The Radicalization of the British Working Class, 1910-1926
And The Impact of the Russian Revolution

by

CAROL LANG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York
2006

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 3214532

Copyright 2006 by
Lang, Carol

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI Microform 3214532
Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

©2006

CAROL LANG

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the Dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____	_____
Date	Professor Alborn, Chairman, Examining Committee
_____	_____
Date	Professor Freeman, Executive Officer

_____
Professor Sandi Cooper

_____
Professor Joel Wiener

_____
Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett

The City University of New York

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ABSTRACT

by

Carol Lang

Adviser: Professor Timothy Alborn

The Radicalization of the British Working Class 1910-1926 and the Impact of the Russian Revolution

There is probably no period in British working class history when there has been a higher degree of class struggle or a greater possibility of revolutionary change than in the period just preceding World War I and its aftermath. British workers' hopes were raised through the events of the war that so markedly changed the British economy; the mere trade union consciousness that existed in the mid-19th century had been transformed into the belief that workers' control of industry was not only a possibility but the only rational way to run the economy. The government had nationalized industry and millions of women had entered the workforce swelling the ranks with workers that had not previously worked in heavy industry. While British workers initially supported the war, its carnage ultimately reduced their support for it and thus by 1916 the government was forced to introduce conscription undermining workers' already shrinking support. The combined affects of profiteering, conscription, "nationalization" of some kind, and the Russian Revolution so radicalized British workers that the government, forced into action, had developed its own plan to maintain this anger by either attempting to buy off the leadership through the offer of cabinet posts or, when necessary, imposed a more draconian course of action including surveillance of workers meetings, censorship of their press, or by attacking demonstrations with military force. Class struggle which had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

been a constant in the factories before the war was stifledat least at the beginning of it , once again became a commonplace. Politics became the purview of workers who had not previously entered the political arena and for many who had traditionally been militant and class conscious the war and the subsequent Russian Revolution brought the question of who rules the society into sharp focus. The Russian Revolution had spurted the world's working classes into action, especially into defense of the revolution. Nowhere was this felt as strongly as among British workers since Great Britain led the counterrevolutionary offensive. This process culminated in the events leading up to and including the General Strike of 1926 and as a consequence its defeat led to tremendous repression against the workers and an attempt to punish them for this steady period of class struggle.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper represents my attempt to shed light on the tremendous struggles and sacrifices that were made by British workers circa World War I. They fought and in some cases died to lift up theirs and their fellow workers' living standards. Without this concerted struggle, their lives would have remained extremelydifficul t and in many cases would have become increasingly dire.

Since this project has taken over 10 years to complete I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the many people who continued to lend me their support. First, I would like to acknowledge the librarians, both in Britain and the United States, who tirelessly found information which was vital to making this a completed project. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Professor Wiener, retired, who struggled with me every step of the way but who read and reread this until its completion. Finally, I would like to thank some good friends who stood by me this entire time and endured my incessant complaints and, I would like to thank my daughters, Jesse, who helped me find the references that were missing when I was struggling with the writing and helped me organize the massive amount of material that I had collected over the years and my daughter Sarah who told me never to give up.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

PREFACE

The story recounted in this dissertation examines the years 1910-1926 with particular emphasis on the workers' movement in Great Britain from WWI through the General Strike of 1926. Except for the period of the Chartist movement, these years were the most militant in British working class history. Internationally and nationally, the post-1918 years posed a profound threat to the hegemony of the European capitalist class. The Great War wrought intense destruction, killing millions of people and wounding and maiming millions more. In countries such as Russia with the least ability to withstand massive losses in manpower there was a revolution marking a change that impacted workers around the world. By November 1917, workers not only overthrew the Czar, but the entire capitalist system in Russia as well.

Disgust at this carnage was felt in a variety of other European countries as well, with liberation struggles heating up at the completion of the War. The example of the downfall of capitalism in Russia raised expectations; hopes for some and fears for others that revolutions would spread to other industrialized nations. Although no successful revolution did occur in Italy the Red Flag was raised over the factories in Turin. Germany's soldiers and sailors mutinied and upon its conclusion hundreds of thousands of workers took to the street demanding fundamental changes. The Social Democrats came to power and although they were not to implement the far reaching demands that the working class had hoped for, the upheaval indicated that the Russian Revolution had touched German workers as well. Not only were there challenges by workers all over Eastern and Central Europe but these challenges were also posed in places such as Britain. This indicated a profound change in the political agenda of the workers'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

movement. At least since the 1850s, the leadership of the organized workers adopted a conservative political agenda seeing itself as part of the mainstream of political activity. And yet even with the momentous challenges posed by British workers, revolution failed to materialize there. Historian, Perry Anderson, in his exhaustive book *The English Question*, argues that workers were conservative and thus unwilling to challenge the labor leadership because they were unwilling to challenge the capitalist system, unlike French workers whose perceived philosophy was more universal and less accepting of their class status. Since Anderson's work spans 400 years it is the most exhaustive work on the English question but since it does try to cover so much territory it is also superficial. He argues that by the time the 1848 movements arose on the Continent, the Chartist movement had been defeated. Marxism had not really touched the British psyche. "The SDF did not succeed in making a lasting ideological impact on the labour movement."[1] The Labour Party included no Marxist component, asserts Anderson. He submits that while WWI caused uprisings to occur on the Continent, "no comparable turmoil disturbed the placid waters of British social history."[2] And while Anderson admits that syndicalism was an important force that might have gotten out of hand had WWI not intervened, he asserts:

> The late Victorian era and the high noon of imperialism welded aristocracy and bourgeoisie together in a single social bloc. The working class fought passionately and unaided against the advent of industrial capitalism; its exhaustion and successive defeats was the measure of its efforts. Henceforward it resolved, separate but subordinate, within the apparently unshakeable structure of British capitalism, unable, despite its great numerical superiority to alter the fundamental nature of its society.[3]

---

[1] Perry Anderson, *English Question,* (London:Verso:1992), 27.
[2] Ibid. 27.
[3] Ibid. 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Other historians such as Trevor Wilson contend in *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* that some workers were too elitist and concerned with their own craft interests to worry about less well off workers. Even after years of fighting and the occurrence of the Russian revolution, which set an example for workers internationally, Wilson asserts that British workers remained patriotic:

> So it appears that in mid-1917, notwithstanding war-weariness at home and social upheaval in Russia, the British working class was far from shedding its powerful internal divisions on the basis of skill, status, and sex. And it remained subject to the strong pull of patriotic zeal—not to say racial bias— that had been so much in evidence since the outbreak of the war.[4]

Still other historians such as Stephen Graubard maintain in *British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924* thatworkers were unwilling and simply too disorganized to mount any real challenge against the state. J. Winter, in "Some paradoxes of the First World War," while not explicitly going into the question of whether workers' were likely to mount a challenge, implies that since workers lives were better off during the war than before it, it was unlikely that they would be so inclined. According to Winter: "...for the bulk of the British population, and especially the manual working class, the wartime state had succeeded where most it mattered, namely, in delivering the goods, both to the men in uniform and to the civilian population."[5] John Horne in *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918* argues that British workers had a more conservative culture than did the French and a "greater continuity in the social composition..., more deeply entrenched trade unions, and a less conflictual labour culture, [which] sustained the unity of the

---

[4] Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918,* (Cambridge:Polity Press:1986), 322.

[5] J.M. Winter, "Some paradoxes of the First World War," R. Wall and J. Winter, ed., *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1914,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1988), 36. Niall Ferguson argues the opposite in *The Pity of War,* (London:Basic Books:1999), 33 He writes: "By 1915 infant mortality rates had increased by over 10% and there was an increased incidence of tuberculosis among women." It seems that where the standard of living had increased much of that, although not all was due to workers' struggles over their previously low standard of living.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

labour movement and its reformist orientation."[6] For F.L. Carsten, in *war against war*, even the notorious South Wales miners were "strongly loyal and patriotic." In response to the fact that workers demonstrated their anger at the rising food prices Carsten maintains that if the government had imposed "earlier and tighter control of food prices and war profits," this "would have eliminated the principal causes of industrial unrest and would have deprived the small groups of the political opposition of their most effective means to make anti-war propaganda."[7] An Independent Labour Party member, Willie Thompson, argues similarly. Thompson believed that what essentially was truth to the revolutionaries was lost on the masses of workers. He maintains that

> for all the mass turbulence of the prewar, wartime and postwar years only a minute segment of the British working class, namely that organized in the far left parties and groups, had been sufficiently affected by these experiences to reject the British social and constitutional structure root and branch and to think in terms of an alternative soviet democracy.[8]

Since workers mounted some serious challenges to the capitalist system but each time they were unsuccessful, I will examine some of the possible reasons for their failures. And while those historians already mentioned argue that the working class was too conservative to consider revolution as any real possibility, there are historians who recognized its possibility but still found success unlikely. Therefore, I am going to examine why the failure of any serious challenge occurred and within that I will examine the leadership of the workers' movement, both trade union and left leaders as a necessary component of that movement. Can it be argued that the leadership was an important factor that militated against the working class' ability to mount a successful challenge?

---

[6] John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1991), 392.
[7] Carsten, *war against war: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War,* (Berkeley:University of California Press:1982), 63.
[8] Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1992,* (London: Pluto Press:1992), 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the case of the trade union leaders, were they too wedded to the system to be willing to change it? I am also intending to examine of theoretical basis upon which the left in Britain allowed itself to be tied to the Soviet Union's Communist Party shaping the politics of this most crucial period.

The central theme, therefore, of this dissertation will be the examination of the workers' leaders. Through reading the literature it has become clear that throughout the period under discussion, the leaders having either been unwilling or unable to mount a successful struggle against the ever-worsening conditions facing their members, had ultimately let the most important fight – that is the General of Strike of 1926 be hopelessly lost. As an example of this kind of leadership we need to look at Ramsay MacDonald's stewardship of the Labour Government in 1924. He was not only ineffective in making any meaningful change in workers' lives, but Mr. H.T.A. Becker, a Conservative Member of Parliament, pointed out that MacDonald was more concerned about his own salary than he was of raising the standard of living of the people who put him into office and yet managed to hold on to the leadership by undermining any challenges from the left. Thus Becker remarked: "why should union leaders who, once they are elected, seem to hold their positions for life, [and] be the only people who can call a strike?" The Conservative MP asked this most obvious question in response to the fact that younger, more militant leaders were advancing the call for strikes, especially in the transport industry. He noted that these union leaders held on to their posts as if they were lifetime appointments subsequently alienating workers. Moreover, when discussing the strikes, he points out that "these strikes are not done for better money, better conditions, but to replace one leader with another, or to superimpose one influence on

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

another."[9] Cognizant of the fact that the Communists were establishing an important role in the trade unions, he was concerned about the influence they were wielding. Hoping to achieve higher wages and better working conditions, workers realized that these things were impossible to achieve without changing their leaders in the process. It was clear that the union leadership, with few exceptions, were seduced by the power, prestige and material gains that were afforded them by their positions as head of their unions. Many of them, unwilling to hold regular membership meetings, bureaucratically ran their unions and thus major decisions were made without the input or knowledge of the members. This was definitely the case for the seamen's leader, Havelock Wilson. At the sign of any opposition Wilson would rely on the courts to take action against his members, the result being that locals were suspended thus leaving members without any protections. This was Wilson's response to workers who dared to support the miners during the 1926 General Strike. Therefore, while the working class had demonstrated tremendous class consciousness and revolutionary militancy, it was their leadership that constantly derailed their struggles and undermined their quest to change directions – that is, to fight for socialism rather than limit their demands to just higher wages and better working conditions. The 1919 near general strike, the 1921 fiasco known as Black Friday, and the 1926 general strike all demonstrate the leaders' unwillingness to either mount a strike, as in 1921 when the membership voted to go out (the membership voted to sanction its leader Frank Hodge but the damage had already been done), or when strikes was thrust upon them they called them off either right before it was to begin or after millions of workers had manned the picket lines as was in the case of 1919 and tragically in 1926.

---

[9] Becker, *Hansard*, House of Commons, June 26, 1924, 722, 724.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This particular period significantly breaks from the previous epoch (pre-WWI) where the productive forces continued to expand, to a point where, in the main, they ceased to expand qualitatively, putting socialism on the agenda. The Russian Revolution marked that change for the world's working classes and for their rulers as well. In the case of Britain, I will demonstrate how these changes had come about and the impact they had on future workers' struggles.

As a result of the war major inroads were made into divisions that had previously existed among British workers. These divisions broke down along craft, gender and race lines.[10] Moreover, challenges to the entrenched leadership of the trade unions were mounted and after the war radical and communist leaders began to seek the allegiance of workers in order to win them away from the traditional leadership. Heretofore, unions sought to maintain the status quo, promoting the philosophy that it was better to seek a common home with the employers rather than challenge them and risk defeat. Labour's support for the Liberal Party had taken root by the 1880s, but by the war's end the Labour Party was the clear contender for power, gaining significant support from the working class. But the younger, more militant leaders could not, for reasons that will be gone into later, figure out how to become the alternative to the already entrenched leaders. While they had a number of opportunities, they could not capitalize on them.

The war posed an important question for workers: that is, how best to defend their hard-won gains in the midst of an ever advancing economic crisis. Thus a controversy

---

[10] Robert Roberts, in *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Ce*ntury, (London:Penguin Books:1971), 21In discussing the many divisions within the working class he gives numerous examples of which many did not even begin to break down until WWI. One such split was found among respectable workers vs. the less respectable workers. These divisions were most often found along craft lines. "So clearly," argues Roberts, "did headwear denote class that, in Glasgow, separate clubs existed for 'hat' girls and 'shawl' girls."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

arose over which approach would be more effective: a political approach, that is, voting or an industrial one. And although the union leadership continued to push for a political approach, workers continued to challenge them. This dichotomy, begun during the latter part of the19th century, continued throughout the early part of the 20th. It reflected both the disparate attitudes of the skilled and non-skilled, and more importantly, the division between the established union leadership and the younger less traditional leaders who came up through the ranks. So by the outbreak of the war British workers, as opposed to their leaders, no longer sought solutions by aligning themselves with Liberals, but began to rely on their own forces posing a challenge to the economic status quo. It would then be important to look at this alternative leadership to make an assessment of how they responded to the economic crises. Leaders such as Noah Ablett and Arthur Cook, who co-authored the pamphlet The *Miners' Next Step,* were two of the more significant leaders that challenged the old guard leading up to WWI. These men reflected the ever growing disgust among miners with their leaders and attempted to put forward a program that would not only challenge them but would hopefully open the way for workers to control their own industries.

The question that this dissertation is endeavoring to answer is: was the British working class embarking on the same journey that was engulfing other European workers? Could the momentous strikes that crippled industry right after the completion of the war be considered as a beginning of this pre-revolutionary period or were British workers still too wedded to the system and too reliant on their own union leaderships to challenge the status quo? The British government was also concerned with this question. The depth of the disgust for capitalism was monitored by the government as well as their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leaders. All segments of the British working class were becoming aware of the profound inequalities that existed in society. From the discussions in the *Supplementary Parliamentary Minutes* after the war, although it is not clear who is speaking, under the subtitle Political and Official, this concern was echoed by the government.

> The sense of antagonism between Capital and Labour has been considerably deepened during recent years by the propaganda of a small but earnest group of men whose teachings are rapidly permeating the entire trade union movement. Advanced causes feed on discontent, and the indisposition of employers to concede the claims of the workers to a higher standard of life has provided fuel for the propaganda of the Independent Labour Party and, more recently, of the enthusiasts of the Central Labour College movement…The influence of the 'advanced' men are growing rapidly, and there is ground for belief that under their leadership attempts of a drastic character will be made by the working classes as a whole to secure direct control…[11]

Socialism, I would argue, was prominently on the agenda for many working class people once Russia had set the example. But unlike in Russia where there had been no popular sovereignty--that is, workers did not vote for their representatives and trade unionism was illegal--British workers historically enjoyed these traditions at least from the 1860s, engendering the belief that change could come through the existing political structure. The war had undermined many of these beliefs, setting up a whole new set of circumstances with which workers were just beginning to grapple. The world political situation was now dividing into camps; and although workers themselves had been classified skilled and unskilled, the war had mitigated this tendency as well.[12] The need for soldiers was so compelling that the government was faced with a labor shortage in the mines and engineering firms. Thousands of miners and engineers left the mines to join up

---

[11] *Sessional Papers,* SDD February 1917-February 1918, "Reports from Commissioners, Inspectors and Others" Vol. XV, 23.

[12] Roberts does not believe that socialism was necessarily on the agenda for British workers but he maintains that Britain had decisively changed. Deference had broken down, distinctions within class had been mitigated, and women had been much more liberated so that the working class began to look to Labour for liberation. 213, 214.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

but because their enthusiasm jeopardized production of crucial items for the war effort the government was forced to fill the jobs with unskilled workers. (Millions of women came into industry as a consequence.) As a result the potential for animosity or the undermining of these divisions which long divided the British working class was put into play. Deskilling, or dilution as it was known then, democratized the workers' movement to a much greater extent than it had ever been.

To that end, this study will attempt to look at some of the different, albeit important, sectors of the society, and to evaluate their viewpoints and examine the dynamics at work in British society as a whole. This will of necessity require looking into the new role of the state in the economy and its relations with the working class. Due to the exigencies of the war traditional laissez-faire management was radically altered. The government took upon itself a new role in the running of the economy which created tremendous ramifications: if the state could nationalize industry during the war, why might this agreement not become permanent? Thus, the restructuring of the British economy began with the needs of government to prosecute the war, setting up the preconditions for the significant change that was to come after the war ended.

Besides examining areas such as the economy this dissertation will cover the debates over the question of workers' attitudes about the war, about dilution and ultimately about control of industry. The class struggle (which had assumed prominence even before the outbreak of hostilities) intensified upon the conclusion of the war, since industry was now in the hands of the government. State controlled industry equaled socialism for many, or at least a reasonable facsimile. With the Russian Revolution, workers expropriated the property of capitalists, which led some British workers to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consider issues of nationalization under workers' control. Debates over issues that had thus far involved a minority of workers broke into the open. The myriad events during this period made people question old established ways of thinking and posed new challenges to a society that in every way had been rocked by the devastation of the war which was then engulfing the entire world. According to Philip Snowden, one of the leaders of the Labour Party: "The slumbering discontents with the sordid and precarious conditions of the workers' lives was fanned into a flame by war-time promises of a better world in which the struggle for a livelihood would be moderated, and in which the common people would enjoy the full measure of wealth, health and culture."[13] Unlike any previous war it was thought that WWI had set up the conditions for a revolution that had the potential to change the entire nature of the body politic.

Therefore, whether or not workers were largely socialists or accepted the capitalist system will be one of the questions to be explored in this dissertation. This argument is not presented totally out of context. Historians and scholars such as Stuart MacIntyre have already begun to exam these questions. He has argued that workers who he investigated in the mines in Scotland and Wales were largely socialists, but not necessarily Bolsheviks.[14] On the other hand, Henry Pelling, while acknowledging the fact that the "foreign" workers, that is the Welsh and the Scots may have been socialistically inclined, he attributed a more conservative bent to the English working class. English workers were much too conservative to consider socialism as any sort of

---

[13] Philip Snowden, *Labour and the New World,* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd.:1921), 36. This sentiment is reiterated in George A. Greenwood's *ENGLAND TO-DAY: A Social Study of Our Time*, 43; PRO, FO371/3015.
So worried were the employers that The British Engineers Association wrote a letter to the Department of Labour to find out details of how industry was being managed in Russia once Kerensky came to power.
[14] Stuart MacIntyre, *Discovering Little Moscows Communism and Working Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*, (London:Croom Helm:1980), 19. Initially the term was one of derision but the workers in these mining towns began to accept the terminology as a way of posing the class question.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

viable alternative to the kind of society that they already inhabited. Pelling argues that workers who joined the Communist Party in 1920 were not English,[15] but Julia Bush contends that when Communist Party leaders came to speak in the East End of London after the war, thousands of workers came to listen.[16] Still other historians, such as John Foster and Allen Hutt,[17] contend that workers were quite sympathetic to Bolshevism once the revolution was successful in Russia. And while it is generally agreed that Scottish and Welsh workers were more militant than the English, largely because most of the workers in these areas were miners or industrial workers and were employed by owners that hated unions and thus attempted to crush them, English employers generally accepted unions and therefore the antagonisms were not nearly as extreme. But the northern region of England was industrial and when the call for a general strike came down from Scotland in 1919 the English workers willingly participated. English workers changed drastically after the war.

Changing attitudes were inextricably linked to workers' views about society as a whole. By 1915 disgust for the war intensified, thus slowing the number of recruits and forcing the government to rely on conscription to fill its quota of men. Conscription, never a British tradition, elicited anger from a majority of the working class once it was imposed. Therefore, much of the controversy for historians who study the period lies in the extent of workers' support for the war. Trevor Wilson, F.L. Carsten and Brock Millman argue in varying degrees that workers supported the war throughout. Others,

---

[15] Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party:A Historical Profile,* (London:Adam &Charles Black Ltd.:1958), 9.
[16] Julia Bush, Behind the Lines:East London Labour 1914-1919, (London:Merlin Press:1984), 75.
[17] Allen Hutt, Post-War History of the British Working Class, (New York:Coward-McCann, Inc.:1938), 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

such as Foster and Challinor,[18] maintain that the tide was turning as workers became disillusioned with the war. Moreover, the union leadership's agreement to suspend all strike activity for the duration of the war further exacerbated workers' discontent.

Thus the politicization of the war years encouraged a more radical outlook among workers. The reconstruction of the British economy brought non-skilled women workers into industries that were traditionally the domain of the male-dominated craft workers. This development, which I will discuss, brought millions more workers into industry and broke down to a far greater extent than ever before the traditional barriers that divided them. Iain MacLean argues otherwise. In *The Legend of the Red Clydeside*[19] he opines that craft workers were uninterested in organizing the unskilled and in fact these workers have been falsely attributed the sobriquet "red." On the other side of this issue, James Hinton,[20] Banco Pribicevic[21] and Raymond Challinor[22] who wrote extensively on the Clyde workers contend that although the workers had aspects of sectionalism in their program they were indeed revolutionary. In fact, they were notorious for their militancy. The revolts that sprang up, especially on the Clyde, although often confused and bristling with many mixed messages, were generally revolutionary in character gaining the leadership of many of the strikes in Scotland including the near general strike of 1919.

---

[18] Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism,* (London:Croom Helm Ltd.:1977), 181. Challinor quotes W.C. Anderson who spoke to Parliament and insisted that a revolutionary spirit was gripping the working class.
[19] Iain MacLean, *The Legend of the Red Clydeside*, (Edinburgh:John Donald Publishers Ltd:1983), 37.
[20]. James Hinton, *The First Shop Steward's Movement,* (Lodon:George Allen & Unwin Ltd.:1973), 75
[21] Branko Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control:1910-1922,* (Oxford:Basil Blackwell:1959), H.E.R. Highton, who was at the time secretary of the Govan Hill (Clyde) branch of the I.L.P. and a Convener of the Shop stewards in a large locomotive factory, pointed out in a letter to the writer that many shop stewards were members of the I.L.P. and the Clyde I.L.P. was 'as class war in its attitude as any other'." 88.
[22] Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism,* 104.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Each of the subsequent chapters concerning the Russian Revolution, the Jews and other immigrants in the East End of London, demobilization, and the declining support of the traditional trade union leadership will hopefully shed light on the ever-increasing militancy of the British workers' movement. And while there is still controversy among historians about how radical workers had become in the East End of London, there is evidence presented in this dissertation that demonstrates the desire of millions of workers including the immigrant population, to control industry. The chapters on trade union leadership and the Labour Party point to some of the possible factors that diverted the struggle for control and thus, in my opinion, points out the reason for the failure of revolution to occur in Britain.

That revolution did not transpire in Britain during or after the Great War is obvious, but it is important to determine some of the contributing factors for this failure. Subsumed under this is a related question; that is, whether socialism had ever been an attractive lure for British workers or whether the British state had sufficiently satisfied their needs. I would argue that the conditions that workers faced were so extreme that the majority of the working class became disenchanted with capitalism and sought a profound change in their society. Therefore, it is my contention that the reorganization of the economy during the war led to tremendous social changes, which forced the government to respond to the growing anger of the workers. Moreover, I would also suggest that workers, especially industrial workers, developed a growing sense that socialism was the only solution to the growing misery of their daily lives. Thus, the failure to implement a socialist society should not be placed upon the shoulders of the working class, but in actuality, should be placed upon its leadership which prevented

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers from raising the stakes of the General Strike that would encourage a revolutionary outcome.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright	P. ii
Approval	P. iii
Abstract	P. iv
Acknowledgement	P. vi
Preface:	P. vii
Introduction	P. 1
Section I: WWI	P. 27
Chapter 1: New Prospects for the Economy	P. 27
Chapter 2: The Influx of Women workers in Industry	P. 39
Chapter 3: The Trades Union and LP Leadership	P. 61
Chapter 4: Workers' Attitudes About the War	P. 78
Chapter 5: Working Class Revolt	P. 110
Chapter 6: The Impact of the Russian Revolution	P. 134
Chapter 7: The Jews, The Émigrés and the East End Of London	P. 156
Section II: The Challenge	P. 179
Chapter 8: 1919-1922	P. 180
Chapter 9: The Struggle Over the 40-Hour Workweek And the Formation of the Communist Party	P. 212
Chapter 10: Black Friday and the Deepening Economic Crisis	P. 270
Section III: The Debacle, 1924-1926	P. 310
Chapter 11: Labour Comes to Power	P. 311
Chapter 12: The Tory Party's Revenge	P. 340
Chapter 13: The Communist Party and the National Minority Movement	P. 360
Chapter 14: The General Strike	P. 380
Chapter 15: Conclusion	P. 419
Bibliography	P. 427

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

INTRODUCTION: 1910-1914

Even prior to the war, the strength of the working class was in evidence. This was not only reflected in their numbers, but was also reflected in a growing consciousness that they were a distinct class and shared little with the Liberals who had been their allies for so many years. The acute unfairness of their lives and lack of any concrete policies to ameliorate their living conditions led workers to reject the politics of free trade and move towards an ideology that was more socialistic in their thinking. Tens of thousands of people turned to syndicalism as an alternative to supporting the Liberals. Sydney Webb wrote in 1912: "The common ideas about the organization and control of industry have changed, there has evidently been in the past twelve months, a tremendous education of public opinion. What the workmen are demanding is something more than a mere rise in wages."[1] Workers were examining the root source of their discontent, i.e. industrial life[2] and were seeking more than mere palliatives like the Insurance Act (1909) to redress their problem.[3]

By 1910 the working class encompassed an enormous section of the population. "Of 2,400,000 workers under agreements [negotiated contracts] in 1910, 900,000 were

---

[1] J.M. Winter. *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-1914,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul:1974), 30; The poet Wilfred Owen in *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen,* C Day Lewis, ed., (London: New Directions Book:1964), 17, observed, "...From what I hear straight from the tight-pursed lips of wolfish ploughmen in their cottages, I might say there is material ready for another revolution."

[2]Sheffield was the cite of heavy industry concentrated largely in munitions giving life to class distinctions which were fostered by impersonal industrial relations that contributed to a sense of independent working-class interests.

[3] In addition to Arthur Henderson's *The Aims of Labour,* (London:Headley Bros.:1918), who frequently discusses the desire of workers for socialism, we even encounter middle class contemporaries who refer to labour unrest. William Leverhulme acknowledges in his *The Six-Hour Day,* (London:Allen and Unwin:1918*),* 7, that "each year the workman is becoming a better educated man, with better social outlook. Whilst his social outlook is expanding, the workman in the twentieth century finds himself simply a seller of service, and that he has gradually become a cipher in a most complex industrial system, and has his lifeabsorbed and controlled as a mere unit in a great factory or workshop that leaves him no scope for the exercise of the higher intellectual development of modern life."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

miners, 500,000 railwaymen, 460,000 textiles workers, and 230,000 metal workers-majority or near majority in all the industries involved."[4] Unlike other European countries, such as France and Italy, Britain was a proletarianized[5] country; that is; a large percentage of the population were workers who worked in industrialized jobs as opposed to working on the land. "The grand total of wage-earners, men, women, boys and girls, as revealed by the 1911 figures, was 15.6 millions, or three-quarters of the occupied population; this is the main core of the working class as understood by contemporaries."[6] Industry had organized workers into massive groups showing the potential not only for extreme actions, but a willingness to arrive at extreme consequences as well. Over the course of this period, workers became conscious that their own independent actions could reap important rewards. Combined with these events were the other upheavals that were also rocking Britain. The women's suffrage movement and the Irish loyalists were mobilizing—sometimes with bricks, and guns, around their respective causes. And strikes in mining towns and on docks were neither mild nor small. "The influence of Jim Larkin had moved, like a spirit troubling the waters, over every pool of casual labor in every port in England. The transport workers, clearly, were in no pacific mood…"[7] writes

---

[4] Peter N. Stearns, *Lives of Labor: Work in a Maturing Industrial Society*, (New York:Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc:1975), 181. James Boughton, "Working-Class Politics, Working-Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, 1918-1931," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Warwick:1985), 8.

[5] According to Jose Harris in her essay "Bureaucrats and Businessmen" in Kathleen Burk's, ed., *War and the State The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919,* (London:George Allen andUnwin:1986), 136, she argues that "less than 10 per cent of the working population was engaged in agriculture-compared with over 40 per cent in France and over 37 per cent in Germany."

[6] Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War,* (New York:WW Norton and Co.:1965), 21. William Gallacher, *Lenin on Britain*, (New York:International Publishers:1934), 252, cites V.I. Lenin who quotes L.George on the high concentration of working class people in Britain. In comparing Britain to France Mr. George exclaims "In France the population is agricultural and you have a solid body of opinions which does not move very rapidly, and which is not very easily exited by revolutionary movement. That is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any country in the world and if it begins to rock, the crash here for that reason will be greater than in any land."

[7] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England,* (New York:Harrison Smith and Robert Haas:1935), 398.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

George Dangerfield. Beatrice Webb chronicling British society, focused mostly on the working class. She and her husband Sidney Webb, involved in reform movements for years before the war, joined the Labour Party in 1918. The Webbs were middle class, though "socialistically" inclined supporting the Fabian movement, and yet were apprehensive at the chaos that working class strikes brought in their wake especially during the early part of the century. In her description of this period she comments:

> At Liverpool in 1911, and still more spectacularly in Dublin in 1913, strikes of a kind which really could be held to be 'a danger to the community'-such as had not been the case since the Chartist strikes of the 'forties-and they saw these strike officered and supported by men who declared that strike upon strike, leading up to one final burst of revolutionary violence, was the only proper goal[8].

Before the war, job conditions, especially for the miners, were often fraught with accidents, leaving them unable to work and unable to support their families. Often, workers would die of accidents that were preventable. In addition to creating extreme hardships for the families upon the death of a miner, the employers would not allow work to stop for others who wished to remove the body to the surface, adding insult to injury.[9] According to the *Manchester Guardian*, "There were 1,182 fatal accidents in coal mines during the year, (1910) causing 1,453 deaths. Of these 95 were persons under sixteen. Non-fatal accidents causing disablement for more than seven days number 152,834, by which 153,306 persons were injured."[10] Workers who struck were threatened with fines, even under these conditions. In examining the coal trade Thomas Richardson, MP, and John A Walbank looked at the relative gains of the capitalists at the expense of workers' shrinking wages in 1910. "Taking the whole period of 13 years, we find that Wages average 45% over the basis taken, while the Ordinary Dividend (money paid to

---

[8] Margaret Cole, *Beatrice Webb,* (New York:Harcourt, Brace and Company:1946), 124.
[9] South Wales Miners' Library, Discussion with Octavius Morgan about his life as a miner. May 17, 1973.
[10] *Manchester Guardian*, August 11, 1910.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stockholders) averages 220% over its basis. Briefly, Capital benefits in the ratio of (approximately) 5 to 1."[11] At a Miners' Conference, James Winstone, ILP member and future leader of the South Wales Miners' Federation, exclaimed: "Of a million children born every year 137,000 died before they reached the age of 12 months. In the last seven years 959,000 children [of miners] under 12 months old had died."[12] As if the situation could not seem more bleak, at a miners' conference on hours, accidents and nationalization, the *Times* reports that "...Mr. Robuck of the Yorkshire miners, related how a thousand families had been evicted from their homes in the mid-winter snow during a recent strike, and described the terrible suffering that ensued." [13]

The miserable conditions that afflicted miners[14] were also visited upon all other sectors of the workforce. And although conditions were intolerable in the mines other industries suffered from their own hazards. Women workers were lead poisoned and by 1912, Sydney Buxton, President of the Board of Trade, noted that: "The reports of industrial poisoning affecting women and girls referred to senior lady inspector for investigation in 1911, have considerably risen, being ninety as compared with sixty-nine the previous year."[15]The *Times* also reported "Distress is growing apace in Cardiff. Four thousand persons are in receipt of Poor Law relief, and 2,000 school children are being fed at the public canteens."[16] Transport workers, railway workers, seamen and people who worked in the cotton mills all suffered from low pay, long hours and hazardous

---

[11] T.Richardon, MP and J. A. Walbank, FFCA *Profits and Wages in British Coal Trade 1898 to 1910,* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne:NACC:1911), 27; Citing Postgate and Cole, Roberts in *The Classic Slum,* 99, writes that 'between 1899 and 1913 real wages actually declined by about 10 per cent." Over the same period 'gross assessments to income tax under Schedule D (profits and interest) rose by 55 per cent."
[12] The *Times,* October. 5, 1912.
[13] Ibid. August 5, 1913.
[14] The *Daily Herald,* August 27, 1912 reported that "a fully qualified pit-head man is receiving 3s 8d for a day of ten hours' work, starting at 6 a.m., and finishing at 5:30 p.m."
[15] Buxton, *Hansard,* H.C., July 17, 1912, 438.
[16] The *Times,* March 19, 1912.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conditions. Increasingly workers were expected to do a variety of jobs simultaneously thus increasing the likelihood that accidents would occur. Alone in the cab it became more difficult for drivers to pay attention to the engine and to the signals simultaneously. *The Socialist* comments that "The disasters at Liverpool and Waterloos Junction (1913) were no doubt due to inaccurate signaling, but here again the evidence shows that the great signal-boxes are miserably understaffed."[17] In addition, unemployment and underemployment were such pressing issues that the government feared that the discontent demonstrated in the massive demonstrations of the pre-war period would spill over into even greater revolts. Employers, regardless of the employees' wretched condition, continued to enjoy large profits and focused on productivity schemes that did not go unnoticed by workers.[18]

Meanwhile, the government concerned itself little with questions of working class health or their conditions of employment. Safety inspectors were at a minimum. Regulations were flaunted, and children suffered under significant strain as they attempted to carry heavy weights while working in factories. According to Lord H Cavendish-Bentinch, head of the Home Office:

> The accidents registered in this factory recorded five recent accidents to women lifting pans and jars. Again, two girls were found carrying a beam in the cloth factory, which weighed 266 ½ lbs. A little girl just over fourteen in the Potteries

---

[17] *Socialist*, October 15, 1913.

[18] According to the *Socialist*: "Whilst, however, placing the increasing cost of living as the principal cause of the unrest, it would be folly not to recognise that there are other important causes which are operating to compel the workers to give attention to the problems of their industrial life. The average worker reading his daily newspaper sees rows of figures demonstrating to him the continued increase in the growth of trade; he reads that the imports and exports of the country are breaking all records; he notices that men are dying leaving fortunes behind them which it would require the labours of thousands of workers to earn; his attention is drawn to the giving of freak dinners and the other means of exhausting the possibilities of luxury adopted by the holders of land and capital; and he naturally asks himself." Where do I come in?" His position proves to him that whilst the wealth of the non-working class is perpetually increasing, he finds it increasingly difficult to keep the wolf from the door." We read in *ENGLAND TODAY* "The mass sees quite well that it [the wealthy] bolsters up, on the one hand, privilege, and on the other servility." 49.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> was seen carrying 62 lbs. of clay upstairs and a little boy of thirteen was seen carrying 53 lbs.
>
> In the Midland district Miss Sadler had only one inspector and one occasional helper. She had to inspect 33,000 factories and 277,000 women and girl workers. The inspection must be a farce under such conditions.[19]

As a possible solution to the ever-growing problem of joblessness the government considered transportation of the unemployed to other British dominions, especially Australia. The Poor Laws, passed in the 1840s ostensibly to provide some relief to indigent families, were not providing enough sustenance for workers charged with supporting both themselves and their families. Edmund Harvey, Liberal MP from Leeds, argued in 1912 that: "sooner or later, we must have some form of detention colonies for dealing with the most difficult cases of those, whom I am loath to call unemployable, who come under the existing vagrancy law."[20] Harvey, not wishing to treat the unemployed as pariahs as was practiced in other countries such as Belgium, recognized that the unemployed were not responsible for their situation. Nevertheless, he conceded that: "We want an institution which shall be in the true sense of the word a Purgatorio, with a way up to the highest place of all, with a door always open leading upwards. Although there may be detention for a time, it must only be with the object of reform."[21] Many men were picked up for vagrancy and sent to work camps in Britain similar to those located in Belgium. These camps "supported" workers while they were unemployed and recouped their losses by profiting from the workers' labor. "It costs 9d.

---

[19] Cavendish-Bentinch, *Hansard*, H.C., July 17, 1912, 444 and 446.
[20] Harvey, *Hansard,* H.C., March 31, 1914, 1134. According to Roberts, *The Classic Slum,* 103, "by 1912 the workhouses of England held 280,000 paupers."
[21] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

per day per man, and about one-fourth of that is recovered from the profits of their labour."[22]

Moreover, workers had become so troublesome because of their constant strikes that the government punished them with the passage of the Osborne Amendment (1910). Up until 1909 the funding of the Labour Party had been accomplished through a levy on workers' wages to support the party. "The railway companies, in particular, found the presence in Parliament of the secretary of the railwaymen's principal Trade Union very inconvenient."[23] According to Beatrice Webb:

> WV Osborne who was a dissentient member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and liberally financed from capitalist sources, carried his case [against political action by the unions] right up to the highest tribunal. As a result, in December 1909, as in 1825, 1867-71, and 1901-6, every Trade Union in the land found its position and status once more gravely impugned. In what became widely known as the Osborne Judgement, the House of Lords, acting in its judicial capacity as the highest Court of Appeal, practically tore up what had, since 1871, been universally understood to be the legal constitution of a Trade Union.[24]

The Osborne Amendment stripped away the Labour Party's financial base by making it illegal to levy workers, which was its main source of support, thereby undermining its ability to effectively intervene on the workers' behalf. And while this was a particular case, once established it became the rule for all unions as well. One way to maintain control especially in Scotland was with a campaign of harassment and intimidation organized by the employers associations. The Economic League attempted to pressure

---

[22] Harvey, *Hansard,* H.C. , March 31, 1914, 1150.
[23] S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism,* (London:Longmans, Green and Co.Ltd.:1926), 608.
[24] Ibid, 608.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers into compliance since Scottish workers tended to be more difficult to control than their English counterparts.[25]

Thus by 1910 workers developed a distinct consciousness seeing themselves in opposition to their employers. The way in which the burgeoning suffrage movement interfaced with the labor movement was but one example of this growing consciousness.[26] Both middle and working class women were included in the movement and yet when working women were arrested, harsher sentences were meted out to them than were to their middle class counterparts. Petitions drawn up to force the release of working class women indicated that workers understood that working women were treated more severely, receiving stiffer sentences. Moreover, tens of thousands of workers embraced syndicalism, thus rejecting voting as an alternative to direct action. By this time working class consciousness was becoming apparent among, at least, the industrialized workers. As a further example, workers began to draw connections between government policy and industrial profits. By 1912 the newspaper *Rhondda Socialist*, popular among Welsh miners, published an article accusing Lloyd George of introducing the Merchant-shipping Act, enabling the owners to increase the tonnage forcing them into what amounted to a productivity scheme.[27] Workers' jobs, especially in

---

[25]According to Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor in their book of essays *Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950:Essays in Honour of Harry McShane,* (1891-1988) (Edinburgh:John Donald Publishers Ltd:1992), 131. "Evidence does suggest that Clydeside employers were amongst the most autocratic and anti-union of British capitalists. Selective re-employment-weeding out activists –after a dispute was common practice, as was the blacklisting of workers on strike to ensure that they were deprived of alternative employment in the region. Professional strikebreakers and 'free labour' agencies were also on hand to provide substitute labour during disputes, as, for example, at Ardrossan in 1910-11. Where employers were also landlords they could utilise the additional leverage of eviction from company housing."

[26] *Daily Herald,* February 22, 1913.

[27]*Rhondda Socialist,* Feb. 24, 1913. In *War Time Control of Industry,* 81, we read "In the year 1914-15 they [coal merchants] were able to distribute a dividend of 20 per cent, free of tax and in 1915-16 one of 25 per

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

heavy industry, had become so unbearable, and so degraded by their employers that it had become almost impossible to ignore the disparity between incomes and living conditions amongst the various classes.

Their living conditions were no better than their working conditions. "The exhausted air and poor feeding fill our streets with bandy-legged children. There the death rate is 38 per 1000 while in the districts of larger houses it is only 16." According to Mr. RL Outhwaite, representative of the United Committee, while telling this story to the *Daily Herald*, in 1912 conveyed the disgust that he felt while examining these homes. He remarked:

> As I climbed the damp steps leading to these tenements and glanced into one small foul apartment after apartment, was to marvel how human beings could maintain existence under such dreadful conditions. A well-bred horse or dog would perish in such dens. Not that a well-bred horse or dog would ever be accommodated under such conditions. Little children were huddled together on narrow landings, which served the purpose of playgrounds. These children provide the sacrifice to the Moloch of land monopoly.[28]

These unhealthy conditions were duplicated in working class districts throughout Britain. The *Rhondda Socialist* not only complained about housing conditions, but complained about the condescending attitudes of councillors sent by the government to examine them compounding the already difficult circumstances of the inhabitants. Instead of acknowledging the need for a remedy the government became antagonistic toward the working poor.

> If we take the statement of Dr. Thomas, the President of the Young Liberal League, there is no need of securing better housing conditions, the best conditions already prevail…When we consider that the death rate of the Rhondda is 16.0 per

---

cent. Since each year they put by a reserve equal to the dividends, the net profits during two years were 90 per cent."

[28] *Daily Herald,* May 15, 1912; Harold Begbie, *The Betrayal of Labour: An Open Letter to The Rt. Hon. J.R. Clynes,* (London:Mills and Boon:1921), 30.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> thousand and infantile mortality 13.0 per thousand births, it must signify that there is some cause for this slaughter of human life.[29]

Living in slums was the lot of the working class, and overcrowding was the norm. Food had been either overpriced or adulterated, diminishing the quality of the already meager amounts workers consumed. [30]

The syndicalist movement, which encompassed tens of thousands of workers, is symptomatic of the extent to which they were angered by their oppressive living and working conditions. Many of these workers hoped that this movement would create extensive changes in capitalist society.[31] Miners especially favored nationalization. The *Miners' Next, Step*, found a groundswell of support. Calling for nationalization under workers' control, these miners took part in and promoted the syndicalist movement that had galvanized many other British workers. Imbued in this philosophy was a profound distrust of leadership and leaders.[32] Syndicalism was not only an attempt by workers to

---

[29] *The Rhondda Socialist*, August 19, 1911.

[30] It is J.M. Winters' contention in many of his books on WWI that these horrendous conditions that existed prior to the war were somewhat remedied because of the war. Roberts discusses these conditions at length emphasizing the meager amounts of food that working families were forced to live on.

[31] SWML, South Wales Miners' Federation Eastern Valleys District Annual Meeting, January 17, 1916. "James Winstone, head of the miners' union in discussing why Welsh miners were so militant wrote "South Wales has long been recognised as one of the working class 'storm centers' of the UK, and the numerous industrial disturbances that have occurred during the recent years in various parts of the coalfield have led outsiders to pass harsh, and usually unjust criticisms against a class of men who, because of the Celtic temperament, are quick to resent oppression and strong to demand what, rightly or wrongly, they deem to be their just rights. There can be no doubt however, that one very important factor consists in the awful monotony and hideousness of the ordinary mining villages, and the over crowding of working-class families in small and badly designed dwellings, which are themselves, in turn, overcrowded on ill-planned land. The discomfort and insanitation of congested dwellings, and insecurity of tenure, and the lack of fixity of rent arising out of the shortage of accommodation the utter disregard of amenity on the part of those responsible for town and village development, the absence of healthy reactive facilities, both for children and adults, these and similar manifestations of the housing problem have stirred, in our imaginative, warm-hearted and enthusiastic Welsh comrades a feeling of bitter resentment which forms no inconsiderable part of the discontent that vents itself in periodical strikes."

[32] Read Bob Holton's, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities,* (London:Pluto Press:1976), 27. But James Hinton maintains in *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1874-1974.* (Amherst:Massachusetts Press:1983), 94. "Judged as a revolutionary socialist current, the syndicalist movement was manifestly inadequate to the tasks that faced it. Loosely co-ordinated, fragmented, and lacking a coherent body of theory, syndicalism failed to organize the grass roots leaders of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fight their employers, whose ultimate goal was a cooperative society; it was also a rejection of the official trade union leaders. In the years shortly before the War, syndicalist philosophy was prominent among many sections of the working class. Tom Mann, one of the main leaders of the movement, traveled to Australia and brought back many of the ideas that had circulated amongst the workers there with much success. In the United States syndicalism was embraced by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and was an important philosophy within the French workers' movement as well. Organized under the aegis of the *Industrial Worker,* syndicalism spread throughout large sections of both organized and unorganized workers. This was a movement that argued for the spontaneity of workers, holding socialist views but providing little leadership towards that end. A conference of the Manchester Industrial Syndicalist Education League in 1910 "attracted some 200 delegates representing between 70 and 80 societies, unions and groups, 16 trades councils, and approximately 60,000 workers were present."[33] Although it declined in most parts of Britain, on the Clyde in Scotland it remained the mode of organizing for the engineers even after the war began. In fact, the lead article in the *Times* of January 1912 read "1911: one million workers strike work". This was indicative of the mood that prevailed in Britain at the time.

Younger workers, who already opposed existing agreements generated by the trade union leadership, led many of these strikes. The strikes were generally not sanctioned by the leaders and in fact were often in opposition to them. This was true of the Cambrian strike in South Wales (1910) when the leadership (people such as President Mabon, and the future President Brace) had control of the South Wales Miners'

---

industrial militancy into a disciplined force capable of leading a fight for revolutionary politics within the labour movement."

[33] *The Industrial Syndicalist*, March 1911.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Federation but left the local to fend for itself. Younger workers were consequently alienated and looked toward a more militant leadership. Many of these young up-and-coming leaders were Marxists who held syndicalist views, and gave advocates of industrial warfare greater leeway within the union.[34] Syndicalist action led many of these workers to believe that greater concessions from management were possible and that the society was more flexible than the traditional leadership had maintained. Although a dynamic and energetic leader, Tom Mann had many shortcomings that would prove problematic in his future endeavors to organize workers. For example, he spent time in South Africa and yet had done nothing to organize Black workers going so far as to deny that they were part of the workforce. Joseph White, who is generally sympathetic to Mann, writes about his stay in South Africa: Instead of uniting the work force Mann complained that:

> 'These kaffirs', …were a 'serious economic factor and add very considerably to the difficulties of the labor problem'. But, despite a clear opportunity to do so and despite the fact that the Johannesburg *Voice of Lab*or had urged him to condemn racism; he did not define black workers as members of the working class who ought therefore to be organised. The context strongly suggests that the Rand Industrial Union, which he helped to form, was for whites only, since he anticipated progress and growth 'notwithstanding that they are at present handicapped by the colored and native problem'.[35]

And although Mann was not necessarily a racist himself, this would not be the last time that he would, in a crucial situation, accept the more conservative union leadership's approach in circumstances where a more enterprising approach might have garnered greater concessions from management. In the circumstances of Russia, it was not until so many workers came out in support of the Russian Revolution that this allowed Mann to

---

[34] Arthur Hungerford Pollen, "The Vital Principle in Business" An Address Delivered at the Meeting of the National Industrial Conference Board, March 17, 1921, 15.
[35] Joseph White, *Tom Mann,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1991), 153.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

do so as well without fear of alienating the traditional trade union leaders.[36] At least as important as the issue of Russia was the issue of the war. Mann put off expressing his opposition until it was safe to do so; that is, until the generality of the working class itself seemed to reverse its position. His reluctance to challenge Havelock Wilson, leader of the seaman's union, for instance, around the question of the war postponed this inevitable demand to find a negotiated settlement.[37] And because he became a popular voice for change who exercised great influence over the rank and file, his reluctance to deal with some of the aforementioned questions was crucial to the success or lack thereof in some of the struggles facing workers throughout the years. It is therefore possible to suggest then that this kind of leadership may be one of the reasons why the workers' movement could not have captured power either before or after the war even when it was clear that the government was fearful that such an event was a genuine possibility. Although the Old Guard of the unions was considered by many workers to be incapable of meeting the new challenges, it was still difficult to dislodge.[38] The agents in the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) were virtually autonomous and had control over its funds and its disputes. The leaders of the SWMF were pragmatic, not radical. These men were not known for taking chances and more often than not caused disgruntlement for doing little in response to employers' slashing of wages and increasing the hours of work. Throughout this period SWMF meetings engendered a variety of resolutions, which

---

[36] According to Lenin in *Lenin on Britain*, 144, "even Tom Mann, whom I regard as the finest of them is fond of mentioning that he will be lunching with the Lord Mayor."

[37] White, *Tom Mann*, 192, says about Mann that, until the Russian Revolution, Mann argued that 'this country must win the war' though he hastened to add that 'he was in favor of a settlement by negotiation as early as possible.'

[38] In E.W. Edwards' essay "The Pontypridd Area" found in Margaret Morris, *The General Strike*, 432, refers to many of the small, highly specialized, craft unions and the NUGMU as "many of these were the personal empires of long-standing officials-for example, the NUGMU was referred to locally as 'Bailey's union'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attempted to unseat the leadership, albeit with little success. The entrenched union leaders maintained control over the organization by wielding control over the machinery of the union. Resolutions that were passed by the members were often discarded. Bylaws and constitutions of individual unions made it difficult to create any real substantive changes within the organization. These professional leaders controlled the machinery for years making it difficult to create an effective organizational response to the demands of the employer. Decisions were made at the top leaving little input from the workers. The seeming lack of concern by the union officials for workers manifested itself in some of the most bitter strikes in South Wales. In some circumstances the leadership even took action against absentee workers, at the same time gaining no concessions from the employers.[39] The miners, however, pulled together as a community, thereby making it more difficult for both the owners and the union leaders to pit one against the other and providing an avenue for political education. Wil Coldrick, a miner from South Wales, talked of this close-knit community. He said:

> What people failed to appreciate I think, that a mining community is so closely knit that the propaganda is infinitely more effective than what it is in disperse populations. Because with a thousand men working in the pit, there were about a thousand in Blaensychan for instance, well pithead meeting and things of this nature, they got to know who were the people whose advice they could rely upon, and they were all turning to people who had a socialist convictions, and a more reasonable explanation of the difficulties than others.[40]

This tendency threatened the traditional union leadership, since workers looked to the younger, less traditional leaders rejecting their more reformist approach. The issue most

---

[39] In order to mitigate the class struggle George Barnes, *Industrial Conflict:The Way Out,* (London:Sir I Pitman and Sons, Ltd.:1924), 17, L.P. leader advocated an expansion of the Industrial Courts act, and "...the prohibition of strike or lock-out on public services until there has been public inquiry into all the facts of any dispute."

[40] SWML, Will Coldrick, Aud 330, September 24, 1973. Workers in the other major industrial unions sought more militant and often socialist leaders to replace the old guard.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

affecting the miners was the question of non-union workers; that is the miners demanded that everyone who worked in the mine be in the union, guaranteeing a uniform pay scale. Thus some of the most extreme class struggles took place in South Wales over this question. Tonypandy in 1910 was the scene of severe rioting.

"Nearly one-fourth of the total number of miners and colliery workmen are found in the South Wales area. Here there are about 1,818,000 underground workers and 31,000 surface workers."[41] During the 1910-1911 disputes in Maesteg, mid-Rhondda and Aberdare the traditional leadership suspended benefits to workers while they were on strike rather than extending them, thereby punishing workers for opposing management. In retaliation workers suspended their contributions to the union, believing that they had no other way of displaying their discontent with their leaders. Their collieries had been shut down since they were considered unproductive, leaving thousands unemployed. "The antagonism of class interests was bitter, the disloyalty of the workmen to their union was general and outspoken, and the differences between the leaders were as acute in a person as they were in a tactical sense."[42] Over 23,000 colliers were idle. Police from Cardiff, Swansea and Bristol reinforced the police force from Glamorgan County, which occupied the area.

Bitter class struggle was also found throughout other industries as well. Before syndicalism's demise, millions of workers went on strike throughout the period just prior to the war, forcing the government, for fear of losing control, to lean on the National Guard to quell disturbances. The seamen's strike in 1911 and the railway strike of the same year saw National Guardsmen intimidating workers and bludgeoning them with

---

[41] *Daily Herald*, February 9, 1912.
[42] David Evans, *Labour Strife in the South Wales Coalfield 1910-11:A Historical and Critical record of the Mid-Rhondda, Aberdare Valley and other Strikes,* (Cardiff:Educational Publishing Co.:1911), 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

batons.[43] A number of the striking workers died during these confrontations. In discussions in the House of Commons, Labour Party MP Keir Hardie remarked on the government's support for the railway operators in suppressing possible strike activity. Even before a strike broke out the troops arrived on the scene. Hardie complained:

> On this occasion, before a single man had gone on strike, troops were ordered out, ball cartridge was supplied to the troops, machine guns were lined up behind the regiments, and the military authorities-we have the statement from the Home Secretary himself-were were given absolutely free hand to act where they pleased and to do as they pleased in what they called the preservation of order.[44]

The Prime Minister, Asquith, when addressing the union representatives "offered a vague Royal Commission and intimated that the Government would use military force to the limit to break any strike."[45] When the offer was rejected his response was "then your blood be on your own head."[46] Thus class struggle was, according to Hardie, inevitable.

While the government proved itself most friendly to the employers, workers were attempting to create a sense of class solidarity in opposition to this onslaught. During the dockers' strike (1911) the engineers and the miners voted to go out in support. Even the unorganized workers who were brought in to replace the striking workers demonstrated tremendous acts of solidarity. The strikers were opposed both by government troops and starvation. Although faced with those double evils workers were not deterred, thus worrying the government and the employers all the more. But leaders such as J.H. Thomas, President of the National Union of Railwaymen, feared that strikes had the

---

[43] In the 1912 Dockworkers strike the National Reserve was sent in and many workers were bludgeoned with batons; June strikes (1911) involving 65,000 seamen, firemen and dockers spread to other trades as well. "Strike breakers," according to Roberts, shielded by the police, attempted to move coal and food. Pickets determined to stop them. In a dozen places fierce fighting broke out that lasted all day. Five hundred police from other towns poured in at once." 95; op cit. Ken Weller, Don't Be a Soldier!, (London:Journeymen:1985), 19 on strikes in North London.
[44] Hardie, *Hansard*, H.C. August 22, 1911, 2335.
[45] Allen Hutt, *British Trade Unionism: A Short History,* (New York:International Publishers:1953), 60.
[46] Ibid, 60.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

potential of getting out of hand, and resorted to other means to settle issues. Generally, unless pressed, Thomas would not call strikes. His philosophy of relying on any strategy other than striking lead to the debacle of Black Friday in 1921 (a near general strike was called off the day that it was to take place) and the failure of the 1926 General Strike. During a meeting of Parliament in 1911 Thomas assured the other MPs that he had tried to keep the workers from going out on strike, but since the police had attacked it was impossible to control them. In a mass rally of 90,000 in Liverpool the police allowed five hooligans to disturb the rally to such an extent that it gave the police a pretext to charge the crowd causing a riot.

The seamen too, in 1912, waged a fierce struggle for better conditions and wages. Many of the workers who had struck were replaced by "blackleg" (scab) labor as a punishment for striking. The end of a ten-week strike was punctuated with riots and bloodshed. Hundreds of workers surrounded these replacement workers seriously disrupting work. In May 1912, a strike of transport workers in London took place, idling 25,000 workers who went out in support of the Watermen and Lightermen's Union who were themselves engaged in a dispute with the Employers' Association. At the Albert Docks, a melee took place that gave way to intense rioting, prompting police action. There too the main demand was that all workers must be unionized. Ben Tillett, leader of the Dockers' Union, wrote in the *Daily Herald* confirmed this collusion between the police and convicts. Ten thousand blacklegs escaped from jail without charge as they joined with the police and raided trade union shops. Tillet argued that the police engineered the assault and then allowed these "criminals and gaol-birds, loafers, and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

worst mixture of the unemployables"[47] to be released without charge. And the Port of London Strike in July 1912, involving over 400,000 seamen, initiated because the company owed the men £500,000 in back wages was never forced to pay although an arbitrator agreed to a 1d. increase from 7d. to 8d. an hour increasing the anger of the workers who were already living in seriously distressed circumstances.

By 1912, distrust of the leaders of the trade unions and the leaders of the Labour Party was growing among a number of rank and file workers. Havelock Wilson, one of the architects of the failed 1926 General Strike, discouraged solidarity among the disparate trades. Instead Wilson sought his solidarity with the owners and the British elite. In the *Seaman,* trade paper of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, there was reportage of a large meeting organized by the seaman's union which "succeeded in assembling together a really unique audience, consisting of ambassadors of the various friendly and neutral Powers, distinguished men and women of every class in London, naval officers and men, able-bodied seamen, ships firemen, ships' cooks and stewards, and officers of all grades of the mercantile marine."[48] Wilson, quite willing to hobnob with the wealthy, offered up more than once the seaman's salary to the economic woes of the shipowners. Moreover, Wilson was hostile to Chinese seamen working on British ships (e.g. calling for literacy tests and ultimately for their expulsion from the country). This policy resulted in some of the worst race riots that Britain had ever witnessed. It is therefore not possible to understand the complex situation that arose in Britain without evaluating the role of the trade union leadership.

---

[47] *Daily Herald*, September 21, 1913.
[48] The *Seaman,* September 28, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

By 1914 the urgency of amalgamating unions had become clear to most workers since employers were amalgamating into federations that challenged working conditions. The Triple Alliance came to fruition as an association between the Miners, Dockworkers and Transport workers hoping to counteract the assault by the employers.[49] Strikes had grown massively but the organization had not been built to sustain them. But fearing that too large an organization of workers would get out of hand, Thomas kept the alliance to just these three unions, although a number of other unions wished to join. His approach to the class struggle was one of conciliation and diplomacy rather than confrontation. Fearing revolution he counseled restraint.

The story that informed these years was fraught with insensitivity by the employers and the government, at best, and a heavy hand attempting to fend off workers' demands at the worst. The complaint of unfair wages was not limited to private employers only. The Government employed dockyard workers who earned even less money than workers in private industry. Therefore, the struggle for a minimum wage dominated this period, especially among the miners. And while the miners officially won this demand in 1912, the employers never respected it. Moreover, Royal dockyard workers who earned 22s a week, attempted to raise this to 24s. In May 1913 Major Christian Guest, an MP from Pembroke, attempted to explain the men's point of view.

> I admit that the dockyard worker has advantages, which his brother workman outside does not enjoy. He has his pension, he has four days' holiday a year, he has the forty-eight week, and he has continuous employment. But the man is hardly able to insure himself against bad times when so great a proportion as 4s is taken out of an income of something like 28s or 30s a week.[50]

---

[49] Before amalgamation only miners and engineers had national contracts. Because of the local nature of many of the workers' unions they were unable to force management to make any meaningful concessions.
[50] Major Christian Guest, Hansard, H.C., July 23, 1913, 2078.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

And many of the workers who studied at the Ruskin College were impacted as well by the same events. The movement to change the curriculum to one that more reflected a Marxist perspective rose from the students and grew in opposition to its purely academic and educational philosophy. The Central Labour College, born out of this struggle, reflected the desire of its participants to learn Marxism instead of a more traditional approach to education. The former General Secretary of the National Council of Labour Colleges, J.P.M. Millar asserts:

> The militancy of the students who were to form the Plebs League [the Marxist response to the more academic administration] was largely explained by two factors. First, a significant proportion of them came from the south Wales coal-fields where industrial conflicts were endemic. Secondly, many of them had imbibed socialist ideas through membership of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) or the Independent Labour Party (ILP).[51]

From this came the Central Labour College with the support of the miner's and railway unions. Many working class people sought an education there. In fact to many of these workers getting an education was at least as important as receiving decent wages.[52] The miners from South Wales were often people who were raised in Christian backgrounds frequently with a father or relative becoming a minister. Therefore, the Church was a central feature in many of their homes. As they lost their faith, they sought out politics as

---

[51] J.P.M. Millar, *The Labour College Movement,* (London:NCLC Publishing Society Ltd:1932), 11; According to Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class,* (New Haven:Yale University Press:2001), 263,
"it was in the pits-'the center of culture amongst the miners'-that Edwards was introduced to Karl Marx. "Marx was a prophet of the revolution; what he said went, and it could hardly matter where." David Gilbert expresses a similar sentiment in *Class, Community, and Collective Action:Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1992), 89, that miners had a "commitment to self-improvement through autodidactacy and to communal improvement through cultural activities."

[52] Education, not just Marxist education, had become so important to workers that the National Citizen's Association, mouthpiece for the employers, lamented the fact that "Labour launched out in extravagant and needless expenditure, the idea at the back of its head being that by lavishing money on schools and teaching it would make all the sow's ears of the country into silk purses." George Eyre-*Todd, Mobocracy or Towards the Abyss,* (Glasgow:Scottish Council of the National Citizens' Union: Holmes and Co: 1922), 43. Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class,* argues that from early on, that is by the 18th C the working classes longed to educate itself. Penny readings, working men's clubs and people's colleges were just a sampling of the arenas organized by workers and artisans to receive an education.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a means by which to understand the nature of the society in which they lived. The miners approached this newfound philosophy with the same powerful spirit as did their parents about god.[53] There was an intellectual predisposition in many of their homes that allowed them to transpose their belief in the church to a belief in politics once their faith in the church was undermined. These were the men who went to the Central Labour College. When war was declared Millar wrote: "The belief that the war had ultimately been caused by the clash between the old imperialist power, Britain, and the new imperialist power, Germany, both in competition for overseas markets and political spheres of influence, led many people to become socialists, especially among the younger generation."[54] Henry Sanderson Furniss, who taught at the Ruskin College, writes:

> the students went away constantly for weekends, generally to speak at Independent Labour Party meetings up and down the country, partly to gain practice as speakers, partly with the object of improving their finances, but largely from a real desire to spread the gospel of Socialism, for Socialism at that time was almost a religion with the keen young men of the movement.[55]

It was thought that at the outset of the war at least 1000 students were attending classes through the Plebs League. Coupled with the College there were Socialist Sunday schools run by the Independent Labour Party that existed almost everywhere in Glasgow.[56] Many sections of the working class, especially those in heavy industry were seeking a

---

[53] Roberts claims in *The Classic Slum,* 173, that this was true of the "undermass" well before the onset of WWI and although Gilbert argues that the affect of much of the communal religious traditions remained in the communities, much of this was eventually translated into a secular theory. In fact Noah Abblett, the author of *Miners' Next Step* initially studied to be a preacher but was eventually converted to syndicalism.
[54] Ibid, 16; Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1974), *293.*Wil Thorne, President of the TUC claimed that there was not only a class war in industry, but there was one in education as well prompting the TUC to demand secondary education for all.
[55] H.S. Furniss, *Memories of Sixty Years,* (New York:D.Appleton and Co.:1931), 87; Simon *Education and the Labour Movement*, 251, also discusses the intensity of the feelings of workers to spread the gospel of Socialism.
[56] Ibid, 301-303. Similar Sunday classes were held in Edinburgh, Leith, Falkirk, Kirkcaldy and Aberdeeen. They were also held in Manchester, Newcastle, Reading and London. All of these classes were organized around the study of Marx. The Socialist Sunday Schools formed a national organization.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

systematic approach to understanding experiences that they had come across in their work. Socialism had become a realistic ideology for thousands of workers.

Moreover, in London, historically the seat of finance and government, industry was becoming a more prominent feature. Its transport system, built at the beginning of the century, had become a major employer. According to Craik:

> The Landaus and family coaches, the horse-drawn bus and cab, were being superseded by the motor-car, the taxi-cab and the petrol-powered bus. London's underground railway system had almost completely turned its back on steam. All those changes in motive power were being reflected in the rise of new branches of production especially in vehicle-building and engineering, and of new occupations, in all of which mechanisation was continuing to advance.[57]

The industrial character of the Labour College encouraged many to seek their education there. The student body in London was comprised of workers, who demonstrated a profound sympathy for social change.

> When the war ended, the number of Labour College classes everywhere increased rapidly. In London there were soon so many that it became necessary in 1920 both to create a London Council for Independent Working Class Education, which could co-ordinate, the various activities, and to appoint Robert Holder, a former CLC student, as full-time tutor organizer…there were 2,854 students attending fifty-one classes in Scotland, of which thirty were in the Glasgow district.[58]

By the time the Russian Revolution occurred, so many of these students had become sympathetic to Marxism that "About one third of the students joined the British Communist Party almost as soon as it was formed."[59] The latter clamored for education

---

[57] William W. Craik, *The Central Labour College 1909-29,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1964), 125. About this Roberts claims that with the advent of the tramcar workers became less provincial since they were more easily able to move around.

[58] Ibid, 21.

[59] Craik, *The Central Labour College,* 125; Ramsay MacDonald supports this observation in his *Political Writings*, ed. by Bernard Barker, (New York:St. Martin's Press:1972), 198. He wrote, "The young workman was buying good books on science, economics sociology and politics. Itinerant teachers appeared and considerable numbers of workmen attended their lecturers, read the text-books prescribed, and wrote papers on the work done…No longer was trade union propaganda confined to defensive work against capitalism as regards wages, hours and such superficial things that, when gained, often meant nothing of substance." According to Furniss, *Memories of Sixty Ye*ars, 182, "The structure of the capitalist system was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with a Marxist understanding and therefore supported the CLC in its struggle against the Ruskin Institute.[60]

The major concern of workers before the War was the fight over the minimum wage and the eight-hour day, although neither objective was achieved during this period. By war's end, workers dealt not only with questions such as the minimum wage, but with a whole host of other questions that involved communism and revolution. WWI seriously weakened syndicalism because of the failure of many strikes to produce lasting results and thus more mature types of leadership began to vie for power. For many revolutionaries, the Russian Revolution created the need to fight for a revolutionary leadership, one that would both challenge the syndicalist view of opposition to all leaders, and one that opposed the tight reformist control of the Trades Union Congress. Ultimately, the TUC managed to retain control, allowing the largest strike in British history—the General Strike of 1926 to dissipate.

The war and the myriad changes that it brought were fundamental to the developing political consciousness of British workers. Their journey from Lib-Labism; that is the practice of the Labor and Liberal parties uniting together to field a single candidate in opposition to the Conservatives, to something that approximated socialism was made possible. Although the changes were extreme in some cases, such as in the reorganization of the economy, many of these changes were simply a continuation of the movements that existed in the prewar years. British workers were the majority of the

---

studied and understood, the relationship between capital and labour was grasped, the historical evolution of industry was known, and forces within it working for its transformation were calculated and explored… Labour…was declining to accept any further a position of mechanical subordination in industry."

[60] Ibid, 100; Simon, *Education in the Labour Movement,* 311. The struggle over which type of education to pursue for working class militants continued, that is education for education sake or to preach Marxism, continued even after the Labour College was established.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

population and their jobs were largely industrial. Throughout the prewar period strikes abounded with tens of thousands of workers demanding higher wages and better living conditions and in some cases even nationalization of industry. Their actions, demonstrated a growing class-consciousness, developed while the economy and the conditions in general continued to become worse despite huge profits made by the capitalist class.

After the outbreak of the war, the syndicalist and anti-war movements had been discarded for jingoistic calls by the labor leaders to oppose the Huns and Prussianism.[61] Thousands of miners joined the colors, although patriotism can only partially explain why this occurred. William Gallacher, a leader of the engineers, explains:

> What terrible attraction a war can have! The wild excitement, the illusion of wonderful adventure and the actual break in the deadly monotony of working-class life! Thousands went flocking to the colours in the first days, not because of any 'love of country,' not because of any high feeling of 'patriotism,' but because of the new, strange and thrilling life that lay before them. Later the reality of the fearsome slaughterhouse, with all its long agony of filth and horror, turned them from buoyant youth to despair or madness.[62]

The wish to escape oppressive work conditions and oppressive employers was what drove many miners to join the armed forces. Moreover, many workers believed that Germany's quest to conquer other nations violated Belgium's national sovereignty. So as a gesture of support to fellow workers in a smaller country, British workers endorsed the

---

[61] Robert Graves in *Good Bye to All That,* (New York:Anchor Books:1929), 183, discusses the "the highly coloured accounts of German atrocities in Belgium...By atrocities we meant, specifically, rape, mutilation and torture-not summary shootings of suspected spies, harbourers of spies." Workers genuinely accepted these descriptions of the Germans and for a time there were riots against German shopkeepers and many Germans were interned in imprisonment camps. One of these camps was found in Islington in North London where there were housed 700 odd Germans. Other camps were purported to be in worse condition.

[62] William Gallacher, M.P., *Revolt on the Clyde: An Autobiography,* (New York:International Publishers:1936), 18; One of the other incentives for joining the military was that there would be guaranteed meals. This was a great incentive for people who often ate little.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

war. They believed that it was their responsibility to defend Belgium. Most workers believed that the war would be short-lived and would in fact be over by Christmas.

As is well-known, the war itself caused tremendous dislocation of families, creating burdens that could not be mitigated by the cry of patriotism. Even in the midst of war, there were magnificent struggles for justice especially around economic demands and although every stance that workers took was not necessarily progressive,[63] the general direction over the years was to seek social justice and liberation from exploitation. These feelings were widely expressed in their overwhelming support for Russian workers after they made their revolution. And while the working class was largely pro-war when it began, it did not remain so throughout.[64] By war's end the government feared that the upsurge would portend dire consequences for the state.[65]

World War I ended with workers lives' no better off than before the war. Scandals involving profiteering by employers were exposed encouraging still further workers' resentments against their employers. Moreover workers in Russia overthrew their employers encouraging British workers to do the same.[66] The British working class had not only witnessed more changes in four years than they had in many years prior to the war but the majority of them increasingly became more class conscious believing that it

---

[63] Some of the strikes were purely sectional and therefore did not fight for the needs of all workers.
[64] Brock Millman argues in his book *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain,* (London:Frank Cass Publishers:2000), 36, that this was not the case and that "the majority of the working class and most of the rank and file union membership supported the war effort for the duration."
[65] This is an on-going theme in the Beveridge Report that will be explored further in future chapters. Henderson writes in *The Aims of Labour,* 75: "The outstanding fact of world politics at the present time- and when peace comes this fact will be made still clearer-is that a great tide of revolutionary feeling is rising in every country. Everywhere the peoples are becoming conscious of power. They are beginning to sit in judgement upon their rulers."
[66] According to the Annual Report of the General Secretary of the TUC 29th Annual Report, December 31, 1918, 6,
"Ships have been obtained from the government and have been disposed of to foreigners at high rates; in the first period of the war the shipowners sold and disposed of shipping when the troops and the country were actually threatened with starvation."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was necessary to revamp the society as a whole, that is, restructuring society so that it would run on a cooperative basis.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SECTION 1: WORLD WAR I

"If any question why we died/Tell them, because our fathers lied." Rudyard Kipling

> By the summer of 1914 British trade unionism 'was working up for an almost revolutionary outburst of gigantic industrial disputes', and Lloyd George spoke of the threat of 'insurrection'. Only the outbreak of the First World War prevented a further escalation of working-class militancy, which might even have attained revolutionary proportions.
>
> Beatrice Webb

CHAPTER 1: NEW PROSPECTS FOR THE ECONOMY

World War I had tremendous implications for the British ruling class and for its workers as well. Germany, by this time as economically powerful as Britain challenging Britain's right to control the world's economies by challenging her hegemony. (Until the First World War, Britain clearly held the predominant position among nations in world politics.) It thus became mandatory for Britain to reorganize her economy and reorganize her relationship with her workers. The very fact that Germany was contending for power with the then most powerful empire in the world indicated that the economy was in a precarious state and in need of reorganization by British capitalists.[1] The German navy

---

[1] Mary Rose in her article "Britain and the International Economy" which appeared in *The First World War in British History,* ed., by S. Constantine, M. Kirby and M. Rose, (London:Hodder Headline PLC:1995), 32-33, argued that in the two decades "after 1873 Germany and the United States altered the international competitive environment. Inevitably such economic development reduced Britain's share of the world's manufacturing output from 20 per cent in 1820 to 14 per cent on the eve of the First World War." Far more worrying than the declining lead in world trade was the narrowness of its export base and the increasing reliance upon empire markets. Long before the First World War wrecked and dislocated the international economy British prosperity was vulnerable because British exports were dangerously concentrated on a narrow range of staple industries. Moreover, "A modern, rationalized American shipbuilding industry, using assembly line techniques became the world's largest producer of merchant ships overtaking Britain in 1918." 240. British trade with Australia and the Far East and South America so important before 1914 diminished considerably; In explaining Northcliffe's (owner of the *Times*) antipathy for Germany Tom Clarke, *Northcliffe in History: An Intimate Study of Press Power,* (London:Hutchinson and Co.:1950), 91, writes: "The aggressiveness of German merchants was only equaled by the arrogance of German statesmen

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was beginning to rival Britain's and many of the supplies, such as dyes,[2] used in Britain's factories, were manufactured in Germany. Accustomed to hegemony, British capitalism did little to innovate either technologically or structurally. Victory would afford British employers any markets that Germany controlled. Africa and the Middle East became venues for this power struggle that began in Europe. The *Times* in 1915 suggested that it would have been wise to make an effort

> at once to capture one and a quarter million pounds worth of German trade in clocks…Sixty years ago British clocks were acknowledged to be the finest that could be had…Clerkenwell was the busy and thriving place where they were made, and the clockmaker then, perhaps with two or three assistants, sold the timepiece of his own making, and was proud of his craft…But in Germany they began to make clocks by machinery and to turn out a score while the Briton was making and perfecting one…Consequently they found a ready market. It is hoped that all of this will soon be altered…The Germans have one factory in which 1,500 of these cheaper timepieces are turned out in a single day.[3]

Moreover, while the German state had been inextricably involved with its economy, the British state had allowed the economy to develop through less direct state involvement. Therefore, a more laissez-faire economy developed in Britain, which by the early part of the 20th century demanded attention and reorganization in response to the war. To help support this endeavor, the Regulations of Forces Act passed in 1871 enabled the government to take over industry and run it providing the owners were compensated. Employing this Act, as Minister of Munitions, Lloyd George[4] hoped to

---

in the Far East, in South America and in South Africa (where Germany was especially intent on developing a considerable colonial empire."

[2] Adam Kirkaldy writes in *Labour, Finance, and the War,* (London:Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd:1916), 10. "It was our proud boast that we left trade free and untrammelled, that we believed in the health giving effects of open competition. It needed the stern lesson of the war to make known how this generous policy could be utilized to our detriment by a rival commercial nation. The facts as to the dye and colour industry and various by-product industries have been developed, so that certain vital trades almost passed under foreign control, came to light only just in time."

[3] The *Times,* January 14, 1915.

[4] The fact that the Ministry of Munitions was established to take charge of the economy was an important change in the running of industry. The Treasury too took on a much more important position. Kathleen

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

squelch a possible menacing industrial situation. In order to placate workers, the Minister promised to nationalize the railroads. Rather than full nationalization, though, he only imposed governmental control while continuing to compensate the owners.[5] Now the British economy was gearing up for war, and the state, unlike before, intervened in the most direct way.[6] Railroads and mines were put under government control although private capitalists continued to profit from these industries.[7]

It would have been impossible to conduct the war without relying heavily on coal and transport, thus forcing the government to take charge. But reorganization without nationalization afforded the employers huge profits while the government took responsibility for them. In taking control of industry, however, the Government had to play down the desires, brewing in the working class for years, to end private ownership.[8]

Burke, "The Treasury: From Impotence to Power" in *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government 1914-1919,* (London:Allen and Unwin:1982), 84 "For the first time the Treasury imposed controls on the domestic money market and involved itself with overseas finance. Burke also says that the export of capital was prohibited and by 1917 "It was illegal to send remittance out of the U.K." 87.

[5] Philip Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution from 1770,* (New York:Barnes and Nobles:1977), 243 .

[6] Kirkaldy, *Labour, Finance and the War,* 16, also argued that: "there is a need for a more complete and authoritative central authority, both for individual industries and for federated trades."

[7] Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution,* 237. "When the Government took over responsibility for the railways at the outbreak of war it did so through the REC (Railway Executive Committee), which was issued with military and strategic directives but was given a free hand to carry them out. It was indirect government control of a unified railway system rather than outright nationalisation…In return for exercising a first claim for the use of the nation's railways the government guaranteed to companies their net revenues of 1913. This was a good bargain from the viewpoint of railway management and the shareholders since the last year of peace had been an exceptionally busy and profitable one. However, the wear and tear on railway equipment was exceptionally heavy in wartime and in 1915 the cabinet recognized this fact by agreeing that the companies should be given additional allowances to cover the cost of repairs and renewals. In the following year it was further provided that all railway capital was to be guaranteed a minimum four per cent return and that all stocks were to be guaranteed at 1913 levels. Between 4 August 1914 and 21 December 1918 the Treasury paid out £95 million in fulfillment of these promises over and above payments made for the movement of troops and military Supplies." The government also insured the ships when private companies were unwilling to do so. According to D. French in his article "Business as Usual" *War and the State,* 19, the government 'intervened in the insurance and financial markets on a massive scale. Between mid-August and the end of 1914 they pledged their own credit behind almost the entire financial system in order to re-establish confidence and to restart foreign trade'."

[8] At the conclusion of the war the desire for nationalization had become the most important component in every struggle that took place on the part of the working class. According to J. R. Richmond, UGD 102/3/10, "Some Aspects of Labour and its Claims on Industry," University of Glasgow, 24, "The industries of the country are no longer regarded as the property and possession of private individuals or

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The intense class struggle that rocked Britain prior to the war had to be eliminated in order to defeat the real enemy; that is, the Germans. Nationalism became the cry not only of the government and the employers but it became the watchword of union officials as well. The salaried segment (managers) of the community became a prominent feature of the war. Lloyd George relied on the industrialists to man the top posts of his ministries. Government now controlled the mines and the railroads with this managerial class made up of the industrialists who continued to guide the government's policies, now from the vantage point of salaried professionals as opposed to industrialists as before the war.[9] On the whole, the wartime trend was towards increased centralization of power. Class distinctions, although never disappearing, faded somewhat, ostensibly gave way to a more egalitarian façade.

