of the Fatherland demands a solid union of all against the annihilating danger of Bolshevism.⁵⁰

Lüttwitz was left, but not for long. Vice-Chancellor Schiffer, who had been left behind by the Ebert Government as a kind of liaison Minister, now offered to mediate, demanding first the resignation of both Kapp and Lüttwitz. The Reichswehr and police officers then met and challenged General von Lüttwitz to show exactly how influential was his following. Save for the leaders and subordinates of the Baltic Brigades scarce half a dozen other officers in high command could be found to support him. Lüttwitz also had, therefore, to accept the inevitable and resign, leaving Colonel Bauer as the sole Kappist authority. Even then the Kappists dared not announce the full meaning of their defeat, nor withdraw their troops from the city.⁵¹

On Thursday, March 18, rumors of a Communist *coup* followed on the news of Kapp's resignation. A general nervous tension was apparent. The "rebel" troops were still in occupation of the public buildings and the old monarchist flag was still flying. The general strike was still continuing. Would the "rebels" withdraw? Nor was the nervousness without reason. In many towns the *Kapp-Putsch* had been the occasion of bloody clashes between the soldiers and the striking workers. At Wilhelmshaven,

⁴⁹ Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-42; London Times, March 17 and 18; Berliner Tageblatt, March 24, 1920.

⁵⁰ Karl Brammer, *op. cit.*, p. 36; cf. London Times, March 18, 1920.

⁵¹ Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 142; London Times, March 18, 1920.

indeed, officers had been disarmed by their own men, but in Berlin the Baltic Brigades were only too strongly united with their officers, and were ready for any act of tyranny against the populace.

Schiffer was now able to inform his colleagues in Stuttgart that the Kapp Government had surrendered, and that the command of the Reichswehr had been put into the hands of Major-General von Seeckt, who promptly ordered the Baltic Brigades to withdraw from Berlin. Schiffer's public proclamation, issued on Thursday, March 18, closed with the important sentence:

In order to prevent the complete collapse of the economic life of the people, and, consequently of the whole nation, the Imperial Government, created and inspired by the people's will, calls upon the German people to resume work.

At the same time the Social-Democrat members of the National Assembly at Stuttgart appealed to the workers to end the general strike. In many towns, such as Munich, Dresden, and Leipzig, work was resumed, but in Berlin and the Rhineland the strike continued.⁵³

As the Baltic Brigades sullenly marched out of Berlin, feeling was bitter on both sides. Many thousands assembled to see the hated troops depart and, as they passed under the Brandenburg Gate, the rear-guard, enraged at the shrill whistling of some workers—a sign of contempt—turned about, and “acting under orders, deliberately fired into the crowd at point-blank range . . . many persons being killed or wounded.” Thus did the troops follow their leaders. As for the leaders themselves, “three-quarters of Berlin would tear them to pieces if it could catch them, and would be glad of the chance,” wrote the *Times* correspondent. Their troops did not withdraw further than the suburbs, and on Friday, March 19, one of their armored cars “careered through the streets with its black, white, and red flags, and exchanged shots with some of the *Sicherheitswehr*, killing two and wounding two more.” The intense feeling of the Berlin workers can scarcely be wondered at when their privations are considered. Another British correspondent vividly described the situation:

⁵³ *Ibid.*, March 18 and 19; *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 24, 1920.

The brunt of that remarkable and miracle-working strike fell on the working class. Casualties were almost as heavy as in a serious battle. The privations to everyone were real, and to the poor terrible. One has only to imagine an over-crowded Berlin tenement, with its women and children waterless, gasless, foodless, and perhaps with its dead and wounded, to appreciate what such a strike means to those who have to carry it through.⁵³

It is possible that the *Kapp-Putsch* might not have ended in failure had the Kappist leaders maintained a determined front for a few more days. Any general strike must find itself fighting against very definite time limits beyond which it is liable to break down of its own success, from the starvation of the workers themselves. When the Kappists surrendered there were barely four days' supplies of food left in Berlin. On the other hand, once the Kappists were ignominiously defeated, at least for the moment, the workers who had borne the burden of the conflict rather naturally refused to return to work until the Ebert Government had given them some definite evidence of showing more backbone in its attitude toward the reactionary element in the nation. Hence, with a few exceptions, the strike in Berlin did not cease with the resignation of the Kapp leaders and the withdrawal of their troops. On Friday, the 19th, the strike situation was unchanged. Rail and trolley services, and the mail, were all at a standstill, and the employees of the telegraph and telephone services threatened to strike at any moment. Leaflets urging the workers to remain out until their definite demands were granted were broadcast by the leaders of the metal workers, the printers, and railway men, as late as Monday, March 22.⁵⁴

On Saturday, March 20, the two outstanding trade union leaders who had originally called the general strike, Legien and Aufhäuser, announced that an agreement had been reached with the Ebert Government, which would permit them to call off the strike. This agreement, signed early on Saturday, while it did not wholly satisfy the union leaders, contained the following pledges on the part of the government:

⁵³ *Manchester Guardian*, April 30, 1920; cf. *London Times*, March 23, 1920, and Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 143. The *Sicherheitswehr* was a sort of a security guard, more akin to the police force than to the army.

⁵⁴ *London Times*, March 23, 1920.

(1) Government representatives to intercede with various political parties to have the State and Prussian cabinets reformed. Ministers to be nominated by agreement between the trade unions and the parties.

(2) Punishment of Kappist leaders, including all officials who supported Kapp.

(3) Democratizing of all administrative offices, with dismissal of all who were proved disloyal to the Constitution.

(4) Immediate extension of existing social laws, and the framing of new ones giving more liberal rights and privileges to civil servants.

(5) Immediate socialization of all industries ripe for it; nationalization of the coal and potash syndicates.

(6) The confiscation of agricultural products and of land improperly cultivated. Punishment for speculation in foodstuffs.

(7) Dissolution of the Reichswehr formations, as disloyal to the Constitution, and their replacement by organized labor.

(8) The resignation of Noske.⁵⁵

Dissatisfaction followed the publication of this "settlement," and on Sunday, March 21, much bellicose temper was shown at many mass meetings of workers. The chief argument against the cessation of the strike was that it would at once release numerous troops from Berlin to repress proletarian supremacy in many industrial districts, such as the Rhineland. Even in Berlin large areas of the city were still barricaded and trenches dug and manned by Government troops. A vivid picture of the chaos still existent on Monday, March 22, is given by the Berlin correspondent of the *London Times*.

It was hoped this morning that the strike would have been completely over, notices having been posted calling on the workers to return. The hope proved false. . . . The main line trains are scheduled to run, but are uncertain. I made a tour this morning of the quays and railway stations. The quays were congested with goods ready for transport, but the carters are still striking. The river and docks were crowded with the steamers and barges of the inland water transport, which are indispensable for feeding the city. But the workers were idly discussing the situation and apparently without word from their unions to begin. At the stations there were few porters or officials. No tramways are yet running, but the electric

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, March 22; cf. Berlin *Vorwärts*, March 22, 1920.

light is working in certain districts and the telephones are again available, though some exchanges are largely disorganized. All the theatres and places of amusement are still closed, and there is no prospect of any newspapers. . . . During a walk along the Invalidenstrasse and through the Moabit quarter I counted a dozen streets the entrances to which were wired. Riots in this area are likely to continue with the food supply in its present precarious state. Many of the shops display notices stating that no meat, bread, potatoes or vegetables have arrived. . . . Outside the butchers and bakers food queues form . . . and they are equally centers for the fomentation of food riots.

The streets were crowded with workers, but the foundries and factories were still idle, the metal workers and foundry men being the "most truculent and advanced of all sections of Berlin labor," playing a large part in keeping the strike going.⁵⁶

The strike was finally and definitely called off when the Industrial Councils and the "shop stewards" joined in an agreement between the trade unions and the Government. A further proclamation to this effect, signed by Legien, Aufhäuser, Crispian, and Rusch (for Greater Berlin) declared the strike ended at midnight Monday, March 22, on the condition that if the Government failed to keep its pledges the general strike would be resumed. The new agreement required that (1) troops be withdrawn, (2) the state of siege be ended at once, (3) armed workers, in the Ruhr for example, would not be attacked, and that (4) negotiations be opened between the trade unions and the Prussian Government with a view to incorporating workers in the *Sicherheitswehr* of Prussia. Fear that the Government would fail to keep the first agreement had led the workers to insist upon these additional pledges, which Chancellor Bauer agreed to see carried out. The strike, moreover, was of such dimensions that even the Independent Social-Democrats, who had fought to keep it going, recognized it must not be continued to the point of "bleeding the workers white," especially in view of the possibility that new struggles would be required to hold the Government to its pledges.⁵⁷

How difficult the situation was for the strike leaders can be seen from certain occurrences during the week immediately fol-

⁵⁶ London *Times*, March 24, 1920.

⁵⁷ *Die Freiheit*, March 23, 1920. (Independent Social Democrat organ.)

lowing the resignation and flight of Kapp. In many towns workers retired from their strongholds as soon as the agreements with the Government had been reached. Promptly the officers of Government troops instituted a house to house search, removed workers' leaders, and in some cases executed them after summary courts-martial. Far from creating definitely republican forces, as pledged in the agreement, the Government granted to Major-General von Seeckt unlimited power to use the military court throughout the country. While Kapp had been in the ascendant General von Seeckt had made no move to come to the assistance of Noske and the Ebert Government. The workers who had risen and armed themselves all over the land, to resist the counter-revolution, "now became prey for reactionary home guards, volunteer corps, and those troops which had tolerated the action of the revolutionists (Kappists) with unmistakable favor. The striking workers and those who had risen in armed resistance had at a stroke become 'Spartacists' and 'Communists,' who were striving for a Bolshevik dictatorship and therefore had to be crushed with a most brutal disregard."⁶²

The situation could hardly have been otherwise unless the Ebert Government had been willing to swing quite definitely toward the left wing. Without the thorough coöperation of the Independent Social-Democrats this would have been politically impossible, and the latter steadfastly refused such coöperation. The result was a triple group of adversaries in the *Kapp-Putsch*. On the extreme right were the "Baltic" Brigades or ultra monarchists, armed and trained and united for any militaristic action. In between stood the so-called Government troops of the *Reichswehr* and *Sicherheitswehr*, only too ready to stand aside and let the "Baltics" have their own way, until the general strike showed the spirit of the majority of Germany's workers. On the left wing gathered the armed workers, often wrongly called Spartacists or Communists, with a small nucleus of actual Communists urging a complete proletarian revolution.

The Ebert Government tried to act as if both the first and the last groups were law breakers. Without any definitely republican-labor forces trained and armed, however, the Ebert Gov-

⁶² Heinrich Ströbel, *Die deutsche Revolution*, p. 192; cf. *London Times*, March 29, 1920.

ernment had to rely, for forceful restoration of order, upon the *Reichswehr* and *Sicherheitswehr*, under officers whose sympathies were far more strongly inclined towards the "Baltics" than towards those whom they looked upon as "Reds" and labor ruffians. Few actual battles took place, therefore, between the first two groups, both of which were too well armed, and knew it. On the other hand action against the armed workers was frequent and sanguinary.⁸⁸

The story of Köpenick, and of the subsequent conflict in the Rhineland, will suffice to show how sadly and completely the workers' victory over monarchist reaction was promptly thrown away through misunderstanding on the part of organized labor and through weakness on the part of the Ebert Government. Köpenick, southeast of Berlin on the River Spree, was a manufacturing town of some 35,000 inhabitants, with a flourishing aeroplane industry. When the news of the *Kapp-Putsch* reached the workers in this town they seized a store of arms at Friedrichshagen. Cut off as they were from adequate news, the workers of Köpenick failed to understand that the Kappists had fled, and that the troops which approached in auto-trucks on Friday, March 19, were actually Government forces and not counter-revolutionaries. Battle ensued and many prisoners were taken by the Köpenick workers. They were surprised to find that their prisoners were not "Baltics," and treated them well, giving first aid to their wounded.

On the next day the workers captured the gasoline store at the aerodrome at Aldershof, killing off the defenders, who were officers. Again the workers lost heavily in the fight. Strong Government forces then came up and refused to permit the workers to surrender. The workers' leaders persuaded their men to cease fighting and return to their homes in the night. Sunday the troops entered Köpenick without opposition, paid house to house visits, and shot out of hand any person taken in possession of arms. Seven of the leaders were tried by court-martial and shot.⁸⁹

In the Rhineland from Essen to the Lippe the armed workers under the incitement of the Communists held their own despite

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1920; Strübel, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁸⁹ *London Times*, March 30, 1920.

the ultimatum of the Ebert Government. They refused any armistice but demanded that the *Reichswehr* be disarmed and a People's Army be formed in its place. There was some fear that these irregulars, if forced to extremities might flood the Ruhr mines and blow up the blast furnaces. General von Watter was sent against the "Red" army, and his troops showed absolutely no mercy, no prisoners being taken. General von Watter's own report, early in April, showed the spirit in which the rising was handled: "Troops," he reported "are advancing along the entire line, killing hundreds of Spartacists."⁶¹ Such behavior, in striking contrast to the manner in which officers and supporters of the *Kapp-Putsch* were either allowed to go scot-free or, if arrested, were set at liberty on appeal to the Imperial Military Court, enraged the trade union forces. Even the impartial correspondent of the London *Times* could write from Berlin on April 5, "It is militarism that is guiding the tied hands of Herr Müller and his colleagues." (The new Cabinet that had replaced that of Chancellor Bauer, late in March.) "The Left, of all shades, now knows this fact, which must be plain even to its own [the Government's] most enthusiastic supporters."⁶²

Confidential representatives sent from the trade unions to the Ruhr, to investigate, returned to Berlin, and the unions thereupon presented further demands to the Müller Cabinet. The Bielefeld agreement, made between the "Red" army in the Rhineland and the Government, whereby the "Reds" were to disarm and the troops of General von Watter were not to advance any further, had plainly been broken by the Government troops. The "Red" troops had then entered "neutral" territory into which German Government troops were not permitted to follow, and they did not dare return to Germany lest summary courts-martial would be their fate. The unions' demands were met by a weak pledge to "recall the Ruhr troops in the near future," and an explanation by Gessler, the successor of Noske, that it was difficult "to disarm five thousand men armed to the teeth if bloodshed was to be avoided." Gessler was referring, not to the red army, but to the "Baltic Brigades," which had not even been disbanded much less punished!⁶³ Such squeamishness

⁶¹*Ibid.*, April 5, 1920.

⁶²*Ibid.*, April 9, 1920.

⁶³*Ibid.*, April 10, 1920; cf. Phillips Price, *Germany in Transition*, p. 46.

as to bloodshed was not evinced when the disarming and punishment of the "Reds" in the Rhineland was in question.

The amazing ingratitude of the Ebert Government to the workers in the Rhineland can be seen when the intrigues that immediately preceded the *Kapp-Putsch* are understood. The troops in the Ruhr just before the *Putsch* were partly under the command of reactionary officers who were fully prepared to take part in the *coup*. Baron von Lützow was one of these, whose corps was on duty in the Ruhr. A letter from the Baron to General von Watter then chief in command in Münster, Westphalia, was captured when the Red army defeated the Lützow corps. The letter was printed in *Die Freiheit*, and quoted by the *London Times*. Dated March 11, it runs as follows:

Your Excellency. Action must and will begin on the 15th inst. at latest. The Free Corps Lützow is absolutely required in Berlin for this purpose. Its removal from the Rhineland must be immediately ordered by you, and that without any regard to the situation there, and without preliminary consultation with the *Reichswehr* General Command in Berlin or the *Reichswehr* Ministry (Noske), as otherwise too much time would be lost, and as approval by these quarters is doubtful. Baron von Lützow. Major and Commander.

General von Watter's immediate recognition of the Kapp government, and his orders to the workers of the Ruhr to keep industry moving—directly contrary to the call for a general strike issued by the Ebert Government—led the workers of all types in the Ruhr to arm themselves and to attack the *Reichswehr*. If General von Watter had remained neutral or had denounced Kapp, much of the Ruhr trouble would never have occurred. Under these circumstances the cowardice and short-sighted policy of the Ebert Government in their behavior to the Ruhr workers and to General von Watter are patent beyond need of comment.⁶⁴

To return, then, to the actual end of the general strike. Business life resumed in Berlin on Tuesday, March 23, only the trolleys and the subways still remaining unchanged. Supplies of water, gas, and electricity were poor and in places lack-

⁶⁴ *London Times*, April 19, 1920, an article on "A White Terror" by Saunders, Berlin correspondent from 1897 to 1908.

ing completely. The printers were still on strike and the Government had to use the multigraph for its proclamations. Owing to lack of electricity the telephones worked badly, some exchanges not functioning at all. By Wednesday, March 24, trains, trolleys, and subways were running, but light, water, and power were still inadequate. The reason for this was the inability of the Technical Emergency Corps to do repair work that was necessary. Political reasons, moreover, often made the Technical Emergency Corps reluctant to "stab the workers in the back" by giving too complete a service. When the strikers finally agreed to return the Emergency Corps had to be evacuated from the various plants before the workers would start work.⁶⁶ Even when the workers returned "it was impossible for work to be generally resumed. In the hands of the Technical Emergency Corps the plant had not received the same care as its regular minders gave it."⁶⁶

On Friday, March 26, the entire Bauer Cabinet of the Ebert Government resigned, since the trade unions objected to the retention of the liaison Minister, Schiffer, who, they claimed, had been too friendly toward the Kapp entourage. Legien would have liked to form a definitely trade union cabinet, but ultimately the Müller Cabinet resulted, with four Democrats (Liberals), four from the Center (Catholic), and five Majority Social-Democrats. The unions were content, for the moment, to await the actions of the new Cabinet.⁶⁷ On Monday, March 29, the National Assembly met again in Berlin, and much bitter comment was made on the Kapp episode and the support given to it by certain of the reactionary parties in the Assembly. In the first days of April further rumors of a new general strike passed around Berlin to the distress of most of its inhabitants, for the food supply, so depleted by the previous strike, had not then been replenished. As to the pledges given to the workers, the *Times* report shows how far these were carried out:

The punishment of the participants in the Kapp coup is already becoming a farce. The Ehrhardt and Balticum Brigades are untouched, and the promise that the naval officers who supported the Kapp régime will be tried by civil authority is already overruled. . .

⁶⁶ *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 24, 1920.

⁶⁷ *London Times*, March 29, 1920.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, March 27 and 29, 1920.

officers and men who remained faithful have since been freely victimised.⁸⁸

How far the Government departed from its solemn pledges to the strikers and their leaders, once the strike was safely called off, has already been told. The sole gain that was in any sense preserved was the resignation of Noske, though his successor, Gessler, did not seem to have any more strength of control over the unruly elements in the higher ranks of the army than Noske himself. After the suppression of the "Red" army in the Rhineland the National Assembly considered its duty done, and in June the elections took place for the first Reichstag to be convoked since the revolution of November, 1918. The extremists of both camps increased their membership at the expense of the Majority Social-Democrats and the other moderate parties. The Majority Social-Democrats were left out of the new Cabinet, but still supported the new Government. Thus ended, in actual victory for the reactionary elements, though in outward defeat, the episode of the Kapp counter-revolution. The general strike alone destroyed its chances of complete success, but the penalty paid by the unhappy workers who caused the failure of the *Kapp-Putsch*, was bitter and unforgettable. It is a dangerous game for the worker to try to save his Government by the weapon of the general strike, even if he succeeds.

NOTE ON THE TECHNICAL EMERGENCY CORPS

One of the most interesting by-products of the general strikes in Germany was the creation of the Technical Emergency Aid or *Technische Nothilfe*. As early as the beginning of 1919 a technical group was formed at the suggestion and under the leadership of an engineer named Lummitsch. This group continued the operation of the electrical plant despite sabotage. Volunteers with technical experience, especially from the engineering and trade schools, aided the military in Berlin and other cities. From this beginning arose the *Technische Nothilfe*. Only professional men can be leaders of these Technical Emergency Corps, preferably those with technical experience; they are pledged to carry on the indispensable work in those industries necessary to the maintenance of life, wherein the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, April 5, 1920; cf. *Ibid.*, April 1.

regular employees have gone on strike. In September, 1919, War Minister Noske permitted the foundation of the present Society of Technical Emergency Aid, placing it under his own jurisdiction, but subsequently transferring it to the Ministry of the Interior, in order that all semblance of military influence and appearance should be avoided. The *Technische Nothilfe* respects the constitutional rights of citizens, including the right of workers to combine in unions, and its purpose is solely that of continuing the absolutely essential community services. The members of the Emergency Corps are paid wages equivalent to those received by the workers whose places they are temporarily taking. In addition they receive free meals, lodging and workmen's clothing during the period of their service. Sickness and accident provision is also made. Eighteen districts, sub-divided into many smaller divisions, each with an honorary engineer at its head, who is actively engaged in his profession, provide for the whole of unoccupied Germany. On October 1, 1920, there were no less than 182,815 members of this organization, ten thousand of whom were in Berlin. Out of every hundred members in 1921, 18 were technical specialists, 10 were craftsmen, 22 were farmers, 18 belonged to the professions, 15 were laborers, 6 were students and 11 were women. In the first year of its existence the *Technische Nothilfe* rendered aid in 885 cases; 58 in electric plants, 54 in gas works, 19 in railroad management, 15 in slaughter-house and refrigeration plants, and in numerous mines and quarries, in shipping, postal service, sugar refineries, breweries, engine houses, and even in nursing, agriculture and undertaking. The stronger the organization becomes the more it attracts the interest and opposition of organized labor, who rather naturally fear that ultimately their strike measures may be seriously thwarted, even when they do not attempt to cover as large an area as a general strike. (Data from Adolph Weber, "Arbeitskämpfe," in *Handwörterbuch des Staatswissenschaften*, 4th ed., I, pp. 776-78.)

CHAPTER XV

AMERICA

SEATTLE AND WINNIPEG IN 1919

THE UNITED STATES and Canada had not been completely exempt from theoretical discussions in regard to the general strike as a labor weapon, but until the close of the World War they had not tasted of the actual practice. Within six months of the Armistice, however, two vivid examples of a localized general strike occurred. The attempt in Seattle, early in February, 1919, lasted but six days; that in Winnipeg ran for some six weeks through May and June. In both instances the general strike was caused by an appeal from the metal workers' trade unions for solidarity on the part of the remaining unions. Hours of labor and wage rates were at issue in Seattle, and the principle of collective bargaining in Winnipeg. In both cities the general strike was called "under ordinary constitutional procedure, by the existing craft unions, with the sanction of the local Central Labor Council affiliated with the American Federation of Labor."