In order to defeat the new menace that threatened to ravage Europe, the entire society, ostensibly regardless of class was to pitch in. In order to secure men who were willing to fight, the government had to modify its relationship to the labor leaders giving them a status that they had heretofore never achieved. They were thus invited into the inner circle of government. A struggle in the Labour Party over support of the war opened the way for Arthur Henderson to replace Ramsay MacDonald as leader bringing the full weight of the labor movement on the side of the government. Henderson and a number of other labor leaders joined the coalition government guaranteeing this connection. A truce between management and labor was negotiated and codified in a

---

corporations. They are regarded as public trusts whose existence in private hands is tolerated for certain benefits they confer on the community, and they must be compelled as the price of their existence to contribute more and more to the common good."

[9] Julian Putkowski argues in A2 and the 'Reds in Khaki' *Lobster*, 1994 No 27, 19"the business community reached the center of government in an unprecedented fashion."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

variety of acts that would assure workers' support for the war.[10] New laws were passed to guarantee workers adherence to the new realities. In order to secure a compliant workforce, the Defense of the Realm Act was passed in 1915 compelling workers to give up striking for the duration of the war. Moreover, people whom the government deemed suspicious were summarily thrown in jail without charges and without trial.[11] The Munitions of War Act[12] providing for the dilution of labour and compulsory arbitration and the undermining of other previously established trade union rights was passed in 1915. The Munitions of War Bill Amendment (1916) was introduced in the House of Commons authorizing the dilution of labor in private as well as munitions factories run by the government. Workers especially in the engineering industry massively opposed these laws.

Nationalism, argued most fervently by the union leadership, should replace class antagonism at least for the duration of the war. Even the more traditionally militant labour leaders disassociated themselves from anti-war stances and supported the government's policies. Ben Tillett, head of the Dockworker's Union who had led the strike of dockworkers in the 1880s and had a long association with George Lansbury MP from Poplar and long time defender of working class and women's rights, declared that he was in support of the war effort. He opposed all strikes and "used the slogan 'Bomb

---

[10] PRO, T102/4. The government set up a War Aims Committee encouraging workers to meet production demands and employed the union leaders to participate in encouraging their workers to work harder and longer hours. Arthur Peters, head of the Typographical Association in Salford volunteered at the government's behest.

[11] Trevelyan, *Hansard*, H.C., November 14, 1918, 303 , informed the House that there were over 100 or more Irishmen in prison without any trial at all and there are 70 or more British subjects from England and Scotland who are in prison without any trial at all, but simply by the will of the Home Secretary, taking the advice of a secret committee.

[12] The Munitions of War Act increased the mobility of labor. Wherever the government chose to place workers they could not refuse to go thereby increasing the subordination of labor to the direction and control of the state. Section 10 of the War Act gave power to the government to regulate the employment of any workmen or all classes of workmen in munitions work. Moreover, no workmen engaged in government work could join the army or leave their employment without a certificate of leaving pass.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Boches!' to attract support. George Barnes, LP member and member of L. George's inner circle initiated the slogan 'Hang the Kaiser!' in the 1918 general election campaign."[13] Cox, the General Secretary of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers, argued in opposition to a class conflict philosophy. According to Cox, "Capital and labour, employers and workmen, combined were essential to industrial development, and … both were benefiting by the maintenance of industrial peace and goodwill. On the one side capital, organisation, and brains; on the other skill, industry and muscle; both cooperators for the mutual benefit of each."[14] The philosophy of John Hodge, leader of the Steel Smelters' Association, was essentially the same as long as the union was "provided a fair share of the plunder."[15] And yet, the employers treated workers like chattel. The union leadership argued for a community of employers and workers and sat on their boards (Hodge was a member of the Alliance of Employers and Employed), giving the appearance of commonality. Workers not only continued to work harder for little wages, but were encouraged to believe that they had a say in how the economy was to function. Corporatism became a cogent force for the union leadership. Before the war the State intervened in industrial struggles with military might, but now with the view towards class conciliation the State attempted to appear as an arbiter mediating economic and social relationships. Any strike or stoppage of work was not only considered unpatriotic but against the workers' best interest.

In places such as Scotland the issue of craft workers was most distinctly felt in munitions factories where craft had been a longtime anomaly held over from a pre-

---

[13] Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924,* (London:The Boydell Press:1994), 146.
[14] Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War England 1914-1918,* (New York:St Martin's Press:1987), 56
[15] Ibid, 56.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mechanistic age. In order to deal with these particular sets of difficulties, the Lloyd George government had to rely on the carrot and stick philosophy. While making use of the Defense of the Realm Acts (DORA), which severely restricted democratic as well as trade union rights, (for instance, left wing newspapers were continually suppressed by the government) the state intermixed this with employer-union boards, which attempted to promote the idea of community. The "united front" of classes implied the burial of class hatred and suspicion and a suspension of controversy.[16] For workers this formula was deadly. The suspension of controversy allowed the capitalists to make exorbitant profits while driving the standard of living of working class people down.[17] Although complaining about profiteering (employers making huge profits at the expense of workers) the union leaders did not complain about exploitation. The challenges to this "united front" would haunt the employers as soon as the war ended, but for the time being the image of a community of classes helped mobilize the economic resources of the country by encouraging the illusion that the class struggle had disappeared.

The significant change that occurred in Britain was not the end of exploitation, but it was the appearance that a neutral arbiter, that is the State, was believed to stand above the classes to mediate fair solutions to the problems of capitalist society. Workers believed that the state would intervene on their behalf but they did not believe that the class struggle had ended. Moreover, the industrialists met the prewar process of

---

[16] In William Beveridge, *Power and Influence,* (New York:The Beechhust Press:1955), 127, he recounts a speech by Lloyd George in Manchester on the topic of labor compulsion. L.G. states: "With regard to labour, two things are…essential. The first is that we must increase the mobility of labour, and the second is that we must have greater subordination in labour to the direction and control of the State."

[17] In Howard L. Gray, *War Time Control of Industry: The Experience of England,* (New York:The MacMillan Company:1918), 9, we learn that "the Price of Coal Act passed in 1915 allowed the 'standard amount' i.e., the amount by which the pit-head price of coal may exceed the prices which prevailed during the twelve months preceding June 1914 [which] had been fixed by the Act at 42 [was] now…made 9s…" In some towns in was 6s 6d.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

amalgamation just as diligently. In order to pool their resources together to better control labor, employers' associations and leagues were established. This was most evident among Scottish capitalists who were even more severe and less accepting of unions than were English capitalists. The Economic League and the British Federation of Industries were both designed to unite their forces against labors' mobilization by blacklisting those they considered troublemakers.[18] The class struggle did not cease just to accommodate the government's war effort. Scottish workers were especially militant and in 1917 strikes were organized on the Clyde for better wages, especially when the ship owners brought workers in from the United States and paid those workers more than they did the Scots. The Clyde Workers' Committee helped to organize that strike and encouraged the American workers to follow suit.

In addition to state control, industry was streamlined, that is, automation was instituted, which blurred the lines between skilled and unskilled labour. No longer would a worker do a job from start to finish; the assembly line divided the job. Workers were increasingly prevented from making any more than a portion of the product. Promising to forego strikes, the union leadership accepted the disciplining of the work force as long as this right, that is the right to strike, was re-instituted upon the conclusion of the war. Arbitrators would suffice for the time being, and if workers did not comply with this

---

[18] Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent,* 170, argues that chief constables gathered evidence of revolutionary organizations in industry. 'Black lists' of suspect individuals (those who were to be pre-emptively arrested in the event of a substantial industrial disturbance) were prepared, and distributed; Even before the war (August 2, 1914) the government was preparing for disturbances that might have arisen when war was declared by employing the Protection of London Scheme for preventing disturbances during the war; PRO, MEPO 2/1963; Anderson, *Hansard,* November 27, 1917 1822, informed the Home Secretary that the National Council for Civil Liberties was raided on 21st November. Mr. Brace's reply was that "These premises were raided because it was suspected that they were being used for carrying on propaganda in the interests of the enemy. Mr. Anderson's response was that 1,230 organisations are affiliated to this council, and that 19 of them are national trade unions, 170 trade councils, and 600 are trade union branches, including some branches of his own association." The Socialist Labour Press was suppressed for printing such articles as "Young Rebel" and "The Revolution."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

system they would be arrested or deported based on these same anti-labor laws. Workers could be forced to leave their homes and be sent to other cities or countries if they defied these new state regulations.[19] The successive DOR Acts were modified over the course of the war but never at the cost of productivity. Ostensibly applied to all classes, the working class felt the brunt of the repression. The New Military Service Act (No. 2) passed in 1918 stated that any sign of industrial unrest, any suggestion of industrial action, can at once be checkmated by bringing the particular class of industry under the sway of the military. Workers were imprisoned and forced to sign no-strike pledges for the duration of the war. Even the discussion of this act was tantamount to treason since arguing that one should resist was against the law.[20] "The Munitions of War Act permitted the employer an advance of twenty percent in profits over the profits of the three preceding years, but it did not permit an average rise in the rate of wages sufficient to meet the rise in the cost of living."[21] Owners who wished to roll back many of the gains that were won before the war hoped to obtain the support of the government in this endeavor. The *Times* reported in 1915: "The owners disapprove very strongly of the renewal of the Minimum Wage Act which was forced upon them by the Government to bring to an end the strike of three years ago at a time when they considered they had the situation well in hand."[22] This was not only a chance for the owners to prosecute the war

---

[19] In a strike on the Clyde at Beardmore's munitions plant a number of Clyde workers were arrested for striking and were deported to other cities until they signed no – strike pledges; Gray, *War Time Control of Industry,* 49.

[20] Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent,* 170, tells us that with the use of the Defense of the Realm Regulations (DDR) of which there were many, pre-emptive arrests were made without warrants.

[21] P. Kellog and A. Gleason, *British Labour and the War Reconstructors for a New World,* (New York:Garland Publishing, Inc. 1972), 155. They point to Cole's analysis that "In the Munitions Act, the state virtually entered into a profit-sharing arrangement with the employers for the exploitation of labor, lending its disciplinary powers to the employers for the period of the war."

[22] The *Times,* February 3, 1915.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

abroad, but it was a means by which they could continue to attack the standard of living of workers at home.

Moreover, to secure the necessary labor required to prosecute the war an Emigration Bill (1918) was passed. According to the Civil Liberties Union this Bill

> prohibits any person or society from publishing any literature or in any way promoting *emigration* unless they are approved by the Emigration Authority. So that the Government will be in a position to boycott British emigrants any place it chooses. Further, the law is not to apply to any but steerage passengers, so that the hold is apparently to be kept only over the working class.[23]

As a way to hang on to possible recruits the government restricted workers rights to emigrate outside of the British dominions. Only people who did not rely on steerage as a means of transport were allowed to come and go freely. Moreover, in order to pay for the war the government argued that it needed to raise revenue. Equality of sacrifice became the theme. Hitherto the war, workers were not required to pay income tax on any money they earned under £120 per annum. In addition, a married man had to pay income tax on income above £145, which included his wife's income. For a wife, husband and two children £195 was the required minimum sum for paying income tax. Workers who were barely making ends meet would now be forced to pay part of their meager income to taxes. The state's role had now become integral in economic relations.

> By the end of the war the Government controlled 90% of total imports and the home production of food, coal and most other raw materials. It controlled shipping and rail transport. It controlled the distribution of food (through rationing) and of raw materials (through allocations). The capital market was under Government control, as were wages and rents. Nearly 3.5 million workers in the metal industries, chemicals and other sectors concerned with munitions produced, were employed directly or indirectly by the Ministry of

---

[23] *Hansard,* H.C., May 31, 1918, Emigration Bill, 1157. National Council for Civil Liberties, July, 1918, Acc. 5241 (7) Edinburgh Central IL.P. Correspondence; The Bill was quite elaborate in the sense that it spelled out exactly who could be deemed a cabin passenger and therefore a candidate for booking a passage. For instance, one provision provides for the fact that a passenger must be "messed throughout the voyage at the same table with the master or first officer of the ship."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Munitions…The larger firms loaned over ninety directors and managers to the ministry for the duration of the war, often keeping them on their own payrolls at the same time.[24]

It was therefore difficult in such an organization to tell where business control ended and state control began.

World War I ushered in anti-labor laws, which initially dampened down the formidable strikes that had occurred just prior to the war. The influence of large employers within the Ministry strengthened them against unions.[25] In May 1915 William Weir, a leading Glasgow employer of munitions and someone who was later to become Director of Munitions for Scotland, remarked "as a general proposition…the existing skilled men, organized as trade unionists, are controlled by the employer, the state should take the employers' disciplinary functions on itself."[26] Munitions tribunals applied to the munitions industry set up to assure diligent work, sobriety and good order and to discipline those workers by fines who would suggest that workers strike over higher wages or better working conditions .[27] Ultimate control over workers could be employed through state sponsored regulations guaranteeing capitalists high profits with little disruption. The balance of forces would now shift to the employer after years of the economy being rocked by strikes. WWI had on the one hand fulfilled the tendencies that had been growing in the British economy, (that is greater concentration and centralization of production) and on the other it marked a clear change that opened the way for the

---

[24] James Hinton, *The First Shop Steward's Movement,* (London:George Allen and Unwin Ltd.:1973), 29.
[25] Bentley Gilbert, *British Social Policy: 1914-1929*(Ithaca, New York:Cornell University Press:1970), 24. 'Men such as A.R. Barrand of the Prudential Assurance Company, H. Kingsley Wood, insurance company lobbyist, and A.H. Warren of the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows…had been given the coupon as a reward for supporting the Government in the struggle over plans for the Ministry of Health. Their concern for politics lay in the defence of interests they represented, in this case the approved societies, which were the administrators of national health insurance'."
[26] *Glasgow Herald*, May 21, 1915.
[27] Lloyd George argued that workers drinking as opposed to conditions in the factories caused a fall off in production.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

events that would occur in the years following the war.[28]

[28] Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British politics, the economy and Empire, 1926-1932,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1992), 37 "Post-war company takeovers and mergers, producing large-scale corporate capitalism with ownership widely dispersed among shareholders and separated from management, were taken to be one set of proofs: capitalism was itself abolishing private enterprise—'devouring its own children'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 2: THE INFLUX OF WOMEN WORKERS IN INDUSTRY

The influx of women into industry was a crucial factor in the reorganization of the economy. Once the government called up men the question of who would do the work previously done by them became, if not the primary question, then one of upper most importance. So in the government's quest to find ever more workers, women were recruited to the jobs that men had previously held. Not only were women becoming workers in other industries besides cotton,[29] but they went into industry by the millions, encouraging a greater feeling of working class solidarity among larger numbers of the working class; for the duration of the war women worked in every facet of the economy.[30] By 1915, 60 percent of the munitions workers were women. According to the *Times*

> There were women employed on the Tyne as blacksmiths' strikers: they are at the fires doing tool fettling and light blacksmiths work and at the power hammer. Women are loading and discharging trucks and weighing material in a sulfur and copper works, and in timber yards they are molding and turning and carrying timber from the trucks. In a motor garage they are washing cars and changing and removing tires. A number of women are employed in a sheet iron works making gunpowder kegs. They do all the work-making the kegs, painting, and packing them. For another firm they are loading picric acid, cleaning the nitrating house, filling and emptying whizzers, and drying and sieving. In a gunpowder factory they are at work on small cordite presses with men oversees-work which some firms had definitely state they could not do. The corporations of Hastings and Brighton have women as chair attendants, and in a scientific workshop women are now engaged in assembling the parts of barometers and compasses. [31]

Further, "the number of women employed in industry, transport and commerce rose by 1,320,000 between 1914-18. Of these over half a million entered the key industry of the

---

[29] Before the war domestic work was the largest employer of women.

[30] Susan Pedersen argues that British women were not considered part of the permanent workforce in the same way as French women were considered. This therefore meant that British women did not achieve the status of worker even though they flocked to industry in droves. Moreover, according to Pedersen, since the unions, the government and the women's organizations agreed that women would be forced to leave industry when the men returned this meant in reality that women's place was in the home raising future generations of British citizens.

[31] The *Times*, October 18, 1916.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

country, the engineering and metal trades, about 40 percent of them directly replacing men."[32]

The ushering in of female labor signaled a general dilution of labor encouraging its deskilling. The battle between time and piecework took off. Craft workers feared for their jobs as the jobs became more and more automated. Where the state did get involved in industry it was in the area of recruitment and training of women especially in war industries to replace men. Lloyd George in agreement with the trade union leadership set the rate of pay and the standards to which women needed to adhere.

DORA was even applied to women who worked in these industries. In factories run by the government women workers had to sign contracts that bound them to obtain certificate of leaving passes if they wished to secure other jobs. As with their male counterparts this was a bone of contention since there was no way to earn higher wages unless one were to leave her previous position. The threat of imprisonment affected them as much as it did men. But without female labor there would have been no way for the government to secure the needed weaponry for Britain's troops. Thus by 1918 there were 4,808,000 women in industry. Women were not protected from the problems that plagued their male counterparts and there was little government oversight to assure that workers' health and safety was protected. "The factory worker suffered from the relaxation of state restrictions on employment, which left her practically without state protection, until the 60-hour week was enforced in October, 1917." [33]

> During the first year of munitions activity, night work and Sunday work were practically universal, and the former is still customary. Many cases were revealed

---

[32] Beryl Stanley, "Women in Unrest," *Labour Monthly,* August 1940, 461; Adelaide Mary Anderson, *Women In The Factory An Administrative Adventure 1892-1921,* 46. In addition to working in private as well as state controlled industry many more married women went into industry.

[33] Stanley, "Women in Unrest, 1914-1918," 458.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> in which women were working for seven days a week with one Sunday off a month. We had twenty-eight consecutive twelve-hour days and thirty consecutive twelve-hour nights. We had shifts of sixteen hours at a stretch. [34]

So said Mary Macarthur, head of the Women's Federation, who charted the work hours of many of the women newly employed in the munitions factories. The work was often arduous and dangerous requiring extremely long hours but women, for the most part, were glad to leave domestic service and obtain factory jobs that paid them better wages. Unions were prohibited for domestic workers, health care was unheard of, pensions did not exist and a master-servant relationship was embedded in the job. But industrial work, as difficult as it was, provided a different kind of employment that offered more freedom for working women. So as dangerous as many of the jobs those women held were, the freedom that working in factories afforded them was far greater than what millions of women had become accustomed to. The wages were not only higher, but also working communally with other workers allowed them to develop a bond not only with each other, but against the employer. According to Robert Roberts, a contemporary living in Salford England, "women grew in social stature and gained an authority they have never lost since."[35] In addition, the work though extremely difficult was in some way rewarding.

Nevertheless women worked hard and often in hazardous conditions. Sylvia Pankhurst, a noted revolutionary socialist and activist in the East London community, described the exhausting hours and harsh conditions that women faced while working in the factories.

---

[34] "The women Trade-Unionists' Point of View," *Women and the Labour Party,* Marion Phillips, ed., (London:Headley Brothers: 1918), 19.
[35] Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, 200.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> With unemployment still rife, the working of excessive overtime-often unpaid for-was exacted, on the pleas of 'national necessity.' Time was 'cribbed' from the workers' dinner-hour, seven days labour imposed, wages often reduced. Close by us clothiers on Army preserving factory women worked from 7:30 am to 6 p.m. for 11s a week, and on till 9:30 for 2¼ d. per hour.[36]

This same story was repeated throughout the industries where women worked. They often earned below minimum wage (£1 a week) and sweating was a definite factor in the production of wealth.[37] Pankhurst points not only to women's extreme exploitation but she argues that in addition women were being watched by the Home Secretary.

> The busybodies of Whitehall, Scotland Yard and Mayfair were determined to establish effective control over the conduct of soldiers' wives. On October 20th an Army Council Memorandum entitled 'Cessation of Separation Allowances and allotments to the Unworthy,' and a Home Office letter to Chief Constables issued instructions for placing all women in receipt of separation allowances under police surveillance.[38]

Women workers who worked at the Chatham dockyards were to be searched by the police when entering and again when they changed into their work clothes. And while working their belongings were searched again. If tobacco or matches were found the women could be suspended or fined.[39] Those who 'misbehaved' were to be punished and their meager allowances were decreased based on the decision of the police. If they were found drinking, unchaste or transgressed the morality codes, they were to be punished and denied the basic ability to survive.

> The police were notified that they should index the 'records' of soldiers' wives and relatives, whilst Army paymasters were instructed to forward to the Chief

---

[36] E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A Mirror To Life In England During the First World War,* (London:The Cresset Library:1932), 91 The *Worker*, 1/14/1914; according to Ken Weller *Don't Be a Soldier!*; (London:Journeyman:1985), 33 middle class women lectured working women at factories on how to cut their consumption of food.

[37] Ibid, 93.

[38] Ibid, 99; University of North London, HD 6079, Minutes of Women's Trade Union League. By December 10, 1914 a letter written by the Women's Labour League to the War Office to protest against the recent proposal of the War Office and Home Office to place the wives of soldiers and sailors under police supervision.

[39] PRO, MEPO 1/1745. These searches were to be increased to seven daily.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Constable particulars of all persons receiving allotments and separation allowances within their area…Women were even ordered to get themselves photographed to supply a means of identifying them to the police.[40]

This strategy was just a minor part in the State's overall scheme to control the workforce.[41] For the majority of working-women, especially in Scotland, their standard of living was so low that working in industry gave them the chance to acquire a more adequate one. Since domestic service could not command the wages that one needed in order to keep body and soul together industry was thus the likely alternative. Helen Crawford, a Scottish feminist, describes the circumstances that many of these women faced daily:

> These women in many cases suffer ill-health and die prematurely, or become sluts and drunken, broken–down derelicts, a plague to their families and who knows what they endure before they collapse? I remember hearing of one Manchester woman who when accused of getting drunk –whisky was cheap at 2s 6d. a bottle- replied that "it was the cheapest way of getting out of Manchester.[42]

The Beveridge Report also confirmed the necessity of a rise in wages if women were to be able to sustain themselves not only during the war but afterwards as well.

> But after making allowance for any probable change, the fact remains that in but few trades are the average earnings of women for full time employment sufficient to support a decent life even when planned on the most frugal lines…it would appear however, that the increase up to April, 1917 was not more than 50 %. But assuming it to be of that amount and allowing for some fall that will probably occur on a return to normal conditions after the War it is nevertheless clear that by whatever standard of human necessity the rates of wages are judged there is an obvious and urgent need for improvement.[43]

---

[40] Ibid, In *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State*, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1992), 1,l Pedersen remarks that "since infidelity (by the wife) was grounds for divorce, the ministry pointed out, allowances should indeed be cut off in such cases. "The woman's repentance and present good character notwithstanding,' unless the man asked that it be continued. In all, various governmental authorities investigated at least fifty thousand cases of misconduct (some 2% of recipients) and cut off allowances in more than sixteen thousand of them-not a high figure, but enough to act as a deterrent to other women."

[41] Millman's *Managing Domestic Dissent* is devoted to this theme.

[42] Fawcett Library, Helen Crawford on the Glasgow rent strikes, 1915.

[43] London School of Economics, Beveridge Report, 1918, 1, Women's employment committee-conditions of employment.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Conditions were, in many factories, terrible for these newly arrived women workers. Deviations from the Factory Acts encouraged sweating. Beryl Stanley writes:

> Factory conditions were often scandalous, since employers grudged introducing the extra accommodation for women. Their attitude was well summed up by 'a steel director', reported in the Engineer (December 1, 1916), who said that in his opinion munition workers were being 'mothered' a great deal too much; the time for pure philanthropy was over; canteens, hostels, etc. should be put upon a sound business footing, and if not found a reasonably profitable investment, quietly dropped.[44]

The factory acts were ineffectual in stemming overtime. Mary Chamberlain's article castigated the employers for forcing women to work so much overtime that industrial accidents were a necessary byproduct. In a case where the employers were actually called in front of the authorities Chamberlain writes:

> The defendants, who are engaged in the manufacture of cartridges for the government, had employed two girls many hours in excess of the law. One, a girl of 16 had worked from 6 am on Friday until 7:30 am Saturday with only two hour rest for meals on Friday and half an hours for breakfast. Then she met with an accident in which the end of her finger was slicked off by the machine. The other girl, 18 years old, worked from 6 am on Friday till 11 am on Saturday – a period of 30 hours.[45]

Her article was filled with many such cases where female workers with little protection were forced to work many hours in overtime by employers who won contracts that "are far larger than the capacity of most factories, and contractors are greedy for work![46] While not officially forced to work in factories, once they were hired the rules of conscription applied to them as well. Thus women workers were also without power to

---

[44] Stanley, "Women in Unrest, 1914-1918," 459.

[45] Fawcett Library, IND/MC3/5 ", Mary Chamberlain, "War on the Backs of the Work," July 25, 1915; Mary Macarthur , 25, writes about the Munitions Act that forced women to work against their will in dangerous and poisonous processes. We have had them heavily fined for refusing to do so, and in addition, penalized by six weeks unemployment before being allowed to take work elsewhere. This is a state of things to which the term "slavery" could much more justly be applied." Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918,* (London:Croom Helm:1977), 61.

[46] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leave the factory if a government war officer sent them. They would be subjected to any hours and conditions that the foreman prescribed, "compelled to obedience of her superiors by military law, and made aware that any objection or remonstrance would be a breach of discipline.[47] Moreover, it was only the women who worked for government agencies who were given increases negotiated by their union leaders. Women who worked for private concerns were not awarded these increases.

Although the work was difficult and unfamiliar, one of their most difficult hurdles was facing their male coworkers who were often hostile to them in what had been previously a male domain. It is true that many men, especially in the craft unions, belittled the idea that women work in what had hitherto been the domain of men and even actively opposed this development for a variety of reasons, but eventually women joined many unions of their male counterparts who either volunteered or were conscripted into the army. Some gripes, no doubt, stemmed from pure and simple sexism, that is that men should be the breadwinners of the family while women's domain was in the home but some had more relevance and should not be dismissed so readily. Male workers understood that their jobs were becoming deskilled as a result of the war and that they would not be able to command the same wage as before. Ironically, many unskilled workers who worked by the piece garnered a larger salary than the craft workers whose work was based on an hourly wage. Deskilling lowered the relative wage that workers earned per hour but it did not lower the absolute wage. That is, speed up allowed non-skilled workers to earn a wage based on piecework and thus the more they produced the more they were paid. Consequently, the problem of dilution was not just a problem that provoked the long historical chauvinism of men, especially those who worked in the

[47] PRO, HD8390-397 War Emergency Workers National Committee, August 1914-1916.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

crafts who hoped to maintain their privileged status vis a. vis the rest of the working class. But it was clear that the employers and the government would use this as a chance to undermine the wages of all workers. According to Barbara Drake:

> A rate of 2 ½ d or 2 ¾ d. an hour was a common wage for an adult woman, and these deplorable conditions of female labour, aggravated by the rise in the cost of living, now threatened to extend to all men's trades to which women were introduced.[48]

Given the lack of any clear definition of skilled labour it was possible to undermine the wages of all workers employing the argument that women were not living up to the standards set for skilled workmen. Not merely legitimizing the discrepancy in pay men rightly feared that women pulling down the wages of all workers would subsequently replace them. Macarthur, who represented women on the central Munitions Labour Supply Committee and the Health of Munitions Workers Committee, points to the ease by which the government made its case. "Some simple adjustment was made to machinery-a twist drill, perhaps, was replaced with a flat cutter, an automatic stop was fitted to a lathe, and it was declared the work was not the same."[49] With the advent of automation wages fell. Confusion arose, writes the TUC

> as to the precise interpretation of this agreement, especially as Mr. Lloyd George laid it down that the agreement related to piecework rates. Time rates were not mentioned, although the men, whose jobs the women were doing, had received both time and piece rates. All this, in effect, knocked the bottom out of the agreement and left the employers to fix women's rates as they pleased.[50]

The fact that craft workers held on so tenaciously to their craft status meant that women were largely kept out of the engineering union but continued to work in the

---

[48] B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions,* (London:George Allen and Unwin Limited:1920), 73.
[49] Mary Macarthur, quoted in Sheila Lewenhad, *Women and Trade Unions: An Outline History of Women in the British trade Union Movement,* (London:Ernest Benn:1977), 53 Duncan, *Hansard*, H.C. , May 15, 1918, 328. Under the title Women Workers Mr. Duncan asked the Secretary of the Admiralty why women were not receiving the same rates of pay as the men.
[50] Trades Union Congress, 1955, "Women in the Trade Union Movement."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

munitions plants. There were then but two possible roads for men to take: either organize women at the same pay or allow the lowering of wages for all workers.[51] Over the course of the War the Amalgamated Society of Engineers made deals with women workers (the Association agreed to work with the Women's Federation around issues concerning munitions workers) but hanging on to craft distinctions only slowed the process of class unity. It was inevitable that employers would take advantage of the lower costs that were afforded by female labour, but the fear of this inevitability led many men to oppose women joining the union thus allowing employers to pit one section of the workforce against the other.[52] The railway workers[53] learned this lesson more quickly than did the engineers, but it is also true that, with some discord and with much trepidation, male workers began to accept females working in these professions.

Deborah Thom and Susan Pedersen view the question of women in industry differently; that is they view it from a gendered perspective. Both argue that rather than women being perceived as workers, they were perceived as temporary workers, as wives and mothers, and thus their wages were not based on the labor they produced but upon their socially necessary roles as mother and wives of soldiers, requiring protection. As proof Thom asserts:

---

[51] Left wing shop stewards such as JT Murphy were well aware of the consequences of sexism. JT Murphy, *The Workers' Committee: An Outline of Its Principles and Structure,* (Pluto, London:1972), 18.

[52] M. Duhman, Ph. D. Thesis, "The Origins and Early Years, 1914-24," (Birmingham University:1982), 208, "The women were sympathetic to the arguments of the 'revolutionary-minded' ASE stewards and rank and file male workers since it was 'they who, as a rule, concerned themselves with the women's organization…In 1916, when a demand for a pay rise for the women workers at the Parkhead factory in Glasgow was held up in arbitration, a threat of strike action by ASE stewards and the NFWW led to a rapid granting of the rise. The following year at another local factory, women came out on strike to demand the reinstatement of four dismissed female workers, and, although this action was disavowed by the NFWW, the CWC supported it with funds, a mass meeting on Glasgow Green and the threat of a general strike. The women were reinstated."

[53] According to Margaret Morris, *The General Strike*, (Harmondsworth:Penguin Books, Ltd.:1976), 81 "there was a tradition of solidarity among the wives of railway workers, and the Railway Women's Guilds gave political as well as social support to the trade unions."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Women trade unionists were closely linked with the network of anti-sweating campaigners, the infant welfare movement and the constitutional suffragists, in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Adult Suffrage Association. They shared the belief of Anna Martin of the national Union. According to these organizations 'The rearing of the child crop is, confessedly, the most vital to the nation of all its industries, being that which alone gives to other industry and meaning or importance; but although its quality is occasioning grave concern, no attempt has been made to apply…principles to those on whose care and devotion it necessarily depends.'[54]

And according to Susan Pedersen

> To explain why such expansion, high pay, and unionization did not in the end transform "women" into "workers" in Britain, while wage earning remained a legitimate role for French women even after marriage, we must place these women's experiences within the context of the social contract previously described. Women's place was determined, in large part, by the nature of the agreements arrived at between employers, trade unionists, and the government…[55]

But the focus of Pedersen's work was not on the workers, rather it was on the leaders not realizing or taking into account the discrepancy between the two. Pedersen missed the fact that rather than acceptance of a gendered role imposed upon them by the TUC and feminist leaders, women rejected this role and proudly saw themselves as workers, at times even leading strikes for higher wages. In fact, at the conclusion of the war when forced back into domestic work, women rebelled. But with the complicity of the trade union leaders who did not conceive of organizing a campaign to assure jobs to all workers, women had little choice but to leave industry. For fear of losing all benefits they reluctantly went back into domestic work. No matter how difficult the conditions in industry women preferred to remain there. Undoubtedly both the men and women's trade union leaders thought and spoke in the vocabulary of the time. According to Thom the language was maternalist, "focusing on the context of the family, or domestic life, rather

---

[54] Deborah Thom, "Women and work," 299.
[55] Pedersen, *Family Dependence*, 92.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

than the life of the workplace."[56] Thom complains "the minimum rate of pay for women in men's work which was £1 for a 48-hour week was not "commitment to 'equal pay' [but] was entirely expedient. It was not designed to attract women into war work or as a recognition of 'worth' but was solely intended to win over men's unions to the process of dilution."[57] Pedersen discusses similar themes. Feminists, Pedersen notes, drew on the 'rhetoric of motherhood as national service' demonstrating the 'gender-based assumption underlying British social policies."[58] "Motherhood, they argued, should be seen as a form of service to the state, rewarded by 'separate but equal' welfare rights."[59] As further proof of her point, when discussing separation allowances for women whose husbands were soldiers Pedersen comments that these feminists demanded that women receive the allowances not for themselves but these allowances would be 'between the national obligations of the soldier and those of fertile women' showing total naiveté about the 'malleability and disinterestedness of the British state'.[60] Therefore, women's sole jobs were to produce children and take care of the family so that the state could continue to have a supply of men for the armed forces. Both Pedersen and Thom mistakenly view the women who went into industry in the way that authors such as Henry Pelling view the working class in general; that is; through the prism of their institutions or the organizations that claim to represent them. But it was precisely this type of employment that gave many women a sense of accomplishment unlike what they had experienced before. In fact Pedersen states:

---

[56] Thom, "Women and work," 300.
[57] Ibid, 305.
[58] Susan Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War", The *AH R*. 1990, 1006.
[59] Ibid,
[60] Ibid, 1004.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Soldiers' wives learned to intervene in the public sphere in their own interest: they responded angrily to charges of drunkenness, lobbied Labour organizations for increased rates, and kept up a constant stream of letters to their M.P.s. The experience of receiving allowances, presumably conditional on being a 'dependent' of a man, forced wives beyond such 'dependent' roles. In the absence of men, and in direct contrast to their administrative logic, allowances created a new direct relationship between the state and the working class wife.[61]

The intense experience of working in industrial plants with thousands of other women even threatening strike activity cannot but change to some degree, women's work experience and the ways that they viewed their own lives.[62] An article in the *Times* reporting on a Women Workers' Federation conference, states precisely this point. "They [the women] did not believe in any sex-war in industry. They realized only too well that behind the men were the wives and children. The struggle was not between men and women, but between both of them on the one side and the employing classes on the other."[63] Despite how the government wished to define women, or whether or not the trade union leaders supported this image, and despite the view of middle class feminists, working women began to view themselves in a very different fashion. "Working-class women in Salford became 'more worldly-wise' in the war.[64] They were much more liberated and having an income more independent to develop their own views. Women became shop stewards defending their rights as workers with the hope of defending their families as well. If we are to accept Thom's and Pedersen's point of view we must agree that these women never saw themselves as workers but only as temporary replacements

---

[61] Ibid, 1003.
[62] According to Sheila Rowbotham in *A Century* of Women, (London:Penguin Books:1997), 85, "the war disrupted established gender assumptions. The young women workers who formed their own football teams, went bicycling or dancing and flocked to theatres, music halls and cinemas were at once heroines of the war effort and dangerously autonomous. By 1917 the newspapers had begun berating them as 'flaunting flappers'."
[63] *The Times* Special Correspondent, September 7, 1916. 7; K. Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier*! 32.
[64] Roberts, *The Classic Slum,* 215; Phillips, "Women in Industry" discusses the "improved bearing and independence" of women even in sweated industries. Ruskin College, 1917, *Some Problems of Urban and Rural Industry*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for the men. But like men women rejected the notions of scientific management and speedup and resisted going into domestic service once the war was over. In fact joint action between men and women was much more frequent than is commonly thought. "The refusal of Pullars [the head of a dyers and bleachers firm at Perth] to recognize the union resulted in a strike and mounted police were drafted into the town to deal with pickets. Women strikers joined eagerly in the struggle against blacklegs. The strikers stayed out for nineteen days and gained bonuses of from 3s to 5s a week."[65] And even in the engineering industry where male craft workers were most reluctant to give up their status a report by the Ministry of Labour discusses a strike of women workers at Beardmore's and the support that it was given by their male co-workers. This sympathy strike was expressly in support of the demands of the women.[66] And in Willesden, northwest London, women bus and train operators stopped work when they were refused a 5s bonus given to the men. "Bus passengers who tried 'to chaff the girls' were warned 'that unless the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' is conceded next week fresh trouble might be expected."[67] Beryl Stanley cites a variety of instances where men and women workers joined together to challenge their bosses and were successful, garnering a few more shillings in their pay packets. And yet it took some years before many of the union leaders began to understand that male workers should fight for all workers no

---

[65] Stanley, "Women in Unrest", 462.

[66] PRO, CAB24/33/2716, 6-7, Report from the Ministry of Labour. Not only were the men striking in support of the women, but they were also striking in support of the unskilled.

[67] The *Times*, August 24, 1918; Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier!,* 32writes about the strike that the women who struck work in Willesden were joined by "women at Hackney, Holloway, Archway and Acton depots or garages, and thereafter the strike spread like wildfire. By the evening thousands of women had stopped work. The striking was initially for a 5s War bonus, a demand which was superseded as the struggle continued by the straight issue of equal pay, or as the strikers put it "same work-same money." Read page 35 for more discussions on strike activity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

matter the sex, no matter the skill. Thus in engineering the battle for equal wages was never completed.[68]

Alternatively, in some circumstances "men's unions were quite prepared to back women with strike action if their own careers were affected. When women transport workers struck for an equal "war bonus' in August 1918, they were supported by one of the main unions..."[69] It was the Transport Union that most willingly accepted women into their ranks. Drake comments that:

> The great transport unions threw their doors wide open, and invited, or even compelled, women to join the union. The railway companies agreed with a comparatively good grace that women should receive men's minimum time rates in each grade, but men's war advances were flatly refused. The point was a not unimportant one, the men's war bonus being 35/-, and the women's 20/6 at the end of 1918.[70]

Unlike the engineering union the railway workers did not treat women with disdain but instead encouraged their organization. Unionization among working class women rose from 400,000 at the beginning of the war to over 1,000,000 by the end of it. By 1917 women were organized in virtually all of the unions. The United Garment Workers had 50,000 women by 1917. Between March 1917 and March 1918 the

---

[68]G. Brayborn and P. Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars,* (London:Pandora Press:1987), 50. "Only if it could be proved that women were doing the work of a fully skilled tradesman were they given equal piece-and time-rates in engineering. Good money could be earned by women on skilled or dangerous work-the highest wages for women in Woolwich arsenal in 1917 were £6 6s as a tool-setter in the fuse factories, but these were not typical. Elsewhere in munitions, they were supposedly paid e-rates on 'men's work', and were guaranteed a minimum wage of £1 (later 24s) for a 48-hour week on time-rate by the terms of the government circular £2. But the whole system was open to abuse, and many employers went to great lengths to prove that women were actually doing 'women's work' once processes were altered, or to stop money from women's pay packets for a succession of reasons."

[69] Ibid, *51*; PRO, CAB 23/33/2716, 6. "A report from the Ministry of Munitions on increasing strike activity notes in November 1917 that the position on the Clyde has grown decidedly worse. A number of more or less important strikes have been, or are still, in progress, notably one among women workers at Messrs. Beardmore's...In connection with this strike the men in a number of shops have resolved to come out in sympathy, unless the women's demands are met and it is even suggested that a general stoppage throughout the West of Scotland might result."

[70] Barbara Drake, Women in Trade Unions, 91.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Postmen's Federation enrolled 8,200 women. The General Union of Textile Workers added at least 20,000 to its membership rolls.[71] Many of the smaller unions also witnessed gains in their membership.

Organization and the militant defense of their rights had been concepts that many women were quite familiar with. Strike action, especially among single working class women, had been a part of their lives even before they entered the munitions factories. As an example:

> In the summer of 1911 a wave of unrest arose, a great uprising of underpaid workers including women, was started off by a strike of transport workers. Every factory in Bermondsey was idle. Fifteen thousand women came out with the men and the national federation of women workers was fully occupied during the fortnight the strike lasted. An appeal for public support met with a satisfactory response, and the successful outcome of the strike brought substantial increased.[72]

Moreover, the industrial unrest that threatened Britain's stability before the war involved working class women as well as men. Women not only had husbands that were involved in strikes,[73] but many of them had worked in textile factories and were involved themselves in unionization drives. As an example the Women's League supported a resolution that encouraged this kind of solidarity.

> The 1912 executive resolution to the conference congratulated women who stood 'shoulder to shoulder' with men in the disputes…At the 1914 conference delegates were reminded that 'the wives of strikers had participated in the rough and tumble of the movement outside their home. In some cases, they had taken their turn when picketing was to be done. Fifteen League branches had strike funds by 1914. [74]

---

[71] Fawcett Library, TUC, IND/DMB/1/3; Phillips, "Women in Industry," 55. Mr. Carter of the Coventry Trades Council said, "The unions must realize that women are going to stop in industry, and if they are wise they will get them into the unions and use their power to get the same standard of wages and conditions for women as for men, and so eliminate undercutting and competition between the sexes."
[72] Glasgow Caledonian University, London women in revolt.
[73] op cit. women's support of striking husbands in 1911 and having to face down the military. Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, 95.
[74] Christine Collette, *For Labour and for Women: The Women's Labour League, 1906-1918,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1989), 141.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In 1913 during the Dublin Transport Workers strike English socialist women intervened by helping transport workers send their children to England for the duration of the strike, so that striking workers had a chance to stem the power of management. Thus with the industrial unrest already experienced by many of the women workers, they were able to mobilize themselves in defense of their rights. In an attempt to keep women's wages low the government argued that single women did not need to be paid at the rate of married men with children. This was particularly grievous for women who had lost their husbands in the war and had to provide for their families alone.[75]

As more and more women were drafted into jobs that were traditionally filled by men, they fought against their dual oppression; that is they fought in defense of their rights as women workers. In fact, concerning their employment women began to take on the whole of the operations in such industries that made heavy tank parts where men just maintained the machines.[76] Employment in factories emboldened many of these women. They were not only going into the unions in droves,[77] but they were beginning to go out on strike as their male counterparts had done before them. As an example of this growing militancy, Gleason and Kellogg refer to a strike in munitions plants in Newcastle of women who demanded a minimum wage because the government allowed the issue to drag on for some time. The Federation had advised against the strike but could not control it. "Within twenty-four hours the award was granted, for this was important war

---

[75] According to Mary Macarthur in Marion Phillips, *Women and the Labour Party,* 106, "women were paid less because most of them were classed as dependants and subsidiary workers."
[76] Adelaide Mary Anderson, *Women in the Factory: An Administrative Adventure, 1892-1921,* 233,234.
[77] Stanley, "Women in Unrest 1914-1918," 462. The National Federation Women Workers working in cooperation with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, became in effect a women's engineering union, and raised its membership from 10,000 to 50,000. About another 60,000 women joined the General Workers' union and nearly as many the Workers' Union. In all about 750,000 women entered the unions during the war-an increase of 160 per cent. Others such as the TUC put the unionization of women at one million.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

work, but the award was for these Newcastle girls alone."[78] Even in the face of this attack, many women stood their ground and in some industries became stewards themselves. Down with sweating! If a woman does a man's work she must have a man's pay! Down with high prices and big profits! No taxation of food or wage! Votes for women to protect our homes and wages! No Compulsion! These demands were raised at a great demonstration of East London Federation of the suffragettes, the Herald League, the BSP, the dockers' union and branches of the ILP, engineers and a variety of other trades.[79]

In addition to other demands The National Federation of Women Workers "supported the Russian Revolution and immediately after the war called upon the government to recognize the Soviet Union.[80] As an organization it focused on women in the unorganized trades. "At its 1916 biennial conference a resolution, passed unanimously, which called for the conscription of all incomes over £1000."[81] And while its program was not socialist it was far more progressive than the traditional trade unions.

In January 1916 Mary Macarthur (head of the NFWW) published and edited the *Women Worker.* According to Sarah Boston the *Women Worker* was a socialist organ[82] but Pedersen remarks that Macarthur only advocated equal pay as a "safeguard [of] the post war position of men" rather than for "reasons of justice due to women" and thus would probably disagree with Boston's assessment of Macarthur and the *Women Worker.* Pedersen asserts that Macarthur admitted that she was "sufficiently old-fashioned" to

---

[78] Ibid, 156.
[79] Fawcett Library, Pankhurst Papers, reel 26, File 5.1
[80] Ibid, 128-129.
[81] Ibid,
[82] Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*, (London:Davis-Poynter:1980), 128.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

believe in an ideal world in which "a woman would not be driven from home and children by economic necessity..."[83] And yet women were driven from their homes precisely because of economic necessity, prompting people such as Mary Macarthur to deal with the realities that women workers faced. Therefore, as much as the leadership of the NFWW would have preferred that women stay at home, that was not to be for millions of women who were forced by economic exigencies, even years before the war, but especially during the war, to seek employment and leave their homes. Whatever Mary Macarthur would have wished for women had to be supplanted by the realities of war and while the NFWW may have agreed to allow women to be sent from industry when the soldiers came back they were also forced to fight for women as workers, not as wives of workers. Therefore her programmatic demands had to be broader and more socially conscious than the traditional bread and butter issues which were demanded by more conservative trade union leaders. The Federation called for: a) Guaranteeing generous treatment to the dependents of all soldiers and sailors who are incapacitated or killed; b) guaranteeing to all workers employment at trade union rates of wages adequate maintenance until such work is found and c) taking over the railways, shipping and mines, and developing the land now in use for the preservation of game and sport, to supply wheat and other necessary foodstuffs.

Moreover, TNT poisoning became a growing concern among working women in munitions factories. Scores of women were blown up in factory accidents and many more died of TNT poisoning. Rather than demonstrating sensitivity on the question Addison (Minister of Munitions) reprimanded the women for complaining. In his *Diaries* he writes:

---

[83] Pedersen, *Family, Dependence,* 100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> I had to admonish a deputation from the Federation of Women Workers this afternoon. They have been holding meetings at Coventry. One of their speakers, of an inventive turn of mind, has been giving a lurid account of the dangers of T.N.T., saying, inter alia, that all their inside organs would turn yellow and that they would not be able to have children, etc.[84]

According to William Beveridge, the number of reported cases of TNT poisoning was as follows: "Three months ended March 31, 1917: 83 cases 12 deaths. Three months ended June 30, 1917, 57 cases 20 deaths; Oct. 30 21 cases 8 deaths; December 31, 29 cases 4 deaths; March 31, 1918 13 cases 4 deaths."[85] Women's bodies turned yellow and often became ulcerated from the poisoning. "It was probably no coincidence that in Sheffield, where large numbers of women were employed in the engineering factories, infant mortality figures almost doubled: from 11,912 deaths in 1913 to 22,281 deaths in 1915."[86] Thus the war allowed women to mobilize as workers, not just the wives of workers creating an even more explosive situation since millions of people were added to the workforce. And even though they were overworked and extremely underpaid women became more confident in themselves because of their new position in industry. In the introduction to *Women and the Labour Party,* once again Marion Phillips alludes to women's newfound confidence.

---

84 Christopher Addison, *Four and Half Years,*(London-Hutchinson and Co:1934), 261. Even though, according to Rowbotham, 76 middle class volunteers dismissed the problem of TNT poisoning. "Toxic jaundice could cause death; at least 349 cases of serious TNT poisoning were reported, and of these 109 people died. There was also the danger of explosions." An explosion at Woolwich Arsenal broke windows in East London.

[85] LSE, Doc. No. 105, Beveridge Report Ministry of reconstruction-third interim report civil war workers' committee.

[86] Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism,* (London:Croom Helm Ltd.:1977), 129-30; J. Burnett, ed., *Annals of Labour,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press:1974), 130. Burnett chronicles the lives of many working people such as Jenny, a munitions worker, when upon finding out that she had TNT poisoning began to see herself as an organizer. Jenny is but one example of the many thousands of women who were pushed into action in opposition to the degradation of their living or working conditions. Jenny, who had learned about unionization by becoming chairman of her trade union branch, also began to explore the question of woman's suffrage, which she had been only marginally aware of before her initiation into the union.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Apart altogether from the politically and industrially organized women, wherever a few come together, whether at their own door-steps, in social intercourse within their homes, or in the long waiting queues outside the shops, the talk necessarily centers more or less consciously upon the political events of the times. The claims of military service have bereft many homes of their menfolk and burdened the women with a undivided responsibility for the care of their families, which has increased their independence of opinion and decision of action, and this in turn is reflected in their growing readiness to form political judgments.[87]

Earning a living gave them a sense of independence heretofore not felt often by women.

> The British chief factory inspector reported in 1916 a 'new self-confidence engendered in women,' and the *New Statesman* found women to be 'more alert, more critical of the conditions under which they work, more ready to take a stand against injustice than their pre-war selves.' By 1915 the National Union of Women Workers had already held a conference to stress the importance of women's role in Britain's postwar reconstruction.[88]

Adelaide Anderson, a contemporary noticed:

> While the hopeful expansion industry following very soon after the War lasted, there was a remarkable, though temporary, re-absorption of women into their own former occupations. They took with them certain great gains from their recent experiences. They brought into their old industrial environment new ideas of fellowship as well as knowledge of fresh processes and of better rates of pay;' they brought strengthened capacity for trade union organization as well as new ideas of the value of intensive training.[89]

Entering the Labour Party after 1918 many of these women continued to identify solely with working class demands while arguing that middle class women who entered the party were not sensitive to them. Pedersen points to this problem when referring to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association.[90] And yet the LP provided no viable

---

[87] Introduction to *Women and the Labour Party* by Marion Phillips, 1918, 9; Adelaide Mary Anderson in *Women in the Factory an Administrative Adventure, 1893 to 1921,* 231, relates a story about a foreman who in the factory said to her "There is more in this than people think; women have been too much kept back."; Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, 204 writes: "To the shocked stares of the respectable, housewives with husbands away or on night work could now be seen going off in pairs to the pictures or sitting with the glass of stout in the Best Room at the pub."

[88] Marwick, *The Deluge,* 94, 97.

[89] Anderson, *Women In The Factory,* 246.

[90] Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain," 995. "The SSFA was at this stage unable to hear or to produce any egalitarian theory of working women's own legitimate and unmediated claims on the state. Raised in the philanthropic tradition that stressed the performance of reciprocal duties rather than

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

alternative to the problem of demobilization and its consequences but in fact demanded that women give up their place in the factories for the retuning solider. "Mrs. Mitchell Founding member of the North Tottenham Labour Party who willingly gave up her war-time job as a booking office clerk at Finchley Road Station because 'it seemed only fair that women, who had taken men's jobs during the war, should relinquish them when the men came back'[91] was indicative of the attitude of the LP and the TUC. Macarthur agreed to the exclusion of women from engineering at the end of the war if the ASE agreed to help in recruiting women workers.[92] Her sense of class solidarity did not mean jobs for all, but jobs for men as long as they were guaranteed a social wage. The TUC and the LP still rested upon their assumption that the craft workers should continue to receive jobs at the expense of all others. As a solution to this most insoluble problem the TUC argued for the reorganization of the unemployment insurance but did not call for the reorganization of industry. Moreover, the government deemed that women who had lost their jobs because of demobilization were given too high a benefit and thus Sir Robert Horne thought it necessary to decrease the little insurance that women were receiving. According to Horne, "the disparity between the amount of unemployment donation payable to women and the amount they were able to earn in many employments before the war, and can now, has created a very natural reluctance to go back to work so long as the donation lasts."[93]

---

the possession of rights, voluntary workers fell back on their defense of cross-class sympathy and moral reform-a vision deeply out of step with wartime democratic sentiment."

[91] Pamela Graves, *Labour Women: British Working Class Politics 1918-39,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1994), 15

[92] Pedersen, *Family,Dependence*, 99.

[93] *Worker's Dreadnought*, March 8, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But during the war, working women who had previously been involved in many struggles that had included their husbands were themselves foisted on the stage of working class revolt. They had taken the lead in the rent strikes on the Clyde in 1915, had worked in textile industries and picketed alongside their husbands when they fought the mine owners. For the first time women in the millions became industrial workers fighting to obtain a decent standard of living for themselves as well as their children. All of these struggles gave them a different perspective on the world. They too talked about socialism and joined unions. They added a missing piece to the organization of the entire working class. In fact, maintains Graves "a sense of optimism and evangelical fervour pervaded the British labour movement in the years immediately following the First World War. In such an atmosphere, new women members were not inclined to question the sincerity of the Labour Party's commitment to the equality of the sexes."[94] 'They expected to join the fight for class justice on equal terms with their male comrades. Some had higher expectations. They were convinced that as women, they would transform the movement, replacing male politics as-usual uplifting the whole of humanity."[95]

[94] Graves, *Labour Women,* 1.
[95] Mrs. Fawcett, LNF WWJ, Speech at the L.P. Annual Conference, 1918, L.P. report (1918), 108.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 3: THE TRADES UNION AND LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP

The trade union leadership failed miserably to defend the workers, leaving an opening for new leaders to appear. They not only encouraged support for the war effort but they discouraged any resistance against the hardship that it would inevitably bring.[1] Supporting a British victory over Germany meant that the union leaders encouraged their membership to do the same. Even those leaders who once challenged management capitulated to the war fever and thus discouraged workers from striking. In fact no-strike pledges were signed criminalizing workers if they did strike. Mingled with this super-patriotism, leaders such as Arthur Henderson and Robert Clynes' joined Lloyd George's government. Anti-German propaganda fostered by Ben Tillett, used inflammatory descriptions such as Hun when referring to the Germans. Therefore, all Germans, not just the government, were the enemy. If any anti-war feelings existed among workers their leaders, in the main, sought to stamp them out. Beatrice Webb describes the traditional union leaders as follows: "The trade union leaders are hopeless."

> Yesterday I spent two hours…struggling with their complacent stupidity and apathy, and with the real desire of some of them to prevent anything being published that would 'arouse expectation', and lead to anything beyond what the Government is conceding. Bowerman does not believe there will be any serious labour difficulties or unemployment after the War; and has really no desire to get anything done. They fail altogether to realise the three-quarters of the whole who are outside trade unionism, or the low paid laborers and women, or the incapacity and disorganisation of the trade unions themselves.[2]

And while Webb's characterization of the leaders is quite harsh many of the characteristics that she ascribes to them were not far from the truth. For example, although Ben Tillet, initially gained his reputation as a fighter, especially given his

---

[1] And yet leaders such as Arthur Henderson referred to the need to run industry cooperatively affording workers more control in its management. 24.

[2] Norman Mackenzie, ed., Webb, B. and S., *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,* 1912-1947, Vol. III, (Cambridge- Cambridge University Press: 1978), 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leadership in the 1899 struggles, as the war approached his views on class struggle began to change dramatically. Tillett had become so rabidly anti-German that although at one time seen as a troublemaker, and a friend of George Lansbury, he ultimately opposed all strikes, raising the cry "that the only good German was a dead one."[3]

Leaders such as Ben Tillett and J.H. Thomas, President of the National Union of Railwaymen, promoted the righteousness of the war. Workers were encouraged to fight Germany and Prussianism. Tillett argued that not only should workers support the war, but they should also be responsible for its prosecution.

> We should realize that we are more responsible for this war than Lord Kitchener. We have greater responsibilities in it than the Government or the Army Council. The men who are fighting are men of our own class. Instead of yapping like terriers we should join hands in this great conflict. I hope that if conscription is to come about we shall be men, and that if they conscript our bodies we shall conscript the material wealth of the country.[4]

He feared German competition and therefore discouraged dissent at home. He encouraged the dissemination of information about the soldiers' plight in the trenches so that the demands of workers at home would seem selfish and thus discouraged. Once discouraged, reports of German atrocities, real or fabricated were embellished. Lloyd George aware of the fact that there would be a profound change in the relations between management and labor attempted to solicit the support of men like Tillett to prevent problems from arising. In a letter Lloyd George wrote: "It is very difficult to gauge what the actual effect of war under modern conditions will be upon either capital or labour, but one thing is already perfectly obvious-it must effect a revolutionary change in the

---

[3] Johnathan Schneer, *Ben Tillet:Portrait of a Labour Leader,* (Urbana:University of Illinois Press:1982), 175.
[4] The *Times,* September 9, 1915.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

relations of the State to both."[5] Tillett took it as his charge to monitor those relations. In fact, so seriously did Tillett accept this responsibility that he became one of the main organizers of the British Workers' National League (BWNL), which gained the approval of Bonar Law. The BWNL absorbed the National Alliance of Employers and Employed and the associated Industrial League for the Improvement of Relations between Employers and Employed. In a meeting on June 17, 1915 Tillett pledged to assist the government in its prosecution of the war.

> That this Annual Meeting ...heartily welcomes the cooperation between the Government and organised labour for the purpose of accelerating the output of adequate munitions of war. It further approves the scheme to avoid all factious disputes during the War by means of compulsory arbitration, and pledges itself to assist the Minister of Munitions to the utmost of its ability....[6]

For many it was difficult to imagine that Tillett should change so radically. His positive views on empire coupled with his racist attitudes towards the emigration of Jews into Britain earlier in the century,[7] and his fear that both Germany and the United States would overtake Britain economically, led him to be one of Britain's staunchest supporters.[8] Along with the dockers' leader Labour also supported the war and thus the war effort. John McGovern, an Independent Labour Party member and a conscientious objector, in *Neither Fear Nor Favor,* recalled when being called up to serve: "I intimated that I was a conscientious objector to military service. In due course I was brought before a local tribunal on which were serving members of the Labour Party. They were

---

[5] PRO, T 172/980, Lloyd George to Tillett, August 25, 1914.
[6] National Transport Workers' Federation, Annual General Council Meeting, 1915, 495 0.
[7] Tillett and others opposed Jewish immigration into Britain.
[8] Jonathan Schneer, *Ben Tillett,* 188. "He mixed with the Duchess of Marlborough and Lord Rhondda; and Cabinet Ministers like Hayes Fisher, President of the Local Government Board and H.A.L. Fisher, President of the Board of Trade...He had heard the Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Dunn, compliment him on having 'laboured well in the cause of Empire'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

all known to me, but they were even more intolerant and unjust than the Tory members."[9] Since Ramsay MacDonald was forced to resign over his moderately anti-war stance, the LP was free to frame its support for the war effort. The union leadership not only joined a coalition government and helped it to prosecute the war, it set up recruiting drives in order to encourage workers to join the armed forces.

Unlike their leaders the motives of British workers for support for the war were complex and varied encompassing the belief that they were in some way contributing to the forces of democracy by defending Belgium against German imperialism. Upon examining the question of why so many workers joined the armed services Robert Smillie, the miners' leader argued "Men of all ranks rushed to join the army, for what to them seemed the holiest cause that could be-the defense of small nations and treaties. Fathers and sons went together to recruiting offices, and fathers made misstatements about their ages in order to be accepted as recruits."[10] Moreover, leaders such as Henderson encouraged workers to go into the munitions industry and "become a War worker, a life saver putting pressure on those workers who had not yet joined the effort. He argued: "The workmen of Germany have been long the enemy of the British. They have been making munitions of war secretly, preparing to conquer you-gain our trade-to take your work away.'"[11]

---

[9] John McGovern, *Neither Fear Nor Favor,* (London:Blandford Press:1960), 44in the Mancheste r Guardian, October 2, 1915 one of the lead articles was *Labour Call for Recruits.*

[10] Kellogg and Gleason, *British Workers and the War, Reconstructs for a New World,* (New York:Garland Publishing, Inc.:1992), 166.

[11] "The Emergency Workers' National Committee, 217.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Havelock Wilson, head of the Seaman's union and staunch supporter of the war,[12] had by 1914 "decided to cooperate fully in the war effort, shelving for the time being all campaigning on the seamen's grievances..."[13] Maintaining extremely racist views, especially against Chinese workers, he not only supported an exclusion act but his support for the British government was so extreme that he pushed for a boycott of Germany long after the war was over. Moreover, as a way of undermining militant actions in other sectors of the economy, Wilson participated in setting up management boards to control activity in those areas.[14] The vast majority of trade union officials supported the war. Labour and the TUC officials were able to secure workers' support and thereby were assured a seat as partners in a society that incorporated them into the running of the state.

Industrial conscription, agreed to by the union leadership, impacted men and women alike. But as voluntarism began to wind down the government was forced to impose military conscription in order to guarantee sufficient recruits. At a joint conference of the Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Advisory Labour Committee in January, 1916 the officials declared:

> While we are opposed to military conscription in every shape and form under ordinary circumstances this conference cannot see its way to recommend any action that would weaken or injure our country in the present crisis, and thus help

---

[12] By 1917, when much of the rest of the union leadership was calling for a negotiated settlement and attempted to meet with other leaders in Stockholm, Wilson refused to allow the seamen to bring them there.
[13] Basil Mogridge, "Inter-Union Rivalries in British Shipping: 1911-1927," *International Review of Social History*Vol. VI, (1961), 387.
[14] This attitude was shared among most of the trade union and L.P. leaders. George Barnes was so fearful of class warfare that he wrote in *Industrial Conflict,* (London:Sir Pitman and Pitman and Sons:1924), 3-4, "The problem is how to get employer and employed to co-operate in a more efficient production of wealth while making further progress toward getting the worker his due share in the advantage of modern civilization. If they cannot, or will not tender such co-operation, that we are heading for class-war revolution and industrial relations will shape themselves accordingly."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> our enemies but recommends that the Labour Party accept the military service Bill.[15]

The working class overwhelmingly opposed military conscription. But Arthur Henderson argued:

> If I support this measure, this particular modified form of compulsion, it is because it does not, in the circumstances, violate any principle to which I am attached, and it is because I see in it none of the insidious menaces to industrial freedom of which we have heard or read so much…In fact, I say the rights, not only of Labour, but of democracy are bound up with the victory which may depend upon this Bill…those who fear that compulsion will remain after the war are those who have no faith in our victory.[16]

In effect, Henderson denied the profoundly negative implications for workers. Acceptance of these edicts meant that workers were denied their basic rights to fight for decent contracts.[17] Henderson became part of the inner circle of five. The war government (June, 1915) had created a Ministry of Labour, which was awarded to Henderson. John Hodge, George Barnes, J.R. Clynes and Lloyd George completed the cabinet. It was not until 1917 that Henderson left the coalition, although Barnes and Clynes remained until 1918. In addition to endorsing the war "only nine Labour Members actually voted against the Bill (Military Service Bill…) [18] compelling workers to enlist.

---

[15] Glasgow Caledonian University, Joint Conference of the Trades Union Congress and Scottish Advisory Labour Committee, January 15, 1916.

[16] This can be found in the University of North London in the section on Industrial Compulsion in the Dockers' Record, January 12, 1916.

[17] G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.:1948), 24 writes: "On March 17 Lloyd George summoned the Trade Unions to the first Treasury Conference, at which the Government asked for a suspension for the duration of the war of all Trade Union practices and customs that might impede war production, on a promise that no obstacles would be put in the way of the restoration of the suspended practices when the war was over. It required a further Conference, a week later, at which the Government promised a limitation of profits on munitions work, to induce the powerful Amalgamated Society of Engineers to accept the Treasury Agreement; but the other Unions concerned, except the Miners' Federation, accepted at once, and as soon as the ASE had come in the Government set up a National Labour Advisory Committee, under Arthur Henderson's chairmanship, to advise it on labour problems arising under the agreement. The terms included compulsory arbitration of wartime disputes as well as the suspension of Trade Union practices as a means to what soon came to be known as 'dilution" of labour'."

[18] Addison, *Four and a Half Years,*159.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The LP was firmly in support of the war and all of its implications. In fact, speaking in the House of Commons Barnes exclaimed, "It is no time now to emphasise differences between class and class. It is no time now to 'nurse their wrath and keep it warm' against anybody within the confines of their own shores. It is a time when all classes ought to make common cause to defend and maintain the best that we have won."[19] Class struggle was to be replaced and support for the motherland encouraged. Britain's traditional voluntary army had by 1916 become compulsory.

As the War persisted a series of Defense of the Realm Acts (DORA) were passed. Workers who did not comply with the law were sent to special Military Tribunals. Because workers were disproportionately drafted and were thus in absolute numbers more often killed than was the middle or upper classes, the Labour Party and the TUC opposed the draft. The Trades Union Congress initially opposed the implementation of the draft arguing that state intervention was a contravention of people's long established liberty against military conscription. The government, according to the TUC, should have been prohibited from imposing its will, at least in this area, on its citizenry. But not too long after their initial opposition to the draft the Labour Party agreed to support laws that would not only criminalize workers who did not wish to be drafted, but agreed to the demand of industrial conscription as well.[20] Workers, in disagreement with their leaders, opposed the draft so completely, since they believed it was a violation of their rights as British citizens that the LP was sent out by the government as recruiting agents for the

[19] Barnes, *Hansard,* H. C., May 3, 1916, 54.
[20] Ben Tillet, who referred to Germans as Huns, was just one example of the patriotic feeling that was encircling the union leaders. Some of the leaders would have their membership singing songs such as *Britannia Rules the Waves.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

war. In response workers argued that Prussiansim had been visited upon Britain as well,[21] ostensibly negating, they believed the reason for waging war against Germany. For workers, conscription seemed a potential harbinger of an even worse situation: that is industrial conscription with the full subjection of industrial workers to military authority. Their discontent around the issue resulted in strikes involving tens of thousands of workers. The struggle over conscription became a regular event especially on the Clyde in Scotland. But even before the military draft was implemented workers opposed the implications of the industrial draft that was implemented once the no-strike agreements were reached with the unions.[22] Resolutions from a variety of trades were passed at union meetings. The NUR's resolution denouncing conscription went as follows: "That we the members of the Edinburgh No 1 Branch of the NUR protest against any form of compulsion or conscription being forced on the workers of the country and we hold that it would be detrimental to their best interest…[23]

For many workers the war was now being waged against them at least as much as it was against the Germans. Whether or not the struggle against conscription meant that the workers were anti-war per se the gravity of the situation forced them to change their

---

[21] See Carl Brand, *The British Labour Party,* 43, and Angela Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress: The First 80 Years 1897-1977,* (Edinburg:Mainstream Publishing:1986), 130. At the Scottish Trades Union Congress she recounts a meeting at the Glasgow Trades Council where workers opposed conscription; since single men were called up first and married men were exempt the rate of marriages increased. According to Roberts' *The Classic Slum*, 151, "This started a run on the registry office that vied with the rush to the colours: 1915 held the palm for the highest number taking to matrimony ever recorded in Great Britain."

[22] D.F. MacDonald, *The State and the Trade Unions,* (London:MacMillan and Co Ltd.:1960), 84. After the initial pause, the number of recorded stoppages swelled from ten at the beginning of 1915, to seventy-four in March of the same year. There were ugly strikes in the shipbuilding and engineering industries on the Clyde; partly political-the IL.P. was strongly entrenched there-and partly in revolt against the 'Industrial Truce.'

[23] National Library of Scotland Minute Book, acc 4313 (16) Resolutions by NUR, September 19th, 1915, 87-88.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

once wholehearted support for it.[24] In order that workers not feel as if they were footing the entire responsibility for the war, the official trade union leadership [25] adopted the demand for the conscription of wealth, that is, making the wealthy pay for the war debt. After the government's call for conscription, conferences organized by some of the larger unions such as the miners, the railwaymen,[26] the dockers and the postal workers were organized to deal with this question. Not surprisingly, Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, condemned these resolutions. As a Conservative he opposed the capital levy (tax on wealth). Although far from calling for expropriation, these resolutions began to expose the discrepancies that existed between capital and labour encouraging many of the official labor leaders to break with governmental policies and ultimately with the Coalition Government. But this was not to happen until 1917.

Not only did the trade union leadership pay little attention to the abuses that continued to plague the armed forces but they did not recognize the deeper motivation for the draft. But the *Daily Herald* exposed what it believed were the motivations for the war. "Another conscriptionist Colonel Sir A. Fitzgeorge, gave the game away by indiscreetly blurting out that "Compulsory service was necessary at this time when the workers were getting out of hand."[27] According to the *Herald* conscription served a dual purpose: that is, to prosecute the war against Germany in order to maintain its economic

---

[24] This issue will be more fully addressed in the next chapter.
[25] The Birmingham Trades Union leadership adopted this demand.
[26] By 1915 upon the suggestion that workers should be conscripted into the army a special Congress was called in order to decide the question. Cole writes: "A resolution in favour of accepting conscription of single men was defeated by 2,121,000 votes to 541,000 and a resolution of uncompromising opposition, put forward by the National Union of Railwaymen and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, was carried by 1,715,000 to 934,000 and then, on a second vote, by 1,998,000 to 783,000. This resolution called on the Parliamentary Labour Party to oppose the Conscription Bill in all its stages." This sentiment was repeated in other major conferences as well. In Bristol, in January 1916, included with the NUR was the Women's Labour League, which also opposed the Military Service Bill (No. 2).
[27] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hegemony and, to keep workers in line during a time of tremendous industrial distress and upheaval. Hostility to profiteering had become endemic in the labor movement and the excess profit taxation, that is profits deemed to be unfairly excessive, was one of the principal trade union conditions for accepting the Munitions of War Act in mid-1915 that called for compulsory arbitration and dilution of labor. But, in the main, since the union leaders were unwilling to jeopardize the war effort, both the TUC and the Labour Party refused to support the Webbs' proposal regarding taxation of wealth. Webb argued, workers were sacrificing their lives for the war, therefore the wealthy, at least, should be forced to pay a larger burden of the taxes to pay for it. Being shaken by the pre-war labor unrest, Sydney Webb attempted to redress some of the inequities that were inevitably born out of the war prompting him to endorse more encompassing social programs.[28] But even a National Labor Conference was unacceptable to many of the leaders.

> When, in April 1916, the government proposed to extend the Military Service Act, the Committee [Workers' National Committee] felt strong enough not only to maintain its own independence but to call upon the TUC to rise to its responsibilities and convene a special National Labour Conference. The TUC, the GFTU and the Labour Party all resisted this suggestion, holding that the Government's recruiting proposal was essential to the winning of the war.[29]

Resentment, already growing over the question of conscription became focused on the high cost of food and the long lines confronted by workers daily.[30] According to The *Times:* "Among the working classes the belief is widespread that the rise in prices is due not so much to natural causes arising out of a state of war, as much as to the actions of shipowners and monopolists in availing themselves of the state of war to make

---

[28] J.Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War, Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-18*(London:Routledge and Kegan Paul:1974), 31.
[29] Harrison, "The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920," 245.
[30] Weller, *Don't be a Soldier!*, 1918 saw near food riots in at least one section of London, 82.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

enormous profits."[31] Workers were aware that the employers profited greatly.[32] W.C. Anderson, a Labour MP, sensitive to the complaints of workers, although not a revolutionary himself, complained of the position of workers in the factories, thereby attempting to demonstrate the inequities that prevailed which created an acute sense of unfairness among employees. The case was demonstrated poignantly by Josiah Stamp, a LP member, who made his report about Exceptional Profits that employers earned due to the War and yet Labour continued to endorse conscription and actively go about attempting to recruit workers to this end. The excessive profits in the midst of tremendous sacrifice by workers put many LP members into a compromised position in relation to their own constituency. For instance,

> shipowners, corn merchants, millers and sugar merchants were amongst those who effortlessly profited from the increased value of their services and stocks. The whole trade profits for the United Kingdom in prewar years were normally between £500m and £600m and in 1915 profits exceeded that figure by about £80m to £90m exclusive of shipping and £120m to £130m inclusive.[33]

"Enormous shipping profits continued to be made until the extension of government control in early 1917..."[34] It was mainly the ILP and The War Emergency: Workers' National Committee (Webb's organization) that pushed conscription of wealth as a way of equalizing the sacrifices that workers were asked to pay. As a consequence, by 1916, massive upheavals occurred in many of the major industries with the result that workers began to put their trust in the unofficial leaders. The Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Labour Party largely organized the demonstrations on the Clyde. They

---

[31] The *Times*, August 19, 1916; Gray, *War Time Control of Industry,* 89. By September 1916 prices jumped 65 percent over pre-war prices and by September, 1917 they jumped 85 percent.
[32] Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, 187. Employers not only profited by the war but the wealthy rode around in their cars garnering more of the rationed foods than workers could manage to obtain.
[33] Bernard, Waites, *A Class Society at War England 1914-1918,* (New York:Leamington Spa:Berg:1987), 100.
[34] Ibid, 100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were industrial strikes, that is, they involved both skilled and semi-skilled workers. Moreover, resentment against the industrial truce was a factor that prompted workers' outbreaks as well. The proposal to extend dilution to private firms in 1917 set off the May strikes on the Clyde with the result that the government was forced to abandon the idea. The fact that government workers were required to obtain "leaving passes" from their employers in order to obtain work elsewhere is what prompted much of the anger. "The cooperation of the trade union leadership was essential, and it was willingly extended. In March, 1915, trade union spokesmen were summoned to consult with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade, whose department was responsible for labour affairs, on the measures to be taken."[35] To be invited into the government's inner circle, argues D.F. MacDonald, was recognition of labor's power, but workers, especially those on the Clyde but not exclusive to it, perceived this cooperation by their union leaders as a way of undermining their rights and thus sought leadership that was outside the official trade union channels. In response to workers' growing suspicion the Clyde Workers' Committee came into existence and support for the Committee was overwhelmingly endorsed by tens of thousands of workers, which cohered into strike activity. Shop Stewards argued that the tendency of the union leaders to capitulate made it imperative to organize strikes that did not rely on the officials. The unofficial leaders insisted: "Strikes at present can only be led by persons who are not weighed down with official responsibility."[36] But these genuinely revolutionary workers could not provide a systematic alternative to the officials so that while strikes were massive and militant they did not challenge the status quo.

---

[35] Ibid, 84.
[36] Hull University, DAR/1/12, The Engineering Strike, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Strikes in the mines where syndicalism had been the strongest also occurred. As a result in a strike in the South Wales mines (1917) the government was forced to concede the miners' demands. And with the advent of the Russian Revolution the National Workers' Committee Movement that had been formed in opposition to the traditional leadership took on an even more radical tone. In the face of this growing alienation of working people from their union leadership and with the acceptance of the shop stewards as their de facto spokesmen the union leadership recognized that they had much less control over the ranks. Therefore, by 1917 the officials were seeking a negotiated settlement in order to end the war. Upheavals that remained illegal and were denied any financial assistance by their official leaders occurred in ever-greater numbers. Pressured by workers' willingness to go out and defy the law caused the members of the Labour Party to have second thoughts about remaining in the government. Henderson's resignation from the cabinet in 1917 was recognition of this pressure that he and the other members of the Labour leadership were under by their memberships to end the war.[37]

The Labour officials did not officially leave the Coalition Government until November 1918 but by that time the leaders of the LP recognized that they had become the number one opposition in the country. For all intents and purposes the Liberal Party was no longer the effective opposition. In response to this new situation Labour began to

---

[37] MacKenzie, ed., *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, 110. According to Sidney Webb in a letter to Sir Oliver Lodge "the seven Labour ministers wished to remain in the government and profit from the coupon. At a special Labour conference on 14 November the vote was 2,117,000 in favour of leaving the coalition and 810,000 against. Four of the Labour ministers (Barnes, Roberts, Wardle and Parker) left the party and remained as temporary 'Labour' supporters of Lloyd George; the other three (Clynes, Hodge and Walsh) reluctantly accepted the party call to resign."; Gilbert, *British Social Policy,* 13 "at the end of December, a conference called jointly by the Labour party and the Trades Union Congress executive agreed by an overwhelming majority to press for a humanitarian and just, rather than a victor's, peace with Germany."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

codify its ideas in the new war aims,[38] encompassing Webb's demand requiring that wealth be taxed and not workers to pay for the war.[39] Its program was sufficiently vague as to mean little. Socialistic phrasing such as the democratic control of industry and the surplus wealth for the common good were not coupled with concrete measures to achieve these goals. The universal enforcement of the National Minimum (that is, a floor under which wages cannot sink) and a call for the revolution in national finance were demands they believed achievable under a capitalist state.[40] Mainly viewing socialism as some sort of cooperative society, Snowden and MacDonald contended that employers and workers would instinctually understand the need for cooperation, discarding the antiquated notion that it was necessary to change the nature of the political system in order to achieve genuine workers' control of industry. According to Snowden:

> The mere fear or threat of confiscation would have a disastrous effect upon production. Capitalists could not be expected to continue to produce, to renew their plant, to improve their processes if the spectre of confiscation were before them. It would be harmful, if not disastrous, to nationalization to advocate a policy which would lower the efficiency of the industries it is proposed to acquire. Nothing could be more silly than the idea which has found favour in some quarters that the best policy to pursue in anticipation of nationalization is to sabotage the capitalist concerns. The higher the state of efficiency of an industry when it is acquired by the community, the better are the chances of its success as a nationalized enterprise.[41]

---

[38] Vol V No. 6, October 1919. Although vague this program expressed the desire of the ranks for nationalization on industry and by 1919 at the 51st Trades Union Congress, which was held in Glasgow. Bevin put forth a resolution calling for the Nationalisation of Banking which was passed unanimously.
[39] James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism,* 103, argues that this new social program *Labour and the New Social Order* was in fact extremely moderate in its aims. "The implementation of this programme would have meant not state socialism, but state-aided capitalism. Clause Four, studiously vague on the critical issue of workers' control, was intended as much to contain as to express the ambitions of the L.P.'s rank and file."
[40] Philip Snowden confuses popular sovereignty with the absolute bourgeois nature of the state thus arguing wrongly that workers could control Parliament if they were only aware of their own class interests.
[41] Philip Snowden, "The Way to Industrial Peace," 83, is a 1927 article cited in *The Brotherhood Movement in Capitol and Labor.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The confusion that ruled Snowden's philosophy emanated from his fear of workers' control but concomitantly was also based on the knowledge that workers would accept little else and thus was forced to sound socialistic in his rhetoric. It was with the help of the new radicals that a body of views was cohered on both domestic and foreign affairs, and set in motion a relationship between the trade unions (which retained the largest percentage of seats after its reconstitution in 1918) and the middle class represented by people such as the Webbs. They were what were characterized as the "brains" in the LP's slogan the joining of the "brains" and the "hand" workers. Disliking the violence and disorder that accompanied many of the strikes, they condemned them.[42] By 1918 the Labour Party began to reflect the views of people such as the Webbs hoping to find ways of controlling these upsurges. Although the LP was pressured (for fear of further explosions by the workers) into supporting Clause IV, that is the call for nationalization of industry, which was incorporated into its 1918 constitution, the entrée of people such as the Webbs determined the middle class nature of the Party. Paul Blanshard, a contemporary, wrote:

> The Labor Party has succeeded in drawing to its ranks many of the ablest leaders of the professions. These middle-class folks have made the party more than a class party. It is a party for all those who believe in a social order based on labor and cooperation. The brain workers, who at first felt out of place in the party, are joining it in increasing numbers. Even Bishops of the Established Church are on its roll.[43]

Blanshard describes the Party as more than a class party. That is despite the fact that the LP was based on the working class, its attitudes, ideas and program did not necessarily reflect workers' class needs. The leadership, as Blanshard aptly states was middle class

---

[42] Ibid, 57. Snowden applauds the involvement of the middle class because he viewed them as a bulwark against revolution. "...they bring with them into the Labour party the traditional British middle class views of constitutional methods which will act as a restraining influence upon wild and revolutionary ideas."
[43] Paul Blanshard, *An Outline of the British Labor Movement,* (New York:George H. Doran Co.:1923), 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and thus even Bishops could find a home for themselves in an organization that would not explicitly condemn capitalist property relations. It is no wonder that Margaret Cole states:

> It is evident that taxation is the Labour Party's substitute for the Red Terror. It proposes to abolish the privileged classes of Great Britain by a sagacious use of the old-fashioned weapon the Government Budget…The program which they propose is one of slow transformation and they are warning their followers not to expect a millennium in a night if the party attains possession of the government.[44]

Its program argued for gradual reform of industry promising that the lives of workers would be less burdened since they would share in the running of industry. A most prominent LP spokesman and ultimately Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1924 Philip Snowden argued: "the 'class war' is based upon a false conception of the true nature of industry. It assumes the permanent antagonism of the interests of capital and labour."[45] In the same speech he maintained that: "peace is not only possible under capitalism but has been proved to be so in innumerable instances…"[46] The program of gradual reform was in direct opposition to the reality of the everyday lives of workers who demonstrated the antagonism between capital and labor.

Workers were daily humiliated by the employers and were intensely exploited. Intent on increasing their profit margins and assuring their hegemony, they continued to show complete disregard for the rights of their employees. This could have only been accomplished with the connivance of the union leaders. Their strategy was to plead with

---

[44] Margaret Cole, ed., *Beatrice Webb,* 41.
[45] Philip Snowden, "The Way to Industrial Peace," 24.
[46] Ibid, 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the employers rather than mount a fight on behalf of their workers.[47] Employers were thus emboldened.

The leadership from more left wing organizations began to formulate their views upon which a future society would be constructed. Industry was to be used for the good of society by organizing it along cooperative lines. By the time the Bristol Convention took place in 1918 declaring a new Labour Party, clauses that included nationalization of property were included in the constitution. The incorporation of these new demands was due to the upheavals of working people against the restrictions that challenged workers' rights. The union and LP leaderships were consequently forced to confront the reality of a society where industry, rather than collectively run, was held by individual capitalists setting the stage for future struggles of the working class which would inevitably come once the crisis of war was ended.

[47] The National Library of Scotland, Dep 201 (49). As an example of this, the National Federation of Foundry Union workers complained at a conference that the workers were shut out because they were five minutes late to work. Rather than challenge the foreman the union representatives merely pleaded that he be fair to the worker. In a situation where workers had to travel long distances to get to work, getting to work on time posed many problems. Transportation was often unreliable and in many cases workers had to walk hours to arrive at their worksites. "We don't plead for the principle that a man should be allowed to come and go to his work as he pleases, but we do plead that these things should be taken into consideration, and if a day's work is lost there is a serious loss both to the man and to the employer" explained the union leaders not wishing to appear too demanding.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 4: WORKERS' ATTITUDES ABOUT THE WAR

The question of how workers felt about the war is a very complex one. Fighting with Germany and her allies took place just after major demonstrations were held in Britain prior to the war creating a complicated situation politically. Since conscription, not a part of the vocabulary of the British populous had by 1916 been implemented; feelings and attitudes of workers about the war were compounded and in some ways confused because of it. Consequently the focus on eliminating conscription,[1] so prevalent within working class institutions, sidetracked the focus on the war. In fact rather than agitating within the armed forces against the war organizations such as the BSP lost some of its members once they became conscientious objectors. The question of conscription was particularly volatile for British workers and therefore many historians have missed the fact that they, especially after the Russian Revolution, opposed the war.

Historians such as FL Carsten in his *war against war* assert that the pro-war elements in the working class were fairly prominent in Britain during the war years and the anti-war competitors could do little to change the balance of forces. Pacifists, socialists and anti-war activists, according to Carsten, were often run off stages where they held meetings and therefore were ineffective in changing the sentiments of everyday

[1] Unlike in countries such as France and Germany, British workers had not had to suffer compulsion and so while they initially went to the recruiting centers in droves by 1915 the numbers began to fall off dramatically. Therefore in order to bolster the recruitment numbers the Derby Scheme was implemented. Employers were encouraged to let workers go in order to make the armed forces the only available option. Before conscription arm-twisting was the method by which the government would compel workers to join. An advertisement in the November 15 *Glasgow Herald* demonstrates this approach. "Enlist before 30th November. If you do not, the Prime Minister has pledged himself and his Government that compulsory means will be taken." But this approach was basically unsuccessful. The government's schemes to compel without compulsion were not working. Moreover, over a million single men who expected to attest did not, thus married men were not expected to attest either. So under the Army Act and the Reserve Force Act, 1882 to 1907, which applied to British males who were either unmarried or widowed without dependent children and were between the ages of 18 and 41, they were to report for the reserves for the duration of the war. And even after conscription was passed in 1916, by March, although 193,891 men were called up, 57,416 failed to report. Resolutions such as the one that the Trade Union Congress passed in September 1917 leave little doubt that the working class opposed the government's conscription plan.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers. Trevor Wilson argues that workers were generally conservative and some groups such as the engineers were parochial and opposed the draft only for themselves. He also points to the seamen's unwillingness to take delegates from Britain to a peace conference in Stockholm as proof of the pro-war feelings. As a result of Havelock Wilson's defiance against the conference he instructed his men not to transport Henderson to Stockholm and thus he was unable to meet with his counterparts to discuss a negotiated settlement. And even the votes in support of the Stockholm Conference, says Trevor Wilson, were slim and were eventually eroded, leaving people like Arthur Henderson, head of the LP, to flounder. Wilson further argues that although people were disturbed by the bread lines they had to endure, often for hours at a time, this inconvenience did not change their fundamental support for the war. As proof of this support he argues that soldiers geared up for the main push in 1917-1918 that ended the war, allowing for Britain's ultimate victory over Germany. He asserts that there is convincing evidence that British workers remained loyal to the government's war efforts until the end. In support of this position, historian Brock Millman takes us through the shifting positions of the government with the hope of maintaining domestic peace, but he too argues that workers stayed loyal enough so that Britain could be victorious. The government, maintains Millman, through a variety of mechanisms, attempted to meet a greater degree of dissent as the disgust for war deepened. By the end of the war the plans put into effect by the state, fearing the possibility of a revolt, became quite elaborate.[2]

---

[2] Niall Ferguson's, *The Pity of War,* 206, supports Millman's thesis about the tightening of the fist of the British government. Not only did the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee build up "an impressive organization of 2,000 volunteers who managed to organize 12,000 meetings at which some 20,000 speeches were delivered, to send out 8 million recruiting letter and to distribute no fewer than 54 million posters, leaflets and other publications, " but economic factors were a definite factor in recruitment. "Nine out of ten of the working men laid off in Bristol in the first month of the war joined up; enlistment rates were clearly lower in areas where business quickly picked up again."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But, argues Millman, aside from the Clyde "what appears to be the case is that while they [workers] might strike from time to time, and would often grumble, the majority of the working class and most of the rank and file union membership supported the war effort for the duration."[3] Historians such as Stephen Graubard submit "the ordinary British trade unionist would have taken much the same view; (that is they would have continued to support the Trade Union leaders) so long as the nation remained at war, military considerations were paramount."[4] Therefore, there seems to be some substantial arguments on the side of the historians who suggest that British workers were largely, or at least in part, patriotic or patriotic enough to defeat Germany.

But contemporaries such as the Webbs argued differently. Beatrice Webb in her letter to her husband Sidney wrote on August 13, 1917: "Hutchinson (Engineers) declared that no responsible T.U. leader could now say with any confidence that his members were for continuing the war, the feeling had quite changed since a year ago."[5] And in South Wales "Mrs. Pankhurst has been holding recruiting meetings...and she says there are districts where the people simply don't care whether the Germans are beaten or not."[6] With the war dragging on and with the Bolsheviks discovery of the secret documents, which exposed the truth about the real motives for the war, workers attitudes' began to shift. According to documented evidence plans were set in motion by the allies to stake their claim on the territories of the Middle East (originally the Ottoman Empire)

---

[3] Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent,* 36.
[4] Stephen Graubard. *British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press:1956), 62.
[5] Mackenzie, ed., *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,* 92.
[6] Durham, "Origins and Early Years," 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and Africa.[7] Rather than little Belgium being the reason for war, workers discovered that it was an excuse. After the Russian Revolution, with the exposure of the true war aims of the competing nations, papers such as the *Socialist*[8] exposed the fact that the British government was largely concerned with its imperialist venture. According to Carl Brand these revelations were grist for the ILP-UDC's mill, which exploited them in whatever way they could. But the more significant change came with the trade unions and the Labour Party, which began passing resolutions against the war calling on the government for a negotiated peace. The Birmingham Labour Party was indignant.[9] And in Sheffield "by early 1917, the pro-war members of the Trades and Labour Council were in a small minority and the Council regularly pronounced in favour of a negotiated peace, against the policies of the Government, and, more radically, against the contemporary ruling class and the political and economic system that sustained it."[10] Moreover, demonstrations of thousands of workers in Glasgow, but not limited to it, impacted both the government and the Labour Party essentially forcing the latter to split off (1917) from the Coalition government.[11] And the fact that the Labour Party had to adopt new war aims, which included opposition to annexations, demonstrates the pressure they felt due to growing working class discontent. Arthur Henderson (and the rest of the trade union leadership) had been, from the beginning, super patriots, but by 1917 he was canvassing

---

[7] One such agreement was the Sykes (British) Picot (French) agreement in 1916, which divided up territories in the Middle East. In the Allied secret documents Russia was given Constantinople and the Straits, while the Turkish Empire in the Middle East was parcelled out to the allies.
[8] *Socialist,* "Exposure of War Aims," April, 1918.
[9] Carl F. Brand, *British Labour's Rise to Power,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1941), 101.
[10] Boughton, "Working-Class Politics," 29.
[11] In James Young's *The Rising of the Scottish Working Class,* (London:Croom Helm:1979), 189, writes: "The anti-war stance of the Scottish labour movement was already evident in 1914; and in Glasgow in 1915 John Maclean told a May Day rally attended by 50,000 working men and women that they ought to fight for 'freedom and liberty at home before going to Flanders to die for it'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for a Stockholm Conference[12] and a negotiated settlement. So there is much evidence that contradicts these authors' suppositions that the working class mainly, until the end, endorsed the government's war efforts. It was apparent that by the time the Russian revolution occurred, resolutions in meetings all around the country were being passed that not only cheered the revolution but also called for the conclusion of the war.[13] It was obvious to people such as the Webbs that workers were fed up with the war and were becoming angry at its continuation.[14] In Britain the trade union leaders were entrenched and the opposition tended not to challenge them, leaving the way clear for their continuation in office. The apparatus of many of these longstanding unions had become well fortified against challenges. Old social conditions that had been long established, that is historical trends, i.e. the maintenance of craft union privileges within the workers' movement were not easily brought to an end although during the war period many of them came under fire. Trevor Wilson disagrees and argues that the working class was pretty firmly in support. His description of working class attitudes are convoluted bringing together truths and half truths that make it almost impossible to decipher one from the other unless one reads all the literature on the subject. In the chapter "The Mood of Labour," Wilson maintains, probably correctly:

> Certainly, the rush to the recruiting stations was even greater among white-collar workers than among labourers. The former, with generally middle-class

---

[12] PRO, FO 317 3015. In addition to growing discontent among British workers, Henderson after arriving in Russia began to understand the gravity of the situation there. The Czar had been deposed and the Bolsheviks were waiting in the wings to seize power. In order to prevent this from happening Henderson hoped for a swift end to the war; Circulated to the King and War Cabinet was a memo that stated that not issuing passports would "alienate numbers of the working classes who are in favour of Conference."
[13] Young, *The Rising of the Scottish Working Class,* 194. See miners' resolution on the war.
[14] Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-19,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press:1976), 169. J.H. Thomas, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, "stated that if a German peace offensive started he feared that many of the members of his union would favour coming to terms. It was therefore important to counter such tendencies by putting the League of Nations in the forefront."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> aspirations that caused them to marry later and breed less and to identify passionately with mother country and Empire, had both stronger incentives to enlist and few domestic responsibilities to restrain them. It was also the case that the working class contained most of the poorest and least well nourished in the land, and so included the large majority of those who, eager or otherwise to enlist, would never qualify medically. Yet the voluntary acceptance of military service by large sections of the working class was still a noteworthy event, and one that some social observers found remarkable, given how few were the material possessions most workers had to defend.[15]

Given Wilson's description of the very middle class nature of the recruitment it is not surprising that those "workers" who identified with the empire would naturally be the first to sign up. But many workers who did join did not necessarily do so out of jingoistic reasons. Besides wishing to escape the boredom of the mines or the arbitrariness of the foremen, many workers did not know the extent of the slaughter that was occurring in places such as Verdun and therefore viewed their stay in the armed forces as an adventure. Because the press was tightly run and little information concerning the mounting deaths were disclosed people did not know the extent of the killing. In fact, for the most part the press emphasized the battles without discussing the casualties. "Back home, the British were not told of the slaughter, One English writer recalled: 'The most bloody defeat in the history of Britain…might occur…and our Press came out bland and copious and graphic with nothing to show that we had not had quite a good day- a victory really."[16]

Beaverbrook, the owner of the *Daily Express,* and Northcliffe,[17] the owner of the *Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News,* together monopolized two-thirds of the

---

[15] Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, 519.

[16] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States:1492-Present*, (New York:Harper Perennial:1991), 351; Millman, 40, documents the fact that the mail of leading dissenters was being examined on a systematic basis by the end of 1915.

[17] Tom Clarke, *Northcliffe in History: An Intimate Study of Press Power,* (London:Hutchinson and Co. Ltd:1950), 92 A managing editor at the *Times,* and friend to Northcliffe, Clarke maintained that Northcliffe's role was crucial in the furtherance of the war. Northcliff reacted to the Kaiser's desire to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

London dailies. Moreover, much of the radical press was continually suppressed as well, hampering any meaningful debate over the issue of support to the war.[18] Relevant information about such issues as the war and Russia were censored, and thus at a minimum. Moreover, censorship had reached such extremes that the authorities could open the mail under any pretext especially that of dissident leaders, and in addition the press was monitored for any hostile articles.[19] But even before the draft was put into effect, information began to seep back from soldiers at the front about the extent of the killing undermining the war effort by changing the attitudes of workers who were most closely affected encouraging them to object to the policies of their Government. But according to Wilson even by 1917, after three years of intense war with millions of workers dead or maimed, and with incredible shortages, the first Russian Revolution had little impact on British workers. The workers, declared Wilson, continued to support the war effort even after this momentous event and the secret documents were exposed. Notwithstanding that there were tens of thousands of workers who descended upon Leeds, Wilson states "the generality of workers… were little inclined to embrace movements whose origins lay in revolutionary Russia." But according to discussions held with miners compiled in the Miners' Oral History project Mel Thomas, a Welsh miner, claimed that:

---

compete internationally protesting Britain's imperial policy in Africa. Thus the war was taken up by the British dailies. "Harmsworth's (Northcliffe) *Daily Mail* caught the mood by declaring that the new halfpenny newspaper would stand for 'the power, the supremacy and the greatness of the British Empire'."

[18] According to Arthur Hendersons' *The Aims of Labour*, 65-66, on the question of censorship, "the military censorship has developed into a wonderful political engine which enables the authorities systematically to control the press. It enables the executive not merely to control opinion but to manufacture it. On the one had it prevents free discussion of questions of public policy; on the other it guides the public mind by means of a steady stream of artificial suggestion and official "information" manipulated and coloured in accordance with official views."

[19] Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent*, 183.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> There was quite a lot of discussion going on within the pit, more so than in the Lodge meetings and there was this feeling of course on the other hand you were being subjected to a terrific amount of patriotic propaganda, with all the local big wigs. And it was a feature of course that the key man as far as the union was concerned in Maesteg was Vernon Hartsell who was, next to CB Stanton, I suppose the biggest war propagandist of them all. And his influence was felt in Maesteg there's no question at all about that. And not for nothing was he given a seat in the re-alignment of the parliamentary constituency.[20]

To demonstrate this further in an interview about his father's political views, Raymond Williams contends that not only was he unwillingly drafted, but "he came out of the army in the mood of so many soldiers, by this time totally radicalized."[21] As for others, such as Noah Abblett and the miners who agreed with his syndicalist approach, they thought war inevitable since capitalists must compete. According to another miner who said about Abblett

> Oh well he was against it but not in the way that ILPers were. I mean there was a tendency I would say among the more revolutionary to regard the war as more or less inevitable and the war had to be accepted as a stage in the development of capitalism. So we shouldn't be concerning ourselves unduly with opposing the war but rather take advantage of the war situation to further our own industrial work for instance.[22]

So the question of support for the war was quite complex but the left organizations posed no strategy that would unite the working class against it. People, such as Noah Abblett and other revolutionists thought it pointless to oppose the war since for him war was an inevitable outgrowth of capitalism and therefore a fait accompli. The No-Conscription Fellowship organized by the ILP had no specific program except for anti-conscription. People who were pacifists and people who were revolutionists co-existed in the same organization confusing the very distinct points. Marxists who opposed capitalism and thus not all wars found themselves housed in an organization

---

[20]SWML, Miners' Oral History Project, Aud 283, May 17, 1973.
[21] Raymond Williams, "Politics and Letters, Interviews with *New Left Review,*" 1979.
[22] SWML, J.L. Williams Aud 396, April 24, 1973.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with people who were opposed to all wars.[23] Rather than the issues being clarified they were muddied. People such as Fenner Brockway who suffered imprisonment argued that the world could be free "from the bondage in which belief in armed force at present holds the peoples."[24] Nowhere in this article did he explain the capitalist nature of the war. Thus "Repeal the Act," the first leaflet issued by the NCF, led to its prosecution in 1916 but it did not bring clarification to the differing views. The people who resisted risked a two-year imprisonment with hard labor often under torturous conditions.[25] Devotion to this cause was generally absolute. But the major struggles that developed within the organization involved the question of whether one should in good conscience work in some capacity for the government or should resist completely. In the midst of this struggle over whether one should work for the government in some capacity, the reasons for the war and the ultimate goal was lost. Little explanation for workers who were moving away from support for the war was provided. It is therefore impossible, at least until a mass movement against the war occurred, to know how many people opposed the war. There was even little clarity about how many people in the Fellowship opposed all wars or WWI in particular since no-conscription became the slogan of the organization. The call for no conscription within the trade unions masked the degree to which workers opposed the war. Clear anti-war slogans were not put forward either by the socialist organizations or in trade union resolutions. Therefore, deciphering the feelings of a vast community requires more than just taking still pictures of a given situation. The reasons

---

[23] Arthur Gardiner, member of the BSP gave a stirring internationalist explanation about why he was a conscientious objector, but others were pacifists and denounced all wars but did not necessarily denounce nationalism or capitalism.

[24] *The Tribunal*, March 8, 1917.

[25] Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: The story of an English community's opposition to the Great War,* (London:Francis Boutle Publishers:2001), 159, explains that "during the first few months of their work the Tribunals 'panicked at the large numbers coming before them."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for large enlistment roles at the beginning of the war, at least for workers, were generally economic. Economic hardship played an important roll in prompting people to enlist. Jobless, unskilled laborers generally accounted for the majority of recruits for the pre-war army. Seasonal workers who were at the whim of production demands and the demands of nature often chose to join the army since poverty was the only other choice. The economic crisis that erupted when war was declared cost nearly 500,000 jobs. Industry was dislocated, adversely affecting factories and an associated slump in demand for energy slashed coal miners' pay. Consumer demand collapsed, terminating employment for clerks, household servants and other service sector employees. Around one in four men who were still in work had their hours cut and women's unemployment during September, 1914 topped 44%. Many bosses bribed employees to enlist to fight in a war that all expected would be "over by Christmas"; others simply sacked some of their workforce.[26] Therefore, workers' attitudes about the war were only in part shaped by "love of country," and it would be safe to say that many other factors influenced their decisions. When Oliver Powell, a miner was asked if he volunteered, his response was "O yes a great patriot I was, bloody glad to get out of the pit. I thought we would have a good time, have a good adventure, it was supposed to be over by Christmas of 1914, what a joke."[27] Further, soldiers developed an acute sense of comradeship, wishing to protect fellow soldiers from harm encouraging people to remain whether they supported the war effort or not. A journal entry called "Death Wish in No Man's Land," by a soldier, who witnessed the fighting, attests to this fact. Rather than leaving upon completion of his tour

---

[26] G.J. DeGroot, *Blighty-British Society in the era of the Great War,* (London, Longman:1996), 47; see also I.O. Andrews *The Economic Effects of the World War on Women and Children,* (Oxford, OUP:1921), chapter 3; Pearce. *Comrades in Conscience,* 24, 131.
[27] SWML, Oliver Powell, Aud 316, November 29, 1973.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of duty, this soldier decided to stay in order not to desert his fellow soldiers. While it can be construed that this was a patriotic act the soldier wrote: 'I could not run away and leave my friends to face that while I enjoyed some soft job in England.'[28] Disgust for the war was indeed growing but a sense of comradeship in the face of this slaughter clearly remained.

Nonetheless, Trevor Wilson insists that the seamen's unwillingness to send representatives to Stockholm was indicative of the feelings of workmen in general. In his description of the Firemen's Union he never mentions the jingoistic and racist nature of its leader, Havelock Wilson,[29] but instead argues that these feelings reflected the generality of working class people. Moreover, he neglects to mention that this action taken by the Seamen's leader was denounced in trade union conferences, which argued that his positions did not reflect the attitudes of the working people as a whole. For instance "the delegates of the Lanarkshire Miners Union emphatically protest[ed] against the decision of the Executive of the NU of SM workers in supporting the action of the Seamen and Firemen's Union in refusing to sail with Messrs. McDonald, Jowett, and Fairchild to Petrograd, when on a Government mission to the Democracy of Russia."[30] Wilson cites figures of support dropping from 1.3 million in August 10 to 3,000; he argues that this is evidence of the lack of working class resolve for this conference. The figures at the TUC reflect different realities, though. It is the case that "a subsequent meeting of the TUC while deprecating the proposed meeting at Stockholm 'as not likely

---

[28] Michael Moynihan, ed., *People at War 1914-1918*, (Newton Abbot [Eng]:David Charles:1973), St. Leger. "Death Wish in No Man's Land," 68.
[29] Arthur Henderson charged Havelock Wilson "…with handling £50,000 for which he couldn't account while Tom Richardson, a Labour MP, alleged that the War Office did the clerical work of Wilson's Patriotic Crusade." Weller, *Don't be a Soldier!*, 57.
[30] National Library of Scotland, Dep. 227 (35).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to be successful,' nevertheless affirmed itself in favour of the holding of an international labour Conference 'as a necessary preliminary to a lasting peace."[31] Already by 1916, there was a growing desire for a negotiated peace.

> In the industrial and mining areas of northern England, Wales and, above, all, Scotland, the movement found considerable support. The Scottish advisory council of the Labour Party gave its adherence, and on March 10, 1917, a Scottish Labour and trade-union conference voted almost unanimously that a negotiated peace rather than a military settlement offered the best security for the future.[32]

And while the entirety of the vote may have shifted away from organizing the conference, many sections of the workers' movement denounced the leadership's lack of resolve. This was reflected in officials such as J.R. Clynes, who eventually replaced Henderson when he resigned his cabinet position. So enmeshed in the war effort Clynes refused to give Margaret Bondfield, the most prominent woman in the TUC, a passport to Stockholm but rather gave one to Mrs. Pankhurst, who supported the continuation of the war.

Therefore, one can only imagine the intense pressure that members of the TUC were under to fight for a negotiated peace, if initially their response to the war was one of whole-hearted support. Robert Smillie, President of the Miner's Union explains this change when he argued that by 1917 the mood of the working class had changed drastically. Anti-war sentiment was cropping up all over Britain. Historian, Cyril Pearce focused on the town of Huddersfield to assess its support for the war. In examining primary documents he found little enthusiasm for the war. "This was demonstrated by the absence of cheering and flag-waving on this occasion and by the fact that the Territorials'

---

[31] Scottish National Library, Acc. 5241 (7), Edinburgh Central I.L.P. Correspondence, 1918.
[32] Brand, *British Labour's Rise to Power,* 86.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reception was 'quiet but cordial'.[33] And while there were Glaswegians volunteering for war, an anti-war movement also grew up around revolutionaries such as John McLean and John Maxton. James MacDougall said at a meeting of engineers with Sir Auckland Geddes, organized in response to the manpower question, that there was a resolution put forward and carried for an immediate armistice. Miners proposed at huge gatherings "at Hamilton and elsewhere solemn declarations of opposition to the continuance of the war [which] were carried with absolute unanimity."[34] And William Gallacher mentions in *Revolt on the Clyde:* "All around George Square, in the faces of the police, women [Women's Peace Crusade] were openly distributing 'illegal' leaflets in defiance of the order." [Publications such as leaflets not endorsed by the Press Bureau were prohibited.][35]

> By 1917 even in places such as London workers sought a solution to the crisis.
>
> In early April a mass meeting to welcome the revolution was organized at the Albert Hall and there Lansbury, among prolonged applause, exclaimed that in Petrograd for the first time in modern history 'soldiers, *whose class* soldiers, have refused to fire on the workers'; in Russia, they had learn the lesson, 'the greatest lesson of all...it is for us to learn it now –because we can understand that when the working classes of all nations refuse to shoot down the working classes of other countries, Governments won't be able to make war any more. (Tremendous applause.)
> The secretary of the Transport Workers' Federation, Robert Williams, stressed that in Britain, Germany and the whole world an honourable and lasting peace could be gained if other countries followed the example of Russia.... A serving soldier who was also present in the Albert Hall felt that 'the fiery speeches' impressed upon them 'that the Russian revolution was not going to stop at the Russian frontier', that it was going 'to find an echo in the hearts of the German, French and British proletariat'. He noticed the same enthusiasm some weeks later at the May Day demonstration in London: 'it found its motto in the 'bloodred' banner' that we all saw, inscribed with the internal device 'Workers of all

[33] Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience,* 72.
[34] Young, *The Rising of the Scottish Working Class*, 194.
[35] Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde,* 178.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

countries, unite!'; it found the approval of the people in the cheers for Russia, for Liebknecht, for the German Social democratic Minority, for Peace.[36]

It appears then that Trevor Wilson's account of working class reactions to the war and to the Russian Revolution was limited and one-sided. Quoting the *Examiner*, Pearce writes: "By 17 August over 140 men had enlisted; half of these since the twelfth. Two days later, however, there were signs of anxiety in the Examiners' report of recruiting, which was 'very brisk in the South of England, but not so brisk in the North."[37] There was no rush to the colors in Huddersfield complained the *Examiner*. Pearce argues, "There is no evidence at all of the crude and violent jingoism of the carefully managed mobs of London, Cardiff, Leeds, Keighley and Bradford,"[38] which Carsten's argues was so prominent during the war. It was the more industrialized north that rejected the call for war. The 'Workers' Own Recruiting committee,' which was designed to drum up enthusiasm for the war, received little support. "The trade unions represented on the HWORC, with the exception of the Tramwaymen, tended to be small and not well represented on the Trades Council."[39]

With few perceived alternatives the workers did not rebel against the war in an organized fashion. Since for the most part the organizations that described themselves as anti-capitalist or pro-socialist provided little alternative to the official leadership's view it was not until the success of the Russian revolution that sentiment against the war mounted. Most of the organizations that considered themselves as alternatives to the prevailing leaders were unable to provide strategies that could challenge the deep-rooted machines that existed. Workers in these organizations, although genuinely against the

---

[36] Carsten, *war against war,* 103.
[37] Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 81.
[38] Ibid, 90.
[39] Ibid, 122-124.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

war and hoping to provide solutions to the problems that were manifested because of it, did not challenge the war itself. Thus there was no real solution coming from these organizations either. Even such well-respected people as George Lansbury did not want to seem unpatriotic.[40] And yet although organizations such as the Socialist Labour Party were small, their impact was far greater than their organization's numbers would indicate, but they too did not, at least in the workplace, organize against the war. These organizations were marginal, although not ineffective in certain areas of Britain, especially in Scotland. And although it denounced the war in its publication the *Socialist* the members did not raise the question of the war while on the job. In fact the SLPs' syndicalist approach to political questions was of a dual nature.[41] And so, while many of their members were in industry they raised only industrial, bread and butter issues and never connected the need for industrial actions with political generalizations. The SLP had its origins within the American DeLeonist movement, which believed that trade unions were so corrupt that it was necessary to set up alternative unions. And although the British SLP ultimately rejected this course of action, the members still adhered to many of the other sectarian positions that the SLP was known for. According to the SLP's tenets, the old leadership, for that matter any leadership, could not be trusted and therefore it was impossible for any of these socialist workers to challenge the traditional union leadership since staying within a non-socialist organization would by necessity be futile. This uncompromising but flawed philosophy had a deadly impact during the

---

[40] Weller, *Don't be a Soldier*! 38Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack,*132.

[41] Ralph Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of JT Murphy,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press:1998), 42. "The shop stewards' syndicalist tradition of separating politics and economics meant that, although their leaders included a number of revolutionary socialists like J. T. Murphy, they did not as yet have a theoretical grasp of the importance of connecting industrial agitation with socialist politics. They were still in the habit of treating politics as something external to the factories and shopfloor unrest as simply an economic issue."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

General Strike period among those Communists who to varying degrees had their political upbringing inside the SLP. Politics was left to the Parliament and those workers who did not consider themselves socialists were discouraged from voting for the SLP. Although Murphy ultimately joined the Communist Party, while in the SLP during the war he maintained his maximal minimalist approach to politics. That is, he was for the revolution within the pages of the *Socialist* but was for the Trade Card Agreement in his workplace. Murphy was an engineer and steward in Sheffield who tirelessly threw himself into the struggle of the engineers. They had a cohesive organization. Outside the Clyde, Sheffield was one of the most organized and politically disconnected from the official leadership of the union. Where the union officials supported conscription, the workers did not. One of the agreements that the government made with the ASE was that the engineers would not be conscripted unlike other sections of the workforce. But the government broke its word and a worker in the munitions plant in Sheffield was drafted. Twelve thousand workers decided to strike unless the worker was returned to his job. Ultimately the strike was successful. The power of the working class was quite evident, but Murphy did not attempt to raise the consciousness of his fellow workers; instead he allowed this strike to be sectional and in some ways antagonistic to other sections of the working class.[42] The Trade Card Agreement protected the engineers from being drafted but this agreement did not protect other workers and therefore did little to advance the anti-war forces within the workers' movement. In the discussion about the collapse of

[42] David Englander and James Osborne article "Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class," in *The Historical Journal* 21, 3 (1978), 619, argued: "The Character of industrial militancy did nothing to endear it to the veteran, conscious as he was, that the failure of the comb-out entailed the application of even greater severity for his re-call. Even the most radical of ex-servicemen believed in the existence of an unlimited supply of power composed of cunning shirkers and the like." Angering those workers who could be drafted allowed conservative military organizations the ability to exploit this wedge between different sections of the work force.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the strike movement in May 1917 and the failure of the strike call in January 1918, it is argued by some that these failures were "deeply rooted in the level of consciousness of the working class, including its advanced sections." Darlington takes issue with this and writes: "The problem with this analysis is that it completely absolves Murphy and the leading stewards of responsibility for their failure to openly and politically oppose the war." [43] Despite the fact that the SLP members were politically dedicated revolutionaries who often faced the closing down of their press and imprisonment in the case of J.T. Murphy he could not figure out how to integrate the day-to-day struggles with the wider political issues.

Thus, it was not by any means only non-socialists who supported the war. Even within the ILP itself there were a variety of differing points of view. Far from being a democratic centralist organization all sorts of disparate people with disparate points of view became members. People such as Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Independent Labour Party, who left the Labour Party over the question of support for the war, took a position that, was at best ambivalent, but which in fact supported the government's actions. MacDonald was the leading platform figure at every ILP demonstration and meeting. His attitude about the war could be summed up as follows: 'If you cannot avoid war then use both the military and diplomatic machine at the same time, and continually probe with the diplomatic arm to see if you can achieve your just aims without carrying on the war too long and to an unjust conclusion.'"[44] Every word begs a definition. For instance, what would be the just aims that MacDonald was alluding to? And while MacDonald finds fault with the more conservative leadership of the LP his

---

[43] Ibid, 45.
[44] McGovern, *Neither Fear Nor Favor,* 42.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

views do not really challenge the status quo. The ILP was extremely mixed over whether to support the war.

> As one of its strongest supporters wrote as early as November, 'the ILP has not sufficiently declared its message to the world at large; it has not accepted the admittedly grave responsibility of a public and fearless campaign against the war... The party chairman, FW Jowett, repeatedly declared that he desired Britain to win the war...In December Keir Hardie stated that none of the ILP pamphlets or statements demanded that the war must be ended immediately... In November MacDonald wrote to an American socialist to clarify his attitude to the war, pointing out the 'enormous differences' between it and the Boer War, which he had violently opposed. By contrast, now 'everyone feels that there is nothing sordid or chauvinist about his intentions. It is a war for liberty and democracy...[45]

MacDonald's philosophy ignored the very nature of the state as a class representative. Theoretically, MacDonald argued that: "socialism marks the growth of society, not the uprising of a class. The consciousness, which it seeks to quicken, is not one of economic class solidarity, but one of social unity and growth towards organic wholeness. The watchword of socialism therefore, is not class consciousness, but community consciousness."[46] It is then not surprising that MacDonald's theory of the state would mimic the theory that the British Government was attempting to promote. Classes were negated or subsumed under the rubric of state hegemony. Businessmen rather than running industry directly became advisors to Lloyd George but the industry was under state control. Lloyd George's recognition of the importance of workers' institutions, thus inviting its leadership into the inner circle of government, created the illusion that workers were sharing in its decision-making. Corporatism became an important element of British governmental design. Unwilling to evaluate the nature of the state, MacDonald could not then fault it for declaring war.

---

[45] Carsten, w*ar against war,* 29
[46] James Ramsay MacDonald, *In Socialism and Society*, (London:I.L.P.:1905), 39.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

An even more pro-war, chauvinistic organization claiming to be socialist was the British Socialist Party, which was headed by H. M. Hyndman. This organization took a stand that supported British claims for a victorious conclusion of the war. Although not as chauvinistic or anti-German as others because he refused to join a newly-founded Anti-German League,[47] Hyndman was not only anti-German but viciously anti-Semitic,[48] and argued for the maintenance of the empire. Moreover, as reported in the *Labour Leader* (August 1917) "Mr. Hyndman has written to the *Morning Post* hoping that the British Government will refuse passports for delegates to Stockholm."[49] Hyndman was even opposed to a negotiated peace. It is, little wonder that with the leadership of the worker's movement to one degree or another on the side of war, workers had little opportunity to draw a different conclusion at least for the first couple of years. Feeding into this initial enthusiasm the left did little to encourage any disagreement with the war.

But as war dragged on and millions of workers were either killed or maimed feelings among working people changed radically. In fact, by wars end "more than a thousand trade union branches, trades councils and local Labour parties passed resolutions calling for the release of the imprisoned men."[50] Disgust for the war grew daily. Had it not been for the activity of workers who insisted upon its conclusion leaders such as Arthur Henderson would have never even considered challenging the government with the Stockholm Conference. Union leaders, until forced to by their members,

---

[47] Chuscichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism,* (Oxford:Oxford University Press:1961), 221.
[48] Note his struggle around control over the BSP and his anti-Semitic attacks on Feinberg the leader of the opposition.
[49] *Labour Leader*, August 1917.
[50] Caroline Moorehead, *Troublesome people: The Warriors of Pacifism,* (Md. Adler and Adler:1987), 74 There were 20,000 people who were classified as COs. And while the government ostensibly recognized the right of COs to oppose war on philosophical grounds, they were expected to fulfill their war service obligations. If they did not, they were treated in the most horrific of ways often tortured in jail for years even after the war ended; Weller, *Don't be a Soldier*!, 50.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

endorsed the war, and counseled workers to go and fight. But, rather than anger at the war Carsten argues that workers' anger was really at the profiteers. He asserts that if it were not for the question of war profits there would be little cause for "industrial unrest and would have deprived the small groups of the political opposition of their most effective means to make anti-war propaganda."[51] Given the exorbitant profits accrued by business, and their intricate connection with the state (often remaining as managers of their own industry) profiteering could have hardly been avoided.

Added to this was the question of demobilization. On November 16, 1917, General Haig[52] ordered men to fight in Passchendaele, France, where a half million men died and no appreciable territory was gained. This territory was later abandoned. At the battle of Trommelfeuer, on the first day 35,000 troops were killed and on the second 40,000 fell. One half mile was gained at Langemarck. On August 14, 1917, 22,000 died gaining 900 yards and on the 26th 17,000 more men perished in the pursuit of 1,000 yards. On the Somme and at Verdun more than a million men gave their lives in totally ineffectual campaigns. At Artois the British and French dead totaled 60,000 around the town of Loos. In four and one half years of savage fighting, millions died, with millions

---

[51] Carsten, w*ar against war,* 63.

[52] Robert Blake, ed., In *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919,* (London:Eyre and Spottiswoode:1952), 356, mentions a discussion with a Battalion Commander and says of the soldiers in the hospital "that he had heard them asking, why should we have a King?" "It is very costly, etc. etc." 344. In another conversation in response to the Viscounantcy offering him a pension he replied "that I felt strongly the manner in which our disabled had been disregarded, and that until the British Government gave me an assurance that the disabled, widows and children, would be adequately provided for, I would not accept a reward of any kind." 345. On the 25th of February 1919 Once again in response to the reward he wrote: "...the Disabled Officers' Fund is expending funds at the rate of £5,000 monthly, and will soon have to close down. This money goes to help (chiefly) officers who have insufficient or no pensions at all and Doctors' Certificates show many are unable to work and yet have no pensions or subsistence." 357. In addition to this reward Haig was made an earl and was given a grant of £1,000,000, 358; in one other note General Haig writes of Germany "if we don't feed her, Bolshevism will spread. This will result in the destruction of Germany and probably in our having to intervene. And, further, Bolshevism is likely to spread to France and England. There is therefore every reason for feeding Germany." 356.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

more wounded and disabled. Cynicism over Lloyd George's war aims grew within the military. British workers fell in battle after battle because of the incompetence of General Haig, who was determined to seize a hill or a ditch, which allowed thousands, often in a day, to perish in miserable conditions.[53] And yet responsibility for the lack of success in the field was put upon the shoulders of workers in munitions plants, who were told that they were not producing enough weapons because they spent too much time drinking. This encouraged a campaign by Lloyd George (especially in the press) against workers' over-indulgence, leading to the closing of the pubs by 11 pm. And while the union leaders objected to the characterization of the working class as indolent drunks, Haig was not forced to take responsibility for his serious mistakes.[54] But the stories of these soldiers did not die with all of those who fell in the battles that were fought to gain a few yards. Although the press attempted to play down the numbers of soldiers dying and mostly focused on battles and land seized, the tragedies of the numbers lost could nevertheless not be suppressed. During the period of working class upheavals soldiers too were beginning to rebel. The Garton Foundation, of which Balfour was a trustee,

---

[53] The descriptions of the battles that were fought are more extensively told in *Back to the Front: An Accidental Historian Walks the Trenches of World War I,* by Stephen O'Shea, (New York:Walker and Company:1996); Michael Moynihan, (David and Charles: Newton Abbot:1973),122 "A Lad Goes to War" *People At War 1914-1918*"...it was the mud -churned holocaust of Passchendaele, during the third battle of Ypres in the autumn of 1917, that most forcibly impressed on Chaney" [author of diary entry]. 'What a slaughter-and what a disgrace to the thinking of our General Staff. Field-Marshal Haig might ride around on his big white horse accompanied always by his two mounted orderlies one proudly carrying the marshal's pennant, but his knowledge of conditions up front must have been practically nil. Either that or he and his staff did not give a damn how many men went west in their endeavour to gain a few yards of worthless, useless ground. It looked well in the papers, a report that our troops had advanced. They seldom said how many yards for how many men.'

[54] De Groot's, *Douglas Haig,* is filled with horrific mistakes made by Haig causing the death of thousands of his men. But ironically "Haig saw a different picture. He told his wife that 'on the whole it was a most successful day's work...' Haig was referring to the battle of Passchendaele; Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory,* (New York:Oxford University Press:1975), 13, 88, also claims that Haig not only did not know what he was doing but had so much contempt for the soldiers that he was unwilling to explain the strategy allowing thousands of needless deaths while at the same moment claiming that he was making 'substantial progress.'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

understood clearly how angry the demobilized soldiers were and the potential threat that this would cause for the government.

> To a very large number of men now in the ranks, the fight against Germany is a fight against "Prussianism," and the spirit of Prussianism represents to them only an extreme example of that to which they object in the industrial and social institutions of their own country. They regard the present struggle as closely connected with the campaign against capitalist and class domination at home. Unfortunately, some of the results of the war intensified this identification of external and internal enemies. The rise to an amount of deep and widespread resentment which is the more dangerous because it is largely inarticulate. The very moderation and unselfishness shown by the responsible leaders of organized labor are looked upon by important sections of their following as a betrayal of the cause, and by some employers a tactical opportunity.[55]

There is little that can be added to this damning statement that so captures the anger of the soldiers for not only feeling betrayed at the Front but experiencing betrayal at home as well. The government gave little in the way of support to disabled soldiers and so voluntarism became the means by which many of them were able to survive.[56] Moreover, the demobilized soldiers were not only concerned with getting out of the army but they became concerned with the fact that there were few jobs to be had once they were demobilized.[57] Those most likely to be demobilized at the end of the war were those who were offered work. That being the case the ones that entered the armed forces towards the end of the war were more likely to obtain work and thus more likely to be demobilized. This naturally caused great frustration and anger among the troops. The scheme put into effect by the government was designed to minimize unemployment but resulted in more animosity. Moreover, stories from back home about the poverty or the

---

[55] Kellogg and Gleason, *British Labor and the War,* 159. Fear of the likelihood of revolt prompted Henderson to remark that "...we shall be faced with graver perils than any that have confronted us in past times. Never before have we had vast numbers of the population skilled in the use of arms, disciplined, inured to danger, accustomed to act together under orders."

[56] Read G. Wootton's, *The Official History of The British Legion*, (London:MacDonald and Evans, Ltd.:1956), 49.

[57] By New Year of 1920 600,000 ex-servicemen were registered as unemployed. Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

near poverty of their families angered them all the more.[58] J.R. Clynes, Food Controller and Labour member of government, recalled:

> Serious outbreaks occurred in France among the troops behind the lines. Rumours had reached the front, very much exaggerated, of starvation in England; and things began to look ugly when they held mass meetings to know why, while they risked their lives for their country, she could not even manage to feed their wives and children at home.[59]

It had become increasingly clear that neither the employers nor the government could do much for returning soldiers regarding unemployment. The benefits were even meager. Sir Alfred Mond writes in a letter to the War Cabinet:

> I find very grave dissatisfaction in Labour Circles in my constituency (Swansea, West) regarding the sum fixed for unemployment benefit under the Demobilisation Scheme. The sum of 24/- is represented to me by responsible Trade union Leaders as being entirely insufficient in presence of the prices of today, to enable an unemployed workman and his family to pay for the cost of food and rent. In one or two instances in which a number of workmen have been threatened with discharge, owing to a cessation of work, they simply decline to go to the Labour Exchange for such benefit, and threaten if the Local Food Controller will not supply them and their family with food that they will have to requisition it for themselves. Up to the present, I have been able to prevent any such action, which would be most regrettable, from being actually taken. But the danger of disturbance of this kind cannot be disregarded.[60]

---

[58] *Hansard,* H.C., October 31, 1918, 1711, is replete with discussions about ex-soldiers and sailors setting up large associations because they felt that they were not being treated fairly with regard to separation allowances and pensions. Resolutions were passed at many of the Labour conferences, asking that the Government deal in a more generous spirit with the soldiers and sailors and their dependents. To indicate the class nature of the allowances to the wives of men in the military Mr. Jowett, L.P., exclaims, October 31, 1918, 1718, "that the regulation was to be worded in such a way as to make it clear that the supplementary allowance of 6s. 6d. per week was to be paid as a matter of course to person unaccustomed to work. Will my right hon. Friend recollect what that means? It means that the wives of men who are not of the working class will never have their cases inquired into because they have not been accustomed to work, and as a matter of course they would get the 6s. 6d. per week. But the workman's wife, because she is the workman's wife, must have an inquiry as to whether she has been accustomed to work, or is unable to work. Take it from me, there is going to be a terrible trouble about this if you put it into operation."

[59] Waites, *A Class Society at War,* 230-1.

[60] PRO, LAB2/272; British Library, LAB2/1052/15, War Cabinet Unemployment Benefit, dated December 1918 called 'A Growing and Grave Difficulty' printed for the War Cabinet a memo prepared by Sir Thomas Munro stated "The inadequacy of the out-of-work Benefit Scheme and the guaranteed minimum earnings of 24s and 30s respectively are strong animadverted on.- It is pointed out that neither gives a living wages, and the demand is made for an increase to 50s and 60s respectively." The memo also indicates that the author was "apprehensive of the attitude of discharged sailors and soldiers, who are banded together in an association which is insistent on its demands and somewhat aggressive." John Bull on March 14, 1917 reports The Scandal of "Class W." "...men wounded or broken in the war [are] put into

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Fear of disturbances provided the impetus for government officials to discuss demobilization, but they had little success in redressing the problem. Veteran's organizations (the National Union of Ex-Servicemen and the International Union of Ex-Servicemen) pointed to the need to change society as a whole rather than just address the problems of the ex-servicemen. But while the IUX considered itself a revolutionary organization with the express purpose of overthrowing capitalism the NUX[61] pointed out the need for change through aligning itself with Labour. The British Legion, organized by General Haig in 1921, was kept apolitical and was to become the largest of the organizations. Haig's distrust of the conscript in war was transferred to the soldiers in the Legion.[62] The Comrades, a politically conservative organization of ex-servicemen, was a rival of the British Legion. The IUX supported striking for shorter hours and higher pay since this would divide the available work and open up new avenues of employment. Grievances among many of the workers, especially the miners who were the first to join, were vociferously expressed. Miners were being given class Z jobs,[63] unable to obtain the class of work that they had left before joining the colors. Complaints were mounting. Moreover, on November 14, 1918 the Minister of Labour was asked if "he is aware that

---

the category known as Class W-formed for men not passed as efficient for active service. When relegated to it they receive neither pay nor work till such time as they might be required for purpose of substitution."

[61] Stephen Ward, ed., *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War,*(London:Kennikat Press:1975), 26.
The NUX sponsored a bill that would provide for back pay for ex-servicemen within Parliament. This could be done by implementing a war tax on "profiteers and landlords who had accrued wealth while servicemen were fighting and dying to defend them" although they were far from adequate.

[62]Ibid, 29 Wootton, *The official History of the British Legion*, 7. Haig was eventually able to secure a pension for the veterans quieting them down to some extent but little was done for the disabled or for the unemployed. A public works' plan was proposed by Keynes but was turned down by the Government; "On Monday or Tuesday past" recollected Lt-Colonel of the Royal Field Artillery "at the Camp Cinema the playing of "God save the King" was hissed. A cry arose 'Death to the officers' which I understand was more than an isolated one." David Englander, *Society for the Study of Labour History,* Vol. 52, No 1, 1987.

[63] Stephen Graubard. "Military Demobilization in Great Britain," *Journal of Modern History,* 19, 1947, 300. Graubard argues that had the government only explained its demobilization "plan" to the soldiers, it would have been more palatable.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

some firms are dismissing soldiers whom they are employing on discovery that they have been wounded in the War..."[64] The government continued to do little for the veteran, prompting angry comments by some members of the Labour Party.

The lack of employment was not only a problem for the soldiers who wished to return to civilian life, but most gravely impacted women workers. With the insistence of the TUC leadership women were forced to leave the factories for the returning soldiers, and were thus forced onto the unemployment rolls. Not only did the women become unemployed, but the employers were not rehiring the soldiers. Therefore, without dividing up the available work the employers were able to drive wages down since the pool of labor had grown significantly.[65] And unlike during the war when workers could command higher wages, the employers after the war had no compunction about undermining the standard of living of all workers by attempting to challenge the unions. In fact, although many of the servicemen were required to do the job of civilian workers they refused to do so since they were only receiving a soldier's pay. These actions led to further struggles that were heightened once the war was over. War industries had to be converted to peace industries, making the situation all the more problematic. It was no longer necessary to build the type of military equipment needed for war and so workers once again found themselves unemployed. And while soldiers waited for employment, and for the government to set up commissions to deal with this problem, nothing much was done to resolve it. As early as 1916 Philip Snowden recognized that discharged soldiers were going to be a problem for the British economy to absorb. The question of

---

[64] Brooks, *Hansard*, H. C., November 14, 1918, 2873.

[65] SWML, The Miners' Federation of Great Britain called for the amending of the eight hours act so that six hours would be substituted for eight and for the government to proceed at once to the nationalisation of all mines and minerals. A number of important unions initiated the movement for a 40 hours week with a view to absorbing the unemployed. This was a definite feature of the 1919 general strike.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

demobilization and a shorter workweek were therefore inextricably bound together. Industry, workers feared, was inevitably going to revert back to the control of the capitalists by the end of the war allowing the government to abdicate responsibility for re-employing the demobilized soldiers. Nationalization became a central issue once the war was over.[66] Five million workers had either signed up or were conscripted over the course of the war. Moreover, many of these workers, who came from the mines of South Wales, while they quite often joined to escape the pit, brought all their beliefs and behavior with them. They therefore viewed their plight as soldiers with the same approach as they viewed their employers when they were workers in the pit. By 1918 the situation became grave. Soldiers wished to be demobilized and were unwilling to quietly accept that this was going to take time to accomplish.

> These men came not only from a very staunch trade unionist background but, in addition these were working class men who were not raised to be genteel. They often dealt with their officers in the way they dealt with their bosses. The fact that they had been the majority of those who fought and died made demobilization an urgency. Both strikers and demonstrations of soldiers manifested tremendous discontent. Soldiers in Egypt demanded to go home. Riots, more or less destructive were fairly common in the army, particularly in the closing period of the war, and strikes-refusals of duty in support of specific objects- became quite popular.[67]

Lack of employment was just one of the reasons for the slow pace of demobilization so that mutinies became a prominent feature of military life. In fact, "there were, it is reckoned, a hundred mutinies in the British Army, many of them very

---

[66] Addison, *Four and a Half Years,* 161; PRO, LAB2/727. In fact, even during the war soldiers had been used as blackleg labour. Twenty thousand soldiers were released from the army and sent to Thornycroft's shipyard prompting those workers to strike. The Controller General of Civil Demobilisation suggested in a memo that "the Government Department concerned are prepared to sanction the manufacture of standard articles of an approved type, guaranteeing the manufacturer at least against loss, and it is for consideration whether the guaranteed should not go further and provide for a moderate profit" Not only would the employer continue to make profit at the expense of the taxpayer, but the demobilized soldier would not necessarily make a living wage."

[67] Ibid, 73; J. Putkowski, "Those Nasty Crawling Things: A2 and the Labour Movement", *Lobster* No. 29, 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

serious and described by Churchill twenty-five years later as a convulsion of indiscipline."[68] None of these mutinies were coordinated, dissipating the possibility of some meaningful change. A letter sent by a soldier to Mrs. McLean expressing sympathy for her husband's imprisonment is an indication of the political strands that ran through the army.

> As a soldier and I also say a socialist I am writing you a few lines to express not only for myself but for hundreds of others our indignation at the treatment of your husband in Peterhead Prison, your husbands name will be remembered when the jackals of the Capitalist class, Hyndman, Blatchford, Thorne, Gillet are forgotten men who profess to be socialist and advise the workers to kill each other for the benefit of capitalism but the soldier knows who are their friends and I can predict a lively time when they come back.

He concludes with the hope "that she will keep the note confidential as you are aware of what is to be in the military machine."[69] One of the more well-known of these outbreaks was in Etaples (1917).[70] Rebellions continued to occur in places such as Ypres, Arras, Folkestone, Shoreham, Dover, India[71] and Egypt just to name a few. And in at least one case "Army Service Corps men …set up a "Soldiers' Council" and declared their intention of marching to the nearest town to 'fraternise' with the workers."[72] And while some rebellions were based on the slowness of demobilization (many of the recruits resented being sent to Russia) a number were based on the arbitrary nature of the commanding officers. In July 1918 these incidents were repeated in Calais. The mood of

---

[68] R. Page Arnot, *The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1967), 140; *The Historical Journal*, Vol, 21, No. 3, (Sept. 1978), 593-621. D. Englander; J. Osborne. "Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class." "From August 1914 until the end of demobilization six years later, court-martials dealt with more than 300,000 offences. The rate of growth of the military police corps greatly exceeded that of the army itself. In 1914 the ration of military police to servicemen was 1:3306; in 1917 it was 1:339; and in 1918 1:292. Of the 3,000 odd men condemned to death, roughly 11% were executed; the overwhelming majority was for desertion."

[69] National Library of Scotland, Acc 4251/3 1918, Note to Mrs. McLean.

[70] Englander and Osborne, "The Armed Forces and the Working Class," 597, quoted soldiers who when a General asked what was wrong said "they wanted the war stopped."

[71] In *Disaffection and Dissent*, 125, 135. J. Putkowski concentrates on the rebellion of British forces in India citing not only insubordination and the inability to force the other conscripts to shoot their fellow conscripts but he cites the introduction of socialist ideas among both the ranks and the officers.

[72] Wootton. *The Official History of The British Legion,* 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the troops became quite decidedly anti-war and morale slipped to a serious low. Discontent was growing daily in the army. A soldier with the British Expeditionary Force writing to a comrade in 1917 wrote, "When we do come back, those who are lucky enough-we will set about changing the social inequality with a vengeance. We have old scores to settle and the right spirit is looming in every heart. I can assure you it will not be subdued."[73] Another soldier writing to a comrade talked about the SLP being the "splendid champions, the real champion of freedom", and ends his letter with long live the revolution.[74] Rather than dealing with the frustrations of the soldiers the government passed a law preventing both officers and soldiers from participating in political meetings or demonstrations that took place at their barracks or camps.[75]

Contributing to the slow pace of demobilization was the British government's desire to undermine and destroy the new Soviet state. Many of the men who had fought in the war found themselves shipped off to Russia to fight yet again. The war against Russia served to delay demobilization and the real likelihood of an explosion over the continuing problem of unemployment. The fact is that many soldiers who went to Russia were convinced while they were there that their own government was committing an atrocity and were won over to the Soviet cause. The *Daily News,* of October 23, 1919, describes the acute resentment and the political awareness that they achieved through the course of their war experiences.

> The public, ..., have been given to understand that all men serving in Russia were volunteers which they were not. The army who were serving out there were no doubt volunteers, and as far as we have been given to understand they were securing double pay. The majority of the before-stated crews have served during the whole five years of war and suffered great hardships without complaint. We,

[73] National Library of Scotland, November 11, 1917.
[74] National Library of Scotland, Letter from soldier, July 14, 1917.
[75] Fawcett Library, Pankhurst Papers, reel 26 file. 5.1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> therefore, consider we have had enough of fighting without going out to fight a nation to whom we have not declared war. At noon on the 12th inst. a signal was received ordering the ships to provision and be prepared to leave for the Baltic immediately but "after due consideration we decided to come straight to Whitehall to have our grievances investigated and settled.[76]

In order to keep soldiers away from politics and the "Hands Off Russia" Committee, the government generally prosecuted those who wished to support it.[77] Resentment began to develop over what they felt were the terrible wrongs that they suffered when they were not only not demobilized but when it was clear that they were fighting people who they believed were not their enemy. Lloyd George realized that workers who were drafted were becoming increasingly unreliable and could possibly fall prey to communist ideas.[78] The *Sessional Papers* show that he thought little of the caliber of the soldiers and realized that "these types of people" were easily influenced by radical and revolutionary propaganda. In a memorandum to the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff De B. Radcliffe DMO, writes:

> I wish to draw attention to military situation in North Russia, which in my opinion is now such as to give rise to considerable anxiety. The chief cause for this anxiety is not so much the actual military offensive power of the Bolshevik forces opposing us as the unreliable state of the troops comprising the forces under the command of Generals Ironside and Maynard and with the uncertain political situation of the rear. These troops are a heterogeneous assortment of all nationalities and were never of high quality. They are now tired, dispirited and sick, and inclined to be mutinous. Their morale is undoubtedly so low as to

---

[76] *Daily News,* September 23, 1919.

[77] Julian Putkowski, "Disaffection and Dissent in the Armed Forces", 156; The rebellion in Calais was caused by the government arresting a soldier who made a seditious speech. 5,000 other soldiers went on strike over demobilization. The military authorities refused to recognize the Soldier's Council, which had been formed by the Ordnance Corps. Moreover, these men wished to attend a meeting in Albert Hall organized by the SP in support of the "Hands Off Russia Committee." Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strike of 1919*, (London:The MacMillan Press Ltd.:1980), 70.

[78] General Golovin, a Tsarist officer, in an interview with Churchill about armed support complains, "The question of giving armed support was for him the most difficult one; the reason for this was the opposition of the British working class to armed intervention." Cited by Coates and Coates, in *Armed Intervention in Russia 1918-1922*, (London:V.Gollancz,Ltd.:1935), 166.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> render them prey to the very active and insidious Bolshevik propaganda that the enemy is carrying out with increasing energy and skill.[79]

The troops' extreme demoralization and the threat of a general strike by the TUC were just two of the main reasons that Britain and the other allied nations supported an eventual withdrawal. As the intervention continued British workers pressured the TUC to demand the pull out of troops.[80]

Disgust for the war, disgust for their conditions, and disgust for the employers grew into a radical movement after the war. Smuggling *The Socialist* into the camps helped this process. But the government, especially during the 1918 election, attempted to keep another one of the offending papers, namely the weekly *Herald,* from the soldiers. Rothstein writes:

> This was frustrated by two soldiers who went into the town, commandeered the whole stock and distributed it in camp. 'The effect was electrical-it was like starving men reaching out for food.' A committee composed of one from each hut was formed immediately, to take orders and arrange distribution. Very soon afterwards 200 copies of each issue were going into the camp, to be read by three times that number of soldiers.[81]

Haig and Churchill were so fearful of disorder in the regions that Germany controlled and were so fearful of the Bolsheviks that both argued for the propping up of Germany in order to stave off what would most certainly end in an unavoidable rebellion.[82] The new Soviet Republic offered an armistice but the British government refused to accept the offer. Thus, when Lieut.Col Lavie pushed to take Archangel the soldiers refused to fight. When the government encouraged war with Russia many

---

[79] *Sessional Papers* SDD cmd 818 XXVIII 1919,1920.
[80] The Resolution of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the TUC August 9th, 1920 was passed in opposition to the continuation of the war against Russia ultimately forcing Lloyd George to remove his troops.
[81] Rotherstein. *Soldiers' Strike of 1919,* 71.
[82] Ibid, *77*; G. J. De Groot. *Douglas Haig: 1861-1928*, 338.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

soldiers and sailors rebelled. Whether or not they believed in the cause of the Bolsheviks they did believe that there was no reason to fight in Russia since for four and one half years they were told that Germany was the enemy, not Russia. Resentment and anger grew in the navy as well. An MP G. Lambert, said on March 12, 1918 "...undoubtedly there was, a trend of last year, grave unrest in the Navy...I do not wish to be violent, but I think I am correct in saying that a match would have touched off an explosion."[83] There can be little doubt that the armed services were crumbling. Thus, pressured by events Churchill reversed his original plan, which demobilized soldiers only if they had a job waiting for them and decided upon the plan that called for first in and then first out.

After finally being demobilized and facing severe unemployment and deprivation with little help coming from the government, many of these ex-servicemen, driven by frustration, were involved with organizing demonstrations and with strike activity throughout Britain.[84] The trades unions, unwilling to organize the ranks of demobilized soldiers in order to guarantee employment, left hundreds of thousands of them to rely on voluntary agencies. And although women lost their jobs in the factories because of the promise made to the returning soldiers neither obtained employment. One of the fatal mistakes made by the socialists was their lack of foresight regarding ex-servicemen. They, for the most part, shrank from dealing with them and their issues. With their main emphasis on abolishing or at least weakening the army people such as Lansbury and Maxton did little to formulate a policy that would be meaningful in fighting even the worst excesses of the army command. Other than the Communist Party no other organization formulated a strategy to deal with the question of mobilizing the troops in

---

[83] Lambert, *Hansard*, H.C., March 12, 1919, 1345
[84] PRO, MEPO 2/1958.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

support of the working class. But prompted by a working class response to the failure of the government to carry through on their promises, many of the ex-servicemen took part in the strikes that broke out in 1919 since they, along with over a million other workers, continued to be unemployed for long periods at a time. The failure of the 1919 near general strike allowed for a more apolitical response to take root among the predominant organization of ex-servicemen, that is, among the members of the British Legion.

The connections were becoming obvious to workers who were less likely to make those connections before the war. Therefore, the issue of support for the war effort and for the government's policies should not be viewed solely by the fact that thousands of workers enlisted. And while the initial support appeared to be high among workers, disgust for it and for those who continued to support it deepened throughout the British population as a whole but especially among workers. These connections became acute so that by 1919 they were more complete and burst on the scene in the form of a near general strike.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 5: WORKING CLASS REVOLT

Workers in Britain's prominent industries were so angered by their inability to negotiate with the government because of the draconian measures codified in the Defence of the Realm Act and endorsed by the union leadership at the onset of the war that the shop stewards' movement was born as a reaction to the implementation of these schemes. And although these workers acquired different strategies due to their respective situations viz. a viz. their union leaders, each group responded in a militant fashion, many believing that they were socialists, and many belonging to socialist organizations. Unlike the railway workers and the miners the shop stewards in the engineering firms attempted to develop an alternative strategy, but none of the movements developed the political maturity to challenge their union leaders effectively and thus, while winning higher wages, they could or would not either overthrow their leaders and thus could not generalize their struggle limiting it to a parochial one.

Given the unwillingness of the union leaders to effectively fight against the DORA regulations or for higher wages "The shop stewards stepped naturally into the breach, and assumed a wholly new importance in the life of the workshop and in the organised relations of employers and employed."[1] These workers were genuinely revolutionary and in every way displayed their desire to protect their fellow workers from their employers, but they did not have a revolutionary program and so while being better trade union leaders (that is organizing job actions that defended the living conditions of those they represented) than the official union leaders, they stumbled over questions such as support for the war. Their desire, on the one hand, to see a genuine change in society along socialist lines, and their inability to know how to do this set up future struggles that

[1] G.D.H Cole, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1900-1927,* 125.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

involved inevitable conflicts with other sectors of the working class. But once the revolution in Russia succeeded these revolutionary workers became the nub of the British section of the Third International.

The situation regarding these workers was a complex one. At one and the same time some of the most militant workers continued to reflect ideas that were quite parochial and that did not necessarily gain the confidence of the entire working class. For instance, they attempted often to the detriment of women and unskilled workers to maintain their craft status. In fact the breakdown of their craft status is what initially pushed many of these workers into action. Considering themselves socialists not just trade union militants they continued to argue that they should not be drafted although they did not actively oppose the war in their workplace. This contradiction was decidedly displayed among the engineers. Since the Socialist Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party were two important organizations that sunk deep roots on the Clyde, and since Scottish employers were more heavy-handed and less sympathetic to unionism workers were imbued with a longstanding radical philosophy often demonstrating their sympathy for radical causes. But the history of craft unionism often reveals provincial and sectoral politics. Workers on the Clyde displayed just this kind of political thinking. In the struggle over conscription, dilution was seen as the necessary precondition to achieve unity among the skilled and the unskilled in order to undermine the disparity in wages and job classifications but the process often elicited resentment, at least at the beginning of the war and thus unity came only after struggles for higher wages took off. The ultimate struggle of socialism was subsumed under the struggle of higher wages and under the rubric of dilution. And since the leadership of the shop

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stewards' movement, was still profoundly affected by prewar syndicalist notions, that is that massive strike action would necessarily mean that workers would ultimately lead the society as the strikes would break the bounds of capitalism they could provide no effective leadership either. Most importantly a significant number of these leaders believed that obtaining leadership necessarily meant abandonment of the struggle and thus the staunch syndicalists opposed the idea of replacing the old union leaders with new ones, leaving, for the most part, the old leadership intact. For the shop stewards, leadership was the problem, not necessarily particular leaders. All leadership was corrupt. It can be seen that many of the views of these radical workers were confused and often contradictory. Lloyd George's governmental regulations on striking were designed to attack them and yet they did not meet this attack with joint actions with other unions but tended to meet these challenges alone. Their concept was at one and the same time a purely trade union struggle and a struggle to fight the wage system altogether. Breathing life into otherwise defunct shop steward committees, that is developing a course of action that could actually defend workers' gains, led other committees around the country to follow the lead of the Clyde Workers Committee. They often displayed a parochial approach to organizing but were always coupled with profoundly militant actions. The Clyde Workers' Committee arose out of the 1915 strike against a two-tiered[2] system of wages, which pledged itself

> to obtain an ever increasing control over workshop conditions, to regulate the terms upon which workers shall be employed, and to organise the workers upon a class basis and to maintain the class struggle until the overthrow of the wages

[2] The Engineering employers brought in Americans to work side by side with their Scottish counterparts for higher wages.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

system, the freedom of the workers and the establishment of industrial democracy have been attained.[3]

The plan, according to J.T. Murphy was to work for 'an ever-increasing control of the workshop' until all the functions of management pass into the hands of the working class as a means to the complete expropriation of the employing class as such."[4] And although many of these leaders were socialists themselves they were reluctant to raise the question of "downing tools" against the war leaving them, at one and the same time, discussing the end of capitalism and not discussing the prosecution of a capitalist war. Even the acceptance of dilution as being an inevitable process of capitalist development posed problems they could not resolve. The situation for the craft workers was quite complicated. On the one hand automation and deskilling was a necessary consequence of capitalist development, something socialists understood, but, as an inevitable result, their job classifications were being degraded. While sometimes encouraging the maintenance of craft status and sometimes accepting the inevitability of its demise, these militant workers were confounded about what to do regarding their longstanding job classifications. Protecting their status meant undermining the jobs of the unskilled.

Moreover, they displayed much confusion about the war. The ILP had stepped back from initial revolutionary leadership while the BSP still had conflicting views (at least until 1916) on the war. To demonstrate the confusion of the ILP around the question of the war and workers' control Councillor Dollan's article entitled "The Truth about Munitions on the Clyde" (5/29/15) states:

---

[3] Allen Hutt, *British Trade Unionism*, 77; J.T. Murphy, "The Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement" in *What the Workers Want: A study of British Labor* by Arthur Gleason, (New York:Harcourt, Brace and Howe:1920), 189.
[4] Ibid, 198.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The absence of unrest would have ensured a steadier production and better results all round, and consequently a regular flow of munitions. The Government failed in their duty, however, and if, as has been alleged, the lack of shells has caused many a hapless British soldier to lose his life, then part of the blame may be laid on the shoulders of the governing authorities…If the employers had met their obligations then, like men, there would have been no stoppage of production, and the Army would have had a reserve supply of munitions equal to the output of three workers' labour. Profits, however, were the first consideration, even though the heel of the enemy had been planted on the nation's neck.[5]

Councillor Dollan did not oppose the war but rather argued that had the capitalists only been fair, then workers would have worked faster helping to meet production needs. Unwilling to challenge Lloyd George's government these socialists would not challenge his war policies. The fact that they themselves were confused does not in any way take away the anger or the revolutionary nature of many of the workers. Their willingness to take on the government in a strike in 1915 when a number of the engineering firms hired American workers for greater pay was quite remarkable. But at the same time they retained some faith in the state, striking agreements with it to set up joint government-worker committees to monitor problems such as the dilution process. And so their fear of dilution led to hostility towards women who entered the plants by the millions. Moreover, in their resentment against being drafted and because of their confusion politically the engineers supported the Trade Bill once more allowing one section of the workforce to be pitted against the other. The Bill essentially exempted many of the engineers from being drafted encouraging those not in the union to join as a way of avoiding the war. Far from being a class-conscious victory (that is protecting all workers) this policy generated hostility among different sections of the workforce that were not so privileged.[6]

---

[5] *Forward,* May 29, 1915.

[6] In fact the policy against combout (that is drafting workers from industries such as mining) forced workers who have already seen combat to continue their war duties.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In order to establish some objectivity, that is in order to seek some fair assessment of the beliefs and the political intentions of the Clyde workers and others who modeled themselves after them, it is necessary to deal with all of the confusion surrounding them. And while many of the craft workers prevented women from joining their unions even after the women demonstrated that they understood the objections of the men and argued that only the struggle for equal pay would prevent job erosion, other factories were, according to Arthur Marwick "socialist to a man of the Bolshevist type..."[7] On the one hand the provincial nature of the craft workers mirrors the least progressive views of some of the more reactionary trade union leaders and yet at the very same time these views were coupled with some of the most revolutionary ideas. A worker at Beardmore's shipyard in Scotland in response to the Russian Revolution exclaims: "I can remember inside the workshops some tremendously enthusiastic discussions...in which this was the beginning of the world revolution."[8] By 1917 the demands of the workers began to fall in step around a more radical program. Workers began to demand an end to the war. William Gallacher, a leader of the CWC, writes: "Huge meetings, night after night, rose to extraordinary heights of enthusiasm in support of the Bolshevik revolution."[9] By January 1918 workers were calling for an end to the conscription bill and an immediate armistice and by May 100,000 workers who met at a May Day demonstration took up these same demands.[10]

---

[7] Marwick, *Women at War,* 63.
[8] Foster, 1917 Scottish Voices, *Scottish Trade Union Review*, No. 36, Autumn 87, 9.
[9] Ibid,
[10] Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde,*144, 158. Gallacher also talks about a demonstration on July 8, 1917 with the major slogans being "Down with the war." "Down with the warmaker." "From thousands of throats these slogans went roaring along the streets. At Glasgow Green, a resolution was put declaring friendship with women of all countries and demanding an immediate peace without annexations or indemnities."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As the war ground on year after year the cry to stop the war became more definite. Revolutionary activity throughout Britain, especially on the Clyde, no doubt concerned Lloyd George. James Hinton's "The Clyde Workers' Committee and the Dilution Struggle," argues that the suppression of the CWC "was the result of a well-planned offensive directed by the Labour Department of the Ministry of Munitions. It is, perhaps, significant that the principal officials concerned were a group of civil servants recruited from the Board of Trade's Labour Exchange and unemployment Insurance Departments."[11] The government feared militant activity whether revolutionary or just for higher wages. Strikes not only undermined the war effort but also had the potential of becoming more than just economic activity. They would thus have to be controlled. The best method to obtain control was through the denial of unemployment insurance. Workers earned little enough when they were working; they could not afford to be denied insurance when they were not. George Weir, head of an engineering firm in Scotland, insisted:

> In the event of a strike, the immediate reaction would be to provide 'police and military protection to all who are willing to work'; to make sure, if necessary by induction, that trade-union funds were not used to support the strikers; and to deport and bring to trial under the Defence of the Realm Regulations any person inciting to strike.[12]

The roots of the CWC began in 1915 in the engineering firms when they came into conflict with the Clyde workers who refused to back down. 10,000 workers went out on strike on the Clyde over a raise of two pence an hour. Because of the shortage of Scottish workers these firms hired workers from America at a significantly higher wage

---

[11]Asa Briggs, ed. *Essays in Labour History, 1866-1923*, (London:Archon Books:1971), James Hinton, "The Clyde Workers' Committee and the Dilution Struggle," 153.
[12] Bev. iii 267-8 'Summary of Dilution Programme as Based with modifications' on Mr. Weir's Memorandum' (January 22, 1916).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

than workers in Scotland were receiving for the same job. The workers demanded 10 ½ d per hour and while the company was not prepared to pay it to the Scots they were prepared to pay it to the Americans. The strike lasted for two weeks with the union leadership paying the fines and thus diffusing the crisis. The leaders of the unofficial committee felt they had allowed themselves to be bamboozled into accepting a deal by the government and the trade union officials that they would otherwise not have accepted.[13] Workers' leaders were arrested and their newspapers suppressed. Later leading members amongst the shop stewards were deported from Clydeside under the wartime legislation, and so they carried Scotland's viewpoint south of the border. Together with the lessons of some of the successes that had been achieved "This was no sporadic outburst; it was a grass-roots reaction to the totally unacceptable and uncontrolled rise in the cost of living."[14] In *Hansard* we learn that the union leadership opposed the strike further alienating them from the membership. "The executive Committee of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, on the matter being reported to them by their local officers, immediately issued a statement repudiating the strike, forbidding the payment of strike benefit, and calling on the men to return to work."[15] Because of this demonstration of power, albeit diffused by the union leadership, the Clyde Workers did not suffer from the sternness of those governmental acts to the same degree that other ASE members did around the country.[16]

---

[13] *Herald*, October 23, 1915; *Forward*, October 23, 1915.
[14] Tucket, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress,* 117.
[15] *Hansard,* H.C., March 28, 1916, 565. Dr. Addison bemoaned the fact that the union leadership was unsuccessful in reigning in the militancy of the Clyde workers.
[16] Beveridge, *Power and Influence*, 129. "The Leaving certificates formed a main subject of discussion between the Minister and the trade unions when a Bill to amend the Munitions of War Act was on the stocks in November 915."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Coupled with massive rent strikes involving 5,000 tenants organized by the wives of many of these workers the Clydeside had virtually come to life with rebellion. Helen Crawford described the scene.

> Due to the demands of war work and munitions, and the property owners immediately proposed raising the rents of houses in working class area. The Glasgow Women's Housing Association took this issue, and in the working class districts, committees were formed to resist these increases.[17]

The CWC "work stoppage and march, in 1915, was joined by an army of women to the Sheriff Court in Glasgow. The protest was fully supported in the shipyards and workshops."[18] Anticipating rent controls the landlords raised their rents once again angering people all the more. Eighteen munitions workers were summoned to court for non-payment of rent resulting in the shutdown of local shipyards where workers downed tools and marched to the court. John McLean, one of Britain's most uncompromising revolutionaries, participated in this event addressing 10,000 workers demanding that the charges against these workers be dropped. For those who could not pay the rent increases the landlords

> made attempt after attempt ... to secure evictions, all of which ended in futility. The increased rent could not be collected, the tenants could not be evicted... When the landlords would receive their increases they took the householder to court. By this means workers were summoned to attend the court and show reason why their wages should not be impounded to liquidate the debt claimed by the factor in the form of rent. In such a case the factor could not only get a decision allowing him to get his rent from the employer out of the wages of the worker, but he could also ask for a judgement placing the costs of the proceedings as an extra burden on the tenants...On the day of the trial Glasgow witnessed a demonstration the likes of which had never been seen before. In the early morning the women were marching to the centre of the city where the sheriffs court is situated. Mrs. Barbour's army was on the march. But even as they marched, mighty reinforcements were coming for the workshops and the yards. From far away Dalmuir in the West, from Parkhead in the East, from Cathcart in the South and

[17] Facwett Library, Helen Crawford: The Glasgow Rent Strikes, 1915.
[18] Ibid, 117.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Hyde Park in the North, the dungareed army of the proletariat invaded the centre of the city.[19]

The Government hurriedly passed the Rent Restrictions Act but socialists did not link the terrible housing conditions to the larger question of capitalism.

Combined with the growing crisis that war inevitably reeks in any society that must bare the brunt of it, and the presence of the ILP on the Clyde, "the engineering and shipbuilding workers were receptive to the view that it was the search by capitalists for profits that had begotten the war." [20] This was prominent in the literature that was promulgated by the CWC. The presence of the Socialist Labour Party on the Clyde, raising political questions and offering an alternative to the traditional trade union leaderships' point of view, was one factor in the heightened political consciousness of the Clyde workers. Many of the leaders of the CWC were members or were close to the organization, and yet even argued a dual unionist approach to organization. (This philosophy intended to pull the most class-conscious workers out of the union leaving it in the hands of a conservative union leadership). In response to what Cole perceived as the Marxist approach of the committee he wrote:

> Both the Murphy and the Gallacher-Campbell pamphlets, representing broadly the English and Scottish Works' Committee movements, confine themselves mainly to questions of method; but it is clear in both that the object aimed at is nothing less than a complete transformation of the industrial system. The Workers' Committees were always, in this sense, revolutionary bodies, aiming at the overthrow of the capitalist system in industry, and at playing their part in the substitution for capitalism some for 'workers' control'.[21]

---

[19] Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde,* 54-55.
[20] B.C. Roberts, *The Trades Union Congress 1868-1921,* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1958), 275. Similar views were expressed among workers in places such as Sheffield where the concentration of industry was quite extreme and thus class-consciousness was also acute. Read J. Boughton's, "Working Class Politics."
[21] G.D. H. *Cole, Workshop Organization,* (London:Oxford At the Claredon Press:1923), 88.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The CWC's program was nationalization of industry with a "direct share in the management down through all the departments."[22] But he maintained that because the leaders of this unofficial movement had attempted to make it strictly Marxian in outlook, "it became more and more the movement of a revolutionary minority seeking to act upon the 'apathetic mass', and draw it, by all available inducements, towards a more revolutionary outlook and policy."[23]

There is therefore controversy over the extent to which these workers could be considered revolutionary and to what extent they impacted their fellow workers. What we do know is that their politics were quite contradictory. The contradiction between these very opposing elements has kept the Clyde Workers on the agenda of many British working class historians. There is probably no more extensive working class British historiography than there is about the Clyde. Workers hoped to build an organization that they believed would more greatly reflect the needs and desires of the rank and file, but they also conceded leadership back to the official union heads once the crisis had passed, and returned to a ginger group until the next crisis. Sean Damer, in his review of Iain McLean's "The Legend of the Red Clyde," along with other historians joined the debate over the revolutionary or non-revolutionary nature of the Clyde Workers Committee. His article criticized Iain McLean's "The Legend of the Red Clyde" and maintained that although McLean may be correct about some things, his assessment of the overall situation on the Clyde was wrong. McLean contends that the hype about revolutionaries in Glasgow was just that. He attempts to debunk the myth that the workers were in fact red. Iain McLean argues that rather than being revolutionary, these workers were merely

---

[22] Ibid, 91.
[23] Ibid, 101.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attempting to defend their craft and defense of their craft came packaged almost within a religious garb couched in revolutionary rhetoric. McLean suggests that these men could be described more closely as religious Presbyterians than radical Marxists. According to McLean

> The ideology inspiring many influential mlitants was not Marxist, except at the most superficial level, but if anything religious; that the most consistently revolutionary party was isolated by its sectarianism from the groups to which it might otherwise have appealed; that the most thoroughly revolutionary individual was cut off from his supporters; and that demands were couched in revolutionary language by individuals whose real purpose was merely the protection of craft interests. Political revolutionaries and religious extremists have a great deal in common. Both believe that they possess the whole truth and nothing but the truth and that those who oppose them are not just wrong but evil.[24]

Iain McLean holds that these workers (engineers) were quite elitist and narrow in their outlook. Damer's response is worth noting.