In both cities, however, the presence and influence of "radicals" and "foreigners" was alleged by the press and the employers, and in each case the strike was fought by the "citizens" in the belief that the strike was but the forerunner of a revolution. Labor, in both instances, denied this allegation. In Seattle the orderliness of the strikers was perfect; in Winnipeg only the final weeks saw any disorder, and even then only when the regular police force had been dismissed and replaced by "specials," or when the strike leaders had been seized in their beds and transported to the penitentiary without privilege of bail. In neither case can labor be said to have won the strike, but in neither instance did their "defeat" seem either overwhelming or completely discouraging to the labor ranks.¹

Like many other cities of Western America, Seattle had grown in a single generation from a small township to a city of

¹ Edward T. Devine, "Winnipeg and Seattle," *Survey*, Oct. 4, 1919.

over three hundred thousand souls.² During the war Seattle's shipyards were responsible for more than a quarter of the ships built for the United States Shipping Board, and the general strike in that city developed from a dispute over the wages of the shipyard workers. During the war the Seattle shipyards operated on a closed (union) shop basis, with collective bargaining between the various shipyard owners and the Metal Trades Council of Seattle, which consisted of delegates from some twenty-one different craft-unions. The separate unions no longer made agreements, but the Metal Trades Council from time to time negotiated a "blanket-agreement" on behalf of its constituent unions.³

TROUBLE IN SEATTLE SHIPYARDS

In December, 1917, the Navy Department and the U. S. Emergency Fleet Corporation made an agreement with the various "international" presidents of the craft unions concerned in shipbuilding, whereby the so-called Macy Board was created, consisting of three members, one appointed by the Fleet Corporation and the Navy Department, one by the president of the American Federation of Labor, and one by the President of the United States. Their task was the settlement of disputes respecting wages, hours, and working conditions in the shipyards. The Macy Board fixed certain wage rates, the adherence to which was insisted upon by the Fleet Corporation on the part of any of its contractors. At the same time the Macy Board provided that "neither employer nor employed may discriminate between union and non-union workmen." Certain shipyards, such as Skinner and Eddy in Seattle, ignored this order and continued to function as a closed, union-shop.⁴

² R. D. McKensie, "Community Forces: a study of the non-partisan municipal elections in Seattle," *Journal of Social Forces*, Jan., March, May, 1924. In 1890 Seattle had a population of less than 42,000.

³ *The Seattle General Strike* (issued by the History Committee of the General Strike Committee), pp. 8-9.

⁴ *United States vs. Skinner and Eddy Corporation* (District Court of U. S. for Western District of Washington, Northern Division), Report of Auditor and Special Master in Chancery, pp. 188-89. Henceforth referred to as *U. S. vs. Skinner and Eddy Corp.* The term "international" is applied to unions possessing membership in Canada as well as the United States.

The wage rates fixed by the Macy Board caused great heart-burning in Seattle, as in practice they gave sixty cents per day more than had been requested to certain crafts, whereas they reduced the wage of others some twenty-two cents per day below the level of wages granted in other (non-contract) work in the same city. As their various international officers had signed the agreement creating the Macy Board, and as the war was still in progress the workers made protest against the award but did not resort to a strike. After the Armistice, many appeals against the award having yielded no relief, the various crafts of the Metal Trades in Seattle took a referendum vote as to the feasibility of a strike. A majority of the craft unions constituting the Metal Trades Council and a heavy majority of the individual shipyard workers voted in favor of a strike. The vote was held as an authorization, by the Metal Trades Council, to call a strike if negotiations failed. The strike was finally called for January 21, 1919, in the shipbuilding plants of Seattle, Tacoma, and Aberdeen.⁵

A seriously complicating factor in the dispute was the attitude of the Emergency Fleet Corporation and its Director General, Charles Piez. At one moment the Fleet Corporation would instruct its contracting shipbuilders in Seattle that the Macy award must be carried out precisely, that no higher wage rate must be paid, that no concessions were to be made to the strikers, who must return on the terms of the Macy award or face the cessation of all shipbuilding. At another moment telegraphic permission would be sent to some or to all of the Seattle contracting shipbuilders that, provided the extra expense be carried by the contractors themselves, an increase *might* be granted over and above the Macy award. There is evidence that when the Skinner and Eddy Corporation attempted to grant such additional wage rates they were threatened with the loss of government contracts, and were looked upon with great disfavor by their fellow shipbuilders in the Pacific Northwest Association.⁶

⁵ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 9-10; cf. also *U. S. vs. Skinner and Eddy Corp.*, p. 187.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-98. Also notes on interview by W. Edwards Beach with Mr. William Short, formerly president of the State Federation of Labor and hostile to the general strike.

The Metal Trades workers demanded a wage of \$8 per day for mechanics, with a graded scale according to skill, down to \$5.50 a day for laborers, with an eight-hour day and a forty-four-hour week. Many of the skilled men were already receiving more than the minimum demanded, but they advocated a strike for the sake of the less skilled laborers who had found the cost of living well nigh prohibitive. The shipyard owners, on the other hand, while willing to grant advances to the skilled men were hostile to any increase for the lower paid laborers. On January 24 the shipbuilders telegraphed the Emergency Fleet Corporation that "the workmen's demands were so unreasonable that it would be impossible to think of negotiating with them." Two days later the Skinner and Eddy Corporation wired Director Charles Fies that "the majority of the workmen did not favor the strike but were forced into it by radical leaders whose real desire was to disrupt the whole organization of society."⁷ That the myth of radical leaders who forced reluctant men to strike had started some days before the general strike is evident from this telegram. If anything is clear, however, from the data available, it is that the ranks forced the pace, and were less willing to call off the strike, when the time came, than their allegedly radical leaders.

Events moved swiftly, once the 35,000 shipyard workers ceased work. On the evening of January 22, the Central Labor Council, consisting of representatives from all the city's trade unions, received a request from the Metal Trades Council that a general strike be called in Seattle and Tacoma in sympathy with the shipyard workers. The request was approved by the Central Labor Council and referred to the constituent unions for a vote of their membership. A week later, so many unions had given a strike vote, that a General Strike Committee was formed made up of three delegates from each union taking part in the strike, and a meeting was called for Sunday, February 2. Many of the unions voting to take part, did so even at the imminent risk of losing hard won gains of previous years.⁸

⁷ For the wage data cf. *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 10-11; for the attitude of the shipbuilders cf. *U. S. vs. Skinner and Eddy Corp.*, pp. 188-89.

⁸ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 12-14.

THE THREAT OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

By the second day of February, 1919, the general public had become aware of the imminent peril that threatened their city. If a general strike actually started no one knew how it would end. No such occurrence had happened before in the United States and the unknown always possesses terrors. Moreover, the Russian revolution had made the ordinary citizen, not well acquainted with the ranks of American labor, see Bolshevism in every large-scale strike. Business men took out riot insurance on their property; householders laid in heavy stocks of groceries; hardware stores unearthed lamp supplies and sold them at a considerable profit; the press alternately appealed to the workers not to ruin their city and threatened them with penalties if Bolshevism showed its head.⁹

Law and order now became the fetish of the city government, which had not bothered itself unduly with law during the war.

Extra-legal was the extraordinary weapon by which more than by any other. . . the alleged revolutionary plot to overthrow government through the general strike was discovered and countered. This was the Minute Men, an organization doing and supplementing the work of the American Protective League in Washington. In the state it had 100,000 members, 2,600 of whom were specially trustworthy investigators.

There were Minute Men who were already members of labor bodies and in a position to learn the inner purposes of men behind the strike. There were Minute Men in every bank. . . while I sat in the office of the organization photographs were brought in of checks signed by the officers of the Soldiers' and Sailors Council. The Minute Men used professional pickpockets, an official told me, to go through a public meeting of protest against the invasion of Russia, to discover how many men were armed. Legitimate labor even claimed that the organization was using the *agent provocateur*. I did not believe this until an official of the Minute Men told me, in the course of his description of the revolutionary character of the Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Council meetings, "We had a man on the committee that drew up the constitution of the Council, and when he got through they had a document that would have sent to the penitentiary any man who put his name to it!"¹⁰

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Kenneth Macgowan, "The Minute Men Clan," *New York Tribune*, March 18, 1919.

Such a frank admission on the part of the "Minute Men," of "planting" their agents with a view to encouraging and thereby incriminating unwary radicals, an all too common method in American labor history, forces the discriminating investigator to discount heavily the cry of "revolution" with which the Seattle general strike was met.

One of the pieces of evidence repeatedly adduced as proof of this intended "revolution" was an editorial published on February 5, the day before the general strike started, in the *Seattle Union Record*, the local labor daily. Certain of the paragraphs that gave greatest offense follow.

We are undertaking the most tremendous move ever made by Labor in this country, a move which will lead—*no one knows where! Labor will feed the people.* Twelve great kitchens have been offered, and from them food will be distributed by the provision trades at low cost to all.

Labor will care for the babies and the sick. The milk-wagon drivers and the laundry drivers are arranging plans for supplying milk to babies, invalids and hospitals, and taking care of the cleaning of linen for hospitals.

Labor will preserve order. The strike committee is arranging for guards, and it is expected that the stopping of the cars will keep people at home. A few hot-headed enthusiasts have complained that strikers only should be fed, and the general public left to endure severe discomfort. Aside from the inhumanitarian character of such suggestions, let them get this straight. *Not the withdrawal of labor power, but the power of the strikers to manage will win this strike.*

Labor will not only shut down the industries, but labor will reopen, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, labor may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities, *under its own management.*

And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads—*no one knows where!*

Mayor Ole Hanson, himself of Norwegian ancestry, made much of this editorial in his self-advertising campaign as the Knight who slew the Red Dragon. In his statement to the United Press, for consumption outside of his own city, Mayor Hanson declared that "the so-called sympathetic Seattle strike was an attempted revolution. That there was no violence does not alter

the fact. . . . The intent, openly and covertly announced, was for the overthrow of the industrial system: here first, then everywhere. . . . True there were no flashing guns, no bombs, no killings. Revolution, I repeat, doesn't need violence. The general strike, as practised in Seattle, is of itself the weapon of revolution, all the more dangerous, because quiet. To succeed, it must suspend everything; stop the entire life stream of a community. . . . That is to say, it puts the government out of operation. And that is all there is to revolt—no matter how achieved."¹¹ To the outside world Mayor Hanson was known as the man who refused to parley with Bolshevism, threatened to have shot at sight the first man who tried to take over the city government, and forced the labor leaders to call off the general strike by the threat of martial law. As such a man he appears in the *World's Work* for April, 1919, and as such he declared himself in numerous public speeches throughout the United States after the strike. In Seattle itself the story of his acts before and during the strike is told with considerably less drama but greater probability.

Perhaps the kindest comment on Mayor Hanson was that made by Robert Bridges, president of the Seattle Port Commission at a luncheon of the National Popular Government League in Washington, D. C., on March 13, 1919:

Nobody in Seattle heard anything of Mayor Hanson's proclamations until long afterward, when eastern newspapers arrived. The only revolution we had was in the mayor's office while he was present. We are sorry, for the mayor is a good advertiser, and a good fellow, but he lost his head entirely.

This strike was the most good-natured vacation ever enjoyed by working people in our city. They stayed at home, nobody got into trouble, nothing happened except that the mayor hired a lot of special police that have cost the city \$30,000. The Tacoma mayor kept his head and Tacoma has not had a penny of expense for special police.

All the leaders in this strike, which was the deliberate action at all times of all of the membership, were reflected afterwards to the Central Labor Council. If they were revolutionary then the rank and file of wage workers are the same.¹²

¹¹ *Boston Herald*, Feb. 17, 1919.

¹² Special Washington correspondence by Lawrence Todd, to the *Seattle Union Record*, dated March 14, 1919.

That the alleged "revolution" was very far from violent can be seen even in Mayor Hanson's statement, which is supported by the *New York Tribune's* special correspondent, who declared that "there was absolutely no violence. The normal police docket of a hundred a day fell to about thirty."¹³

Four days before the general strike the meetings of the General Strike Committee commenced and, with their first meeting on Sunday, February 2, the control of the strike passed over to that Committee from the Central Labor Council. As already stated, this larger Committee consisted of some three hundred delegates from over one hundred unions, all specifically elected for the purpose of conducting the general strike. Problems of organization immediately arose. The constituent members of the Central Labor Council had known and worked with each other for some time, but this was not true of the new General Strike Committee. The amount of business accomplished in such an unwieldy body was, under the circumstances, quite remarkable. An Executive Committee of fifteen was instructed to draw up a plan of action and to consider all questions of exemption from the strike that might arise. Other committees on publicity, on finance, and on tactics were appointed. The decisions of the Executive Committee were at all times subject to appeal to the whole of the General Strike Committee. The date for the actual commencement of the general walk-out was finally set at ten o'clock in the morning of Thursday, February 6, 1919.¹⁴

An interesting comment on the temporary power of the strike committee is contained in a report by the *Nation's* special correspondent.

The extent to which the city recognized the actual rather than the titular government of the community is apparent enough to anyone who reads the carefully kept records of the strike committee, and observes what was actually done. Before the committee, which would seem to have been in well-nigh continuous session day and night, appeared a long succession of business men, city officials, and the Mayor himself, not to threaten or bully, but to discuss the situation and ask the approval of the committee for this or that step.

¹³ Kenneth Macgowan, "The Truth About Seattle," *New York Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1919.

¹⁴ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 15-17.

Heads of business houses, little used to asking permission of employees under any circumstances, wrote formal, courteous letters to the committee, exactly such as they would have written to any recognized municipal official or department, setting forth their reasons why some business operation should be allowed to go on, and asking the privilege of continuing it.¹⁶

It was natural enough that, once the strike was clearly waning, such business firms should feel a strong reaction against the necessity of such an appeal to an "administration" not elected by democratic vote of the whole of the citizens. This reaction became evident in the support given to the Mayor when he swung over from conciliation to hostility and threats of martial law.

The Executive Committee's first grant of exemption from the strike order was typical of its spirit and purpose. A delegation from Firemen's Local 27 was requested to appear before the Committee, and after some discussion the firemen were requested to stay on the job. A further exemption followed from the consultation of the laundry drivers and the laundry workers. Their program, accepted by the Executive Committee, proposed that hospital laundry only should be handled during the strike. For this purpose a certain number of laundry wagons were exempted and furnished with signs and permits, and one of the city laundries was chosen to do this specifically exempted work. It is significant that the Seattle Mutual Laundry, owned by organized labor, was *not* the laundry chosen for exemption. The laundry workers' scheme, planned to the last detail, included warning to the laundry employers not to accept any new work from that date, and on the other hand allowed the workers to continue a few hours after the strike hour, if the laundry already in their hands was not completed.

Further problems of exemption included appeals for janitors for the City Building and the Labor Temple. The Committee, playing no favorites, turned down both applications. On the other hand, requests by the Teamster's Union to carry oil to the Swedish Hospital, and by the Port of Seattle for men to load a government vessel (where no private profit was in

¹⁶ William MacDonald, "The Seattle Strike and Afterwards" (written in Seattle, Feb. 28, 1919), *The Nation*, March 29, 1919.

question) were both granted. Garbage wagon drivers were instructed to leave ashes and papers, but to collect garbage, and the drugstores were advised to fill orders for prescriptions only, during the strike.¹⁶

Two most vital problems came up for decision on the Tuesday before the strike commenced. The first concerned the preservation of law and order, the second the duration of the general strike. To meet the first problem the Executive Committee created a Labor War Veteran Guard, consisting of union men who had served in the U. S. Army or Navy. Some three hundred such men were organized, but were given no arms or even clubs, lest the citizens should fear the outcome. These men might have been enrolled in the Special Police at the City Hall, have received stars and clubs and pay, had they been willing to take the oath, but they preferred the unarmed method of persuasion among their own ranks. On the blackboard at the headquarters of this organization was written: "The purpose of this organization is to preserve law and order without the use of force. No volunteer will have any police power or be allowed to carry weapons of any sort, but to use persuasion only. Keep clear of arguments about the strike and discourage others from them."¹⁷

The question of the strike's duration, and whether a definite limit should be set to it ahead of time, led to much discussion. Many of the older labor leaders, who frankly dreaded the general strike, were urgent that a definite term, preferably two days, should be set to the strike. Among these more conservative leaders were James Duncan, secretary of the Central Labor Council, and E. B. Ault, editor of the *Seattle Union Record*. Their efforts, however, failed when the proposal was referred to the general conference committee of the Metal Trades Council, in whose behalf the general strike had been called.¹⁸

On the last day before the general strike a further flood of questions came up before the Executive Committee. One of the printing plants of the city, asked leave to continue, inasmuch

¹⁶ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 18-22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 49-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22; also notes of an interview by W. Edwards Beach with E. B. Ault, who held that a 48-hour strike would have served its real purpose of a protest against the action of Emergency Fleet Corporation and the Macy Board, but would not have endangered labor.

as many of the unions needed material printed. Leave was refused, but the plant was ultimately turned over to the strike committee, and the printers gave their services without wages for the duration of the strike. Auto drivers were given permission to drive mail and to answer emergency calls for hospitals and funerals, provided such calls were made through the Auto-Drivers' Union. Certain bake ovens were allowed to operate, all wages earned during the strike at such bakeries to go to the strike fund. The Ministerial Federation of Seattle sent delegates to the Executive Committee, to submit resolutions they had already telegraphed to Emergency Fleet Corporation Director Piez and to President Wilson, and to ask that the strike be postponed one week in order to give them an opportunity to bring about a peaceful settlement. Their request was refused, but a rising vote of thanks was given for their interest.

The most serious item, and one that brought much of the odium of subsequent days upon the strikers, was the press interview with Leon Green, business agent of the electrical workers, published in the Wednesday morning paper, declaring that not a single light would burn in Seattle, that the telephones, the press, and all concerns depending upon electric power would cease to function.¹² This aspect of the general strike was, perhaps, the one that brought the least credit to the strike leaders. The various committees, upon reading Leon Green's threat, all became deeply concerned. What would happen to the hospitals, the fire alarm system, the water supply, and the preservation of order on the streets if the electric power were shut off? Hour after hour the problem was debated. The Metal Trades Council finally brought all its influence to bear upon the electrical workers in order that certain exemptions should be granted.

The Mayor of Seattle, in conference with the strike committee, refused to consider the cessation of street lighting, even if other essentials continued. At this point the Electricians' Union informed the Mayor that if the electrical workers came out from the power plant they themselves would operate enough of the plant to provide for the public needs, such as hospitals. A midnight meeting of the Executive Committee, with the elec-

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

trical workers, the Engineers and the Metal Trades committee made the final decision. The Mayor himself attended, was reported as saying that water and light must run, but that he did not care so much about the other public utilities; that he would prefer to run the plants with union men, but would use soldiers from the near-by camps if forced to do so. After he left, the Executive Committee ordered the electrical workers to run the city plant, with the exception of commercial power. As it turned out, no cessation of power occurred, the whole threat of a walk-out being a matter of bluff on the part of Leon Green, who could not have called out the workers at the plant if he had tried, as they were but partially organized. After the strike Green left the city and was later arrested in Chicago on a bribery charge. There was a general feeling among the labor ranks that he was an *agent provocateur*, as he subsequently dropped out of the union movement.²⁰

THE WALK-OUT AND ITS AFTERMATH

As the hour of ten o'clock arrived on Thursday morning, February 6, the street car men turned their cars toward the car barns, union elevator men in the large buildings abandoned their posts, and restaurants closed their doors as their union cooks and waiters departed. For twenty-four hours no attempt was made to run a street car, in spite of Mayor Hanson's threats to use the military.

At the opening of the second day of the strike the press wires from Seattle reported that theatres and schools had closed, shipping was being diverted to Oregon points, newspapers had suspended publication, and restaurants continued closed. Over a thousand soldiers arrived from Camp Lewis to aid the police in keeping order, but the police did not receive a single trouble call as a result of the strike. It was estimated that thirty thousand men and women had left their employment in sympathy with the striking shipyard workers. The hotels operated without engineers, maids, or laundry service, but they did not lack food as large supplies had been laid in before the outbreak of

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27, also interview by W. Edwards Beach with William Short, formerly president of the State Federation of Labor; cf. *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 6, 1919.

the strike.²¹ Friday evening the Scripps paper, the *Star*, published a strike edition, with its plant under armed guard of soldiers, further soldiers riding on and guarding the distribution truck. Saturday morning the *Post-Intelligencer* put out a four-page sheet and distributed it to the crowd gratis.²²

On Friday the Mayor had demanded that the strike be called off on Saturday morning, February 8, on pain of martial law. This threat severely embarrassed the Executive Committee who were already considering the question of ending the strike. By a vote of 18 to 1 they decided nonetheless to call off the strike on Saturday night. When their decision was carried to the full General Strike Committee it became evident that the ranks were unwilling to return to work. Discussion raged all afternoon and night, and at four o'clock on Sunday morning, February 9, the resolution to end the strike was overwhelmingly defeated.²³

Despite this vote of the Committee of three hundred delegates, the strike had begun to dwindle. On Friday a single union barber shop had reopened, and fifteen of the city schools had remained open, their engineers and janitors refusing to heed the strike orders. By Saturday several unions returned to work by order of their international officers, who had never approved of the strike call and had hurried to Seattle to handle the situation. On Monday the stereotypers, the barbers, auto drivers, milk drivers, ice wagon drivers, and bill posters were reported as back at work.²⁴ The restaurants, however, were still badly crippled as their union cooks and waiters determined to remain out.²⁵ When, therefore, the Executive Committee again put forward a resolution, this time calling for the end of the strike at noon on Tuesday, February 11, the General Strike Committee accepted the resolution at once.²⁶

As the strike ended, the reaction that always follows such an event set in. An "open shop" rule was launched by the Waterfront Employers' Association, the employers feeling secure behind the ranks of armed men and with the tacit aid of the international officers of the unions, who were likely to

²¹ *Ibid.*, Feb. 6 and 7, 1919.

²² *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1919.

²³ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 51-57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58; cf. *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 6, 1919.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1919.

²⁶ *The Seattle General Strike*, p. 59.

penalize their union locals for their unauthorized strike.²⁷ Arrests were made of I. W. W. members although they had not been responsible for the calling or the running of the strike. The Socialist party headquarters was raided and its candidate for the city council arrested. The Equity Printing Plant, a co-operative plant with stock owned by individual workers or their unions, was raided, its manager arrested, and the plant closed down. Presumably some one had to be "the goat" after such an outcry about "revolution," and these individuals seemed the least likely to be defended by the regular union forces.²⁸

The strike in the shipyards, however, continued unabated, the general strike accomplishing nothing save the stiffening of hostility on the part even of erstwhile friendly shipyard managements.²⁹ Attempts made in February to reopen the Skinner and Eddy plant under the same wage rates in force before the strike were met by further vacillation on the part of the Emergency Fleet Corporation and representatives of the Macy Board, who at times appeared to favor resumption on the pre-strike terms, at others asked the Emergency Fleet Corporation to penalize the Skinner and Eddy Corporation for departing from the Macy Board award.³⁰ Finally, as late as March 17, 1919, the shipyard workers returned to work in the Seattle and Tacoma yards on the conditions existent before the strike. Owing to the stand taken by the Skinner and Eddy Corporation, the rest of the shipyards had ultimately to withdraw their open shop ultimatum.³¹

The reaction against organized labor took a political shape in the municipal elections of 1919 and 1920. In 1919 three union men were nominated as candidates against three councilmen standing for reelection. As Seattle elections had been on a non-partisan basis for some years this cleavage on class lines was all the more evident. Organized business was alarmed and the Chamber of Commerce appealed to the citizens to support those candidates who were not "subservient to" or "controlled by" "any one organization or class"! The three labor candidates

²⁷ *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 10, 1919.

²⁸ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 57-58.

²⁹ For example, the Skinner and Eddy Corporation, cf. *U. S. vs. Skinner and Eddy Corp.*, p. 180.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-99.

³¹ *Seattle Union Record*, March 17, 1919.

were defeated. In 1920 James Duncan, secretary of the Central Labor Council, was put forward as candidate for mayor and supported by the *Seattle Union Record*. The three other papers opposed him, and the issue was made one of "loyalty" and "patriotism." Duncan suffered severe defeat, but two of the labor candidates were elected to the City Council.⁵²

Apart from the loss in wages that the general strike entailed and the possible loss of wage increases in certain cases pending just before the strike, the Metal Trades found that they had incurred a loss of nearly seven thousand dollars in their food-kitchen experiment. Twenty-one eating places had been opened in various quarters of the city by the strikers. The food had been cooked in large kitchens donated for the purpose by different restaurants; thence transported to various halls and served in cafeteria style, at twenty-five to thirty-five cents a meal, according to whether or not the customer possessed a union card. The short duration of the strike was largely to blame for this deficit, as the managers of the food kitchens overestimated the number of meals that would be required in the first days of the experiment and had much loss in food. Equipment and trucking had caused further heavy expense that a longer period of service would have recouped. By the close of the strike, however, the commissary committee was serving 30,000 meals a day with little trouble or friction—quite an achievement for "green hands" in so short a time.

In similar manner the milk wagon drivers' union had to meet a loss of some seven hundred dollars, through the quantity of milk that went to waste, for which they had contracted with the farmers. On the other hand, these milk wagon drivers had succeeded in organizing milk centers all over Seattle where pure, certified, but unpasteurized milk was available for the babies and invalids of the city.⁵³ The general sense of coöperative achievement that such experiments left behind them and the recognition of the solidarity of labor, even in the weaker unions, made up, perhaps, in some degree, for the very evident failure of the general strike. Such failure was due, in no small degree, to the strike

⁵² R. D. McKenzie, "Community Forces, a Study of the Non-Partisan Municipal Elections in Seattle," *Journal of Social Forces*, Jan., March, May, 1926.

⁵³ *The Seattle General Strike*, pp. 41-45.

leaders' omission at the outset to define clearly and definitely both the duration and the precise purpose of the general strike. In the absence of such definite limits it was a simple matter for the forces of the citizens, the employers, and the non-labor press to raise the cry of "revolution," and, in the end, demonstrate to the world's satisfaction that the general strike had been a fiasco.

THE TROUBLE IN WINNIPEG

The localized general strike in the city of Winnipeg, starting on May 15, 1919, and running through to the 26th of June, constitutes the longest and most stubborn general strike in history, not even excepting the Swedish example of 1909 and the Chinese instance of 1925. Though on a comparatively small scale, the total number of strikers not exceeding 35,000 in a population of about 200,000, the effect of the strike was to paralyze all life and industry in the city and to threaten seriously all the larger towns and cities, on the main lines of communications from Toronto to Vancouver, with an extension of the strike, before the Winnipeg dispute was brought to a close.³⁴

The Winnipeg strike produced more lasting effect than that in Seattle earlier in the same year, not only because of its duration, but because it crystallized the strong class feeling of the after-war period, alike in the strong *Citizens' Committee of One Thousand* that opposed the strike leaders from the outset; in the final, hasty legislative steps taken to railroad the strike leaders into jail and out of the country; and in the dramatic trials of those leaders that followed upon the failure of this attempt to be rid of them by covert means. The treatment of the strike leaders by the Dominion and Provincial Government was much quoted, at the inception of the great British strike of 1926, as a hint to the British Government that similar high-handed action might be advisable. Fortunately, such press advice was not taken in the British case.

The persistence with which the general strike continued is the more remarkable in that labor had been better organized at the outset of the strike in Seattle than it had in Winnipeg, yet the Seattle strike was wavering within three days of its com-

³⁴ E. B. Fussell, "Winnipeg Labor Men 'We'll Stick,' " *Nonpartisan Leader*, June 2, 1919.

mencement. In Winnipeg, moreover, the unions in the Metal Trades had their own council, as in Seattle, but unlike Seattle, it was not recognized by the employers. The majority of the metal workers were employed in the Winnipeg railway shops, and were organized in some nineteen craft unions, and the officers of the Metal Trades Council were railway men. The controversy that arose in the metal trades, however, had to do, not with the railway shops so much as with three foundries: the Vulcan Iron Works, the Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works, and the Dominion Bridge Company. The managements of these companies were willing to make contracts with their own workers, through the craft unions if necessary, but they were unalterably opposed to making any joint agreements through the Metal Trades' Council. It was the refusal of "Collective Bargaining," in this rather novel interpretation of the term, that was one of the basic causes of the general strike.⁸⁵

A demand for a living wage that would more nearly meet the war-time increases in the cost of living, was a further immediate cause of the strike. The Building Trades' Council had sought to obtain an increase of twenty cents an hour. The employers had offered about half that amount, but had refused absolutely to deal with the Building Trades' Council, though, like the ironmasters, they were willing to make agreements with the individual craft unions. The cost of living was said to have increased some 80 per cent over pre-war rates, whereas the previous wage increases had amounted to barely 20 per cent. The wage increase demanded constituted a further 32 per cent. The outcome was the declaration of a strike among the building workers in Winnipeg on May 1, 1919, and one day later the Metal Trades' Council called a strike in its own trades. The wage rates asked for by the metal trade workers were the same as those paid on the railways for similar work, under the McAdoo award. In addition a reduction of hours from 10 to 8 per day was demanded. The employers were willing to grant only a nine-hour day.⁸⁶

As in Seattle the trades on strike in Winnipeg appealed to their local Trades and Labor Council for support. That organi-

⁸⁵ E. T. Devine, "Winnipeg and Seattle," *Survey*, Oct. 4, 1919.

⁸⁶ *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, published by the Defense Committee, pp. 33-41.

zation advocated a sympathetic strike of the remaining industries and trades and referred the question to its constituent unions for a secret ballot. Of the twelve thousand workers affiliated with the Trades and Labor Council on a preliminary return some 8,667 voted for a strike and 645 against it. Even the police union members voted 149 to 11 in favor of a walk-out. The various unions concerned, some 95 in all, each appointed three delegates to a large Strike Committee, with a smaller executive committee of fifteen, selected from the larger body. The full Strike Committee, however, decided all matters of policy, and appointed the subsidiary committees on the Press, on Relief, on Organization, and on Food Supplies. The Pressmen's union decided to do no printing whatever, not even of the Labor paper, but agreed to depute men who would work without pay on the strike bulletin, which was issued daily from the 17th of May onward. The appointment of the editor, the policy, size, and finances of this strike bulletin were also decided by the Strike Committee.⁸⁷

The general strike was definitely called for May 15, 1919. The Strike Committee included in its strike call the city firemen, employees in the city's high pressure water plant, in the light, power, and street cleaning departments, even the clerks in the City Hall. Only the police and workers in the domestic water supply plant were specially requested to stay at their posts by the Strike Committee. Furthermore, the employees of the Manitoba Government Telephones and of the Dominion Government's post offices, workers in the various express and telegraphic companies, and on the Winnipeg Electric (street) Railway, all joined the strike. There were called out, in addition, employees in the bakeries and dairies, in retail and wholesale establishments dealing with the necessaries of life, together with the carters and delivery men of these establishments. Restaurant workers, passenger and freight elevator operators, caretakers and janitors ceased to work, and the hotels were practically closed down, as were the banks, owing to lack of mail and telegraphic communication. The only telegraphic messages allowed to pass were those concerning health, the moving or arrival of troop trains, and Government business. By the third day of the strike the news-

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

papers had to cease publication owing to the pressmen's strike. Only the daily strike bulletin and the sheet issued by the Citizens' Committee appeared.³⁸

On the second day of the strike, having given evidence of their power to close down the whole life of the city, the Strike Committee requested the distributive workers to return, the delivery vans of bread and milk carrying special cards with the words "Permitted by authority of the Strike Committee." This assertion of control over the city's life was looked upon by the Citizens' Committee as evidence of the revolutionary purpose of the strike, and ultimately these cards were discontinued as a result of the strong disapproval of Mayor Gray.³⁹ Elevator operators and engineers at the city hospitals were asked by the Strike Committee to resume their work, and volunteer carpentry work was done for hospitals without pay by union men. But for the rapid organization of the Citizens' Committee, however, Winnipeg would have been in a sorry plight, or would have been forced to concede the strikers' demand of "collective bargaining," higher wages, and reinstatement of the strikers.⁴⁰

THE "CITIZENS' COMMITTEE OF ONE THOUSAND"

The general strike in Winnipeg was not completely without warning. In the previous year a strike of public utilities lasting less than two weeks had forced the citizens to organize themselves as volunteer workers, for street-car, postal, and telephone services, and for police and fire protection. The lesson of that earlier experience had not been lost upon the citizen volunteers. Again, from another source there had been a hint of coming trouble. A great mass meeting in the Walker Theatre on December 22, 1918, had given vocal protest to the feelings of organized labor in Winnipeg against the method of government by "Orders-in-Council," by which the right to strike had been forbidden as late as October 11 of that year. Workers feared that such "orders" would carry over their prohibitory force into peace time, after

³⁸ *London Times*, May 21, 1919; cf. also *Activities and Organization of the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand*, p. 5, and Bill of Indictment against the eight strike leaders printed in the *Winnipeg Telegram*, Nov. 19, 1919.

³⁹ *London Times*, May 22, 1919; cf. *Activities . . . of Citizens' Committee*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, p. 22. *London Times*, May 21, 1919.

the signing of the Armistice, although that particular "Order-in-Council" had been repealed by the Governor on the 19th of November. In the subsequent trial of the strike leaders the Government tried to prove that the Walker Theatre meeting was but one act of a series in a plan to bring "into hatred and contempt" the laws and Government of the Dominion of Canada, the culminating act of which was, of course, the general strike.⁴²

The most evident proof of prearranged trouble, in the minds of the citizen volunteers, however, rested in the famous Western Canada Labor convention held at Calgary, Alberta, on March 13, 14, and 15, 1919. That convention had been confessedly a move to break away from the "international" labor federations affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and to inaugurate the régime of One Big Union for Canada, with an industrial and political program more akin to the radical reconstruction program of British Labor at that time. The resolutions committee of this convention had combined demands for free speech, removal of the ban upon radical labor literature, the release of political prisoners, the six-hour day and five-day week, with a plan for a general strike on June 1 if these demands had not been granted by that time. A further resolution had threatened a general strike if the Allied governments persisted in using armed force against the existing Soviet Government of Russia. The thought of the general strike was, therefore, well to the front in the minds of the more radical workers and leaders in Canada at this time.⁴³

On the evening before the strike was called the original Committee of One Hundred held a public meeting and expanded that smaller body into the *Committee of One Thousand*, the better to cope with the crisis which they foresaw must develop immediately. A volunteer fire brigade took charge of the city fire stations at the moment when the regular men walked out on strike. Threats had been made that if the city water pressure were raised above thirty pounds (sufficient only for two story buildings) all the

⁴² C. L. Johnson, "Revolution or Strike in Winnipeg?" *The Public*, June 21, 1919; cf. Bill of Indictment published in the *Winnipeg Telegram*, Nov. 19, 1919, and *Report of Labor Situation in Canada* ("Confidential," U. S. State Dept., 1919), pp. 25-26.

⁴³ *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, pp. 21-30. Cf. also speech of A. J. Andrews, K. C., at trial of R. B. Russell, in the *Manitoba Free Press*, Nov. 29, 1919.

staff remaining at the Domestic Water Plant would join the strikers. The Citizens' Committee proceeded at once to organize three shifts of volunteers under competent engineers and, when ready, made formal demand upon the civic authorities that water pressure be restored to normal. This was officially ordered by the Mayor and City Council; the remaining regular staffs walked out as threatened, and the volunteer staffs at once took charge, under the supervision of the City Engineer.⁴³

A further organization was formed to protect the 350 fire alarm boxes in the city, inasmuch as frequent false alarms had been rung in after the walkout of the regular firemen. A motor transport organization was formed with a fleet of sixty cars to serve the fire department and the high pressure pumping station, and a further general utility fleet of seven hundred cars, divided into a hundred units of six men and a captain. The captains met daily and carried the orders to their units at once. In the event of a general alarm, assembly points throughout the whole city were apportioned, where each unit would be ready to place itself under military orders. In the meantime this motor transport organization served to carry volunteer workers to and from the telephone exchanges, deliver mail, distribute the *Daily Citizen*, attend to hospital requirements and transport the military headquarters staff and the citizen soldiers.⁴⁴

At the outset of the strike there were no such military resources as existed within easy reach of Seattle. Possibly two hundred returned soldiers were in barracks awaiting discharge, and a score of North West Mounted Police. Within a week, however, at least ten thousand soldiers were in Winnipeg under Brig.-General Ketchen. Significantly enough the strike bulletin announced that "permission to handle troop trains on the rail-ways has been granted," apparently showing considerable power of permit-granting on the part of the Strike Committee.⁴⁵ Some three to five thousand citizen volunteers were formed into a militia organization, and the city was divided into five military districts. Later in the strike a band of special police were en-

⁴³ *Activities . . . of Citizens' Committee*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 28-24.

⁴⁵ *London Times*, May 23, 1919. Cf. E. T. Devine, "Winnipeg and Seattle," *Survey*, Oct. 4, 1919.

rolled, consisting of returned officers and men from the expeditionary forces.⁴⁶

THE RETURNED SOLDIERS TAKE PART

The returned soldiers played a large part in the strike, both sides angling adroitly for their support. On the very first day of the strike a mass meeting of war veterans was called. A resolution to observe neutrality in the strike, but to place their services at the disposal of the civic, provincial and military authorities was voted down after a stormy meeting, and the following short motion was carried:

That this meeting declares its full sympathy with the purposes of the present strike to meet the general condition of the people, and pledges itself to use every legitimate means to preserve law and order, and that after the strike is settled labor and the returned soldiers get together and discuss the deportation of the enemy alien.

The second portion of the motion showed evidence of the efforts already made by the "Citizens" side to set the returned soldiers against the ranks of union labor, under the plea of the vast number of aliens and alien enemies in the unions. In the second and succeeding weeks of the strike, street parades of strikers led by over one thousand returned soldiers, would alternate with parades of some thousands of returned soldiers carrying banners with such lurid titles as "To Hell with the Alien Enemy," "Down with Bolshevism," "Deport the Undesirable Alien," showing that the poison of propaganda had already done its work pretty well. Even to the end something approaching two thousand of the returned soldiers stood by the strikers.⁴⁷

An attempt to bring the strike to an end in the second week by means of a meeting before Mayor Gray, of citizens, trade unionists, and employers, failed dismally, since the employers demanded that the sympathetic strike be renounced in principle before they would negotiate, whereas the strike leaders demanded

⁴⁶ *Activities . . . of Citizens' Committee*, p. 4; cf. *London Times*, May 23 and June 9, 1919.

⁴⁷ C. L. Johnson, "Revolution or Strike in Winnipeg?" *The Public*, June 21, 1919, and *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, p. 83. *London Times*, June 16, 1919.

the right to "collective bargaining," and R. B. Russell, leader of the metal trades' workers, declared that the trade unionists of twenty-six other cities were ready to strike rather than see Winnipeg labor lose.⁴⁸ This failure to negotiate, and the growing strength of the citizens' organizations and the military forces, stiffened the resistance of labor and hardened the attitude of the authorities. The strike settled down to a grim struggle of attrition.

The Dominion Government issued an ultimatum to the postal employees to return to work by the 26th of May and to sign an agreement never again to join any sympathetic strike, nor to remain affiliated with the Trades and Labor Council. The alternative was dismissal, loss of pension, and the right to be employed by the Dominion Government. The Provincial government took the same attitude toward the telephone employees and the Civic authorities to their city employees. In the majority of cases the employees refused to return or to sign the "slave pact." How little was the response is seen from a Winnipeg wire to the *London Times* as late as June 2 stating that all public services except the trolleys had been restored by *volunteer labor*, but that the ultimatum to the police had been postponed to June 3—a full week after the original ultimatum date!⁴⁹

In point of fact, a great deal had happened in that week. The railroadmen on the main lines through Winnipeg began to grow exceedingly restive, took strike votes, and sent urgent telegrams to headquarters of their international unions for permission to strike. On May 24 the miners of Alberta went on strike. A heavy strike vote was cast by forty-four unions in Toronto on May 27, while in Calgary the street cars ceased to run and hotels and restaurants closed down. In Vancouver the Trades and Labor Council telegraphed the Dominion Government:

Unless the Government recedes from its position of opposing collective bargaining through joint councils and of expressing its determination to replace the striking postal workers of Winnipeg and other places, the workers of this city will declare a general strike.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, May 24 and 26, 1919.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, May 26 and June 4, 1919. Cf. *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, pp. 63-69.

By the 1st of June, 235 factories in Toronto were closed, fifty garment-making shops were idle and work on some fifty buildings had stopped. On June 3 a sympathetic general strike started in Vancouver.⁵⁰

In Winnipeg itself matters had grown no easier with the passage of time. Two thousand returned soldiers marched upon the Manitoba Parliament and demanded of Premier Norris an immediate settlement of the strike by legislation making collective bargaining legal, and the modification of the ultimatum to the Winnipeg police. An orderly and peaceful parade through the streets of the city followed.⁵¹ The next day a still larger crowd of returned soldiers went to the Parliament House for Premier Norris' answer, only to be told that the police were not under his jurisdiction but under that of the city; that he could not give immediate legislation; that the Government would not act until the sympathetic strike had been called off. A stormy meeting followed at the City Hall, where the Council was in session. Mayor Gray insisted that there must be no more sympathy strikes in the public utilities. He contended that there had been no ultimatum to the police. It was learned later in the day that the ultimatum had been postponed for a week.⁵²

On June 2 a third visit to the Premier was made by the strikers and soldiers. This time only soldiers were allowed within the building. The same demands for immediate legislation were made with the alternative of Premier Norris' resignation. The Premier declared that he could not call a special session, that he favored collective bargaining but opposed sympathetic strikes. He refused to consider the resignation of his office. The same attitude toward the strikers was taken by the Dominion Government. Premier Borden stood by his decision that civil servants should not take part in strikes, and that all who did so would be instantly dismissed.⁵³ The Dominion Minister of Labor, Mr. Robertson, writing to President Gompers of the American Federation of Labor, gave his view of the Winnipeg situation:

A general sympathetic strike involving ninety-five unions was called in the city of Winnipeg May 15, resulting in a complete tie-up

⁵⁰ *London Times*, May 26, 27, 29, June 2, and June 4, 1919.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, June 2, 1919. ⁵² *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, pp. 64-91.

⁵³ *London Times*, June 6, 1919. Cf. *Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike*, pp. 66-69, also *New York Times*, June 3, 1919; *Boston Herald*, May 31, 1919.

of all business and the declaration of the strike committee of control over civic affairs, as well as interference with provincial and federal employes. As in the case of all general strikes of this nature it has already defeated itself, but I feel it is proper to address you, after being on the ground for several days, that in my opinion the prestige and authority of the International Unions whose local membership participated in the strike. . . should receive earnest and serious consideration of the executives of the various organizations concerned. . . . The underlying motive in calling the strike is undoubtedly to support what is known as the One Big Union movement. . . .

The result of the letter and the strike was to bring a number of the "international" officers up to Winnipeg and Toronto, for the purpose both of settling the strike and of penalizing the recalcitrant locals.⁴⁴

The pressure upon the strikers throughout Canada now became intense. In Toronto, where 15,000 men had quit work for a 44-hour week and in sympathy with Winnipeg, the employers refused point-blank to make any concessions, claiming that it was "not a strike but a Socialist-inspired movement" and a "rebellion against capital." A citizens' committee of ten thousand was formed to meet the emergency. The success of the general strike hinged largely on the action of the returned soldiers. After a long meeting the street car men, nearly 80 per cent of whom were war veterans, finally decided not to join the general walk-out in Toronto and this decision practically settled the fate of the general strike call in that city. The appearance of "international" officers in Toronto and the hostility of the more conservative leaders of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council completed its failure.⁴⁵

THE STRIKERS BECOME BITTER

On the other hand, the strike spread in Western Canada, where the interest in radicalism and the One Big Union was far stronger than in the east. At 11 o'clock on June 3, some 60,000 workers "downed tools" in Vancouver, at the call of the Trades and Labor Council in that city, in sympathy with Winnipeg, and for a program of their own. The shipyards, the harbor and, a

⁴⁴ *London Times*, June 2, 1919.

⁴⁵ *Boston Herald*, May 31, 1919; cf. *London Times*, June 3 and 4, 1919.

day later, the street cars, all closed down, and the compositors threatened to censor all "unfair" news. At the same time Kennedy and James Duncan from Seattle, alleged "Bolshevik" leaders, but in fact among the more conservative in Seattle, arrived in Winnipeg and were reported as advising "famine" tactics. Whether or not this was actually the fact, the strikers resumed a good deal of control in Winnipeg for a day or two, calling out once more all milk and bread wagon-drivers, employees in the restaurants and the city newboys. In retaliation the Mayor had yet more "specials" sworn in, forbade all processions in the streets, guaranteed protection to bakeries, and had city milk centers at forty-three of the public schools. Large supplies of ammunition were unloaded and distributed to the Winnipeg barracks on June 3—a sinister event.⁵⁶

Tension increased in Winnipeg. Where hitherto order had reigned, even by the admission of labor opponents, now for the first time an ugly spirit began to show itself. Bread and milk delivery carts were stopped, their tires torn off, and food deliveries made difficult. The workers' ranks were reported as "substantially unbroken" on June 10, and the employers, with the full support of the Federal and Provincial Governments on their side refused any negotiation as long as the sympathetic strike lasted.⁵⁷ On June 7, in the Dominion Parliament at Ottawa, a bill to amend the existing Immigration Acts was rushed through both houses and received the royal assent within the unseemly space of one hour. The purpose of the amending bill was to make it possible for the Government to seize a man who was not born in the Dominion and to deport him without trial and even without a charge, save that he was "an undesirable alien." The purpose was evident. Fourteen out of fifteen members of the strike committee in Toronto were English born, and a large number of the leaders in the western provinces were English speaking socialists, rather than Russian or "enemy aliens" as the press propaganda had endeavored to prove. Such an Act would permit the obnoxious leaders to be railroaded out of the country without trial or legal delay.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, June 6, 7, and 9, 1919.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1919.

⁵⁸ E. T. Devine, "Winnipeg and Seattle," *Survey*, Oct. 4, 1919; cf. London *Times*, May 27, June 2, and 9, 1919.