> I think that this study fails on two important counts. Firstly, it is an exemplar of a certain kind of historical political science, which relies heavily on official and other printed sources of data. In this sense, it is a profoundly empiricist piece of work. McLean has absolutely no feel for the sweep of events on the Clyde in the first two or three decades of this century, no sense of the sheer political drama of the period, no empathy for the dynamic personalities involved, no sympathy for the dedication and suffering of some of these personalities, no nose for the optimism of the time. There is absolutely no sense whatsoever of the working of EP Thompson's 'machine' of class as described in the famous passage in 'The Peculiarities of the English'. But these are notoriously difficult to measure, and for McLean, if you can't measure it, it's not there, it didn't exist. He is so keen on plumbing the depths of the 'rapids of revolution', that he has failed to notice the force of the current. He is ignorant of the existence of an oral history of the period amongst thousands of surviving Clydesiders. Thus the tenor of his book is profoundly patronising. It is full of witty aphorisms about the Characters of Kirkwood, John MacLean and so on. I am sure they will go down well in the Senior Common Room at University College, Oxford. In Glasgow, they go down like a lead balloon.[25]

---

[24] Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside,* (Edinburgh:John Donald Publishers Ltd.:1983), 98-99.
[25] Sean Damer, Review of Iain McLean: The Legend of the Red Clyde, *History Journal,* (18) Autumn 1984.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus although McLean has argued that not a great deal was special about the Clyde and that many of the beliefs about its alleged "red" nature was a myth, other historians, in addition to Damer have argued the contrary. Moreover, the conditions were so similar to Russia that revolution was not impossible in Scotland.

> To the existing overcrowding came 100,000 wartime influx into the Clyde Valley, some 60,000 into Glasgow alone. The Clyde was overwhelmingly a proletarian district. The workers themselves were to an extent concentrated in large engineering concerns, shipbuilding and engineering plants any of them employing 6,000 workers or more. Yet, the growth of industry was sufficiently novel for its arrival to be remembered, its growth checked and annotated. Industrialism did not appear to the Clydeside workers as a God-given and inevitable environment of mankind, but rather as one phenomenon amongst others, changing and changeable, fit to be moulded by his hands as it has been by others. These factors, large-scale industry, growth of population, proletariat still in process of training to new processes were also to be found in Russia's St. Petersburg, similar conditions produced similar stimuli.[26]

But while many of the stewards were often socialists themselves they did little to advance the political understanding of their fellow workers. Their strikes, especially on the Clyde, were militant encompassing many thousands of workers, but were most often apolitical, that is, they generally did not raise political demands. Their challenges to the union leaders were most often in the nature of complaining about their lack of democracy or militancy in defending workers. It was not until much later that they mounted a political challenge. Not only did they not challenge them politically but because of their view on leadership quite often they shied away from union politics altogether, arguing that to become a leader was to automatically become corrupt. Since the SLP did not discuss the question of the war with the workers who worked at the engineering plants, many of the questions such as conscription were impossible to resolve. They may have been fearful that the majority of the workers continued to support the war because war meant full

[26] National Library of Scotland, Acc 4251.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

employment; thus these socialists feared that actively opposing the war would alienate them from their fellow workers. It is therefore impossible to tell how many workers would have actively opposed the war had there been those who were willing to challenge it, but since the question was not raised until 1917, after the Russian Revolution, this is something the Clyde Workers Committee could not have been certain about. Rather than organizing against it, the CWC hoped to mitigate what they considered the worst aspect of it, that is, dilution.

Historians such as James Hinton, who has already been cited, suggest that although the revolutionary potential of these workers' committees "were never realized, nor indeed came very near to being realized, that such a development existed as a possibility and was perceived as existing by the revolutionaries."[27] There is a reason that Hinton can legitimately point to the CWC's revolutionary nature without dismissing their political confusion. The CWC concerned with workers diminishing rights states: "let us preserve what rights still remain and refuse steadfastly to surrender another inch to our allied foes-the capitalists and politicians. The liberty and freedom of the organized worker is the one thing; our fight is the fight that matters, and now is the time to act."[28] In response to the Munitions Bill and the government's waging both industrial and political war, workers began to develop a political understanding that exceeded just the need for industrial action.

There is little doubt that there was a lack of clear political understanding among the CWC or the SLP or the ILP for that matter, which caused confusion amongst the workers. The SLP was sectarian and rigidly formalistic, forcing workers to take an

---

[27] James Hinton, *The First Shop Steward's Movement,* (London:George Allen and Unwin Ltd:1973), 15 .
[28] Glasgow University, ugd 102/3/9, Clyde Workers' Committee, 1916-17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

entrance examination on the principles of Marxism before they were allowed to join the organization. Its theory of revolution was confused, at best, interchanging revolution with industrial unionism. But according to Cole's account although their tactics may have changed from the prewar years "the driving force remained the same- an increasing anti-capitalist feeling expressing itself largely in a somewhat vaguely but insistently expressed desire for a real share in the control of industry."[29]

The leadership of the CWC did not do much better: incorporating members that either supported the war outright (John Muir) or having members that opposed the war but who did not organize against it (John Gallacher). Gallacher did little until the latter part of the war to raise workers' consciousness about its capitalist nature. He oftentimes even refused to discuss issues that were not on the agenda, making it difficult to broaden political discussion. Nonetheless, the historical record will show that Sean Damer was correct. These men believed themselves to be revolutionary, and, to one degree or another, believed they were fighting the established order.

Iain McLean also contends that John MacLean, a teacher and supporter of the British Socialist Party, John Macdougall, a bank clerk and Socialist Labour Party supporter, and John Maxton, a teacher and supporter of the Independent Labour Party, all socialists, were all middle class and therefore were able to understand Marxist economics since they had been educated, unlike the workers whom he dismisses as implicitly unable to understand such heady concepts. While John McLean was not originally from a proletarian household, he was poor growing up and never considered himself anything other than proletarian. This was true for Maxton and Macdougall as well. Their relationships were with other workers and both McLean and Macdougall were fired for

[29] Ibid, 129.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

standing up for their fellow workers. Iain McLean argues moreover that although John McLean's Marxist ideas were lucid "there is no evidence that, even here, his influence was particularly profound."[30] The literature on the influence that John MacLean held challenges Iain McLean's view. At least for now, it is worth pointing out that John McLean not only had thousands of people listening to his speeches against the war every Sunday in Glasgow, but he and other faculty at the Central Labour College such as Ness Edwards, had an important influence on all kinds of workers, including miners and railwaymen. In fact, upon McLeans' final release from prison for violating the Defense of the Realm Act for the third time he was met by a deputation of miners who eventually brought him to Fairfield shipyard where a "monster meeting" of workers was held. He was met by thousands of workers at the Buchanan street station in Glasgow with a horse drawn carriage. Upon his release from prison

> All round the station and down Buchanan Street was a crowd which literally packed the street. When the train drew in the cheering was terrific. With the utmost difficulty we escorted McLean to the carriage. The horse had been taken out and several of the stalwarts were in the shafts ready to start. But the difficulty of getting him through the crowd to the carriage was as nothing compared with getting the carriage out of the station and along the street. A huge red flag had been presented to him, and he stood in the carriage, a figure of revolutionary defiance, waving the flag above his head.[31]

Banco Pribicevic also disagrees with Iain Mclean and discusses in some detail the rise of the Shop Stewards' movement in a variety of industries. He writes:

> In these seven years (1915-22), and particularly in the first half of this period, it [CWC] played an extremely important role in the development of engineering trade unionism, and of the radical socialist movement in general. By the end of the war it had spread all over the country and exercised great power in many engineering establishments and even whole districts. Trade Union officials, employers, and even the government had been forced to reckon with it and to

---

[30] McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside,* 104.
[31] Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde,* 213.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> negotiate with it. Never before or since has an unofficial rank-and-file movement exercised such power and influence in this country.

"...the movement was revolutionary in the sense that most of its leading members held that the abolition of capitalism was one of its principal objectives."[32]

Workers' control of industry had become a common theme throughout Britain, especially since the state had become the major employer during the war of millions of workers. The engineering industry had gone through enormous changes, not only with regard to its new employer, but the whole question of technology, and therefore dilution, impacted the workers intensely and relatively suddenly. But Hinton writes: "while they were right to see the skilled engineers, in war conditions, as the key section of the workers, they were quite wrong to assume that this section was so strong they had no need to draw other sections into the struggle."[33] In short this was the perfect opportunity to draw into the struggle other workers who felt the pain of the Military Service Bill and the increasing cost of livig. The Clyde workers missed their opportunity and attempted to wage a struggle on their own. Weakened by their isolation they did not exploit their potential allies. But according to Pribicevic "Up to the point at which the movement was dissolved the idea of workers' control was part of its very existence, and any attempt to reject it would have met with great opposition from the rank and file."[34]

Even on a limited basis many of these workers displayed militancy and courage in the face of the draconian laws that were put into effect during the war years. Workers on the Clyde felt angry at the unfair advantage that the employers held regarding job conditions. By December 1915 Lloyd George was invited to St. Andrew's Hall in

---

[32] Banco Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-22*, (Oxford:Basil Blackwell:1959), 85.
[33] Hinton, *The First Shop Steward's Movement,* 170.
[34] Pribicevic, 146.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Glasgow to speak to Clyde Workers. In *Pioneering Days,* Thomas Bell recounts the pandemonium that broke out as soon as Arthur Henderson began to speak. He was to introduce Lloyd George, the main speaker at the meeting. Although "elaborate precautions were taken to protect the speakers; a special barricade was ... erected across the platform to prevent anyone getting to it from the body of the hall." The workers spent the time while waiting for the speakers in singing socialist songs-'The Red Flag', "The International," and a favourite piece of doggerel set to the Hallelujah hymn, "Tell me the old, old story."[35] Both Lloyd George and Henderson were greeted with condemnation and vituperation when they attempted to speak. Mr. George hoped that his close relationship with these labor leaders would win him support among the workers, but this only inflamed them more. When the *Forward* attempted to describe the meeting in the next issue it was suppressed. The CWC organized its own press called The *Worker* to publicize its view on the issues. The fourth issue too was suppressed.

Given the contradictory nature of many of the political viewpoints among Clyde workers it is quite difficult to pin down the exact nature of their political consciousness. To say that it is quite complex is to understate the obvious. But to argue as Iain McLean does that these were just craft workers protecting their turf totally misses the point. They may not have been, and clearly weren't sophisticated Marxists, but they were for promoting a different, most likely a socialist society devoid of the offences that they experienced daily. Both the workers and their unofficial leadership were confused, but they believed themselves to be revolutionary socialists. Stuart Macintyre, in his study *Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-33,* attempts to define the indefinable. In his study he gives us a description of the consciousness of the working class without

[35] Thomas Bell, *Pioneering Days,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart Ltd:1941), 113.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

completely pinning it down. Macintyre says, "We should be careful not to imply that we are dealing with a single stream of social protest…" Anyone studying the organised labour movement in the early part of the twentieth century must be struck by its untidiness, not just the considerable degree of regional and sectoral differentiation but the coexistence of quite separate strands of social thought."[36]

The importance of understanding the Clyde leadership is twofold: 1) their influence was extremely important not just on the Clyde but in other parts of industrial Britain as well. That is, if people believed that they were indeed revolutionary than this would mean that workers who followed their lead probably sought extreme social change as well; 2) since their leadership was contradictory, this would have made their leadership problematic thus presenting little real challenge to the trade union leaders who would not challenge either the employers or the government. The failure of the 1919 uprising was a direct result of the CWC's inability to lead.

Unlike the engineering industry the miners and railway workers formulated a different strategy in order to deal with the consequences of war and their respective union leaders to either rise or not to the challenges that they faced in their industries. As militant and as political as these two sectors were they too could not break out of the hold of sectionalism in which they found themselves.

The miners showed a similar recalcitrance against what they perceived were repressive acts by both their employers and by the government. Although craft issues did not confound them (at least not to the same degree as the engineers) they had to fight some of their leaders who undermined many of their more important strikes. But the

---

[36] Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-29,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1980), 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

miners did feel that leaders such as Robert Smillie (ILP) acted in defense of their demands and thus did not form permanent opposition groups. (The Fife Miners Reform Committee although not without influence did not play the same roll as the CWC.)

By 1914 the Triple Alliance, which included the railroad workers, the miners and the transport workers, had already come into existence. The growing sense that workers needed to raise the ante by organizing larger and larger amalgams of workers' combinations, by its nature challenged the employers' control. Since at least 1910 the miners had demonstrated their willingness to take on the employers, the state, and their own union leadership. In some very serious situations, showdowns occurred, especially in South Wales. The police assaulted striking workers at Tonypandy for demonstrating their refusal to go back to work unless their demands were met. By 1912 they were striking for a minimum wage. The miners' union had a long tradition of syndicalism. Moreover, *The Miners' Next Step,* which was circulated widely, put its main emphasis on the nationalization of the mines under workers' control. These workers did not follow their traditional union leadership, but were socialists and garnered support from their fellow workers around positions that would challenge the employers' rule. While nationalization, especially after 1914, became the watchword for the miner's union this was not coupled with a call for workers to wrest power from the employers. And yet in the split in the Ruskin Labour College the Miners and the Railwaymen endorsed the Marxists supporting the school not only with worker-students, but they actually bought it guaranteeing its continuance. Ness Edward, a miner and educator argued that: "these classes became the thought centres for the coal-field."[37]

---

[37] Ness Edward, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation Vol.* I, (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1938), 78

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But divisions in the union existed and while the workers of South Wales never abdicated their right to strike, the union leadership of the miners' federation (MFGB) decided that workers in different regions should negotiate separately as opposed to organizing a national struggle. Moreover, William Brace, the miners' president, was appointed to the position of Under Home Secretary in the War Coalition Cabinet leaving the position open for James Winstone, an ILP supporter, to take his place. In the struggle that embroiled the miners in 1915 when their leadership put forward demands that the miners would not accept the government stepped in and proclaimed that the coalfield had been put under the Munitions of War Act, making it illegal for the miners to strike. On July 15, 1915 a strike was called against the Munitions Act. This strike was of a political nature as opposed to just for bread and butter issues.[38] And although the Executive recommended that the miners return to work the conference voted their recommendation down. The Government ultimately backed down in the face of this united response. The agreement that was passed was known as the Conciliation Board Agreement of 1915.

The younger miners were for socialism and continued to elect people that they believed were socialists. James Winstone, initially a miner's agent, argued for the irreconcilability of capitalism. Anyone who hoped to be elected by the miners had to be on the left politically. Thus Frank Hodges was elected Secretary of the Miners' Union during the period of the 1919 strike and the 1921 debacle. Each up and coming leader had to at least pay lip service to the destruction of capitalism if he wished to win the confidence of the workers. And once the initial flurry of patriotism passed an anti-war

---

[38] Peter Hain, *Political Strikes:The State and Trade Unionism in Britain,* (London:Viking Press:1986), 75 writes: "Since the development of wartime collectivism had to a very great extent placed the government, rather than the owners, in control of industry, labour ambitions readily resolved into direct confrontation between unions and government. In these circumstances the line between industrial and political power was fine indeed."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sentiment began to develop inside the miners' union. According to Ness Edwards, "among the rank and file the propaganda of the Socialist Labour Party was fast creating an active rank and file movement with a definite working-class view of war." [39] At this juncture, Edwards complained about the confusion of all of the dissidents, those who were anti–war and anti-conscription who found themselves in the anti-conscription movement neglecting to take a stand on the war.[40] Rather than developing a clear program in opposition to the war many anti-war miners believed that the anti-conscription movement represented their doubts about Britain's involvement in the war. But the miners joined their resolutions to others that had already been passed to demand that the government not impose compulsory military service. In the meantime the Executive encouraged the continuance of recruiting. But in contradistinction to the leaders, Ness Edwards maintains that the consciousness of the miners developed in an anti-capitalist direction.

> At the conference held in June for the purpose of amending the rules of the organization, a rule was inserted to the effect that it was the object of the organization to secure the entire organization of all workers employed in the and about the collieries situated in the South Wales and Monmouthshire coal-field, with a view to the complete abolition of Capitalism.[41]

Nevertheless, the Executive still considered it its duty to help the government recruit miners. Now instead of the government taking responsibility for calling up the workers, the workers would be doing the job of the government recruits. The union leaderships argued that this would keep vindictive foremen from retaliating against militant miners by sending them to the front, because they would be choosing themselves, which men would go. Striking against the Munitions Act led to its successful

---

[39] Ibid, 94.
[40] Read *The Hound of Conscience: History of the No-Conscription Fellowship 1914-1919* by T. Kennedy.
[41] Ibid, 98.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repudiation, but even after that successful struggle against the government, Lloyd George attempted to impose the Defense of the Realm Act upon them in 1916. In addition to South Wales, the miners' militant tradition led them to down tools in other places as well. In West Yorkshire, according to W.D. Stewart, a serious dispute arose "over the question of adjustment of percentage additions to the minimum rates. This dispute led to a strike which lasted almost six months, and was finally settled in favour of the miners, at least for the duration of the war, only after the whole of the British coalfields had threatened to strike in sympathy."[42] And, according to James Young, "in the Lanarkshire coalfields the Miners' Union conducted a ballot on peace negotiations, and 18,767 miners voted for immediate peace negotiations and only 8,249 voted for the continuance of the war." "Then in November a giant workers' demonstration hailed the German revolution as the beginning of international socialism; and this new mood of working class militancy found expression in the votes polled in the general election."[43]

As for the Railwaymen's leader, J.H. Thomas, he displayed little difference from the rest of the union leadership. Political or even militant struggle was to be played down when fighting for railway workers' demands. But railway workers did not form any sort of permanent dissident groups in the union allowing Thomas to retain control. Therefore a conservative such as Thomas was able to continue to make policy unhindered. "Mr. J.H. Thomas, M.P assessing a meeting of railway workers at Brighton yesterday, made a strong protest against undisciplined action by railwaymen to obtain their demands." Thomas said, "they had in the railway world reached a very dangerous stage. Never within the experience of the society was there such a united and determined demand for

---

[42] W.D. Stewart, *Mines, Machines and Men,* (London:P.S. King and Son Ltd.:1935), 60.
[43] Young, *The Rising of the Scottish Working Class,* 194.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

an improvement in the men's conditions as now."[44] The Railway workers, like the miners endorsed the Marxist leanings of the Central Labour College and helped to purchase it in the midst of its own fight with the Ruskin Institute. When workers on the Clyde were deported for organizing a strike the NUR passed the resolution: "we consider the repressive action of the government was unwarranted and was undertaken for the purpose of smashing trade unionism, increasing the supply of cheap labour and entrenching the capitalist class in their exploitation of the working class." [45] And according to Boughton "In 1920, the ASLEF no. 1 branch in the city [Sheffield] passed resolutions calling for workers' control of both the railways and the mines and in succeeding years it several times demanded industrial action to achieve political ends."[46]

As members of the Triple Alliance the combined forces of these three unions added up to well over a million men. The miners' union alone had nearly one million workers. The size and the growing strength posed a potential threat to both the employer and the government. Workers who daily faced arbitrary decisions by their employers, who not only served to intimidate them but humiliated them as well, responded to their arbitrariness. The more militant layers of the working class organized independently of their own union leadership and called for workers' control (to one extent or another) over their own industries. This was manifested around the demand for the elimination of industry that was privately run, but since no united opposition movement provided any more than an abstract program of disagreements with the union leadership, the leadership managed to maintain control undermining the possibility of a unified response to the crisis that was facing the whole of the working class.

---

[44] The *Times*, September 6, 1915.
[45] National Library of Scotland, Acc 5428.
[46] Boughton, "Working-Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield" 95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

According to James MacDougall, "the victory of the revolution in Russia had breathed new life into international socialism, almost killed by the antagonisms the war had bred." [1] Among most workers there was a growing desire to end the war. Even Arthur Henderson, Minister of Labour and head of the Labour Party, was forced to resign from the Coalition government. Support for Woodrow Wilson's war aims, which appeared to oppose imperialist annexation and indemnities upon the conclusion of the war, were growing within the TUC and the LP. The only group that actively opposed this solution was Havelock Wilson's Firemen and Seaman's Union, which was not only for the continued prosecution of the war but encouraged racist attitudes against non-white workers, especially the Chinese, which contributed to the terrible race riots in port towns such as Cardiff in 1919. Wilson congratulated the land labour (farmers) in Liverpool who "have the foresight to realise the dangers of Yellow labour while at the same time playing the part of patriots."[2] His staunch policy against peace prevented other union leaders from going to Stockholm where the "socialists" and labour leaders of the belligerent countries intended to discuss peace. Trevor Wilson argues that Havelock Wilson's adamant refusal to take delegates to Stockholm was proof that the workers of Britain were just as pro-war as the government. As proof of workers' hostility to a negotiated peace Wilson raises the point that a resolution was passed "at a meeting of seamen in South Wales...unanimously rejecting the decision of the Labour conference to send delegates. "Ominously", we are told 'it demanded a referendum of the rank and file

---

[1] *Forward*, July 13, 1918.
[2] *Seamen,* March 2, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of Trade Unionists'."[3] We are not told though how many people attended the meeting or whether their leadership provided a democratic vote since Havelock Wilson was not known for his exercise in democratic trade unionism. We know little about the makeup of the people who were there and less about the debate. Trevor Wilson provides little detail except for the fact that the resolution was passed.

In contrast to this meeting we find that thousands of workers met at Leeds to greet the first Russian Revolution with enthusiastic calls for recognition. Even leaders such as Ramsay McDonald and Philip Snowden, who had no revolutionary intent, rode on the wave of this enthusiasm. Workers and soldiers' councils were set up modeling themselves on the Russian example. The overwhelming endorsement by British workers for the uprising and the promise of democracy had profound consequences for the remaining portion of the war and the subsequent intervention of the British government in Soviet Russia.[4] MacDonald paid homage to the democratic revolution and called for British workers to emulate the experience. The delegates called for guaranteeing the right of both self-determination of nations and the equality of men and women. Strikes that flared up in Scotland were strongest on the Clyde where the shop stewards' movement was the most pronounced, prompting the ILP to take advantage of the sentiment which led to the Leeds Conference.

---

[3] Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War,* 525.

[4] Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-1919,* (Cardiff:University of Wales Press:1976), 155. Talking about the Nottingham Labour Conference on January 23, 1918, Robbins describes it as an "emotional occasion, with the singing of the 'Red Flag', and cheers for the international and the Russian Revolution." Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution.* Vol Two, (London:Sphere Books Ltd:1965), 213, asserts "In the Kornilov detachments advancing to the conquest of Petrograd, there were English armoured cars with English operatives…The head of the English military missing in Russia, General Knox, reproached the American Colonel Robins, for not supporting Kornilov: Said Knox "I am not interested in the government of Kerensky…it is too week. What is wanted is a strong dictatorship. What is wanted is the Cossacks. This people needs the whip! A dictatorship-that is just what it needs." This momentous uprising not only changed the face of Russia, but it changed the dynamic of the war for the British government, its workers and its leadership.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Historically the relationship between British and Russian socialists went back to the beginning of the century. Between April 1902 and May 1903, the Social Democratic Party in Britain printed seventeen issues of Iskra, the Russian Social Democratic newspaper.[5]

> The comparison between the two cities; that is Petrograd and Glasgow is quite striking. Glasgow was terribly overcrowded before the war, and during it even more workers flooded in exacerbating an already difficult situation in search of work. The city became a flood of mankind, but rather as one phenomenon amongst others, changing and changeable, fit to be moulded by his hands as it had been by others. These factors, large-scale industry growth of population, proletariat still in process of training to new processes were also to be found in Russia's St. Petersburg; similar conditions produced similar stimuli.

The SDF distributed large quantities of literature among the crews who were commissioned to build new warships creating a highly industrial and politically conscious working class on the Clyde.

> Industrialism did not appear to the Clydeside workers as a God-given and inevitable environment in the Clyde to replace Russian losses in the Russo-Japanese conflict of 1904. In 1905 the Russian Revolution built up with the aid of leading members of the Scottish SDF a secret arms delivery network which received shipments of revolvers and ammunition from agents in Blyth, Sunderland and North Shields and shipped them out to Czarist Russia, through Scottish ports with the aid of Revolutionary seamen on board Russian vessels. In Glasgow as in London there existed a significant colony of refugees from Czarist tyranny.[6]

The relationship between Russian and British workers was longstanding and thus camaraderie grew among these workers. The close relationship had a profound influence on the workers of Scotland and Wales. In an article in the *Call* in June 1917, the author writes:

> Our comrades from the Russian warship, at present lying on the Clyde, who took such a splendid part in the great demonstration on Glasgow Green last Sunday wish it to be clearly understood on what grounds they participated…They came

---

[5] Ogden, *Revolution 1917-1967 Soviet Power-A Changing World-the Effect on Britain*, CP Pamphlet, 2.
[6] National Library of Scotland, Acc 4251, Box 2/9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> here, 200 of them, in the name of international solidarity of labour to protest against the continued imprisonment of John MacLean and their fellow countrymen, Peter Petroff...."[7]

As early as 1915, even before the Russian Revolution took place, Peter Petroff, a Russian revolutionary at both indoor and outdoor rallies "attracted large audiences and at his first public engagement a crowd of over 1000 people turned up at the Glasgow Panopticon for his lecture on the Russian Revolution."[8]

The program of the Leeds conference was fourfold: a) support of the Russian Revolution; b) foreign policy and war aims; c) civil liberties; and d) workmen and soldiers councils. Historian Arno Mayer contends that MacDonald and Snowden triumphed over the more radical faction and mainly wished to promote their own peaceful war aims.[9] They were able to show their revolutionary credentials by grudgingly supporting the February revolution without having to put forward any concrete proposals that would either end the war or allow for workers' demands for nationalization to be satisfied. MacDonald and Snowden were considered the opposition to the more conciliationist members of the LP that is to people who supported the government's war drive. Therefore MacDonald was viewed as someone who genuinely wished to end the suffering of working people. Consequently, no concrete program was proposed and nothing was accomplished. There can be no doubt that there was a desire for peace among working people, but there was also a longing for workers' control as well. The failure of the Workers' and Soldiers' councils which called for these Councils of

---

[7] *The Call,* June 1917; PRO, FO 371/3008.

[8] J. Smyth and M. Rogers, "Petroff and the Socialist Movement in Britain, 1907-18," *From the Other Shore*: *Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917,* ed. by John Slatter, (London:Frank Cass:1984), 105. According to Michael Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse: March 1917-March 1918,* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press:1981), 249, "the police had raided the Communist club in Shoh, 'and found a meeting of Russian revolutionaries taking place'."

[9] Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918,* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 1959), 179. Also read Ward's *Red Flag and Union Jack,"* 160-61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Workmen and Soldier delegates to initiate and coordinate "working class activity in support of the policy set out in the foregoing resolution, and to work strenuously for a peace made by the peoples of the various countries, and for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour...,"[10] was not merely doomed to failure for lack of support but it was actively sabotaged by the trades unions leaders and the government as well. The Clydebank and District Trades' and Labour Council passed a resolution stating "that a vigorous protest be extended against the banning of public meetings, the encouragement given by the Government to organise hooliganism, and, to demand that the right to hold the Glasgow meeting to establish a workmen and soldiers council be conceded at once."[11] While the Conference was designed to endorse the February Revolution, agreeing with Mayer, Raymond Challinor argues that it was designed by politicians such as Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald to head off more militant actions. Both Snowden and MacDonald looked toward an electoral strategy to win some degree of workers' control.[12] They attempted to take the lead at the convention in order to fend off the more hotheaded elements that would inevitably vie for leadership. The Leeds Conference allowed those leaders who attended it to shape its existence. W.C. Anderson, a Labour Party member and presenter of the motion for a Workers' and Soldiers' Council, declared:

> I have been very much astonished indeed, in visiting various places recently, at seeing a feeling spring up in this country which I did not believe possible-that is, a deep revolutionary feeling springing up among many of the workmen of this country...I do assure you that you will be astonished and, unless you are very careful, you will bring the country to the very verge of revolution. Only a week ago, I saw 70,000 people-the estimate was made not by any Labour people, but by

[10] Coates and Topham, *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain. A book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control,* (London:MacGibbon and Kee Ltd:1968), 116.
[11] Fawcett Library, HH31/28/49.
[12] Ward, *Red Flag and the Union Jack,* 158.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> one of the local newspaper-march through the streets of Glasgow with banks and banners every one of the members of that procession wearing the revolutionary colours.[13]

Challinor contends, correctly, that it was Anderson's intention to control the outcome of events. Many people believed that what Russian workers had done the British workers could do as well. William Gallacher remarked enthusiastically: "Here we were in the early months of 1917 with the great masses of Glasgow aroused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. "Release McLean," "Long Live Free Russia," "Down with War-Down with the Warmakers."[14] The connection between the victory of the Russian workers and at least those workers who lived in Scotland cannot be minimized. The sympathy for the Russian revolution was so profound and so widespread that workers, especially those in coalmines, but not exclusive to miners, were referred to by their co-workers as Bolshies. A number of the coal mining towns in both Scotland and Wales were renamed *Little Moscows* by the miners. Workers in Wales, especially the miners, celebrated the revolution. In another interview, a South Wales miner who came to socialism through one of the older workers in the mines said, upon learning economics, about the Russian revolution and about the counterrevolution that Churchill was waging against the Bolsheviks, "indeed the Rhondda Valley was seething with the philosophy of Communism, and advance socialism."[15]

---

[13] Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism*, 181.
[14] Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 138. Many such examples were quoted from this period by the author. When it was discovered that Churchill had secret discussions with a White general promising 10,000 volunteers to fight Bolshevism the Pontypridd Trades and Labour Council called 'on the government to place [Churchill] on trial for high treason. Pontypridd Labour Party Minute Book, July 30, 1920. Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes of* 1919, 14, cites a number of examples of workers passing resolutions against their government and "unanimously declared that they 'view with fierce indignation the appalling sacrifice of the members of our class involved in the continued campaign against the Russian Socialist Republic by the international capitalists, and demand the immediate withdrawal of the Allied forces from the country'."
[15] SWML, Dyffryn Cellwan Tape No 78, November 6, 1973.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But even in England, and in contrast to Pelling who argued that English workers did not support the Russian Revolution in the way that the Welsh and the Scottish workers did, the revolution found its supporters. In a paper *The Truth about Russia* we learn that "the Engineers Institute was packed with working men and their wives, come to hear Colonel Malone, MP, who has just returned from Moscow." It also claimed that efforts to get a bigger hall in the city of Sheffield were stymied. At a TUC meeting a resolution was proposed that the organized workers demand the immediate establishment of trade relations with Russia and that they declare a "down tools" policy should the Government not immediately agree.[16] And in response to MacLean's final arrest the North London Herald League (NLHL) organized a massive demonstration with 10,000 people present indicating quite clearly that it was not just Scottish workers who identified with MacLean's message. He was released on December 3rd, 1918.[17] These are but a few examples of workers who enthusiastically hailed the revolution.[18]

For the Labour leadership and the government the February revolution proved to be a boon. Both the TUC and Labour Party leaders could now encourage the workers of Britain to fight on since Russia had ostensibly joined the democratic nations by overthrowing the Czar. There was therefore no reason to continue to object to Russia as an ally. But even the February revolution created problems for the government's coalition. Lloyd George, with trepidation, welcomed the revolution but feared its revolutionary implications. So worried was the government and its representatives in Scotland that they prevented, along with the union leadership, Councils voted upon by

---

[16] Working Class Movement Library, *The Truth About Russia*, No. 26.
[17] Weller, *Don't be a Soldier*!, 43.
[18] Among other examples workers all over Britain, including England organized "Hands Off Russia" Committees.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers at Leeds from actually coming into existence. War conditions had undermined the already low standard of living of so many workers giving rise to enthusiastic support by Britain's working class.[19] The fact that workers in a society so brutally run could overthrow their own ruling class brought hope to the workers of Britain that their living conditions could also be improved by concerted working class action. The police, therefore, were on alert against any signs of agitation against the war since socialists had stepped up their call for peace. Demonstrations to support the Russian Revolution also called for an end to war. In fact at a Labour Party meeting on September 13, 1917 a motion was passed that "protested against the action of the Glasgow Town Council in prohibiting the Conference of Soldiers and Workmen's councils in Glasgow on August 11th." [20]

The union leadership feared the revolutionary implications of this support and begged Lloyd George to put off implementing the Man Power Bill (this was the right of government officials to call up miners) for fear of the possibility of general strike activity.[21] And since workers were becoming increasingly disgruntled with their officials, controlling the membership had become quite problematic. Time and again workers demonstrated their lack of faith in their union leadership. Workers passed resolutions in their lodges attempting to vote out their leaders but nothing came of these resolutions. Complaints about lack of support for their struggles against management fell on deaf

---

[19] In "Some Paradoxes of the First World War" ed. by J.M. Winter and R. Wall in *The Upheaval of War*, 10, Winter argues that the standard of living for working class people actually improved during the war, but if you consider the combination of casualties, food lines and the undermining of civil liberties the domestic situation actually worsened. He also concludes this in *The Great War and the British People*, (Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1986), 305, 21. But not only is there substantial disagreement among historians over the degree to which workers received benefits, but ultimately Winter himself argues that the war posed a problem for working people.

[20] National Library of Scotland, Acc 5241 (5), Labour Party meeting, September 13 1917.

[21] Cole, ed., *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912-1924,* 107.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ears. In the face of overwhelming support for strike activity union leaders continued to settle disputes with little concern for the wishes of the union membership. Strikes that had occurred in the coalfields previous to the war (1911) were unauthorized and were opposed by Mabon,[22] the union president. And again in 1915 the South Wales miners went out on strike and once again their leaders opposed it. Page Arnot, one of the leaders of the Communist Party said about the strike that the workers were forced to negotiate with three cabinet ministers without the backing of their leaders.[23] Certain that the employers were profiting from the war suffering on queues that lasted for hours just to receive meager provisions workers became increasingly angry. In addition, they had to deal with their union leaders who continued to stay on even when voted out of office.[24] British workers were therefore heartened by the situation in Russia because it gave them some assurance that they too could overthrow what they understood was the "Prussianization," or the dictatorial postures of their own government. Like the Russian workers they could decide their own fate.[25] This was too irresistible for them not to notice and not to want for themselves.

Macdonald and Snowden were well aware of this possibly dangerous situation and therefore sat on the fence ultimately coming down on the side of Lloyd George. Arthur Henderson, who had been in the coalition government until 1917, pushed for the Labour Party Conference to allow Kerensky, the then leader of the Russian government, to attain a hearing. But when the October Revolution occurred, that is the Bolshevik

---

[22] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action:* "His [Mabon's] industrial relations policy emphasized the virtues of harmony between owners and employees in the coal industry." 74.
[23] SWML, Interview with R.P. Arnot.
[24] This is true of J.R. Thomas who was voted out of office in 1919) by the membership of the NUR.
[25] Kellogg and Gleason, *British Labor and the War,* 44write about the Nottingham Conference of the British Labour Party in January 1918. "From the gallery, before they had sat down, the call came for three cheers for the Russian revolution." At this same meeting "they threw open their doors to the representative of the Russian Bolsheviki and acclaimed the revolution." 42.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Revolution, Arthur Henderson denied Litvinoff, the Russian emissary, the same hearing. Fear of working class sympathy for the Russian workers led Henderson to promote this political agenda. For Henderson, Kerensky not only supported the war, but he was a sensible leader, not prone to enforce workers' control in his own country unlike Litvinoff, who advanced the idea of workers' control in Russia. But J.T. Murphy a Sheffield shop steward and founding member of the Communist Party, writes in *Preparing for Power* that "the first impact of the Russian Revolution carried the working-class movement of this country much further than the leaders wanted to go. This was soon proved by the way in which the leaders ignored the instructions of the convention and allowed the movement to die down."[26] Fear of the inspiration that the Russian workers might have sparked in the British working class prompted middle class liberals such as ILP member Henry Brailsford to opine that there may be some reasons that would justify intervention although he conceded that the Russian people had the right to choose their own government without interference. He then hastened to add that intervention could not be for imperialist aims and that it would have to end as soon as the German threat ended.

So it was the combined effort of the socialist organizations with the impetus of the Russian Revolution that garnered 700,000 votes to pressure the Labour Party to leave the Coalition government in 1917. The ever-growing disquiet among workers around these most serious issues put pressure on the union leadership to seek solutions to the problems facing the country. An article in the *Labour Leader*, April 1917, tells of a meeting at the Albert Hall pertaining to the revolution, which was filled to capacity. Twenty-five thousand people attended. Five thousand people were left outside hoping for a chance to

---

[26] J.T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power: A Critical Study of the History of the British Working-Class Movement,* (London:Jonathan Cape:1934), 151.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

get in. "Russia Free!" began the article. "There was a magic in the words. From all parts of London the friends of Freedom came gathering to their call."[27]

"In March and April 1917 work stoppages involved nearly 200,000 men causing the loss of 1,500,000 working days 'more than the total of men affected and days lost in the engineering and shipbuilding trades between the outbreak of the war and the eve of the strikes.[28] So concerned with this growing sentiment that by 1918 "Basil Thomson, Director of Intelligence at the Home office, reported to the Cabinet...People were now 'asking whether Allied intervention was really necessary.[29] And while it is often a maneuver on the part of government representatives who wish to exaggerate threats especially in times of crisis in order to justify greater security resulting in the undermining of civil liberties, it is likely that, combined with other evidence, that the government had something to worry about. As a result, one of the obvious changes in the rhetoric of the government and the press was their harassment and stepping up of repression against foreign-born escapees of Czarist repression. Much of this took the form of anti-Semitism. By mid-1918 Britain and many other nations invaded Russia in order to stem the tide of revolution. This not only brought the question of support for socialist Russia to the fore, but it raised the question of conscription once again. Many thousands of workers were not demobilized after the war and conscription continued to be in place even though the war was over. Therefore, they did not miss the connection between conscription and intervention in Russia. This was demonstrated by the fact that

---

[27] *Labour Leader,* April 1917.

[28] Beveridge, *Power and Influence*, 129.

[29] Stephen White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy, 1920-1924,* (New York:Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc.:1979), 30 In an article called "Skilled Workers and the Politics of the 'Red Clyde," *Socialist Labour History Society Journal*, No 18, 1983, J.R. Morris quotes Basil Thompson as saying he "believed Britain was "as near revolution as at any time since the Bristol riots."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers who were sent to Russia began to mutiny.[30] By 1919 "an emergency resolution was put forward by the miners calling for the withdrawal of British troops from Russia, the raising of the blockade against Germany, the release of conscientious objectors and the withdrawal of the conscription bill then before Parliament."[31] Workers disillusioned with the slowness of demobilization and substandard wages and working conditions raised the question of non-intervention even more forcefully.

The Russian Revolution undoubtedly had a profound impact on British workers. In August 1918 upon MacLean's release from prison there were shouts of applause for the Bolsheviks of Russia and cheers for John McLean; there was the singing of revolutionary songs. Moreover, there were demonstrators that demanded employment for discharged soldiers. Glasgow was alive with the desire for change and the Bolshevik Revolution became the hope for many who wished to find a solution to the tremendous social problems that they faced. The continued imprisonment of John McLean angered workers who felt that he represented the Bolshevik solution in Scotland. Moreover, revolutionaries from Russia who were associated with MacLean were imprisoned for helping to organize strikes on the Clyde. Whether revolution was possible or not, the British government was taking no chances. A *Labour Leader* article, of May 1917, describes major demonstrations in different parts of Britain.

> Labour in Manchester celebrated May Day on Sunday by a demonstration which filled the Free Trade Hall to overflowing, not even standing room was to be found. The meeting had been called by the Manchester and Salford Trades and Labour Council, the Gorton Trades Council, and the Manchester and Salford Labour Party, to commemorate and rejoice in the Russian Revolution…[32]

---

[30] Articles reported in the *Socialist* that "Sailors Refuse to go to Russia" October. 30, 1919 and "Not Volunteers for Russia," found in the *Daily News,* October 23, 1919 are just some of the examples demonstrating Britons unwillingness to fight in the war against Russia.
[31] Ibid.
[32] *Labour Leader,* May 10, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In Glasgow, the author contends:

> Mere statistical details alone would be futile to convey an adequate impression of Glasgow's inspiring fete, but they will serve as a basis for an impression. There were 215 organisations, with something like 1,000 branches, represented in the procession, which was calculated to contain over 70,000 persons of all classes, and was watched by crowds of spectators, who must have numbered a fifth of the city's population, which exceeds a million people. The procession, marching with very little traffic interruption and in brotherly order, took over two hours to travel from George Square to Glasgow Green-a distance of a mile and a half.[33]

While the Soldiers' and Sailors' committees never actually got off the ground there was no lack of support for the Russian Revolution. Workers made up the bulk of the army and therefore were most impacted by the war.[34] Therefore, in support of the Political Committee of the Bristol Trades Council the Merthyr Trades Council (1918) by a vote of five to three adopted a resolution protesting military intervention in Russia and Siberia. The intervention was viewed "as being carried out under the orders of the various representatives of capitalist nations, whose fear of the overthrow of their accursed system will drive them to adopt any and every cruel and subtle method to stave off the inevitable."[35] In May 1920 it was reported that at an Executive Council of the Ferndale Lodge General Meeting a resolution was passed on international solidarity.

> That this meeting expresses its solidarity with all the subject nationals striving for national independence from capitalist states, and with every national section of the working class striving for the overthrow of capitalist class domination and enthusiastically congratulate the workers of Russia in the magnificent struggle for the maintenance of the workers' republic. We pledge ourselves to give every support of them possible in the struggle.[36]

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Winter, *The Great War and the British People,* 37 writes about recruitment of varying classes of people and finds that "employers in both large and small firms tended to stay at home with greater frequency than did the men they employed."

[35] *The Scottish Trades Union Congress,* 149. See Bagwell's essay "The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-1922," 107; Page Arnot, *The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart,:1967), 175; Allen Hutt, *Post-War History of the British Working Class,* (New York:Coward-McCann, Inc.:1938), 26, 29.

[36] SWML, SWCC:NUM/L/33/2, Ferndale Lodge Meeting, May 9, 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In opposition to this view James Hinton maintains that it was not in revolutionary solidarity that these resolutions were called but instead had "more to do with war-weariness and fear of conscription, than with any more explicitly revolutionary solidarity or intention."[37] Undoubtedly, in the midst of a war that raged for over four years war weariness certainly cannot be discounted among the outstanding reasons why workers would no longer wish to continue to fight in Russia, but it was by far not the only reason that workers opposed intervention. Attitudes of a whole class of people generally difficult to assess since they are so intangible and often hard to pin down, can some times be demonstrated. In the case of Russia sympathy for the Russian experiment was tangible. Many ordinary workers referred to themselves and their co-workers as Bolshies and to the police as Cossacks. Under pressure of the 'Hands Off Russia" Committees the trade union officials were forced to call for a general strike against intervention. And while the "Hands Off Russia" Committee began in 1918, soon after the victory of the Bolsheviks, by 1919-20 it managed to win such overwhelming support among workers that resolutions were coming in from all over the country in many different unions and Trades Councils to stop intervention immediately. Once the war in Europe ended workers had the opportunity to deal with the question of intervention in Russia. It was the revelation that life for working class people had not gotten better that fed the flames of discontent. War profiteers had made fortunes off the misery of war. Feeling so pressured by the ranks, even the more conservative union leaders began discussing the importance of pulling out of Russia and tending to the affairs of Britain.[38] Not wishing to fight any

---

[37] Hinton, *Labour and Socialism,* 113.

[38] James Hinton, 70, remarks that: "Herbert Morrison criticized the Party for neglecting to secure a reversal of the Government's intervention policy, and suggested that whether Labour agreed or disagreed with the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

longer was a definite motivation to end the war against Russia, but the general strike resolution also demonstrated a genuine support among workers for socialism in Russia.

For many British workers the blockade of both Russia and Germany was an act of hostility against socialists. The "Hands Off Russia Committee," demanded the withdrawal of British troops and opposed conscription as one of the central features of this internationalist perspective. These "Hands Off Russia" committees sprang up throughout Britain, involving thousands of workers. But it was not until August 1920 that the TUC leadership took any concerted action on the question. General strike resolutions in 1919 and 1920, in conjunction with actions by workers, finally pressed the TUC to demand withdrawal of British troops and financial assistance for its war against Soviet Russia. And by July 1920 the dockworkers and railway workers refused to handle any goods going to support Poland's war against Russia. As a demonstration of their support for the revolution English dockworkers refused to load the *Jolly George* (1920), a ship which was to be supplied with arms to what workers believed was a counterrevolutionary struggle waged by the Polish government and instigated by Britain and the other imperialist powers against Socialism.[39] Resolutions, reported in the *Workers' Dreadnought* were put forward at a London Workers' Committee Conference to join with French and Italian workers in calling for a general strike not only against intervention,

---

Bolsheviks, believed or disbelieved the atrocities with which they were charged, were matters of no consequence. The important issue was the war then being waged against 'the international Socialist movement,' in which British Labour was itself threatened. Only when the Labour Party came to use its full political and industrial powers would the situation be improved. These, the remarks of a fairly conservative member of the Labour Party, indicated something about the sentiment that existed in more radical quarters."

[39] C.J. MacFarlane's, *Past and Present,* (1967) quotes the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in a memorandum dated 1 Dec. 1919; War Office Papers, 33/950, North Russia, 1919: "The difficulties of the Entente in formulating a Russian policy have indeed been insurmountable since in no Allied country has there been a sufficient weight of public opinion to justify armed intervention against the Bolsheviks on a decisive scale. Consequently the attitude of the Allied Governments has, of necessity, been that of 'willing to wound and yet afraid to strike' with the inevitable result that military operations have lacked cohesion and purpose." Morris, *The General Strike*, 178.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

but to secure the release of political prisoners and to demand the end of the blockade of Russia and Hungary. Since the TUC ignored the predominant sentiment of its members regarding British intervention and the blockade of Russia,[40] it took until August of 1920 to pressure these leaders to denounce intervention and declare that they would organize a general strike if the intervention did not cease. One example of a resolution passed was by Doncaster and District Trades and Labour Council

> At three great mass meetings led in Doncaster today the following resolution was unanimously adopted: That this meeting of Doncaster and district workers is emphatically against intervention in the war with Russia. It is absolutely opposed to the supply of men and munitions to Poland. It demands that peace negotiations be continued, and the immediate raising of the blockade and the resumption of trading relations with Russia. In order to secure action on the lines indicated we send word to the Prime Minister and the joint labour executive that we are prepared to down tools and refuse to serve in any military capacity.[41]

The General Union for Swansea Labour Association, the National Union of Ex-servicemen, the Federation of Trades Councils, and the Walsall Labour Party advocated a down tools policy. The National Union of Labour Clubs, on August 7, 1920, passed a resolution as follows: "The conference of the National Union of Labour Clubs with an affiliation of 20,000 members demand that the intervention of Britain in Russian affairs cease and the blockade raised."[42] Smethwick Trades and Labour Council, October 13, 1920: To the National Council of Action –

> Dear Sirs, Your letter of August 27th acknowledging resolution passed at the August meeting of my council requesting the National Council of action to fix a definite date for the conclusion of Peace with Russia, was read at the last meeting of my council. The feeling of the council was that the reply was not satisfactory, and I was instructed again to write you pressing the national council of action to

---

[40] Councils of Actions were organized by the Trades Union movement all over the country to demand the end of the blockade and intervention in Russia. Although these committees were officially sponsored it was only through mass pressure of the working class that they got off the ground. It wasn't until August 1920 that the TUC began to complain about Lloyd George's policy in Russia.
[41] National Museum of Labour History, CA/GEN/58-100, Councils of Action.
[42] NMLH, CA/Gen/1-57, Resolutions of Intervention.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> take the steps indicated in the resolution, namely to fix a date upon which, failing the compliance of the government with the demand, a general strike will be called. Yours faithfully, C.C. Jorres, Secretary.[43]

In response to the question of independence of Poland the Council of Action (London) sent this message to the government:

> The real object is to destroy the power of the Government of Russia and to re-establish in that country a form of government more in harmony with the capitalist interest who dominate the foreign and domestic policy of European States. The workers of this country have nothing to gain by the contemplated attack on Russia. If War is declared we should again be involved in unlimited sacrifice of blood and treasure, and should be used as the tools of capitalist oppression.[44]

The resolution such as the one passed by workers in Grosvenor Square is an example of how strongly workers felt regarding this question. The *Call* reports:

> This meeting of workers, held in Grosvenor Square denounces the unprovoked attack by Polish militarists upon the Soviet Republic of Russia. We believe that such attacks are instigated by the capitalist Governments (the British among them); and call upon the workers everywhere to refuse supplies to the Polish Government. It further records its determination to assist in every possible way the Polish workers in any attempt they may make to stop the infamous war now being waged.[45]

By 1920 the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party, resolved:

> that this Joint Conference… feel 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 organised workers will be used to defeat this War; that the Executive Committee of affiliated organisations 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; and that a Council of Action be immediately constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect.[46]

---

[43] NMLH, CA/Gen/1-57, Council of Action.
[44] Russia and Poland: Declaration issued by the Council of action, London, August 10, 1920.
[45] *Call,* June 3, 1920.
[46] NMLH, CA/FOR.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moreover, Beatrice Webb's *Diaries*so replete with impressions of workers during this period serve as an excellent historical resource. Her comments do not serve as an endorsement of workers' attitudes but she is struck by the groundswell of support for Russia amongst British workers. Since she is in no way sympathetic to working-class radicalism, and will not be swayed to exaggerate their claims she is worth noting. Combined with the hundreds of resolutions by the Councils of Action it is clear that the Russian Revolution had impacted British workers immensely. According to Webb:

> One of the exciting issues of the immediate future is how long will the rebels admire Bolshevik Russia. At present the swing of the Socialist movement throughout the world into the Third International seems irresistible, and Lenin's and Trotsky's military and administrative and diplomatic successes and humiliation of the capitalist governments in having to recognise them as the rulers of Russia have undoubtedly intensified the movement towards what is thought to be the Left.[47]

In contrast to the available evidence Carsten argues that although the Russian February revolution touched a longing among working class people, revolution was unlikely to occur. But the lack of outbreak of a revolution should not blind us to the growing disgust that workers felt for the established order. Pressure was on the Parliamentary Labour Party and the LP, and the TUC "to pass a resolution against the war (August 1920) as a 'crime against humanity, warning the government that the 'the whole industrial power of the organised workers' would be used to prevent this, and urging trade unions to instruct their members to down tools as soon as called on to do so."[48]

---

[47] Webb, *History of Trade Unionism,* 177.

[48] Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars: 1918-1940,* (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press:1963), 41 This is but one example of the hundreds of resolutions that came in across the country especially after the Councils of Action were formed in 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The question of whether workers were going to achieve any sort of equity was posed most starkly during this period so that many hundreds of thousands of workers attempted to find solutions to their economic woes. Workers were increasingly arguing for nationalization in order to guarantee a fair wage but the union leaders had other plans. Like Lloyd George, C.T. Cramp, the railway leader and a "socialist", intimated that the cost of the war should be born by Germany as a way of assuring workers a higher wage. This proposal however implicitly argued that the German working class was to blame for the war.

What was undoubtedly true was that as the economic crisis grew and competition over jobs increased and an already difficult situation grew far worse. The leaders of the unions either did nothing to guarantee that they would struggle for jobs for all, or worse, they exploited an already dangerous situation, fanning the flames of racism. Strikes continued unabated throughout 1920. The ship builders and miners struck independently because philosophically many of these union leaders hung on to their original attitudes concerning trade unionism. They were largely craft-based, hostile to the idea of industrial unionism, and did little to unite the workers in the various unions.

With the advent of the Russian Revolution, and the huge outpouring of support for it among British workers,[49] many of these leaders had at least to adopt the rhetoric of socialism. In the face of tremendous power employed by the government in 1919 to end

---

[49] SWML, SWCC/MNA/NUW/I/20/7 June 15, 1920, 1054-55. The Ferndale miners called upon the leaders in the Rhondda No. 1 District to stop work on the first Monday of each month, as a protest against intervention in Russia and that "we continue on this one day a month strike until the British troops are withdrawn from Russia and the Blockade risen." January 13, 1920. The South Wales Miners also passed resolutions condemning President Wilson's handling of the IWW and the shooting down and massacring of people in India. Mr. Malone 'in a discussion in Parliament asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the desire of large numbers of workers in this country to save the workers' republic in Russia, any difficulties will be placed in the way of men who desire to enter Russia for the purpose of serving in the Red Army; and whether they will be permitted to train and organize units in this country?'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the strike the union officials had to employ more militant sounding demands. C.T. Cramp claimed that British workers sought socialism as much as the Russian workers did but that their revolution would be different. "Every measure which we take, every principle which we adopt in our movement, is designed to destroy the foundations of capitalism. According to Cramp, "We believe that conditions make it necessary for us to go steadily and without hesitation sap those foundations, but we cannot bring down the wall of our capitalist Jericho by the flourish of trumpet."[50] Cramp illustrated the quandary of the union leaders. It was necessary to raise the cry of revolution without necessarily carrying it through. But unlike the majority of the union leadership who, at the very least understood the tenor of times, J.R. Thomas was a throwback to the days when the philosophy of trade associations' views predominated within the craft unions. He would not be pushed by the militancy of the workers. Regarding the Russian Revolution and intervention, Thomas concerned himself more with Poland's neutrality than protecting Russia from British intervention, seeking assurances that Poland would not be overrun by the Soviets. These concerns came at the same time when Lloyd George deployed soldiers in Russia and gave millions in aide to fighting the Bolsheviks.[51] It is no wonder that the working class was so resoundingly defeated in the post-war period. The left-wing organizations that had often been confused about their own political perspectives immediately jumped on the bandwagon in support of the revolution and as demonstrated by unions such as the Postal and Telegraph Clerks' Association, which was the first to

[50] *Railway Review,* December 10, 1920.
[51] Glasgow Caledonia University, Gallacher Collection, September 1920. "In November 1918, the British Government issued a White Paper giving a return of the total expenditure of that government only on naval and military operations in Russia from the date of the armistice to October 3 of the next year." 1. In less than one year the government sent £94,830,000 to fight the Bolsheviks.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

raise the question of workers' control there was much sympathy in the working class for such a demand. As a demonstration of workers' desire to implement their control

> the Postal and Telegraph Clerks' Association had the honour of being the first Union to make a public and open demand for joint control – a proposal characteristically stigmatized by the dotards of the *New Statesman* as fantastic. A generation in advance of their time, the Postal Workers are fighting, against odds, the battle of National Guilds. It is significant that the demand for control should have come so far in its most articulate form in such a public service as the Post Office.[52]

Already by 1917 Postal workers protested against the practice of dismissing and canceling the pension rights of Civil Servants who were conscientious objectors and since postal workers have a direct relationship to the state it is not surprising that they would then carry the germs of socialist thinking before those who work for private industry. Thus, the demand for joint control!

The demand for nationalization and workers control was taken up by mine workers as well and was made a staple of their program at least until their defeat in 1926. The railroad workers also endorsed nationalization of industry. The generalized consensus that nationalization was desirable allowed the National Union of Railwaymen in January 1917 at their conference to support a similar resolution.

> That this Conference, seeing the railways are being controlled by the State for the benefit of the nation during the war, is of opinion that they should not revert to private ownership afterwards. Further, we believe that national welfare demands should be acquired by the State to be jointly controlled and managed by the State and representatives of the National Union of Railwaymen.[53]

As Challinor points out, that the 'Bolsheviks had acted a great stimulus to revolutionary groups in Britain, whose influence was expanded in any case as a result of

---

[52] Coates and Topham, *Industrial Democracy,* 254-55.
[53] Ibid, 151.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the growing industrial unrest."[54] Not surprisingly it became increasingly clear to many workers who had to face the military when they went out on strike that the state was not neutral when disputes over wages arose. Once the revolution occurred many of the old views were discarded paving the way for a genuine revolutionary leadership to emerge.

The October Revolution attracted many of the pre-war syndicalists to Communism. Although there were still significant differences within the British left, Bolshevism became an important pole. Arguments over political issues continued, and communism demanded the attention of left wing socialists in a way that had not existed previously. It demanded an allegiance to a program leading to revolution although many of its adherents often did not understand much of what they themselves espoused. "The controversies over methods and powers gave way in 1917 to a distinctly open and popular movement which flowed over from a purely 'industrialist' shop-floor struggle, towards a 'deeper revolutionary feeling."[55] Sentiment among workers after the Russian Revolution had changed markedly.[56] When the shop stewards' movement was eventually revived it was revived on a more political basis than when it had begun in the war era. It moved from the purely industrial and therefore purely sectional struggle, to the ever-increasing political struggle. Many of the shop stewards joined the Communist Party during its formation in 1920 and were largely the same people who moved into its leadership.

---

[54] Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism,* 183-84.

[55] Coates and Topham, *Industrial Democracy*, 94-95. In the Rules and Constitution of the National Shop-Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement during the War there was listed a need for "an ever-increasing control of workshop conditions, the regulation of the terms upon which the workers shall be employed, the organization of the workers upon a class basis to prosecute the interests of the working class until the triumph of the workers is assured."

[56] *Forward,* February 2, 1918. Gallacher describes huge meetings night after night. Geddes, the government minister responsible for conscription, was summoned to a meeting of 3,000 engineers organized to discuss the question of Man Power. The stewards refused to allow the pro-war officials to chair the meeting. The meeting rejected the new conscription bill and unanimously voted for an immediate armistice.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 7: THE JEWS, THE ÉMIGRÉS AND THE EAST END OF LONDON

Debates in the historiography of Jewish emigration have arisen over the question of how radical the East European Jews were and where they stood philosophically on the questions of the war, the working class and socialism. Sharman Kadish, for one, argues in *Bolsheviks and British Jews* that although Jews from Eastern Europe were not assimilationists and were, in fact, hostile to West End Jews who were much wealthier, they were not at all sympathetic to the Bolshevik revolution when it occurred in 1917. This view is in opposition to historians such as Julia Bush who contends that while East End Jews were not necessarily going to model themselves after the Bolsheviks they were quite sympathetic to socialist ideas and eagerly listened to revolutionaries especially after the Russian revolution. This will be taken up further in the chapter

During the turn of the 20th century many thousands of Jews emigrated from their native homeland in Russia and settled in cities such as London and Manchester. Mostly poor arrivals they not only had to contend with hostility from people in their host country, but had to face, in some cases, bigotry from many of their fellow co religionists who had settled in Britain in the mid half of the 19th century many of whom became middle class. Like other immigrants who were forced to uproot themselves and relocate to a new country, Jews who suffered oppression in their homeland[1] had to leave their native Russia. Having to start a new life not only meant learning a new language (although many Jews continued to speak Yiddish), but learning new rules of their adopted

[1] Read W.J. Fishman, "Jewish Immigrant Anarchists in East London 1870-1914," in *Jewish East End 1840-1939,* ed. Aubrey Newman, (London:The Jewish Historical Society of England:1981), 233; L.P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914,* (London:George Allen and Unwin Ltd:1960), 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

homeland and having to accept emerging challenges from their children who would no longer accept the long-established values of their parents.[2]

For the most part Jews who will be discussed in this section and who came from Eastern Europe between the years 1880-1900 were largely religious and were largely kept separated while living in Russia[3] from the greater Russian community given the intense anti-Semitism that existed. Unable to exist under such conditions by 1914 there were approximately 180,000 Jews who immigrated to Britain. As well as the East End, Jews lived in Manchester and in Leeds. Not only had they to deal with the attitudes of the Sephardim (mainly Dutch and German Jews) and had by the time of the arrival of the Ashkenazim been well established and quite Anglicized, but they had to deal with their new countrymen who spoke a different language and lived a much more secular lifestyle. Hostility to the East European Jews by the Sephardim was apparent since many of them demanded their return. Dutch Jews often considered the immigrants beneath them and feared a loss of employment since they competed for many of the same positions.[4] For example, a worker for the Jewish Board of Guardians complained: "When I came to the Board in 1922, there was a staff of 30 of whom 20 were Dutch (Jews). The Dutch could read and write so they got the jobs. All the collectors from the friendly societies were

---

[2] Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto* and *Grand children of the Ghetto* develop these themes quite sympathetically. See *Selected Works of Israel Zangwill,* (Philadelphia:The Jewish Publication Society:1938).

[3] Many Jews who arrived in Britain had lived in ghettos, or in what was known as the Pale of Settlement, which bordered Poland and Russia.

[4] In fact Gartner, quotes, in *The Jewish Immigrant in England*, 55, "a conservative MP for Islington, Benjamin L. Cohen [who] informed the anti-alien lobby in Parliament that he and certain other Jewish MP's were 'disposed to assist in the establishment of such regulations as would discourage the immigration of undesirable persons, provided that precautions were taken to preserve inviolate and right of asylum…He admonished the native Jewish community as President of the Jewish Board of Guardians that proposed anti-alien measures were not anti-Jewish in intent nor would they deny the right of asylum." Cohen voted for the anti-alien act of 1905.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Dutch. And they didn't like the Polish and Russian immigrants really and truly…they felt superior, they just didn't like them very much."[5]

The Russian Jews who had settled in a small area of the East End of London, largely around Mile End Road, Whitechapel, and Benthal Green, moved into tenements. The inhabitants of these dwellings lived in extreme poverty. According to V.D. Lipman, "the Jewish Board of Guardians' Sanitary Committee's visitor during 5,209 visits to 1,746 dwellings in 1892, …found 986 of them below the standards laid down by the local authority under the Public Health Acts."[6] People who lived there complained that "there were five people to a room; sometimes no bed."[7] Coupled with their inability to deal with the numbers of people who sought help, Anglicized Jews who ran the Board of Guardians treated their Eastern European brethren with contempt.[8] Little contact existed between these two groups. Rather, hostility grew around issues such as class and issues concerning WWI and conscription. Together with this growing anti- alien feeling among members of the British government there was in evidence an anti-Semitic response among other sectors of the population. By 1905 the British government passed the Anti-alien act, which was mainly directed at immigrant Jews. Its enactment gave anti-Semitism a rationale for British shopkeepers with the support of Major Evans Gordon (elected to Parliament from Stepney in 1900 and was the founder of the British Brothers League forerunner of the British Union of Fascists) claimed that Jewish shops were cheap and dirty and were kept open all day long and most of the night and thus should be shut

---

[5] Jewish Museum, London, Oral History Project, Tape 426.
[6] V.D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950,* (London:Watts and Co.:1954), 105; Joseph Buckman. *Immigrants and the Class Struggle: the Jewish Immigrant in Leeds, 1880-1914,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press:1983), 96
[7] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 149.
[8] Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant,* 53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

down.[9] The anti-Semitism and anti-alien attitudes of the British government encouraged Jews to find political solutions (in this case political refers to politics in the broadest sense, encompassing industrial action) to these most pressing issues. That is they needed to assert themselves both as Jews and as workers in order to fight the established view of Jews. Thus radical politics became an important element in the East London community frightening both the conservative West End Jewish establishment and the Rabbinate. In response to this radical approach a writer for the *Arbeiter Freund*, an Anarchist newspaper established in East London in 1903, wrote: "A Gang of fanatical Jews had broken into the hall and were trying to grab the collection money [of a socialist meeting]. The gang was armed with sticks, knives and meat cleavers with which they attempted to attack our comrades."[10] 1905 also saw Jewish workers striking in London over conditions that Rudolph Rocker, a German anarchist organizing in the East End, describes

> as workshops [which] were ordinary living rooms, completely unfitted for the purpose, heavy with the seat of many working people, to which was added the damp of the pressing irons on the cloth. There were no regular hours of work. Employment was completely seasonal. In the busy season the people worked all the hours of the day and night, to save something for the slack season, when they earned next to nothing. It was slave-driving. In the busy season the pace was killing. In the slack season it was hunger and hopeless despair.[11]

They often denounced strikes. Unlike in London whose workforce worked in small shops making unity in the entire work force problematic, the Leeds workforce was much more cohesive since many of the establishments were larger. Industrialized to a greater extent, the city of Leeds sported a larger and more well-established trade union

---

[9] Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse,* 197. When referring to Litvinov's presence in London after the Russian Revolution, Balfour claimed that he would exempt East End Jews from military service if he could. According to Balfour, "This would create an intolerable position in the East End, where these Russian Jews were making large sums of money by supplanting British shopkeepers who had been called up for military service." Essentially, Balfour was in agreement with the anti-Semite Gordon from Stepney.
[10] Buckman, *Immigrants,* 163.
[11] Rocker, *London Years,* 168. This description was confirmed by many of the participants of the Oral History Project done by the Jewish Museum in London.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

movement. Joseph Buckman argues that in Leeds, at least, the Jewish tailors, and thus a well-established section of the Jewish working class was more integrated into the Trade Union movement as a whole. The Leeds tailors were regularly represented at TUC meetings.[12]In London the Jewish entrepreneurs in the East End generally had small establishments forcing workers to work not only extremely long hours but in sweatshop conditions. The influences that permeated East End Jewry were quite different from that of the West End. Socialists were completely integrated into the trade union movement of the East End. "...the anarchists were always in the forefront of the anti-sweating campaign, and therefore the Jewish workers would remember, vividly remember, the articles that appeared and the leadership that the anarchists gave, in encouraging the workers to strike" said a person living in the East End at the time.[13] Although socialists were initially the main leftwing influence, by 1905 the Anarchists began to surpass them. Until the Russian Revolution, most often the more militant European workers tended to support anarchism as opposed to joining socialist organizations, which tended to attract more of the middle class. The anarchists were closer to the syndicalist philosophy that maintained the view that larger and larger strikes would ultimately lead to socialism making it unnecessary to build an intermediary organization that would only stand in the way of socialism's logical development. They largely took the lead in many of the more important actions that took place in the community. People such as Rudolph Rocker worked among Jewish workers espousing anarchist propaganda and winning adherents and supporters among people in the community. The paper *Arbeiter Freund* sold over 5,000 copies a week with a readership in even greater numbers. People such as Malatesta,

[12] Buckman, *Immigrants,* 113.
[13] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 211.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Italian anarchist and Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist Prince and even Lenin and Stalin were just some of the people who spoke to the London community when they visited in the early part of the 20th century at venues such as the Jubilee club set up by the anarchists. Moreover, the anarchists played an important roll in educating the East London community by organizing trips to the British Museum and holding discussions on great European classics. Political and intellectual life was also stimulated through the discussions that Russian Jews held who arrived after the revolution and who lectured on such subjects as the arts and culture.[14]

But as long as workers continued to work in factories speedup continued to be a prominent feature of their everyday lives. Unlike in the West End of London where tailors made their clothes from start to end, in the smaller firms in the East End craft was undermined leaving the door open for the establishment of the piecework process. In effect the assembly line was introduced in the East End tailoring firms.[15] Moreover, a handful of Jews with some money were able to invest in many of the tenements that the impoverished Jews inhabited. Given these conditions class struggle between these two groups was virtually inevitable. According to the United Synagogue, "houses under the old landlord 7s a week [are] now 16s a week. Huge blocks of dwellings are being erected by private enterprise in which the rent is enormous. A very extensive development of the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company would be of marked benefit."[16] Rackrenting

---

[14]William J. Fishman, *The Streets of East London*, (London:Duckworth:1979), 124.
[15] Fishman, *The Streets of East London*, 82. According to Fishman, Charles Booth "provides a picture of how the new master living on 'green labour' develops his workshop until he can "press forward into the ranks of the large employers."
[16] Jerry White, "Jewish Landlords, Jewish Tenants: An Aspect of Class Struggle Within the Jewish East End, 1881-1914," *Jewish East End 1840-199* , 208-9; Buckman, *Immigrants*, 161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

became an important element within the Jewish community and a source of great tension between middle and working class Jews. According to Jerry White

> protest meetings were held up and down the East End that winter (1898), with speeches in Yiddish and English. They attracted many hundreds of immigrant workers, and as the agitation wore on it became more and more closely allied with the labour movement. George Lansbury, Lewis Lyons, the Stepney Labour League, and the Whitechapel Social Democratic Federation, all help direct the anger of immigrant workers into a more politically-conscious protest. It was at this point that the housing question threatened to merge with the wider struggle for socialism.[17]

Out of fear that the situation might get out of hand wealthy Jews such as the Rothschilds were forced to do something drastic about the crisis that was looming.[18] Not only were these poor Jews protesting against the tremendous increases in rent, but the conditions were so hazardous that people such as the Rothschilds, the unofficial leaders of Anglo-Jewry, were forced to build better and more affordable housing. Thus the Four Per Cent Industrial dwellings were built. Baron Nathan Meyer de Rothschild formed a company to build cheap tenement dwellings for Jewish tenants while at the same time providing a 4% return to its shareholders. The Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company was formed in 1885 and opened to tenants in April 1887. Despite this attempt at assuaging the anger of the people in the East End, class struggle within the community increased, pitting the working people against their masters and landlords and pitting them also against the more religious sectors of the community.

Although many Jews who arrived maintained their religious influences and could not conceive of their children rejecting the Chasidic traditions, others were profoundly affected by the 1905 revolution in Russia. Those radical Jews who were forced to flee

---

[17] Ibid, 211.

[18] Roberts, *Classic Slum,* writes: "The Jews, twenty thousand strong, dwelt in an area adjacent to ours on the north side, some in a poverty so appalling that it shocked even us." 171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

brought revolutionary politics to the East End and other communities where Jews resided. Rocker wrote in his memoir *The London Years:* "the Jewish workers in London followed these events with passionate interest. Each time something happened there was a big mass meeting in the East End, which thousands of people attended."[19] *Arbeiter Freund* supports this assessment. The impact of Jewish organization in Russia encouraged the development of trade unionism in Britain since so many of those fleeing had ample political experience.[20] By 1904 there was a bakers' strike and given its wide appeal the possibility of it becoming more generalized was quite real. The whole East End, says Rocker, was behind the strike.

> On April 6th 1904, we held a public meeting in the wonderland, in Whitechapel, to deal with the question of the general strike. There were five thousand seats and every one of them was occupied, and there were crowds outside who couldn't get in…Besides our East End Jewish speakers we had all the leading speakers in our movement in London, Malatesta, Tarrida del Marmol, Tcherkosov, Tchiakovsky, Mainwaring, Ted Leggatt, Kelly, John Turner, Kitz.[21]

The strike was so solidly supported by the workers that the bakers won the right to display the union label. And in 1912 anarchists took an active role in the union movement and were eventually able to lead a strike of increasingly impoverished tailors, 90 percent of whom worked in small workshops. This strike was called in defense of the West End tailors who went out for higher wages. Even with conditions so antithetical to a successful strike, the East End tailors supported their West End brethren who were not largely Jewish and who earned a higher wage. Workers, whose jobs were seasonal, and thus transient by its nature, had to continue to look for other work once the job was

---

[19] Rocker, *London Years,* 174; Buckman, *Immigrants,* 95; Roberts, *Classic Slum,* 212.
[20] T.A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet,* (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1953), 135, reports, "there was terrific excitement in Leeds, where the large Jewish population came predominately from Russia, or from parents domiciled in that region.
[21] Rocker, *London Years*, 170.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

completed. The Jewish tailors worked "from 8 in the morning until 7 in the evening. In the Spring season, you were more or less compelled to work frequently until 10 pm." This tailor wrote that the workers even had to defy the Chief Rabbi, "a man named Adler…and he didn't want to know because he was of German origin, rather he was German and he despised the East Europeans."[22] Fifteen hundred West End tailors struck and Rocker and his group sought to gain support from East End Jews. Fear of what others in the working class would say about Jewish workers, that is, that they were driving the wages down of all workers, helped encourage them to strike in support. Not having enough money to support this strike Rocker had an uphill battle. But he ultimately convinced 8,000 workers to go out on strike. Rocker writes:

> The spirit of the workers was wonderful…Except for the employers, who were interested parties, the whole East End was on the side of the strikers. The better-paid workers who had some savings refused to take strike pay. They even contributed to the strike fund. We were not able to provide much more than tea and bread and cheese. But sometimes we also gave hot meals. The Jewish Bakers' Union supplied bread; and the cigarette makers provided cigarettes. All the Jewish trades unions put a levy on their members for our strike fund. Many who were not workers themselves and had no contact with the Labour movement sent us money. The Yiddish theatre gave several performances to benefit the strikers. As a result we were able to pay the strikers a few shillings during the first weeks.[23]

A Jewish worker remarked: "Jewish workers were more politically conscious of what was going on, more aware. Many of them came away from pogroms so that political philosophy…there were anarchists, syndicalists, communists, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks..."[24] As a result of the strike that began in solidarity with the tailors in the West End the Jewish tailors transformed that strike into one that pushed their own demands as well. They fought their own Masters' Association, which refused to support

---

[22] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 102.
[23] Rocker, *London Years*, 221.
[24] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 211.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

any master tailor who accepted the workers' conditions. As a result of the strike the West End tailors won major concessions but the strike in the women's garment industry in the East End continued. Finally the Masters' Association with the East End settled with their tailors who won union recognition forging a new relationship with native tailors as well. Once this strike was concluded, the dockers went out. This struggle brought Jews and non-Jews together fortifying a relationship that had hitherto been marred by anti-Semitism. Joint demonstrations were held on Tower Hill and Mile End Waste.[25] *Arbeiter Freund* took up the fight and encouraged Jewish families to take in the children of the dockers so long as they were on strike. Three hundred dockers' children went to live in the homes of Jewish tailors. The growth of trade unionism and the integration of left-wing politics within the workers' movement provided a socialist approach to trade union politics. Once isolated, the Jews began to see themselves as part of an emerging workers' movement. The connection forged during the dockers' strike led to an anti-conscription movement conference in December 1915.

Workers' Circles also became a prominent feature of the Jewish East London experience. Having its origins in the United States it spread to London where mutual aid societies were set up to "protect its members in sickness and need, it operated in direct contra-distinction to the religious Friendly Societies, in that it was motivated by Socialist ideals."[26] Upon the instigation of *Arbeiter Freund* the Workers' Circle was set up in 1903. Cultural and political discussions were held and what little money that could be obtained by membership dues was invested in progressive schools. Not only was the Workers' Circle involved in intellectual pursuits but it was involved in the 1912 and 1913

[25] Rocker, *London Years*, 222.
[26] Fishman, *East End 1875-1914,* 273.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

strikes. It supported strikes of tailors in 1912 and "it helped the bakery workers in their strike [1913] and supported their co-operative, playing an important part in its management.[27] The amalgamation of workers and the growing militancy and class-consciousness mirrored that of the rest of Britain. It was the intervention of WWI that put an end to this very tumultuous period.

The First World War brought fresh tensions and provided the opportunity for the British government to adopt a 'comprehensive alien's policy' for the first time.[28] And although Jews did enlist in the British army[29], conservative policy makers, and shopkeepers who competed with them saw them as shirkers. It was argued that they were unwilling to fight for Britain while British young men died for their country. Since Jewish workers in the East End were never integrated fully into Britain and never received citizenship it was argued that the British government had no right to draft them into the army. Britain was allied with Russia, the country from which over 100,000 people escaped. Ironically, while Jews hoped to escape Czarist persecution by leaving Russia, their adopted country was fighting alongside the country that they had so recently left. Russia oppressing and exploiting Jews, even organizing pogroms where many

---

[27] Ibid, 254.

[28] Ibid, 45. According to Bernard Gainer in the *Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905,* (London:Heinemann Educational Books:1972), 102-103, Conservative and Unionist Associations formed in order to press for reforms in the East End of London since housing and working conditions created unrest among the inhabitants. They therefore argued that the alien invasion caused the dearth in both housing and in jobs. Organizations such as The British Brothers League spearheaded these campaigns. The views concerning Jews ranged from Beatrice Webb's, which claimed that the characteristic love of profit of the Jewish race has a two-fold tendency to raise the workers as a mass of individuals, and to depress the industry through which they rise," to the *Evening Standard,* which declared that "The advance of Socialistic and anarchical opinion in London is commensurate with the increased volume of foreign immigration." The anti-aliens crisis developed out of a period of economic depression in Britain when the Jew became synonymous with aliens.

[29] *Hansard*, H. C., July 24, 1916, 1416-1417. Herbert Samuel said that 2% of the 25,000 eligible Jews should be conscripted while King argued that Jews not be coerced but persuaded to join the colors. In *The London Observer,* March 13, 1917, it was reported that the Chief Rabbi at the Walworth Synagogue said "they rejoiced that Jewry had done its duty in the present great crisis. Jewish young men had answered the call to the fighting forces as readily as their elders responded to the call for National Service."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

thousands of Jews were killed and their homes burnt to the ground, led to Jewish immigrants setting themselves in opposition to the war.[30] Since Russia had been oppressive to Jews, the British government could not initially claim that they should be drafted. But Lloyd George's plans were to draft the Jews even over the objections of Labour Party Members. Labour opposed the threat of deportation of Jews legally living in Britain but encouraged the government to first try to persuade them to volunteer. Joseph King, a Labour MP, argued that economically the Jews were in fact enhancing the war effort by making clothes for the soldiers and ammunition cases in which to store the weapons. He hoped to end the possibility of deportation by arguing that the 'yellow press' (the racist anti-Semitic press) was promoting the false view that Jews were taking jobs away from British workers. After the February revolution, King, encouraged the government to accept repatriation of Jewish immigrants who wished to return to Russia. With the removal of the Czar, Lloyd George made the claim that Jews should no longer be exempted from the draft. Disingenuously arguing that Jews should participate in the war effort now that Russia was a democracy, Lloyd George had already made plans, even before the revolution, to deport Jews if they did not join the armed forces and while the Czarist government was still murdering Jews in Russia. Thus by 1917 with the overthrow of the Czar and with a democratic government installed, according to Lloyd George Jews had no reason to resist the draft any longer. They were given little choice: either join or be deported. Some of the MPs who hoped to prove their sensitivity denounced their

---

[30] Gainer, *Alien Invasion,* 1, discusses the reasons why so many Jews came seeking asylum in Britain from Russia. After Czar Alexander II was assassinated in March 1881 "a wave of terror began which engulfed the Jewish inhabitants of the Pale of Settlement to which Russian law restricted them. In the Russia of that day, any public calamity provided the excuse for a new pogrom. In 1882, the 'Temporary Orders concerning the Jews', the so-called 'May Laws', were promulgated, attacking the basis of Jewish economic life in Russia. These events touched off the exodus of Russian Jewry which swelled in volume unabated until well after the First World War; probably one million had fled the country by the turn of the century."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

forced deportation if they did not comply but after the first Russian revolution, and the ending of the Czarist regime, this objection was withdrawn. The Foreign Jews Protection Committee (FJPC) was formed seeking the right to asylum even though the revolution in Russia had occurred. Even the more conservative Jewish *Chronicl*the paper of the West End and thus the more conservative Jews opposed the attack on the East End Jews but did not oppose the war demanded the continued right to asylum. By this time, shopkeepers in the East End were displaying definite signs of anti-Semitism by attacking Jews and attempting to encourage their deportation. The *East London Observer* reprinted articles that castigated Jews for not signing up. An anonymous Stepney councilor wrote: "Since the war began I can honestly say that I have not come across a dozen Jewish soldiers. I have been told in many quarters that they are earning heaps of money in consequence of the shortage of men. If this is so, it is a despicable advantage to take, and the sooner it is brought to an end by conscription the better."[31] The *Observer* reported on a demonstration organized by the Minister of Agriculture, which attacked East End Jews for not signing up. "English Jewry" it went on to report "feels just as strongly about these 'Yiddisher Boys' as English people and we urge the government to act before worse things take place than have yet happened."[32] The conservative press ranted that under the Alien Restriction Act these Jews should be deported.[33] The *Chronicle* acknowledging the tremendous hardship of the Russian Jews and the oppression that they faced while living in Russia still downplayed the oppression in order to show their support for the war effort. "...we cannot help asking whether, having, from his [Dr.