Once the bill was law, the propaganda redoubled. On June 10, press reports made much of a Secret Service investigation in Canada and the United States, purporting to show that the Winnipeg strike originated at the Calgary Convention in March, that it was directed by the I. W. W., and that the leaders "possessed disgraceful traitorous records in every case." Significantly not a single name was given in the press report! Simultaneously the whole police force of Winnipeg, refusing absolutely to sign the pledge against sympathetic strikes, found themselves dismissed from office, and a new force of 2,000 overseas men were sworn in. At the same time the various city tradesmen refused any further credit to those with no money. Up to this point in the strike Mr. Richardson, owner of the *Winnipeg Tribune*, could say "apart from much petty intimidation there have been no riots or bloodshed."⁹⁹

Now, however, the long suppressed feelings on both sides burst forth into violence. The immediate cause was simple and natural enough. The special police appeared officially upon the streets for the first time on June 10, taking the place of the 225 regulars who had been dismissed the night before. At noon two special constables, one of them an overseas veteran and son of a former Cabinet minister, took their stand at a busy corner to direct the traffic. A crowd of strikers gathered and after certain remarks at the expense of the new police had been made by returned soldiers, trouble started. Mounted and foot special police were assailed with bottles, brick-bats, ash-can covers, and their own clubs. For three hours the *mêlée* lasted, and broken heads were too numerous to be counted. Twelve of the police were injured and five had to receive hospital treatment. The *Citizens' Committee* protested rather bitterly that Mayor Gray had not read the riot act and turned the affair over to the military, which was in barracks in great strength. The Mayor, however, was determined that a call for the military should be given only for "extreme provocation."¹⁰⁰

For a few days the "specials" were removed from the downtown streets, and traffic moved easily, there being no disorder,

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, June 12, 1919.

¹⁰⁰ *Boston Herald*, June 11; *London Times*, June 14, 1919. Cf. *Activities . . . of Citizens' Committee*, p. 16.

even though no police were in sight. Vast crowds of strikers gathered around the Trades Hall as rumors spread that the leaders were to be arrested. The Chief of Police, offered three months leave, and refusing to take it, was dismissed, though he had served the city for nine years.⁶¹ Evidently more rigorous methods were on foot, as a Toronto wire to the *London Times* on June 14 would indicate:

There is great tension in Winnipeg. The authorities have 45 squads of machine gunners and 10,000 civilians and returned soldiers, each of whom spends two nights a week in barracks, 800 mounted police, 100 Fort Garry Horse, and 3,600 special police.

The gravity of the situation is accentuated by the certainty that a percentage of the returned soldiers are in sympathy with the strikers.⁶²

Finally the bolt was shot. After long conferences between Premier Norris, General Ketchen and Lt. Colonel Stearns of the North West Mounted Police, the authorities took courage behind their vast military forces, and in the "wee, small hours" of the morning of June 17, ten of the strike leaders were arrested, hurried from their beds, and taken to Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Bail was refused, and it was stated in the press that some of the arrested men would be deported under the new Act, without charge or trial. The Manitoba Premier accused the Dominion authorities of being responsible for the arrests, and the Dominion Government returned the compliment.⁶³

Later, Minister of Labor Robertson of the Dominion Government admitted that the Federal Department of Justice was responsible for the arrests. Widespread protest followed the spiriting of the leaders to Stony Mountain. The Mayor of Winnipeg declared that the danger point was past and the leaders already discredited. The *Winnipeg Free Press* asserted that the arrests were untimely, since the strike would have been defeated in another thirty hours. Pressure of public opinion resulted in the release of Ivens, Russell, Quinn, Heaps, and Bray

⁶¹ *London Times*, June 14, 1919.

⁶² *Ibid.*, June 16, 1919.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, June 18 and 19, 1919. Among the leaders arrested were R. B. Russell, secretary to the Metal Trades Council, Rev. William Ivens, of the Labor Church, R. E. Bray, leader of the returned soldier strike parades, George Armstrong, and Aldermen Quinn and Heaps—a very Anglo-Saxon list of names!

on bail of \$2,000 each, inasmuch as they were all British born, and the Government decided to proceed against them in court.⁴⁴

By the end of the next week the strike was officially ended, but not until a most bloody riot had occurred. How far the riot was desired by the armed authorities as a more effective means of convicting the arrested leaders will never be known, but there is some evidence to show that the firing took place with little or no warning to the crowd. On Saturday, June 21, a silent parade of strikers and soldiers was organized. Mayor Gray had previously announced that "any women taking part in a parade do so at their own risk." Despite the warning vast crowds of strikers and their women folk assembled to witness the "silent parade." A delegation from the soldiers was interviewing Senator Robertson, and had not returned to their comrades when the latter began to line up on Main Street near the City Hall. At the time the parade was scheduled to start, about two-thirty in the afternoon, some fifty mounted men, swinging baseball bats, rode down Main Street. Half of these wore khaki; the rest were in the red coats of the North West Mounted Police. The crowd opened to let them through, they turned and charged the crowd, which greeted them with stones and hostile cries. The men in khaki disappeared at this juncture, but the red coats re-formed, and "with revolvers drawn, galloped down Main Street, turned, and charged right into the crowd on William Avenue, firing as they charged." Such is the story as told by J. S. Woodsworth, one of the strike leaders, an ex-Methodist minister and director of a Bureau of Social Research, maintained by three Canadian provinces.⁴⁵

The other side of the story is that Mayor Gray read the riot act when the 20,000 strikers had assembled, and called on General Ketchen for aid. The crowd mobbed a street car (the trolleys had not hitherto been running), and attacked the mounted police who then rode up; the mob, beaten back, fought with stones, and started to wreck everything in sight. A mounted trooper, unhorsed, fled; was pursued and fired at. The mounted police returned the fire and the military came to their aid. The crowd

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, June 20 and 21, 1919.

⁴⁵ From Bill of Indictment against Woodsworth quoting his article "Bloody Saturday" as a "seditious libel." The case against Woodsworth was dropped by the Government some months later.

in their hurry to escape broke through shops and private houses. Armored cars were at all important street corners. Both stories sound a trifle too perfect. The outcome was the death of one spectator and the wounding of many others, including a returned soldier.⁶⁵ At the trial of the arrested strike leaders the officer commanding the mounted police on the day of the riot was reported as stating in his evidence to the Court:

About 120 bullets in all were fired into the crowd of men, women and children. They were not marching around the streets but standing in front of the City Hall. Many were running away when we fired at them. . . . I have no idea if the crowd would have run if blank cartridges were fired instead of those able to take effect. Under instructions I didn't wait to see if they'd run with our charge, but fired at them.⁶⁷

On the 26th of June, some six weeks after the general strike had started, it was officially declared at an end. The Provincial Government for its part appointed a commission to investigate and settle grievances. The metal trades were said to have won their demand for collective bargaining, but the firemen, police, and postal employees lost their positions permanently. The telegraph and street car operators were to be reinstated, as also the railway shopmen who had struck in sympathy, but disciplinary action was taken against the locomotive engineers who had joined the strike. A loss of some four million dollars due to the strike was alleged.⁶⁸ As in Seattle, so in Winnipeg, the class struggle of the general strike was carried into the local political field at the municipal election that followed. The *Citizens' Committee* used every effort in the three daily newspapers to defeat the labor candidates, and all candidates likely to "split" the *Citizens'* vote were persuaded to withdraw. The result was a vote of 15,630 for Mayor Gray, as against 12,514 for his labor opponent. Four of the seven wards of the city were carried by labor, but the "plural" property vote defeated their candidate. At the close of the election, labor possessed a 50 per cent representation on the aldermanic body.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *London Times*, June 23, 1919.

⁶⁶ *New letter of the Defense Committee*, dated Winnipeg, Feb. 21, 1920.

⁶⁷ *London Times*, June 26 and 27, 1919.

⁶⁸ A. Vernon Thomas, "Quoting Isaiah in Winnipeg," *The Nation*, Jan. 3, 1920.

THE TRIAL OF THE STRIKE LEADERS

Apart from the stubborn resistance of the strikers over so long a period of time, the Winnipeg general strike will be famous in labor history for the dramatic trials of the strike leaders. Of the ten men arrested and put on trial for conspiracy and seditious utterance, not one was born outside the British Empire. Six were born in England, two in Scotland, and two in Canada, a comment on the propaganda of "alien" leadership that needs no further emphasis. Two of them, William Ivens and J. S. Woodsworth, were ex-Methodist ministers; two, Quinn and Heaps, were Winnipeg aldermen; one, F. J. Dixon, was a member of the Manitoba Legislature, with the largest majority of any member in that body.⁷⁰

The indictment preferred against all but Woodsworth and Dixon consisted of seven counts, which in very brief summary included the following points:

(1) Conspiracy to bring into "hatred and contempt and to excite disaffection against the Government, laws, and constitution of the Dominion of Canada" and of the Province of Manitoba; together with the promotion of hostility between class and class.

(2) Responsibility for the Walker Theatre meeting in Winnipeg, December 22, 1918, and for that held in the Majestic Theatre on January 19, 1919. That "as a result of said meetings unlawful assemblies and riots took place, and property was destroyed and persons assaulted and injured" in Winnipeg, (presumably six months later on June 10 and 21). Aiding, abetting and assisting in causing the holding of the Calgary Labor Convention in March for the purpose of furthering the One Big Union; the publication of seditious literature (strike bulletins and the *Western Labor News*); and the calling of the general strike in Winnipeg on May 15, 1919, were further portions of this count.

(3) The paralysis of industry in the city of Winnipeg, whereby "constituted authority was challenged and usurped."

(4) Endangering the lives of Winnipeg citizens, and the exposure of property to serious injury.

(5) Undermining and destroying the confidence of Winnipeg citizens in the Dominion and Manitoba laws and Governments, all "intended to be a step in a revolution against the constitutional form of government in Canada."

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

(6) The attempt to bring about a Soviet form of government in Canada through general strikes.

(7) Depriving the citizens of Winnipeg of their "right to conduct themselves and their businesses in such manner as they were lawfully entitled to do."⁷¹

The actual indictment covered eight columns of newsprint in fine type, and was as full of circumlocution and repetition as such a document could possibly be.

R. B. Russell's case was taken first, in the late fall of 1919. Russell had been a machinist until February, 1918, when he became the business agent for the local Metal Trades Council. It was Russell who moved the resolution in the Walker Theatre demanding the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Russia. He represented the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council at the Calgary convention and it was his Trades Council of metal workers that was largely instrumental in calling for a general strike in Winnipeg. Russell's trial was of importance in that evidence obtained in that trial was used subsequently against the other accused leaders. In Judge Metcalfe's charge to the jury in this case he declared:

If collective bargaining means that thereby the workers of Canada may enforce upon the employer a recognition. . . of agencies for the purpose of making contracts for their men with the employers; and if such a condition of affairs will make it more easy for those who control or who desire to control labor for unlawful purposes, to tie up industry from coast to coast, to give as much inconvenience to the general public as possible, to make a strike efficient. . . so that a revolution by a strike might be brought about more easily, it was seditious to make these demands in that way.⁷²

Russell was found guilty by a jury of ten farmers and two merchants on all counts and was sentenced to serve two years in the Stony Mountain Penitentiary. In labor quarters the verdict and sentence raised a storm of protest. Trade union lawyers declared that if the verdict stood there would be nothing to prevent leaders of any strike being prosecuted for seditious conspiracy. The verdict summarized seemed to imply that the following would be classed as seditious: general strikes, sympathetic strikes, direct action, one big union, seeking to control in-

⁷¹ *The Winnipeg Telegram*, Nov. 18, 1919, printing indictment in full.

⁷² Metcalfe in *The King vs. R. B. Russell*, Winnipeg, December, 1919.

dustry, advocating a change in the form of Government, in short, anything endangering the "comfort, etc." of the public.⁷³

F. J. Dixon's trial was as sensational as Russell's but for a different reason. An Englishman by birth, a single-taxer, a Labor member for Winnipeg in the Manitoba House, but hostile to the One Big Union idea, his part in the strike consisted chiefly in speeches to the workers exhorting solidarity. He was accused of seditious libel, that is, of editing the strike bulletin after the arrest of William Ivens; and Justice Galt, before whom he was tried, declared that this "was one of the most infamous conspiracies" he had known in Canada, and that "the strike was illegal from the very start." Dixon pleaded his own case against three of Canada's ablest lawyers and based his defense on inherent rights, part and parcel of the British heritage of democratic freedom. After *forty hours* of deliberation the jury brought in a verdict of "not guilty."⁷⁴

In June of the same year, in the elections for the provincial legislature of Manitoba under the new system of proportional representation in voting, F. J. Dixon achieved a further extraordinary popular triumph. He received 11,000 first choice ballots, or *three times* as many as his nearest opponent, the Minister of Public Works. Labor as a whole polled 45 per cent of the total effective vote and obtained 40 per cent of the seats for Winnipeg city.⁷⁵ Dixon's acquittal caused the Crown to drop the case against Woodsworth, whose indictment was on much the same plane as Dixon's, save that one of the counts against him (under the head of *seditious libels*), was the publication during the strike of certain vivid passages from the *prophet Isaiah* about those who "decreed unrighteous decrees"⁷⁶

In the trial of the remaining seven men, the Crown counsel went out of his way to accuse William Ivens of sympathy with Tom Mooney, "that bomb thrower," as though, declared Ivens, "President Wilson had not asked for amnesty and a fair trial for Mooney." At another point in the trial an article was adduced by the Crown as a cause of the riot, counsel alleging that

⁷³ *New York World*, Jan. 11, 1920; cf. *New York Call*, Dec. 28, 1919.

⁷⁴ J. A. Stevenson, "A Set-back for Reaction in Canada," *Nation*, March 6, 1920.

⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 3, 1920.

⁷⁶ Bill of Indictment against J. S. Woodsworth, count (4).

the "blood of the man who was shot" was upon "the head of the writer of that article." The writer in question retorted by proof that the article so adduced had been written *after* and not before the riot!⁷⁷ To the very end the tense feelings and drama of the strike itself surrounded the trials. A near riot occurred when the verdict was announced. It was first mistakenly reported that the accused men had been acquitted, and a wild cheer broke from the crowd in the courtroom. Judge Metcalf instantly ordered the court cleared, but before the order could be obeyed the verdict of guilty was announced. Hisses, cries, and hoots greeted the announcement, and the court was cleared with great difficulty by a squad of constables. Of the seven, only Alderman Heaps was found not guilty on all counts. Bray, the returned soldier, was sentenced to six months, and the remaining five to one year's imprisonment. So ended the second experiment in the practice of the general strike in English-speaking America.⁷⁸

THE GENERAL STRIKE WEAPON IN SOUTH AMERICA

The method of the general strike found its way to certain South American states, especially in the years directly following the Great War. In the majority of cases, the declaration of anything approaching a really general strike in any South American nation was the signal for violence on the part both of labor and of the authorities, often with considerable casualties. Of the smaller South American countries, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay all had experience of general strikes in the year 1918 or 1919. In Chile, lying across the mountains from Argentina, there was a well organized Socialist party, supported by the trade unions. In January, 1919, a general strike was called in the Punta Arenas region, in the south of Chile, as a protest against the high cost of living, greatly aggravated as it was by the unfavorable exchange balance against Chile. Great destruction of property and very serious rioting resulting, as the strike spread into the textile mills and the mines all over the country.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ W. H. Crook, "Winnipeg Justice," *Socialist Review* (N. Y.), May, 1920.

⁷⁸ *New York Times*, March 28, 1920.

⁷⁹ Marion G. Eaton, "South American Notes," *Socialist Review* (N. Y.), Jan., 1920, p. 117.

A further protest strike of a general character was set for February 7, 1919, but the government declared martial law and halted all demonstrations. By the first week in September of the same year the labor federation felt itself sufficiently powerful to call another general strike, this time lasting four days, and signally marked for the quiet and orderly conduct of the strikers and their leaders. The strike ended with the organization of a conciliation court under the direction of the President of the Chilean Republic.

Peru had its general strike, locally restricted to Lima and Callao, in March of 1919, called, as in Chile, as a protest against the high cost of foodstuffs. Again, rioting occurred and once more martial law was declared. Uruguay went through a similar experience in the summer of 1918, with some rioting and bloodshed in Montevideo, and with a threat on the part of the hospital nurses to walk out for a 25 per cent increase in wages. A forty-eight hour week for labor was decreed throughout the republic, and some degree of social insurance was provided, though how far this was a direct result of the strike is doubtful.⁶⁰

Brazil has known little of the trouble of widespread strikes, being a country of great distances and comparatively difficult communications, and possessing only an infant labor movement. It is, therefore, to Argentina that one must turn in South America to find any history of the general strike in practice. In the Argentine Republic, as in the other Latin-American lands, a great many of the industrial organizations and means of communication are owned by foreign capital. The collapse of the land and cattle boom of 1910 left an aftermath of poor economic conditions and industrial troubles up to the outbreak of the War. President Irigoyen, member of the Radical party, coming to power in 1916, was largely instrumental in keeping his nation strictly neutral even when the United States and Brazil joined the war. The country enjoyed great prosperity, until the armistice threatened severe industrial upheaval, and during the war period trade unionism developed considerable strength, particularly among marine and dock workers. The President was reputed to be most sympathetic towards labor,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

and the efforts of his cabinet were largely devoted to social legislation.⁵¹

There have been several attempts at a general strike in the Argentine Republic, the most complete example taking place in January, 1919. The influence upon the Argentine labor movement of Spanish anarchists, mostly from Barcelona, who had fled to the Argentine after the execution of Francisco Ferrer in 1909, was evident. Their advocacy of the general strike as the chief weapon of organized labor had much to do with the subsequent attempts to practise that method. Among the large number of prisoners taken in the severe strike of 1919 no less than two hundred were Catalonians.⁵² None of these attempts at a general strike was deliberately planned at the start with the intention of inaugurating a social revolution, but they were almost always spontaneous outbreaks of labor protest against political acts of the government, or else against certain repressive measures taken by the Argentine police during strikes or labor demonstrations. Once started, however, these strikes would often take on some of the aspects of the revolutionary general strikes characteristic of those in Spain and Italy, described in the first part of this book.

The oldest and largest of the Argentine labor organizations, known as the FORA, from its full title *Federacion Obrera Regional Argentina*, was entirely controlled by Anarchists of the Spanish type, who emphasized the importance of revolutionary mass action by labor. The FORA proclaimed the first general strike in Argentine history in January, 1908, as a protest against the "Law of Residence," which enabled the government to expel from Argentine territory all "undesirable foreigners," guilty of radical, anarchist or even strike propaganda. This attempt proved a complete fiasco, there being no response to the call of the trade unions.⁵³

In the following year a localized general strike took place in Rosario, the second largest port of the Argentine, due to coincidence of strikes in several trades for economic demands,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, cf. *Encyc. Brit.*, 19th ed. I, 209.

⁵² Associated Press dispatch from Buenos Aires in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 14, 1919.

⁵³ These data obtained from notes on the Argentine strikes by Arnold Roller, author of the pamphlet, *The Social General Strike*.

enhanced by some purely solidarity strikes. The demands of part of the strikers were granted. In the same year, 1909, the FORA organized a first of May demonstration in Buenos Aires, which was attacked by the police, eight workers being killed and over a hundred injured. The FORA called a general strike in protest, which lasted for nine days and spread over the whole country. The government immediately declared martial law and arrested some two thousand workers in Buenos Aires alone. Nothing was gained by the workers, though it demonstrated the power of labor to paralyze all means of communication and the major national industries. The assassination of the Buenos Aires chief of police by a Russian anarchist in November of the same year, brought a period of severe repression and a multitude of arrests, with imprisonment in jails located in the extreme south of Argentina.⁸⁴

The year 1910 was the centennial year of Argentine independence, and celebrations of the national event were planned for the last week of May. The government had, in the meantime, passed a law called the *Ley de defensa social*, the law of social defense, which punished with three years' imprisonment anyone who attempted "by insults, threats or violence, to induce persons to join a strike or boycott." All open air meetings required a police permit eight days in advance, and those within doors a similar permit with twenty-four hours notice. The purpose of this law was explained by the judge and deputy Ferrer, who sponsored the bill, when he stated that "all agitators should be placed without the law so that it should be possible for every citizen to kill them on the streets like dogs."⁸⁵

The FORA organized a demonstration of some 80,000 workers through the streets of the capital, demanding the repeal of the repressive laws, the freedom of political prisoners, and a general amnesty, with a threat of a general strike if the government did not grant these demands before May 18. The police replied by arresting all known Anarchists and at least two thousand active trade unionists, on the 13th of May. Armed bands of the Argentine Patriotic League attacked labor headquarters and newspaper offices, destroyed the machinery and burned down the buildings, including the offices of the moderate

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, citing Felix Weil, *Die Arbeiterbewegung in Argentinien*, p. 2.

socialist organ, the *Vanguardia*. The general strike was attempted but with no success, the government having taken every precaution, and a large mass of the population having become incensed at the Anarchists, mainly foreigners, for using the greatest patriotic celebration in Argentine history for such a revolutionary demonstration.⁸⁶

The great general strike in Argentine history, however, known as *la semana sangrienta*, "the bloody week," took place very early in 1919. A grave national railroad strike, with the wreck of trains, the burning of carloads of cereals, and of railroad terminals, had dragged on over several months in 1918, and had paralyzed transportation throughout the Argentine. It was settled only by the insistence of the Irigoyen Government that those roads owned by foreign capital should pay similar wages and grant similar working conditions as existed on the government-owned railroads. This pressure upon foreign industrial concerns gave rise to much ominous comment in the press and in letters from Argentine business houses to their New York representatives, regarding future labor trouble. In the latter part of 1918 the workers in the Vasena iron and steel works went on strike. This company, situated just outside Buenos Aires, largely owned by English capital, and controlled by directors living in England, continued to operate by the use of strike-breakers.⁸⁷

On Tuesday January 7, 1919, the striking laborers attempted to attack the strike-breakers. Police and firemen, armed with rifles, formed a line of defense against the strikers. The strikers had closed all but one of the streets in the neighborhood, and had cut the telephone wires, so that the police were considerably hampered in their effort to bring reinforcements to the scene, without serious fighting. The armed forces fired indiscriminately into the crowds killing four and wounding twenty.⁸⁸ The indignation of the neighborhood, which was almost exclusively inhabited by workers' families, was so intense that all labor spontaneously left the factories in the district in protest. When the news spread to other parts of Buenos Aires the Anarchist daily,

⁸⁶ Arnold Roller's notes. Cf. *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed. I, 208.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, and Marlon G. Eaton "South American Notes," *Socialist Review* (N. Y.), Jan., 1920, p. 115. Cf. also *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed. I, 209.

⁸⁸ *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 8, 1919, and Roller's notes.