---

[31] *East London Observer*, January 1, 1916.
[32] Ibid, February 10, 1917.
[33] *Evening Standard*, April 24, 1917. The *Standard* claimed that the "so-called friendly alien is a menace to this country, and if the truth were known he regards no nation as possessing the authority to enforce the laws."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Magnes] point of view, attacked the Russian authorities as he did, he was the wisest choice for a mission to the Russian Empire, while the country was engaged in a life and death struggle with a relentless enemy."[34] On March 23 the *Chronicle* wrote:

> Can anyone conceive it possible that if Russia, instead of being allied with the Entente, had been joined to the Central Powers, liberty and freedom can have won there as they have triumphed or, indeed that the bonds that bound our people in the Empire of the Tsar would not have been drawn closer? That there would have been so is, in the light of what has occurred, almost axiomatic; because Germany must have supported the Bureaucracy and the Bureaucracy must have tightened the bounds of retrogression.[35]

The *Chronicle's* position mirrored that of Herbert Samuel's, Home Secretary on enlistment of Russian Jews and supported Britain's designs on Palestine hoping to realize a Zionist homeland. It was this group of Jews that pushed the question of Zionism while the East London Jews opposed the scheme.[36] Many Jews hoped to return to Russia to continue the process of democratization. But while trying desperately to find a way to recruit Jews into the army, the British government was reluctant to let them leave in order to return to their homeland. The LP had to intercede in order that the Jews who wished to leave would be allowed to do so.

After the second revolution in Russia, every section of British society was deeply impacted by the success of the Bolsheviks. This was no less true of the Jewish émigrés that left Czarist Russia for a land that they hoped would be more inviting and less anti-Semitic. So when the Russian working class took power in November 1917, working class Jews opposed intervention. They joined with their fellow workers in a variety of trades in opposing it. The Jews who did not return to Russia helped to encourage a more political understanding among their fellow workers. This was often indicated in the

---

[34] *Chronicle*, January 2, 1917.
[35] Ibid, March 23, 1917.
[36] Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858,* 150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

remarks made by a number of people who participated in the Oral History Project at the Jewish Museum in London. Philip Yason, a participant, said: "Don't forget that what attracted my generation to Communism was that we thought that it was the only way Jewish people would have equality is through socialism, through communism."[37]

A number of these émigrés were under surveillance by government agents. Spying on radicals was standard procedure. Aliens and radicals were suspect. The government's position on immigrant Jews was at best confused and contradictory and at worst it was so suspicious of this population that the Home Office spied regularly on its immigrants.[38] According to the Home Office Abraham Bezabel was one of those dissidents who was to be watched by the authorities because he sent telegrams to other émigrés discouraging them from signing up Russian subjects in Britain.[39] The delegates of a variety of Eastern European socialist groups (not necessarily just Jewish groups) had pinned their organization to an international socialist program, which also appealed to the British workers.

The rhetoric of government and the press became vitriolic after the Bolshevik Revolution. The leaders of Britain were decidedly anti-Semitic although some were more anti-Semitic than others. The traditional stereotypes that dogged Jews were believed and endorsed by the British government as well creating a contradictory policy, both foreign and domestic concerning the Jewish population. Winston Churchill

---

[37]Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 102.

[38] According to S. Kadish in *Bolshevik and British Jews The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution,* (London:Frank Cass:1992), 45 "aliens were viewed in two categories: enemy aliens and friendly aliens. Anti-German feelings were prevalent and so many of these people were interned. But even those deemed friendly that is, those coming from countries that sided with Britain were suspect. "Polish Jews", according to Kadish, in particular suffered from their 'indeterminate national allegiance'. A Jew from Warsaw, then part of the Russian Empire, was deemed 'friendly' by the Home Office, whilst his co-religionist from Austria-controlled Galicia was on the enemy side."

[39] PRO, HO 318,095/309 June 26, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wholeheartedly endorsed this approach and thus his *Sunday Herald* promoted the stereotype of the international Jew, that is, that he was primarily a Bolshevik.[40] Churchill supported the Balfour declaration calling for a homeland for the Jews in the Middle East because he sought to encourage the 'Zionist Jew' in opposition to the 'revolutionary Jew'. According to Churchill:

> This movement among the Jews is not new. From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxembourg [sic] (Germany and Emma Goldman (United States), this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality has been steadily growing.[41]

Moreover, declares Churchill, "the Russian Revolution is merely the latest manifestation of the 'schemes' of 'this sinister confederacy' of 'international Jews' who are seeking to create a 'world-wide communistic state under Jewish domination'."[42]This would be the antidote to Jewish Bolshevism and would, the British government believed, encourage support for the war among Jews in America, Britain and Russia. The heart of Churchill's message was that a Jewish center in the Middle East would siphon Jewish energies away from radical politics in the west. "In short, Zionism presented itself as an

---

[40] Lloyd George had similar feelings about Jews. He refers to Radek, the Russian revolutionary in his *War Memoirs*, "as an international Jew of the same type as Trotsky." 122; In Tom Segev's *One, Palestine, Complete* (London:Little,Brown:2000), 38 he quotes Lloyd George about his feelings about the Jews. "The Jewish race had world-wide influence and capability, and the Jews had every intention of determining the outcome of the World War-acting, he said, in accordance with the financial instincts. They could influence the United States to intensify its involvement in the war, and as the real movers behind the Russian Revolution, they also controlled Russia's attitude toward Germany." And again from Segev he quotes Lord Robert Cecil: "I do not think that it is easy to exaggerate the international power of a Jew."

[41] Kadish, *Bolsheviks and the British Jews*, 140.

[42] Ibid, 141; PRO, FO 371/3015. "Any symptoms of disorder and of Social extremism were maliciously attributed to the Jews, and even some journals in London and Paris were persuaded to hold the Jews responsible for every anti-war manifestation in the new political organizations. An echo of these accusations, which appeared in the *Times* on March 28th, was very effectively dealt with in a long telegram from M. Vinaver to the Conjoint Committee, which was published in full in the *Daily Telegraph* and other papers." This philosophy was endorsed by people such as Henry Ford in the US, who entitled his pamphlet *The International Jew,* which was subsequently endorsed by Adolph Hitler.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

antidote to Bolshevism, a constructive ideal to neutralize destructive tendencies."[43] The East End Jews were thus forced to seek a political solution to anti-Semitism. The distortions by the press, even the *Times*, became much more prevalent encouraging both an anti-Russia and an anti-Jewish sentiment. On the question of the proposed "Leninist Armistice" the London *Times* wrote on November 23, 1917 "They know that Lenin and several of his confederates are adventurers of German-Jewish blood and in German pay, whose sole object is to exploit the ignorant masses in the interest of their employers in Berlin."[44] Moreover, a series of anonymous editorials appeared in the *Times* with no comment called "Jews and Bolshevism, The Mosaic Law in Politics. Racial Temperament",[45] which claimed that Bolshevism succeeded because of the Jews.

Therefore, in order to assess the degree of support given to the revolution by the ex-patriot Jewish Russian working class, as opposed to the more middle class Jews, it is important to look at both what historians are saying, and what the Jewish community was saying about the question. As in the section discussing the Clyde workers there is debate over how radical these workers actually were. Challinor contends that Trotsky's *Nashe Slovo* had a wide readership in Britain by 1916. Harassment by state officials was therefore a necessary antidote to this sort of political influence. But while Challinor does not make any specific claim for the amount of support this literature generated among British workers at large, the fact that the government needed to cease its distribution and attempted to smash the organizations that distributed it, suggests that Lloyd George was afraid of the influence that it might have on support for the war effort.

---

[43] Segev, *One Palestine*, 137.
[44] *Times*, November 23, 1917. Even Hyndman, former leader of the BSP, employed anti-Semitic rhetoric in his faction fight with Fienberg, who led the opposition to the war.
[45] *Times*, November 27, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But it is historians such as Sharman Kadish that argue in an otherwise excellent, well-researched history that even working class Jews were not sympathetic to the Russian Revolution. In fact the myth that the East End of London was a "hotbed of pro-Bolshevik and anti-war feeling"[46] was just a myth according to Kadish. And while it would be an exaggeration to argue that all working class Jews who resided in areas such as East London or Manchester were sympathetic to the revolution in Russia, the British government feared such a possibility. In fact it was true that many Jews did leave for Russia even after the February revolution and more left once the Bolshevik Revolution was seen to have staying power.[47] But Kadish argues that, for the most part, Jews had little sympathy for the Bolsheviks and for communism. She bases her argument about working class Jewish anti-Bolshevism on a small amount of evidence. She cites the *Jewish Chronicle*, which was opposed to Bolshevism, as if this in some way represented the voice of Jewish workers. She admits the editor, Leopold Greenberg, was a "liberal" and therefore "when war was declared he threw its editorial weight behind the war effort" and yet because of Kadish's lack of understanding of class dynamics she promotes the argument that if Greenberg was a Jew than that proves that Jews were unsympathetic to Bolshevism. Greenberg, who supported the war effort wholeheartedly, showed little concern that Czarism practiced a virulent kind of anti-Semitism and therefore it was the most serious threat to Jews. For Greenberg "the 'German menace' outweighed any scruples about alliance with Russian reaction. Russian anti-Semitism, it was argued, was

---

[46] Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, 45. "The Workers' Circle Jubilee Publication (1909-29) records the following: 'The Revolution of 1917-1918 led to the ruination…of the J[ewish] S[ocial] D[emocratic] O[organisation] in England, whose most active comrades went straight back to Russia and devoted themselves to the service of the Revolution; many comrades were deported by the then government, which wanted to preserve the land from the 'Red Spectre' which the Russian Revolution had called forth'." 209.

[47] PRO, FO 371 3008. "There are some thousands of Russians waiting in England to return to Russia," expressed a secret document on April 7, 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the product of Prussian 'militarism'. The Anglo-Russian Alliance was justified in the interests of rooting out the latter.[48]

This attempt to prove that Jewish workers did not support either the Bolsheviks or the revolution has discredited her case. While arguing rightly that the Anglo-Jewish establishment was hostile to the Bolsheviks she attempts to paint all Jews with this wide brush. But she disproves her own case when she describes the massacre of the Jews in Russia by the White army during the Civil War. Contrasting the working class Jews in the East End with the middle class Jews of the West End Kadish writes:

> It was clear that the majority of Anglo-Jewish leaders were not prepared to overstep certain limits when making a public protest. They were reluctant to indulge in overt political activity, especially with regard to the pogroms in the Ukraine. This, they feared, could all too easily be misinterpreted-or misrepresented –as anti-interventionism or even pro-Bolshevism by right wing opinion at home.[49]

Thus the response of the middle class Jews to the murder of Polish Jews by the White Armies vs. Jews in Whitechapel, who organized a procession to Hyde Park of 30,000-40,000 people in opposition to the killings, was quite different. Their attitudes regarding the massacre during the Civil War in Russia reflected their respective class positions as well. The middle class did little to protest since they chose to assimilate and not display their Jewishness. She writes: "The East End, in contrast, suffered from no such compunctions." "Schools, shops, and businesses closed down for the day out of solidarity with Polish Jewry."[50] For Jews, and for others who were by and large marginal to the society, proof of patriotism is often viewed as proof of being full-fledged members of that society. Paradoxically, the middle class Jews, promoted their Jewishness, not in

---

[48] Kadish, *Bolsheviks and the British Jews,* 61.
[49] Ibid, 116.
[50] Ibid, 117.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

support of their brethren in Russia, but in their press and in their quest to set up an Israeli state. It was necessary for them, as opposed to the working class Jews to demonstrate their loyalty. But as members of both the working class and an oppressed community, working class Jews, much more alienated than the middle class, viewed socialism positively. A woman interviewed by the Oral History Project remembers:

> My father was very political. He was a member of the bund. In fact I can even remember the discussions after the Russian Revolution. Neighbours and friends came in and there were frensied discussions. There was a tremendous hope that the Russian Revolution would solve the problems of the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism would be eliminated, a thing of the past. All the economic problems of the Jews would be resolved.[51]

According to Jerry White the intensity of the struggle drove a wedge between the Jewish worker and the Jewish master. The class struggle was heightened "by the close personal relationship of the workshop, [which] was frequently brutal. Violent attacks on pickets, masters and even masters' wives were commonplace."[52] Julia Bush also argued, in opposition to Kadish, that the émigrés wholeheartedly welcomed the revolution believing that democracy would make Russia a better place for those who wished to return.

> Russian socialist groups organised the East London celebration; however enthusiasm spread far beyond the politically committed few. On 24 March over seven thousand packed the Great Assembly Hall I Mile End Road, and many others had to be turned away. Telegrams and messages of greeting were received from almost every Jewish trade union and labour organisation. Russian speakers shared the platform with anti-war British socialists such as Robert Williams, Secretary of the National Transport Workers' Federation and Val MacEntee of the BSP. On the following day a routine meeting of the Foreign Jews Protection Committee a socialist-led organisation formed to defend Jews' right of asylum in Britain became another mass rally to greet the revolution.[53]

Fermin Rocker, son of revolutionary anarchist Rudolph Rocker, asserted that his father

---

[51] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 211.
[52] Ibid, 253.
[53] Ibid, 75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

believed that the most intelligent and militant revolutionaries in London went to Russia after the February revolution.[54] A Jewish worker living in East London remarked:

> I read the news over and over again till I was convinced that it had really happened. I felt a tremendous surge of elation and excitement. Surely the Revolution would bring this mad war to an end, and give the peoples peace at last!...I could see all my comrades in the West End rush off to go to Russia! The Revolution had opened their native land to them! They would not hesitate one moment to give their services to the Revolution! They would kiss the Russian earth from which Czarist despotism had exiled them! [55]

Bush's *Behind the Lines*, describes the lives of workers, both Jew and non-Jew, who lived in the East London area. She maintains that people worked primarily in sweated industries although many people worked at the docks. Since the wages were so inadequate, wives were forced to work as well. Not only were few workers organized in unions but a family wage was unheard of. In the sugar refineries it was not unusual to work sixty-seven hours a week with no vacation. Class-consciousness in the East End of London was extremely high even before the war and the extreme difficulties that the war engendered intensified this already existing class-consciousness.[176] The war caused extreme hardship in East London. Unemployment, at least in the beginning years of the war, wreaked havoc with an already starving community. Sylvia Pankhurst, in her newspaper *Workers' Dreadnought*, described the conditions that East Londoners endured. Although Pankhurst set up her own makeshift soup kitchens and clinics it was not nearly enough to deal with the problem of poverty.

> During the first week of the war food prices rose by an average of 16 percent. To make matters worse, many of the biggest increases were on cheap items which formed the mainstay of workers' diet, such as sugar, bread, margarine, eggs and fish. Food prices had risen precipitously. White lump sugar, for instance, went

---

[54] Jewish Museum, Fermin Rocker.
[55] Jewish Museum, Tape 211.
[56] Ibid,12 -13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> from 2-½ d to 6d. White moist sugar from 2d. to 6d. Brown moist sugar 1 ¾ d. condensed milk from 4d. to 5 ½ d., Nestle's milk 6d. to 7 ½ d., rice 2d. to 4d., 4lb loaf 5d. to 5 ½ d. and jam from 4d to 5d.[57]

Coupled with high food prices, unemployment devastated the East London community. Profiteering became an obvious fact of life for British workers and one in which the unions would eventually have to rally around. Food prices by December 1915 were 46 percent higher than in August 1914 and by 1916 they had climbed as high as 84 percent of that of 1914. Moreover, the rise in coal and other necessities pushed the East London working class on the verge of virtual starvation. Trades such as tailoring were seasonal and therefore when someone was sick "people went to work since there was no sick pay; 1 ½ p per coat. Worked with festered fingers. Kill yourself when there was work because there was little work after a few months. Since there was piece work you didn't get paid for sitting around if there was no work."[58] And while many men were forced to leave their wives and children, especially after conscription had gone into effect, their separation allowances were either slow in coming or often never arrived adding to the already heavy burdens of working class women. And although Parliament debated the question of separation allowances many of these cases went unresolved for years. [59]

As in other parts of Britain anti-conscription demonstrations began to take hold by 1915 since support for the war had seriously eroded by this time. Although newspapers diligently pushed the anti-German line with tales of atrocities on the part of the Huns against the British "during 1917-18 the economic and military situation worsened to such an extent that many began to doubt the possibility of an outright military victory. In this

---

[57] War Emergency Workers National Committee (WNC), *Report*, August 1914-March 1916, and WNC Minutes, October 10, 1918.
[58] Jewish Museum, Oral History Project, Tape 107, Ada Bloomberg.
[59] *Daily Herald*, August 22, 1914.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

situation the Russian revolutions exercised an important influence on British labour politics."[60] And while itwas evident that British workers were not going to make the revolution immediately socialists in East London found audiences willing to listen to arguments about peace. Socialists in a variety of organizations set up meetings and study groups to discuss economic and political questions. "The *Herald* did particularly well in Stepney; within a few weeks over eighty members had been recruited to a new branch of the Herald League."[61] By early 1918 resolutions were coming from all over East London including the London Trades Council, to demand that Lloyd George end the war. A series of strikes took place, which involved dockworkers, tram, bus and tube workers and others. Moreover, the government's stepped up repression against Jews resulted in [In March 1918] "a new DORA order prohibited aliens from addressing meetings and from 'engaging in propaganda."[62] Russians living in Britain were pulled out of their beds in the middle of the night and were deported without clothes, funds and with their affairs not in order. It thus appears that the British government felt threatened by the response of those Russian émigrés that enthusiastically supported the Russian Revolution.[63] A segment of the Jewish community had been either forced to leave or left with enthusiasm to support the war that they believed would liberate their people at last. Many of those who remained joined the Communist Party when it finally formed in 1920.

---

[60] Bush, *Behind the Lines,* 74.
[61] Ibid, 78.
[62] Ibid, 186.
[63] See Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism,* 184; Kadish, *Bolsheviks and the British Jews,* 47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SECTION II: THE CHALLENGE

The Prime Minister has said that the new world must be constructed by private enterprise and unrestrained competition. Those forces may construct a new world for capitalism, militarism, and war; they will never establish a new world for democracy, cooperation and peace.

Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association – 1920

Every fight waged, and every victory won, by the men will inevitably assist them in arriving at a clearer conception of the responsibilities and duties before them. It will also assist them to see that, so long as shareholders are permitted to continue their ownership, or the State administers on behalf of the Shareholders, slavery and oppression are bound to be the rule in industry. And with this realization, the age-long oppression of Labour will draw to its end. The weary sigh of the over-driven slave, pitilessly exploited and regarded as an animated tool or beast of burden: the medieval serf fast bound to the soil, and life-long prisoner on his lord's domain, subject to all the caprices of his lord's lust or anger: the modern wage-slave, with nothing but his labour to sell, selling that, with his manhood as a wrapper, in the world's market-place for a mess of pottage: these three phases of slavery, each in their turn inevitable and unavoidable, will have exhausted the possibilities of slavery, and mankind shall at last have leisure and inclination to really live as men, and not as the beasts which perish.

The Miners' Next Step: 1912

The Conference was a gloomy gathering with the imminence of the miners' defeat, with the funds of every Trade Union fast disappearing some of the wealthiest Unions, -e.g. the Steel Smelters-being bankrupt, not through any strike or lock-out, but merely because of unemployment benefit; whilst other Unions are not only denuded of money but are engaged in or on the eve of a strike or lock-out. But though the delegates were depressed, they were not exasperated or revolutionary. Quite the contrary: the trend of opinion was towards the Right, the pendulum was once more swinging back to political action. It was a "Clynes-Henderson conference"; the ILP being in abeyance and the Communists a despised minority. And outwardly there was no sign of impending disaster to the manual working class. The leading Trade Union officials and Labour MPs were there with their wives, living at expensive hotels, and enjoying the brilliant sunshine at a fashionable seaside [resort], without any consciousness of the disparity between their lives and the circumstances of their members. [June 27, 1921]

Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 8: 1919-1922

World War I engendered such momentous changes in British society that if not for people such as the Webbs, who were Fabian socialists, and people who supported their brand of socialism, like Ramsay MacDonald, any attempt to guarantee order would have been difficult since many had lost faith in the government. Understanding the urgency of reorganizing British society, the Webbs counseled the Labour Party and thus the government on how best to promote social change without changing the basis of society altogether. They feared workers' uprisings and encouraged the Labour Party to respond to workers' demands by promoting a social program that would guarantee an ever-increasing role of government in the economy. Nationalization became an important platform in their program of stabilization.[1] While miners and railway workers called for this as a genuine way of restructuring industry,[2] the Fabians called for nationalization as a way of rationalizing the economy but with only the vaguest of calls for workers' control. In fact MacDonald went so far as to argue that, "under Socialism the captains of industry will be managers, [this] seems to point to inefficiency, it must not be forgotten that the best of them and those bearing the greatest responsibilities are only managers now."[3] Thus there will be no workers' control. Instead, Whitley Councils were proposed as a means by which to avoid the demand for nationalization and as a way of negotiating contracts. Dissatisfied with the results, workers, not to be dissuaded especially since the Russian Revolution, were calling for increased or total workers'

---

[1] Read Henderson's, *The Aims of Labour* and Snowden's *Labour and the New World.*
[2] Arthur Gleason, *What The Workers Want*, 3. Gleason emphasizes throughout the book that workers wished to participate in the management of their industries and pushed continuously for them to be nationalized. The choice for Britain, according to Gleason was either socialism, that is socialism as an evolutionary movement, or revolution. He believed that the status quo would not last given the nature of unrest amongst the working class. Britain he said "is faced by universal unrest in the working class and by a demand that economic power shall be shifted from the owners of capital to the workers." 4.
[3] Barker, ed., *Ramsay MacDonald's Political Writings,* 149.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

control.[4] The possibility of a Russian style revolution in Britain pushed the government to find new means to prevent its occurrence. The Labour Party helped to quell the fears of workers by promoting a social program that was vague at best, and in actuality, did little either to protect workers' rights or gradually put the working class in power. Rather than socialism, the LP promoted state-assisted capitalism. That is, the workers would be involved

> in workshop management and [would take] responsibility for seeing that each workplace contributes its proper quota to the necessary national total…the coordination of workplaces in districts and the concern for generally efficient management will be in the hands of district committees, upon which the managerial and technical sides will be strongly represented…[5]

November 11, 1918 saw the end of hostilities but the powerful working class movement that had been curtailed because of the war resumed when it was clear that although the government promised to "build homes fit for its heroes to live in," it could not provide any meaningful solution to the country's economic woes. And although the economy initially improved, this improvement was not long-lasting. The social ills that plagued Britain persisted into the post-war era. Housing continued to be a problem, and after the initial upswing in the economy workers once again grew disgruntled. The economic bubble that existed just after the war could not be sustained for long. In fact, the war exacerbated both economic and political tendencies that existed prior to the war. According to William Beveridge, "unemployment was between two and three times as severe as before the World War."[6] Industries such as mining and railways had been put

---

[4] Gleason goes back and forth about this subject. Sometimes he argues that workers want nationalization with joint participation by workers and sometimes he argues that, at least in the case of the miners, they want full workers' control.
[5] Barker, ed., *MacDonald's Political Writings*, 253.
[6] William Beveridge, *Full Employment in a Free Society,* (New York:W.W. Norton and Co. Inc.:1944), 328.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

under government control, indicating to workers and their leaders and employers that the traditional means by which industry had been run up until 1914 would now become obsolete. Industry was too big to be run efficiently by the employers. The North London Manufacturers' Association in 1918 notes:

> Specifically, no part of our pre-war industrial system is more likely to be radically changed in design and practice after the war than the relationship between employers and employed...Though not all employers were so conciliatory, most did share the belief of one large industrialist that the question uppermost in the minds of all Britain today...is whether, now that the Germans are beaten, there shall be peace or war in industry.[7]

The situation in Britain, as in other parts of Europe, had changed. The enormous profits earned by industrialists and repudiation of the system of profit making demonstrated by the Russian workers through their revolution had a profound impact on British workers. Winston Churchill was all too aware of the possible impending crisis. According to Churchill, "The events and watchwords from Russia seemed to millions of people in every land to offer prospects of moving forward into a brighter new world of brotherhood."[8] The Ministry of Labour in November 1917 feared that "Those who are leading in the world of Labour are determined to secure complete partnership and control of industry, and also to secure that the basis of all industry shall be social service and not the pursuit of rent, profit, and interest."[9] A *Memorandum on the Industrial Situation after*

---

[7] James E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain:1918-1979,* (New York:Schocken Book:1984), 20. About this Leslie Hannah in *The Rise of the Corporate Economy*, 36 wrote: "The business classes were, of course, very much aware of the need to provide a political and economic alternative to socialism. It was their position that was endangered by depression and it behooved them to revalidate it by showing that those parts of the market system which were causing trouble could be excised by the reorganization of private capitalism. The three-way promise of the rationalizer that 'it is intellectually possible...it is materially profitable; it will save our economic system from disaster... Rationalization readily became a defensive reaction to the challenge to the existing structure of power and ownership in industry, which was posed with increasing urgency by the rapid growth of trade unionism and labour socialism."

[8] Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis:"The Aftermath"*, (London:Thorton Butterworth:1929), 59; Gleason, *What the Workers Want*, 83.

[9] PRO, CAB 24/33/2716.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the War pointed out that: "Industry itself has a human side. The discontent of labour is not exclusively a matter of wages and hours of work. It is becoming increasingly evident that it is based to a very large extent upon questions of *status* and social conditions."[10] The memorandum warns that unemployment will become an increasingly contentious problem.

> The absence of unemployment is due, not to thriving trade, but to the withdrawal of several million men from the labour market, the inflation of the currency, and the concentration of purchasing power in the hands of the State, which has not to study the absorptive power of commercial markets for the disposal of its purchases, but uses them to destruction as fast as they are produced.[11]

That is to say, the war had been a boon to the economy, not because it produced goods that the society needed, but because it produced weapons at the cost of millions of pounds, putting nothing positive back into the economy. In addition, the war, at least temporarily, had settled the question of industrial strife. Workers, prohibited from striking (although British workers struck more than any of the other European workers), and subjected to draconian labor laws continued to exist even after the cessation of hostilities, workers no longer were convinced that it was their patriotic duty to work for low wages and in hazardous conditions. The economy had changed drastically, involving the state to a degree that it had not played before. The Labour Party, once struggling to get off the ground, had become the clear contender for power, and although it did not win office until 1924 it was clear even at the war's end that Labour was the main challenger.[12]

---

[10] Caledonian University, HD8388, Memorandum on the Industrial Situation after the War, 11.
[11] Ibid, 9.
[12] In 1919, in Stepney, 14 of the 18 seats went to Labour compared with not a single seat before the war. Four of the new Mile End Guardians were Labour men, while even the Whitechapel Board, renowned as one of the meanest in the country, was joined by one Labour Guardian. *London Labour Chronicle*, May 1919; Snowden, in *The New World Order*, 65, writes: "The peculiarities of our electoral system enabled the Government party to secure four-fifths of the seats in Great Britain by votes which represented in the aggregate only eleven-twentieths of the total votes cast. This adventitious majority gave the Government a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

And while these very same leaders began to feel pressure from the workers to tackle social problems postponed by the war they were nevertheless incapable of rethinking their old politics and were therefore unable to come up with any viable solutions. To this end Mr. Robert Young, General Secretary of the ASE, defended certain policies that were made in 1916, and which continued to be held by union leaders even after the war. He asserted that "it would be a calamity for this country if when this war is over there should be a series of big industrial disputes; it would be bad for the country as a whole, and, I believe, bad for the workers themselves."[13] And yet, "...the Cabinet agreed in November 1919 to refuse any further payments to civilians,"[14] leaving workers little choice but to support the call for direct action. Along with the housing problem, low pay and long hours continued to plague British workers. Many of the old standard bearers such as J.R. Thomas were denounced by the membership and were asked for their resignations.[15] Workers were becoming more assertive and began to feel entitled, especially after the Russian Revolution, to their right to a better life. Their mood was one of impatience and anger. Lynden Macassey, an industrial arbitrator, argues that "they were misled by socialists into believing that the denial...of a human status in industry' was 'caused by the capitalist organization of industry'. In consequence, 'The strongest sentiment...permeating the workshops' was a quite unjustified 'suspicion of employers'.[16] The government frightened by the possible flair up that they witnessed before the war set up foundations afterwards to deal with the impending industrial crisis.

---

five years' lease of power, which under the constitution they can hold, in spite of the fact revealed by the results of the subsequent by-elections that they no longer retain the support."

[13] Robert Young, General Secretary of ASE, in response to Professor AC Pigou, at a forum sponsored by Ruskin College on The Reorganisation of Industry.

[14] W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment, 1919-1939:A study in public policy,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1990), 36.

[15] This will be explored further when discussing the 1921 Black Friday debacle.

[16] Hannah, *The Rise of the Corporate Economy,* 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Garton Foundation in its series of recommendations states: "there is a very strong feeling among all classes that a mere return to the conditions which existed before the war would be a tragic anti-climax."[17] The memorandum continues:

> The use of industrial organization to obtain political ends has received a strong impetus from recent events on the Continent, and the influence of this idea may be seen as plainly in the Seamen's Boycott as in the proposals occasionally heard for the creation of Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils in this country. It is a development which brings us nearer to the conception of real class-warfare then we have been for many hundred years.[18]

Whiting Williams, an American observer chronicling the thoughts of British workers, documents in his book *Full up and fed up* the feelings of the miners regarding the Russian Revolution. His findings supported the observations that the Garton Foundation has counseled against. Regarding the pits in Wales Williams exclaims:

> In the Rhondda Valley one miner claimed 'for all day down in the headings 1,000 feet below it has been little but a succession of Bolshevist meetings....Another miner exclaims...Avv coorse, the capitalists do be clever in niver goin' quite too far in their oppressions. 'Twould be better if they did. But the world war be the oondoin' av the, whatever...This morning we all obeyed the appeals of the leaders at last night's meeting to 'carry on' and so went down in the pit as usual-only to attend a succession of meetings at each of the junction points for the discussion of the question, 'to mark or not to mark the tans...We must stop all chawnce fer private profit and let the people 'ave the profit. Look w'at we'll sive by cuttin' out all the middlemen, with the government runnin' all the country's business, in a sense o' speakin."

According to Williams:

> As near like the factory soviet meetings of Russia as anything imaginable these gatherings certainly are-as the men put their lamps on the ground or suspend them from their knees which they sit there is groups, in the black and silent headings, talking now English and now Welsh but always with fervor.'
>
> About Glasgow Williams remarks 'I got into a huge crowd farther in by the Nelson Monument-to learn from several speakers that 'Socialism is the country's only hope!' that 'Russia is being fought by the Poles only because the desperate and frightened financial and capitalistic powers realize themselves in a death-grip

[17] The Garton Foundation, Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War, January 1919, 18.
[18] Ibid, 20.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and their mortal foe'; that "Bolshevism and Capitalism cannot live on the same globe' because 'Bolshevism makes a demonstration of the power of the working men to get everything they want the moment they will practice the solidarity the war showed them to possess...Unity no will save the world from bloodshed-and help us to put into operation in all our chief cities the humane and efficient regime of the Soviets.'' (Much applause and a multitudinous 'Hear! Hear!' About Glasgow the debate over its radical nature took place even then. 'Most of the educated people here seem to think that Glasgow does not deserve its reputation for extreme radicalism, but the last few days spent at the gates of the Clyde bank shipyards and the docks certainly show that a very large number of workers are very sore at things in general and at the 'capitalist class' in particular-very particular.[19]

To be sure this sentiment was uneven and often diffused by the belief that the LP and the trade union leaders would be able to win crucial concessions, but the feelings were smoldering and in 1919 they broke out in a near general strike. 1919 was considered by Raymond Challinor and other historians to be a crucial period in British working class history. It was considered by some to be a near revolutionary situation which had come to an end by 1921 with the failure of the miners' strike.[20] Scotland Yard reported that 'the number (of workers) who are determined to have a revolution by constitutional means is certainly increasing' and that, by 1920, those who sought social revolution of some sort had become a majority.[21] And in a circular to the Cabinet in December the Home Secretary warned: "The temper of the men is becoming increasingly bitter...There is much muttering about the ostentation and luxury of the 'idle rich' and agitators have seized upon the real discontent and distress to carry on a ceaseless

---

[19] W. Williams. *Full Up And Fed Up,* (New York:Charles Scribner's Sons:1921), 57-175. For the first time in modern history, remarked J.A. Hobson early in 1919, in *Confessions of an Economic Heretic,* (London:George Allen and Unwin Ltd.:1938), 136, "the humanist advances of the past few generations are visibly imperiled by the demands of armed defence and the sympathies for Fascism manifested by large sections of the upper classes, who prefer to undergo the expenses of armaments with the risks of war to the encroachments of a Labour or Socialist Party upon their profits and the management of industry."

[20] In fact it was people like Hodges of the miners' union that helped undermine workers' militancy because he was viewed as a radical alternative to the stodgy old-fashioned union leaders who were unwilling to fight management. Gleason suggests that Hodges was their new kind of radical leader.

[21] James Cronin, *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain,* (London:Croom Helm: 1979), 112.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

propaganda of class war. Pleased with Russia as a panacea for unemployment is their constant theme."[22] The Whitley Councils, which were ostensibly designed to bring some modicum of fairness to negotiations by proposing joint boards of workers and employers, with the state representing the consumer, were losing their credibility. According to Kirkaldy, "The existing systems of profit-sharing and co-partnership hardly meet the claims of labour for a share in the control of industry."[23] The Whitley Councils, which provided, no alternative to the erosion of the job market opened the way for people such as Tom Mann, one of the future leaders of the Communist Party, to be elected as General Secretary of the ASE. Although his ideas were not yet clearly articulated he did advocate workers' control of industry. This growing anger had its impact on the Labour leaders.

The nature of the Labour Party changed as well. Fabian socialists such as the Webbs were quickly incorporated into the Party giving it the flavor and tenor of a socialist organization. And yet the Webbs, who lent the LP their reputation as social reformers, allowed the Party to assume the identity of a socialist-leaning party but thought little of Labour's constituency and insisted upon the need for enlightened management of industry as opposed to workers' control. Beatrice Webb's *Diaries* complain:

> In its constitution it assumes itself to be representative of the special interests of the disinherited and propertyless men and women who are not specially moral and intelligent persons-not even the majority of them-they are just the lowest strata of average sensual men. The creed of the Labour Party is too good for its ostensible constituents.[24]

---

[22] PRO, CAB 24/116, CP 2273. Report on the Revolutionary Organizations in the UK, December 9, 1920; K. Laybourn and D. Murphy, *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain, c. 1849-1991,* (Gloucestershire:Sutton Publishing Ltd.:1999), 41.
[23] Kirkaldy, *Labour*, 38.
[24] Webb, *Diaries,* 163.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Margaret Cole describes these attitudes in *The Story of Fabian Socialism.* Their condescension towards workers had important implications when they were invited to join the Labour Party's leadership. Their civil servant attitude shaped the LP in very complex ways. For them the question of the state was similar to that of MacDonald's. Rather than society being broken down into an irreconcilable class conflict, the problem facing society derived from a lack of socially responsible civil servants running it. Clearly this ruled out class struggle. Bernard Shaw, also a Fabian, justifies British imperialism as well. "The world is too big and powerful by necessity," Shaw wrote, "and the little ones must come within their borders or be crushed out of existence."[25] Those who were educated would lead, while workers who were not educated would follow their betters.

> We have little faith in the "average sensual man", we do not believe that he can do much more than describe his grievances, we do not think that he can prescribe the remedies... We wish to introduce into politics the professional expert-to extend the sphere of government by adding to its enormous advantages of wholesale and compulsory management, the advantage of the most skilled entrepreneur. [26]

If nothing else can be said to describe the working class in Britain during this period it would be most accurate to say that they were extremely class conscious. But the Fabians were all too aware of the crisis that had ravaged Britain during the war and hoped in some way to avoid any recurrence of the upsurges that took place prior to the war. The report on *Labour and the New Social Order* prepared by the Fabians demonstrates this fear. "Just as in the past" says the report "the civilizations of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage and the great Roman Empire have been successively destroyed, so, in the

---

[25] Robert J. Scally, *The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social Imperialism, 1900-1918,* (New Jersey:Princeton University Press:1975), 50

[26] Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain,* 37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

judgment of this detached observer, the civilization of all Europe is even now receiving its death-blow."[27]

The likelihood that workers would look to the Fabians as leaders was extremely remote. Their real significance was the role they played in shaping the program of the Labour Party in 1918. Even GDH Cole, a guild socialist and politically to the left of the Webbs, endorsed the notion of "brain" vs. "hand" workers. Workers might destroy capitalism but they would need salaried staff members to run the new society. Therefore Cole attempted to appeal to the managerial workers to win support for this new socialist society. It was now no longer necessary, he argued, in fact it was counterproductive to think in terms of the narrow class distinctions that Marx had penned in his writings. On the contrary, it was time to expand that definition to intermediate layers, such as the middle class.[28]

In 1918 nationalization of industry was added as a plank to the LP program. In discussing the political system the pamphlet states: "We of the Labour Party, whether in opposition or in due time called upon to form an Administration, will certainly lend no hand to its revival. On the contrary, we shall do our utmost to see that it is buried with the millions whom it has done to death."[29] And yet, contrary to its philosophy of burying capitalism the door of the LP was open to a significant number of Liberals who had grown disaffected by the Liberal Party, while at the same time fearing the potential explosion of workers. Many of these Liberals feared social chaos especially after

---

[27] *Labour and the New Social Order,* A Draft Report on Reconstruction, 1.
[28] This is the opinion of A.W. Wright in his book, *G.D.H Cole and Socialist Democracy,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press: 1979), 87. This theme informed much of Cole's treatment of Guild Socialism in general, and of trade unionism in particular. It also informed his response to the Labour Party's 1918 constitution, which he welcomed for its individual membership provision which would provide an opportunity for the entry of these intermediate social groups into the Labour movement. Wright appears to be quite right about Cole's philosophy.
[29] *Labour and the New Social Order*, 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

witnessing the devastation of the previous war and sought to influence the Labour Party in an attempt to guarantee stability.[30]

Fear that workers would challenge the status quo, was not misplaced by either the employers or the government. The Labour leadership shared this fear as well. For the LP, Woodrow Wilson, the American President, became the standard-bearer of peace. The leaders of the labor movement endorsed the Fourteen Points that he proposed,[31] including the formation of a League of Nations. The Trades Union Congress in *The Memorandum of War Aims* called upon the government to support President Wilson's Peace proposals. The League of Nations, they argued, would become the institution through which peace in the world would be assured. But it was now no longer feasible for the Labour Party to ignore the tremendous changes that had taken place. The assessment of the Garton Foundation on the feelings of the workers was that "they will not go back without protest to the old, often wretched, conditions of their life before the war."[32]

Membership in the LP was no longer confined to affiliated organizations; it was now possible to join as an individual member of a constituency organization. But while there was room for a variety of points of view the unions were unwilling to give up control of its leadership. When the LP was reconstituted in 1918 a large majority of the

---

[30] Robert W.D. Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads 1919-1932: A study in politics, economics, and international relations,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:1987), 17. Virtual Cobdenites all, they were reunited in the belief that economic nationalism was the principal source of international conflict. The last war had been catastrophic; the next one, they were convinced, would bring anarchy, revolution, and the destruction of the existing social order. It was thus from profoundly conservative motives that they joined the socialists in the I.L.P. to promote a just peace, an effective League of Nations, and a stable world order.

[31] Lloyd George supported Wilson's statements especially in the Coupon election to win workers' support. Read Gilbert's description of Lloyd George's *War Aims*, (Boston, Little, Brown, and Co., 1937), 13

[32] *Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War*, 57. Under the heading Class-Suspicion it is written that: "A Hitch in the restoration of the Trade Union safeguards has already arisen. The delay in passing an Act giving effect to the pledges of the War Governments is at the moment of writing creating a situation of utmost gravity... There is reason to fear that some employers look on the Military Service Acts, the State control of war industries, and the temporary abandonment of Trade Union restrictions, as an opportunity to establish once for all the ascendancy of Capital over Labour." 59, 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leadership's positions were left to the trade unions. Moreover, although nationalization was incorporated into the Constitution neither the LP nor the TUC were willing to go too far in challenging the status quo. Under the subhead The Pillars of the House the LP argued for a democratic society by supporting a) the Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum; b) the Democratic Control of Industry; c) the Revolution in National Finance; and d) the Surplus Wealth for the Common Good.[33] And while arguing that the Factory Acts and the Workmen's Compensation Acts have failed miserably to protect workers, they argued that with enlightened statesmen and economists their program could have been effective.[34] And while the program called for a national minimum and the like there was no mechanism by which it could have been implemented. "In one way or another remunerative employment or honourable maintenance must be found for every willing worker, by hand or by brain, in bad times as well as in good." The entirety of the program gave little direction to the LP on how to achieve these ends. The war had not shaken their faith in the system and thus when the LP did come to power it did little in promoting, not to mention implementing, its own program. The TUC and LP were merely content to fight for guarantees that employers would no longer engage in future wars. But since it believed that the state did not represent a particular class, the problem then stemmed, in their opinion, from the people who controlled the government. Therefore, the state was not to blame for the problems facing Britain and the world's working classes. That is, capitalism was not the problem, but rather the lack of any social program offered by its representatives was really at fault. Therefore, the leadership concluded that Labour should have a place at the Peace Table.

---

[33] *Labour and the New Social Order*, 4-5.
[34] Ibid, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The combined forces of the Russian Revolution and the huge strikes that began to rock Britain by early 1919 forced both the government and the Labour Party to assuage the demands of millions of workers who were seeking some kind of control of industry. Nationalization became the catchphrase for both the miners and the railwaymen. The Triple Alliance, organized in 1914, became a threat by 1919. Workers all over Britain walked off their jobs, frightening the TUC, the LP leadership, and the government. Miners, according to the *Times*, complained that their wages did not keep up with the cost of living. Although wages went up 75 per cent for some and 83 per cent for lower wage miners, the cost of living had risen between 120 and 130 percent.[35] The government was fully aware of the intensity of the situation. Not wishing to challenge the government, MacDonald, now head of the LP, was prompted to write letters to trade union leaders to call off the strike that was to occur in February 1919.

The severe economic crisis, which preceded the war, was exacerbated by the expenditure of billions of pounds on the Russian invasion and the huge war debt the British economy went into a tailspin leaving millions unemployed.[36] The government even considered schemes to settle people overseas. "Lord Milner, Colonial Secretary, urged his Ministerial Colleagues … to remember: 'that all money expended on the overseas settlement of suitable settlers…relieves to that extent the housing problem here and also tends to relieve in still greater proportion the problem of unemployment."[37] By 1922, approximately 1.5 million people were unemployed and another seven million were on reduced work schedules.

---

[35] The *Times*, January 13, 1919. According to the Garton Foundation, "The general level of prices will undoubtedly remain high." *Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War*, 46.
[36] PRO, FO371/3015. Already by 1917 the British government had to meet the interest payment on Russian loans that totaled £21,400,000.
[37] Garside, *British Unemployment,* 181.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Engineering, shipbuilding, steel (with dependent coking coal-mining), shale-mining, and oil-refining, bleaching and dyeing, paper and cloth-weaving show few signs of revival. Several large shipbuilders and engineers in the West of Scotland state that even with no margin of profit they cannot secure contracts and they are inclined to anticipate a worsening rather than a bettering of trade before the winter is through. The motorcar industry, in particular, is very hopeless. [38]

This evaluation came from a conference in Scotland on the economy.

> The present condition of trade is almost uniformly bad and the prospects for the winter are little better. The relief available from private sources and cooperative societies for many workers has been considerable but is now largely exhausted. Distress is widespread and is especially marked throughout the steel and mining areas. As resources diminish and distress becomes more acute these particular areas will have to be carefully watched. In them, and principally in Fifeshire, Lanarkshire, and Glasgow, there are very inflammable elements which while subjected during ordinary times to damping down by the saner and much larger section of the community, will not improbably be fanned into activity as the endurance of that more sober section is broken by the continued tightening of waitsbelts round empty bellies.[39]

And yet

> the Chancellor of the Exchequer appealed as early as September 1921 for unemployment relief expenditure to be the lowest minimum possible to prevent starvation in order that it should not interfere with the more important process of effecting a systematic reduction in wage costs.[40]

The distress when understood in human terms is quite astounding.

> In Glasgow the slump spread out into the depression, again earlier than in other parts of the country. The revival of industry during 1919 was not enough to absorb the demobilised servicemen and unemployment in 1920 averaged a steady 16 per cent. The tonnage of ships launched fell sharply to 175.000 tons and unemployment rose to 25 percent in 1923. There was not only none of the transition to new industries which saved Britain's future in the south, but a positive reluctance to invest in the modernisation of existing ones...At a time of

---

[38] PRO, HH 31/36/1, The National Archives of Scotland, 3; *Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War*, 45. "For the first time this country has itself been obliged to contract a heavy State debt abroad, chiefly in the United States, the total of which may be estimated at £1,500,000,000...the amount of the recoverable loans is only about two-thirds of the foreign debts. Moreover, foreign securities which may be roughly estimated at £350,000,000 have been sold during the war, and in addition, large sums invested in Russia and elsewhere have become a total or partial loss. The income derived from abroad in the shape of payment for shipping, banking, and insurance services, has been very seriously diminished during the war, and it may take some years before it reaches its former level."

[39] PRO, HH 31/36/1, The National Archives of Scotland, 7.

[40] Garside, *British Unemployment*, 289.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> rapid and depressing economic fluctuation of Clyde remained fatally tied to heavy engineering and building of ships.[41]

The failure of the 1919-1920 struggles by workers led to the weakening of the trade unions, worsening the already terrible unemployment problem, which changed the character of the movement from one of working class defiance to challenges by the unemployed. Moreover, the situation for women and non-white workers grew even worse because women were either forced back into the home or into domestic service.

For women workers life was particularly hard. But during the years 1918-1921 millions of workers learned about politics. Men and women workers both sought change through political struggle. After the war they flocked into the Labour Party and into co-operative guilds. The war had emboldened them. They had to deal with obstreperous bosses and joined unions in industrial struggles. Often enough they had to struggle with male workers in order to be accepted into industry and into the unions. Through long hours and difficult working conditions they learned about industrial strife and became more combative. "For a growing number of working-class women, these new experiences were a source of self-confidence and political awareness. They, in turn encouraged their fellow workers and neighbors into the streets in numerous public protests ranging from industrial and rent strikes to peace marches and right-to-work demonstrations."[42] As a result of the war women obtained a variety of experiences that radicalized them. Many had worked in munitions plants and suffered the same conditions as men, and since the government ran many of these plants they too became convinced that nationalization was necessary. In response to sweating conditions women became shop stewards. They often instinctively understood the class question since their husbands were miners and

---

[41] Middlemas, *The Clydesiders,* 97-98.
[42] Graves, *Labour Women*, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

railwaymen, but the issue of class was driven home when they entered the work force themselves en masse.

> In 1919, the members of the Leyton Women's Cooperative Guild for example, wrote to the *Daily Herald* to announce that as the wives of trade unionists, they had 'sworn to stand by and support (their) husbands to fight to the finish, let the consequence be what they may. In the past, we working women have been blamed for holding our men back. They cannot blame us this time. Our motto is 'Fight to the finish and win the world for the workers.'[43]

A substantial number of working women identified with their class and felt alienated from middle class women. The reality of their lives and those of their husbands and neighbors was that they or their husbands had to sell their labor power for a living. This was reflected in the working women's feelings of alienation from their middle class counterparts in the LP. As an example, Pamela Graves refers to, Ellen Jane Kendall who joined the Labour Party and (when referring to whether she had any relationship to middle class organizations) said: "We had little knowledge and no contact with such organizations. We would have thought that they were not sufficiently aware of the problems of working women."[44] During the war women such as Emmeline and Cristobal Pankhurst even suspended their struggle over women's votes, and while the feminist movement was at its height prior to the war the leadership argued that Votes for Women did not necessarily mean votes for all women. Emmeline and Cristobal argued that they would accept suffrage for women who had property and would wait until a later date to extend this right to all women. The source of much tension between the trade union movement and the suffragettes was derived from this demand. It is no wonder that many of these working class women, trying to hold their families together identified little with

---

[43] *Daily Herald*, April 13, 1919; Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG). Letter from Margaret Daplyn, Honourary Secretary, Leyton.
[44] Graves, *Labour Women*, 124.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

middle class women and instead identified with their male counterparts who sought a different type of society altogether. Working class women sought a more cooperative society, one where people could live equally and in control of their own lives. For millions of women the struggle with employers became a part of their daily lives. So for these women workers who were forced to give up their jobs to returning servicemen their economic prospects grew ominous. Before the summer of 1919, 400,000 women were reported out of work. And with the removal of the Wages Act of 1918, the wages of women tumbled. Many initially refused domestic service but were forced to apply for it since their benefits were threatened if they did not comply.[45] Since Labour professed to support the equality of the sexes, but never successfully fought for its implementation, it ultimately accepted the fact that men would be the breadwinners and women the homemakers.

But women had changed drastically during the war and were reluctant to leave industry even though the leadership of the LP and the TUC insisted on putting them back in the home. And in recognition of the extent to which women had changed during the war, Beveridge notes in his "Memorandum on trade unionism"

> During the past few years under the pressure of many influences, the attitude of women towards trade unionism and indeed towards public life generally has been profoundly modified. The prolonged agitation for suffrage and its successful result; the demands made on women during the war; the extent to which additional women have recently entered industry, are causes that have assisted to

[45] Pedersen *Family, Dependence,* writes, 126: "Women war workers were eligible for the out-of-work donation and were, in its initial months of operation, the majority of claimants, but stringent enforcement of the rule that benefit could be denied if the claimant refused to accept "suitable employment" succeeded in reducing the number of women receiving benefit from one half million to 120,000 within three months: women's doles were cut off, for example, if they turned down laundry work or domestic service, even if they had no prior experience in such work and were offered wages far below the level of the dole. By November 1919, when the scheme was finally ended for all but servicemen, only one-fifth of the 137,000 civilians still receiving benefits were women."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

awaken a new spirit among women and to heighten their sense of their importance and dignity.[46]

According to the trade union leaders and the government it was time for women to return home. There were too many workers for too few jobs, so once the war was over, women were pressured to leave their employment. Many had lost their husbands and were left alone to protect their families, but their leaders, including the NUWW, and the government argued that they had no right to jobs while men were unemployed. Forced into becoming servants or losing their benefits many eventually relented and took domestic jobs. Domestic labour was an unattractive alternative even to factory work since women were neither allowed to organize nor did they receive decent pay or pensions upon retirement. *Labour Woman* a LP paper dealing with working women's issues, "was reluctant to criticise male-dominated unions for their attitude to women…"[47] This approach betrays an implicit acceptance of male dominance and of the official union leadership. The latter's lack of willingness to challenge the existing status quo meant that jobs would remain limited in number, encouraging extreme competition and divisiveness. But for women who were employed during the war, their lives had changed drastically. In fact, women had changed so dramatically that a correspondent for *Labour Woman,* Winifred Moore, wrote: "Give women a chance, a fair field and no favour; work towards equal pay; make them full members of the unions-and then all together to do away with the real cause of unemployment – the capitalist system of industry."[48] Rather than adhering to this advice, the union leaders, including women leaders, allowed the employers to use one section of the working class against the other. There was little

[46] LSE, 1918, Quoted in The Beveridge Report, "Doc. No 105, "Memorandum on trade unionism"
[47] Ibid, 297.
[48] Ibid, 199.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

employment for women except in their traditionally accepted jobs. Under these circumstances employers believed that they could achieve rollbacks on advances that workers had made during the war.

Non-white workers suffered similarly and while 1919 not only witnessed enormous solidarity among workers demanding shorter hours and better conditions, terrible race riots among the seamen in response to rising unemployment occurred as well. The leadership role of Havelock Wilson was an important ingredient in these riots. Robert Smillie, Havelock Wilson[49] and Emmanuel Shinwell (ILP)[50] called for the expulsion of Chinese workers from Britain. The *Labour Leader,* paper of the ILP, although sympathizing with the plight of the Chinese seamen emphasized the fact that because they worked for significantly lower wages ship owners' profits were boosted by pulling down the wages of white workers. Therefore, rather than attempting to unionize all workers the ILP not only called for immigration to stop but it called for expulsion as well. Since the Aliens Act of 1905 was in effect throughout this period it was possible to suggest that the seamen be expelled on the basis of this law. Ultimately, Wilson called for the expulsion of all Chinese seamen from British ships by 1920. With such brutal competition over jobs,[51] especially in shipping, riots broke out in Cardiff and Glasgow

---

[49] According to L. Tabili, in "We Ask for British Justice," 91, the *Seaman* denounced "the gradual and stealthy advance of the Asiatic in his invasion of the British labour market." Wilson depicted the Chinese as a threat to "the Western standard of life," predicting "we shall soon be having 'Rule Britannia' sung in pidgin English."

[50] According to Jacqueline Jenkinson in her study, "The Glasgow Race disturbances of 1919," *Race and Labour in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London:Frank Cass:1985), 56 exclusionist views were expounded by Shinwell as well as the union leadership. Presiding over a meeting of seamen on January 30th he urged them to take effective steps to prevent the employment of Chinese labour on British ships."

[51] With the Asiatic Agreement of June 1912, 56,497 Chinese seamen were working on British ships. Although the *Labour Leader,* April 18, 1914, attempted to demonstrate some sympathy for the Chinese seamen who earned 8d per day, it also demonstrated its extreme racism. According to the *Labour Leader,* "the areas where they live are rotten centres from which they constantly emanate the most degrading and demoralising influence; and it would be futile to deny that many young women have been lured to destruction by the seductive suavity and treacherous imbecility of the Yellow Man."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

against Black and Asian workers. Communists denounced these racist attacks, but the union leadership wholeheartedly endorsed them.

As an empire, Britain fostered migration into the country from all parts of the world especially during the war. Lithuanians and Spaniards played a special role in mining by contributing to the development of the union in places such as Scotland and Wales. Workers from Asia and the Caribbean had a significant impact on the shipping industry, and therefore in the Seamen's union. Britain's empire allowed her to develop trade in many parts of the East, opening the door for non-British workers to obtain employment on British ships. As with other industries, technology allowed for a reduction in the necessary skill that was required to do the jobs previously done by skilled labor. However, Wilson maintained strict control over the union opening or closing its door to many of these workers.[52]

Wilson's approach to foreign workers had historically been eclectic, first in opposing their entrance into the union and then, forced by the sheer numbers, in agreeing to unionize them. The focus of his attacks depended on which groups were immigrating into Britain at the time. By the turn of the century, these attacks were mainly directed against Jews, but as other workers entered and competed with British seamen for jobs, they too felt the brunt of Wilson's chauvinism. By 1902, 40% of the workforce was foreign; therefore, he employed a variety of schemes to deal with the problem. 1914

---

[52] For Kenneth Lunn, in his article "Race Relations or Industrial Relations?:*Race and Labour in Britain,* 11 "The uncertain nature of employment in the industry made it difficult to recruit and to maintain a strongly unionized workforce and, in the period before 1914, there were rapid fluctuations in the fortunes of the union. Even at the height of its activity in these years, there was never more than 20 per cent of the labour force under union membership and control. The nature of the job also meant that meetings were often poorly attended and thus voting on union matters was usually low. This gave more power to local and national officials for the construction and implementation of union policy. It was this situation, which allowed Havelock Wilson's domination of the union, both through his own efforts and through the loyalty and mutual interest of most of the union officials. All these characteristics of the union were to be significant in the formulation of its policy towards 'foreigners'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

brought many Blacks from the Caribbean, Indians, Chinese and African workers into the country, both to fight and to man the ships where labor was scarce. The very complex relationship that arose between these colonized peoples, the British government and British workers was exhaustively discussed by Laura Tabili who argued that "the war accelerated three interrelated processes contributing to postwar racial conflict: one was Britain's deteriorating global economic position; another was the tenuous condition of imperial unity; and third was the continuing struggle over the redistribution of wealth and power at home."[53]

It was evident that, by the conclusion of WWI, many employers continued to exact exorbitant profits as a result of Britain's economic position, even though her power began to wane. The US, Japan and Germany had been Britain's major competitors before the war, and with Britain owing millions of pounds to the US her hegemonic position was now being challenged. Forced to repay the debt the British economy suffered, and although there was a temporary boom after the war, it did not last long thus many workers were seeking jobs without success. Competition for jobs, especially on the docks, was intense. The Indian Merchant Shipping Act was enacted to allow employers to employ Lascars on worse terms than British workers. And "they [the Chinese] are tied to the ship to the filth, to the low pay and scabby food, just as securely as were the indentured and enslaved Orientals of the Gold Mines,"[54] argued the labor leaders. By 1918, as a result of the shortage of British labor, there were so many Chinese seamen working on British boats that restriction on the employment of these workers was demanded. But with a newfound belief in their rights, many of Britain's non-white

---

[53] Ibid, 30.
[54] *Labour Leader,* April 18, 1914.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

workers demanded the end of inequality within the work force, especially the end to hierarchy in job classifications and entitlements to jobs. And yet Wilson realized that it was self-defeating to oppose unionizing these men. Therefore "in conjunction with the recruitment drive there was a consistent attempt to enforce and strengthen the regulations restricting the number and quality of foreign seamen employed."[55] In combination with a declining economy and well-designed racial stigmas supported by management, the government, and the union, one cannot be surprised at the explosion that occurred on the docks in 1919 in some of Britain's most depressed cities. In the context of this background, Wilson encouraged the heightening of racial tension by undermining the status of non-white seamen, adding to an already volatile situation. A Negro worker exclaimed:

> The employers, and their agents, the reactionary trade union leaders of America, England and France, are fostering race hatred among the white sailors and dockers against their coloured class brothers. In this way the Negro workers become the victims of the worst forms of discrimination; the bosses give them the heaviest and dirtiest work, and pay them lower wages than the white workers. The Negro sailors are put in the most dirtiest and overcrowded parts of the ships. They are being given the worst food and they are forced to work under the most terrible conditions.[56]

And yet in this hierarchical set of circumstances, forged in empire, class and racial divisions, not all sectors of the British working class succumbed to this racial backlash. In fact there was much fraternization among working class people on the East London docks, contributing to a long history of interracial marriages.[57] But in 1919, the confluence of these factors led to riots, with the brunt of the racial attacks against the

---

[55] Lunn, "Race Relations," 11.
[56] Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice," The Negro Worker,* 41.
[57] *African Telegraph*, vol. 1, No. 8, (Dec. 1918), 94. Even in the midst of these terrible riots "some of the British Tommies who fought side by side with these coloured soldiers in the trenches…took sides with the coloured soldiers, so much so that when the Provost-marshal arrived on the scene with a number of military police to restore order there were many white soldiers seen standing over crippled black limbless soldiers, and protecting them with their sticks and crutches from the furious onslaught of the other white soldiers."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chinese seamen. In order to accomplish this, the press employed the usual racial stereotyping in order to undermine any sympathy that the population may have had and encouraged their deportation. The Chinese were vilified in the press calling them "lazy, dirty and insolent, and give way to drink much more than the much-maligned Britisher."[58] All of the stereotypes and fears that existed in the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods about the East were played upon to achieve their expulsion.[59]

Not surprisingly, with the post-war boom ending and the demobilization of soldiers numbering in the hundreds of thousands an explosion was inevitable. Moreover, the riots of 1919 involved not only British seamen but also other European workers who worked on British ships. These riots occurred in places such as Cardiff and Glasgow, with their otherwise militant traditions. Since most of Britain was enjoying a limited post-war boom, employers in Glasgow, for example, were punishing workers for their disputes during the war. Glasgow was in a depression even before other parts of Britain began to notice the slump. According to the *Socialist,* "as could only be expected, the Trade Unions have prided themselves on having ousted coloured labourers from certain occupations. This, of course, is but the logical development of the Trade Union's policy, which is prepared to strike rather than that any unskilled white workers, should be in a 'skilled job'."[60] The parochial views of the leadership imbibed by such leaders as Shinwell and Smillie undermined their stated belief in socialism. They neither believed in it nor did they even organize around the elementary demand of jobs for all. The

---

[58] Lunn, "Race Relations," 12.
[59] The attitudes of the respectable British about the East were of a strange mixture. They consisted of fear of the unknown, and a strange awe of the mysterious. By the late 19th century opium use was widespread in Britain and this too was blamed on the Chinese. See "Foreign Devils and Moral Panics: Britain, Asia and the Opium Trade by Andrew Blake, in *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural history,*" (New York:Routledge:1996), Bill Schwarz, ed.
[60] Jenkinson, "The Glasgow Race disturbances of 1919," 56.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scramble over the ever-shrinking jobs encouraged the outbreak of these riots. The result of defending one section of the work force over the other, as in the case of the seamen, meant the inevitable decline of wages for all workers. Wilson's record of capitulation to the employers and his use of strong-arm tactics in the union to crush dissent against racist attacks on non-whites contributed to the already terrible conditions brought on by the ever-deepening economic distress.

The distress that was so clearly manifested on the docks and among the seamen was not only caused by the economic downturn but any hope for amelioration was impossible since the union leaders chose to give up the fight before it began. Wilson, who so dominated the Seamen and Firemen's Union, was responsible for this catastrophe. Working in conjunction with management to "resolve labor disputes," it was Wilson's policy to give up raises in times that were considered industrial depressions.

> Upon the demand of the shipowners in 1921, he [Wilson] agreed to a reduction in wages for the members of his Union. In 1922, again meeting the wishes of the shipowners, he allowed the wages of the able seamen, to be reduced by £2 and those of other categories by 20 to 24 percent. The seamen went on strike whereupon Havelock Wilson addressed an appeal to their wives and children, urging them to persuade their husbands and fathers to call off the strike because, as he said, 'It would entail the greatest suffering to the wives and children'.[61]

Thus the race riots were essentially a foregone conclusion given the unwillingness of the trade union leaders to wage a concerted struggle against wage reductions. This fact was clearly demonstrated in hearings that were organized between Ernest Bevin, the dockers' leader and the ship owners. It was clear that the owners had made outstanding profits during the war. During this court of inquiry (1920) Bevin reminds the government that "on May 24, 1919 on the second reading of the Finance Bill, he [Law] said: "The shipowners have been allowed to make profits directly arising out of the war

[61] Working Class Movement Library, Salford, File 14 Box 2, National Minority Movement.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which we ought not to have allowed them to make. As a rule, during the 3 years which have elapsed since the war, big shipowners have made the whole of their capital: they have made the equivalent of 33 1/3% after paying excess profits". According to Bevin

> I want to suggest that after May 1917, when we were being refused advances of wages to meet increased cost of living. In 1918 a very large retrospective sum was paid to the shipowners in spite of the fact that all of the increase we had received had been paid by the government even in Scale no. 1. I want to make a point clear. These rates in Scale No 1, arranged in 1915 for the shipowners provide that additional labour charges etc, shall be born by the state, and in spite of that this increase was granted to them at the period when we had difficulty in getting a copper or two per hour in order to maintain our people in decency.[62]

Moreover, in 1921 the government allowed prices to rise, virtually eradicating all price controls. In addition, the London Dock Scheme was devised to diminish the wages of the dockers, who were already suffering from unemployment. The general provisions of the act were as follows:

> That they [workers] only become entitled to benefit after completing three waiting days, and thereafter only receive benefit for days on which they are 'continuously employed'. Under the Act continuity is broken whenever a claimant fails to sign for more than two consecutive days or on the first and third days out of any consecutive three days. He must then complete a fresh waiting period except where the failure to sign can be bridged over by the rule under which two periods of unemployment of not less than six days each is separated by not more than six weeks.[63]

Dockworkers employment was so sporadic that 4,000 to 5,000 men were turned away daily. Therefore, both employment and unemployment provisions were denied to many of these workers. And at the very time that the working class was suffering in many instances from deplorable housing and unemployment, Lloyd George's government attempted to impose new taxes on workers in order to pay back the debt that it incurred during the war. Sir Robert Horne, Head of the Board of Trade, declared that not only

---

[62] NYPL, *Sessional Papers*, Vol. XXIV, Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, Transport Workers Court of Inquiry, February 3, 1920, 11.
[63] PRO, 347/1919, London Dock Scheme.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

must everyone sacrifice but that the Board of Trade's figures of 125% or 130 % increase in the cost of living was on certain items only; therefore a raise was not warranted. In fact, he argued that the cost of living only rose 100 percent, justifying his claim that the rise in wages had been commensurate with the rise in inflation. Moreover, the poor quality of food contributed to workers miserable conditions increasing industrial unrest.[64] George Roberts, of the Ministry of Food, warned that while any serious outbreak of unrest had been averted during the war, "I am convinced that abandonment (that is controls) unless and until, conditions have become relatively normal will be attended with the gravest dangers to civil disorder…I think it would be a grave mistake to reduce the quality of bread if at the same time you increase the price."[65]

The confluence of reduced earning power because of long periods of unemployment and the lack of willingness by the union officials to confront the employers in order to redress these problems in addition to the racist rhetoric of many important heads of unions almost guaranteed that riots would occur.

Coupled with a strategy that divided the working class along race and gender lines was the argument that voting was the solution to the workers' economic plight. Thus industrial action was downplayed in favor of the vote undermining direct action generally practiced by the more militant sectors of the working class. By 1922 economic strategies had transferred to political strategies. This accounts for the ascension of the Labour Party to power with Ramsay MacDonald at its helm in 1924. Due to the defeats of 1921-22 workers joined unemployed councils in lieu of militant strike action. It was not until the LP took office in 1924 that strikes began to appear again. And although workers

[64] LSE, By 1917 the Beveridge Report claimed that tuberculin animals were being sold to the general public. Beveridge Report, June 21, 1917: In War Time Control of Industry, 66.
[65] LSE, Food Control, Vol VIII, Ministry of Food –George Roberts, February 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

anticipated a sympathetic response to their demands once the LP came to office, for the most part the strikes were defeated. It was not until 1925, a year before the General Strike of May 1926, that strikes became a significant issue in British politics again.

It was quite apparent to Members of the LP that social unrest would be inevitable. In a report entitled, "Relations of Capital and Labour After the War," Sir William Beveridge reported extensively on social and labor conditions. He wrote: "The war has shown on the one hand, that there is in certain quarters very considerable bitterness of feeling between employers and workpeople..."

> During the war restrictions have to a large extent been abandoned and the hostility between employers and workpeople has been kept in check by patriotic motives, though the difference with which this has been done in some cases illustrates the strength of the evil. There would be ground for considerable fear as soon as the war pressure was removed, even if the circumstances were then likely to be in other ways normal. In fact the circumstances will not be normal, and the forces making for lack of industrial harmony and efficiency before the war are likely to be much strengthened by the special circumstances of the time immediately succeeding the war.[66]

And the union leadership feared this eventuality as well.

> In view of the world-wide shortage, after the war, of exportable foodstuffs, raw materials and merchant shipping, Labour proposed that all belligerents continue the necessary government controls.... Furthermore, convinced that extensive unemployment would be an inevitable by-product of uncontrolled reconversion, Britain's Labour leaders declared that the "restless" mood of the demobilized soldiers and workers could be satisfied only by equitable measures calculated to minimize the social and human cost of reconversion.[67]

Besides the significant economic changes that the war ushered in, the psychological changes among working people could not be denied. The door was now opened for political change which resulted in a challenge to the Lloyd George government, and although the Coalition was reelected in the 1918 election, in 1919

---

[66] LSE, Beveridge Report, 1917, Relations of Capital and Labour After the War, 20.

[67] Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919*, (NY:Alfred A. Knopf:1967), 321.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Labour won many seats in a variety of bi-elections. In fact, Henderson commented: "We are the second largest party, and thus entitled to become the Opposition: but if we had readily contested 600 seats under normal conditions, instead of 362, and if all the soldiers had been at home to vote… I am not sure that we should have been the first largest party."[68] The number of workers joining the LP also began to increase. It was clear that the older, more conservative leaders such as J.H. Thomas and J R Clynes, who feared the mounting militancy, would argue against direct action at Labour Party congresses. "We shall not convert our friends by threats" was [Clynes'] warning to the advocates of truculence."[69] The LP would have to make room for more moderate leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald and moderate socialists including the Webbs if it was going to meet the exploding challenges that occurred once the war was concluded. Most certainly, argues Mayer, Labour's radical sloganeering helped maintain its "democratic and parliamentary" approach to politics.[70]

Labour's program was one of reform, not revolution, and all of the social problems that plagued Britain persisted. The problems were mounting. For instance, the *Workers' Dreadnought* reported: "a worker [was] forced to sign forms that upon leaving his employer who got him out of the Army, [he] must notify the military authorities, and, since it is stated that he may be recalled to his regiment at any time, he may always suspect that to leave his employment may mean his recall."[71] An explosion was likely. In fact mutinies were beginning to happen among the soldiers who wished to be

---

[68] *Times,* January 3, 1919; See Gilbert, in *British Social History*, 26-27.
[69] *Times*, September 13, 1919. But Arno Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy, Political Origins of the New Diplomacy 1917-1918,* (New Haven:Yale University Press: 1959), 141,also contends "the abolition of the House of Lords was the most extreme constitutional change envisaged by Labour."
[70] Ibid,
[71] *Workers' Dreadnought,* January 25, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

demobilized and were frustrated at the delays. The Lloyd George cabinet debated what action to take regarding these mutinies. Because the soldiers were needed at home to defend the country against striking workers and abroad against revolt it was necessary to placate them while not appearing to look as if the government was caving into their demands and encouraging even more rebellions. "On 14 January Haig and other generals claimed that 'the state of the army is deplorable', on the 15th that the army was 'rapidly disappearing', on the 16th Churchill wrote that 'the army is liquefying fast', and on the 17th Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General staff, told Churchill: 'We are sitting on the top of a mine which may go up at any minute.'[72] It did not go unnoticed that while many tens of thousands of workers had been wounded in the war and had come home to face a critical shortage of jobs that general Haig "had a handsome salary during the war and got a gratuity of £100,000. The rank and file got 6d per day and a miserable pittance of gratuity hardly enough to buy them clothes, now they propose giving Haig a large mansion and estates… ."[73] According to the memoirs of Vida Goldstein, a contemporary observer of the British scene,

> Soldiers everywhere and the workers everywhere are being raised to white heat by the failure of their governments to do anything to meet the difficulties with which they are faced in finding employment, in finding decent housing decent food, decent clothing except at exorbitant prices, and prices that are rising daily, especially with those commodities which are no longer controlled by the government.[74]

Soldiers who were considered to be troublemakers, causing discontent were relegated to the bottom of the discharge list. Insubordination was punished, and according to the *Workers Dreadnought,* "The regulations further state that 69 battalions

---

[72] Chanie Rosenberg *Britain on the Brink of Revolution:1919,*(Bookmarks:London:1987), 17-18.
[73] *The Worker,* December 20, 1919.
[74] Fawcett Library, Gb/106/7, Vida Goldstein memoirs, August 19, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of 18-year-old boys now at home are to be sent at once to the Rhine bridgeheads, The armies will be composed, again the sinister phrase, "In the first stance," of those who did not enlist before January 1st 1916."[75] Workers were to be punished for not volunteering in the first place, adding to the already intense anger felt by many of the servicemen. Soldiers were also used as conscript labor when the employers wished to break strikes. Workers who had previously had a long history of trade union pride were being asked to blackleg on other workers. The evidence is overwhelming that in both the army and navy discontent was so palpable that it rose to unprecedented proportions. Walter Kendall points to the impatience of the sailors to be demobilized by arguing that unrest among "sailors, whilst military disorders were at a peak, should haul the red flag to the masthead of HMS Kilbride at Milford Haven on 13 January 1919, with the declaration that 'Half the Navy are on strike and the other half soon will be,' indicated how serious the situation had become."[76] Kendall attributes the maintenance of stability to the failure of the soldiers and sailors to make common ground over their grievances. But according to Kendall, there is little doubt that the sector enforcing governmental rule was itself in a state of disintegration.[77] The distress was increasingly felt and was subsequently recorded in an article "Should the Soldiers Rejoice?"

> What are the facts now that war has been won and the men returned from the fighting lines? The soldiers and the dependents of those who have fallen are not receiving any of the benefits of the promised social reforms. Instead they have been thrown on the scrap heap, to eke out a living as best they can. The over one

---

[75] *Workers' Dreadnought,* February 8, 1919.

[76] Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain in 1900-21:The Origins of British Communism,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson:1969), 190.

[77] Even the police, which normally defend the interests of the state, were suspected of possible disloyalty. The police union, NUPPO, according to Jane Morgan, in *Conflict and Order,* 69, "was affiliated to various labour bodies in the country, and this led to immense alarm in government circles. Discontent came to a head in London in August 1918 when, in the words of Leon Dunning, one of the inspectors of constabulary, 'an organized attempt to seduce the police from their duty met with a regrettable amount of success'." A police strike occurred soon after that in 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> hundred thousand people are out of work, a high percentage of them being returned soldiers. Instead of them having fine houses to live in, hovels and dog kneels (some people call them huts) are the only places available.[78]

The conditions mentioned above conspired to encourage workers to reexamine their long accepted beliefs about the system of laws that they had believed to be binding on all classes. According to Joseph Melling, a contemporary, the situation

> demonstrates conclusively the degree to which rank and file militancy was matched by a transformation within the Scottish ILP. This party had always been more to the Left than its counterpart in England. During the war its members had worked closely with the activists of the BSP and SLP, and by its end the Scottish ILP was, by and large majority, in support of affiliation to the Third International- a vote repeated in that organization's Scottish conference in 1919 and 1920.[79]

The minute book of the Clyde Shipbuilders Association illuminates the extreme nature of the situation that was occurring on the Clyde. Discussions took place among Clydeside's employers, sometimes virtually hour by hour, which placed these events much more within the context of the strike wave that was spreading across Europe at the end of the war. It makes clear that local employers thought the strike to be political.[80] Anti-Bolshevist organizations supplying millions in pounds to undermining both the strike and what they believed to have been an incipient socialist movement sprung up everywhere. "Winston Churchill, had been down to Cricccieth colloguing with his chief, he tells everyone that he is going 'to root out Bolshevism' at home and abroad. On all sides we hear of consolidation of the forces of Capitalism and a readiness to bring about *The Day* when Labour is to be routed."[81] Havelock Wilson, the Seamen's leader, participated in this anti-Bolshevik endeavor by setting up his own organization in

---

[78] WCML, Should the Soldiers Rejoice?, No. 8 June 1919.
[79] J. Foster. "Red Clyde, Red Scotland," 123, in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley, eds., (Polygon:Edinburgh:1992).
[80] Strathclyde Record Office, TD 241/1/18, ff 144-159.
[81] Webb, *Diaries,* 165.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conjunction with the employers. But this did not curtail the rebellion that was rocking Britain. "Workers rebelled in a massive wave of strikes, with working days lost leaping from nearly six million in 1918 to nearly 35 million in 1919 - which was an average of more than 100,000 workers on strike every working day."[82]

Along with a number of other issues facing workers, conscription continued to be one that the union leadership was forced to confront. In a *Times* article it was reported that a Labour convention issued with a *Special Appeal to Responsible Leaders*, which put forth resolutions that encompassed demands for a shorter workweek, and an end to intervention in Russia. The article on January 28, 1919, states "the instigators of these revolts have almost as bitter a distrust and hatred of those trade union officials as they have of the 'bosses' or the Government."[83] Further:

> Unless the leader comes from some more or less responsible quarter, matters will reach such a state that open insurrection or revolutionary action may speedily ensue. We must hold the suggested convention to prevent unofficial strikes, to avoid the growth of anti-officialism among the best of our men and women, and to create such a condition where in the officials shall be asked to carry out the mandate of those whom they represent.[84]

Now, even the more moderate leaders had become aware of how drastic the situation had become and were thus forced to confront the rising tide of disaffection among millions of their own workers.

---

[82] Chanie Rosenberg, *Britain on the Brink,* 7.

[83] *Times*, January 28, 1919. Cronin writes in *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain,* 128, "The Coalition government tried by various means to bolster the authority of trade union leaders, but it was a difficult task. The aspirations of the rank-and-file had obviously outrun the tactics, strategy and outlook of the leaders and produced a crisis of confidence."

[84] *Times,* February 7, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 9: THE STRUGGLE OVER THE 40-HOUR WORKWEEK AND THE FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

> I do not think we shall have to face the industrial calamities which so many people seem to fear. It is true we are a very conservative country, but I claim that we are at the same time a very adaptable people. At the outbreak of war, when things were in the melting pot, when international credits seemed to be suspended, and the outlook was very black, the prophets of woe seemed to think that the old industrial system was about to collapse, but look at the marvelous recovery which took place; how normally, in a sense, the machine is running. I believe that exactly the same sort of thing will take place after the war; that both industry and capital are very adaptable; that capital, through its holders, will be seeking for the best use, and that workers will be ready to take the best advantage of anything in the shape of employment, I therefore, face the position, as I say with some degree of confidence, and certainly with more optimism than seems to be the case with a very large number of my colleagues. Thomas Shaw J.P.[1]

By January 1919 a near general strike broke out involving workers from all industries and in all parts of Britain. Moreover, the demand for nationalization of industry grew passing over the more minimal demands of higher wages. Nationalization involved such questions as who ruled industry and how the available work should be divided up. Mere economic questions began to take on political implications. Whether the government would join together with workers or whether workers should run industry by themselves were questions that were now up for grabs. Different sections of the workforce encouraged competing strategies; they were often at odds with each other, but it is clear from the evidence that workers did believe that their condition would not appreciably change if the employers continued to run industry as had been done in the past. Once the Russian Revolution occurred in combination with this new outlook, the idea of a new revolutionary organization being formed mirroring the one in Russia naturally came to the fore.

---

[1] The Council of Ruskin College, Oxford, 1916, *The Reorganisation of Industry*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the midst of this turmoil and discontent arose one of the first potentially revolutionary incidences that Britain had experienced since before the war. Labor problems began to develop on a massive scale starting with the engineers on the Clyde on January 27th, who demanded a 40- hour week. This struggle then quickly spread to other industrial cities.