La Protesta, organ of the FORA, called for an instant general strike. This time the response was immediate. Nothing was organized or prepared, and the Federal Committee of the FORA next day merely made a general declaration of protest against the shooting. On the ninth of May, however, the day on which the dead were buried, the whole city was at a standstill, and all factories were stopped. Following the funeral, members of the Federal Committee addressed the crowd, and the latter, forming in procession, burned a passenger train on the Pacific Railway, which ran near the cemetery, and then tore up the track, paralyzing the traffic on the Trans-Andine line.⁸⁹

Which side actually began the firing, after the funeral, is not clear from the press reports, but that extremely heavy casualties resulted is agreed. Rioting, incendiarism, destruction of property, sacking of a privately owned gun shop by the strikers, all occurred on the evening of the day of the funeral. Several thousand government troops were assembled from the Argentine army and navy; mounted police, machine guns and cannon were all called into action by the Government. Firing was incessant all day of January 10, and further heavy casualties resulted. General Dellepaine, who had assumed military dictatorship, called in the strike committee of the FORA and ordered them to bring him a schedule of labor demands upon which the FORA was prepared to settle the strike. Severe fighting took place before the Congressional Palace, the Palace of Justice, various police stations and the post office, and only the free use of machine guns enabled the governmental forces to gain control.⁹⁰ On the other side of the conflict, *La Protesta* appeared in three editions daily, calling for a revolution and the occupation of the factories by labor.⁹¹

By Saturday, January 11, a New York corporation's Buenos Aires representative could write in the weekly letter:

As all traffic is halted, people find it impossible to reach business, and the great majority of business places have been closed, some few that remained open until Thursday having the windows shattered in spite of the metal blinds used here. The city is without food and has been existing several days on tinned provisions.⁹²

⁸⁹ New York *Evening Post*, Jan. 10, 1919, and Rollet's notes.

⁹⁰ New York *Evening Post*, Jan. 10 and 11, 1919.

⁹¹ Rollet's notes.

⁹² Marion G. Eaton, *loc. cit.*, quoting letter in question.

The food situation, indeed, became very serious by the close of the first week of the strike. Meat was unobtainable and vegetables were scarce. General Dellepaine, the temporary military dictator, accepted the offer of an American packing house to supply the army and the police force with beef.⁸³ Rioting continued on Saturday, January 11, the mobs setting fire to the central market, in which several million pounds of River Plate wool were stored, and to a large print-paper warehouse. The strike itself, however, was officially called off that day, by the strike committee of the FORA, when the demands, formulated by that organization, were largely granted by the authorities. These demands included the persuasion of the Vasena Company, where the trouble had started, to grant their workers' claims, the release of all arrested workers, and the pardon by the Minister of Justice of all convicted workers, whose offense had related to the labor dispute.

On receiving a pledge that these demands would be granted the FORA had cancelled the general strike, but had pointed out to President Irigoyen that the maritime strike had antedated the general strike, and would not, therefore be cancelled. On the other hand, the FORA promised that the railroad workers, who were reluctant to resume their tasks until they saw the governmental pledges realized, should be ordered to return to work immediately. The FORA had more difficulty in obtaining obedience to its resumption order, than it had to the call for a general strike.⁸⁴ As late as January 15 the Associated Press reported that the disorders in the interior of Argentina were due largely to railroad workers, that a condition of complete paralysis was rapidly approaching on the railroad systems, and that five provinces had asked for troops to control the situation.⁸⁵

Not until the 15th of the month were food supplies in Buenos Aires replenished, and a supply of meat forthcoming. The Senate failed to obtain a quorum and therefore was unable to take up the proposed measure for instituting martial law throughout the nation. As it turned out martial law became unnecessary, as the disorders slowly quieted down, the troops gained complete control, and many of the foreigners among the

⁸³ *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 13, 1919.

⁸⁴ Roller's notes.

⁸⁵ *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 15, 1919.

labor ranks were arrested. As already stated above, no less than two hundred of these were Catalonians, who had left Barcelona after the strike fiasco there in 1909.⁹⁵

In this instance of general strike practice, victory and defeat were strangely mixed. Many of the economic demands of the workers were actually granted, but as far as a revolutionary rising was the ultimate end, then the FORA's aim was completely balked. Two hundred and fifty dead and 700 wounded as a result of the riots is a very conservative estimate, given by the commanders of the government troops. A ranking naval officer declared the true figures to be much nearer double in both cases, and the Associated Press cables gave the total at 1,000 killed and from 3,500 to 5,000 wounded. As can be imagined from the description of the rioting, the property losses were also very heavy.⁹⁷

Further attempts of a less serious character took place in 1920, 1921, and 1923. In 1920 during a domestic quarrel within the FORA, a new Federal Committee was elected, including many new arrivals in the revolutionary movement. This new committee announced it would call a general strike in March, if all prisoners of the "bloody week" of 1919 had not then been released from jail. They openly announced that they would use bombs in such a strike. All such threatened bombs were found shortly afterwards by the police, several workers were arrested, but the organizers of the "bomb strike" were left untouched. This general strike was a complete fizzle, and a few months later it was discovered that these organizers and advocates of bomb practice were police *agents provocateurs*. The numbers in the trade union movement fell off rapidly after that fiasco, from 180,000 to less than half that total. The two later strikes were for strictly limited periods and partook more of the character of what the syndicalists term "revolutionary gymnastics" than of a genuine general strike.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1919. Cf. *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 14, 1919.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 13; *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 16, 1919.

⁹⁷ Roller's notes.

CHAPTER XVI

FROM SHANGHAI TO VIENNA

THE ORIENT TRIES WESTERN METHODS

IN THE long and at times detailed description of the resort to the general strike weapon, on the part of many national labor groups, this study has dealt almost without exception with the white race, whether on the continents of Europe or of America. It would not be fitting to close the study without the briefest glance at the remarkable adoption of western methods by the Orient in the last few years since the Great War. In 1925-1926 the great Chinese cities of Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong, and Peking offered the nearest approach to a general strike that has occurred in the Orient, indicating that race is no barrier to these mass-strike weapons once the economic and industrial situation is ripe for their use. The fact that the nationalist element was predominant in this instance, rather than primarily economic or internal political factors, merely adds to the interest, as showing the yet wider use to which such an economic weapon can be put.

It would be a grave error to state baldly the immediate cause of the Shanghai general strike of 1925, without a brief but necessary allusion to the great difference between the methods of economic production most common in China, as contrasted with those of the occidental nations most addicted to the strike weapon.

In China there is no class struggle. There are no classes. There are no huge fortunes, except the recent political fortunes, which are seldom devoted to industry, and which tend to dissipate themselves in politics. There is no abject poverty, except among the beggar class, which is professionally poor. The vast majority of the people are farmers, who hold their land in an age-long communism, the community being the family, a unit of society which may consist of thousands of human beings all bearing an identical surname and descending from the same ancestor.¹

¹ George E. Sokolaky, in *The China Year Book, 1926*, pp. 695-96.

Naturally whenever the crops are poor there is a surplus of population in the village, and migration becomes necessary in face of famine. In the North of China this migration takes the form of joining one of the armies, or, failing this, becoming members of some bandit group. In South China, on the other hand, these surplus humans migrate to other provinces and there become either itinerant or industrialized laborers. In Shanghai, for example, there were, in 1925, 400,000 men from Ningpo, 160,000 Cantonese, as well as Swatow men, the majority of whom were industrialized laborers, creating for the first time a definite proletarian class.²

For the vast majority of the Chinese workers the old handicrafts system still exists. Guilds control their members, largely as they did in the days of Mediaeval Europe, and the interests of master, employee, and apprentice are not separated.

The Chinese artisan works in his shop in the cities, usually within view of passers by, where he can lay down his hammer and shears to participate in a quarrel or a conversation. Or he works in the back room behind the shop, making beautiful or useful things, slowly and laboriously, just as the artisan did before the Industrial Revolution in Europe. He works from sunrise to sundown. His food and lodging are part of his wages. . . . All the members, including the employer, are practically members of a large family, and have a wide, common interest.³

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand that injustices and indignities which the Chinese worker will endure at the hands of Chinese employers, would not for one moment be tolerated where the employer is a foreigner, whether Japanese or White. This attitude to foreign employers is due, in no small degree, to a national inferiority complex on the part of the Chinese, bred by the belief that all foreigners look down upon them and treat them like children. This belief has, unfortunately, only too much basis in the attitude of many of the resident nationals of the Great Powers. Such a complex, especially among the migratory laborers massed in modern factory production in the large Chinese cities, provides a ready tinder of disaffection for any otherwise trivial spark.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 226. Cf. p. 1006.

The *Kuomintang*, organized by Sun Yat Sen in 1905, was the first political party in China to grasp this factor in Chinese psychology. This party recognized that the future of labor in China depended largely upon the development of a genuine proletariat, and that as long as the handicrafts system, with its benevolent and paternal head as employer, continued to exist on such a large scale, and as long as there were not more than half a million factory workers in a population of four hundred millions, organized labor would necessarily find it difficult to defend its position. This paternalistic ideal, moreover, continued even in large factories run by Chinese employers, where the employer looked upon himself as a father to his workers.

It was this fact, and the belief that the struggle of 1925 was primarily nationalist or anti-foreign in its aim, that made the Chinese employers so willing to cooperate with their striking employees, after the Shanghai incident of May 30, 1925. They failed to realize at the moment that the organization of Chinese labor in the syndicalist manner of "one big union" was likely to be as detrimental to their interests as to those of the foreign employers. Hence it happened that the strikes were financed by those who ultimately were likely to suffer most from the syndicalist type of labor organization, the Chinese employers, Chambers of Commerce, and Government. Indeed, the Chinese tobacco, printing, shipping, and textile companies hoped that the strikes against their foreign competitors on Chinese soil would end in their elimination, and to some extent this actuated the financial support of the strike.⁴

The *Kuomintang*, while it stood for Nationalism, Democracy, and the right of people to live, not necessarily communist ideals at all, was undoubtedly oriented toward Soviet Russia rather than toward America or Western Europe. Actual Bolshevik agents had small success in China, partly because of their mediocre caliber, and partly owing to a common suspicion that they were too ready to utilize China's misfortunes for their own ends. Where they gained access to Chinese labor ranks, it was due more to foreign stupidity and to the foreigners' racial superiority complex, than to any basic desire on the part of Chinese

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1005, 1012. Cf. 896.

labor to approve of Bolshevik ideals.

The syndicalist ideas upon which the organization of Chinese labor proceeded, after the war, served to keep industry in a chaotic state and made it possible for politicians rather than *bona fide* laborers to be leaders of the movement. An example of this is seen in the habit of the *Kuomintang* to use new and unknown men to lead their newly organized labor unions, rather than old and experienced laborers. The head of all the labor unions in Shanghai, for instance, "was unknown in that city until May 30," 1925.

That the suspicion of self-interest on the part of certain of these union leaders, who suddenly appeared on the scene, was perhaps justified can be inferred from the lack of any strike fund accounting. Whereas some half million to one million dollars were reported to have been raised there was no record of moneys received or paid out, and no responsibility appears to have been felt for this fund. In this matter the labor leaders were like most Chinese administrators! This fact, however, did not make the striking workers any better pleased at the corruption in the unions, and when the strike broke it was not so much due to the lessening of power among the unions, or to easier international relationships, as it was to a feeling of resentment by the workers that they had been badly treated by their leaders.⁵

Two other factors must be mentioned which help to explain the unrest that culminated in the vast sympathetic strike movement of 1925. The migration of surplus population from the villages into the industrial cities, to which reference has just been made, was at first of a temporary character, great numbers flowing back to their villages with the wages acquired in their city jobs. This meant a heavy turnover of labor, which showed a tendency to decrease only when civil war became serious in China. With the difficulties in the return of the villager aggravated by civil war, increasingly large number of workers stayed in the cities and became urbanized, building up a more definitely proletarian class than hitherto in Chinese history.

The second factor was the constant uncertainty as to the currency. The laborer, though often paid in "big money" (silver

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1008-6

dollars) used copper coinage as his means of exchange. As the rate of exchange between silver dollars and copper coins was always fluctuating, with copper pretty steadily declining in purchasing power, the laborer who had any surplus over his actual needs found his copper savings constantly diminishing in value; a situation that did not ease the cost of living for the worker. This uncertainty of the purchasing power of wages (in terms of copper coinage) was particularly evident in Shanghai.⁶

THE SHANGHAI STRIKE

The vast sympathetic strike of 1925 in the Chinese cities had its origin in Shanghai, China's first port, and one of the five greatest ports of the world, as far as shipping tonnage is concerned. Shanghai in 1925 had a population of over one and one-half million souls, of which somewhat over twenty thousand were foreigners, largely Japanese. In addition to its position as a major port, Shanghai has recently developed greatly as an industrial center, possessing a number of silk, cotton, wool, and rice mills, engineering and shipbuilding works.⁷

The International Settlement of Shanghai was governed in 1925 by a municipal council whose members were of British, American, and Japanese nationality, with British predominating, but with an American, Mr. Sterling Fessenden, as chairman of the council. In the International Settlement itself, as distinct from the Chinese city, there were about a million persons, only twenty-two thousand being foreigners. The Settlement was originally intended solely for foreign merchants, but the fact of foreign protection of its order and property made it an attractive spot for vast numbers of Chinese.

The powers of self-government conferred upon this foreign community by the various treaties, consisted in exclusive police control within the area, in draining, lighting, maintenance of streets and roads, making and enforcement of sanitary regulations, and the control of markets and dairies. To meet the expenses for such self-government the foreign ratepayers were authorized to levy taxes on land and houses, to levy wharfage dues on goods landed or shipped, and to charge license fees.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 803-4.

⁷ *Encyc. Brit.*, 13th ed. III, 522-23.

The result is that taxes were levied upon all who lived within the Settlement. In point of fact some 90 per cent of the taxes were paid by the Chinese residents, although they had no representation upon the municipal council. Racial antipathy and discrimination, unhappily, were common.⁸

The great strikes of 1925 were concerned with two important labor organizations, the Shanghai Federation of Labor Unions and the National Labor Association. The former was a federation of 37 labor groups, fathered by a group of Hunan Labor Union members exiled by Governor Chao after a textile strike in 1922. The latter had its birth in 1925 at a National Labor Conference held in Canton on May 1st under the auspices of the *Kuomintang*. The Shanghai branch of the Association, known as the Shanghai Central Labor Union, was organized a month later. Shanghai thus became the center of the national labor movement, and the source of all other important labor agitation, including the formation of the Peking Labor Federation in June, the Tientsin Central Labor League in August, the Honan Central Labor League in September, and various railroad labor unions at different dates in the same year.

Two daily labor newspapers were published; the *Chan-ys Daily News* in Shanghai being forcibly closed down after a short but active existence. The Shanghai incident of May 30, and the similar incident in Canton in June, added impetus to the organization movement. Two great labor unions vied with each other in assuming leadership of the subsequent maneuvers, their activities finally bringing them into conflict with the authorities. They were expelled from the International Settlement on September 18, 1925, and a week later forcibly dissolved by the Chinese authorities, but the movement went on as before, although the two organizations were shorn of official recognition.⁹

⁸ *Encyc. Brit.*, 11th ed. XXIV, 800-1. Cf. Ta Chen "Study of Strikes in China from 1918 to 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct., 1926, p. 107. For instances of racial antipathy see also Paul Blanchard "An Inquiring Reporter in Shanghai," *Nation* (N. Y.), Sept. 16, 1925. Cf. also King-Hall, *China of Today*, p. 35.

⁹ "Labor Problems in China in 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, June, 1926, pp. 52-83 (reprinted from the *Chinese Economic Monthly*, March, 1926, pp. 103-8).

Of 198 cotton mills in China at the time of the Great Shanghai strike, 36 were owned by Japanese, 12 of these being located in Shanghai. For some years the Nagai Wata Kaisha Cotton Mills, although of Japanese ownership, were admitted to have the best labor conditions in Shanghai. The manager had introduced modern methods, and had provided a social service and educational system for employees the equal of which did not exist elsewhere in China. He protected his workers from "money sharks," yet, when disciplinary measures were taken against certain of the mill workers, a strike was called and the nationalist issue raised. As already explained above, it was a simple matter to get workers out on strike where a factory was owned by foreigners, even if the labor conditions were more favorable than in mills owned by Chinese.¹⁰

Even with such alleged improvement in labor conditions, the ordinary factory laborer worked about twelve hours daily with a pay of about fifty cents. Such earnings proved to be insufficient to meet the increased cost of living, and on May 4, 1925, the Chinese workers of the Nagai Mills struck for a wage increase, in protest against the failure on the part of their employers to carry out the terms of settlement in the previous strike, and also against the dismissal from employment of certain union spokesmen.¹¹

Violent anti-Japanese outbreaks had characterized such strikes in the past, and the Japanese overseers, in consequence, had armed themselves. The management of the mills approved the use of these arms in case the protection of their foremen became necessary. On May 15 occurred a sympathetic strike by the Chinese employees in five other mills, and a seventh mill closed down in order to avoid trouble. A dispute arose and the management opened fire, wounding more than ten workers, one of whom, Kao Tseng-hung, died shortly afterwards.¹²

¹⁰ George E. Sokolsky, in *The China Year Book, 1886*, p. 1004. The Chinese had, however, complained of ill-treatment by Japanese foremen of the Chinese women and child workers, who constituted some 80 per cent of the total labor force, and a strike had resulted in February, 1925. Cf. Stanley High, "The Shanghai Affair," in *Chinese Students' Monthly*, Dec. 1925, pp. 30-32.

¹¹ Stanley High, *loc. cit.*

¹² Ta Chen, "Study of Strikes in China from 1918 to 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct., 1926, p. 107. Cf. Stanley High, *loc. cit.*, and "Labor Problems in China in 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, June, 1926, p. 25.

Popular indignation rose to a great height. Two days later a memorial demonstration with a crowd of seven to ten thousand persons gathered near one of the mills under student leadership, the student organizations having a great deal to do with the enlistment of public sympathy for the cause of labor. The police broke up the demonstration and arrested six students for disturbing the peace. The arrest of their comrades, and the total lack of investigation into the death of the Chinese worker on the part of the Municipal Council of the International Settlement, led the students to carry their agitation into the foreign Settlement itself. The students waited until a hearing had been given to their arrested comrades, but when the latter were committed to jail as unable to furnish bonds, a demonstration was staged for May 30. The tragedy that followed the student-labor demonstration on May 30 was the spark that lit the general strike tinder.

The student class in China today possesses peculiar prestige. Having little material wealth to imperil, it is more free than any other educated group to champion a cause that may appeal to its enthusiastic nationalism. In this it is practically alone. The business class is bound by its wealth and loath to undertake leadership in movements that might endanger the security of capital investments. The vast mass of the people, unlike the students and the business class, are exceedingly illiterate and apathetic toward national affairs. Hence an injury to members of the student class is likely to cause more widespread indignation than the death or injury of a Chinese coolie.¹³

The Shanghai press for Sunday, May 31, carried a full report of the occurrence from the police of the International Settlement. According to the police, about two o'clock on May 30 a report reached the Louza Police Station in the Settlement that "students were making speeches of an anti-foreign nature and carrying flags with anti-foreign sentiments," refusing to disperse when so ordered by the police. Inspector Everson and a party of Europeans investigated, arrested three students whose crime consisted in "actually making a speech to a crowd with two others standing by with flags." These students admitted the speeches were anti-Japanese in tenor and that their demonstra-

¹³ H. Owen Chapman, *The Chinese Revolution, 1926-27*, p. 12.

tion was part of a prearranged protest of students against the killing of the Chinese laborer on May 16. The crowd that accompanied the arrested students were told to leave the police station, and on refusing were in turn arrested and incarcerated. This stupid process of arrest of a few students and the subsequent imprisonment of the crowd that followed them to the police station, was thereupon repeated.

By 2:45 the temper of the crowd had changed, and an assault was made on one of the white police constables (the majority of the force were Sikhs or Chinese). Arrests followed and further mobs escorted the prisoners to the station, only to be ordered off. In the confusion the men accused of assault escaped. At first the mob retreated slowly, making further assaults upon the white officers and trying to wrest from them their weapons, the Chinese themselves being unarmed.

Police were now using sticks and batons freely but the crowd got entirely beyond control and the police were slowly forced back to the Station gate by an enormous crowd, shouting Kill the Foreigners, and making special efforts to wrest the arms from the foreign members of the force. As the crowd were about to enter the Station gate Inspector Everson gave the order to fire and the Sikhs and Chinese (police) at the Station gate opened fire, killing four outright and wounding a number. . . . The men who were shot were undoubtedly students. The shooting had the immediate effect of dispersing the crowd and traffic became normal shortly afterwards.¹⁴

As a result of the firing six were killed and more than twenty wounded, all Chinese, there being no foreigners on the casualty list.¹⁵

The description of this scene by one of the student eye-witnesses is equally vivid. Speaking of the crowd in the Nanking Road he states:

There I noticed that my colleagues had blocked the traffic. It was a glorious sight. Even the trams and motor buses were held up by

¹⁴ *China Weekly Review* (formerly *Milford's Weekly*) Strike Edition "published entirely by the foreign staff and foreign help," June 13, 1925, quoting the Police Report.

¹⁵ Ts Chen, "Study of Strikes in China from 1918 to 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct. 1925, p. 107. Cables to the *New York World*, referred to without adverse criticism in the *China Year Book* for 1926, p. 921, put these casualties as 70 killed and 300 injured!

the students who were armed with nothing more than three kinds of pennants. On these were inscribed the words "Down with Imperialism," "We are the Students' Brigade," and "Our fellow students are arrested." The police first pushed us back. Sticks were used. We refused to move and we laughed as we were struck. In fact all of us offered to be struck. We made a rush for the door of the Station and shouted "Let's all go to jail with the other innocent boys."

Bayonets were then used by the Sikhs at the gateway and a volley fired into the air. When the students saw that the firing was not directed at them they shouted

"Hit them! Hit them!" and bang came the volley of rifle fire from the entire squad. My school mate of the Tung Chi Medical School, Yin Ching-yi, who was standing beside me, fell in a pool of blood.¹⁵

An impartial witness, Harry Kingman, American Y. M. C. A. secretary of Shanghai, declared that "the motive of the students who milled around on Nanking Road last Saturday afternoon was neither pro-communism nor anti-foreignism. For the greater part it was loyalty to fellow students which motivated the demonstration."¹⁷

The effect of the shooting was immediate and national. Prominent militarists telegraphed their support to the students and to the Peking Government. The Peking Government addressed the Diplomatic Body in Peking on the matter, and appointed special delegates to proceed to Shanghai to investigate. The most striking and for the purpose of this study, the most interesting, result was the decision of a mass meeting held the very next day, May 31, to declare a general strike of protest against the massacre, the strike to commence on the first day of June. This decision was supported, for reasons already explained above, by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce for Shanghai. In other words,

¹⁵ Student Hsiao in the *China Press*, quoted in the *China Weekly Review*, June 13, 1925.