> On the first day of the strike, on Monday 27th January, a huge rally took place in St Andrews Hall, with several overflow meetings outside. The Joint Committee claimed that 40,000 were out in Glasgow, alone. The demonstrators marched from Charing Cross to George Square for a rally and speeches. The huge red flag was hoisted onto the flag-pole of the Municipal Buildings, and the enthusiasm and excitement of the event caused much stir throughout the land. [2]

Miners decided to strike in sympathy although their contract would not expire until March. Before the strike actually began there was some disagreement within the movement over precisely what the demands should be. Many of the more militant workers, including the miners, demanded a 30-hour workweek and a £1 minimum wage. From a section in *Miner's Notes* we are all too aware of the impatience of the miners with their leaders.

> While the delegates were inside the union offices the demonstrators outside… rushed the offices and took them by storm. The secretary declared that Thursday would be an official idle day pending negotiations, and promised to inform all outlying districts. It has since been discovered that he did not do so. On Thursday a repetition of Wednesday demonstration took place, and Friday was also declared an official idle day. A council meeting was summoned for Friday, but the executive of the organization called the council meeting off, thereby hoodwinking the men. Now the regular council meeting for Monday, 3rd, February has also been cancelled. These actions have been the means of causing a division between the strikers, and at a meeting held on Sunday 2nd February the whole country will come out again. The struggle is on and nothing can avoid it. The executive's action has caused a temporary delay in the fight. The men realise that their officials are not working for their interests, and very soon they will

[2] Glasgow Caledonian University, Gallacher Collection, John McKay, "William Gallacher Biography," Unpublished dissertation, 1993, 91.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> sweep them from their pedestals and replace them by men who have their interests at heart and will do as they are instructed by the rank and file.[3]

The workers were intimately involved in the strike effort bringing thousands of people to the picket lines. Mass pickets involved between 10,000 and 20,000 people. Socialist newspapers were sold to strikers and many of the strikers' wives were involved in the picketing. "By the third day, Wednesday 29 January, all factories were closed." [4] But even while the workers organized in such a massive way

> the Parliamentary Committee having adopted certain dates for a conference and for action following thereon (namely, 1st February for conference, and 10th February for a general strike), after consultation with union, cannot accept responsibility for the declaration of a general strike on 27th January, which was decided upon against our advice. The promoters of the general strike, however having accepted the policy of a 40-hours week (the policy of the Scottish Trades Union Congress), the Parliamentary Committee, in these circumstances, adopted no hostile attitude, but continued to cooperate with the joint committee in making preparation for a general strike which adhering to the calling of a Scottish National Conference on 1st February, and general action on 10th February.[5]

Not only were obstacles put in the way from the very beginning by the trade union leaders, according to Phillip Bagwell "there was no hint of a concerted plan to press the particular demands of each industrial group."[6] Instead of supporting the strikers, J.T. Brownlie of the Executive Committee of the ASE condemned the unofficial strikes altogether.

> The Executive Council strongly deprecate the continuance of unofficial action by their members, and whilst fully realizing that during the deplorable period of the war for a variety of reasons, it was necessary to deal leniently with those responsible for such unofficial action, conscious that, in the interests of the trade union movement, a firm stand has got to be taken.

But, according to the same article, the resolution that was passed went as follows:

---

[3] *Miner's Notes,* Lanckashire, February 8, 1919.
[4] Rosenberg, *Britain on the Brink:1919,* 37.
[5] Glasgow Caledonian University, Gallacher Collection, January 24, 1919. So while the unofficial leadership was now in charge the official leadership would only half-heartedly give its blessing.
[6] Briggs, *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923:* Bagwell, "The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-1922," 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> That the mass meeting of the London members of the Electrical Trade union demand that the Government at once intervene in the Labour dispute on the Clyde, in Belfast, in London &c., with a view to introducing legislation making operative a national 40-hours working week, with the object of absorbing all the unemployment in the country, and that in the event of the Government deciding not to intervene, we, the London members of the Electrical Trades Union, will cease work on Thursday next, ...[7]

Since the crisis had grown to such grave proportions, especially in Glasgow, the government called out troops but avoided employing them from the surrounding area. Troops from the outskirts of Scotland would show less sympathy for the strikers. Tanks as well as soldiers were brought in, engaging workers in battles, that is workers were batoned, ultimately sending some to the hospital and some to prison. "A great melee broke out in George Square. Up the hill the workers began to retaliate...The boxes became barricades, and the bottles were used as ammunition against the police, with many demobilized servicemen taking a leading part in the fight."[8]

> Spikes from rails became weapons for many of the ex-servicemen. Leaders of the strike committee had asked to send a delegation to the Lord Provost, giving him until the following Friday to deal with the questions that demanded attention. And while he accepted this delegation the melee in George Square began. Although sympathy for strike action began in Scotland it quickly spread to Belfast, and then to England. At a mass meeting held in the Central Halls, Westminster, last night (Friday), it was decided by an overwhelming majority to down tools on February 6 at noon and demand a 40-hours week. District committees and all unofficial bodies are forming a strike committee. 'Tell the Clyde men we are coming.'[9]

Nationalization of both the railway and the mines had motivated workers in these trades to endorse the strike. Unemployment, although not nearly as bad in 1919 as it was to become a year or two later, was rising especially among the demobilized soldiers.

---

[7] *Times*, February 4, 1919, 10.
[8] Mckay, "William Gallacher Biography," 95.
[9]Glasgow Caledonian University. Gallacher Collection. There were a number of resolutions around the question of a 40 vs. a 30-hour workweek. Eventually the 40-hour demand prevailed. Demobilization was integral to the questions of unemployment and a shorter workweek.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Britain's war debt was enormous.[10] Lloyd George calculated that Germany would pay a substantial portion of this debt (this was accomplished by employing German workers at a cheaper rate than British workers had been receiving for the same job),[11] guaranteeing the further degradation of British industry. Unemployment skyrocketed to over a million workers. In addition, the price of goods was kept as high as the market would bear making it almost impossible for workers to obtain the necessities. The *Times* on February 1, said of the strike in London: "The deadlock in the ship repairing yards is still complete." From the article we understand that all classifications of workers were involved. They included railway, miners, electrical workers etc. Although the strikers differed somewhat on the question of hours the struggle for an 8-hour day, (except in the mines), became the demand of most workers who hoped to absorb those who were unemployed. The momentum throughout Britain, but most severely felt in Glasgow and Belfast, ignited a large portion of the work force and therefore challenged both the government and the Trade Union leadership. Harry McShane, then a member of the BSP and one of the founding members of the Communist Party, argued:

> We regarded the 40-hour strike not as a revolution but as a beginning. Other things would follow; it was the first rank –and-file agitation to be led by socialists after the war. The working class movement was bigger at the end of the war than before, and the socialists themselves had hardened. There was no return to the big meetings in the Pavilion and Metropole theatres; the pre-war mood and the artistic side of the movement, the William Morris-Edward Carpenter element, had gone.[12]

The nature of the movement had changed. "The combination of economic discontent, class-suspicion, the doctrines of Social Revolutionaries and the tendency to Industrial

---

[10] Outhwaite, *Hansard*, H.C., May 15, 1918, 359. "*The* proceeds of National War Bonds amounted to £12,596,000, whilst the deficiency to be made good by borrowing from all sources in the Budget Estimate is just under £41,000,000 a week."

[11] This was as a consequence of the Versailles Treaty, which guaranteed millions of tons of coal at reduced or no cost to France undermining British coal.

[12] H. McShane and J. Smith, *Harry McShane: No Mean Fighter,* (New York:Pluto Press:1978), 109.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Prussianism, threatens us with a bitter conflict between Capital and Labour…" wrote the Garton Foundation about the industrial situation in 1919.[13]

Massive strikes temporarily postponed by the War, started up again changing the nature of the debate over the question of leadership. Many people, even including members of the government recognized the possibility that Bolshevism might actually be a British phenomenon as well as a Russian one. Patrick Dollan, then a member of the ILP, declared at the May Day rally: "The message of May Day 1919 is: "Save Socialist Russia from her enemies." John McKay states in his unpublished biography of Gallacher that it is pretty certain that "at a local level … the danger to the bourgeois state was being mounted in Glasgow by the working class." The *Herald,* according to McKay, so feared the rising disturbances that the "Day after the strike started, an editorial accused the strikers of acting out 'the clap-trap nonsense of Trotsky', and 'Unhappily the signs of volcanic fires are omnipresent."[14] And even a less vituperative paper such as the *National Review* commented in March 1919:

> Talking of impending 'revolution; labour leaders, it was forecast, would soon be in Buckingham Palace, and the King working in a mine or driving a lorry…Indeed the whole of Europe, the Premier wrote the following month, was 'filled with the spirit of revolution…' the whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other.[15]

British workers were now seen as a growing problem along with other European workers who were also shaking the governments of many European countries. Therefore, this

---

[13] Garton Foundation, Memorandum on the Industrial Situation, 61-62.
[14] McKay, "William Gallacher, Biography," 99.
[15] Stephen White, "Ideological Hegemony and Political Control: The Sociology of Anti-Bolshevism in Britain 1918-20," 3, *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 9, June 1975.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

challenge had to be met with clear decisive action by the government.[16] Since DORA was still in effect the government not only used troops to clear away dissenting workers in George Square and other parts of Glasgow, but Churchill was able to employ DORA provisions to threaten strikers with jail sentences. And while historians largely agree that revolution was unlikely, partly because the strike was not evenly supported throughout Britain, the government's demonstration of brute force against the strikers indicates that it was not so certain at the time. With the strike undermined, employers were able to return workers' wages to pre-war levels.

> The employers' organisation itself, the Federation of British Industries, maintained a Parliamentary Department, and a Liaison Department was set up in 1918. In fact it was hardly necessary to provide for communication between the two bodies in this formal manner, for the connection was scarcely at risk: at least sixty-six MPs, and seventy members of the House of Lords, were at this time directors of companies which belonged to the Federation. Directors of such firms, moreover, were in many cases prominently represented in government, Horne, Chamberlain and Lloyd-Greame among them. A reciprocal link was established when Sir Erick Geddes, a former Minister of Transport became President of the Federation in November 1922.[17]

The British workers of old, that is prior to 1914, had changed, and although they might not have completely shed their parochial, hierarchical and craft perspectives, they had changed radically.

In addition, internationalism became a reality for many of the soldiers. During the war they had often fraternized with the "enemy," playing cards and singing songs,[18]

---

[16] According to Boughton, "Working-Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield," 68, "in the early 1920s, the police in Birmingham regarded it as part of their duties to attend all public meetings of left-wing organizations in the town in order to check the expression of seditious utterance."

[17] S. White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy, 1920-1924,* (New York:Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc.:1979), 236.

[18] Song written by Siegfried Sassoon called *Everyone Sang. The War Poems,* arranged and Introduced by Rupert Hart-Davis, (London:faber and faber:1983), 73. As another example of this hostility to those in power Sassoon writes: "What have you done in the Great War, old man? Four years' home-service, twenty miles from home, "drawing a Major's Pay." You've helped recruiting; Drilled men for battle; won your spurs with pride; Sat on court-martials; judged and sentenced soldiers; And some of them have died to keep

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

after which they were then forced to return to the battlefield. With a potentially dangerous situation brewing, those soldiers who fraternized with workers during the strike were kept in their barracks. The new recruits who were called up to put down the strike were young, inexperienced and, because of the distance from Glasgow had little connection to the people who amassed that day on Glasgow Green. They were different from the soldiers who came home from the war to face the same social conditions that they escaped when they went to war and, moreover, that had worsened since their departure. At the Trades Congress, in September 1919, "...Bailie Wheatley said that, 'there are 47,000 people living in little better than lethal chambers."[19] By 1919, distress had grown so widespread that although Glasgow's reputation was one of revolution, other parts of Britain, not sharing the same reputation for militancy, were beginning to follow suit. The Strike Bulletin distributed during the 40-hour movement (January and February 1919) applauds the solidarity of workers throughout Britain and declares in an article entitled "The Strike Spreads:"

> The movement has become national and nearly every industrial centre in the country is on strike, or preparing to strike, to enforce the demand for the 40 hours. The Barrow men down tools to-day the London men come into the arena to-morrow Sheffield and Birmingham are in full preparation for action, and a general strike is about to be declared in Ireland. The Scottish workers have united the ranks in the spirit that no force can break.[20]

---

you snug. In some of the diaries reported by Moynihan, in *People at War,* (London:David and Charles:Newton Abbot:1973), 91, one soldier talks about the suffering of the Germans and says "I cannot feel less pity for them than for our own." In another diary Tommy Atkins writes about No Man's Land and while attempting to move through German lines writes: "We used to crawl in the ditch on the right of the road and they would crawl on the left. When we got near the middle one would put up a helmet on a rifle and back would come the sign in the same way. We would then sit down and wait. After some time we would again put up the rifle and helmet, or sometimes even stand up and wave, and get the answering sign. And so back to report all quiet."

[19] *Labour Leader*, September 11, 1919; Williams, *Full Up And Fed Up,* 144. "Glasgow had ten thousand houses condemned as unfit habitation before the war. They're all being lived in today. Houses that would have cost then 250 pounds will now cost 1,000 pounds."

[20] *The Strike Bulletin*, Organ of the 40 Hours Movement, Feb. 5, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Tories[21] remained in power continuing to demonstrate little sympathy for the conditions that working people faced daily. Historian Tony Adams in an article entitled "Working Class Unrest and the Sheffield Labour Movement 1918-21" depicts large demonstrations of the unemployed and strikers providing a picture of the extreme dissatisfaction that was felt by many workers.

> 'Lively scenes outside Sheffield Town Hall...police and iron gates were necessary to restrain the eager throng'. 'Our councillors and T & LC leaders led a deputation to the City Council. Meeting inside the Town Hall the councillors could clearly distinguish cries from the crowd, which included 'rush the gates' and 'three cheers for the workers republic'.[22]

But on January 27, 1919, the first day of the General Strike, British workers were taking up political as well as strictly economic issues. Debates among workers had been an historical commonplace in Glasgow. Workers who were working a 54-hour week, wished to reduce their workload by splitting up the available work and thus the central theme of the strike was the reduction of hours. This was manifested over the question of a 30 versus a 40-hour workweek. In direct opposition to the wishes of the workers, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers attempted to negotiate a 47-hour week instead of the 30 or 40-hour week. In fact, the trade union leaders of the ASE not only opposed the 40-hour struggle but the Executive Committee suspended the District Committee Chairman and the Secretary from holding any office in the Society for two years. In a statement

---

[21] The Khaki election had not only seen one of the lowest turnouts of voters but many of the soldiers and sailors were unable to vote since they had not yet arrived back in the country. Leon Trotsky, in *On Britain,* 90, writes: "Important portions of the population are actually deprived of the suffrage right. Women have the vote only after thirty, men only after twenty-one. A lowering of the age limit is, from the point of view of the working class, in which the working life begins early, a rudimentary demand of democracy. And, to cap the climax, the boundaries of the election districts in England are fixed in such an outrageously unjust manner that there are twice as many votes corresponding to one Labour delegate as to one Conservative." Austen Morgan *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1987), 83, claims that the Labour Party had been robbed of the 1918 election because "though it had gained over a fifth of the vote, it secured only eight per cent of the seats."

[22] Tony Adams, "Working Class Unrest and the Sheffield Labour Movement 1918-21," 18. Chris Wrigley, ed., *Local Studies and Labour History, Essays in Victorian and 20th Century East Midlands History.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

promulgated by the workers it was clear that they felt the ever-widening gap between themselves and their leaders.[23] Therefore, the 40-hour struggle not only represented a conflict between the employers and workers, but also the rift between the workers' traditional leadership and the newly formed leadership.

The Clyde Workers Committee had gained its reputation during the war, and by 1919 made its last stand before the Shop Stewards' movement died with many of its members joining communist organizations.[24] By 1920, with the development of the Communist Party, the more politically aware workers hoped to build an organization that would lead the working class to socialist revolution. These same leaders led the CWC. The debate that ensued over the number of hours to be worked found its fault line between the more militant vs. less militant sections of the committee that organized the strike activity. Ironically it was the socialist Emmanuel Shinwell, an engineer and an ILP member, who insisted on the 40-hour workweek while many of the more militant workers argued for a 30-hour week. Shop stewards were summoned to a Joint Conference on January 18 to discuss the question with the Glasgow Trades Council. There the official leaders won out. But the stewards sped up the demand for a General Strike to begin on January 27. The Manifesto Committee issued "A Call to Arms of the Workers."[25] The floodgates of support were opened and workers went to their workplaces to gather information about the strike. Workers who had not previously been involved began to leave their places of employment. Describing the scene Harry McShane explained that although there was overwhelming support for the strike, some of the trams continued to run right down the middle of George Square where thousands of workers

[23] The University of Glasgow, UGD 102/1/2, Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1.
[24] The leaders of the Sheffield Workers' Committee joined the Communist Party as well.
[25] Angela Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress,* 157.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were gathered. Discussing the role of the tram workers apparent lack of support for the strike, MacLean makes the point that although employers were willing to do almost anything to guarantee their profits, the Scottish employers were even more ruthless then were the employers in England. James Dalrymple, the general manager of the trams, in conjunction with the Chief Constable provoked the strikers by forcing the tramwaymen to drive the trams down the center of George Square. The leader of the Tramway union did nothing to prevent this from happening. Bailie A. Turner, the general manager, orchestrated what he knew would be not only a divisive, but also a dangerous act. His heavy handedness and use of spies to frighten workers made them fearful, making it difficult for the tramwaymen to participate. According to MacLean, "The men were kept in a constant atmosphere of suspicion unfavorable to organisation but favourable to scabbery."[26] The most intense fighting surrounding the 40-hour week was in Glasgow. Pitched battles moving from street to street went on between the police and the demonstrators. McShane describes the incident.

> The police charged, but the crowd stood; when that happens the police are lost. One policeman dropped his helmet and got it thrown back in his face, someone else hit the chief constable, and the Riot Act was torn out of the sheriff's hands. Gallacher and Kirkwood came out to control the riot, and the police batoned them down and arrested them with some rank-and-file demonstrators. Then it spread up all the side streets and even to Glasgow Green.[27]

Glasgow had become an armed camp. Newspaper articles proclaimed 'Glasgow Rioting', 'wild Scenes in George Square', 'Strike Leaders arrested.'[28] The government instructed reporters not to give press coverage to the alternative leaders and even after the strike was called off workers continued to stand firm in order to guarantee the success of their

---

[26] John MacLean, ed., *Vanguard,* "Sack Dalrymple, Sack Stevenson," 2.
[27] McShane and Smith, *Harry McShane,* 106.
[28] Middlemas, *The Clydesiders,* 92.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

demands.[29] The government and Churchill in particular, refused to consider any of the demands of the strikers. In fact, fearful of the relationship between the discharged soldiers and sailors and the industrial working class who were, "providing much of the backbone for the mass pickets" the government could not help but take notice. "These pickets had already stopped virtually every industrial workplace and were now threatening the one remaining source of electricity supply."[30]

And while the central focus of the strike was to shorten the workday in order to divide the work, especially to the benefit of the soldiers who were returning home,[31] the employers wished to reassert their authority by maintaining this reserve army of labor. Lloyd George, the Provost of Scotland, and the Highland military, all collaborated to undermine the strike. But the rank and file leadership, which arose in the midst of the battle, could not cohere an organization that would challenge the state for power. Rather than marching off to the military camps where there was support for the strikers, the leaders attempted to negotiate with the government. Their faith in the fairness of these representatives proved to be naïve. William Gallacher, than a member of the BSP, explained that rather than making a revolution he was attempting to lead a strike. Gallacher, in fact, wrote years later in *Revolt on the Clyde:* "A rising should have taken place. The workers were ready and able to effect it: the leadership had never thought of

---

[29] According to John Foster, "Red Clyde Red Scotland," 56, "The editors of the Scottish press were to be called in and told to effect a 'judicious cutting down of statements concerning the unofficial strike and eliminating from reports the names of the strike leaders'. "

[30] Ibid, 124.

[31] According to the Manifest of the Joint Strike Committee published in the Strike Bulletin 1919 in a call to their fellow workers: "Thousands of them are being demobilized every day. Over a hundred thousand workers in Scotland have been dismissed from civil employment. They are out of a job. There are no jobs for them. There is only one remedy, reduce the hours of labour."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

it'."[32] While there is no guarantee that had a rising taken place it would have been successful, everyone was unprepared for such a strong response by the state. Gallacher may have been guilty of wishful thinking but there is no doubt that Lloyd George was responding to the ever-growing discontent that was manifested most emphatically in George Square. Troops brought in from the Highlands were stationed in public buildings. Union offices were raided and machine gun posts were set up in City Chambers. Soldiers in full battle gear marched along the main streets intimidating the citizenry.

The Scottish TUC decided to retract the demand for the 40-hour week and instead to accept a 47-hour compromise. The intervention of the military demonstrated the seriousness of the employers' position, and their fear that the strike would go too far. January 28 1919, now known as Bloody Friday, was the outcome of this heightening tension and the politicization of the workers. The employers were now on the alert. The Economic League instituted blacklists designed to discriminate against militants and left-wing workers. "Indeed, they appear to have been the only organisation in inter-war Britain providing a nation-wide, centralised political blacklisting service of this kind."[33] Fear was indeed widespread especially on the Clyde. Contemporary commentator William Bolitho, though exaggerating the immanent danger of revolution certainly expressed the feelings of many employers and some governmental personnel.

---

[32] R. Duncan and A. McIvor, ed., *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict On the Clyde 1900-50* Terry Brotherstone, Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?, 56; C. Wrigley writes in *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour:The Post-War Coalition 1918-22,* (New York:St. Martin's Press:1990), 294, that "in the upsurge of working-class discontent in 1919 and 1920, the possibilities of widening industrial action through sympathy strikes, spearheaded by the Triple Alliance unions, greatly worried many minister."

[33] Duncan and McIvor , ed., *Militant Workers*, 151; Read Wrigley *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour,* 298. He maintained that that M15 had compiled 250,000 cards and 27,000 personal files on adult aliens in Britain. "Although the army ended surveillance of industrial workers in early 1920, surveillance of the Left by other official bodies was continued after the First World War."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The Red Clyde, the smoldering danger of revolution in Glasgow, owing to the swift development of political affairs in Britain, has ceased to be a local anxiety, and become an interest and an alarm to the whole civilized world. The complacent days of trust in things as they have gone since the world war and the Russian upheaval, and no State, however geographically remote, however seemingly secure in possession of an unshakable constitutional system, can any longer be certain of immunity from violent, bloody change in its body politics…[34]

The brutal crushing of the 1919 strike by government troops may have dampened the working classes' response to the social inequities that persisted, but it did not eliminate activity altogether. Unemployment was now worse than ever. By December the *Times* reported:

> An official of the General Workers' Union states that unemployment has become much worse in London during recent weeks. In the western districts men in the engineering trades are chiefly affected. In the East End things are bad all round, and depression has fallen on practically every trade. The view is taken, however, that the situation is abnormal, and that there must be an improvement within a few months. For this reason it is urged that the Government should revert to the policy pursued immediately after the Armistice, and put into operation a special unemployment donation. Many people can get benefit at present under the Unemployment Insurance Act.[35]

And yet the situation was not surprising. One hundred eighty thousand ex-servicemen, 30,000 seamen, and thousands of dockers, and even shipbuilders joined the ranks of the unemployed.[36] Mini uprisings and strikes occurred over and over again. "The strike recommendation of February 1919 [was] for a package of demands including nationalisation [and] was overwhelmingly endorsed by the miners in the Sheffield

---

[34] Ibid, 71.

[35] The *Times,* December 16, 1920; In his address to the National Industrial Conference Board, March 1921, 22. Arthur Pollen exclaims: "in May, June, and July, 1920, in many works in England, although the hours were shorter and the wages higher, the output per hour was actually greater than in pre-war days. In other words the men had responded to the cry for production. But, unfortunately, they had hardly done so when, owing to the breakdown of the exchanges, and the total collapse of the foreign markets, manufacturing concerns found themselves in possession of vast stocks-or inventories…-for which there was no sale. The men who responded to the cry for production found themselves out of work, and it seemed that this was so only because they replied to the call made upon them."

[36] Adamson, *Hansard,* H.C., October 21, 1920, 1118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

area."[37] The East London trade unions of 1919, "In many respects were different from those of the pre-war years: they were not only larger, but also more demanding."[38] Eight thousand shipyard workers listened to a speech by Harry Pollitt at the Poplar Hippodrome and gave enthusiastic support for the strike.[39] Even the police went out on strike to obtain union recognition. The powers of law enforcement were crumbling although the police strike was defeated. At the close of the strike May Day demonstrations were proposed advancing support for the Russian workers.

> In April the CSA [Clyde Shipbuilders Association] impotently expressed its annoyance that the Clyde District Committee of the Boilermakers had unilaterally announced May Day as a holiday without any attempt at negotiation. The 100,000 attending again passed resolutions of support for the Russian Revolution, demands for British withdrawal from Russia and for a socialist revolution in Britain.[40]

The resolution stated:

> This meeting calls for the overthrow of the capitalist system of production for profit and the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth based on production for use; and further that this meeting, assembled on Glasgow Green, sends their fraternal greetings to the European Soviet Republic and to the workers of the world.[41]

---

[37] Ibid, 23.

[38] Bush, *Behind the Lines*, 195; PRO, MEPO 2/1958. In 1920 a major demonstration occurred in the East End of London involving unemployed ex-servicemen. The police attacked the demonstrators which resulted in an ensuing riot. The superintendent wrote in his report: "As we arrived we were met with every conceivable insult and obscene language by a road, who was obviously composed of the lower class of alien Jews…A deputation of London labour mayors was meeting at Downing Street-the procession tried to get through police lines…At certain intervals during the excitement, two separate processions, headed by a man carrying a red flag, attempted to force a way through the police lines." This demonstration, headed for Trafalgar Square, was joined by a deputation of 500 ex-servicemen.

[39] Ibid, 199.

[40] John Foster, "Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919" *International Review of Social History* Vol. XXXV-1990-1991, 57.

[41] John Foster, 1917, "Scottish Voices" *Scottish Trade Union Review,* no. 36, Autumn 87; SWCC:NUM/L/33/2. Resolution passed at Ferndale Lodge General Met in solidarity with Russia and all oppressed people internationally.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For many workers the Russian revolution was now viewed as a model for the type of change that needed to take place in Britain. Socialism had become part of the British working class' vocabulary.[42]

The demand of the Trade Union leadership was either for full employment or full maintenance. There were, though, conservative leaders who continued to push productivity schemes as a way of promoting the positive nature of capitalism and to try and take the pressure of waging a serious campaign against unemployment off themselves.

> Huge posters appeared in the hoardings in every town in the country, bearing the photographs of prominent trade union and labour leaders, calling on the workers to work harder and earn an increasing share in industrial prosperity. The outstanding caption on these posters ran: "Produce more-the gate to More is Increased Production.[43]

Union leaders set up lectures in the factory extolling the virtues of capitalism and encouraging workers to get on board and work a little harder. This way everyone would profit: there would be no need for industrial conflict.[44] But calls for direct action had not abated and no doubt there was pressure on both the leaders and the government to alleviate some of the worst conditions that provoked these spontaneous uprisings.

The press chided the strikers and endorsed the government's heavy-handed approach; that is, bringing in the military. A statement that the fight with the railway workers must be "like the war with Germany" appalled even the conservative leader of

---

[42] Gleason observed, in *What the Workers Want,* that "The workers are no longer prepared to acquiesce in a system in which their labor is bought and sold as a commodity in the Labor Market", 373.
[43] Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles,* (New York:Harper and Row Publishing Inc.:1973), 73.
[44] Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement,* 302, relates a story about J.H. Thomas and Lady Astor, who says about Thomas that "Thomas is a clever fellow, very bright and quick, and no doubt he has done good work for his people, but metaphorically and actually he is always telephoning the opposite side to say how he is getting on and whether he has succeeded in calming the ardent spirits in the movement." "In Should the Workers Increase Output?," (London Workers' Committee:1920), 3, W.F. Watson, a British socialist quotes J.T Brownlie, Labour MP, who exhorts the workers to increase output in order to "save the world from disaster."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the railway union. The *Times* argued that this must be a fight to the finish. Although traditionally sympathetic to the employers' appeals for retrenchment, Thomas responded as follows:

> It is an incitement to bloodshed; it means the mobilization of all the resources of wartime against our own citizens. Already the Government is beginning to act on the lines to which the *Times* incite them. They have summoned warships to the main ports; they have provocatively stationed armed guards everywhere; and, most unfortunate of all, they are using against their own countrymen the methods of propaganda, which they used in war time against the foreign enemy.[45]

The failure of the railway workers and the engineers to negotiate a decent contract came directly out of the failure of the Trade Union leaders to genuinely endorse the general strike in the earlier part of the year. Churchill had wished to alleviate the government of the responsibility for control of industry by handing it back to its owners. Therefore, the crushing of the January struggle meant that at least for a time, the workers lost the advantage. Lloyd George was confident that leaders such as Thomas would not mount a real challenge. But in September Thomas complained that the government offered a new standard rate which: "fell considerably below the present earnings."[46] In an article on the 27th of September, the *Times* reported that Field Marshal Haig and Major General Fielding were present at the Cabinet meeting.[47] Everyone was preparing for a national railway strike. The armed forces were gearing up for a possible showdown with

---

[45] *The Times,* September 30, 1919; The Beveridge Report reveals the government's plans to deal with the impending railway strike. LSE, February 17, 1919. Beveridge worried that 70% of the armed forces would not be in support of crushing the workers and thus put forward the idea of imposing a blockade without previous warning to try and force public support for the government. But he also worried that this plan might promote bitterness among workers and engenders "destructive" rioting in the blockaded areas. This, he claimed, would be a form of unannounced civil war. There were other possible plans as well all in the hopes of breaking the strike. Bagwell *The Railwaymen,* 393, notes that relations were friendly and a number of the ex-servicemen's unions refused to take any part in blacklegging the strike.

[46] Ibid, 8. As an example of this policy of wage reduction a porter earning between 51s and 53s would receive 40s—a reduction of between 11s and 13s. *Hornsey Journal*, February 11, 1921.

[47] According to Bagwell *The Railwaymen,* 375, "there were 179 company directors in the new Parliament compared with an average of 139 in the whole inter-war period."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the National Union of Railwaymen whose membership numbered over 416,000, and the Associate Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen with over 47,000 workers. The *Times* proclaimed euphemistically that:

> The government are under no misapprehensions on the point, and they are determined to exert all the powers at their command in an endeavor to cope with a situation which may imperil the whole social, industrial, and economic life of the nation…The whole force of the British state was mobilized because the Railwaymen,..in their national programme, presented to the Government last winter, demanded the standardisation of conditions of service on all railways…Each railway has its own system of grading its staff and its own rates of wage for each grade…The railwaymen claimed that every worker in a given grade, irrespective of the line on which he worked, should be paid a rate equal to the wage paid before the war to the highest paid worker in that grade on any railway, with the addition of 33s weekly war advance as a part of his permanent wages. [48]

And while the reporter applauded the generosity of the Government, it also recommended the use of troops if the situation required it.

> Mr. Lloyd George declared that he would not enter into any negotiations with the railwaymen's unions until the men had unconditionally returned to their duty. A national appeal was made to all the Local Authorities-not to strengthen the police force by special constables, as is the constitutional procedure, but to institute a 'Citizen Guard,' in order to repel the forces of disorder; a wild use of a term of bad omen, which was calculated, if not intended, to bring the 'class war' into the streets.[49]

1919 continued to be a pivotal year, although the trade union leaders limited the workers' challenge to the intransigence of their employers. With pressure growing, even Thomas, when faced with determination by the railway workers, was forced to accept support by the electricians, the dockworkers, and the vehicle workers after he initially refused their solidarity appeal. On this the *Times* wrote: "The leaders of the Transport Workers' Federation last night issued a manifesto stating that their members could not be

---

[48] Ibid, 8.
[49] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism,* 544. This is also described in Bagwell's, *The Railwaymen,* 389.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

restrained from taking drastic action in support of the railwaymen."[50] Workers overwhelmingly understood the need for working class solidarity, even if their leaders were troubled by it. The railway workers were forced to strike even without the wholehearted support of their leaders. Without strike action wages would have been reduced and the union weakened. Due to overwhelming support by the public for the railway workers and the mounting accidents that occurred to volunteer rail workers the government was forced to capitulate and offer a settlement. Standardization of railway rates would be made complete. "In high glee at the prospect of a favourable conclusion of the strike some of the more daring of the NUR Executives sang 'The Red Flag' and the 'Internationale'..."[51] Knowing that lack of support for the railwaymen would have meant certain defeat the Transport Federation supported the strike. Thomas who had not really supported strike action was not liked by his own ranks.

> Mr. Thomas was ever active advising the membership of this union on the need for increased production and the folly of direct action, while, on the other hand, he utterly failed to warn them of the Government's obvious plot, then maturing to launch a sudden attack on our organisation, with the intent to break it up.

This was a charge that was raised by the railway workers at a congress that denounced him. His members ultimately demanded his removal from office.

> This Congress also notes that during the strike Mr. Thomas went around protesting that we had no intention of pulling down the Government, and imploring other unions from coming to our assistance, what time the said Government was organising every possible means, legal and illegal alike, to crush our union beyond repair.

The resolution goes on to state that:

> This Congress further notes that, following on the so-called satisfactory settlement of the strike, Mr. Thomas failed to press the great moral victory achieved by the rank and file; but instead, frittered away both time and

---

[50] *The Times,* October 1, 1919; Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, 387.
[51] Ibid, 398.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> opportunity, until ultimately he attempted to stampede a special Congress of this union into unqualified acceptance of an utterly unsatisfactory scheme of standardisation on the average. In view of the situation provided by these repeated failures of Mr. Thomas, this Congress demands that the Right Hon. Gentleman forthwith resigns his official connection with this union.[52]

Thomas was never removed from office[53] but it was the disastrous social conditions that faced all workers, which caused them to organize against these difficulties.

It was the demand for nationalization of the mines and other industries which workers seized upon. The demand for nationalization not only became an enormously popular one, but at the same time acted as a trap for the miners. The government had de facto nationalized the mines, or at least they were under the government's control. It was in early 1921 that the mines were returned to the mine owners creating incredible havoc within the mining community and leading to the 1921 strike. Encouraged by its efficiency, and the gains that the miners managed to extract from the government during the war, the union leaders, under the pressure of the mineworkers, demanded nationalization under workers' control.[54] Workers in the South Wales mines, when asked about the Sankey Commission (that is, the commission set up to deal with the demands of the miners) and nationalization and workers' control, contended that there were no disagreements about these questions among mineworkers.[55] Robert Smillie, at a Trade Union Congress in Glasgow, recounted harrowing figures about death and permanent injuries among workers. "Under private management 1,240 miners, nearly 4 a day are

---

[52] H.R.S. Phillpott, *The Right Hon. J.H. Thomas: Impressions of a Remarkable Career,* (London:Sampson Low, Marston and Co: Ltd.), 136.
[53] The leadership controlled the apparatus making it difficult for any resolutions to be put into effect.
[54] Glasgow University, ugd 145/ July 30, 1919. *The Control of Industry; nationalisation and kindred problems.*
[55] University of North London, HD 6661m6.19; SWML, Mel Thomas, May 17, 1973, Aud 283. In fact when asked how he and his fellow workers felt about the question and was asked whether there were two sides on that question Mel Thomas emphatically said NO. NO. Aud. 285 May 17, 1973. The *Monthly Circular,* between the years 1919-21 moved from endorsing the Sankey Report because it ostensibly favored nationalization to condemning the system outright.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

killed on the average annually, whilst 6 ½ million miners have been injured during the last 20 years." He suggests: "It was not too much to claim that the men and women employed in the mining industry should have as much voice in the industry as those who invested their money in it."[56] But Smillie refused to support the call for full worker control, and instead argued for joint government and worker control. In a rank and file convention in Westminster, held on March 10 and 11, 1920, the demands of the workers go much further than the demands of their leaders. The special mines committee organized by the convention passed the following resolutions: 1) to press forward the strike policy; 2) to consult with the unofficial Reform Committee of the miners, with a view to formulating and urging upon the workers a scheme for socialization and workers' control of the mining industry; 3) to enlarge the demands of the strike in the direction of the general socialization of the land and all industry.[57]

By 1918 a conference of miners met to discuss the issue. Winstone, the Welsh miners' representative presented a motion calling for the nationalization of the mines.

> That in the opinion of this Conference the time has arrived in the history of the coal-mining industry when it is clearly in the national interest to transfer the entire industry from private ownership and control to State ownership, with joint control and administration by the workmen and the State. In pursuance of this opinion the National Executive be instructed to immediately reconsider the Draft Bill for the Nationalisation of the Mines (as agreed upon at the Swansea Conference 1912...) [58]

This resolution pointed to the desire of miners to have control of their own industry, but a fair number of miners continued to believe that the State could be neutral and thus be a

---

[56] *Dreadnought,* September 20, 1919.
[57] Fawcett Library, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, reel 28. Leaflet from the Rank and File Convention, Westminster, March 10th and 11th, 1920. 28.
[58] Stewart, *Mines, Machines and Men,* 69.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

partner in the running of industry.[59] And yet their leaders merely settled for seats on the Sankey Commission.[60] Not only did this have minimal result in winning any demands for the miners, but sitting on the Commission encouraged the illusion that miners would have some degree of control over their working conditions. Sankey issued reports about the state of the mining industry, sometimes encouraging nationalization and sometimes encouraging an end to subsidies but he never supported the miners' call for nationalization which would have been the only means by which their grievances could have been resolved. Consequently, the issue of subsidization of the mines became the cornerstone of the miners' leaders' policy for social change. While only supporting the most minor demands, Sankey became the hope for both the union and the government. During March 1919, when the miners threatened to strike, Sankey issued calls for nationalization of the mines (which the Lloyd George government promptly ignored) and a 2s. wage increase and reduction of hours for labor underground from eight to seven per shift. Robert Smillie successfully implored his workers to accept this agreement. According to Sidney Webb capitalism and the mining industry appeared to be on trial but the official union leaders were ill-equipped to take advantage of this changing balance of forces.

> While in the robing room of the House of Lords the mock trial of capitalism proceeded, outside the decisive moment for action by the labour movement to secure its wartime gains passed unexploited. In the event those revolutionary miners, like Will Lawther, delegate from the Red village of Chopwell, who opposed the Sankey Commission from the outset as a delaying manoeuvre by the Government, showed better political judgment than either Smillie or Webb.[61]

Lloyd George recognized this quality in the union leadership and astutely remarked

---

[59] Of course this belief was ever shifting depending on the circumstances.
[60] Hinton, *Labour and Socialism,* 111.
[61] Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Smillie is an extreme man, but the fight he put up against the extremists induced them to accept the [Sankey] Commission and proves that he has some measure of statesmanship in his equipment. If the leaders are under lock and key, the movement will pass into the hands of hotheads and feather-brains of the Noah Ablett type.[62]

Fife rank and filers attempted to oppose this approach but never went as far as organizing an alternative leadership since their philosophy was in opposition to leadership in general. The Manifesto of the Fife Miners Reform Committee in 1919 stated, "the craft union official thinks and acts as a leader whose function it is to keep harmony between master and man-hence arbitration, conciliation, betrayal, and failure. The interests of capital-capitalist and worker-Labour are opposed. Harmony is impossible, fellow miners." And while it called for the abolition of "the present out-of-date constitution, so as to place the complete control in the hands of the rank and file,"[63] its program never challenged the existing state since the Committee believed that rank-and-filism would ultimately achieve the workers' desired ends.

Smillie shrank from direct action despite his reputation for radicalism. By 1921, he stepped down from the leadership because of growing opposition within the union to the attacks by the owners. But the politics of this newly emerging dissident leadership, which began to challenge the official leaders, did not cohere a movement that would ultimately challenge the state apparatus. That is, they did not fight for a workers' state. Their political approach harkened back to the days of the syndicalist movement that rocked Britain before the war. Since many of these militants who had previously belonged to the shop steward committees never recognized the power of the government (syndicalism discourages setting up any sort of state apparatus even after the revolution,

---

[62] Ibid. 119.
[63] Hull University, DAR/1/12, Manifesto of the Fife Miners Reform Committee, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

essentially arguing that bigger and bigger mass movements will lead to socialism), they essentially called for workers' control of industry without specifying how that was to be achieved. By October 1920 the strategy that union leaders implored the workers to accept had failed and a strike was no longer avoidable.

The miners' strike in October 1920 was prompted into action over the question of productivity. By March 1921 Lloyd George gave back control of the mines to the mine owners eliminating the subsidy, thus undermining the miners' wages. Protections such as Part III of the Industrial Courts Act expired, allowing for the depression of wages. Realizing that the union leaders would do little against the Emergency Powers Act, passed in 1920, the government attempted to employ it during the 1921 strike. Lloyd George called for productivity and the datum line (the amount of coal that had to be produced), and an end to the national pool, meaning a reversion back to district settlements. Productivity, in other words, would be the driving force before workers could achieve any wage increases. Integral to the miners' program was the National Pool; that is, the profits of all the mine owners were to be shared among all the employers so that the wages of workers in an individual district were not reduced. Mines that did poorly would be able to draw from a fund that all mine owners contributed to. This would provide for workers in all parts of Britain to share in the profits guaranteeing the economic viability of the community. But the owners wished to push district agreements in opposition to the National Pool. Moreover, it was revealed that the agreement the employers made with the government during the war afforded them millions of pounds in profits. The *Times* reported that:

> The agreement is a long and complicated document but its main effect is to leave the collieries under their previous management, and to secure to the owners the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> profits of the undertakings, provided that if the profits exceed the pre-war years, the amount of the excess, after excess profits duty has been deducted, shall be divided between the owners and the Government in the proportion of one-fourth to three-fourths. The Exchequer, therefore takes 80 percent of the excess profits, the Coal Controller 15 per cent, and the owners 5 percent,[64]

Miners were nowhere mentioned in this scheme, and thus it is unclear exactly what the *Times* reporter intended for them. Since the concept of the state continued to be a murky one it is not surprising that many workers believed that the state was class-neutral. Consequently, socialists more often attempted to encourage reform of the state rather than declaring the need to overthrow it. It was the miners that pushed the TUC to support joint action to force the government to take a positive stand on nationalization and thus "a section of the Miners' leaders fervently believed that a general strike would lead to the defeat of the Government and this would be the first step towards the overthrow of the capitalist system."[65] But eschewing industrial action, the Labour Party and the TUC saw their roles solely in the context of the electoral process. The views of many Labour MPs were grounded in the belief that if they won seats in Parliament the government would be persuaded to reform both itself and the worst evils of capitalism.[66] This message had a profound impact on the consciousness of workers and was one of the main sources of disagreement among the moderates and the left wing and socialist organizations about the question of support to Labour especially during the unity convention, which was organized to form the Communist Party of Great Britain.

---

[64] *The Times,* March 14, 1919.
[65] Lovell and Roberts, *A Short History of the TUC,* 62.
[66] In a letter addressed to Sir Oliver Sidney Webb explains the urgency of supporting the Labour Party for fear that workers will seek more radical solutions. Webb writes, in *Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,* 111, that "there is an ugly temper abroad (not in the Labour Party and, in fact, in revolt against the constitutional parliamentarians of the Labour Party). The best safeguard against 'Bolshevism' is a strong Labour Party in Parliament, voicing the discontent and bring to light the grievances of the masses."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But the idea of nationalization was raised among other workers as well. Both the railway workers and the Locomotive engineers favored a call for nationalization. "Mr. Bromley of the locomotive Engineers moved a resolution favoring workers' control of industry to end exploitation," and at a Trades Union Congress in Glasgow in 1919, this motion was passed unanimously.[67] One of the shop stewards also declared: "People talk as if the demand for control was something that had to be created among the workers by a slow process, but it's there already."[68] While this was not true the workers' political understanding had been heightened to the extent that they regarded the need for workers' control as something to strive for.

1919 only raised the specter of revolution, since there was no successful challenge to the Trade Union leadership although workers were clearly disgruntled. As an example of this, in a discussion about pay increases, reported in the *Parliamentary Sessional Papers* of 1920, between the dockworkers' leader Ernest Bevin and an arbitrator who tried to help negotiate an agreement, one can glimpse the difficulties that the trade union leaders were experiencing regarding the rank and file. Bevin stated: "we have to face the men, and instead of being the wild red revolutionaries that we are often considered to be we find ourselves trying to defend ourselves against our inability and our lack of success, and therefore it is necessary even that our own men should appreciate and understand our difficulty."[69] As a consequence of the failure of the Trade Union leadership to act decisively in 1919 a downward spiral continued to strengthen the hand of the employers.

---

[67] C. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics,* (G. Bell and Sons Ltd:1920), 15.
[68] Ibid, 31.
[69] *Sessional Papers*, 1920, Vol. XXIV, Transport Workers Court of Inquiry:Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> He [the employer negotiating with Bevin] gave me the impression that he would be prepared to make many concessions on his original claims…He described with approval the schemes which had been introduced in Rotterdam and Antwerp. According to his statement, the principle of these schemes is that as many men as possible are placed on a permanent or weekly basis, and that the remainder of the normal requirements of the Port are met by a body of preference casuals, to whom a maintenance wage is guaranteed. Any further requirements are supplied by a margin of purely casual labour, for whom no provision is made.[70]

Proffered by the employer negotiating with Ernest Bevin was a two-tier system of wages and conditions. Not only were casual workers poorly paid, but the acceptance of this plan opened the door to lowering the wages of all workers. Bevin himself, during these negotiations, pointed out that while the dockworkers' income had increased 144.44% his expenditure had increased 212%."[71] Pleading his case, he pointed to the large profits that the shipping company, the White Star, had earned over the years.

> I forget the figures at the moment, but I think over the period of about twenty years they have distributed in profits £7,000,000, and I in Southampton have men working where our union lost money on the contributions by reason of the excess of death rate. I repeat that. The men worked such long hours in Southampton on the different companies' ships that, taking the contribution for the year 1913, we actually paid more money in funeral benefit in that port than we received in contributions; and they distributed in twenty years£17,000,000. [72]

Quite aware of the wealth that the owners amassed, Bevin tried to argue the righteousness of the dockers' cause. Playing down the class struggle, the dockers' leader referred to the workers that he represented as part of the community rather than referring to them as employees, thus mitigating the fact that contract negotiations were at hand. Said Bevin, "think of the tremendous contribution that the community is handing over in millions to a comparatively few or a very small section of the community, itself

---

[70] PRO, 2/24/21, dpl 347, Special Scheme for Dockers.
[71] *Sessional Papers* 1920 Vol. XXIV, Transport Workers: Court of Inquiry, 26.
[72] Ibid. 36.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

controlling great interests running around the ramifications of the world."[73] Filled with such examples, these negotiations indicate quite clearly that the leadership understood and was frustrated by the size of the profits that the employers made, especially in relation to the meager wages of the workers. And while Bevin genuinely hoped to obtain an increase for his men he did little other than arbitration to receive an award. He feared that if his workers did not receive an increase this would be unacceptable to them, since they too were aware of the kinds of profits that their employers had received over the years. The General Secretary's 29th Annual Report refers to the issue of profiteering among the ship owners.

> Our shipping companies have seized the meanest advantages of the war, the wealthiest of the companies being the worst sinners. Ships have been obtained from the government and have been disposed of to foreigners at high rates; in the first period of the war the shipowners sold and disposed of shipping when the troops and the country were actually threatened with starving.[74]

The traditional leaders had now to contend with workers who had gone through a profound change because of their experiences in WWI which were reflected in the strike waves, in the breaking down of old craft traditions and in soldiers coming back from the front. And even the leaders who had been considered to be "red" previous to the war demonstrated that they had not exactly deserved that reputation. Leaders such as Robert Smillie, still enjoyed considerable support from the membership but demonstrated a limited approach toward the question of unity.

The millions of pounds spent on undermining the Bolshevik revolution, in addition to the already steep war debt (£10,000,000,000), sent the British economy

---

[73] Ibid. 34.
[74] General Secretary's Annual Report. 29th Annual Report, December 31, 1918, 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

downward causing even more unemployment.[75] Workers continued to demand action from their leadership by passing strike resolutions; and yet many of their leaders looked for alternative solutions to strike activity. A legislative approach was generally proposed as the means by which the latter argued for change. In fact without the intervention of the union leadership the government would have felt much less secure about maintaining control over the working class. Robert Smillie relates a discussion that he had with Lloyd George about the 1919 strike wave, years after the event. In a meeting with the TUC leadership, Lloyd George states:

> Gentlemen, you have fashioned, in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you, a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has occurred already in a number of camps. We have just emerged from a Great War and the people are eager for the reward of their sacrifices, and we are in no position to satisfy them. In these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us.
> But if you do so,' went on Mr. Lloyd George, 'have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the Government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the State, which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State, or withdraw and accept the authority of the State.
> Gentlemen,' asked the Prime Minister quietly, 'have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?'
> From that moment on," said Robert Smillie, "we were beaten and we knew we were.[76]

Trade union leaders such as J.R. Thomas who was arguably a straight business-unionism leader and therefore considered to be on the right politically, or Robert Smillie of the miners' union, who was considered to be on the left, demonstrated to one degree or another their belief that the system could be reformed and the rights of workers guaranteed. But trade unionism is by its nature sectional and, especially in the case of

---

[75] Caledonian University, Gallacher Collection. Between November 11, 1918 and October 3, 1919 the British government spent £94,830,000 on naval and military operations in Russia.
[76] Leon Trotsky, *On Britain,* (New York:Monad Press:1973), 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Britain, has historically had a narrow base. Therefore, workers began to push for greater amalgams if their struggle was to be victorious. It would have been necessary to overcome the sectional disputes that divided them and caused their strikes to fail. Even before the war, amalgamation was considered to be the only successful means by which workers would be able to win their demands. But many of the union officials were unwilling to use this tool and backed away from confrontation.

Regarding the Russian Revolution there is little doubt that it played a enormous roll on the political thinking of the workers who were not only involved in coal mining and railways but, in addition, impacted those workers who were not necessarily involved in war production. In the first months of 1919, when the confrontation between the government and the workers of Britain was so palpable that the troops were sent into Glasgow, the leadership of these unions retreated but workers maintained that nationalization of industry had to be accomplished so that all workers would be guaranteed a living wage.

This belief led to the formation of a revolutionary party that would model itself after the Bolsheviks in Russia. There was an expression of optimism among socialists that a revolution could be successful and that Russia had pointed the way forward. A turn toward the building of a leadership with the express purpose of making a revolution was an important departure for many revolutionaries who focused on individual issues rather than on a systematic change in the society as a whole. The Bolsheviks opposed the war not just the injustices that it brought. They opposed capitalism and did not quibble over the question of how far to allow jobs to be diluted. The question of success came with a body of revolutionaries, who were committed to overthrowing capitalists and not

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sharing the functions of the state with the sitting government, which theyargued, represented the capitalists. The Clyde workers could now not just lead strikes but they could organize for a revolutionary change that would overthrow the capitalist system.

By 1920 against a background of extreme social crisis talks around its formation began. Given the significant disagreement the talks did not go smoothly. The conference to form the CP was called involving organizations that included the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, Sylvia Pankhurst's Socialist Workers' Federation Party and assorted other small organizations including the South Wales miners. The workers who participated in the conference tended to be consistently in opposition to their own union leaders and were militantly pro-Communist, holding many meetings in their own pits. Given the significant disagreement the talks did not go smoothly. While everyone wished for the success of the Revolution in both Russia and Britain, no one was sure exactly how to achieve it. Workers who formed the leadership of the new party were serious revolutionaries, but theoretically unsophisticated. Therefore, the question of how to lead a successful revolution became a bone of contention.

Inspired by the Russian Revolution, the membership of the organizations at the Unity Conference worked hard but in the end many would not agree to join. The major stumbling block was whether the Labour Party warranted any support from workers. Labour, many argued, tried to corral the challenges that workers waged against their employers rendering the Party insupportable. This was the crux of the debate within the Unity Conference. A number of genuine revolutionaries thought the price too high and therefore would not agree to form a united Communist Party. Revolutionaries such as Sylvia Pankhurst and members of the SLP thought the LP too corrupt and reformist to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

join, while Lenin and the leaders of The Third International insisted that British revolutionists work inside the LP. Given these difficult beginnings the CP's organizational and theoretical strength was week with important implications for their intervention in future working class struggle. Even William Gallacher, leader of the CWC, up until his trip to Russia remained committed to spontaneity rather than building a Leninist organization. The remaining portion of the BSP membership after the faction fight of 1916 formed the nub of the new organization. By August 1920 the Communist Party was formed. At its formation the CP was small (probably numbering around 5,000), with for the most part a paper membership.[77] Not surprisingly, given its weak beginnings, the organization was small and retained its political diversity and confusion.

The history of the CP is still a debated subject and of great importance for understanding the working class movement during this most contentious period. Although always small, in certain periods, especially during the General Strike of 1926, its role was out of proportion to its numbers. Historians who have examined the question wonder whether a revolution of the Russian kind could have succeeded in Britain. Walter Kendall is one who has entered the debate. He maintains that revolution had been possible but not of the Russian variety. Kendall is so disappointed with the British left that he argues any success that it might have achieved was completely undermined by the slavish following of the Russian party.

> The CPGB … became a stranger in its own country, an artificial creation which owed its existence, its form and its character, to the Communist International

[77] Many more people were attracted to the ideas of the CP than who were actually willing to join. The organization had just been formed and its program was not well worked out. In addition, the membership displayed much confusion and it was sometime before the CP was able to put forward a coherent revolutionary policy that made sense to the working class. This did not diminish the feelings that many thousands of workers had about the inequities of British society and the need for social change.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> which had given it birth and had provided the sustenance which alone made its continued existence possible.
>
> The sectarian character of the Communists and their lack of Bolshevik consciousness, were in themselves but an 'objective' expression of the inappropriateness of Bolshevism to a British environment. An endeavor to overcome these 'weaknesses' by a 'forced march' dependent on Comintern aid and direction, could not therefore make it easier for the Communists to lead the working class and conquer the state, but only estrange the party from the working class and make it impossible to achieve any such objective. The decision to found the Communist Party was thus based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the level of revolutionary consciousness of the British working class, an error from which the party itself never recovered.[78]

Kendall believed in the revolutionary potential of British workers arguing that they were quite militant and would have considered revolutionary changes had British revolutionaries found their own way. In fact, he supports the view that the Clydeside workers deserved the label of "red." But rather than remaining true to their "ultra democratic, opposed to leadership as an article of faith…" road, they slavishly adopted Bolshevik principles, that is "ultra centralization, professionalization of the revolutionary movement and the substitution of the idea of the liberation of the working class by its own efforts by that of liberation by the exertions of a self appointed Leninist elite."[79] For Kendall, that is where the tragedy can be found.

Henry Pelling makes a different argument. English workers, contends Pelling, were never attracted to the CP and its membership was largely foreign. (The Scots and the Welsh were considered foreign.) Pelling asks:

> What manner of men and women were these foundation members of the British Communist Party? Judged as a social group, their most striking characteristic was their sectionalism. As might indeed be expected …the membership consisted, to a remarkable degree, of persons of non-English origin. The BSP, which had been the strongest component of the party in England, had always contained a high proportion of immigrants and exiles from the Continent, who regarded it as

---

[78] Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain in 1900-21,* 296-298.
[79] Ibid, 300.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> recognisably similar to the Marxist parties to which they had previously belonged.[80]

In support of this view, he points to the fact that the Welsh miners, as opposed to the English, took a strong stand in support of the Third International. But he also asserts that the English lacked sympathy for the revolution. Another component of his argument is similar to Kendall's; that is, that the British workers were so overwhelmed by the Russian Party both in number and prestige that British Communists were unable to maintain any independence at all.

Before examining the nature of the leadership that emerged, it is important to note that these differing opinions are part of a small but ever-growing debate. Attitudes and feelings of people in historical circumstances are difficult to codify, but there are many historians who suggest that although revolution did not take place in Britain this has not changed the way workers felt about the system under which they lived. According to John Foster, it is undeniable that British workers identified strongly with Russian workers. He therefore disagrees with Kendall and Pelling's supposition that the politics of the CPGB was an imposition from the outside. Resolutions opposing intervention and support for the Bolsheviks were passed at meetings organized by workers, which were then presented to the Councils of Action in order to protect the new Soviet State. By August 1920 the TUC leadership demanded withdrawal of troops and threatened a general strike if Britain did not cease its intervention in Russia because workers overwhelmingly demanded that they do so.[81] Pelling is right when he asserts that Welsh and Scottish workers were more revolutionary on the whole than were their English

---

[80] Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile,* (London:Adam and Charles Black Ltd:1958), 17.
[81] Read Stephen Graubard on these subjects. 105.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

counterparts but it is unfair to say that these groups were foreign or that the English workers did not display great sympathy for the Russian Revolution. In fact, when Communists came to speak to workers in the East End of London thousands came out to hear them.

And while a resolution against intervention in Russia is not necessarily an argument that British workers were themselves revolutionary, it is clear that workers not only opposed intervention because it was a bad thing, but they opposed intervention "in order to bring pressure to bear on the government, who in making war on Russia is trying to crush that country in the interests of 'international capitalists'."[82] Pressured by the ranks, the Chairman of the executive Committee of the LP declared:

> If the powers that be endeavour 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 fashion without 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.[83]

And while the objective conditions of Russia and Britain following the conclusion of the war were different, the increasingly desperate conditions facing British workers were not abating. Britain did not suffer the kind of conditions that were so apparent in Russia, but during the war much of society had changed, and the success of the Soviet state put into focus more sharply the question of which class should rule society. Lloyd George was aware of these new and disturbing circumstances, and in his memorandum to the Versailles Conference in 1919 he wrote:

> Europe is filled with revolutionary ideas. A feeling not of depression, but of passion and revolt reigns in the breasts of the working class against the conditions

[82] National Museum of Labour, Manchester, CA/Con/1-87, Ramsgate Labour Party. This is but one of the sentiments expressed by workers who often referred to militant workers as Bolshies.
[83] C.J. MacFarlane, "Hands Off Russia," *Past and Present*, 38 (1967).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> of life that prevailed before the war. The whole of the existing system, political social and economic, is regarded with distrust by the whole population of Europe. In some countries, like Germany and Russia, this unrest is leading to open revolt and in others, like France, England and Italy it is expressed in strikes and in a certain aversion to work. All signs go to show that the striving is as much for social and political changes as for increases in wages[84]
>
> For the first time in modern history, JA Hobson remarked early in 1919, 'Property is seriously afraid'. Indeed the whole of Europe, the Premier wrote…was 'filled with the spirit of revolution…' the whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other.[85]

Newspapers reported May Day demonstrations where one million people were present. Lloyd George sensed this growing anger and understood that even after the fiasco of 1919 workers still had not given up their longing for something better. At a mass demonstration organized by the British Socialist Party, "R.C. Wallhead, the last speaker of a representative-platform of men and women, happily clinched the issue. Amidst a storm of approval and in tones vibrating with passion and emotion he touched the responsive chord in the vast mass of his audience by his phrase, 'the future of Russia is in the charge of the workers of England."[86]

Not being entirely able to assess whether these feelings represented the majority of the workers, it is fair to say that given the massive demonstrations that filled the streets, there was great sentiment in support of the revolution. Therefore, Kendall's argument ignores the obvious meaning of these demonstrations in support of a Bolshevik-style revolution, in fact, there appeared to be much sympathy for it among the masses. And although this revolution did not occur, it would not be correct to infer that workers did not wish it to happen. There is much room for historical debate around its failure

---

[84] Murphy, *Preparing For Power,* 172.
[85] Steven White, "Ideological Hegemony and Political Control: The Sociology of Anti-Bolshevism in Britain 1918-20, *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* June, 1975, No 5.
[86] *The Call,* "Mass Demonstration at the Albert Hall," February 13, 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

since meetings of thousands of workers all over Britain passed resolutions demanding the end of British intervention in Russia, on a daily basis.

The Bolshevik Revolution resonated with British workers giving them a place to focus their discontent and offered a hope that it would provide some sort of concrete solution to their serious problems. Headlines such as *'Bolshevism Rampant'* appeared in the local Govan paper, itself Unionist, which described the meetings, which preceded the election when John McLean ran for office. "It described how it was difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the Unionists and Liberal candidates to secure a hearing-even in previously Orange neighbourhoods."[87] And although it is often the case that very conservative people use the bogeyman of Bolshevism as a battering ram to whip up hysteria and thus may indicate little more than a polemical attack, given the clear discontent on the part of the working class the description *Bolshevism Rampant* probably reflected the government's fear that feelings of frustration were beginning to resurface among workers. It would, thus, be unlikely that this paper would complain about the lack of a "fair hearing" for the opposition without there being some truth to the allegation. Govan had given tremendous support to McLean when he ran for office after being released from prison. The "Hands Off Russia" Committees had begun in 1918 and mushroomed to over 350 Councils of Action by August and September of 1920, prompting the leadership to take these questions seriously. And from the *Evening News* came this report.

> There is no doubt that the position in this country as regards continued support of Admiral Kolchak is by no means satisfactory. Only yesterday Colonel Pirie Gordon, a member of the Mission we are sending to the Baltic Provinces, told me that the engineers, members of the Engineers union who were working on the cars

[87] John Foster, "Scotland and the Russian Revolution," *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 23, 1988, 10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> which are accompanying the Mission, had suspended work on the grounds that the cars were intended for "Russia," and it was only on his giving assurances that his Mission was a commercial and economic one that they agreed to continue work.[88]

This observation came from Russia about British workers.

> At yesterday's meeting of the Petrograd Soviet, the violinist Soermus, who has just returned from captivity in England, stated that the English workmen implore the Russian Communists to hold out for a little while longer, promising speedy assistance. Lloyd George, by his barbarous policy is creating a revolutionary spirit among the workmen. The best workmen-demobilized soldiers, are unemployed the discontent is increasing, especially among the miners and railway employees.[89]

Although a small sample, these letters and resolutions demonstrate how many working people felt about their jobs, their society, and about Russia and social change. Since Wales and Scotland were much more industrial than England, they created a workforce that often challenged management to a greater degree. But workers in England when faced with unemployment and deteriorating job conditions also answered the call of their fellow workers to the north in the 1919 struggle. Workers sought answers to all of these pressing social issues coming up against their own leadership, often challenging them as well. Many of the leaders feared losing control of their membership; above all they feared revolution throughout Europe.[90] Hoping to get British workers back to work, the trade union leaders made trade with Russia a central plank in their program. But the attitude of workers was genuinely different, in that they wished for the success of the Russian workers' state. Lack of revolution did not necessarily mean that there was a lack of a crisis. "Four-fifths of this country is industrial and commercial; hardly one-fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in mind when I think of the

---

[88] PRO, FO 317 4024, A Response to an extract from the "Evening News," June 20th 1919.
[89] PRO, FO 371 4014, Wireless News Russia and England. March 29, 1920.
[90] A *Times,* correspondent feared that "if the extremists here in France have their way, they will let loose in Western Europe the world upheaval preached by Moscow." August 18, 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dangers of the future here" remarked Lloyd George understanding the potential power of the working class if it wished to employ it.[91] The degree to which Britain was industrialized heightened the contradiction between capital and labor. Unlike in many of the Central and Eastern European countries, Britain had no peasantry to mitigate the relationship between these two classes. Industrial workers numbered in the millions, and seizing the machinery and working cooperatively was not far from their comprehension, especially after the Russian revolution. Lloyd George was, not surprisingly, concerned about the social atmosphere that was generated. And while the discussion about the revolutionary nature or the lack thereof continued, British workers were developing a healthy suspicion of their own union leaders. Kendall suggests that, combined with the loss of confidence in the government and in their leadership, both the military and the police were disintegrating.[92] That is, the forces of order could not be relied upon if a revolutionary crisis did occur.

Contrary to what Kendall believed were the CP's inherent flaws, that is its subservience to Moscow and its too professional approach to politics sidestepping what he believed were timeworn traditional methods of British workers, and thus its failure to make an important impact, some historians claim the opposite. According to Julie Macwhirter:

> The infant CPGB was itself very ineffectively organised in 1920; but more than that, it was suffused, still, with the ideas of syndicalism and the belief in the propensities of the British working class for 'spontaneous' revolutionary action. It was this belief that coloured the statements of someone like William Gallacher

[91] Gallacher, *Lenin on Britain*, 184.
[92] Jane Morgan, *Conflict and Order: the Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1987), 69. Morgan contends that the coordination of the police force under closer government scrutiny resulted in a series of Police Acts as the consequence of the enormous working class outbreaks since 1911.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> [CP leader], in face of what was at times an almost pathetic cry for leadership from some of the local councils.[93]

Macwhirter describes a situation where the CP encouraged the local Councils of Action to go it alone if the National Council was unwilling to move. This posture was contrary to the notion that leadership should lead. Leaders such as William Gallacher had demonstrated his immaturity in dealing with the Clyde struggle just a few months before the organization's formation and Tom Mann had not criticized the war until 1917 for fear of alienating the trade union leaders.[94] Many of these people (although sincere in their belief that the revolution would come) had not much time to learn the lessons of either the struggles of their counterparts in Europe, nor had they had time to learn the lessons of their own mistakes before the next crisis was to arise. The CP was incapable of dealing effectively with the next crisis: that is the crisis that arose in 1921. Its approach was to warn the workers to watch the leaders, never being certain of what these leaders would do.

Raymond Challinor attempts to speculate as to why the CP had tremendous support, when it had a membership of only a few thousands. This support was noticed and codified "in a report to the Cabinet, dated 13 January 1921, the Special Branch estimated the number of active communists at 20,000, but thought that five times that number favoured communism. How was it, then, that so small a proportion of the

---

[93] Julie Macwhirter, "Internationalism and the British Labour Movement, 1917-27," 37, *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, No. 6, December, 1972.

[94] As an example of Mann's contradictory leadership he opposed the war but since he feared alienating people such as Ben Tillett of the Dockers' Union it wasn't until the tide had turned in 1917 that he could finally opposed the war. White states in *Tom Mann,* 92 that he "had previously taken considerable care not to antagonize Havelock Wilson and other pro-war union leaders, and had even declared at the 1916 annual conference of the National Transport Workers' Federation that 'this country must win the war', though he hastened to add that 'he was in favour of a settlement by negotiation as early as possible'."; *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 155.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

population joined the Communist Party?"[95]But since Challinor argues similarly to Kendall that the CP was seen not as a genuine indigenous group but an agent of the Russian government he cannot explain their wide support. In describing the membership he correctly maintains that many of these militants were confused because they both saw themselves as members of the Bolshevik Party and at the same time viewed themselves as militant rank-and-filers. In addition, they largely maintained their long-standing approach toward political and trade union questions, that is in crucial situations they did not call for the replacement of the trade union leaders with revolutionaries even while attempting to build a party based on the Bolshevik model.

On the question of joining the LP, Challinor sides with those militants who refused to go along with Lenin's arguments about why revolutionaries should have joined. He asserts that Lenin was unfamiliar with the British scene, (being too caught up with Russian affairs) he must have been wrong in the advice he gave to the members of the CP about other issues as well. For Challinor the LP was opportunistic, that is, it argued for what appeared to be socialist aims, while unwilling to challenge the employers. Therefore, Lenin's position

> becomes more inexplicable when the record of communists operating within the Labour Party is examined. Their lack of success would tend to suggest that the Labour Party was not a particularly fruitful field for recruitment of new CP members. Nor were there any perceptible signs that, under communist pressure, the labour Party was moving in the direction of being a fighting socialist organization.[96]

Whether or not Challinor's assessment is correct and Lenin was wrong the LP's membership did grow enormously, thus providing an rationale for Lenin's point of view. But the newly formed CP rerouted tactic into strategy; that is, its immediate position

---

[95] Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism*, 253.
[96] Ibid. 218.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which was to join the Labour Party in order to meet left-moving workers, eventually turned into a long-term strategy with joining the LP as its uppermost political necessity. By 1920, the LP had grown to 4,360,000, with many workers voting Labour because they believed it was a socialist party. But fearing a potential threat, the LP would not allow militant left wing organizations to join as a group, and thus opposed the Communists' application for membership, although there were individual pockets of resistance to this policy.[97] For some time Communists could join as individuals, but even this policy did not last. MacDonald and Snowden were so distressed about the Third International gaining any sympathy that they helped to organize the Second and a Half International, which sought to dissuade workers from joining the Third.

Since so many workers were sympathetic to the Bolsheviks and many workers, especially the Shop Stewards' Movement in Scotland and Sheffield, and the miners' union in Wales[98] applied for membership to the Third international, it is worth examining why many fewer people joined the CP when it was actually formed. But since the interviews with workers who joined the CP were generally framed in a way that would elicit an explanation of why they did join; it is difficult to tell why others did not. Therefore, historians such as Pelling provide little understanding of why the CP was not a mass organization. Since massive demonstrations were organized to support the Russian Revolution it is possible to assume that workers wished for a similar outcome in Britain. Given the CP's weak theoretical basis the leadership was not absolutely certain of how to lead and when situations arose such as the 1921 debacle, workers, not having the guidance of a clear political alternative which the CP was suppose to provide, were

---

[97] Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 49.

[98] In addition organizations such as Poale Zion, a British Zionist group, and a variety of anarchists and syndicalists groups affiliated to the Communist International as well.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stunned by the massive defeat foisted upon them by the union leadership. Utterly unprepared, the organization could not discern how to deal with that situation. It was some time before its membership was cohered enough so that they could intervene in their fellow workers' struggles. Even James Klugman, the CP's official historian, does not explain nor does he ever grapple with the question of why, with so much support did British workers not join the organization en masse or what impact this might have had on a potentially revolutionary situation. Except for the workers of the SWMF the membership among the working class was small.[99] The CP did manage to attract the left wing of the ILP, and the leadership of the Shop Stewards' movement, especially in Scotland, but it could not organizationally capture the mass of the workers. One answer may lie in the fact that British anarchist tradition was important in its history. Workers most often did not join leftist organizations although they behaved quite militantly and even believed in socialist ideas. The pre-WWI strikes were syndicalist in nature.

Nevertheless, much of the original leadership was made up of workers who had been politically active in a variety of organizations prior to its formation. These workers were disgusted with the social ills that plagued Britain. As a way of attempting to grapple with the problems of the newly born CP Klugman argues that

> the new Party had inherited its organisational form from the earlier socialist groups. Its branches were still the old types of propagandist group, loosely bound by a co-ordinating centre; itself based on representatives of different trends and different geographical areas. It was not yet in any sense the centralised or disciplined Party necessary for revolutionary struggle. It was a Party with a new role and as yet an old type of organisation.[100]

---

[99] There were about 4,000 people who initially joined the CP.

[100] Klugman, *The History of the Communist Party,* 71; Durham, in "Origins and Early Years," writes: "At the Third Congress of the CI, it was severely criticized by the leading Bolshevik, Karl Radek, for its bad organization in the mining districts and for the failure of its paper to report Party activities in the affected localities." 57, 72. Moreover, disparaging and racist remarks were made about colonial peoples by leaders such as Quelch at the Second Congress of the CI.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Although he assures his readers that the task before the CP was momentous because to one extent or another workers remained wedded to capitalist ideas, Klugman also maintains: "A Party must be judged not only by its formal resolutions and statements, but by what it said and did in the struggles of the day..."[101] At least for the first couple of years the CPGB was at best confused about how to proceed if in fact it did intervene in the massive struggles that were unfolding right after its formation. The leadership criticized itself in 1922 for not attempting to take charge of the 1921 debacle. But this was a missed opportunity, a chance for revolutionaries to make an impact in the workers' struggles and draw important political conclusions. Therefore, an evaluation of the evidence should help us understand whether, in fact, historians such as Kendall were correct in their contention that it was the foreign nature of the CP that kept the organization isolated, or if it was the program of the membership that prevented it from becoming a real mass party. Since the social history of this period is so complex, it is impossible to narrow an answer down to one defining characteristic. With millions of people making up the social material that goes into an historical analysis, the permutations are endless, but a few of the relevant facts can be discerned through listening to the voices of the workers who were the "human material" that was called upon to organize strikes, and ultimately a revolution. Therefore, it is not just as an intellectual exercise that we attempt to understand the CP, but it is a way of pulling apart the nature of the period.

The betrayal of the miners in 1921 by the other sections of the Triple Alliance forced the CP to reevaluate its own political views, since it was unable to effectively

[101] Ibid, Preface; Durhman, "Origins and Early Years", 88, claims that the report of the CI "was harsh and wide-ranging, and that 'the Party has made no real progress either numerically or in terms of influence'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intervene in the struggle.[102] At its Fourth Party Congress in 1922, it admitted to being unprofessional and haphazard; that is, its behavior in no way could be considered professional or disciplined. Kendall's concern that the CP metamorphosing, at least at the beginning, into a disciplined elite Party was unfounded, at least by the membership's standards. By 1922, with the defeat of the miners and a devastating blow to other sections of the work force, unemployment abounded, leaving its members to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the struggle of the unemployed. Here they had much support from unemployed workers, but their program was generally centered on feeding and housing the latter. The working class was now in retreat. But even with the 1921 defeat, its influence continued to grow since so much of the unemployed struggle fell to their leadership. The unemployed councils that made their way to London from all parts of Britain organized marches of many thousands. Their lack of theoretical clarity became problematic. They were unable to question the leadership of the Third International especially once it became bureaucratic and by 1924 it refused to examine the factional fight that was beginning to erupt in the Soviet Union. It was thus their overwhelming respect coupled with their lack of political development that fostered their own degeneration not as Kendall argues that an imposition of foreign views served to undermine their revolutionary approach to the British situation. The prominence of Russia understandably impacted the British section as it did others of the Third International, but many of the members lost sight of their need to discuss policy in a critical fashion. This lack of theoretical development had disastrous conclusions for the workers that they hoped to persuade. While Kendall maintains that any organization that

[102] Ibid, 108. The CPBG was criticized by the CI for appearing "on the scene under the cloak of the 'Workers' Committees' during the miners' strike, rather than as an independent organization."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was not indigenously British would necessarily fail, Marxists argued that the capitalist system is worldwide and thus the relationship between employer and worker existed everywhere that capitalism existed. It therefore can be argued that the members of the British CP were ill-equipped to understand the politics rather than the politics not reflecting British social conditions. Is it possible to definitively argue that this type of organization was foreign to British workers when sympathy for the CP steadily grew? In a biography of Mrs. Bessie Braddock, she relates a story about her mother, a Communist, who after visiting Russia in 1921 and returning to Liverpool, remarked: "Communists were only a little less plentiful than in the place she had visited. Meetings were packed with Communists who voted that the club should be turned over to the party."[103] It is impossible to argue with certainty to what extent other people felt this identification, but it is possible, by looking at resolutions passed at meetings of workers and at songs sung and discussions held to glean which issues were important to ordinary working people and how they thought about the world around them. It is also possible to evaluate the CP based on its political documents and how it organized politically. The fact that

> the CPGB was a negligible force electorally and did nothing to hurt the mass party where it really counted. Similarly, it was possible to purge the constituency Labour Parties of Communists because at no time in the inter-war period was there a co-ordinated movement of radical opinion within the Labour ranks, despite the CPGB's efforts to create one, that was big enough to defy and challenge the leadership.

Therefore, for John Callaghan Leninism was a non-starter. Callaghan also maintains that

> The periodic upsurges in militancy since the late 1880s, though they helped to promote socialist politics in the working class, did not represent the degree of estrangement from the political system and reformism which was required for the creation of a strong revolutionary current in Britain.[104]

---

[103] Millie Toole, *Mrs. Bessie Braddock, M.P.*, (London:Robert Hale Limited:1957), 67 By 1921, 50,000 copies of the *Communist* had been sold.
[104] John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain since 1884,* (London:Basil Blackwell:1990), 102.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

World War I changed all that.

> During the War, trade interests opposed themselves to public interests and public safety. Even while British soldiers were dying for their country, British commercialism was sending iron ore to 'our friends Messrs. Krupps,' or making huge profits out of exporting commodities, which we ourselves had good need to put into stock against the terrible submarine danger. I have special knowledge of these matters, because I diligently served on war committees, which were concerned, with them.[105]

The British Empire was on the decline, her colonies rebelling. Ireland, Egypt and India were waging national liberation struggles and straining the military. Britain's war debt, which was massive (£400,000,000 yearly on interest on the debt), had grown exponentially because of the cost of the war against Russia. By 1920 over a million and a half people were unemployed and seven million more were on short time. Housing continued to be dilapidated causing serious health problems. British workers were being asked to pay taxes for a war they did not create or profit from. And after the war was over nationalization was a constant demand. Within this context although the CP remained small it had tremendous influence, disproportionate to its size, but because of its inherent theoretical shortsightedness the problems demonstrated in the earlier period were apparent even later.[106] It is therefore not surprising that in the subsequent struggles the Communist Party was unable to intervene in a way that would help the working class break from the union leadership and begin to form a new organization that would be able to deal with the struggles that it had continued to engage. For example, the next major

---

[105] Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles,* 92.

[106] From its inception, the CP had difficulty knowing how to position itself viz.a viz. the trade union leaders. Generally speaking the CP's criticisms were often amorphous and unclear to many workers and therefore could not provide them with a clear handle on how to relate to these leaders. This proved disastrous during the 1926 general strike.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

confrontation between the miners and their employers developed around the question of the datum line.

The Communist Party, just barely completing its unity conference, did not have the wherewithal to engage in this struggle. The policy adopted by the government was one that would take on the most organized and militant section of the working class, defeat them and teach a lesson to every other worker who sought to challenge the right of the employers to make their profits. The *Communist*, the paper of the Communist Party, claimed that all the resources of the capitalist class and the government were organized to beat back and derail the struggle of the miners. In response to the Emergency Powers Act that was passed in 1920 to prevent the miners from striking the Communist wrote:

> All the watchdogs of vested interests, from Cabinet Minister, Capitalist politicians and journalists to the meanest podsnap in Fleet Street have suddenly been let loose in a vile press vendetta against the miners. Lurid pictures are drawn of disaster, ruin and bloody revolution in thoroughgoing melodramatic style, if the Government should climb down on this occasion.[107]

But workers were generally unwilling to abandon the fight for higher wages and better conditions. October 1920 saw the miners' strike. The miners' demand was for a rate of £6 a week. They sought an increase over and above the 1914 levels. Management insisted that in order to get increases, miners had to be more productive. This was known as the datum line. Defying the Emergency Powers Act the miners struck on October 30, 1920 and the government declared a state of emergency allowing it to take over essential functions of the society. Since the TUC leadership took only the mildest of stances against the government's blatant strikebreaking tactic the Emergency Powers Act was not

[107] *The Communist,* August 26, 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rescinded.[108] The LP's resolution against the Act consisted of many contingencies with little or no meat on its bones.