¹⁷ Quoted by Stanley High, *loc. cit.* A circular found on the person of the students arrested stated the reason for the agitation as follows: "The Japanese killed our labor friends and with the assistance of the police arrested our workmen. Students who endeavored to raise subscriptions for the workers were arrested by the police as a reward for their good-heartedness. Moreover the students who attended the funeral of Kao Tseng-hung, the worker who was killed, were also arrested."—Police translation of the circular published in *China Weekly Review*, June 13, 1925.

here, for the first time, was a general strike to which employers and employees alike gave their approval.

The Shanghai Municipal Council, with its American chairman, retaliated with a declaration of martial law and called out the volunteers, consisting of the foreign residents. These volunteers remained on duty for many weeks. As the shops in the International Settlement closed up the Municipal Council appointed a Food Controller to collect supplies for rationing. Twenty-two foreign men-of-war lay in the harbor, one thousand sailors and marines going ashore for duty and over two thousand more standing by ready for aid if needed. The whole city was plastered with handbills urging the Chinese to "Boycott the Foreigner," and to "Drive the Imperialists out."

The first day of June saw the shopkeepers surreptitiously conducting business, though their shops were officially closed. The tramway employees refused to strike, so the trams were attacked by mobs and their passengers stoned. Fire hose failing to subdue the mob, the police again fired upon the crowd, killing one and injuring seventeen. Several Chinese were shot in other parts of the Settlement when they refused to disperse. On the second day of the strike 3,000 members of the Chinese staff at the Electrical Department of the Municipality failed to report for work, and the foreign permanent staff with the aid of 100 Russians took their places. By June 3 business was at a standstill, and it was estimated that nearly 150,000 Chinese workers were on strike. The following day saw the Chinese employees of all the foreign press join the strike. Mimeograph was resorted to in one case, but the rest continued, by means of foreign aid, to print greatly reduced editions.¹⁸

By the close of the first week the emergency staff on the *China Weekly Review* could state in their first strike edition that "As these lines were written (June 7) practically every industry in the Shanghai district was tied up by strikers, and it was difficult for foreigners to do anything except serve as part of the local defense units. . . . Practically every class of Chinese was affected from house boys and chauffeurs to bankers and department store owners and directors. . . . Shanghai was literally paralyzed as a

¹⁸ For both paragraphs, cf. *China Weekly Review*, June 13 and July 23, 1926, "Complete Story of the Strike."

result of the strike. . . .¹⁹ By that time, moreover, the Chinese Advisory Council to the Municipal Council (on which there were no Chinese directly represented), had tendered its resignation, leaving the foreign born Municipal Council completely at a loss for contact with the Chinese.

The seventh day of the strike saw the situation become much graver, as the wharf coolies ceased work, holding up the British and Japanese boats at the docks. Next day the strike spread to the shipping, the Chinese seamen on the British coast and river steamers walking out, thus at one stroke drying up the sources of supply and of business. As late as July 25 the *China Weekly Review* could report that very little actual business was being accomplished "owing to the difficulty of transporting cargo to and from the interior. . . . With one or two exceptions the large British fleet of Yangtze and coast steamers has not been able to move."²⁰ Indeed even these few exceptions, using untrained crews of Russians, ran the first ship aground that essayed the trip, half way to Hankow.

THE CHINESE DEMANDS

In the second week a monster mass meeting outside the native city formulated various demands including the abolition of extra-territorial rights held by foreigners. These demands, formulated by students and labor unions, went far outside the strictly economic or political causes immediately responsible for the strike, and brought in the more basic nationalist discontent with the behavior of the Treaty Powers toward China.

The following day the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai put forward their thirteen demands, largely based upon those of the students and labor unions. These demands included:

1. The cancellation of the state of emergency. (In Shanghai.)
2. Release of all arrested Chinese. Restoration of all educational institutions in the Settlement, sealed or occupied by the Authorities.

¹⁹ Issue of June 13, 1925. Workers in the cotton mills provided some 68,000 of the strikers; wharf coolies about 31,000; employees of tobacco companies 11,000; municipal electric plant 3,100, and some 3,000 seamen. The rest of the 146,000 strikers were drawn from silk-spinning, iron-works, the press, tramways, glass factories, laundries, telephone and waterworks employees, etc., etc. Cf. *China Weekly Review*, Nov. 14, 1925, p. 265.

3. Punishment of the offenders. (i. e. the police officers who gave the order to fire.)
4. Compensation for the dead and wounded, to be paid to their families, and for damage sustained by Chinese workers, merchants and students.
5. An apology from the Settlement authorities.
6. Rendition of the Mixed Court. Prosecution of Chinese henceforth whether under the criminal code of the Chinese Republic, or that of the Municipal by-laws, to be in the name of the Chinese Republic, and not of the Shanghai Municipal Council.
7. Complete reinstatement of all foreigners' Chinese employees, with pay for the strike period.
8. Freedom to cease work on part of individual worker, without penalty.
9. Municipal franchise to be given Chinese on same basis as to foreigners. Chinese to be eligible for election to Municipal Council.
10. Restriction on power to construct roads beyond Settlement boundaries. Roads already made to be turned over unconditionally to China.
11. Withdrawal of resolutions in Municipal Council in regard to proposed new by-laws for censorship of printed matter, increase of wharf dues and licensing of exchanges.
12. All Chinese residents in the Settlement to have freedom of speech, assembly and publication.
13. Dismissal of Municipal Council Secretary, E. S. B. Rowe.²⁰

Of these demands the Chinese Chamber of Commerce held numbers 6, 9, and 10 to be the most important. It was their insistence upon these as the basic cause of friction that compelled the Commission sent from Peking by the Foreign Legations to return without accomplishing anything. Such demands, the Commission held, were outside the scope of their instructions when they set forth from Peking.²¹ Incidentally, when the Diplomatic Commission returned to Peking it finally "agreed on a report with recommendations for settling the Shanghai trouble. This report included censure for the chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council, dismissal of the Shanghai chief-of-police" and a "recommendation to the Shanghai Consular Body to remove the whole Shanghai Municipal Council if it refused to carry out the orders of the Diplomatic Body."

²⁰ *China Year Book, 1926*, p. 933.

²¹ *Ibid.* Cf. *China Weekly Review*, Aug. 28, 1925.

This report of the Diplomatic Commission was approved by all of the Ministers and *Chargés d'affaires* in Peking and sent to Shanghai. No one knows how much money was expended on cables in getting this report suppressed, but anyone familiar with Shanghai's official attitudes toward Peking diplomacy, and China generally, can appreciate the sensation which the report created when it was received by the Shanghai Consular Body. At any rate Shanghai had sufficient influence to get it suppressed, but not before it had been published in Paris and Tokyo, and worse yet, in the Chinese press.

The British, American, and Japanese consuls rejected the note of the Peking Diplomatic Body and urged a Judicial Investigation in the place of the recent commission.²²

In the meantime the Shanghai general strike had affected many other large Chinese cities, where great sympathetic strikes had broken out, largely as protest against the massacre at Shanghai and in general protest against the foreigner, particularly the Japanese and British. The sympathy strikes began in Hankow, six hundred miles up the Yangtze River, on June 11, in Hongkong on June 18, in Canton on the 21st. At Hankow and Canton parades led to machine gun or rifle fire, chiefly in the hands of British volunteer companies, and loss of life by great numbers of Chinese and some foreigners.²³

As the days passed the various general strikes became more definitely economic boycotts against Britain and Japan, and gradually ceased to be completely general. The Shanghai Chinese Chamber of Commerce called off the shop strike on June 19, and on the 26th the Chinese banks and business houses generally reopened their doors, but the seaman's strike grew in intensity. By July 20 the majority of Chinese in the two British newspapers at Shanghai had resumed work, but the cotton mills remained completely shut down and only one British river steamer and one coastal steamer were running, with Russian help.²⁴

When the general strike started in Shanghai and the Chinese telephone operators walked out, the foreign staff took control of operations at once, and in retaliation promptly cut off all Chinese subscribers. On July 6 the Shanghai Municipal Council

²² *Ibid.*, p. 264.

²³ Stanley High, *loc. cit.*; *China Year Book, 1926*, p. 922; *China Weekly Review*, July 26, 1925; Lewis Gannett, "In Red Canton," *Asia*, June, 1926.

²⁴ *China Weekly Review*, July 25, 1925.

cut off power from all the Chinese mills, which had been running on full time, and were thriving during the forced cessation of their Japanese and British competitors. The Council's plea for such action was the continued absence from work of their own Chinese employees in the Electrical plant. This act caused consternation among the Chinese but was approved by the foreigners in the Settlement. The evident purpose behind this act of retaliation is seen in the comment of the *North China Daily News* for that day. The editors implied that the Chinese workers, who had been thrown out of a job by the cutting off of electric power from the Chinese mills, would soon come to blows with their fellow nationals who had been on strike, and the editors wondered if the General Labor Union would be as willing to pay strike pay to these employees of the Chinese employers as they had been to remunerate the striking employees of the foreign companies.³⁵

The Chinese police closed up the offices of the General Labor Union in Shanghai at the end of July, and the Chinese Government at Peking issued a warrant for the arrest of Li Lik-san, president of the Labor Union, who fled to Canton. The month of August saw the conflict continue with varying intensity, the purely economic phases becoming more prominent. The postal services were tied up for a while, and new strikes in Chinese owned mills and factories "turned the anger of labor from the foreign to the Chinese employer of labor. During September the strike dissipated itself and the boycott against foreign goods in North and Central China soon disappeared."³⁶

The Japanese mills settled with their workers on August 12, though they had considerable trouble in getting re-started owing to the lack of electric power. The British mills were the last industries in Shanghai to settle and resume work, as late as September 26, on terms very similar to those agreed upon by the Japanese. These had included recognition of the workers' union, a wage increase, payment in "big money" (Mexican dollars), with four days' pay to aid the poverty caused by the long strike; arms were no longer to be carried by foremen under ordinary conditions, nor any worker discharged without just cause.³⁷

The economic cost of the great series of anti-foreign strikes in Shanghai and elsewhere can be gleaned from sample data of

³⁵ *China Year Book, 1926.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 967.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 956; cf. *China Weekly Review*, Oct. 3, 1925.

merchants' and company losses in various cities. Owing to the shipping strike in Hongkong the number of vessels cleared, which had averaged over 190 daily for the year of 1924, during the quarter-year period from July 1 to October, 1925, dropped to 84 vessels, and the tonnage, which had in the previous year been close on 120,000 daily now fell to 55,000.²⁸ It was estimated that Hongkong suffered a *daily* loss of trade during the height of the strike of one quarter of a million pounds sterling.²⁹ Hongkong civic revenue was very seriously depleted and real estate was a drug on the market even at a 33 per cent reduction of values.³⁰

In Canton the shipping of British concerns fell off, as compared with the previous year, nearly nine-tenths of the total normal amount of tonnage.³¹ The economic losses incurred in the Canton-Hongkong strikes were estimated at two million dollars (Chinese currency) per day as long as the strikes lasted, or roughly a million dollars daily in U. S. money. As the strike lasted more than 300 days in these two cities the cost can be easily estimated.³² As for Shanghai itself the loss was estimated to be no less than ten million dollars daily during the worst period of the strike, while the dispute was general.³³

A Judicial Commission of Investigation was ultimately appointed by Britain, Japan, and the United States, but was completely boycotted by the Chinese when it sat for its inquiry in Shanghai. The Commission made public its report in January of the following year, and even then could not issue an unanimous report, Judge Finley, the American representative, making a long independent statement. In the course of this statement Mr. Justice Finley declared that one of the causes of trouble was the "failure on the part of the foreigners in China to realize that the Chinese people have made a greater advancement during the past ten years in civics, in the fundamental principles of government,

²⁸ *China Weekly Review*, Nov. 7, 1925, p. 252.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Aug. 26, 1925.

³¹ Lewis Gannett, "In Red Canton," *Asia*, June, 1926, giving figures for five months in 1924 as 2,282,000 tons as contrasted with 266,990 tons for the corresponding five months in 1925.

³² Ta Chen, "Study of Strikes in China from 1918 to 1925," *Monthly Labor Review*, Oct., 1926, p. 109.

³³ *China Weekly Review*, Nov. 14, 1925, p. 233, citing article in *Chinese Economic Monthly*.

and in the better understanding of individual rights under the law, than they have made in any hundred years in their entire history."⁸⁴

Specific causes for the trouble were many, among them being the usurpation of legislative, judicial, administrative, and police powers in Chinese territory, lack of representation by Chinese residents on the Shanghai Municipal Council, and the killing of Chinese workers by Japanese in the cotton mills, without any criminal prosecution following. The Judge believed that the tragedy of May 30 might have been avoided had the full available force of police been forthcoming at the commencement of the disturbance, thus obviating the resort to firearms and the order "shoot to kill."⁸⁵

That the Municipal authorities were too ready to rely upon outside naval aid where an adequate local police force should have been provided is evident in the farewell speech of Rear-Admiral McVay, commander of the U. S. Yangtze Patrol, to the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai early in October, 1925. Declaring that the use of U. S. Naval men to do police work in Shanghai was absurd, save for the two or three days immediately after the May 30th affair, when the disturbances justified the landing of naval parties for protective purposes, he complained that these men had not been returned to their ships promptly. "In cases such as the recent strike troubles," the Rear-Admiral concluded, "the forces of the U. S. Navy cannot be used for performing police duty, which is the function of the Municipality."⁸⁶

The outcome of the inquiry was not startling. The Municipal Council sent a check of \$75,000 to the Chinese Commissioner of Foreign Affairs in Shanghai, "as a compassionate grant to the victims and their families of the May 30th incident." This check was returned by the order of the Peking Government, as a totally inadequate and unsatisfactory method of settlement. The best comment on the whole sordid and unhappy affair is perhaps contained in the editorial of the Shanghai *China Weekly Review* during the actual process of the strike:

⁸⁴ *China Weekly Review*, Sept. 19, Oct. 3 and 17, 1925, and Jan. 9, 1926.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1925.

Many of the men in vital positions of responsibility in the Settlement have been imbued not only with racial antagonisms but also with the ancient habit of mind exemplified in the expression, "the public be damned," except that in the case of Shanghai the expression should be changed to read, "the Chinese be damned". . . . The days of the Kaiser-mind are over in this part of the world as well as elsewhere, and it is well to accept the inevitable before it is too late.²⁷

The memory of the Shanghai incident, and the long and disastrous economic results, upon the foreign business interests, of the subsequent strikes and boycotts, had no little to do with the nationalistic revolt that followed in the immediately succeeding years. If Chinese labor was not permanently thrown into the arms of the extreme communist sympathizers with the Soviet movement, it was little thanks to many of the foreign representatives in the great commercial cities, of the caliber seen so vividly in the Municipal Council at Shanghai.

VIENNA IN 1927

In the earlier chapters of this book samples in plenty have been adduced of general strikes whose aim was the overthrow of the existing government. Vienna in 1927 witnessed a general strike called for the purpose, openly stated at the time, of *preventing* a wild protest riot from ending in civil war and revolution. To those who knew Vienna only before the Great War the events of the bloody fifteenth of July, 1927, are not easy of interpretation. For an understanding of that wild and tragic day the contrast between the old, pre-war Austria and that of 1927 must be outlined.

The city of Vienna was once the great political and cultural center of an empire of fifty million souls. With the signing of the peace treaty it became a city-state with little hinterland, struggling for economic and political existence against surrounding territories whose rampant nationalism erected almost insuperable tariff barriers. All that was left of Austria was compelled to import across those unfriendly borders many necessary raw materials, while remaining almost completely bereft of a friendly market for its exports. The resulting partial industrial paralysis produced gravest problems of unemployment and

²⁷ *China Weekly Review*, July 4, 1925; cf. also Jan. 9, 1926.

financial disorganization. Austria, therefore, has had to live quite largely upon its "invisible exports"—the services and satisfactions rendered to the countless flood of tourists who seek that beautiful mountain republic.²⁸

In 1927, moreover, Vienna had become the stronghold of one of the most powerful Socialist parties in the world, in proportion to the size of its nation. In a population of but six and one-half millions, the Socialist party of Austria polled over a million and a half votes, or 43 per cent of the total national electorate. In the city of Vienna itself, wherein was found more than a third of the population, they possessed 62 per cent of the vote, or close on 700,000 votes. Many very important social reforms had been accomplished by the Socialist Municipal Government. In the five years ending 1927 they had built 25,000 homes for working men; the child welfare work of Vienna was not excelled in Europe, infant mortality having been brought down from 16 per cent (before the war) to 8 per cent. The taxation system had likewise been reorganized in such manner that some 800 "capitalists" were paying a combined annual tax equal to that paid by the other 490,000 taxpaying citizens. Such heavy taxation was not enjoyed by the eight hundred, but it resulted in the "healthy faces and sturdy figures of the mass of the population, and the disappearance of that terrible hunger which stalked through the streets and rendered ghastly the faces of men and women who had passed through the famine days of the war."²⁹

Vienna was not merely the capital city of the Austrian Federal Republic, but was itself by far the most powerful of the constituent federal states of that Republic. The situation, therefore, was a difficult one for statesmen when, as in 1927, the national Government and the Government of the city-state of Vienna were not of the same party or persuasion. In 1927 the national Government of Chancellor Seipel had a majority of twenty-three seats over the Socialist opposition, mainly because of "bourgeois" support in the country districts. His Government was a coalition of Pan-Germans and "Christian-Socialists," of which party the Chancellor himself was a member. The Gov-

²⁸ For Vienna's anomalous position today see Leo Pasvolaky's excellent summary, *Economic Nationalism of the Danubian States*, chap. VII.

²⁹ Nell Forbes Grant, "Gay Austria," *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept., 1927. Cf. also Prof. Harry J. Carman, "The Vienna Riots," *Current History*, Sept., 1927.

ernment program had been repeatedly thwarted by the Socialists, who had blocked many bills in committee and had often demanded the resignation of the Seipel Government. One result of such opposition had been a swing toward Fascism by many "bourgeois" political leaders. Militaristic organizations of the Fascist variety, such as the so-called "Front-fighters" and the *Heimwehr*, had caused much trouble, and the Socialists had formed the *Schutzbund*, or Republican Defense League, as a counter-irritant.⁴⁰

The immediate cause of the uprising and the subsequent general strike, was a verdict delivered in the case of three members of the "Front-fighters." On the same day in January, 1927, the "Front-fighters" and the Socialist Republican Guard had held demonstrations in the same Burgenland village of Schattendorf. As a result of the almost inevitable friction that followed, a worker and an eight-year-old boy were shot and killed by Fascist enthusiasts. Three men, the brothers Tscharmon and one Julius Pinter, were held for trial. The evidence was so confused that the Court was unable to form a clear conclusion as to which side started the trouble, but legally there was no question as to which persons fired the fatal shots. Nevertheless the three "Front-fighters" were acquitted.⁴¹

The news of this acquittal reached the mass of Vienna workers on Friday morning, July 15. The Vienna *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, organ of the Austrian Social-Democrats, published a fiery protest, termed the "perjured jurymen" "dishonorable lawbreakers," and suggested that influence was used to make the jury feel the "Front-fighters" were doing a good deed in shooting Socialists. The editors continued:

When workers have to recognize that there is no justice for them in the capitalistic order, that justice degenerates into comedy whenever the question arises of avenging a worker's death, then their belief in justice will be destroyed, and the failure of justice is the worst thing that can happen to a worker. When once they recognize this, and their mind is dominated by this depressing fact, then there is an end to any order. The bourgeois world always warns us against

⁴⁰ Carman, *op. cit.*, and Clarence K. Streit, "A Priest Who Is Austria's 'Strong Man,'" *New York Times Magazine*, July 31, 1927.

⁴¹ T. J. C. Martyn, "Austria's Unrest Due to Economic Break-up," *New York Times*, July 24, 1927, and *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, July 22, 1927.

civil war, but is not this smooth, this tantalizing release of men who have killed workers, just because it is *workers* whom they have killed, already civil war? We warn them all, from a sowing of wrong such as occurred yesterday, only grave misfortune can possibly grow.⁴²

The events that followed the publication of the verdict to the general public on Friday morning beggar description, and are extremely difficult to disentangle.

Much of the European press and some of the American papers alleged a Communist plot as the origin of the riot and bloodshed. There is evidence that Communists were present in Vienna in some numbers, and that they made use of this opportunity to inflame popular feeling, but it is more than doubtful if the affair was not the combined outcome of naturally enraged workers and the unwise actions of the police early on Friday morning. What is clear is that Vienna workers in a hundred different spots throughout the city, on learning the news of the acquittal, immediately and spontaneously ceased work, held countless meetings, with the same decision in each case—"On to Parliament!" During the night the power station workers had decided to give a demonstration-strike, and from eight to nine on Friday morning the trolleys ceased to run. The workers, bent for Parliament and the center of the city, poured in on foot and by auto-truck.⁴³

In the meantime the Government had ordered out the mounted police, not seen in Vienna street demonstrations for many years. The first group of demonstrators to appear in the *Ringstrasse* were municipal employees, not Communists. Addressed by the head of their organization on the Schattendorf murder case, these municipal employees decided to march across the *Ringstrasse* to the Parliament House. At the police cordon, Reismann, the leader of the municipal workers, asked the police to allow his orderly procession to pass through, and this was granted. Suddenly an attack was made from the direction of the Parliament House by the mounted gendarmes, who charged across the street, blocked the way, and rode in upon the crowd. Further consultation with the police officials followed and the order to withdraw was given to the police. Then suddenly, so the report

⁴² Vienna *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, July 15, 1927.

⁴³ Special bulletin of the Social Democrat Party *Mitteilungs-Blatt* No. 1, issued in Vienna Saturday, July 16, 1927.

runs, the police lost their heads, pushed forward again into the crowd and were in turn attacked by the angry crowd with stones and planks.⁴⁴

"The police started the whole trouble without need," declared a state employee, who had watched the events from the Parliament House, to a couple of Socialist Members of Parliament. A blow with a sabre on a worker, with the subsequent arrest of the worker by the foot police, was first cause of the trouble. Mounted police then pursued the assembled workers with drawn sabres, and a wild *sauve qui peut* followed. Mad with indignation, the workers endeavored to reassemble in many places and to arm themselves in some fashion. A house was being repaired near-by and the loose planks were seized upon as weapons. Glöckel, a Social-Democrat leader, tried vainly to stem the tide of popular wrath, but in vain—only the instant withdrawal of all the offending police could have helped the situation at that point. Chief of Police Schober's order to the police to cease their attack was useless, as the men continued, and roused the workers to fever heat. The first wounded were carried into the Parliament House, and the police cleared the space at any cost.⁴⁵

The mob hastily constructed barricades of building materials, park benches, ladders and planking. Street repairs gave ample supply of missiles of granite setts. These were answered by police revolvers. An attack now followed upon a police station by the assembled mob of angered workers, of Communists and of the less responsible elements of the city streets, caused apparently by the police firing upon the crowd from the windows. The mob tried to lynch a police inspector, but were prevented by the *Schutzbund* or Republican Guard, who made heroic efforts to keep the demonstration within peaceful bounds, but were faced on one side by a maddened mob and on the other by the equally insensate police.

Uniforms were ripped from the police by the rioters and strung up on lamp-posts, where they still hang as scarecrow effigies. The police efforts to quell the troubles continued, but without avail. Reinforcements coming in the motor "Black Marias" were taken from the cars and beaten by the crowd. Meanwhile the mob penetrated the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. statement by Dr. Oskar Pollak, Vienna correspondent of the *Daily Herald* (London), July 26, 1927.

⁴⁵ *Mitteilungs-Blatt* No. 1, of Vienna Social Democrats, July 16, 1927.

Ministry of Justice and began hurling documents, judges' robes and caps into the street, where bonfires were immediately made.⁴⁶

The fire spread through the broken windows to the building itself, or as other and more lurid reports have it, was actually set by Communists. The fire brigade failed to get near to the burning building, in spite of efforts made by Dr. Julius Deutsch, former Socialist Minister of Defense, and Mayor Karl Seitz—at the risk of their lives—to persuade the mob to give way.⁴⁷

With the arrival of the Militia the streets now became a positive battlefield and the police, now armed with rifles and expanding bullets, made frightful havoc in the crowds, who neither gave nor received mercy. The mob also attacked and partially destroyed the offices of the "bourgeois" newspapers, the *Reichspost*, the *Neue Wiener Nachrichten*, and the *Deutsch-Osterreichische Tages Zeitung*, crying out, in the words of the *Reichspost's* own editorial on the acquittal, "A Clear Judgment, A Clear Judgment!" In the meantime the acquitted trio, the cause of all this riot, escaped across the frontier only a few moments before their Socialist pursuers arrived at the house where they had lodged, and destroyed it.⁴⁸

At seven o'clock in the evening of the bloody Friday, word passed around that a general strike was to be decreed. Post, telegraph, and radio services ceased. In the first special bulletin issued by the Social-Democrats on Saturday, July 16, it was argued that it was better to use economic means of battle, especially all means of transport and communication. Hence the Social-Democratic party Executive and the Trade Union Council jointly issued the following order:

1. Railroad, postal, telegraph and telephone services to cease all over Austria and resume only upon definite orders, food trains alone exempted.
2. For twenty-four hours (i. e. Saturday) all workers and employes in Vienna to lay down tools as a protest. At close of the

⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, July 22, 1927.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, and *London Times*, weekly ed., July 21, 1927. George Seldes, American reporter, present at this riot, definitely alleges the crowd was led and the fire started by young Communists. Cf. his book, "You Can't Print That!" pp. 449-52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, cf. *New York Times*, July 20, 1927. Cf. *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, July 22, 1927.

twenty-four hour period all to resume work, save those employed in communication and transport. The only exceptions to this one day general strike . . . workers in hospitals and health institutions, water-works, bakeries, gas and electric plants, and occupations that cannot cease without danger. The street car men to strike for twenty-four hours and then resume, but be held in reserve for further strike if necessary.

8. In all quarters of Vienna the Republican *Schutzband* is to be on permanent duty.

9. All other comrades must neither go to the *Ringstrasse* nor start any kind of demonstration. Every attempt at a demonstration will call forth fresh bloodshed, which we desire to avoid. Any large demonstration of the unorganized masses weakens the effectiveness of the Republican *Schutzband*. The Government has gathered forces of militia and police, and we desire no clashes that would accrue to the credit of the Government.

Therefore: No demonstrations today! Silent, dignified, complete protest strike. Meanwhile the unlimited strike of the post, telegraph, and telephone services has begun and will have greater effect than the largest street demonstration.

Our future behavior depends upon the action of the Government and Parliament, whose immediate convocation we demand.⁴⁹

A later edition of the strike-bulletin published by the Social-Democrats on Saturday, reported on the progress of the walk-out and warned the workers against the arguments of the Communists:

The orders of the Party Executive and the Trades Union Council have done their work. Rail traffic has stopped since midnight in all Austria. The postal, telephone and telegraph strike has carried on throughout Austria. The protest-strike of the working class has been put through with strength and dignity. The *Schutzband* is in readiness in all Austria. We ask you comrades, to preserve full discipline and to permit yourselves to be diverted from our orders by no kind of provocation!

Do not allow yourselves to be misled by the Communists!

The Communists are agitating for the instant arming of the working class. Against whom we have to declare: The arming of the working class at the present moment would mean immediate civil war, as a result of the armed struggle between the working class and the military formations of the state. Civil war would mean (1) fresh

⁴⁹ *Mitteilungs-Blatt* No. 1, July 14, 1927.

horrible sacrifice of life; (2) the most terrible economic catastrophe, famine and the increase of unemployment; (3) the ruin of the working class in the agricultural districts, and the great strengthening of armed Fascism in those districts; (4) the gravest danger for the existence of the Republic.

We do not want to experience what the working class of Italy and Hungary have endured. *We desire, therefore, to make all efforts to avoid civil war.* We beg all comrades to resist all Communist provocations and to hold firmly to the orders of the Party and the Trade Unions.⁵⁰

That the Communists gave the orthodox Social-Democrat leaders much apprehension is evident from the above warning. But for a disturbance in one of the suburbs of Vienna Saturday would have passed in complete quiet. As it was in this instance "Communist youth and city rabble" gave an opportunity to the guard for further shooting, causing six more deaths. According to the strike bulletin "the Communists not only thoughtlessly forced out the guard, but also fell upon a section of the Republican *Schutzbund*, outrageously attacking class comrades."⁵¹

As the hours passed the stories of the wicked plots of the Communists grew, and eyewitnesses testified that the trouble before the Palace of Justice on Friday was caused by a band of Communists led by Herr Fiala. That this comparatively small band of "Reds" pushed through the thousands of assembled Socialists and began firing upon the police. The presence and activity of the Communists is said to have come as a complete surprise to the Social-Democrat leaders of Vienna, who were anything but "Red" extremists.⁵²

The story is a vivid one and may have much truth in it, but on the other hand we have the evidence of a member of the workers' defense guard who rode, as escort, on Lincoln Eyre's auto from the outskirts of Vienna to the office of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*,

⁵⁰ *Mitteltungs-Blatt*, No. 2, July 16, 1927. The international trains were stopped at the Austrian border and re-routed; cf. *New York Times*, July 17, 1927.

⁵¹ *Mitteltungs-Blatt*, No. 3, July 17, 1927. The Socialist *Schutzbund* had come to the aid of the police against the mob led by the Communists. Cf. *New York Times*, July 18, 1927.

⁵² Navarre Atkinson's wire to the *New York Times*, July 18, 1927. For Atkinson's dramatic escape from Vienna and the difficulties met in telegraphing the United States see George Seldes, *op. cit.*, pp. 465-66.

before daybreak on Monday morning, July 18. The guard declared:

It is all nonsense to say that Communists were the instigators. There are not enough Communists in Vienna to instigate a dog-fight, much less a revolution. We Socialists were running things the whole time. We burned the Palace of Justice to teach the police not to interfere with our right of peaceable demonstration. Also we drove the cops off the streets. Then we organized our own police force of workers' defense. Those who are not on defense duty have gone home. The trouble is over.⁵⁸

Chancellor Seipel himself, in the special session of Parliament which met July 26, stated that "the Communists took advantage of the tumult for their own ends, but *did not instigate it*."⁵⁴

A far more serious problem than the Communists, however, faced the Social-Democrat leaders of Vienna on the Sunday and Monday after the one-day general strike had ended. The "communications-strike" was still in full force, and while the leaders could not call that off too soon after the wild riots of Friday had subsided, for fear of their own rank and file, there threatened a still graver danger to the whole Socialist movement. Word came through from one provincial town after another that the bourgeois or Fascist forces were gathering for an attack upon Vienna in case the Seipel Ministry were forcibly superseded by the Socialists, or if the latter persisted in retaining the "communications-strike" indefinitely. In the Tyrol and the Vorarlberg the *Heimwehr* were even attempting to run trains and so transport their forces to Vienna. At Graz, the capital of Styria, seat of the University and center of provincial Socialism, there had been a threat from the *Heimwehr*, several hundred strong in the surrounding rural districts, of an invasion of that city. Socialist leaders in Graz, therefore, "sent a most urgent request to Vienna to end the strike, owing to their fear that a state of civil war in Graz was imminent."⁵⁵

The Government of Chancellor Seipel, recognizing the difficult position of the Socialists, merely sat back quietly, waited for time to crystallize events in their favor, and in the meantime

⁵⁴ Lincoln Eyre, in the *New York Times*, July 20, 1927.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, July 27, 1927. Italics ours.

⁵⁶ Navarre Atkinson, in the *New York Times*, July 19, 1927.

made arrangements for the shipment of "loyal" provincial troops by river to Vienna.⁴⁶ With such knowledge to fortify them against the possible wrath of their partisans, the Social-Democrat leaders of Vienna decided, on Sunday noon, to call off the "communications-strike" unconditionally on Monday midnight, July 18, and to fight out the question of responsibility in Parliament.

A violent debate followed in the House in the ensuing week; the "lie" was passed between Chancellor Seipel and Burgomaster Seitz; but the strike was over, a hundred dead had been buried—with the aid of Sinclair Lewis's tears—and a property loss had been incurred by the city of Vienna of some thirty-five million dollars.⁴⁷ And the little mountain republic of Austria remained in just as difficult and unenviable a situation, between its hostile and nationalistic neighbors with their high tariffs, as before any Schattendorf case had caused blood to run in the Vienna streets and class feeling to flare up by the lurid fires of the burning Palace of Justice.

Chancellor Seipel was not in as strong a position as he and his partisans had expected. The reaction against the Socialists was but temporary. Thirty of the "criminals of July" were brought to trial before the juries of Vienna, and without exception every one was acquitted. The juries expressed the view that the excesses that in ordinary circumstances would unquestionably have merited severe punishment, had to be regarded as an aspect of a mass state of mind. The Vienna juries perceived that after the acquittal of the three Fascists of the Schattendorf shooting incident it would be rather an aggravation of the injustice to punish for slighter offenses of rioting. In various elections held in the early months of 1928 the Socialists showed gains both in votes and in representation in many provincial municipalities, although the campaign against the Socialist ticket had been most energetic. It would seem, therefore, that neither the riot of June 15, nor the general strike of July 16, nor even the "communications-strike" of July 15-18, 1927, were able permanently to alienate much support from the working class party of Austria.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, July 18, 1927.

⁴⁷ Prof. H. T. Carman, *loc. cit.* Sinclair Lewis had acted as special "super-reporter" for the *New York Evening Post* (cf. July 21, 1927).

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, May 6, 1928.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE GENERAL STRIKE ORDER

(T. U. C. MEMORANDUM)

SCOPE.—The Trades Union Congress General Council and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, having been unable to obtain a satisfactory settlement of the matters in dispute in the coal-mining industry, and the Government and the mineowners having forced a lock-out, the General Council, in view of the need for coördinated action on the part of affiliated Unions, in defence of the policy laid down by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, directs as follows:

1. TRADES AND UNDERTAKINGS TO CEASE WORK.

Except as hereinafter provided, the following trades and undertakings shall cease work as and when required by the General Council:

TRANSPORT, including all affiliated Unions connected with transport, *i.e.* railways, sea transport, docks, wharves, harbours, canals, road transport, railway repair shops; and contractors for railways and all Unions connected with the maintenance of, or equipment, manufacturing, repairs and groundsmen employed in connection with air transport.

PRINTING TRADES, including the Press.

PRODUCTIVE INDUSTRIES, IRON AND STEEL, METAL, AND HEAVY CHEMICALS GROUP, including all metal workers and other workers who are engaged or may be engaged in installing alternative plant to take the place of coal.

BUILDING TRADE.—All workers engaged on building, except such as are employed definitely on housing and hospital work, together with all workers engaged in the supply of equipment to the building industry, shall cease work.

ELECTRICITY AND GAS.—The General Council recommend that the Trade Unions connected with the supply of electricity and gas shall coöperate with the object of ceasing to supply power. The Council request that the Executives of the Trades Unions concerned shall meet at once with a view to formulating common policy.

SANITARY SERVICES.—The General Council direct that sanitary services be continued.

HEALTH AND FOOD SERVICES.—The General Council recommend that there should be no interference in regard to these, and that the Trade Unions concerned should do everything in their power to organize the distribution of milk and food to the whole of the population.

With regard to hospitals, clinics, convalescent homes, sanatoria, infant welfare centres, maternity homes, nursing homes, schools, the General Council direct that affiliated Unions take every opportunity to ensure that food, milk, medical and surgical supplies shall be efficiently provided.

2. TRADE UNION DISCIPLINE.—(a) The General Council direct that, in the event of Trade Unionists being called upon to cease work, the Trade Unions concerned shall take steps to keep a daily register to account for every one of their members. It should be made known that any workers called upon to cease work should not leave their own district, and by following another occupation, or the same occupation in another district, blackleg their fellow workers.

(b) The General Council recommend that the actual calling out of the workers should be left to the Unions, and instructions should only be issued by the accredited representatives of the Unions participating in the dispute.

3. TRADES COUNCILS.—The work of the Trades Councils, in conjunction with the local officers of the Trade Unions actually participating in the dispute, shall be to assist in carrying out the foregoing provisions, and they shall be charged with the responsibility of organizing the Trade Unionists in dispute in the most effective manner for the preservation of peace and order.

4. INCITEMENT TO DISORDER AND SPIES.—A strong warning must be issued to all localities that any person found inciting the workers to attack property or inciting the workers to riot must be dealt with immediately. It should be pointed out that the opponents will in all probability employ persons to act as spies and others to use violent language in order to incite the workers to disorder.

5. TRADE UNION AGREEMENTS.—The General Council further direct that the Executives of the Unions concerned shall definitely declare that *in the event of any action being taken and Trade Union agreements being placed in jeopardy, it be definitely agreed that there will be no general resumption of work until those agreements are fully recognised.*¹

6. PROCEDURE.—(a) These proposals shall be immediately considered by the Executives of the Trade Unions concerned in the stoppage, who will at once report as to whether they will place their powers in the hands of the General Council and carry out the instructions which the General Council may issue from time to time concerning the necessary action and conduct of the dispute.

(b) And, further, that the Executives of all other affiliated Unions are asked to report at once as to whether they will place their powers in the hands of the General Council and carry out the instructions of the General Council from time to time, both regarding the conduct of the dispute and financial assistance.

(Signed)

A. PUGH, *Chairman,*
WALTER M. CITRINE,
Acting Secretary.

¹ Italics ours.

APPENDIX B

"THE SAMUEL MEMORANDUM"

1. The negotiations upon the conditions of the coal industry should be resumed, the subsidy being renewed for such reasonable period as may be required for that purpose.

2. Any negotiations are unlikely to be successful unless they provide for means of settling disputes in the industry other than conferences between the mineowners and the miners alone. A National Wages Board should, therefore, be established, which would include representatives of those two parties, with a neutral element and an independent chairman. The proposals in this direction tentatively made in the report of the Royal Commission should be pressed, and the powers of the proposed board enlarged.

3. The parties to the Board should be entitled to raise before it any points they consider relevant to the issue under discussion, and the Board should be required to take such points into consideration.

4. There should be no revision of the previous wage rates, unless there are sufficient assurances that the measures of reorganization proposed by the Committee will be effectively adopted. A Committee should be established as proposed by the Prime Minister, on which representatives of the men should be included, whose duty it should be to cooperate with the Government in the preparation of the legislative and administrative measures that are required. The same Committee, or, alternatively, the National Wages Board, should assure itself that the necessary steps, so far as they relate to matters within the industry, are not being neglected or unduly postponed.

5. After these points have been agreed and the Mine National Wages Board has considered every practicable means of meeting such immediate financial difficulties as exist, it may, if that course is found to be absolutely necessary, proceed to the preparation of a wage agreement.

6. Any such agreement should

(i) If practicable, be on simpler lines than those hitherto followed.

(ii) Not adversely affect in any way the wages of the lowest-paid men.

(iii) Fix reasonable figures below which the wage of no class of labour, for a normal customary week's work, should be reduced in any circumstances.

(iv) In the event of any new adjustments being made, should provide for the revision of such adjustments by the Wages Board from time to time if the facts warrant that course.

7. Measures should be adopted to prevent the recruitment of new workers, over the age of 18 years, into the industry if unemployed miners are available.

8. Workers who are displaced as a consequence of closing of uneconomic collieries should be provided for by

(a) The transfer of such men as may be mobile, with the Government assistance that may be required, as recommended in the Report of the Royal Commission.

(b) The maintenance, for such period as may be fixed, of those who cannot be so transferred, and for whom alternative employment cannot be found; this maintenance to comprise an addition to the existing rate of unemployment pay under the Unemployment Insurance Act, of such amount as may be agreed. A contribution should be made by the Treasury to cover the additional sums so disbursed.

(c) The rapid construction of new houses to accommodate transferred workers. The Trades Union Congress will facilitate this by consultation and coöperation with all those who are concerned.

APPENDIX C

TERMINATION OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

Stenographic notes of a meeting held at 10 Downing Street, S. W. 1., on Wednesday, May 12, 1926, at 12:20 P. M.

The following were present: The Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M. P. (Prime Minister); the Rt. Hon. Sir L. Worthington-Evans, Bart., G. B. E., M. P. (Secretary of State for War); the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Birkenhead (Secretary of State for India); the Rt. Hon. W. C. Bridgeman, M. P. (First Lord of the Admiralty); the Rt. Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M. P. (Minister of Health); the Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, Bart., M. P. (Minister of Labour); Col. the Rt. Hon. G. R. Lane-Fox, M. P. (Secretary for Mines); Sir Horace J. Wilson, K.C.B., C.B.E. (Secretary, Ministry of Labour); Mr. E. A. Gowers, C. B. (Permanent Under Secretary, Mines Department); and Mr. T. Jones (Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Offices).

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS GENERAL COUNCIL.—Mr. Arthur Pugh (chairman), Mr. A. B. Swales (vice-chairman), Mr. W. M. Citrine (acting general secretary), and other members.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Pugh, will you be good enough to make a statement?

MR. PUGH: Well, sir, when we separated something over a week ago it was of course recognized and expressed on both sides that the ultimate end would be a settlement of this matter by negotiations, and although the conflict has been very much extended and developments have taken place since then, clearly both sides and all sides and all parties have had in view, they must have had, the ultimate arrangements that would have to be made to bring this trouble to a successful end. We, of course, like yourself, have had, despite whatever developments might have taken place, everybody has had to direct their thoughts in that channel and to use such opportunities as presented themselves and such public opinion that existed with a view to effecting a resumption of negotiations. In that respect, sir, your contribution was made in the statement delivered to the people of

the country through the wireless stations. That was something which we on our side certainly could not ignore.

On the other hand we had been exploring other possibilities with full knowledge that whatever happened, and however long the present position lasted or whatever might be its consequences in the long run, the process of negotiations would have to be gone through. Well, as a result of developments in that direction and the possibilities that we see in getting back to negotiations and your assurance, speaking for the general community of citizens as a whole, that no steps should be left unturned to get back to negotiations, we are here today, sir, to say that this general strike is to be terminated forthwith in order that negotiations may proceed, and we can only hope may proceed in a manner which will bring about a satisfactory settlement. That is the announcement which my General Council is empowered to make.

THE PRIME MINISTER: That is, the general strike is to be called off forthwith?

MR. PUGH: Forthwith. That means immediately. There is just a point about the actual arrangement, but that is in effect what it means. It is merely a matter of the best way to get it done with the least confusion.

THE PRIME MINISTER: I mean there would be a great deal of work for both of us to do. All I would say in answer to that is I thank God for your decision and I would only say now, I do not think it is a moment for lengthy discussion; I only say now I accept fully and confirm fully all I have said in the last two paragraphs of my broadcast message. I shall call my Cabinet together forthwith, report to them what you have said, and I shall lose no time in using every endeavour to get the two contending parties together and do all I can to ensure a just and lasting settlement. I hope it may be possible before long to make a statement of the lines on which we hope to accomplish that end.

MR. THOMAS: Only one or two of us wish to say anything to you and it will be very brief. You answered us in the way we knew you would answer us, namely, that just as you recognize we have done a big thing in accepting the responsibility we felt sure the big thing would be responded to in a big way. We are satisfied all too well that it will not be a day or two or a week in which the

dislocation and difficulty can be put right, but whatever may be the view of the merits of the dispute now ending there is common agreement that assistance from those who were opposing parties ten minutes ago is essential to rectify and make good and start things on the right road again. Your assistance in that is necessary, our assistance is necessary. We intend to give it and in doing that we believe you can help. We want you to help us in that direction. I never liked the word war and I do not want to use it—but we want your help when this dispute is ended. We trust your word as Prime Minister. We ask you to assist us in the way you only can assist us by asking employers and all others to make the position as easy and smooth as possible because the one thing we must not have is guerilla warfare. That must be avoided and in that both sides have to contribute immediately. Nothing could be worse than that this great decision which we have taken should be interpreted otherwise than as a general desire to do the right thing in a difficult moment for the industry of the nation.

Mr. BEVIN: I think you will agree in the difficulties we have had before us, at least we have taken a great risk in calling the strike off. I want to urge it must not be regarded as an act of weakness, but rather one of strength. I am not talking of strength of muscle and brawn, but rather that it took a little courage to take the line we have done. I want to stress Mr. Thomas's point and ask you if you could tell us whether you are prepared to make a general request as head of the Government that facilities, etc., ready facilities for reinstatement, and that kind of thing, shall be given forthwith. The position is this. Some of the undertakings that are affected, of course, are affected by associations which are get-at-able, otherwise are all over the country. When this goes out in the Press it may cause untold confusion, but if you could agree with us to make a declaration it would, I think, facilitate matters; and employers no doubt have been acting at least in carrying out the spirit of the Government during the fight naturally, and they would no doubt respond to a statement of that character, and I would put it to you very strongly that that is one of the easiest ways of doing things.

One of the reasons I want to put it to you is this: In a dislocation of this character it does affect production very much,

especially in producing trades, and if there is a resumption with a sort of good feeling, then the thing gets back on to its usual footing very rapidly. If there is not, then it does affect the restoration. I remember after the 1912 strike, when we were beaten, Sir Joseph Brookbank went into it very carefully, and the loss in output of transport was something like twenty-five per cent, for some time, until the war. We do not want that kind of thing. We have had a row and it does upset things, but we are quite willing to coöperate with our men to repair the damage just as much as the employers, but the employers are the people who can facilitate that kind of feeling, and I am sure they would respond to you if you issued that as a statement. It would be very helpful to us before we left the building if we could have some indication in that direction, because we shall have to send telegrams to unions whose headquarters are not in London, with whom we cannot converse, and coupling with it a declaration from yourself would in a way give the lead as to how the thing is to be approached. You said, sir, also you were going to call the parties together in order to effect a just settlement. Now we have called our show off and work will be resumed pretty quickly.

I do not know whether I am overstepping the bounds, but I would like you to give me an idea of whether that means that there is to be a resumption of the mining operations with us or whether all the negotiations have to be carried on while the miners still remain out.

MR. THOMAS: That implies that we interpret your speech to mean what I am sure it did mean.