> This Congress, representing the organized Labour movement of this country condemns the action of the Government in forcing through Parliament the Emergency Powers Bill, which, in our opinion, strikes at the existence of the Trade Union movement. We hereby enter our emphatic protest against the Government's action, and instruct the Parliamentary Committee, in conjunction with the Labour Party Executive and the Parliamentary Labour Party, immediately to consider the whole matter, in order that a Special Conference may be called, if necessary, to deal further with the question.[109]

As Chancellor of the Exchequer Bonar Law remarked in October 1920 that he had been pleased that, although this act clearly sent a signal to the unions not to get out of line, he was "glad to think that the tone of the discussion, especially in the last two speeches which I have heard, does not give any indication of any fierce flame of revolutionary sentiment which is likely to bring the Constitution down about our heads!"[110] And while a Labour Party member here and there would complain about the sweeping powers that the government would gain from enacting these powers, or about the vast fortunes that employers made while workers were unemployed, it did little to stand in the way of its enactment. LP MP Mr. Arthur Jones charged that government supporters, not the government itself "[wanted] to destroy the trade union movement in this country, and organised labour politically and industrially."[111] While charging the Conservatives with a

---

[108] According to Morgan, *Conflict and Order,* 190, "the regulations introduced under this act 'for the preservation of the peace' and 'for any other purposes essential to the public safety and the life of the community' provided a blanket cover for military operations aimed at maintaining essential services. They also meant markedly increased police powers. The police were now allowed, with the approval of the Home Secretary, to prohibit marches and meetings; they were granted wider powers of arrest without a warrant, and leave to enter and to search premises."

[109] TUC Parliamentary Minutes, May 3, 1921, 170.

[110] *Hansard,* H.C., October 26, 1920, 1705.

[111] Ibid, 184. Swan of the L.P., complained of the vast fortunes that 200 millionaires made and who were allowed to increase their fortunes all the more during the War "to the amount of another £ 200,000,000." He also challenged the government for holding up 'the essentials of life' upon which this Act was passed because they held up the price of sugar when it could have been sold more cheaply."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spirit of venom and bitterness he did little to defeat the Bill. In fact, once the strike was called, sailors and soldiers were drafted into South Wales to man the pumps in the mines. Moreover, fearing the unrest of workers, the government gave the "Citizen Guards" power to protect property and to maintain law and order at all costs. This type of policy foreshadowed the Black and Tans that ravaged Ireland a few years later. Unaware of the implications the LP continued to behave as if the government was a neutral force that is without direct ties to the employers and thus not part of the problem. And yet the British Federation of Industries, highly represented in Parliament, saw to it that its policies were passed into law. Since the LP was unwilling to mount a fight against the Act the best it could do was to modify it with the hope that by eliminating the most offending provisions workers would not be prevented from striking. And while the government never officially opposed striking, it argued that it was calling upon the armed forces to protect the essentials of life. Bonar Law though understood the implications of both the strike and the possible reaction to the Emergency Powers Act, far more than did the union leadership. A growing sense of disquiet developed among the membership with their leaders in response to acts such as these. Unable to see the profound problems waiting for the miners with the passage of this Act, the union leadership passed resolutions that were toothless. Nowhere in the resolution did the officials recognize the threat of the "down tools" policy that had won the small victories workers had achieved up until then. Fear of waging a fight left the miners without support from the other sections of the Triple Alliance. The Act was invoked once the threat of a strike was proposed. Army leave was cancelled and reservists called up.

Pooling of profits was the central demand of the miners. This entailed the richer

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mine owners contribute more into a united fund to compensate for the poorer mines so that *all* the miners receive the same increase. The *Communist* explains:

> By "pooling" the profits the poorest mines are compensated by the richer mines, and thus coal which might be untouched otherwise, if left to private enterprise is given a social value. There is also a considerable export trade in coal. This coal yields a profit to the Government department of no less than £66,000,000 a year. It is this £66,000,000 that forms the immediate bone of contention. The miners contend that a reduction in the price of household coal by 14s. 2d. per ton as well as an advance in wages of 2s per shift to the miners with corresponding increases to boys, can be effected out of this surplus accruing from the export trade. Having regard to the continuous rise in the cost of living this proposal of the miners to reduce the price of household coal is distinct benefit to the community-a social service...What the Government and their Capitalist backers are really preparing and determined to resist is the proposal of the Miners' Federation that the mines should be treated as industry essential to the life of the community and to hand back to the private interests that controlled them in 1914.[112]

In fact, the union leaders hoped that the miners would take the cut in order to fend off any confrontation that was brewing over the question of raises. The miners had already been convinced to give up raises and were now being asked to give in to further reductions in their pay. According to JR Clynes, "they are ready to submit to a substantial reduction, and their leaders have announced their readiness to suffer a further loss of 2s per man per day, which would amount to between 10s. and 12s per week and would reach a total of £30,000,000 a year."[113] Thus a reduction in wages, according to the union leaders was an acceptable solution if the corresponding cost of living index was lowered as well.

Although the strike only lasted a few weeks with nothing settled, the mines were shut down tight with the full support of the other union members. In addition to the million workers out on strike, there was the ripple effect. Starvation and near starvation levels could be clearly seen among large pockets of miners. The stalemate over the raises continued until April 15 1921, when the next strike was to be called with promises by the

[112] The *Communist,* August 26, 1920.
[113] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Triple Alliance to come to the aid of the miners. In analyzing the situation the CP put forward what they hoped would be solutions that would help the miners through this crisis. 'Watch the union leaders' continued to be the CP's constant refrain but otherwise it provided little analysis of what workers could expect from them. They argued that the officials would betray their struggle because they were middle class, pointing to their elaborate lifestyles without pointing out their political program. And while it was true that many union leaders lived much more elaborately than did their membership, many came out of the industries they led. Leaders such as Ben Tillett and Havelock Wilson became enamored with material possessions, but others did not and yet they did not carry through on their promises to the workers they represented. This can be said about the miners' leader Robert Smillie, who was never accused of living lavishly but did support agreements that were devastating for the miners. At least until 1921 many of the members of the CP still retained syndicalist notions that all leaders were corrupt and therefore never suggested that they be replaced with ones that held revolutionary positions.

The miners had the potential to wage a militant strike that would have forced the employers and the government to concede but the leaders chose to settle, at least for the moment. In the midst of the 1921 struggle, it was reported in the *Daily Herald* that the coal owners were "selling export coal at ridiculously low prices to subsidize their companies, under their own control, and thereby retain profits which, intercepted by the Coal Controller, would enable the price of domestic coal to be further reduced by 5s a ton."[114] And yet the coal owners continuing to siphon off enormous profits still pressured the unions to drop their demand for a 14s 2d increase, although the cost of living had

[114] *Daily Herald,* February 18, 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

risen over 30 percent since the miners' last increase. The President of the Board of Trade, Sir Robert Horne, argued in Parliament for a mathematical approach to the question as opposed to granting a straight forward raise. He maintained that he was following the prescribed means set up by the Sankey Commission. The government was now disputing the two shillings promised to the miners by the Commission. The Coal Mines Emergency Act promised that the government would control the mines at least until August 31, 1920, but would most likely be extended until August 31, 1921. And yet,

> the Mining Industry Act was then passed on August 16, making provision for the levying of a penny per ton upon all coal raised in the country for welfare purposes, the setting upon Joint Pit committees for advisory purposes only, and the establishment of a Mines Department. The active miners in all the coal-fields were disgusted with this measure which merely re-established private enterprise on a firmer footing with the aid of the experience of the miners on the Pit committees. The miners were not to be used for assisting private enterprise in an advisory capacity. The disgust with this measure was accentuated by the appointment, and acceptance of William Brace, President of the SWMF, to the post of Chief Labour Advisor, at a princely salary, to this new Department. The mountain of labour upheaval of 1919-20 had produced a molehill, which stank in the nostrils of every class-conscious miner, resulting in the refusal of the Federation to operate that portion of the Act that required the setting up of Pit Committees.[115]

And while admitting that the cost of living index had risen to 49 points as opposed to the 32 points when the commission was initially set up, Horne contested the union's demands by noting that there was a formula which the government was required to follow regarding wage increases. "Every five points in the cost of living should justify an increase in the wage of 1s per week."[116] According to Horne it would be totally inappropriate to apply different standards to miners than to railway workers. In the House of Commons he argued that the usual 250,000,000 tons that had traditionally been

---

[115] Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation.* Vol. 1, (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1938), 116-117.
[116] *Hansard,* H.C., October 19, 1920, 801.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

produced, was down to only 236,000,000 tons by the third quarter of that year. The implication was that miners were not productive enough and thus productivity would have to be increased. This would then require instituting the datum line, the standard by which increases in pay could be justified.[117] The datum line was introduced into negotiations. Although the miners resoundingly rejected this offer, Brace of the Mine Workers Union did not entirely reject it. He suggested that:

> It shall be given as a temporary measure, and that, between now and December, the coal owners and ourselves shall get our machinery into operation, and concentrate upon output. Concentrating upon output means concentrating upon money, because the extra that we get will be exported, and will be bringing a large sum of money into the common mining pool.[118]

The deal that Brace proposed was a postponement of the inevitable productivity clause. Miners, he argued, would come to see that being more productive would be to their benefit and therefore the government need not push this issue. But in opposition to Sir Robert Horne's proposed productivity scheme Frank Hodges, the Secretary of the Miners Union published a pamphlet entitled *Nationalisation of the Mines* arguing against more productivity since speedup was the cause of many more mining accidents. According to Hodges, "taking the year 1918 as an example, a man is killed every six hours, whilst a man is injured every three minutes."[119]

The issue of unemployment, a continuously growing problem in Britain was not being resolved. As a result on November 1, 1920 the Unemployment Bill was put on the agenda of the House. In response to the niggardly provisions of this Bill, Thomas Shaw

---

[117] In her *Diaries* Webb writes, 196-197, "Great was the disappointment when the Government proposal to give the advance conditionally on an increase in the national output calculated on a datum line (supported by Smillie and other leaders) was decisively, almost contemptuously, rejected by an increased majority in a ballot of all the coalfields. Clearly it was not the leaders but the mass of the men who had gone 'red'."
[118] *Hansard*, H.C., October 19, 1920, 820.
[119] Frank Hodges, *Nationalisation of the Mines,* (New York:Thomas Seltzer, Inc.:1920), 48.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of the Labour Party, remarked negatively, but yet was unwilling to do anything more than raise an objection. Therefore, even this Bill, which was designed to help workers through the crisis was insufficient to the task. The provisions called for: "The weekly rate of the grant payable under this Act shall be five shillings in respect of a wife or husband as the case may be, and one shilling in respect of each dependent child: Provided that the weekly rate shall not in any case exceed nine shillings."[120] Shaw's response was unlikely to engender much fear on the part of the government's adherents.

> Whilst we feel so strongly on these matters, whilst we feel so strong that the Bill is wrong, whilst we feel so strong that the methods adopted are bad, we must say to the Minister in charge-at any rate, I say to him in my own name-that, at any rate, we appreciate his courtesy. We have not received much at his hands, but perhaps in future, when this scare of economy is passed, when the Government have regained more courage, when certain newspapers have less power, when, above all, the people demand it, we shall find my right hon. Friend coming forward with better, wider nobler, and more generous proposals for dealing with this problem.[121]

Mr. Lunn, a member of the Board of Guardians, agreeing with Thomas Shaw's sentiment, said: "This Bill is not only contemptuously niggardly in the benefits it gives, but it renders worse the position of the unemployed worker who is compelled to seek relief." "Yet this Bill, if it becomes an act, will preclude the thrifty man from receiving even that little additional sustenance for himself and his family, towards the provision of which he has contributed." [122] Having no other choice miners were compelled to strike for higher wages.

---

[120] *Hansard.* H.C., November 1, 1921, 1578.
[121] Ibid, November 1, 1921, 1707.
[122] Lunn, November 1, 1921, *Hansard,* H.C. 1710. According to Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939,* 40: "Some Boards openly defied regulations concerning the appropriate Poor Law payments to be made to the unemployed, most notably at Poplar. He also states that in Scotland it was illegal until November 1921 for Parish Councils to provide outdoor relief to the able-bodied, but so grievous was the situation in particular localities, such as Dundee and Fife, that the Scottish Office urged local authorities to act illegally to meet the emergency needs of the unemployed."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moreover, Hodges, attempted to demonstrate the growing desire of mineworkers to participate in the management of the mines. Productivity schemes, argued the miner's leader, meant far more accidents for the miners. And yet the union leadership, including the miners' union, accepted the fact that workers would have to pay their own increases with more production. By March 1, 1921 it was announced that the miners would be receiving no pay increases under the strike settlement. Mr. Thomas argued for a settlement because he feared that the alternative, a strike, would be more damaging. Railway workers were demanding that the union strike to support the miners. Always the conciliator, Thomas claimed, "Many of our difficulties are caused by our not understanding the employers' point of view. If we are denied an opportunity of knowing their case, can you wonder that mistakes are made? The same is equally true from the point of view of employers."[123] According to Thomas there are no class conflicts, just misunderstandings. In opposition to the desires of their leader The *Daily Herald* reported: "The large majority of the NUR branches in South Wales have instructed their delegates to support strike action by railway workers. Motions among Railway Clerks and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen also agreed to come out in support of the miners." In addition to the Triple Alliance this would have added over 75,000 more workers to the ranks of the striking miners. These workers not only promised to defend the miners but were also under attack and therefore could not help but understand the need for a united fight. By January 1921, short time vs. unemployment on the Royal Dock Yards became as serious issue. Mass meetings indicated the degree of discontent among workers.[124] On March 7 the road transport worker also called a mass

[123] Coates and Topham, *Industrial Democracy*, 270.
[124] *The Times,* January 12, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meeting to discuss similar concerns and vowed to resist any attempts at lowering their wages.[125] The feelings of the workers were running high since they were aware of what was at stake. Providing no alternative, W.C. Adamson of the Labour Party accepted the datum line as a lesser of two evils.[126]

The warnings of the union leadership not to take the anger of the workers for granted were not idle threats. They understood the feelings of the workers, the utter frustration at the promises that the government made at the conclusion of the war, and the fact that the government rejected these promises once profits became an issue. Therefore, a resolution was passed by a joint agreement of the union and the President of the Board of Trade

> recognizing that on the **increased production** [my emphasis] of coal there depends, the nation and the cost of life of the people; and having in view that this urgent need can only be met if the miners and mine owners throughout the country work together cordially for this common purpose; and further, having regard to the necessity of setting up machinery for regulating wages in the Coal Trade so as to get rid of present anomalies and provide against future difficulties. Not only the prosperity of all who are engaged in the coal industry, but also the welfare of the nation and the cost of life of the people; and having in view of this urgent need can only be met if the miners and mine owners throughout the country work together cordially for this common purpose; and, further having regard to the necessity of setting up machinery for regulating wages in the Coal Trade so as to get rid of present anomalies and provide against future difficulties.

The Mining Association and the Miners' Federation solemnly pledged themselves to make every effort to achieve these objectives:

> a) Cooperate to the fullest extent to obtain increased output, and for this purpose … arrange to set up district committees and a national committee; b) proceed forthwith and prepare a scheme for submission to the Government at the earliest possible moment, and not later than 31st March, 1921, for the regulation of wages in the industry, having regard, among other considerations, to the profits of the

---

[125] Ibid, March 7, 1921.

[126] *Hansard,* H.C., October 19, 1920, 895. Adamson admitted the fact that the miners had been paid by output and while he did not personally liked it he believed that the miners' union accepted this as inevitable.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> industry and to the principles upon which any surplus profits are to be dealt with.[127]

And yet the mine owners never accepted the wages board that would create the pool which miners sought. This agreement was binding on both parties and if coal production declined Sir Robert Horne warned the coal owners' that he would, upon consultation with the union, push for a reduction in the coal owners profits by 10 per cent if the production levels were not kept high. The coal owners balked at this agreement but ultimately relented. While this agreement had the appearance of even-handedness the owners would now be encouraged to force the miners to work even harder in order to raise the productivity levels. There was no discussion of hiring the ever-growing numbers of the unemployed who through demobilization or a decline in the economy were let go from their employment. Rather than heeding this warning, the government held its position. The date April 15th 1921 was set for the showdown between the mine owners and the Triple Alliance. And although its organization had now been established, the CP could not, because of its inherent problematical roots, intervene in a way that might have challenged the union leaders or prepared the membership for the events that were to transpire.

[127] *Hansard*, H.C., October 28, 1920, 1942. Sir Robert Horne, the President of the Board of Trade, thanked both Brace and Hartshorn for their support in this matter.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 10: BLACK FRIDAY AND THE DEEPENING ECONOMIC CRISIS

1921 concluded with the previous turmoil of the prior two years. This set the stage for a deepening economic crisis and for the further defeats that the working class suffered throughout the decade. The TUC continued to demonstrate its unwillingness to mount a fight against the employers' attacks abandoning the workers just when a strike was to take place. Fearful of the situation getting out of control, the TUC functioned in the same way as it had during the 1919 mass demonstrations. 1921 was thus a year that saw the culmination and defeat of this rising working class tide. The failure foretold its consequences of 1922 with the massive layoffs of workers especially in the engineering sector.

The next big showdown occurred with the Triple Alliance calling a strike to support the miners' demands for higher wages. Consisting of the Big Three (Railway, Miners, and Transport Workers) the Alliance called a strike for April 15, 1921. All of Britain was poised for a tremendous assault by the workers.[128] But on the morning of April 15, now known as Black Friday, the strike was called off[129] without informing the workers. Allowing the miners to be defeated, the rest of the Alliance abandoned them

---

[128] PRO, MEPO 2/1956, January 13, 1921. According to Major General "...there was a reserve of 10,000 rifles and equipment stored in the Tower and earmarked for issue to Reserve Battalions of Territorials for use in case of emergency. An additional 2,000 to 3,000 could be stored [he said] at the Tower of London and retained for the use of the Metropolitan Police."

[129] Bonar Law cited in Peter Hain's, *Political Strikes: The State and Trade Unionism in Britain,* 74 "remarked that unions were the only thing standing between his class and the breakdown of the established order. 'The lesson of this period...was that trade unionism could amount to a considerable weapon of social control." SWML SWCC:NUM/L/22/2 April 19, 1921. "In 1921 resolutions were passed condemning the actions of the Triple Alliance for calling off the strike and demanded the resignation of the general Secretary, Mr. Frank Hodges, for conveying to a private meeting of Members of Parliament on Thursday last the idea that the workmen were in favour of a temporary settlement of wages, which statement is quite contrary to the decision of the last national conference. It was then resolved that the delegates support a resolution that a Triple alliance Conference of the Rank and File be convened to consider the position created by the calling off of the proposed action to be taken in support of the miners."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

setting the stage for further attacks on all workers. What Lloyd George and the employers could not achieve the Triple Alliance managed to accomplish.

The miners once again challenged the employers and the government and demanded that the national pool be implemented. But negotiations with the mine owners were contentious and, on the mine owners' part, secretive. Instead of seeking a settlement the owners sought confrontation. Mineworkers, who had deserved 211 percent on the selling price, were only offered 155 percent."[130] Accidents were a constant source of agitation as well. Robertson, a Labour MP, gave staggering figures of non-fatal accidents that occurred in the mines. Moreover, no accident was considered to be an accident unless the miner was out of work for seven days or more. According to Frank Hodges, "taking the year 1918..., a man is killed every six hours, whilst a man is injured every three minutes."[131] The number of boys working underground was at a staggering level. Forty to fifty thousand boys 16 years or under were working underground. An average of seventy was killed each year. Labour MP, Mr. J.E. C. Swan, claimed that the government negotiated secretly with the owners and arrogantly expected the workers to take the offer or leave it with no further explanation as to how they arrived at their figures.[132]

It was an explosive time in the lives of British workers. By April 6, 1921, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that due to worker sabotage, eight pits were already beyond repair because there had been massive flooding and fires. The pumpmen, who were mine workers specifically directed to work on the pumps so that they did not flood, had been removed, which allowed the mines to fill up with water. Reservists were ordered to report to depots. "The Secretary of the Admiralty announces a Royal

---

[130] Swan, L.P. *Hansard*, H.C. April 6, 1921, 313.
[131] Hodges, *Nationalization of the Mines,* 46.
[132] Swan, L.P., *Hansard,* April 6, 1921, 314.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

proclamation calling out all men belonging to Class B of the royal Fleet Reserve...,"[133] reported the *Manchester Guardian*. When thousands of miners in a small Fifeshire town marched to the railway station to ask railway workers to cease work the police charged them, and the marines were summoned. The *Times* reported, "the outbreak of disorder at the West Benbar Colliery yesterday and in the early hours of this morning approached the gravity of a riot."[134] Although order was restored, the pithead premises were completely wrecked. This was just one of many such incidences that occurred even before the strike began. The conditions were volatile. Miners were hoisting the red flag and fighting the police. But Regulation 22 allowed the Home Secretary to call in the armed services to work the mines or the railways with blackleg labour. Regulation 27 revived the old DORA provision as to arrest without warrant. Any police constable might arrest without warrant any person suspected of being guilty of an offence against this Regulation.[135] Armed with Regulation 22 and the Emergency Powers Act the government was ready for a showdown.[136]

This was the backdrop to the negotiations that took place with the miners' union. The October 1920 strike had ended in a stalemate and now the showdown was to take place. The Triple Alliance was formed in 1914 and touted for years as the alliance that would guarantee decent living standards for workers who endorsed it; but it had failed to act in 1919; it was now to demonstrate its strength in support of the miners. The Union of Railway Workers and the Transport Workers were to add their muscle to that of the

---

[133] The *Manchester Guardian,* April 14, 1921.
[134] The *Times,* April 1921.
[135] *Hansard*, H.C., April 6, 1921, 316.
[136] The *Daily Herald,* May 25, 1921, claimed angrily that the police were using the Emergency Regulations to initiate a reign of terror in South Wales."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

miners if Lloyd George denied the latter their just demands.[137] Even J.H. Thomas consistently called for fairness to the miners and argued that they deserved their 2s raise without having to endure productivity schemes. Moreover, the Attorney General argued against the miners' claim for unemployment insurance and maintained that they should receive only 91 percent above pre-war level. Since prices had risen by 141 percent that meant the actual standard of pay would be 50 per cent below the pre-war level. Thomas lambasted the unfairness of the situation and even admitted that

> in certain districts the reductions proposed are even greater. In three of the largest coal-producing areas (South Wales, Durham, and Northumberland) they amount respectively to thirty-six percent, thirty-three percent. and thirty-seven percent. Were they accepted, the wages of adult miners in South Wales, Durham and other districts would actually be below the legal minimum rates fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board for agricultural labourers, and by the Trade Boards for workers in certain sweated industries. Thus, underground and surface labourers-adult, able-bodied workmen-in Durham and Northumberland, who form twenty-five percent of the total body of workers in those counties, would be forced down to a wage of about £2 per week. In resisting these monstrous proposals the Triple Alliance is defending the standard of life of the whole working class.
>
> 'Nor is this all' remarks Thomas. For generations the trade union movement has set the establishment of national wage agreements in the forefront of the programme. The miners, the railwaymen, and the transport workers, after prolonged effort, have secured them. Now the mine-owners have flung that principle in on one side, insist that the miners shall be forced back to district agreements, and declare that a worker who hews coal in South Wales or Scotland or Durham shall have his economic status entirely severed from his fellow workers, a member of the same organisation and performing similar work in Yorkshire, Lancashire or the Midlands.'

---

[137] The railway workers were also agitating for nationalization of the railways with joint control. Bagwell's, *The Railwaymen,* 405, maintains that the government went along with the demand as a way of buying time until it could develop a strategy that would keep the demand from actually being carried out. He muses that "there may well have been thousands of railwaymen among the more than five million electors who voted for the coalition candidates in the General Election of December 14, 1918, in the mistaken belief that their votes were votes for the nationalization of railways. All the indications were that the Government intended such a reform. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, told a deputation from the TUC on March 20, 1918, that he was in 'complete sympathy' with the general character of the proposal to nationalize the railways."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> This arbitrary and unjust action threatens principles which are vital to trade unionism. It is designed to break up the Miners' Federation.[138]

And yet knowing this would only portend disaster if the union leaders were unwilling to mobilize their ranks, the leadership did worse than nothing; they called off the strike right before it was to begin. The implications of a general strike were far reaching. The strike, the union leadership feared, would challenge the authority of the government. Without it the miners would be unable to even force the owners to negotiate. Even though Thomas refused entrance of the ASLEF, RCA and other transport unions into the Triple Alliance when it was first formed, thereby weakening its potential strength, the number of workers involved was so massive that it would have been difficult for the owners not to negotiate. Union after union had declared that it would stand behind the miners. After the Transport Workers' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen declared their solidarity on April 12 the government moved in and invoked the Emergency Powers Act, declaring a state of emergency and giving itself the right to mobilize the military. The declaration of a general strike was postponed and negotiations restarted. Once again negotiations broke down and a strike was declared for April 15. Devoting time to the government's strategy, Philip Bagwell contends that the government attempted to divide the Alliance in order to weaken its effectiveness.[139]

---

[138] Phillpott, *The Right Hon. JH Thomas,* 66-77.

[139] Bagwell, "The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-22", 125. "Despite all these divisions and weaknesses within the organisation, an Alliance strike might still have happened in April 1921 if the Cabinet had acted clumsily and provocatively. Instead it again displayed remarkable cool-headedness and circumspection in dealing with the crisis. Three days before Black Friday, when there might have been every excuse for panic, it decided 'that any action which might be regarded and quoted afterwards as provocative' was to be avoided. A few days earlier the Supply and Transport Committee of the Cabinet had considered whether, in the event of the miners' strike, the railwaymen's guaranteed week should be suspended. The Committee concluded that to rescind the guaranteed week would be to invite railway workers 'to throw in their lot with the miners'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On April 15, 1921, at 10 am, the showdown was to begin but even before the miners learned of it the government and the press was given the word that the Triple Alliance had pulled out and the miners were to go it alone. Soon after the strike was aborted Thomas took an oath of office to become a Privy Councillor to the disgust of many workers. The employers, while relying on the state machinery continued to push Parliament to pass laws encroaching on the workers' right to strike. By passing the Emergency Powers Act, Bonar Law was assured that the working class would be held in defiance if it went out on strike. When asked if Thomas was instrumental in getting the miners to concede on the safety question he [Thomas] responded that that was good advice.[140] In disbelief many workers went out anyway, but they were eventually told to withdraw. Having to go it alone for three months the miners lost the strike. In the wake of this disastrous defeat there were terrible ramifications for the whole of the working class. The employers were now able to implement a serious assault. Demoralization under the circumstances was inevitable. Workers were then victimized by their employers and either fired or put on short-time. After the settlement, many collieries were closed down or dismantled. Unemployment ran as high as several thousand in the South Wales mines alone. In the Rhondda area unemployment reached an acute state. Once accomplished a ruthless attack on the engineers occurred in 1922 when they too attempted to strike.[141] The ostensible reason that Thomas gave for calling off the strike was that: Hodges assented to Lloyd George's proposal that negotiations be reopened and that a temporary solution be sought to avoid a strike. The miners' leader had claimed that

---

[140] Ibid, 76.

[141] Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, 20. Layoffs also occurred among the railway workers reducing the workforce from "676,802 persons employed on the railway in March 1922 being 59,068 fewer than in the March of the previous year."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he supported the proposal that there be a "temporary settlement on the basis that wages shall not fall below the cost of living..."[142] Consequently, the mineworkers demanded that the three MFGB officials (specifically along with other members of the Executive board) resign since they refused to carry out the mandate of the miners.[143]

In point of fact, the other members of the Alliance had promised to defend the miners and failed to do so using Hodges' statement as a pretext to avoid supporting the strike. In addition, they complained that the miners would somehow take control of the entire strike in which their unions participated. Appearing to be a reasonable concern since the railroad and transport workers would be involved as well, the miners remembered that in 1919 Thomas had struck a deal with Lloyd George. That is "In return for abandoning nationalisation of the railways and workers' participation in management, the railway unions were promised equal representation with the companies on central and national wages boards which would settle wage rates and other conditions of service."[144]

Given the employers' uncompromising attitude, the prospect for a settlement without a concerted effort was unlikely. The Versailles Treaty signed at the conclusion of the war guaranteed free labor and free coal to France, ironically helped to undermine the British economy in the process. The total of the German indemnity was £11,500,000,000.[145] British workers were thus made redundant because German shipbuilders, as part of the reparations agreement, were forced to build and repair British ships at a lower wage. This was true in the coal industry as well. British coal was more costly because German coal was not only guaranteed to France, but it was guaranteed at a

---

[142] Ibid, 119.
[143] SWML, MNA/PP/51/1.
[144] Ibid, 113-114.
[145] *Daily Herald,* January 2, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

much lower cost. Germany was required to deliver 7,000,000 tons of coal per year to France for ten years.[146]

The United States also weighed in and sent large quantities of coal to the continent, further undermining the British economy. In addition to siphoning off millions of pounds in profits by the mine owners and the ever-deepening international competition between Britain and her former allies, the British economy was in crisis. This was the backdrop to the negotiations in the mining industry. The incident that precipitated the heightening of tension was the government's refusal to continue the subsidization of the mining industry until August 1921. It withdrew its promise of a £10,000,000 subsidy in March in response to the miners' unwillingness to make major concessions. In order to insure the miners' defeat the government imported oil through the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The oil was refined in Scotland while Scottish miners remained unemployed. The British government controlled two thirds of the shares of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, thus helping the mine owners to crush the strike. By June 1922, while the miners' strike continued the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's refinery at Llandarey, near Swansea, was available for refining oil. This was in case miners retaliated against the mine owners making "it desirable to set up the necessary retorts..."[147] Oil becoming a replacement for coal, caused even more unemployment and encouraged the mine owners in their war

---

[146] According to Lubin and H. Everett, *The British Coal Dilemma,* (New York:Macmillan:1927), 43-44, "through the Bureau Des Charbons, the French government fixed the price at which British coal could be sold in France, a price that was considerably below the current figure. Indeed, the price of certain types of coal was fixed at a level as much as 30 shillings below that agreed upon in contracts with the British for delivery for the coming year. The new market condition led to a precipitate collapse of British prices and the government found itself with an unexpected burden on its hands. It had guaranteed profits to the coal owners, and having limited prices at home it had figured on realizing those profits through sales abroad. During the early months of 1921 a drain on the Treasury began and on the basis of January's deficit alone it became evident that to continue state control and guarantee profits until August 31, the date at which, according to a former announcement, government control was to cease, would mean a loss of about £40,000,000."

[147] Malone, *Hansard,* H.C., June 26, 1922, 1655.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

against their employees. The cost to workers was in the millions of pounds, not only in strike benefits but in job losses as well. By the end of the three-month strike, the employers had gained the upper hand and unemployment and desperation grew steadily. The miners' wages fell below the pre-war level of 1914. By July 23, the *Times* reported: "The wage bill loss to the miners has been well over £60,000,000, and the cost to the organisation will represent somewhere about £10,000,000..."[148] And because there was little coal, many businesses were forced to shut down with the result that more workers were excessed. Regarding the coal dispute and the likelihood of severe reductions in the workforce Mr. Gould remarked in the House of Commons on April 6, 1921: "I employ something like 9,000 men, and I shall probably have to turn all those men out on Saturday because of no fault of my own, but simply because I cannot get coal."[149]

It was not just the miners that were under the gun, but the entire working class was being asked to forfeit increases that they had received during the war. Since the miners' union was the strongest, the government employed the divide and conquer strategy: first undermine the miners and then the railway workers. This is precisely what happened. Union after union was asked to take cuts and was often forced to go out on strike alone.

Unlike many other historians who have studied the question of Black Friday and often condemn the union leadership for its role in this defeat, or at least understand those who do, Stephen Graubard takes a very different approach to the question. Instead of faulting Hodges, who accepted the government's deal, allowing the leaders of the other unions the opportunity to repudiate their agreement with the miners, Graubard contends

---

[148] The *Times,* July 23, 1921.
[149] Gould, *Hansard,* H.C., April 6, 1921, 302.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that it was the fault of the workers that they were defeated thereby disagreeing with the assessment of the Communist Party, which railed against the leaders. Graubard denies any validity to the Communists' argument that the union leadership deliberately sold out the strike for fear of greater ramifications. He denies that the possibility of rebellion was at all a factor in why the leadership might have called off the strike. Therefore, it must have been the decision of the workers themselves to abandon the miners as opposed to their leaders.[150] He maintains that the warnings that the Communists raised, namely that union leaders would not go through with the strike, was nonsense, since the leadership was not afraid of rebellion and it was not therefore afraid of unleashing millions of workers. And yet the fact that the government felt the need to pass the Emergency Powers Act and call up the military should have indicated that the situation was extreme. The strike was called off on the day that it was to go into effect. Workers were growing politically conscious and unwilling to accept the defeat. An organizer of the Communist Party was arrested for making speeches in Cardiff and was sentenced to three months imprisonment for sedition, but the charge was withdrawn.[151] "A crowd of 1,000 strikers paraded in the streets to the accompaniment of a band. They stopped outside the police station and hoisted the red flag."[152] In April 1921, the following resolution was passed in the Lewis Merthyr Lodge: "Moved and seconded that we support and protest against the imprisonment of persons for their political views and demand the immediate release unconditionally believing it is a policy which is contrary to the principle of free

---

[150] As a refutation of Graubard's position Kellogg, *British Labor and the War,* 176, cites figures of unparalleled amalgamation of workers in ever-greater numbers and had the Triple alliance willed the shut down, the industrial life in Britain would have stopped.

[151] According to Durham in "Origins and Early Years", 84, the CP "lost members due to frequent harassment by the authorities, and the jailing of many of them...In the first half of 1921 over 70 leading communists had been arrested, more than half of whom were sentenced to imprisonment, some with hard labour."

[152] The *Times,* May 13, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

speech."[153] The highly charged situation put the government on high alert. In quoting the *Daily Herald* Graubard suggests that the author of the article is more realistic. And since, the *Daily Herald* had not been traditionally sympathetic to management or the government, the author must have been correct in his assessment of the situation.

> We on this paper have said throughout that if the organised workers would stand together they would win. They have not stood together, and they have reaped the reward. It is not for anyone to criticise anyone else or pretend that he himself would have done better than those who have borne the heaviest responsibility... We cannot, however, believe that one misunderstanding or mistake could have stopped the strike, defeated the movement, and brought about the present disaster. Not one, nor a hundred, nor a thousand such trivialities could have affected the issue if the whole movement had really been solid in organisation and understanding as well as in sympathy. That is where the fatal weakness lies...[154]

In support of Thomas' decision to renege on the agreement, another union leader, George Naylor, secretary of the London Society of Compositors, said:

> Surely, once having declared their intention of coming out in support of the miners, the other partners in the alliance were entitled to a voice in all the negotiations going on and a vote on all questions to be decided. Had that measure of participation been provided for, it is fairly certain that an early settlement would have been reached? The miners, however, did nothing discreditable, for they were acting within the alliance rules; it was the constitution of the alliance that failed.[155]

Graubard assures the reader that workers did not call for the resignations of union leaders. But if one were to dig deeper resolutions and condemnations could be found in abundance against the officials.

> At the annual general council meeting of the National Transport Workers' Federation in June, the assault upon the leaders continued. Jack Jones MP asked suspiciously whether 'private negotiations' behind the scenes had produced the debacle. Did he suspect that Tillett had participated in them? No names were mentioned, and Bevin denied that any 'deal' had been made. Meanwhile Tillett had reversed direction again. 'I honestly regret that decision on the Friday night,' he told the assembled delegates of the National Transport Workers' Federation. 'I

---

[153] SWML, SWCC:MUN/6/23/157, April 21, 1921.
[154] *Daily Herald*, April 16, 1921.
[155] Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution,* 166-167.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> do not believe that all 100% of our men would have come out; but I do believe we could have had the majority…because they would think it was right.'[156]

Peter Chambers of the Scottish Mineworkers said:

> The failure was not due to the rank and file; it was the leaders to blame. It was a notorious fact now that there were certain leaders among the railwaymen and the Transport workers Federation who had all along been moving heaven and earth to get out of the prospective strike. Mr. Thomas had said it was the proudest day in his life when he got out of it.

David Marshall, of the Scottish Dock Labourers said: "In the West of Scotland they were ready and solid for a strike…The Triple Alliance would revive, but its constitution – curious one- would have to be altered."[157] Busmen in London were so angry that they seized union headquarters.

The result of this failure to act concertedly was demonstrated in a myriad of ways. In a desperate act by Hodges in a desperate situation he had agreed to a reduction in salary if the government would grant £36,000,000 a year until the cost of living had fallen enough so that the miners would not be forced to starve. By that time (May 4) the miners had lost £21,000,000, and the nation 16,000,000 tons of coal.[158] And although the *Daily Herald* placed the blame for the failure of the workers who were, according to the article, unable to pull together, the latter placed the blame on their union leaders and passed resolutions denouncing them. Miners' Lodges throughout the mining towns in South Wales called for Hodges' resignation. Also, many transport workers felt betrayed by their leaders and continued to support the strike. Railway men, report the *Times,* were attempting to "hold over the leaders of the NUR a threat of lightening local strikes…"[159] In an attempt to defend the miners, the dockers put an embargo on loading coal. But as a

---

[156] Schneer, *Ben Tillett,* 214.
[157] Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress,* 170.
[158] The *Times,* May 4, 1921.
[159] Ibid, May 13, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

way of undermining this solidarity, Havelock Wilson instructed his men who worked for Belgian ports to load coal going to Britain even though Belgian workers initially refused this work. In retaliation for this support the National Council of Port Employers took action against the Clyde dockers when they refused to unload five cargoes of coal from Cardiff.[160] And yet

> railwaymen continued to seek advice from union leaders about moving blackleg coal during a strike. Men were disgusted, questions and discussion followed, expression disappointment and seeking meaning of action out of mess and muddle. By way of Questions to Brother Niven the members showed their deep irritation at the part played by the EC [Executive Committee]. In subsequent meetings the EC decided to lift the embargo on blackleg coal.[161]

Under the heading "Bitter Disappointment," the author in the *Daily Herald* writes: "Glasgow railwaymen are bitterly disappointed with the 'weathercock policy of their Executive'." And yet given the eclectic nature of the *Daily Herald* an article contradicting the one on lack of solidarity was also published. In an interview with Councillor James Killide of the NUR he states flatly that, "never before had the men been in such fighting form. In his opinion the response to the strike call would have been almost unanimous. All plans for the stoppage were made."[162] Articles that appear to contradict each other would appear in the paper but there were rarely any articles that would upbraid the union leaders. It appears that important sections of the working class were quite willing to support the miners' struggle.

Before the strike was declared, workers promised support to the miners, not just for reasons of altruism or working class solidarity but because they understood that the miners would be the guinea pigs in their employers' quest to cut wages, and if successful,

---

[160] *Daily Herald,* May 2, 1921.
[161] National Library of Scotland, Acc. 4313 (23) National Union of Railwaymen May 22, 1921.
[162] The *Daily Herald,* April 18, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the railway workers would be next. Thomas argued that the railway workers supported the strike out of fairness to the latter, but he neglected to mention that the railway and transport workers had agreed to make the issue not merely one of miners' wages but railwaymen and transport workers' as well. This was because by June 1920, it was proposed that all the increases granted by the National Wages Board in their varying degrees according to grades from 2s to 8s 6d. and averaging about 5s a week be cut.[163] Decontrol of the railways was to take place in August, leaving the railway workers to the same fate as the miners. By July 1921, the President of the NUR, J. J. Abraham of Sheffield, "said that employers … were apparently determined that wages should be reduced and their economic status lowered irrespective of the suffering it would bring to millions of people or the disastrous results to the nation through strikes and lock-outs that were inevitable in such circumstances."[164] The same refrain by employers was heard throughout the year. By December it was the Scottish railway workers' turn to suffer the cuts. In addition, a lockout of engineers began in June of 1921 but became even more serious in 1922. Until the crisis occurred, workers, many of who had been willing to trust their leaders, ceased to trust them.

But since syndicalism was the only alternative to the entrenched trade union leadership, which had deep roots in the British working class, an alternative leadership had not been organized to challenge the union officials. Therefore by 1921, workers had no alternative organizations to express their discontent. The Communist Party was not strong enough to promote itself as an alternative, and although it continuously warned workers to "watch their leaders," they did not, or could not, form an alternative. Only

[163] Ibid, December 6, 1921.
[164] Ibid, July 5, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

formed in 1920 the CP was a new organization that was far from cohered. Disagreements still continued over whether or not to support the LP and many of the leaders retained their syndicalist approach to organization. Not really grasping the extent to which the official leaders feared upsetting the status quo, as late as April 9, the CP still held out hope that the strike would commence. They felt it unnecessary to warn the workers that their leaders might call it off. The *Worker* (the paper of the CP in Scotland) did not call for a new leadership to be built, nor did it discuss with the workers any plan in the eventuality that Hodges and the others would back down. Radek, a leader in the Soviet Union commented on how the traditions of the unofficial movement asserted themselves during this struggle. He noted that "in many places,…'the Party appears on the scene under the cloak of the 'Workers' Committees' and any success that is achieved by the propaganda does not bring the masses near to the CP."[165] And according to Murphy,

> We were of course far from having put into operation all that was required by the CI resolution to reconstitute the new Communist Party. We had made our political declaration of adherence to its principles, but its one thing to accept a principle and another to apply it to life. The CP was supposed to be a Marxist party, but there were few in it who had more than a nodding acquaintance with the writings of Marx.[166]

Again Murphy wrote:

"We were ardent trade unionists, most of us experienced in leading unofficial movements. That was our strength…(but) the theoretical equipment of the leadership as a whole was not a high standard. I remember there [were] only Tommy Jackson and myself who were at all familiar with the philosophical aspects of Marxism."[167] Even one month into the strike, when 60 Communists were arrested and scores of railway men

---

[165] Murphy, *New Horizons,* 65.
[166] Ibid, 181.
[167] Ibid,73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

victimized, the CP repeated the same refrain, providing little direction. Enter into "unceasing agitation" offered no real alternative to what was being offered by the union officials. The very people at the head of the union machinery continued to play the deciding role in the fate of millions of working class people. Because the CP was still imbued with syndicalist attitudes, it was unable to understand the very union machinery it criticized. The unconscious holdovers from the Shop Stewards' Movement regarding leadership remained as a prominent part of the CP's approach; thus there was no call for a new leadership to be built in counter-position to the union officials.

Bevin's explanation for the failure of the strike was that: "Mutual trust and confidence, essential in this sort of operation, were conspicuously lacking. This, more than any last-minute fear, compelled the transport and railway unions to seize on the divisions in the Miners' Federation Executive to extricate themselves from a difficult situation."[168] The Communists, complains Graubard, would never admit this explanation. "Machinery meant nothing to them; only men counted; and the men, they asserted, were entirely prepared, waiting only to be ordered into action." Graubard is wrong when he claims that all the workers wished for was a word from their officials. That the *Daily Herald* has demonstrated quite aptly. But, in fact his criticisms of the CP are quite valid. As dedicated and as revolutionary as the communists were they did ignore machinery; that is, they ignored both the trade union and state machinery. Not even the armed forces amassing at the mines prompted them to tell the workers that they needed, at the very least, to defend themselves much less did they think to discuss the question of socialism to end exploitation. Calls by the CP for socialist revolution remained abstract.

---

[168] Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution,* 178.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Regarding the leadership's unwillingness to carry through on their threats Ben Tillett's demonstrated this aptly. "If the capitalist will take one word from me, the capitalist owe not merely the success of the war to the general trade union movement, but the capitalists of the country owe the maintaining of their industries to that success of the trade union movement."[169] Tillett unabashedly applauded the intervention of the trade union leaders on the side of management, thereby effectively guaranteeing stability and compliance with the employers' wishes. The ideology of the 'Old Guard' had perhaps never been so boldly stated. To that end the MFGB had allowed blacklegs to scab on the strike. It was reported at a Scottish Colliery Engine Boilerman's Association, May 1921 that the Miner's Federation allowed the government and the employers to employ workers to discharge the duties normally performed by miners. The chairman at this meeting said:

> I am [of] the opinion they were absolutely wrong in allowing anything but Trade Union labour to be used for this purpose; in fact, the Federation actually agreed to the policy of blacklegging. They might have logically, though mistakenly, have continued their attitude of opposition, but if they were allowed to give any permission at all they ought to have agreed that the regular Trades Union men be employed for that purpose. To do anything else was to injure the men regularly employed at the engines boilers.[170]

"Accordingly, we have to consider what our attitude shall be in view of the fact that while the majority of the Miners Federation favours a continuance of the struggle the majority of our own men are in favour of its termination."[171] Lloyd George was well aware of the uses to which such representatives of labour could be put.

---

[169] Schneer, *Ben Tillet,* 207.
[170] National Library of Scotland, Scottish Colliery Engine Boilermen Association, Report of Annual Delegate Meeting, May 1921, Acc. 4570 No. 7.
[171] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Second in command to Thomas was C.T. Cramp, who at one time was considered to be a revolutionary, but by 1921 Lloyd George referred to him "as one of the most respectable citizens of this land..."[172] With the help of union leaders such as J.H. Thomas, the government could move from a standoff position with workers to one where it was decidedly on the offensive. The unions managed to force Lloyd George to stand down (with tremendous coaxing by workers) regarding his hostile stance on Russia. They had managed to force him to back off, at least temporarily, on the question of wages and on the question of the pool, but now the leadership would not follow the memberships' will and thus handed the victory over to the employers.

As a result unemployment touched millions of workers either through direct loss of employment or through working shorter hours. Thousands more workers were discharged from their employment, which put a strain on the Guardians' ability to provide even limited services to the unemployed. "Defeat struck hard at the unions. The big post-war gains in membership melted away. On February 5, 1921 the headline of the *Daily Herald* was *Eight Millions Face Starvation,*[173] and this was even before the lockout began. Between 1921 and 1923 there was a drop of over 2,000,000 in the affiliated membership of the Trades Union Congress, representing rather more than the increase registered in 1918."[174] Union treasuries were strained to the breaking point. By the end of 1921 unions had paid out £35,000,000, leaving treasuries nearly bereft of funds. Housing

---

[172] Bagwell, *The Triple Industrial Alliance,* 122.
[173] The *Daily Herald,* February 5, 1921.
[174] Hutt, *Post-War History of the British Working Class,* 50; On the question of unemployment among railway workers Bagwell claims in *The* Railwaymen, 433-434, that "the basis of the companies' claim for further economies at the expense of their staff was different in 1923 and 1924 from what it had been in 1921 and 1922. In the earlier period the sharp fall in the volume of their own business had prompted the economies. At the later date it was mainly pressure from manufactures and traders for a reduction of freight charges which eventually induced the companies to attempt further inroads into the earlier agreements on wages and hours of work."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conditions, already terrible in Glasgow before the war, grew worse afterwards. "Private builders were not encouraged by the subsidies given under the Addison Housing Act and in 1921 only 1,409 workmen's houses were under construction in a city of over a million people with the highest density of slum population in Britain."[175] Rent strikes once again flared up in the style of the 1915 strikes, encompassing thousands of people. Unemployment, soldiers who were not yet demobilized, and terrible slum conditions fanned the flames of discontent, especially in cities like Glasgow where there was little prospect for better housing and many jobs were tied to shipbuilding, as an industry was on the decline where unemployment grew exponentially. A Derbyshire militant in 1921, speaking about the possibility of a strike said: "We can starve the Government into subjection now, just the same as they will do to us next March...Every time we go to Downing Street we get weaker."[176] This is precisely what happened, and so 1921, which began on a promising note for workers' rights, ended in defeat. The workers believed that their leaders had betrayed them. The *Socialist* writes on the "Great Betrayal": "J.H. Thomas trots around Downing Street, and the government goes on moving Scottish troops to England and English troops to Scotland and 'blacklegs" to the mines, and while all this is going on the officials are holding an "unconditional conference."[177]

As an indication of the extent of the discontent among miners over their leadership, South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) voted overwhelmingly to support the Third International.[178] The SWMF and Monmouthsire Miners' Federation had already

---

[175] Middlemas, *The Clydesiders,* 102.
[176] Hinton, *Labour and Socialism,* 114.
[177] The *Socialist,* April 14, 1921. This was just a harbinger for what was to come a few days later.
[178] H. Francis and D. Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press:1998), 30 "One of the few areas in Britain where the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had substantial roots was the South Wales coalfield where some of the supporters of the Unofficial Reform Committee and what remained of the Rhondda/South Wales Socialist Society had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

incorporated into their constitutions that the object of the Federation and the condition of employment would be that the miners agreed to "the complete abolition of capitalism."[179] The SWMF had a particular history, which allowed them to believe that they were entitled to challenge the system. The pits were seething with political dialogue. Dyffryn Cellwan, a South Wales miner, remarked

> John Thomas an older miner discussed politics and different things, and the rights of the miners and how socialism was brought about, and the Russian Revolution had taken place. Lenin was leading the Russians against the counter-revolution of Churchill and all the rest, and they become victorious and indeed the Rhondda Valley was seething with the philosophy of Communism, and advanced socialism.[180]

In addition, Marxist education was prominent in the coalfields with thousands of workers attending Labour College classes.

> There are many signs, which indicate that the forthcoming winter is going to be a record one for Marxian educational classes. The proof that we are going to eclipse all our previous efforts next winter has caused a great deal of consternation in the ranks of the ruling class. During the past few weeks the Press has been instructed to write up special articles on 'Labour and Education.'[181]

Once the Labour College was broadened into the National Committee of Labour Colleges, Marxist education spread all around the country.[182] Moreover, for many miners, the Church, which at one time had been central to the community, ceased to have faith in it resulting in the weakening of the chapels.[183] And since the church had been

---

joined the new organisation…A coalfield conference in July 1921, representing over 150,000 men, voted 120 to 63 to urge the MFGB to affiliate to what it mistakenly called the Third International."

[179] Gould, *Hansard,* H.C., July 6, 1922, 645.

[180] SWML, Oral History Project, Idris Cox, Tape No. 78.

[181] The *Socialist,* August 14, 1919.

[182] SWML, Oral History Project, No. 83; William W. Craik *The Central Labour College,* 100, contends that very soon after the College arrived in Kensington it began to conduct evening classes, both within and without, for working men and women in the district, and to extend their range. Not many years were to pass before there was hardly a suburb in Greater London without one or more Labour College classes at work in it.

[183] When discussing with a miner about his loss of faith in the church he said "the conditions that they [the deacons] had the workers suffer under them was tyrannic, tyrants, they had to men the both collieries, tyrants." SWML, Aud 220 J. Henry, December 1, 1972; Quoted in *Class, Community and Collective*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

such an integral part of the miners' lives, many of these communist miners who came from traditions of learning and had incorporated some sort of worldview to explain their existence now searched for a worldview that could replace it. Miners' leader and founding member of the CP, Arthur Horne, at one time studied to be a minister, but after the war looked for a different worldview to replace what he had held to be immutable truths.[184] Many miners felt that religion and its representatives were outdated and corrupt. John Henry, a miner in Abercraf, discussed the conditions that he was forced to abide. His experience was generalized in other mining villages.

> You had to fill your quota. If you couldn't do that. Sometimes you were going home on your loss because you had to use a lot of power if you didn't earn sufficient now, the power would take it, house coal again would take it, see. Of course I wasn't having house coal because I was lodging, but people were. They were going from there now with starvation wages. And those people, it's a peculiar thing I'm saying it, and its true, that the people who are responsible for those conditions were the foremost men in the religious life of this community. They were deacons.[185]

Circumstances such as these pushed workers such as Arthur Horne to seek other explanations for their life circumstances. Marxism provided the miners with an alternative worldview. To demonstrate the degree of support that the Communists held in the collieries Morgan Jones, a miner, was asked if he knew Lewis Jones a leading Communist in the mines.

> Jones had been both a checkweighman and a Communist. 'He was a good one again. And I remember his funeral, one of the biggest funerals I've ever seen up here. There were even darkies from Cardiff. There were people from all parts in

---

Action, 9,1 a miner says "So disillusioned was he that he felt as frustrated as many others on the 'dole', now seeking emancipation and salvation in the materialistic doctrines of Communism rather than in Christianity. He no longer sang with devotion the Welsh hymn 'Pa Ddaw sy'n maddeu fel Tydi' (What God savest Like Thou), but with head uncovered bawled out 'The People's Flag in deepest red', that stirring line of 'The Red Flag'."

[184] Another miner said about school "It certainly filled the gap [chapel] I will never be able to repay the debt because they gave me so much power so much information over the books." Oliver Powell Aud 316, November 29, 1973.

[185] SWML, John Henry Aud. 220.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> his funeral. He'd, he'd fight for the coloured people in Cardiff as well as the miners and everybody else, and I don't know what happened, but I saw his funeral. Ooh there was a tremendous crowd. One of the biggest funerals I've ever seen from up here.'[186]

At least as important as the other factors already mentioned Will Coldrick, a Welsh miner adds:

> That mining community is so closely knit that the propaganda is infinitely more effective than what it is in disperse populations. Because with a thousand men working in it, there were about a thousand in Blaensychan for instance, well pithead meeting and things of this nature, they got to know who were the people whose advise they could rely upon and they were all turning to people who had a socialist conviction, and more reasonable explanation of the difficulties than others. And so gradually they moved over and there was no room for the Lib/Labs you see and they had to become committed socialists virtually before they joined the Labour Party and became a candidate of any sort.[187]

But struggle and class loyalty were not a monopoly of the South Wales miners. Miners in Fife and Durham either put Communist leaders at the head of their unions or incorporated a call for communism in their constitutions and support resolutions were passed by other sectors of the working class to defend the miners. The failure of the unions to respond led to devastating results for millions of workers who were now, in all professions, out of work and whose unemployment insurance had grown thin if they were receiving any at all. The employers were paying starvation wages with many workers ending up in the workhouses. "The modified workhouse which it is said the Ministry intends to set up, is one to which a man is taken while his wife and children are maintained outside. Maintenance outside is just sufficient to keep the women and her children alive. Once inside the Bastille a man is nothing else but a prisoner."[188] By June laws such as the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act were passed to guarantee that

---

[186] SWML, Morgan Jones Aud 227.
[187] SWML, Will Coldrick Aud 339, September 24, 1973.
[188] *Daily Herald,* April 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

miners did not obstruct the functions of the mines by preventing scabs from going down the pits. Colonel Newman speaking in Parliament under the euphemistic subhead *Protection of Workers* wrote:

> Colonel Newman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, seeing that the freedom of the individual is still secured by Section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, which makes liable to a fine or imprisonment a person who, with a view to compel any other person to abstain from doing any act which such other person has a legal right to do, uses violence or intimidation or besets his house or follows him about with other persons in a disorderly manner, he will say why the protection of this Section is not afforded to these persons who in a peaceful and orderly manner have recently desired to resume their occupation in the coal-mining industry.[189]

He was assured that the police were making arrests of those Offenders. By August 1921 miners were denied unemployment benefits.[190] The union leadership allowed the situation to deteriorate, leaving members of their unions defenseless and out of work. Paul Blanshard, a contemporary and supporter of Arthur Henderson wrote: "Without the credit of the cooperative stores many a miner's family would have starved during the thirteen weeks' coal strike of 1921."[191]

The defeat of the miners set up the circumstances whereby the government felt confident that reducing workers' wages would not engender a fight by the union leaders thus feeling certain that it could make inroads into the living standards of all workers. The result of the lack of a concerted mobilization by the union officials resulted in massive layoffs, thereby changing the character of the struggle from a workers' movement to one that emphasized the unemployed. In the meantime, further discussions in Parliament reveal that

---

[189] Ibid, June 27, 1921, 1782.
[190] Newman, *Hansard,* H.C., August 4, 1921, 1714. Workers in other industries were receiving unemployment benefits but the other MPs believed that the lack of unemployment benefits for miners was their own fault.
[191] Blanshard, *An Outline of the British Labour Movement,* 102.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> in 1913 the total receipts of the railways of the country were £139,000,000, the working expenses were £87,000,000, and the net receipts were £50,000,000. In 1918 the receipts had gone up to £197,000,000 or £60,000,000 more than 1913. The working expenses had gone up to £143,000,000. They were roughly £60,000,000 above the 1913 figures. But the net receipts had gone up from £50,000,000 to £53,000,000, and the net receipts as shown by the figures of the Board of Trade for 1917 and 1918 were the highest net receipts in the history of the railway service of this country, and at the very time these figures were being published by the Board of Trade we had the Prime Minister circulating a document to the public that the railways were being worked at a loss, and that loss was being passed on to the general public.[192]

Moreover, the government had promised to maintain the upkeep on the railways which took the form of subsidies in the millions of pounds. The railway workers attempting to win higher wages in the midst of tremendous subsidies to the railway companies were forced time and again to strike. It is not hard to imagine that these lessons were not lost on the miners.

Moreover, Lloyd George assured the MPs that radical and communist literature would be confiscated. In May 1921, the police raided offices of the Communist Party, taking from it everything that they could. Raiding offices of the CP, imprisonment of socialist authors and regulations crafted to prevent workers from challenging the employers' use of scab labor in combination with the Emergency Powers Act opened the door for what appeared to be a rising class war against the working class. It was not just the CP that bore the brunt of the attacks. Union leaders were arrested and their offices broken into and their papers confiscated. At a mass meeting of the Clydebank Unemployment Committee the workers unanimously voted for this resolution:

> That this meeting of workers records its disapproval for the undue interference of freedom of speech and free press which is shown in the cases of Thomas Mitchell managing Secretary of the SLP of GB and at the time of his arrest, responsible editor of the 'Socialist' official organ of the SLP of GB, publisher of the article 'Under which Flag; and Sam Smith, writer of the article. Also the case of Guy

[192] Meyers, *Hansard*, H.C., June 24, 1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Aldred, now serving a sentence of 12 months on a charge of sedition, arising out of an article published in the 'Red Commune' of which paper he was editor at the time of his arrest. Further, in the case of John McLean MA (a member of the SLP of GB), and Alexander Ross, who are charged with delivering seditious speeches to workers in Glasgow? Further it most emphatically protests against the imprisonment of those men in the name of the working class, and calls for their immediate release.[193]

The economic depression deepened leading to the decline of industrial struggles and the rise of unemployment councils. The Communists began to make their breakthrough organizing these councils and leading thousands of workers in the challenge for better benefits and better living conditions. The unemployment councils swelled.

The trade union leadership, on the other hand, argued that Black Friday was proof that industrial strife was not an effective weapon against the employers' greed. The emphasis would now be focused on electing people to the House of Commons rather than engaging in industrial struggles. As a result, in 1922 Labour did exceedingly well since workers began to shy away from industrial activity.[194]

Believing that they had won a resounding victory by winning so many seats in Parliament it was obvious that the LP had become the clear contender for power. Workers were sure that their voices would now be heard. Cheering workers, especially in Scotland, had come out to meet the people who would represent them in Parliament. "Never again in subsequent elections was enthusiasm to rise to this height or possess quite this intense quality…" exclaims John Paton, a Labour Party supporter, who

---

[193] PRO, HH31/33 Clydebank Unemployment Committee, 1921.

[194] Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party,* (London:MacMillan and Co. Ltd.:1961), 50. "In 1922 came a new election and with it the reward for the skilful generalship of Henderson in the preceding eight years. The Party increased the number of seats that it contested to 414, which was now over two thirds of the total. It won altogether 142 of them – almost double its strength at the dissolution, which had already been recruited by successes at by-elections. Although there was a clear Conservative majority in Parliament, in many ways the rise of the L.P. to a total exceeding that of the broken segments of the Liberal Party was the most important single feature of the election."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

witnessed this outpouring and marveled at the hope that working people had in this success. "With startling suddenness the incredible had happened-Labour had won a great series of sweeping victories and leapt forward into second place! Nothing could possibly be the same again."[195] Paton remarks in his autobiography that he saw hundreds of thousands of people who lined the streets in Glasgow waiting to glimpse the LP leaders who would bring their message to Parliament. He believed that this outpouring of support for the LP was really a desire for socialism and that he, as thousands of other workers supported it with the hope that it came to power and that it would implement a socialist policy. J. Ramsay MacDonald had already taken the reigns of the Labour Party with the help of the ILP. But, says Paton, "bold words in the House of Commons somehow assumed the value of deeds; the walls of Capitalism were being breached, and soon would totter to their fall: our anticipations were roseate visions of a red dawn."[196] But the walls of capitalism did not fall and, in fact, he maintains that rather than challenging the system MacDonald and Snowden behaved to the contrary.

> Labour was fit to govern in the accepted and sure ways established by tradition-that was the way to power. Nothing should be done to disturb popular confidence; the great middle-classes must be taught that they'd nothing to fear from a Labour Government. That on the contrary they'd much to gain-every disturbing voice and influence in the labour Party must be repressed or disowned; Mr. MacDonald was already well set on the course that was to lead him to the pinnacle of glory.[197]

The emphasis on political change in its most narrow sense, that is, mainly by using the ballot box, guaranteed the downplaying of industrial struggles.

> Harry Gosling said that the defeats suffered by Labour were the sequel not of Black Friday, but of Black Saturday-the 1918 General Election. Gosling argued

---

[195] John Paton, *Left Turn!, The Autobiography of John Paton*, (London:Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd.:1936), 144.
[196] Ibid, 151.
[197] Ibid, 162.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that strikes during the slump had been fruitless, and concessions by the workers were the wiser policy. Labour should unite politically and recover lost ground through the ballot– box. [198]

For the union leaders, the failed strategy of industrial conflict was represented in the failure of the miners' strike. Miners and other workers felt equipped to challenge the employers and therefore denounced their leadership because it relied only on the vote. In June 1922 Clynes' address to the General Workers' Congress, discussed the crisis and explained that not only did the employers have nothing to fear from the trade unions, but, in fact, the unions should be considered their allies. In the same address, Clynes advised against a struggle and encouraged submission to the employers. Since the miners did not heed that advice, the union leaders responded by putting a stop to industrial action.[199] As a result, after a three-month strike in 1921, the miners were humiliated and forced to return to work setting the stage for future strikes to fail and for attacks on the standard of living of all workers resulting in extreme consequences, especially for women. As a consequence of TUC and the LP abandoning women workers, the Women's Trade Union League was disbanded. "…after forty-seven years the league ceased to exist and a committee of the General Council, the women Workers' Group, took on the role of looking after women's interests within the TUC."[200] Women, driven from the unions in unprecedented numbers were the least protected of all sections of the work force. The trade union leaders had sacrificed them in order that men would be able to return to work. The miners had been sacrificed and humiliated because of their unwillingness to accept the datum line and productivity, and now it was the engineers' turn.

---

[198] The *Daily Herald,* June 9, 1922.
[199] Ibid, June 2, 1922.
[200] Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement,* 147.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Before the electricians even decided upon strike action, they were locked out of their places of employment. The employers were on the offensive. The trade union officials were ill-equipped to deal with the massive numbers of people who were struggling to meet their daily needs. Workers' wages were reduced with no fear that the TUC would retaliate. "The engineers found the cards stacked against them from the start. 'In fact, writes Boughton: "When a mass meeting of engineers in firms unaffected by the dispute voted by a two to one majority that members working in non-Federated firms should be called out...twelve members of the Sheffield AEU District Committee were suspended by their national executive when they sought to enforce this decision."[201] 'Never,' wrote a contemporary observer 'have they had to face such a crisis in such conditions as obtain today.' The best that could be hoped for was a concession from the employers which would enable the men to return to work with dignity."[202]

The employers wished to lower the wages of the AEU employees by 26s 6d a week. "In 1921 time-workers in the shipyards had their wages reduced by 17s a week and piece-workers were cut from 40 to 60 percent."[203] The engineers were forced to accept a 12-½ per cent reduction in the raises that were conceded to them during the war. But the real problem for the engineers was the question of overtime. With 92,884 out of 400,000 workers unemployed and 76,000 on donation (they received benefits from the union) the fact that workers were forced to work overtime meant other workers were unable to find work. Longer hours were sought by employers in order to cut down on the number of people employed. Since the employers were emboldened by the failure of the Triple Alliance strike to take place, they felt that there would be no repercussions for this move

[201] Boughton, "Working-Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield," 91.
[202] Coates and Topham, *Industrial Democracy,* 129.
[203] *Labour Leader,* March 9, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

against the engineers. The Secretary of the Employers' Federation, Mr. Brown, stated: "In any organisation for the direction of human effort, it is necessary that there shall be one directional authority, and all experience has shown that dual control, such as is now sought, is incompatible with the proper working and efficiency of an industrial establishment."[204] In other words, there would be no discussion over who ruled industry. Any discussion of nationalization or workers' control was prohibited. Employers essentially demanded the right to remove workers at will and put others in their place. The engineers' demand for a pool, similar to the one proposed by the miners which would have spread the work throughout the industry. Moreover, the employers demanded that any engineer who resigned his membership in the union should be entitled to continue working as a non-union member. The union leadership agreed to these demands and encouraged workers to support these contract proposals, although the workers voted them down. The rejection of the employers' proposals by the engineers allowed the employers an excuse to give notice of a lockout on February 22, 1922. And yet in the midst of Labour's numerous successes in the bi-elections (1922) the employers continued to slash wages and lock their workers out of work. The lockout persisted for months. The union would be made absolutely powerless. In addition to the failure of workers to assert control over the industry, reparations, so devastating to the shipbuilding industry encouraged an all out assault against the union. The employers had decisively obtained the upper hand.

> That negotiations will proceed on the machine question, the claim of the Union to negotiate on behalf of the apprentices, and payment for holidays, on the understanding that the memorandum is accepted; therefore it should be clearly

[204] Brown, *Hansard,* H.C., March 20, 1922, 75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> understood that unless this memorandum is accepted, it is probable that negotiations on these important matters will not be proceeded with.[205]

As an added affront many workers were cut off benefits because of the dispute. Since there was ostensibly an objective umpire or arbitrator dealing with these cases the government would not intervene to reinstall their meager benefits. But wages were so low that many of these workers were worse off working than they would have been receiving benefits. By March 16 half a million men were locked out and more layoffs were to be expected unless there was an agreement on future wages. Union treasuries were depleted. By May 1922, only £32,572 was left in the general fund, and by May 27 all funds were suspended for everyone but the sick and the retired worker.

With the miners also locked out, little could be raised to shore up the treasuries of any of these unions. They were nearly bankrupt. Responding to a question in Parliament about whether in fact these workers were Bolsheviks or sympathetic to Bolshevism, Robert Young of the Labour Party replied:

> If they are, you have made them so. Every promise to them has been repudiated. Every useful measure of legislation has been repealed or devitalised. More than that, large numbers of their comrades are on the streets, without house, without work, without wages. They have been fed during the past three years since election time-and even before-on specious promises and pleasant platitudes.

In response to the social unrest that was engulfing thousands upon thousands of workers, he lashed out at the employers' unwillingness to compromise, or even negotiate. He stated: "We are not to blame if through your inability to fulfil your promises, discontent and unrest is prevalent in the country."[206] Discontent and unrest was so

---

[205] Ibid, 102.

[206] Young, *Hansard.* H.C., March 20, 1922, 103; PRO, MEP 2/1959 May 8, 1922. The assistant commissioner in referring to a demonstration of engineers remarked: "Our presence here has upset the plans of the leaders and several of the most dangerous types have left for Newark 16 miles distant where the mob has gone so far as to turn the employers out of their own factories. Two very active Communists,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prevalent and the employers so intransigent that the LP was put in a precarious position. Not wanting to wage an industrial fight, they could not deliver jobs. The lockout lasted thirteen weeks and ended on June 13, 1922. It involved 260,000 workers with 13,650,000 working days lost. But although the engineers were defeated they avoided a rout since they had shown so much solidarity. Workers went out together and returned together. But the economic crisis deepened.

The Labour Party, much like the TUC, had no strategy to deal with the mounting numbers of unemployed. They had discouraged direct action and argued for political change. Now many MPs were Labour Party members and they encouraged a strategy of reform through Parliament. Workers had been assured that striking was counterproductive and that reforms would come now that Labour was a clear contender. And while workers grew desperate, the unemployment bill, initiated by MPs in Paliament in 1920 continued to stagnate. Labour officials attempted to revisit the question of reparations as a solution to Britain's economic woes. German workers were working for nearly nothing, driving down the wages of British workers; therefore it was necessary that reparations be renegotiated. Not uttering a word about the desperate situation that German workers faced, the LP only concerned itself with the impact that they had on British workers. Moreover, Labour argued that the League of Nations should be viewed as an arbiter for workers so that their rights could be guaranteed. Although the depression-like conditions continued to grip the economy Labour advanced no concrete resolutions.

---

strangers to that city have suddenly left for other places. Before we came the mob stripped several foremen in the streets but no person has been interfered with today."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once again, the TUC refused to mount a fight in defense of the engineers and so layoffs skyrocketed. The lowering of wages by the employers was not enough. Management attempted to sweeten the pot with their agreement not to interfere with unions, but employers demanded assurances that the unions not interfere with them. With this assurance the union was hampered from defending its workers.[207] Employers wanted the unions to relinquish all claims to control. Their intention was to eviscerate the unions, undermining their ability to protect their membership. As a consequence other three-quarters of a million men were forced out of work in addition to the 90,000 or so engineers already locked out. Shortage of labor combined with militant class struggle, especially in Scotland, had not allowed the employers to drive wages down as far as they had wanted during the war. They were now in a position to recoup what they felt they had lost. Workers' wages were too high and had to be forced down. Moreover, Labour's suggestions regarding the establishment of a mediating committee to resolve problems were constantly rebuffed by the government.

Along with the engineers, the railwaymen were also targeted. Employers were demanding a 12-hour day for signalmen in Scotland. The Scottish railway companies wished to cut wages, lengthen hours, raise the adult age from 18 to 21, and abolish the special payment for night work.[208] In response the employers asserted that the tramwaymen were doing relatively well in comparison to the rest of the workforce, whose situation had been far worse than the railroad workers. "Compared with the rates of other workers," said Mr. Beckett, "a tramway motorman is getting 101 per cent and a

---

[207] According to The *Daily Herald,* February 23, 1922 the employers demanded that: "The trade unions shall not interfere with the right of the employers to exercise managerial functions in their establishments, and the Federations shall not interfere with the proper functions of the unions."
[208] Ibid, January 19, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conductor 113 per cent above pre-war rates, and has a guaranteed week. The poor miner is only receiving between 25 and 30 per cent over pre-war rates."[209] Since the tramways were operating at a loss, workers' wages had to reflect this reality. And yet the railway workers also refused to be crushed. The Glasgow workers were still calling for workers' control. Even while handicapped by the union leaders the engineers, the railwaymen and the miners continued to struggle. But Bonar Law, who had become Prime Minister after Lloyd George's removal from office, refused to subsidize the coal industry. The agreement proposed to the miners made no provision for the unemployed. Since "oil fuel had come to stay,"[210] the 20,000 workers already unemployed in Durham would see many more added to their ranks. Unemployment had become a fact of life in Britain. Since there was such a great concentration of mines in South Wales, the situation among miners there was bleak. Unlike other parts of Britain with some diversity in employment, that situation did not exist in South Wales. The *Daily Herald* expresses the workers' dire circumstances.

> 'It's wearing us out, on the food we get,' 'But what does that matter? We're only men-there are hundreds of others, waiting for our jobs!' 'Most of them take down only bread and margarine nowadays,' 'and some times there's nothing in their boxes at all.' Her husband was a labourer in the mines; the lowest paid man, whose minimum (38s) is also the maximum; for he cannot, by working harder, increase it. After stoppages (not including coal) this man brought home 33s; the weekly rent was 8s. 2d. and rates 7s. 10d. So far, they had struggled to keep up rent payments, but the rates had not been paid since April. They had only three children.'[211]

Wages were not more than 20 percent above the 1914 wage level and the price of coal doubled. Mr. Swan complained to the Members of Parliament that decontrol had hurt the miners to such an extent that:

---

[209] Ibid, September 4, 1922.
[210] The *Workers' Dreadnought,* June 17, 1922.
[211] The *Daily Herald*, June 19, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Throughout the county these people are in a state of hunger, resembling the dark times of the late 'seventies." The children are in a state of emaciation. This state of affairs demanded that there should be a careful and deliberate inquiry into the reasons of this, not only in Durham, but in the whole of the mining community of the Kingdom.[212]

As a result of decontrol more than 20,000 miners in Durham alone were out of work. Without communal kitchens and help from other sectors of the labor force, the miners would have starved. Workers were not only impacted by the economic crisis, but were also targeted by the employers for their political involvement in the 1921 strike. They were considered Bolsheviks and agitators, and were blacklisted.

And while the mine owners made more profits, the miners had to supplement their wages by applying for help to the Poor Law authorities. Not well funded by the government, these authorities were almost bankrupt. The miners received little help there. With many workers already unemployed for a number of years, the miniscule funds handed out by the Guardians diminished even further, and in some areas workers were cut off altogether. In England, local authorities had been compelled to close their doors since the government had not given enough money to maintain them. Wil Thorne, another Labour MP, remarked that "the Steel Ingot Makers' Association have already received a reduction during the last 12 months of about 37s per week; that … of the lower paid labourers are now working for about 33s, per week;"[213]These wages were well below the 1914 wage levels. The ship owners, too, were demanding a reduction in wage levels, including the Port of London Authority workers who not only were paid by the government, but had also already suffered a wage reduction of 24s per week. Their wage was once again to be reduced by 2s. Moreover, for one seeking employment at the Post

---

[212] Swan, *Hansard,* H.C., July 6, 1922, 701.
[213] Thorne, *Hansard*, H.C., August 3, 1922, 1695.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Office in many cases the hours of work being offered were generally no more than 2 1/2 to 4 1/2 hours per day, thus offering little in the way of sustenance, "whilst at the same time he is prevented from returning to the Exchange in the hope of securing a full-time position."[214]

British workers, especially those in South Wales, who were mainly industrial, were also highly political. Many had been educated through the Labour College which was explicitly Marxist. With the support of the other major unions the miners were mounting a serious challenge to the employers. With the defeat, the balance of forces shifted away from the miners, loosing all the clout that they had hitherto achieved. Moreover, one of the causes of the demise of the Red International of Labour Unions, which was organized by the Third International in 1919 and endorsed by the South Wales miners in opposition to the International Free Trade Unions supported by the TUC, based on the Second International, was due in part to the failure of the strike. By no means was this the only reason, but it was a contributing factor. Therefore, discussions around joining an alternative organization (i.e. the RILU) were now defunct. And while the South Wales miners discussed the question and attempted to encourage the MFGB to join, indicating the extent to which these workers were political, it never actually succeeded and was ultimately disbanded in 1924.

Meanwhile, the economic downturn grew worse. The TUC was impotent in affecting any positive change in this situation, although they were well aware of the degree of desperation facing their membership. Resolutions were passed calling on the government to modify its harsh approach to benefits such as unemployment insurance, but calls for action were not made. The General Council regretted the government's

---

[214] Ammon, Ibid, June 23, 1922, 1545.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

decisions and called upon it to promote employment schemes to deal with this massive unemployment but had no concrete suggestions or strategies to offer. Their approach to politics was purely electoral, expressly opposing any kind of industrial response. Many months could and did go by with little movement regarding workers' issues. The Unemployment Bill was virtually stalled in Parliament even after the LP took the reins of power.

The Communist Party led unemployment councils incorporating tens of thousands of workers, in the National Unemployment Workers' Committee Movement (NUWCM), and organized great demonstrations of unemployed workers all over Britain.[215] "Unemployed demonstrations 'found their way' into Board Rooms, and refused to budge without relief. Pitched battles with the police[216] were often needed to remove them, and, in many cases, the Guardians were compelled to grant, quite illegally, the relief demanded."[217] Paul Blanshard describes how "armies of the unemployed marched on London, rioting broke out in several industrial centers, and the entire city council of Poplar, a section of London, went to prison as a protest against the inaction of the government in the crisis."[218]

---

[215] Already by 1920 one of the key demands of the London District Council led by Wal Hannington, a Communist Party member, was recognition of the Soviet Union. Foreign trade became a universal panacea that everyone could support. The CP also argued that recognition of the Soviet Union would provide a direct benefit to British workers because trade with Russia would necessitate the restarting of production of British industries. The metallurgical industries would be reinvigorated, providing a boon to workers so long out of work. But recognition was not forthcoming until the 1924 election, which put the L.P. in power. It is likely that had this scheme been put into effect, it would not have fundamentally changed the ever-deepening depression. Nevertheless, it became one of the central demands of the unemployed councils and of the Communist Party as well.

[216] Mortan, *Conflict and Order,* 199. "At Lincoln, during the engineering dispute in 1922, the chief constable borrowed twelve mounted policemen from the Metropolitan Police on the authorization of the watch committee, to protect blacklegs who were working on non-union wages."

[217] James Klugman, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain,* 119; S. Inwood, A *History of London*. (New York:Caroll and Graff Publishers, Inc. 1998), 750.

[218] Blanshard, *An Outline of the British Labor Movement,* 108. "At a funeral of a hunger marcher who died in London thousands of unemployed mourners stood bare-headed and in all solemnity sang 'the Red Flag'

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But in response to the suggestion that the TUC or the Labour Party take up a resolution calling for direct action against unemployment the TUC leaders such as J.H. Thomas encouraged workers to vote. The official leaders of labour rebuffed any attempt at a challenge to the government.[219] Demonstrations persisted all over London, moving from the jails to the workhouses and eventually to Parliament. Bonar Law cavalierly referred to the unemployed deputations as criminal elements. In Scotland, CP members led the campaign for "increased scales of relief payment for the unemployed and their dependants; the right to work and its provision at trade union rates; and targeted the failure of capitalist government and reactionary municipal and parish councils."[220] The tenant and unemployed councils worked together, often preventing people from being evicted from their homes for falling behind in their rents. The National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement coordinated the joint councils, which was generally at the head of many of these attempts to keep families and their small possessions together. The *Times* reported that a riot broke out in Leicester, where the unemployed came into conflict with the police, "the result of which was that a goodly number of heads were broken and leaders of the rioters were arrested."[221] As the lockouts increased the severity of the situation increased proportionately.

---

and the 'International' as the train moved out to convey Comrade Walter Tompkins to his last resting place." WCML, Insurgent in London. National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement; Boughton, "Working-Class Politics in Sheffield and Birmingham," 98, "in June, 1921…50,0000 gathered outside the Town Hall to protest at cuts in the Board of Guardians' scale of relief…Such strength and apparent success must have been exhilarating for the unemployed and for a short period perhaps it did seem, as the *Sheffield Forward,* claimed, that 'they were the real rulers of the city'." According to Durham in "Origins and Early Years," 61, "buildings were seized for use as centers for the unemployed and militants also raided factories that utilized overtime in preference to taking on additional labour."

[219] Hannington, *Industrial History in Wartime.* In opposition to a resolution supporting direct action these leaders who orchestrated Black Friday continued to oppose any sort of action in defense of the unemployed.

[220] Walton Newbold, "Motherwell for Moscow, Revolutionary Politics and the Labour Movement in a Lanarkshire Constituency 1918-1922," *Scottish Labour History Journal,* No. 28 1993.