MR. BEVIN: It helped us to rise to the occasion. I thought personally—of course it is so difficult when you have to take it without conversing—I really felt in the event of our taking the lead in assuring you we were going to play the game and put our people back that it was going to be free and unfettered negotiation with the parties very speedily, because thousands of our people cannot go back if the colliers are still out, and if the colliers are still out it is going to make it extremely difficult to get a smooth running of the machine. Those are the two points I wish to put to you.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, Mr. Bevin, I cannot say more here at this meeting now. I did not know what points you were

going to raise, or that anything would be said beyond the statement of Mr. Pugh. The point you have put is one I must consider, and I will consider it at once. I would only say in my view the best thing to do is to get as quickly as possible into touch with the employers. I think that the quicker that is done the less friction there will be. You know my record. You know the object of my policy, and I think you may trust me to consider what has been said with a view to seeing how best we can get the country quickly back into the condition in which we all want to see it. You will want my coöperation and I shall want yours to try and make good the damage done to the trade, and try to make this country a little better and a happier place than it has been in recent years. That will be my steady endeavour, and I look to all of you when we are through this for your coöperation in that. I shall do my part, and I have no doubt you will do yours.

In regard to the second point there again I cannot say at this moment what will happen because I shall have to see the parties. My object, of course, is to get the mines started the first moment possible and get an agreement reached. I cannot say until I have seen them exactly what the lines will be upon which my object can best be attained, but you may rely on me and rely on the Cabinet that they will see no stone is left unturned to accomplish that end. Now, Mr. Pugh, as I said before, we have both of us got a great deal to do and a great deal of anxious and difficult work, and I think that the sooner you get to your work and the sooner I get to mine the better.

MR. PUGH: Yes, that sums up the position for the moment.

MR. BEVIN: I am a little persistent. I do not want to take up your time, but shall we be meeting on these two points soon?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I cannot say that, Mr. Bevin. I think it may be that whatever decision I come to the House of Commons may be the best place in which to say it. I cannot say at the moment whether the better thing would be to do it there or meet again, but we are going to consider right away what is best.

The proceedings then terminated.

APPENDIX D

THE TERMS OF SETTLEMENT

(A) PRELIMINARY RAILROAD TERMS

Terms of Settlement as between the railway companies on the one hand and the National Union of Railwaymen, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and the Railway Clerks' Association on the other.

1. Those employees of the railway companies who have gone out on strike to be taken back to work as soon as traffic offers and work can be found for them. The principle to be followed in reinstating to be seniority in each grade at each station, depot, or office.

2. The Trade Unions admit that in calling a strike they committed a wrongful act against the companies, and agree that the companies do not by reinstating surrender their legal rights to claim damages arising out of the strike from strikers and others responsible.

3 The unions undertake:

(a) Not again to instruct their members to strike without previous negotiations with the companies;

(b) To give no support of any kind to their members who take any unauthorised action;

(c) Not to encourage supervisory employees in the special class to take part in any strike.

4. The companies intimated that arising out of the strike it may be necessary to remove certain persons to other positions, but no such persons' salary or wages will be reduced.

Each company will notify the unions within one week 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.

5. The settlement shall not extend to persons who have been guilty of violence or intimidation.

On behalf of the General Managers' Conference:	On behalf of the Railway Trade Unions:
FELIX J. C. POLE	J. H. THOMAS
(Great Western Railway)	(N. U. R.)
H. G. BURGESS	C. T. CRAMP
(L. M. & S. Railway)	(N. U. R.)
H. A. WALKER	J. BROMLEY
(Southern Railway)	(A. S. L. E. & F.)
R. L. WEDGWOOD	A. G. WALKDEN
(L. & N. E. Railway)	(R. C. A.)
R. H. SELBIE	
(Metropolitan Railway)	

The unions asked that opportunity should be afforded them of discussing the case of any man dealt with under clause 5 of the Terms of Settlement. The general managers agreed.

14th May, 1926.

FELIX J. C. POLE.

(B) FINAL RAILROAD TERMS, MAY 21, 1926.

1. The principle of Clause (1) of the Settlement of May 14 that "men who have gone out on Strike shall be taken back to work as soon as traffic offers and work can be found for them" will be maintained, subject to a temporary suspension of the Guaranteed Week Clause in the National Agreement of April, 1919, on the following conditions:

2. The suspension of the Guaranteed Week will be administered in such a way as not to cause expense to the Companies, and will not be applicable to men who did not take part in the Strike.

3. The Railway Companies will aim at finding employment at each station or depot for as many men as possible in the respective grades, on the basis of so distributing the available work amongst the men in each grade as to yield on broad lines, an actual weekly earning equivalent to three days' pay at ordinary rate.

4. If at any station or depot the available work for any grade is less than the minimum mentioned in Clause (3), endeavor will be made:

(a) to find employment at a neighbouring station or depot, where work is available, to which the man can travel without cost to the Company to take duty at the times required;

(b) to transfer men at their own expense to other stations or depots where work is available.

The Company to be relieved from any obligation under these arrangements in respect of men who decline to travel or to be transferred.

5. If at any station or depot the distribution of the work under the foregoing clauses would not yield to the whole of the men earnings equivalent, on the average of three days' pay at ordinary rate, the work will be distributed on the basis of three days' minimum to a portion of the men each week under a weekly rotation.

6. Subject to the foregoing clauses, the work available in each particular grade at each station or depot will be distributed in such a manner as to equalise, as far as practicable, the earnings of the men in each grade.

7. In distributing the available work in any grade, during the continuance of this Agreement, regard will not be paid to age or seniority in the service.

8. The Companies will arrange, as far as possible, that re-employed men entitled to holidays with pay will be relieved so that they may take their leave during the period of suspension of the Guaranteed Week.

9. The Companies agree that men whom it is not possible to reemploy under these arrangements, shall be recorded on waiting lists, and, during the continuance of these arrangements, will be accorded privilege ticket facilities, provided they are not in other employment yielding three days' wages or more.

10. These arrangements will continue in force until it is mutually agreed to restore the Guaranteed Week.

11. Persons entitled to Unemployment Insurance benefits will be excluded from any participation in these arrangements, if by sharing in the available work they would prejudice the non-insured employees.

12. The existing National Agreements will continue in operation, except as varied by the foregoing arrangements.

13. These arrangements to come into operation as from the first day in the next pay week after Whitsuntide.

On behalf of the Railway Companies:	On behalf of the Railway Trade Unions:
H. G. BURGESS	J. H. THOMAS
R. L. WEDGWOOD	C. T. CRAMP
JAS. MILNE	W. DOBBIE
A. HARRIS	J. BROMLEY
D. DURRANT	J. CORDREY
	A. G. WALKDEN, Railway Clerks' Association.

} National
} Union of
} Railwaymen.
} Associated Society of
} Locomotive Engineers
} and Firemen

(C) THE PORT OF LONDON SETTLEMENT

1. The Port employers in London will reëngage labour on the terms of the National agreement which the Unions admit they have broken.

2. The men to present themselves for work at their usual places of engagement at 7:45 a.m. on Monday, May 17, 1926.

3. Employers will take on as many men as work is available for.

4. Permanent men, whether supervisory or labourers, shall be re-instated in their former positions on resumption of work.

5. The Union undertakes:

(a) Not in future to instruct their members to strike, either nationally, sectionally or locally for any reason without exhausting the conciliation machinery of the National Agreement.

(b) Not to support or encourage any of their members who take individual action contrary to the preceding clause.

(c) To instruct their members in any future dispute to refrain from any attempt to influence men in certain supervisory grades (to be specified hereafter) to take strike action.

6. After general resumption of work any arrears of pay due to men at the time of the stoppage to be paid.

7. The stevedores' Agreement of February 28, 1924, is maintained as regards stevedores as amplified by this agreement.

These terms were signed by Mr. F. C. Allen and Mr. G. Grilling Harris for the Port employers; by Mr. Ernest Bevin, Mr.

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Harry Gosling, Mr. F. Thompson, Mr. D. W. Milford and
Mr. John Cliff for the Transport and General Workers' Union,
and by Mr. J. B. Ruark for the stevedores.

APPENDIX E

TRADE DISPUTES AND TRADE UNION ACT, 1927

An Act to declare and amend the law relating to trade disputes and trade unions, to regulate the position of civil servants and persons employed by public authorities in respect of membership of trade unions and similar organisations, to extend section five of the Conspiracy, and Protection of Property Act, 1875, and for other purposes connected with the purposes aforesaid.

(29th July 1927.)

Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1.—(1) It is hereby declared—

(a) that any strike is illegal if it—

(i) has any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in which the strikers are engaged; and

(ii) is a strike designed or calculated to coerce the Government either directly or by inflicting hardship upon the community; and

(b) that any lock-out is illegal if it—

(i) has any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in which the employers locking-out are engaged; and

(ii) is a lock-out designed or calculated to coerce the Government either directly or by inflicting hardship upon the community:

and it is further declared that it is illegal to commence, or continue, or to apply any sums in furtherance or support of, any such illegal strike or lock-out.

For the purposes of the foregoing provisions—

(a) a trade dispute shall not be deemed to be within a trade or industry unless it is a dispute between employers and work-

men, or between workmen and workmen, in that trade or industry, which is connected with the employment or non-employment or the terms of the employment, or with the conditions of labour, of persons in that trade or industry; and

(b) without prejudice to the generality of the expression "trade or industry" workmen shall be deemed to be within the same trade or industry if their wages or conditions of employment are determined in accordance with the conclusions of the same joint industrial council, conciliation board or other similar body, or in accordance with agreements made with the same employer or group of employers.

(2) If any person declares, instigates, incites others to take part in or otherwise acts in furtherance of a strike or lock-out, declared by this Act to be illegal, he shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years:

Provided that no person shall be deemed to have committed an offence under this section or at common law by reason only of his having ceased work or refused to continue to work or to accept employment.

(3) Where any person is charged before any court with an offence under this section, no further proceedings in respect thereof shall be taken against him without the consent of the Attorney-General except such as the court may think necessary by remand (whether in custody or on bail) or otherwise to secure the safe custody of the person charged, but this subsection shall not apply to Scotland, or to any prosecution instituted by or on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

(4) The provisions of the Trade Disputes Act, 1906, shall not, nor shall the second proviso to subsection (1) of section two of the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, apply to any act done in contemplation or furtherance of a strike or lock-out which is by this Act declared to be illegal, and any such act shall not be deemed for the purposes of any enactment to be done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute:

Provided that no person shall be deemed to have committed an offence under any regulations made under the Emergency

Powers Act, 1920, by reason only of his having ceased work or having refused to continue to work or to accept employment.

2.—(1) No person refusing to take part or to continue to take part in any strike or lock-out which is by this Act declared to be illegal, shall be, by reason of such refusal or by reason of any action taken by him under this section, subject to expulsion from any trade union or society, or to any fine or penalty, or to deprivation of any right or benefit to which he or his legal personal representatives would otherwise be entitled, or liable to be placed in any respect either directly or indirectly under any disability or at any disadvantage as compared with other members of the union or society, anything to the contrary in the rules of a trade union or society notwithstanding.

(2) No provisions of the Trade Union Acts, 1871 to 1917, limiting the proceedings which may be entertained by any court, and nothing in the rules of a trade union or society requiring the settlement of disputes in any manner shall apply to any proceeding for enforcing any right or exemption secured by this section, and in any such proceeding the court may, in lieu of ordering a person who has been expelled from membership of a trade union or society to be restored to membership, order that he be paid out of the funds of the trade union or society such sum by way of compensation or damages as the court thinks just.

(3) As respects any strike or lock-out before the passing of this Act but since the first day of May, nineteen hundred and twenty-six, which, according to the law as declared by this Act, was illegal, this section shall have effect as if it had been in operation when the strike or lock-out took place.

3.—(1) It is hereby declared that it is unlawful for one or more persons (whether acting on their own behalf or on behalf of a trade union or of an individual employer or firm, and notwithstanding that they may be acting in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute) to attend at or near a house or place where a person resides or works or carries on business or happens to be, for the purpose of obtaining or communicating information or of persuading or inducing any person to work or to abstain from working, if they so attend in such numbers

or otherwise in such manner as to be calculated to intimidate any person in that house or place, or to obstruct the approach thereto or egress therefrom, or to lead to a breach of the peace; and attending at or near any house or place in such numbers or in such manner as is by this subsection declared to be unlawful shall be deemed to be a watching or besetting of that house or place within the meaning of section seven of the Conspiracy, and Protection of Property Act, 1875.

(2) In this section the expression "to intimidate" means to cause in the mind of a person a reasonable apprehension of injury to him or to any member of his family or to any of his dependants or of violence or damage to any person or property, and the expression "injury" includes injury to a person in respect of his business, occupation, employment or other source of income, and includes any actionable wrong.

(3) In section seven of the Conspiracy, and Protection of Property Act, 1875, the expression "intimidate" shall be construed as having the same meaning as in this section.

(4) Notwithstanding anything in any Act, it shall not be lawful for one or more persons, for the purpose of inducing any person to work or to abstain from working, to watch or beset a house or place where a person resides or the approach to such a house or place, and any person who acts in contravention of this subsection shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding twenty pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months.

4.—(1) It shall not be lawful to require any member of a trade union to make any contribution to the political fund of a trade union unless he has at some time after the commencement of this Act and before he is first after the thirty-first day of December, nineteen hundred and twenty-seven, required to make such a contribution delivered at the head office or some branch office of the trade union, notice in writing in the form set out in the First Schedule to this Act of his willingness to contribute to that fund and has not withdrawn the notice in manner herein-after provided; and every member of a trade union who has not delivered such a notice as aforesaid, or who, having delivered such a notice, has withdrawn it in manner hereinafter provided, shall be deemed for the purposes of the Trade Union Act, 1913,

to be a member who is exempt from the obligation to contribute to the political fund of the union, and references in that Act to a member who is so exempt shall be construed accordingly:

Provided that, if at any time a member of a trade union who has delivered such a notice as aforesaid gives notice of withdrawal thereof, delivered at the head office or at any branch office of the trade union, he shall be deemed for the purposes of this sub-section to have withdrawn the notice as from the first day of January next after the delivery of the notice of withdrawal.

For the purposes of this subsection, a notice may be delivered personally or by any authorized agent and any notice shall be deemed to have been delivered at the head or a branch office of a trade union if it has been sent by post properly addressed to that office.

(2) All contributions to the political fund of a trade union from members of the trade union who are liable to contribute to that fund shall be levied and made separately from any contributions to the other funds of the trade union and no assets of the trade union, other than the amount raised by such a separate levy as aforesaid, shall be carried to that fund, and no assets of a trade union other than those forming part of the political fund shall be directly or indirectly applied or charged in furtherance of any political object to which section three of the Trade Union Act, 1913, applies; and any charge in contravention of this subsection shall be void.

(3) All rules of a trade union made and approved in accordance with the requirements of section three of the Trade Union Act, 1913, shall be amended so as to conform to the requirements of this Act, and as so amended shall be approved by the Registrar of Friendly Societies (in this Act referred to as "the Registrar") within six months after the commencement of this Act or within such further time as the Registrar may in special circumstances allow, and if the rules of any trade union are not so amended and approved as aforesaid they shall be deemed not to comply with the requirements of the said section.

(4) Notwithstanding anything in this Act, until the thirty-first day of December, nineteen hundred and twenty-seven, it shall be lawful to require any member of a trade union to contribute to the political fund of the trade union as if this Act had not been passed.

(5) If the Registrar is satisfied, and certifies, that rules for the purpose of complying with the provisions of this section, or for the purposes of the Trade Union Act, 1913, as amended by this Act, which require approval by the Registrar have been approved by a majority of the members of a trade union voting for the purpose, by the executive or other governing body of such a trade union, or by a majority of delegates of such a trade union voting at a meeting called for the purpose, the Registrar may approve those rules and those rules shall thereupon have effect as rules of the union notwithstanding that the provisions of the rules of the union as to the alteration of rules or the making of new rules have not been complied with.

(6) Section sixteen of the Trade Union Act, 1871 (which provides for the transmission to the Registrar of annual returns by registered trade unions), shall apply to every unregistered trade union so far as respects the receipts, funds, effects, expenditure, assets and liabilities of the political fund thereof.

5.—(1) Amongst the regulations as to the conditions of service in His Majesty's civil establishments there shall be included regulations prohibiting established civil servants from being members, delegates, or representatives of any organisation of which the primary object is to influence or affect the remuneration and conditions of employment of its members, unless the organisation is an organisation of which the membership is confined to persons employed by or under the Crown and is an organisation which complies with such provisions as may be contained in the regulations for securing, that it is in all respects independent of, and not affiliated to, any such organisation as aforesaid the membership of which is not confined to persons employed by or under the Crown or any federation comprising such organisations, that its objects do not include political objects, and that it is not associated directly or indirectly with any political party or organisation:

Provided that the regulations made in compliance with the provisions of this section shall not prevent—

(a) any person who is at the commencement of this Act an established civil servant from remaining a member of any trade union or organisation not composed wholly or mainly of persons employed by or under the Crown of which he had, at the commencement of this Act, been a member for more than six

months, if under the rules thereof there had on the fourth day of April, nineteen hundred and twenty-seven, accrued or begun to accrue to him a right to any future payment during incapacity, or by way of superannuation, or on the death of himself or his wife, or as provision for his children; or

(b) any person employed at the commencement of this Act by or under the Crown who thereafter becomes an established civil servant from remaining, so long as he is not appointed to a position of supervision or management, a member of any trade union or organisation, not composed wholly or mainly of persons employed by or under the Crown, of which he is a member at the date when he so becomes an established civil servant, if under the rules thereof there has at that date accrued, or begun to accrue, to him a right to any future payment during incapacity, or by way of superannuation, or on the death of himself or his wife, or as provision for his children; or

(c) a person who in addition to being an established civil servant is, apart from his service as such, also engaged in some other employment or occupation from being a member, delegate, or representative of any trade union or organisation, of which the primary object is to influence or affect the remuneration or conditions of employment of persons engaged in that employment or occupation.

(2) Subject as hereinafter provided, any established civil servant who contravenes the regulations made under this section shall be disqualified for being a member of the Civil Service:

Provided that, in the case of a first offence, a civil servant shall forthwith be warned by the head of his department, and the said disqualification shall not take effect if within one month after such warning the civil servant ceases to contravene the said regulations.

(3) In this section—

(a) the expression "established civil servant" means a person serving in an established capacity in the permanent service of the Crown, and includes any person who, having been granted a certificate by the Civil Service Commissioners, is serving a probationary period preliminary to establishment; and

(b) the expression "conditions of employment" means in relation to persons other than persons employed by or under the

Crown the conditions of employment of persons employed under a contract of service.

6.—(1) It shall not be lawful for any local or other public authority to make it a condition of the employment or continuance in employment of any person that he shall or shall not be a member of a trade union, or to impose any condition upon persons employed by the authority whereby employees who are or who are not members of a trade union are liable to be placed in any respect either directly or indirectly under any disability or disadvantage as compared with other employees.

(2) It shall not be lawful for any local or other public authority to make it a condition of any contract made or proposed to be made with the authority, or of the consideration or acceptance of any tender in connection with such a contract, that any person to be employed by any party to the contract shall or shall not be a member of a trade union.

(3) Any condition imposed in contravention of this section shall be void.

(4) There shall be added to section five of the Conspiracy, and Protection of Property Act, 1875, the following provision, that is to say:

“If any person employed by a local or other public authority wilfully breaks a contract of service with that authority, knowing or having reasonable cause to believe that the probable consequence of his so doing, either alone or in combination with others, will be to cause injury or danger or grave inconvenience to the community, he shall be liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding ten pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months.”

7. Without prejudice to the right of any person having a sufficient interest in the relief sought to sue or apply for an injunction to restrain any application of the funds of a trade union in contravention of the provisions of this Act, an injunction restraining any application of the funds of a trade union in contravention of the provisions of section one of this Act may be granted at the suit or upon the application of the Attorney-General.

In the application of this section to Scotland, there shall be substituted therein for references to an injunction references

to an interdict, and for the reference to the Attorney-General a reference to the Lord Advocate.

8.—(1) This Act may be cited as the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act, 1927, and shall be construed as one with the Trade Union Acts, 1871 to 1917, and this Act and the Trade Union Acts, 1871 to 1917, may be cited together as the Trade Union Acts, 1871 to 1927.

(2) For the purposes of this Act—

(a) the expression "strike" means the cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any trade or industry acting in combination, or a concerted refusal or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of persons who are, or have been so employed, to continue to work or to accept employment;

(b) the expression "lock-out" means the closing of a place of employment or the suspension of work, or the refusal by an employer to continue to employ any number of persons employed by him in consequence of a dispute, done with a view to compelling those persons, or to aid another employer in compelling persons employed by him, to accept terms or conditions of or affecting employment; and

(c) a strike or lock-out shall not be deemed to be calculated to coerce the Government unless such coercion ought reasonably to be expected as a consequence thereof.

(3) This Act shall not extend to Northern Ireland, except that the provisions of this Act relating to civil servants shall apply to civil servants employed in Northern Ireland in the administration of services with respect to which the Parliament of Northern Ireland has not power to make laws.

(4) The enactments mentioned in the Second Schedule to this Act are hereby repealed to the extent specified in the third column of that Schedule.

APPENDIX F

THE SPANISH GENERAL STRIKE OF 1930

On November 15, 1930, a general strike broke out without warning in the city of Madrid, spreading in subsequent days to Malaga, Barcelona, Valencia and several other cities throughout Spain.

The immediate cause alleged for the general strike call was the firing by police upon a crowd attending a funeral of workers, who had died in a building collapse. As a result of this clash with the police four persons were killed and many wounded.

As in previous Spanish strikes radical or communistic labor groups forced the pace, and only reluctantly did the Socialist unions ratify the general strike call, usually after workers had either walked out voluntarily or had been forced out by threats of violence on the part of radical agitators.

The general strike call was obeyed in such manner as to paralyze "every branch of the capital's life," depriving it even of most of its public services. Taxicabs and street cars quit the streets; the subways ran under heavy guard. Newspapers ceased to appear. Cafés were closed and food stalls overthrown in the market places. Vegetables, milk and bread became exceedingly scarce and troops were called upon to act as emergency bakers! The number who responded to the call in Madrid was estimated by officers at a quarter of a million workers. (*New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1930.)

When the strike ceased in Madrid it broke out with violence in the provinces, several young workers being killed or wounded in clashes with police in Barcelona. (*New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1930.) While students appeared to side with the workers in Madrid and the provinces, it was generally believed that republican motives were behind their actions. The presence of a strong undercurrent of revolutionary republicanism was evident through all the demonstrations in Madrid and elsewhere.

The *Sindicato Unico*, a communistic labor organization, was much blamed for use of threats and violence to other, less radi-

cal, workers who desired to continue working. Even after the official order to return to work had been issued such threats and violence deterred many workers from resuming their jobs immediately. (New York *Times*, Nov. 21, 1980.)

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