[221] The *Times*, October 1, 1921.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On November 23, 1922 a demonstration of the unemployed attempted to see Bonar Law. According to the *Daily Herald* there were varying estimates of those who attended, ranging anywhere between 20,000 to 50,000 people. The Prime Minister declined to see the deputation. Thus under the heading *Labour Members Heckle Mr. Bonar Law* George Lansbury wrote:

> He asked the Prime Minister whether he would reconsider his decision not to see the deputation, and mentioned the danger of the spread of smallpox through men whose vitality was lowered by privation and exposure to the infection. He added that 'on that day, for the first time, the police had begun to arrest these men for simply walking along the streets.[222]

Law would not relent, and he would not be challenged by unemployed workmen. In the midst of Lansbury's protest, Law denounced the marchers and vehemently vowed he would have nothing to do with them. The *Times* and the British Federation of Industries argued that nothing could be accomplished unless the question of trade was settled with Germany. In addition Sir Alfred Mond, the Minister of Health, declared that there was little need to provide more housing for the working class.[223] The demonstrators organized a petition campaign to demand that Law see them. In response to their request, Law snubbed them, and called the police circulating the story to the press that this was a "Red Plot"[224] to topple the government. The *Times'* labor correspondent encouraged the belief that the Communists wished to exploit the workers and create trouble, and should be watched closely. "Unless wiser counsels prevail," argues the author "trouble seems to be indicated, and may, in fact, be desired by the Communist element, which is a directing force among an organized minority of those who are workless."[225] And according to the

---

[222] *Daily Herald,* November 28, 1922.
[223] Ibid, September 4, 1922.
[224] Ibid,
[225] The *Times*, November 28, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

London Municipal Society and the National Union of Ratepayers' Association, whose meeting was reported in the *Times*, not only was the CP to be watched, but the Labour Party should have been watched as well.[226]

On May 29 in London workers demanded an end to a five-week gap system so that they could obtain benefits earlier. Demonstrators marched to the Embankment, but upon returning to Hyde Park, the police did not allow the demonstration to proceed. Later, the NUWM (predecessor to NUWCM) decided upon a national week of struggle against the gap system. The call was taken up everywhere "and there was hardly a town or industrial village, which did not witness during that week mass meetings or demonstrations against the gap."[227] The organizers provided few provisions for the marchers, who had come as far away as Glasgow and who faced a myriad of hardships including cold weather, and rain. "The whole of the marchers, numbering 20,000, had to arrive in London on the same day-17th November-practically one month from the date when the first contingent took the road."[228] The unemployed London participants alone reached 20,000.

As a result of this mounting pressure that these demonstrations brought upon the government, it was forced to reduce the gap from five weeks to one. As a consequence of unemployment evictions mounted. "During May and June, 1922, Glasgow and the whole of the Clyde witnessed stormy scenes in the fight against evictions, which were becoming almost daily occurrences."[229] The struggles over evictions in Glasgow led to their

---

[226] The *Times,* March 2, 1922, "Their programme was a thorough-going declaration of war against private enterprise in any form; and if carried out it would deal a smashing blow against the revival of trade and manufacture in our great cities."
[227] Hannington, *Industrial History in Wartime*, 70.
[228] Ibid, 81.
[229] Ibid, 71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spreading to other parts of the country. The movement for better housing led the Glasgow City Council to set up special rent funds. In the southeast, Londoners supported these anti-eviction demonstrations and resistance to evictions grew. The government looked upon these demonstrations with dismay, having no sympathy for workers who were made homeless. At a TUC meeting in Southport the mayoress opened her statement with "why all this unrest? What ails the workers? And in answering her own question she stated: "It seems that in the rebound that the anxieties of the war, we are all trying to get something for nothing. Too much selfishness exists; that is the result of all the evil. We must not ask for the impossible."[230] By this time, even the union leaders were incredulous, but only faulted government representatives with ignorance as opposed to lack of concern or even worse, support of the employers. Bob Smillie, the miners' leader, responded, "The lady mayor would never have made that statement about unrest had she been aware of the real facts that caused it."[231] It was only under the auspices of the NUWM that a condemnation of the government's failure to deal with the crisis was made. In these events the TUC failed to provide any meaningful support to its workers. But as strikes began to pick up again in 1923-24, workers began to look to the Labour Party for a way out of the deepening crisis.

[230] Ibid, 79.
[231] Ibid, 79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SECTION III: THE DEBACLE, 1924-26

They have shown the country that they have the capacity to govern in an equal degree with other Parties in the House…and, considering their lack of experience,…have acquitted themselves with credit in the House of Commons…The Labour Government have also shown the country that patriotism is not the monopoly of any single class or party. Finally, they can justly claim that they have left the international situation in a more favourable position than that which they inherited. They have in fact demonstrated that they, no less than any other party, recognize their duties and responsibilities, and have done much to dispel the fantastic and extravagant belief which at one time found expression that they were nothing but a band of irresponsible revolutionaries intent on wreckage and destruction.

MacDonald to the King, October 10, 1924

"I know the Government's position", said Thomas. "I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Government won…but this is not only not a revolution, it is not something that says, "We want to overthrow everything." It is merely, a plain, economic, industrial dispute…"

J.H. Thomas, on the 1926 General Strike

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. When one visualizes all that that means, and takes into account the passions and tempers that would have been stirred up and the reactions that would have followed, it is seen how very near the country would have been brought to revolutionary conditions.

"British Constitutionalism and the Coal Settlement." by J.R. MacDonald, August 2, 1925

Dear Sir: I have your letter of the 4th instant. My sympathies are certainly with the man who returned to work before the strike was called off, though I need hardly say that my sympathies are greater with those who did not strike at all. The Prime Minister's idea I believe was to get as many men back as possible but you probably know that it is perfectly clear that the railways were frightfully overstaff; no one in their service really worked his hardest and I think that some result of the recent strike will be either that they will work with less men or that if the total number are employed they will not be able to have full-time work.

To J.H. Thomas from Joynson Hicks, June 8, 1926

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 11: LABOUR COMES TO POWER

This final section will deal with these pivotal years 1924-26 that set the stage for the continuing depression that was to plague not only Britain but the rest of the world as well. The implications for this period are far reaching, although historians are still debating their nature and extent. The failure of the working class to make successful gains — in fact, many of their hard-won gains were rescinded — opened the way for the employers to debilitate the historically combative nature of the British working class, sending ever more workers into poverty and into a defensive posture viz a viz their employers for many years to come. And although Labour came to power in January 1924 few appreciable gains were made. In fact, some of the more egregious means tests implemented by Labour, (workers had to prove that they were seeking work in order to receive benefits) were continued by the Tories when they took office at the end of 1924.

With Labour's ouster from office, Winston Churchill, became Chancellor of the Exchequer and reinstated the gold standard, further deepening the economic crisis. (Gold was used to pay back Britain's debt to the United States.) Miners who believed that they had achieved an understanding with the LP were disheartened by the fact that the Tory government reneged on Labour's promises. The stage was set for the events of 1926. And although the potential for winning sweeping changes in Britain had existed, the struggle ended in bitter defeat for the miners and the entirety of the British working class.

With some exceptions, the extreme economic crisis continued throughout this period. It had been temporarily abated in 1923 with the French invasion of the Ruhr

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

territory.[1] Halting German shipments of coal to Britain had allowed some respite for the British miners since they did not have to compete with German coal. Thus, the miners were able to reach a temporary deal with the coal owners allowing a wage increase. By 1924 this had changed with the institution of the Dawes Plan. By 1923 there was a rise in working class disputes and the consolidation of many trade unions.[2] The General Council was given extended powers, signaling a rise in working class activity against cuts to wages. According to Scott Nearing, "This consolidation is most marked among the General Workers' Unions, who were formerly in a multiplicity of small, sectional, and local organizations. Today over a million of these workers are banded together in three big unions."[3] The potential existed for the working class to make important strides in their living and working conditions. The result of workers solidifying their strike activity was increasingly more frightening to the employers, the government, trade union officials and the LP.

Elected Prime Minister in 1924 through the maneuverings of the Tory and Liberal Parties, Ramsay MacDonald helped negotiate the Dawes agreement. And while the Labour government was a minority government, that is it did not have a majority membership in Parliament, it did make important policies that impacted both the British

---

[1] The German government defaulted on the debt opening the way for the invasion of the Ruhr with the support of the Belgian government.

[2] In opposition to a strike of the ASLE and F over the question of blacklegging, Thomas and Cramp advised workers to go back to work. Bagwell, in *The Railwaymen* writes, 465, "Critics of Mr. Thomas were asserting that ever since the December 1923 election had resulted in the formation of a Labour Government with Mr. Thomas as its Colonial Secretary, he had been strongly opposed to any drastic action by the unions. Within a few days of the date of commencement of the strike he was due to sit next to the Prince of Wales at a banquet." Consequently, the railwaymen were forced to make further concessions to management.

[3] Scott Nearing, *British Labor Bids for Power: The Historic Scarboro Conference of the Trades union Congress,* (New York:Social Science Publishers:1925), 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and German working classes.[4] Helping to ward off revolution in Germany the Dawes Plan allowed for the reorganization of the German economy and helped the government make reparation payments to evade the standoff between Germany and France. The way was opened for the reshipping of coal to Britain, thus removing the crisis that the French invasion had posed and undermined the bargaining power that the miners had gained because of the intervention. It added to Britain's already seriously eroding economy.[5] The Dawes Plan stabilized the situation but both the German and the British workers would be its victims. German workers continued to pay for the reparations with low wages and high inflation, but competition over the cost of coal was intensifying. The French and British governments would now be repaid. Britain was able to repay its debt to the American banks and with the implementation of the Dawes Plan American loans to Germany were repaid as well. The Plan involved a loan given to Germany by General Dawes, soon to be Vice-President of the United States, in order to help underwrite the enormous burden of reparations. It not only allowed the US government to reap tremendous rewards, but German workers were forced to work at very low wages and work very long hours. Accepted by both Germany and Belgium, it helped to put pressure on the French to remove its' troops. With their removal the shipments of coal returned to Britain.

Because MacDonald was instrumental in putting together this plan, it became a bone of contention, pitting British workers against their Prime Minister. In an article in

---

[4] According to a miner Idris Cox, he joined the CP in January 1924 because he "was so thoroughly disgusted with the Labour Government which used the excuse of being a minority to cover up all kinds of reactionary steps that it was taking." Idris Cox. No 83, June 9, 1973.

[5] By May 1, 1921 the German debt amounted to 31 billion dollars. George P. Auld, *The Dawes Plan and The New Economics,* (New York:Doubleday, Page and Co.:1927), 60. "The Germans were required to pay interest at 5 percent. and a sinking-fund contribution of 1 per cent. per annum on the 12 ½ billion dollar debt. This charge amounted to $750,000,000 a year."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the *Manchester Guardian* entitled "Miners Case Against Reparations", the paper's labor correspondent wrote: "The miners' case is really against the whole system of reparations. In their view, it depresses the standard of life of the German miner or, as they put it, 'enslaves the German workers.' They object to the Dawes scheme as increasing the power of German capital to depress wages and to lengthen working hours."[6] The union leadership attempted to undermine this sense of international solidarity expressed by British workers for the plight of the German working class. CT Cramp, head of the National Union of Railwaymen, argued against the extremists who opposed the Dawes plan for fear that it would exploit the German workers while enriching American financiers. According to Cramp "It must not be forgotten that the British labour movement has always insisted upon the obligation of Germany to pay reparations...Not only the principle of paying reparations, but also the plan whereby Germany was to be enabled to pay reparations has been specifically endorsed by the international trade union and Labour movement."[7]

By 1924 with the victory of the LP hope among workers increased but, given the cautious MacDonald government, little had changed.[8] Many of the conditions that prevailed before the Labour government came to power continued to exist even afterwards. By the time Labour came to office over a million people were still unemployed.[9] The industrial depression had ravaged the economy. Unemployment

---

[6] The *Manchester Guardian,* October 17, 1924.
[7] Ibid, September 30, 1925.
[8] According to the *Times,* after winning the election, McDonald argued, "Had it not been for the constitutional action of the Labour Party again and again in the face of all sorts of demagogic and revolutionary temptations the nation would not have been able, perhaps, in tranquility and joy, to enjoy Christmas and the New Year recess. He told them plainly that the price of continuation of that tranquility was gentlemanly and honest politics."
[9] *Hansard*, H.C. 1999. By March 1924 1,120,000 persons had been unemployed for years.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

benefits had not increased but, in fact, had declined. In March 1924, *Hansard* indicates the extent to which industry declined.

> The state of the cotton trade is deplorable and they tell me the losses on last year's trading will be some of the very worst on record. In shipping, it is an exception for a voyage to end in a profit, and in the coal trade, which has been so helped by the stoppage in the Ruhr deliveries, when the German coal trade resumes, we may look for a very serious form of competition there.[10]

Added to the terminally unemployed were students who left school who needed to obtain work, both to help their families and to keep from being idle. Not surprisingly, the cost of living increased. "The wages of over 7,000,000 workpeople were cut by about £6,000,000 per week. In 1922, in a good many cases, there was another cut of about £4 ¼ million of money per week. In 1923 there were cuts of another half a million."[11] By June 1924, the cost of living was 71 per cent above the 1914 level. The government paid £1,000,000 a day in interest payments on the war debt, which left little as a safety net, and yet profiteering continued unabated. According to Maxton:

> They [workers] see flaunting wealth all round about, and alongside it is abject poverty, and they hear hon. Members opposite always saying that nothing better can be expected for them, but that the workers have got to work harder and lay more bricks per day, and be longer at work, that they have got to speed up and have better organization, and no new hope for the working class in the future is ever to be allowed by hon. Members below the Gangway or on the other side.[12]

Workers could not miss the acute unfairness of their lives as opposed to the lives of their employers, increasingly put their hopes in the LP. This continuing sense of injustice had raised their consciousness quite keenly. But while giving the LP a chance to correct these

---

[10] Baldwin, *Hansard*, H.C., March 10, 1924, 1988.
[11] Macnamara, *Hansard*, H.C., June 26, 1924, 657; Eyre-Todd, *Mobocracy or towards the Abyss,* 63. In response to the desperate conditions of the working class the National Citizens Union argued: "what the country needs urgently and absolutely is cheap labour. It is of no use to talk about the cost of living. That false will-o-the-wisp has nothing whatever to do with the wage it is possible to pay for work. If a family cannot get ham and eggs it can live quite wholesomely on porridge. Wages will have to fall tremendously within the next few months if men are to get work at all."
[12] Maxton, L.P., *Hansard*, June 26, 1924, 678.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wrongs this did not mean that workers ceased to consider direct action, nor did they reconsider the need for socialization of industry. And while many believed that Labour would begin to address their concerns, it was the Russian Revolution and Lenin that caught the imagination of those workers who hoped for a better life. This attitude was reflected in their reaction to Lenin's death. An article in the *Daily Herald* demonstrates this profound sadness at a memorial that was given in his honor:

> With signs of deepest respect and sorrow the large gathering that packed every square inch of space stood motionless and silent in Poplar Town Hall on Saturday while the music of the Russian funeral march, played on a piano, solemnly commemorated the passing away of the
> great Russian Leader Lenin.
>
> So eager were the participants in this act of tribute (organized by the Communist Party of Great Britain) to gain access to the hall that a large crowd waited patiently outside the hall for 90 minutes before the meeting was timed to begin. An "overflow" meeting of about 200 was addressed by speakers from the balcony of the hall.[13]

But for the moment the LP was seen as a socialist organization that would do for Britain what the Russian workers and the Bolsheviks had done for the Russian working class. The LP was now asked to deliver.

Ostensibly, the Labour Programme insisted upon the need for National Work, including the establishment of a national system of electrical power supply, the development of transport by road, rail and canal, and the improvement of national resources by land drainage, reclamation, afforestation, town planning and housing schemes. But in fact the Labour leadership, especially the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Snowden, was fiscally conservative unwilling to jeopardize his balance of payments. Snowden's philosophy was, quite simply, to make industry more productive. According to Snowden, "More cannot be taken out of industry than is produced. Good

[13] *Daily Herald,* January 28, 1924.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wages cannot be paid out of an unprofitable industry. The more prosperous industry is the better are the chances of Labour getting higher wages. The sensible policy for Labour then obviously is to cooperate in making the industry efficient."[14] In a word, what we need is to Christianise our industrial system.[15] Snowden believed that "A man's real politics arise from his temperament and feeling. And the Governor's [Montague Norman, Governor of the Bank of England] nature is essentially democratic. I should say that he hates snobbery and class distinctions."[16]

Therefore, while committing itself on paper to developing a semi-socialistic program, in reality Labour's policy differed little from the Conservatives. The Chancellor sought after stability, always ranging himself against the struggles of the masses of working people.[17] He accomplished little more than carrying out financial orthodoxy and limited reforms.[18] Cutting costs and reducing expenditures was the task of Snowden's short tenure as Secretary of the Treasury. In fact, he wholeheartedly greeted the return of the gold standard. Sir Robert Horne, the Conservative, said of Snowden: "I do not think we have ever heard a more clear or perspicuous statement with regard to our national finance."[19] 'We propose no revolution', he [Snowden] said, 'and we do not propose and I

---

[14] Snowden, "The Way to Industrial Peace," 27; Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden,* (London: Barrie and Rockliff:1966), 198, rightly argues that, "as a former civil servant himself, Snowden had a high regard for the higher Civil Service and an instinct about how its mind worked. And, of course, both he and the Treasury were thoroughly Gladstonian."
[15] Ibid, 39.
[16] Ibid, 198.
[17] In fact Wil Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, (London:Lawrence and Wishart:1989), 213 bitterly tells his reader in his autobiography that when in Parliament Snowden made the comment describing him [Thomas] as a person who demonstrated "unlettered ignorance and unfitness for Parliament." L. Chester, S. Fay and H. Young. *The Zinoviev Letter*, (London:Heinemann:1967), 17Snowden hoped that his colleagues would 'show the country that we were not under the domination of the wild men'."
[18] In his book *The Clydesiders,* Middlemas argues that Snowden's authority went unchallenged. "His conservatism at the Treasury, his acceptance of orthodox dogma, the return to the Gold Standard of which he approved, and the reduction of the Debt gave him the name of 'the last nineteenth century Chancellor'." 171.
[19] Cross, *Philip Snowden,* 205.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

certainly always will resist, any proposal of confiscation."[20] Initially he had proposed that there be a capital levy on the wealthy to pay for the cost of the war, but even this was never enacted.[21] Instead of taxing the wealthy he proposed in its place a Royal Commission "composed of the very best men of all parties"[22] and so Britain remained in debt, owing large sums to British banks and the American government. In fact, the national debt absorbed over 40 percent of the budget in interest payments alone. Cutting indirect and direct taxes, the Chancellor was forced to cut expenditures, making difficult any hope of genuine social reform.

Snowden argued for sound economics and a belief in the workings of a free market. Nationalization of industries such as the mines or the railways, while a given for Labour Party members did not necessarily mean under workers' control. These views were consistent with other middle class socialists, like the Guild Socialists and the Fabians (such as GDH Cole and the Webbs), all of who deprecated the idea that workers could run their own society. In response to Snowden's inability to deal with the unemployment problem, Dr. MacNamara, a Conservative politician in Parliament, remarked:

> Labour's record in respect of unemployment was pretty shameful. Before the election it "worked" unemployment for all it knew. Its solicitude for the man vainly seeking work was only exceeded by its bitter denunciation of the two previous Governments for their cynical betrayal of that man in the hour of his dire necessity. The Labour work schemes it found in operation, schemes which it denounced as beneath contempt. For the rest it had increased and extended the money relief furnished by the Unemployment Insurance Act, relief that it characterized as wasteful and demoralizing.[23]

---

[20] Ibid, 187.
[21] The *Daily Herald,* December 6, 1923.
[22] Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924, The Beginning of Modern British Politics,* (Cambridge:At the University Press:1971), 364.
[23] The *Manchester Guardian,* September 8, 1924. Dr. MacNamara's attack on R. J. MacDonald.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But even before the LP took office Thomas warned the British working class not to expect too much. When explaining why the LP intended to take office, Thomas said MacDonald and his colleagues are not interested

> because of the prestige or emoluments attached to office, but solely to give constitutional effect to the duty of carrying on the King's Government. He goes on to say 'did anyone really believe all the rubbish they had published about the attempt to form trade unions in the Army and Navy. That a section of our people responsible for guiding pubic opinion should hold such foolish views would make one despair.[24]

Consequently, the Labour government, long on complaining about the evils of the bosses, was short on solutions. The LP was committed to stability.

> Thomas acted as intermediary in assuring Stamfordham that MacDonald would form a government if asked to, would introduce 'no extreme legislation or…violent administrative changes' and would not 'play…up to the Clyde division…He committed MacDonald to accept the outgoing government's Budget and to let the King keep all his Household officers so long as they did not 'antagonise the government.'[25]

Labour promised the employers that they would be moderate. It would thus not 'play up to the Clyde' and demand anything unreasonable. While it is true that Labour was a minority government once in power, MacDonald chose for his Cabinet people who, in many cases, could not be considered friends of labor. For MacDonald's senior government he proposed eight representatives of the ruling class and seven trade unionists. Eleven of its members originated in the working class and nine belonged to the Union of Democratic Control (UDC).[26] Even Lords were represented in his cabinet. Lord Haldane, an ex-Liberal who had urged Baldwin to stay in office eventually took the post

---

[24] Ibid, January 2, 1924.
[25] Cowling, *The Impact of Labour,* 364. In a letter to J.M. Keynes in January 1918 Sidney Webb recounts in *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,* 150, that: "The Labour Party wishes to run a candidate for each University election, just to emphasise that it is not a workman's party, and that it claims support of all classes as a national party."
[26] Cowlings' *The Impact of Labour* argues that although the UDC can be considered liberal and loosely speaking in some cases "socialist" they were mainly from the middle class.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as Secretary of Imperial Defense. Beatrice Webb writes of Lord Haldane: "Haldane signified that when this Government is brought to an end by a general election he will dissociate himself from the Labour Party, and return to a detached position in the House of Lords-as an Elder Statesman ready to work with any Party."[27] Lord Chelmsford was appointed on Haldane's recommendation although a lifelong Conservative. "Parmoor-although a faddist-was a lifelong Conservative, Churchman and believer in 'Christian methods' in government who made a reputation in the 1895 Parliament by defending employers' rights in relation to Workmen's Compensation."[28] About MacDonald the Webb's *Diaries*note: "MacDonald is accepted by us all but he is not *liked* by any member of the inner circle of the Labour Movement: he is far more popular with the imported persons-Chelmsford, Haldane, Thomson, and the non-political Lord Advocate."[29]

Even the workers who were picked for the Cabinet were people who would not challenge the status quo. *Workers' Weekly* describes Johnston's role as Pensions' Secretary. Johnston was a member of the Coatbridge Trades Council and had reduced pensions of workers that were inadequate and that were lowered by the Tory Government even before Labour arrived on the scene.[30] The Secretary of the Mines went to Emmanuel Shinwell who, while he was a leader in the Clyde movement, opposed the nationalization of the mines once in office. According to the Manchester Guardian

> In a reference to the nationalization of mines, Mr. Shinwell said that did not mean the mines for the miners.' That was a false conception, which he repudiated entirely. The truth had been distorted to make political capital by Liberals and Tories. The miners did not want the mine so-they wanted them to be properly and

[27] Cole, ed., *Beatrice Webb Diaries, 1924-1932,* 40.
[28] Ibid, 40.
[29] Ibid, 17.
[30] *Workers' Weekly,* January, 1924.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> efficiently administered, but they did earnestly desire that the mines should be owned by the whole of the people. Neither did the miners themselves desire that they themselves should run the mines. They said that there should be enlisted all the available intellect, capacity, and energy associated with the industry. All they asked was that in the administration of the industry they should have their full share.[31]

This was the closest the LP would allow itself to get to a program that approximated socialism. In fact it never reached this goal. Nationalization of the mines, or their control, ceased to be on Labour's agenda.

As Prime Minister designate, MacDonald prevented the "Red Flag" from being sung in the House of Commons. "It [would] be by degrees that he hope[d] to break down this habit."[32] In an interview with the *Daily Herald* he said "why was it necessary to assume that the Socialist was going to 'abolish' the present state of society?"[33] The Tories had little to fear from MacDonald's tenure in office. He was so traditional in his acceptance of propriety that when the time came to be officially sworn in by the King, he took part in all the ceremonial pomp of the occasion.[34]

The working class not willing to wait for Labour to implement its program realized the necessity of organizing industrial action (even if that meant against the LP) if it wished to defend any of the gains that it had won over the years. Moreover, when workers once again began to assert their rights by striking, MacDonald raised the specter (although he never actually carried it out) of the Emergency Powers Act (March, 1924), allowing the government to call out the troops in order to force workers back to work. This was in response to a tramway strike where, although workers were making little

---

[31] The *Manchester Guardian*, June 9, 1924.
[32] Morgan, *J.Ramsay MacDonald*, 101.
[33] The *Daily Herald,* July 16, 1923.
[34] Ibid, 23; Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 194; Chester, *The Zinoviev Letter*, 142. "The King, [who] admitted to his private secretary, Lord Stampforham, that he would not be pleased to lose him."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

enough, they struck for only 8s a week increase. The drivers' maximum was at 67s, and the busmen and the underground workers agreed to come out in support. The strike affected 17,000 workers. In February, the dockers called a strike and won minimal gains. Employers were determined to break the strike by local settlements, and rather than accepting local agreements the dockers understood the acute need to stick together. They demanded "2s per day on the existing minimum rates, which are 10s a day for the larger ports, and 9s for the smaller,"[35] but they did not win nearly that much by the end of the strike. Ernest Bevin, the dockers' leader, terminated the strike before it could successfully win all of its demands.[36] MacDonald had a hand in undermining the strike. "In the House of Commons last week, to the loud cheers of the Tories, he [MacDonald] stated that the nucleus of an organization had already been set up for unloading foodstuffs, mails and what not." Bevin defended the move:

> The government is responsible for the moving of the mails. They have refrained from using soldiers, naval ratings, blacklegs or force of any kind. But they are being driven up against it, and soon will have to take the choice of exercising their powers or going out of office. That was the choice, and there is no need to beat about the bush. We discussed the position with the Government. I want you to

---

[35] Ibid, January 28, 1924.

[36] *Daily Herald*, July 10, 1923. In 1923 workers began to organize strikes in response to the impoverished conditions that marred their daily lives and often against the desires of their own leaders. As an example, in July 1923 the dockers struck. An estimated 40,000 workers walked off the job in such places as London, Hull, Grimsby, Immingham, Cardiff, Bristol and Avonmouth. In some other cities workers either decided to stay at work or proceeded slowly. The strikers were not only angry with the Board of Guardians but were angry with their union leadership as well. The call for a strike was for a new leadership and a new union. The author of an article written for the *Daily Herald* stated that he had discussed the strike with the men who were definitely in opposition to union leaders such as Ernest Bevin, Harry Gosling, Ben Tillett and the *Daily Herald* as well. When asked by the reporter whether anyone wished to stay in the official union, no one was in support. Once the strike began officials from the Transport and General Workers' Union (TandGWU) appeared at the Liverpool docks to express their opposition to the Birkenhead strikers. At the Victoria and Albert docks 800 dockers were angry at the fact that their leaders (the unofficial leadership of the strike) entered into discussion with the official union leaders. Thus, those (unofficial) leaders who had taken it upon themselves to oppose the will of the workers were forced to resign. The difficulty in ousting the old leadership had been demonstrated time and again, and in 1923 it was the dockers' turn to attempt this almost impossible fate and yet from the descriptions regarding the dockers' mood there was little sympathy for the traditional, inbred officials.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> see the influence on our judgment in the course of the developments that has gone on.[37]

In April the government, which had offered the miners a Minimum Wages Bill, narrowly averted a national coal strike, but in the end the miners were forced to deal with the coal owners who offered an increase for only twelve months. Miners' wages had sunk below 1914 levels. At the conclusion of this agreement the owners demanded the retraction of the gains of the previous year, setting the stage for the events of the following two years. J.R. Thomas saw to it that that the railway strike would not take place. Receiving notice from MacDonald, Thomas acted accordingly. MacDonald wrote, "I do hope we are not going to have a really serious strike…If it occurs, it is going to be a very nasty blow to us and is to increase our worries so much as to spoil our prospects. Of course, if it must come it will come, but it is beastly hard for us."[38] The *Manchester Guardian* reported on an unauthorized strike by NUR workers who had been denounced by their own union leaders. Cramp said: "This is a fight between order and mob law. It is only one manifestation of an underground movement that has been going on for a considerable time. Almost every large union in the country has been afflicted by this disease."[39] The leader of the NUR denounced his own membership at the same time the employers were threatening to fire them. In front of Unity House, a striker said:

> The Union had failed to function, and the men had revolted against that failure. It was no use asking the men to go back to conditions under which skilled men earned from £2 4s to £2 15s a week while unskilled messengers employed by the railways could earn from £3 to £3 10s. When the union opened up negotiations with the railway companies for the benefit of the shopmen the strikers' end would be accomplished. Meanwhile, the men would support the unofficial strike committee.[40]

---

[37] *Workers Weekly,* March 1, 1924.
[38] Ibid,
[39] The *Manchester Guardian,* June 12, 1924.
[40] Ibid,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Workers continued to pass strike votes in many of the major unions. Strikes went on continuously throughout the tenure of the Labour Government. According to Beatrice Webb:

> Sidney reports Henderson as saying 'that the epidemic of labour revolts reminds him [from police information] of what was happening in Russia in 1917 against the Kerensky Government'. Those little bands of wrecking Communists are undoubtedly at work. The unthinking 'leftism' of some of the minor Trade Union leaders makes them tools of these mostly middle-class mischief-makers. Also unfortunately MacDonald's present pose as an aristocratic charmer and courtly society man exasperates many of his honest and fervent disciples. 'MacDonald is no Labour man, he is one of us' said Milly Duchess of Sutherland to her sister Lady Warwick; 'he is the illegitimate son of the old Duke of Argyll,' she added. 'No,' said another grande dame, 'he is the son of the Duke of Richmond.'[41]

Her quote is indicative of the problems of the Labour Party. Webb describes MacDonald as a social climber, whose socialist politics dragged out for the masses had little basis in reality. Workers, in defiance of the LP continued to strike.

The NUR was threatened with the rescinding of the guaranteed day and guaranteed week independent of Sunday work. A number of shipbuilders that same month began to protest their wages as well. In August 1924, the building trades' workers organized a strike involving over 600,000 men. They demanded a minimum increase of l ¼ d. per hour and 1 d. per hour in London and the maintenance of the 44- hour week, and what is called 50 per cent of lost time.[42] Unemployment was widespread. Figures such as 17.9 percent in marine engineering and boiler making and 32.5 per cent in shipbuilding are but two examples among a population where unemployment was not abating. These two sets of workers were pushed to take action. The struggles of workers continued into 1924 as a result of the lack of any significant gains made during the 1923 strikes.

---

[41] Cole, ed., *Beatrice Webb Diaries, 1924-1932,* 18.
[42] Wood, *Hansard,* August 6, 1924, 2557.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus, by 1924 little in the labor leadership had changed, since little in the way of any real strategy by the Labour Government to alleviate the impoverishment of the workers was formulated. The LP never programmatically attempted to challenge the discrepancies in earnings between the employers and their workers. Labour's ineffectiveness was due to the fact that it could not fundamentally break with the confines of capitalism since it did not believe that in order to change society workers must run it. Therefore its policies while trying to mitigate some of the more destructive aspects of capitalism could not really break from its dictates. And while workers hoped that Labour could be pushed to take more "socialistic" stances, confidence in what Labour could accomplish was diminishing. Because class distinctions played less of a role in the philosophical underpinnings of Labour than did the question of community, people such as George Lansbury, a Christian socialist in a debate in the House of Commons challenged the class nature of the laws passed by the wealthy but only on the basis of some kind of abstract notion of 'community control'. Lansbury asserts that the lawmakers "Shall make them not for the interests of a class but in the interest of the community. I deny that we represent a class." Lansbury contends that he wished to "use Parliament for the purpose of getting control of the land and all the means of life,"[43] but did not recognize that capitalism had sunk its roots deeper than just in Parliamentary debate. In fact, Turner Samuels, another Labour MP, put the question of revolution frankly:

> I ask hon. Members to try to listen to reason for once. We are trying to cultivate the Constitution, and we do not want the country to be destroyed, because we intend that this country is going to be the inheritance of our people. We do not want any revolutions in this country, and so long as the Labour Party are in office there will be no revolution in this country. The only chance there ever was of a

[43] Lansbury, *Hansard,* June 26, 1924, 736.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> revolution was when the Conservative party were in office, and the only reason why the Leader of the Opposition went to the country last year was because he wanted to avoid the advent of revolution, by his going out of office.[44]

The fiercely liberal tone taken by Labour is one that categorically denies the class struggle. The leaders of Labour imbibed the tradition of middle class socialism, or Fabianism. Nationalization, although already in the program, was never put into effect by the Labour Government.

In this context, the *Workers' Weekly* discussed the cuts that were likely to take place in social reforms, such as the rescinding of a cut in the food prices. The cost of living by November was higher than when Snowden made an initial reduction in taxes. By November 1, it had risen to 80 percent above the 1914 level.[45] Those who could not support themselves often ended up in workhouses or labor colonies. Sixty percent of the glassworkers were unemployed, and yet the government maintained its contracts with glass companies abroad, whose workers worked for even lower wages. Steel and food were imported at much lower costs. And while protectionism was no answer to the problems plaguing the British economy, free trade by itself guaranteed that British workers would be made redundant. The Labour Party had no solution to the enormous problem of unemployment. In addition, MacDonald's foreign policy did not differ much from its predecessor's. He supported his government's intervention in Turkey in order to undermine a nationalist struggle led by Ataturk and he opposed Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan while attempting to guarantee Britain's dominance over the Suez Canal.

---

[44] Ibid, 742-3; Steven Fraser, in his book *Labor Will Rule*, (New York:The Free Press:1991), 150, explains the role of the British L.P. by citing an article in *The New Republic*. Editors council American liberals who were worried about workers' revolution in the US that the only way to safeguard against "deplorable class warfare lies…in the formation of a party of workers whose program would be as radical as the proposed programme of the British Labour Party."

[45] *Workers' Weekly,* November 21, 1924.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the case of India he suggested that home rule be granted but made no real attempt to successfully guarantee even the autonomy he promised.

> MacDonald categorized dependent territories according to racial hierarchies:
>
> With white Dominions intended to form an ever-closer Commonwealth in association with Britain, India to be 'nursed' towards self-government within a unspecified time-scale, and the tropical colonies to be maintained and enveloped as a duty and according to what MacDonald called an 'Imperial standard' of 'human liberty and the administration of justice'.[46]

And regarding rebellions of Britain's' colonies MacDonald supported the policies of his predecessors.

> In July 1924 MacDonald's response to a rebellion in Bengal by the Swaraj party was to support the Viceroy's view that extra-legal measures should be taken to deal with the conspirators. Labour sanctioned the Bengal Ordnance on October 25 to empower police officers not only to arrest, but to imprison indefinitely, any person suspected of having the intention of committing certain crimes set out in the criminal code.[47]
>
> After six months the Ordinance was to expire and upon its expiration the government proposed to pass these provisions into law in the Bengali Legislative Council. The possible passage of this law was roundly condemned by all segments of Bengali society, but this did not deter the government from exercising "its arbitrary powers and [it] 'certified' it, and it became law."[48] Moreover, the pacifist Mr. Leach heralded support for the bombing of Iraq.
>
> Let me say the British Air officers and men are invariably the model of chivalry, patience, and goodwill…They know they have been libeled in British newspapers, and nobody has defended them. Well, I defend them. I have talked to many of

---

[46] Stephen Howe, "Anti-colonialism in British Politics": *The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964.* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1993), 45; also see J.M. Winter's *Socialism and the Challenge of War:Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-18,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul:1974). Winter describes pretty thoroughly the racist attitudes of the Webbs especially against the Chinese. 43.
[47] Mesbahuddin Ahmed, *The British Labour Party and the Indian Independence Movement, 1917-1939,* (New York:Envoy Press:1987), 63.
[48] Ibid, 64.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

them, from Air Marshal Sir John Salmond downwards, and I realize how they feel about it.[49]

While this provides no explanation or rationale for why Labour should bomb a country that had not declared war on Britain, coming from a pacifist socialist an explanation like this is incomprehensible.

The policies of the LP can hardly be surprising when its members historically argued for an open door policy suggesting that this policy would lead to universal development. And according to Partha Gupta, Morel, the secretary of the UDC, held "a non-vindictive policy towards the Germans with regards to their colonies",[50] that is there was an implicit acceptance of imperialism. Morel's opposition to intervention of French troops in Germany was not only an objection to French imperialism, but he feared that France was using "black troops" to oppress white Germans.[51] Morel represented the LP's left wing. Even espousing these views, he was the LP's most important proponent of antimilitarism and a consistent antiwar activist, but was not appointed to the Foreign Office. MacDonald reserved that position for himself. J.R. Thomas, also given a post in the Cabinet wholeheartedly endorsed the concept of Empire. "As I see it, this Empire is a trust for which we are the keepers for the British race. Can we not develop it as it deserves? Let there be no mistake. What I mean by development is a fair chance for the child, a real outlook and opportunity for the parent-in short, an Empire of happy and contented people."[52] And while "pacifistic" leanings in the LP had prevailed the year before, by 1924 increased funding for the Navy had been introduced. The LP did little to

---

[49] *Workers' Weekly,* August 2, 1924.
[50] Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and The British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, (New York:Holmes and Meier Publishers:1975), 31
[51] Read Catherine Ann Cline, *Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party 1912-13,* (Syracuse:Syracuse University Press:1963), 79.
[52] Phillpott, *The Right Hon. JH Thomas*, 183.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

change the predominant policies (partly because of the time constraints and partly out of inclination) that had been established by its predecessors, both the Liberal and Conservative governments.

The Communist Party, although still small, had developed some notoriety by 1924 and had taken a contradictory stance in relation to the Labour government. Lenin had argued that it was important for revolutionaries to be in the LP so that they could be involved politically with the masses of workers who engaged in politics, but he took a critical position in relationship to it; that is, he encouraged workers to vote for the LP while at the same time pushing the Communists to expose its reformist nature. But the CP had an inconsistent approach to the new government.[53] Encouraging workers to vote for it arguing correctly that its victory would be a positive step, the CP had initially greeted its victory with mixed voices. Its leading theoreticians, J.T. Murphy and Palm Dutt, had opposing points of view. Dutt argued that the LP represented some kind of workers' government to be wholeheartedly supported, while Murphy argued the opposite.[54]

Over time these positions would plague the CP in its relationship to such questions as the General Strike. But it did not define itself merely by its support for the LP. Its membership, although small, was becoming an ever-growing factor in the

---

[53] Durham writes in "Origins and Early Years", in mid-January, 1924, 140, "JT Walton Newbold said: 'In the next few months we shall have to do a great deal of barking back at the 'boss' class, and as little as possible, I hope, of snapping at our leaders. We must set ourselves to rally the working class in support of our leaders and theirs'." By 1922 the CP was hoping to "fight the reactionary junta and seek to transform the L.P. into an instrument of revolutionary progress." 138. Moreover, the *Communist Review,* 90, argued that "many members sold papers they did not have time to read, introduced resolutions at trade union branch meetings that they did not understand, and there being exhausted by hyper-activity, while education and political development was neglected." It is thus no wonder that the CP could not arrive at a clear line regarding the role of the L.P.

[54] Murphy's position, simply stated, was that MacDonald's party was a bourgeois party. To support MacDonald uncritically would have meant that the C.P. would have had to give political support to the more reactionary layers of the L.P. and trade union leadership, thus supporting the rule of the capitalists.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

industrial arena as well. It organized the first National Minority Movement (August, 1924) in the unions with 271 delegates encompassing 200,000 workers. Since the CPGB played such a prominent role in the 1926 General Strike, a section will be devoted to their politics alone. With all of their theoretical confusion and inability to apply a consistent political framework they were still given tremendous support causing the conservatives to attack the LP, ultimately bringing down its government. Once accomplished, this helped to frame the Tories political relationship to the working class thereafter. On the pretext that the editor, J. Campbell, of the *Workers' Weekly*, a CP paper, had allowed an article to be printed discouraging the military to shoot their fellow workers in the event of a strike the Tories went after the LP. MacDonald's willingness, and then unwillingness, to try the editor for treason encouraged the Tories to oust Labour. Bowing to the pressure of workers to defend Campbell, MacDonald vacillated. As the *Workers Weekly* reported, "A prosecution was foolishly begun, and then withdrawn in face of a growing chorus of left-wing protest. The Law Officers responsible stated that the decision to withdraw had not been taken on political grounds; but hardly anyone believed them."[55] This incident was the opportunity the Tories were waiting for to undermine the Labour government. MacDonald's reluctance to deal with the question did not derive from his unwillingness to deal harshly with the Communists, but he understood that this disingenuous attack was a flimsy pretext to control workers and that they understood and opposed it. In order not to lose face, MacDonald stressed Campbell's war record and argued that he was only the temporary editor and thus should not be prosecuted. But what Mr. Thomas feared the most was that it would drive the working class closer to the Communists, jeopardizing

[55] G.D.H Cole, *A History of the Labour Party From 1914,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd:1948), 164.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the legitimate union movement. Thomas argued, "You will pay a heavy price if you drive the constitutional trade union movement of this country into the hands of the rebel."[56] Still, the Tories who feared the influence of the Communists innately sensed the weakness of the Labour government demanded that Campbell be tried.

Labour's indecisiveness and compliance disenchanted the working class with its slowness to act. By October 1924 thousands of miners were being let go in such places as Durham, and the miners once again militantly challenged these decisions. The response of the Labour Party members was not even one of anger. Mr. Shinwell, the Secretary of the Mines, responded to the news with great reserve.

> I am aware that a considerable number of collieries have been closed during the last few months both in Durham and in other coalfields. I have, however, no power to compel any colliery to continue at work against the judgment of its owners, or to provide them with funds for the purpose, and I fear therefore, that the inquiry which my hon. Friend suggests could not enable me to take any effective action.[57]

The LP would provide no challenge to the traditional Tory policy.

The miners were not as sanguine as Shinwell about the layoffs and were thus unwilling to accept Labour's sacrifices. The normally liberal *Manchester Guardian* railed against them for adopting a policy that was supported by the extremists.

> Today's decision at the miner's conference was a victory of the extremists coming from the Celtic fringes, with the support of Durham. When the Executive at their meeting on Wednesday decided to recommend the acceptance of the position and the taking part in the work of the royal commission, the extremists announced their intention to challenge the policy of the Executive and the challenge has been made and carried through with a surprising measure of success. It may well happen that today's vote will be a tonic to Mr. A.J. Cook, for it is the affirmation of his policy. [58]

---

[56] Thomas, *Hansard*, H.C., October 8, 1924, 692.
[57] Ibid, October 2, 1924, 361.
[58] The *Manchester Guardian,* October 9, 1925; Durham asserts in "Origins and Early Years," 133, that "It should be borne in mind that although the CP was not affiliated, some of its members were members of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But to be sure the non-Labour members saw the Communist handwriting on the wall. On the subject of perpetual strikes Mr. Becker astutely understood that Communists were becoming prominent in the labor movement because workers felt dissatisfied with their leaders.

> The last strike was waged by several different and contending parties, and undoubtedly there was a Communist element among them. I do not say that trade unions are Communistic in their attitude or methods, but there is a strong Communist movement within the union, and some distinguished Members on the other side have said so, and it has been said that the movement even threatens the security of the unions.[59]

Thus, the ongoing saga that was at the core of the relationship of the LP and the CP. Labour, given its support of capitalism albeit in a modified form feared the Communists more than they did the employers, and therefore felt it necessary to keep the Communists at arms length. Although initially allowed to join the communists were generally rebuffed although in some places they could still join. But by 1924

> both the Labour Party and Trade Unions Congress are stiffening themselves against the Communists. The executive of the Labour Party meeting at Hull yesterday, decided to recommend to the party conference in London next month that members of the Communist party may be accepted as delegates but cannot be endorsed as Labour candidates.

On the agenda was the expulsion of the CP. On September 24, the *Manchester Guardian* reported: "The [Labour] conference is also almost certain to refuse the request of the Communist party for affiliation; a definite challenge will be thrown out."[60] By 1925 Communists were even excluded from individual membership. The Liverpool Congress of September 1925 gave the LP the impetus to exclude them altogether. In fact at the

---

L.P. as well, and were able to play an important part in the fight to get constituency L.P. and trade union support."

[59] Becker, *Hansard*, H.C., June 26, 1924, 722.

[60] *Manchester Guardian,* September 24, 1924; Lewis, *The Zinoviev Letter*, 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Congress MacDonald said: "I do not think that we will go down in any of the important divisions, but the Communists will have to be fought with the gloves off."[61] This was seen as a signal to the Conservatives who at their annual congress in October promised to prosecute Communist Party members, ultimately jeopardizing the trade unions and attacking the workers in the process. Resolutions were passed that would cripple the trade unions and prosecute the members of the Communist Party. The Conservatives were thus emboldened by the LP's attitude toward the CP and were therefore able to limit Labour's ability to put through any meaningful reforms.

The Labour government could not deal successfully with any of the acute problems that faced its constituency. Unwilling or unable to change much to alleviate the quickly decaying social environment, Labour was ill-equipped to deal with either the problem of housing or to guarantee protection for workers against the Trade Dispute Act (1911). Workers, who had been locked out, even through no fault of their own were often denied unemployment compensation even if they were not directly involved in a dispute with the employers. If workers in a particular shop or a union were involved in a strike, a walkout, or other type of dispute, or were locked out by other employers, they could be denied unemployment compensation simply because they were in the locality where the dispute was taking place. The responsibility was on the worker to provide proof that he was not involved in any way, or that he did not support other workers who were on strike. Meanwhile, employers who were federated in trade associations gave assistance to other employers who were involved in disputes with their workers.

The Unemployment Bill became a serious issue. The debate over the Bill centered on the question of how long a worker needed to be unemployed before he could receive

---

[61] David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald,* (London:Jonathan Cape:1977), 426.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

benefits. In many cases workers had been unemployed for years, and in other cases children leaving school could do nothing but enter a job market where no jobs existed. If not removed, the clause that insisted that people make 30 contributions to its credit before being able to receive unemployment benefits would have prevented the less well-off workers from receiving even the small amount of aid that the government was willing to extend. For workers who had not worked in years and for children who were now considered part of the working class, this was impossible. Young workers would not have been able to amass those many contributions and were thus added to the ranks of the unemployed. The provisions of the bill were so stingy that those who were partially unemployed for three days in one week would not qualify for benefits. George Barker of the LP complained that a worker

> 'may work four days a week and he may be idle 33 per cent of his time, and yet he would not get one penny benefit from this Bill...Although these workers were only partially employed, and are receiving a very low rate of wages, they have to pay the very high contribution of 10d. per week out of their scanty earnings, and a man who is partially employed may lose 100 days work in the year, and yet he would not be qualified for benefit under this Bill...There are as many men partially employed as there are unemployed, if not more, and some of these partially employed men, owing to reduced employment, are actually getting no more income than men who are totally unemployed.'[62]

This bill, so obviously defective in its approach to the serious problem of unemployment, was proposed by Labour as a way to provide relief for those long without work. There were no provisions for the creation of jobs, and yet Ramsay MacDonald, arguing against the dole expressed the need to develop a healthy economy instead.[63] But no concrete solutions were advanced during Labour's tenure either. Many of the Exchanges denied

---

[62] Barker, L.P., *Hansard,* HC., May 20, 1924, 2115.

[63] Garside, in *British Unemployment,* 44, discusses the 'seeking work' test imposed on the unemployed in 1924 which 'put the onus of proof upon claimants to produce satisfactory documentary evidence of their search for work' if they were to receive any benefits.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

proofs presented to them by workers who were genuinely seeking work, but could not find any. They were then not only denied unemployment benefits, but also denied benefits from the parish council or the Board of Guardians because it was deemed that they were not genuinely seeking employment. Fear of starvation and humiliation at being denied benefits, fed workers' frustrations.

The Rent Restrictions Bill too provided little relief.[64] It provided for a reduction in rent by 10 percent since unemployment had persisted for so long. In addition, the Bill pointed to the deplorable conditions that continued to exist even after Lloyd George claimed that he would build "homes for heroes to live in." In a speech in the House of Commons by B. Gardner of the LP it becomes clear how seriously hazardous the housing conditions are. Moreover, with the hope of obtaining higher rents landlords evicted thousands of their tenants. Tenants evicted wholesale and few alternative living spaces. And while the LP attempted to retain controls, at least until 1928, they did little in the way of building new housing.[65] And yet in the city of Birmingham alone 19,000 families were still on waiting lists, hoping that housing would be made available. Against the proposal by the Tories that workers should purchase their own homes, the reply by Minister of Health, Wheatley, was one of ridicule. He queried how it would be possible for miners to buy their own homes on 8s a day. And yet Wheatley, while he wished the LP could propose a socialist program in order to provide housing, faulted not the LP but

---

[64] By 1920, S. Webb wrote in *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,* 138, to RJ Herron on the housing crisis in Britain. Wrote Webb "Do the women of the Seaham Division realize why it is that the babies in the mining-districts continue to die at so high a rate? It is partly because the Cabinet Ministers cannot make up their minds to take the action that would, as they know, result in a great improvement in the housing and the sanitation of the mining villages."

[65] *Hansard,* H.C., February 19, 1924, 2174; Coal Commission #16 AB400761, 3-4. Beveridge Report indicates that "In all districts, and particularly in some parts of South Wales, there are considerable numbers of houses which have been condemned as unfit for habitation, but which remain occupied by the miners, since there is no immediate prospect of their being replaced by better ones, and the closing of them would merely increase the existing over-crowding."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the capitalist system. Little could be done to improve housing. And although Wheatley castigated the previous government for its lack of attention to the housing problem,[66] he mainly provided housing in urban districts to the neglect of rural areas where the housing was even more run down and unsanitary than were apartments in the cities. Living in such dwellings was the leading cause of TB. In the previous years, subsidized housing was built largely for the wealthy, while the working class was excluded from obtaining these newly built homes. Luke Thomson of the LP argued that the 6,148 houses that were built with the aid of state subsidies and were sold for £800 and £900.[67] The situation of British workers continued to grow grim while the LP debated the issues. The Housing Bill was essentially made null and void by tremendous reductions of workers employed in the field. "The number of brick layers in 1914 was 73,000 and in 1924 it had fallen to 53,000, showing a shortage of 20,000."[68] The Housing Bill provided minimal protection for the working poor, but a more important Bill, the Eviction Bill, failed to pass. This Bill would have prevented workers from being thrown out of their homes for nonpayment of rent.[69]

Consequently little was accomplished, partly due to Labour's short tenure, but, more importantly, Labour never really waged a challenge allowing the problems to continue unabated. In fact, the real program of the LP, although criticized by some of its members, was to endorse the Industrial Council Bill introduced by the Liberal Party. This

---

[66] Wheatley, *Hansard*, H.C., February 22, 1924, 1467. The previous government provided 691 houses in January 1923. This was to be provided by private enterprise and 15,501 houses were to be provided by local authorities in Scotland under the act of 1923.
[67] Thompson, *Hansard*, H.C., June 4, 1924, 1499.
[68] Ibid, June 4, 1924.
[69] The Rent Restriction Act passed by Chamberlain in 1923 allowed landlords to raise rents.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bill encouraged industrial peace, arguing that it was somehow possible to avoid class conflict, but instead attempted to promote the identity of interests.

> At last capital has made up its mind that it has to take labour into partnership. No longer can a master say that he does not want to use the intelligence and the helpfulness which we find in our factories, and he is prepared to accept the help which can be found in our industries and to give a chance to the man who works in the factory to express his views and offer his suggestions for a more economical production of the work he is doing. On the other hand, labour must drop the class war and the social revolutionary ideas, which have made it difficult for both sides to work together. [70]

A rehash of the Whitley Councils, established during World War I, attempted to undermine the industrial warfare that was taking place in industry. One of the two criticisms of the Bill by an LP member was most apropos. E. Thurtle, (Labour MP) in his opposition to the Bill, said "I am reminded by this Bill of an old saying or aphorism which I have used before and doubtless so have hon. Friends here on many occasions; that is the saying that the capitalist is prepared to do anything to win over the worker except to get off his back."[71]

The one area where the LP could establish its "socialist" leanings was on the question of Russian trade. But getting MacDonald to agree to trade with Russia required tremendous pressure, without which the trade agreement would have been doubtful. After agreeing to resume trade with Russia (trade represented £50,000,000 yearly in state revenues) it was also necessary to guarantee a £30 million loan with the promise that two-thirds of it would be spent in Britain.[72] The loan and its sinking fund (this was money that would back up the loan) would have stayed in British banks and would have been extended to agricultural implements, shipping, and railway material. MacDonald

---

[70] Murrell, *Hansard,* H.C., May 30, 1924, 763.
[71] Thurtle, *Hansard*, H.C., May 30, 1924, 782.
[72] Read Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 376-377.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was equivocal about lending money to a country that had not repaid its loans. (These loans were originally taken by the Czarist regime). But it was argued that this would revive the British economy thus helping British merchants who traded with Russia and shipbuilders and manufacturers who built ships for Russia. Snowden had similar reservations. Ultimately the loan was agreed to but was never granted because the Tories replaced the LP in November. Since the Liberals were no longer a threat to the Conservatives, the latter thought it time to remove Labour from office. By November they were leading the government. But before this change occurred MacDonald was accused of hiding the fact that the CPGB had received a letter from Zinoviev, President of the Communist International, with instructions on how to organize revolution in Britain.[73] On October 24, the Foreign Office, alleging that the *Daily Mail*[74] was about to publish a copy of the letter, sent it and a draft reply to the press, which was published four days before the election. By not replying, MacDonald allowed the mystery surrounding the letter to fester, making himself fair game for the Tories who used this alleged plot to undermine him in the upcoming election. The letter was a forgery, a pretext to remove the Labour Party from office. Furious at MacDonald's lack of forthrightness, the *Workers' Weekly* wrote:

> By itself the "Red Letter" meant nothing. The *Daily Mail* could have published it, the *Morning Post* could have published it and it would have been treated by the mass of the people as simply a gigantic election stunt, but when it was accepted by Mr. MacDonald then a different complexion was put on it…He [MacDonald] has not before him any evidence of the authenticity of the Zinoviev letter. Nor does he demand any. He sits down and writes a ferocious Note to Rakovsky,

---

[73] Boughton,195 , "Bolshevik Attempt to Ruin Britain! The Russian Reds Call for Revolution! British Foreign Office Exposes Malignant Plot! Screamed a handbill issued by the Unionist candidate in Yardley."
[74] The title of the *Daily Mail* article was "Moscow Order to our Reds. Great Plot Disclosed Yesterday." According to the article The CP "was instructed to set up cells in all military units, and also in munitions factories and military store depots…[Thus would be established] in the event of an outbreak of active strife, the brain of the military organization of the Party." In the article there was a call for the "Socialist Ministers" to expel all the Bolsheviks in Britain.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> breaking a previous agreement and leaves it to the Tory Foreign Office Officials to send it to Rakovsky, if they have evidence that the document is genuine. The effect that the issue of such a Note would have on Labour's fortunes at the election, on the Anglo-Russian treaty, was obvious.[75]

MacDonald sealed the fate of the Labour Party. And while the latter deemed the letter a forgery in September 1924, in order to undermine the treaty with Russia by being ejected from office, no discussion occurred at the Labour Party conference. As significant as this issue was it was dismissed. Combined with this issue and their wavering on the question of Campbell, the Tories had ample opportunity to take down the Labour government. But Sir Simon not wishing to bring the government down, at least not immediately offered a proposal for a select committee to examine the situation. The Conservatives proposed censure. David Dutton, Sir Simon's biographer, opines that in this situation "the government probably preferring defeat on this issue rather than on a proposed trade treaty with the Soviet Union, where Liberals and Tories were also expected to go into the same lobby, insisted on making the Liberal amendment a vote of confidence."[76] As a result of a vote in the Commons the Conservatives amassed 389 seats to Labour's 148 with the Liberals garnering 38 votes. Philip Williamson remarked about the LP's defeat: "The Conservative party won a parliamentary majority of over 200 seats. The Labour party lost forty seats, but in gaining a million more votes than at the 1923 election it displayed an enduring potential."[77] In November the Tories regained control of the government. And although workers continued to look to Labour even with its failing record they did not give up the desire to regain their industrial momentum.

---

[75] The *Workers' Weekly*, November 13, 1924.
[76] Dutton, a political biography, 69.
[77] Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government,* 22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 12: THE TORY PARTY'S REVENGE

Between 1919 and 1926 crises continued to erupt in Britain, but in 1926 the majority of the workers felt compelled to support the miners in their struggle to obtain a living wage.[1] This movement spread like wildfire encompassing 3 1/2 million workers, continuing to grow even as the General Council called it off. Workers from around the world were so inspired by the actions of British workers that donations came in as far away as India to support that effort. The General Strike was the most important working class event that has been chronicled to date in British working class history. Even in its defeat it encompasses the spirit of the movement that had been growing since before the War. But most importantly, the examination of the General Strike will allow the historian of the working class some insights into the feelings, the attitudes, and the hopes of workers who lived during that very tumultuous period. Although the government took on a greater role in mediating the relationship between the employers and their workers during the war, resolutions to these conflicts generally came about through industrial action. Carter Goodrich, a contemporary and observer of the relationship of the working class to both their employers and the State, argues that:

> For progressive employers, and for trade unionists whose first priority was the restoration of 'orderly' industrial relations, Whitleyism [the means by which the government set up negotiations between the employers and their workers in order

[1] According to Morris, *The General Strike*, 32. "Harry Watson then an apprentice lighterman, remembers how he felt: In the branch, everyone present welcomed the decision to support the miners. I had a fair idea of the kind of work the miners did. I understood how dirty and dangerous and low paid it was in comparison with what they should have been getting. They were an important section of the community and we depended on them for everything. Take the river alone, we used to transport hundreds of thousands of tons of coal a week to the power stations up and down the rivers and canals. Dockers felt a kind of bond with miners. Also, I think it was in the minds of the older, more experienced men that the implication of the coal-owners' behavior, supported by the Government, was that if they got away with it with the miners, then everyone else in the working class would feel the wash of events. And when it was reported to us that the owners were asking them to accept not only a reduced rate of pay but a longer working day as well, then the indignation we felt at this contemptible attitude towards men of the caliber of the miners was so open and that there was no question or doubt in anybody's mind."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> to resolve conflicts] offered a means of containing the disruptive tendencies, which the war had unleashed. More collaborative bargaining arrangements would prevent the explosive accumulation of workers' grievances, and would either absorb or exclude the power of the shop stewards whose independent negotiating role was such a threat to established union-employer relations.[2]

Thus 1925 saw events escalating. William Gallacher, one of the leaders of the Clydeside Movement and a founding member of the CP, claimed that Winston Churchill's reintroduction of the Gold Standard was a decisive landmark in labor relations in Britain. "The march to the General strike really began at that moment. First it was the return to the Gold Standard which started the clamour for a lowering of production costs to boost exports; and a lowering of production costs meant only one thing to the industrialists of 1925-yet another cut in wages."[3] W.R. Garside astutely views the reinstatement of the gold standard in the context of international competition. New York had become a dominant "rival center of international finance [which] was paralleled by London's increasing difficulties as a short-term debtor to the rest of the world. Falling commodity prices in a period of excess supply impoverished British customers in primary producing countries, whilst her capacity as a foreign lender was weakened by the flight of 'hot money' in search of a better return."[4] Thus, argues Garside "the strength of the gold standard, "...depended upon the inherent strength of London as an international financial centre, not the reverse. But so long as the opposite belief prevailed, it was understandable that the monetary authorities should interpret external and internal stability as a natural concomitant of the successful operation of a fixed-exchange gold standard."[5] That is London had to maintain its reputation as the

---

[2] Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control,* XX.
[3] John Murray, *The General Strike of 1926:A History*, (London:Lawrence and Wishardt Ltd.:1951), 33.
[4] Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939*, 124-24.
[5] Ibid, 117.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stable financial center if it was going to retain any credibility. Meanwhile, every major industry was suffering with a decrease in production from the 1913 level, pulling down wages and increasing the number of people receiving some sort of benefit. Coal output declined from 92 percent to 88 percent. Iron and steel production similarly declined from 87 per cent to 76 per cent. In response to workers' demands for a wage increase, the employers, with the support of the Baldwin government, called for drastic cuts. Little was done to ameliorate workers' difficult living conditions.

The employers hoped to break the resistance of the miners, the most militant section of the working class. Kingsley Martin, a contemporary, argued that in no uncertain terms "William Joynson-Hicks and Mr. Churchill have frequently let us know that they regard the stamping out of Bolshevism as a primary duty." Mr. Churchill seems to have accepted the doctrine of the inevitable conflict in his reported remark that 'a little blood-letting' would do no harm."[6] By September miners in Whitburn, a mining town on the outskirts of South Shields, Scotland had been on strike for four months. Nine thousand miners were unemployed. Violence had broken out with the police over the use of blacklegs. A Young Communist League member

> got hold of a box and addressed a spontaneous meeting of 300 to 500 miners, and the meeting closed with the Red Flag and a unanimous decision to join the Minority Movement en masse; a further meeting of roughly 3,000 was held the following afternoon, the Clara Vale miners marching to the meeting behind the Lodge banner. 52 prisoners wearing red buttonholes who stole coal received 12 months in prison.[7]

---

[6] Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and The General Strike,* (London:Leonard andVirginia Woolf:1926), 29. Regarding W. Joynson-Hicks' heavy handed approach to workers the *Workers' Weekly,* December 5, 1925, quotes him as saying: "A good dose of Mussolini would not do any harm here." PRO, MEPO 2/1958. The government feared demonstrations of communist support by the working class. July 12, 1918 a procession of NUR workers, all wearing Communist Badges came from places such as Deptford and Bricklayer's Arms who ostensibly had offensive demeanor. The bulk of the demonstrators were young men.

[7] WCML, Tyneside Turning Left, September 11, 1925.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Conservatives were hoping that once the miners were defeated the Trades Disputes Act and the Political Levy would be abolished. But workers' resistance (especially the miners) increased and the police and military[8] were assigned even greater peacekeeping duties. In response to these attacks, the TUC met in London in April to organize a Unity conference between British and Russian trade unions and at Hull in September 1925 they adopted an "Industrial Workers' Charter, enlarging the powers of the General Council and greeting the President of the Russian Federation of Trade Unions."[9] "Workers of the World Unite!" and "Long Live a World-Wide Federation of Trade Unions!" were the slogans adopted. Vernon Hartshorn, former president of the South Wales Miners' Union, called upon the government to take ownership of the mines to deal with the problem of rising unemployment. Three hundred thousand miners had already been made unemployed but the employers argued for higher productivity as the answer to falling profits.[10] Even J.H. Thomas, at a National Union of Railwaymen's conference at Southport, called for state ownership of the railways, but was unhesitatingly opposed to the demand of the communists for workers' control. However, while the railway companies were asking for a wage reduction it was suggested that there be a 30s benefit for every unemployed person. Thomas outraged his membership when he opposed the suggestion and responded: "I will fight to the death to prevent the introduction of Russian

---

[8] All army and navy leave was cancelled and troop reinforcement was moved into London, Scotland, South Wales and Lancashire. In Liverpool two battalions of infantry landed from a troopship and marched through the city with steel helmets, rifles and full equipment while the battleships Ramillies and Barham, recalled from the Atlantic Fleet, anchored in the Mersey. Warships also anchored in the Tyne, Clyde and Humber, and at Cardiff, Bristol, Swansea, Barrow, Middlesbrough, and Harwich; Farman, *The General Strike,* 116.

[9] Scott Nearing, *The British General Strike: An Economic Interpretation of Its Background and Its Significance,* (New York:Vanguard Press:1927), 19.

[10] *Western Mail,* July 9, 1925; Marquand states in his biography of *Ramsay MacDonald*, 434, "before the benefits of reorganization could be felt, the Commission insisted, wages would have come down. The miners were being asked to pay now for future benefits which might never materialize. They refused to budge."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

methods into this country."[11] Angered by Thomas' statements, the membership of the Shoreditch Labour Party recommended to the National Exec that he be expelled from the Party.

> A great mass meeting of over 1,000 railwaymen in Manchester rallied to the Milton Hall on Sunday night to hear a report from their representatives who were delegates to the special delegate meeting…The meeting passed deliberately and unanimously, two resolutions, one condemning the Award and the other demanding J.H. Thomas' resignation.[12]

The union leaders could not quell the anger of the ranks. Moreover, the Communists were stirring up trouble that would create tremendous problems for both the old-line TUC leaders and the Tory government. The support given to the Communists was demonstrated in March at a meeting in Albert Hall organized by George Lansbury. The huge mass meeting of 10,000 "solemnly repeated after the chairman 'We call upon all soldiers, sailors, and airmen to refuse, under any circumstance, to shoot down the workers of Britain, and we call upon all working-class men not to join the capitalist Army'."[13]

Churchill had become Chancellor of the Exchequer under the returning Baldwin government. From its 90 percent value the pound sterling was revalued at the 1914 rate. Thus the pound sterling was overvalued by 10 per cent. "…foreign business men wishing to buy British goods discovered that pounds were 'expensive'. In other words, British

---

[11] WCML, File 14, Box 2 NUR Annual Conference, July 10, 1925.
[12] Railmen in Revolt Everywhere Repudiating Wages Board Agreement. JHT's resignation demanded. February 5, 1926. Warwick University, MSS 127/NU/DCI, April 9, 1926: From Eastleigh No. It was recommended to the branch "that in view of the general conduct and recent speeches of Mr. JH Thomas we are of the opinion that the continuance in office as the general secretary of this union [NUR] is proving a serious obstacle to the unity of the workers comprising the transport industry, is proving detrimental to the cause of Labour generally, and we hereby call upon him to resign his position in this Union at the earliest opportunity."
[13] *Workers' Weekly*, March 12, 1926 Albert Hall Sedition: Ten Thousand People Deserve Jail.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prices became relatively high and British exports suffered accordingly."[14] The result of this was that coal exporters had to lower their prices by 10 percent or loose export markets. Moreover, the *Workers' Weekly* remarked that within this new budget it was the employers and not the workers who were able to receive tax abatements

> Two things must be remembered about the Budget. In the first place, it makes the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie the present of about 33 ½ million pounds in respect to the remission of taxation. As far as the great majority of the workers are concerned, it makes no remission of taxation whatsoever.[15]

Not surprisingly, there were restrictions on credit and interest rates reducing the financial ability of employers to continue the existing rate of wages resulting in even greater levels of unemployment. Moreover, deficit spending "...strengthened the post-war urge to restore fiscal orthodoxy, both to eliminate inflation and to secure stability of the exchanges."[16] But most importantly, argues Garside, banks had become heavily invested in industry and many firms were failing causing banks to loose tremendous amounts of capital investment.[17] According to John Maynard Keynes "Mr. Churchill's policy of improving the exchange by 10 per cent was, sooner or later, a policy of reducing every one's wages by 2s. in the £."[18] Again Keynes remarked: "The policy can only attain its end by intensifying unemployment without limit, until the workers are ready to accept the necessary reduction of money wages under the pressure of hard

---

[14] Wootton, *The Official History of The British Legion*, 89. According to J. M. Keynes' *Essays in Persuasion,* (London:Rupert Hart-Davis:1952), 244, the foreign buyer was to pay 10 per cent more in his money or we have to accept 10 percent less in our money.
[15] *Workers' Weekly*, May 8, 1925.
[16] Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-39,* 318.
[17] Ibid, *211-212.* "When the boom collapsed many banks found themselves having to shoulder industrial indebtedness, especially in the cotton and steel sectors, principally to safeguard their original loans...Reconstruction, in other words, was being forced upon firms by their financial difficulties and not as a result of any rational plan."
[18] Pollard, Sidney, ed., "The Economic consequences of Mr. Churchill" *The Gold Standard and Employment Policies between the Wars*, J.M. Keynes, (London:Methuen and Co. Ltd:1970), 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

facts."[19] "Like other victims of economic transition in past times, the miners are to be offered the choice between starvation and submission, the fruits of their submission to accrue to the benefit of other classes."[20]

The result, therefore, of the imposition of the gold standard was that wages of British workers were lowered gaining the complete support of the press. "The *Times* (29 April) claimed that the great majority of businessmen would rejoice in the return to gold. The Economist (2 May) expected it to effect 'a definite broadening of the base of British commerce'; the new policy was subject for congratulation to the Chancellor and was 'the crowning achievement' of Montagu Norman."[21] Moreover,

> British coal exports in 1925 were 20 percent less than the prewar export average. As four-fifths of all outbound British tonnage was coal, the decrease in coal exports not only decreased profits in the shipping industry but it meant higher fuel costs for all British industry. The economic interest of the entire British capitalist class was therefore tied up with the coal crisis.[22]

The time was also quickly approaching for the miners' agreement to end with the coal owners. July was the date of expiration of the agreement with the owners who were demanding a cut in wages, longer hours, and an end to national agreements. On the miners' side, the MFGB asked not only for a raise in pay but continued demand for a national pool with no increase in hours.

> The majority of miners worked on piece rate, and were paid according to an elaborate price list, which stated the rate for each particular job. Normally each colliery had its own price list; sometimes there were several lists for different seams, especially where conditions varied a good deal…Taking the industry as a whole, it was clear that miners' wages had fallen faster between 1921 and 1924 than those of any other group of workers…By 1925 Government figures revealed

---

[19] Ibid, 35.
[20] Ibid, 37.
[21] Sayers, "The Return to Gold, 1925," *Gold Standard and Employment Policies*, 87.
[22] Nearing, *The General Strike,* 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that the average pay of miners was only 48s 6d a week-or lower than the pay of workers in the most depressed industries, such as textiles and shipbuilding.[23]

The showdown was to happen on July 31 with the expiration of the miners' agreement. The TUC promised that the miners would not be sacrificed. Lockout notices were posted in front of the mines as the Tory Court resolved that the mine owners should have been condemned for not reorganizing their operations, but no positive results were forthcoming.[24] The mine owners meant to defeat the miners; this was clear to workers from a variety of unions. The railway and transport workers vowed to place an embargo on coal if the lockout notices were not rescinded. Endorsed on July 20 by the National Conference of Trade Union Executives of the TUC, the fight that should have been waged in 1921 was imminent. Baldwin expressed the industrialists' desire to lower all workers' wages. "I mean all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet."[25] There was no clearer example of where Baldwin's sympathies lay. For all intents and purposes the Tories had placed themselves on the side of the owners. But fearful that the government was not yet ready for the showdown, Baldwin was forced to rescind his initial stand against a subsidy. This

---

23 Farman, *The General Strike,* 73. "In Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Cannock Chase, South Derby, Lancashire, and North Staffordshire they proposed to reduce the rate pay between 1s and 1a 6d per shift, and in Scotland by 2s. In Durham and South Wales the proposed rates were lower than those of 1914. The Durham miner was to lose 18s. 4d a week and his comrade in South Wales we to have his weekly earning reduced from 78s to less than 46s. There was to be no national percentage minimum for the industry and it was made clear that the National Wages Board proposed by the Samuel Report was to be no more than a rubber stamp for settlements imposed in the districts."

24 The Samuel Commission, published on March 10, 1926, proposed that the industry be made more efficient by promoting the scientific use of coal, by developing marketing and better labor relations. But it rejected nationalization but proposed that the state should acquire the minerals and thus obtain the royalties. It opposed the continuation of the subsidy and supported the owners' demand for productivity gains either longer hours or less pay.

25 Ibid, 41; Marquand notes in *Ramsay MacDonald*, 438, that MacDonald concurred with this decision. In fact "As one would expect, he agreed with the General Council's decision to make peace and shared its growing exasperation with the miners. It seemed as obvious to him as it did to Bevin and the negotiating committee, and as it had appeared to do to the miners' leaders themselves for a fleeting moment on the eve of the strike that there could be no settlement without some reduction in wages at some time."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

became known as Red Friday. Before the subsidy was granted, the General Council had been prepared to force the miners to accept the Samuel Report, which, although it called for a reorganization of the mines, also called for wage reductions. Thomas remarked that: "given an opportunity the General Council would recommend wage cuts and leave the miners to like it or lump it."[26] Thus the subsidy was granted but only temporarily. As of May it was to be rescinded.

The events leading up to Red Friday and then to the General Strike were ones that rocked Britain. Although difficult to predict what would have happened had the union leadership maintained the struggle a little longer, given their unwillingness to wage a concerted industrial struggle, it is important to note that the fact that the General Strike was called at all represented a hardening of the lines for both the employers and the workers. According to Gallacher, "Baldwin had capitulated primarily because the Government was not yet fully prepared to meet the organized workers on a head-on clash."[27] The Earl of Scarborough, writing six months later, concurred.

> 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, the transport and the provision of efficient personnel at a moment's notice would have been extremely difficult.[28]

Ramsay MacDonald also concurred. "The Government has simply handed over the appearance, at any rate, of victory to the very forces that sane, well-considered, thoroughly well-examined socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy."[29] Now MacDonald was so compromised that neither he nor the TUC would be effective in

---

[26] Farman, *The General Strike,* 105.
[27] Ibid, 43.
[28] Wilfred Harris Crook, *The General Strike: A Study of Labor's Tragic Weapon in theory and Practice,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press:1931), 297.
[29] Ibid, 44.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

staving off either the employers' offensive or the inevitable reaction on the part of the workers to defend their standard of living. Baldwin stated that the Government had

> found itself challenged with an alternative Government…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…it is not wages that are imperiled; it is the freedom of our very Constitution.[30]

Whether Baldwin was just grandstanding or not, the truth is that given the magnitude of the strike both the government and the union leaders feared that challenges may have been brought against the British government and its very institutions. Hoping to keep the strike within the bounds of legitimacy the *British Worker* (the paper of the TUC during the strike) never ceased to explain to the ranks that this was an industrial struggle and had no intention of challenging the Constitution. But with 3.5 million people on strike there was no guarantee that it would not get out of control. In fact, according to Scott Nearing, in response to the question of constitutionality, he wrote: "I remember a huge meeting cheering for several minutes when a miner said: 'If the British constitution makes a miner work underground for less than £2 a week, it is about time that constitution was challenged.'"[31] For the GC leaders to honestly believe that taking over the responsibilities that the government generally handled was merely an industrial and not a political act, was either naïve or self-delusional. Because the union officials understood the stakes, their fear of losing control was ever constant. J.R. Thomas thought it a definite possibility. "Thomas confessed: '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

[30] Baldwin, May 3, 1926, 74.
[31] Nearing, *The General Strike,* XIV.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

knows what would have happened'."[32] The reality was that losing control was indeed a definite possibility. The strike began when printers at the *Daily Mail* refused to set an article called "For King and Country" which denounced the miners.[33] Protesting that they knew nothing of the incident, and even denouncing the unauthorized act, the union leaders tried to ameliorate its impact. But the mine owners used this as a pretext to keep in place the original lockout notices. Whether MacDonald thought it unwise, the hotheads were becoming an important factor in the struggle that was shaping up.[34]

The police and military were sent into the mines. Arrests were widespread and some strikers were even physically intimidated. This was most prominent in places such as Wales, where there had been a traditionally tight-knit, militant culture that often found miners voting for communists. In an article in the very conservative *Western Mail* "Miners and Police Clash:16 Strikers and Four Officers injured in West Wales" the superintendent claimed that a miners' demonstration was granted permission to send a deputation to the collieries where other miners were working. At that point, according to the superintendent, the rest of the crowd surged forward and a fight broke out with the police. According to the workers, the reverse was true.

> A police inspector came up and talked now to the leaders, diverting now the original route and told us to go the other way you see. And we did go the other way. Now it was just a mountain bareness, not a stone to be seen, now on the road, if we had taken the road there was plenty of ammunition there, but we never thought, we never had that in our mind at all. All we wanted to do was to try and get these people who were blacklegging in the Rock Colliery to come out in

---

[32] Renshaw, *Nine Days That Shook Britain,* 177.
[33] Morris, *The General Strike*, 236. "The Daily mail did not appear in London but the Manchester edition carried the contentious editorial calling all 'law-abiding men and women to hold themselves ready at the advice of King and Country.' It said the strike was intended to bring suffering upon the great mass of innocent persons in the community and that the miners were 'at war with economic law'."
[34] SWML, Aud 1998, February 4,1974. Eddie Thomas a miner during the '26 strike said in an interview that miners were becoming interested in left wing politics. When asked whether audiences for people such as Pollitt or Oliver Baldwin were good he responded Oh Yes! In addition the education classes that miners took discussed questions such as internationalism vs. Nationalism, fascism and socialism etc.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> sympathy with us. Well anyway this Police inspector now had our leaders now and we followed them down as soon as we came within say 200 yards out came a battalion of police, with truncheons, drawn, and hitting right and left on everybody.[35]

And according to Glyn William, "all the policemen were on the road. I remember, just after the riot now that they wouldn't allow you to be more than five gathered together to speak on the road in groups. And there was about two or three policemen always together about every say fifty yards."[36] The South Wales Miners Federation had a long history of militancy and socialist sympathies. Many of the most advanced workers politically were from Wales. Noah Ablett and Arthur Cook, authors of *Miners' Next Step*, a syndicalist treatise on the mining industry were Welsh. The culture of the mining community was an important aspect in shaping the miners' consciousness. Communities dubbed *Little Moscows* in Scotland and Wales even retained their militancy after the GS was defeated. To demonstrate the extent of the sympathy the Miners Minority Movement was instrumental in organizing the strikes there. Mardy, a mining community in Wales, for example, had a very strong CP presence.

Intent on smashing the strike the government relied not only on the military and the police[37] but it also encouraged fascists[38] to help it meet the demand for labor in the

---

[35] SWML, Aud 220; Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, 200, asserts that "One man formerly in the Leinster Regimen, the Black-and-Tans, and the Ulster Constabulary, who had joined the Gamorgan Police Reserve who were lent to the Carmanthenshire force for the duration of the strike wrote I felt very proud to have had the privilege of being amongst those who joined in the battle cry of 'Up Glamorgans' and let the Communist swine see what we were there for."

[36] Ibid,

[37] According to K. Jeffery and P. Hennessy *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking since 1919,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul:1983), 111. "The number of troops in Great Britain was now about five times as large as in 1921."

[38] The Organization of Maintenance and Supplies (OMS) ultimately merging its forces with the governments, incorporated British fascists to supply labor in the event of a general strike. Farman writes in *The General Strike* 76, "By May 1926, the British fascists had virtually ceased to exist as a separate body…It is likely that Lord Hardinge, president of the OMS, had indirect contact with the British Fascists through his cousin, the Rt. Hon. Arthur Hardinge, who sat on the party's executive. Some members also offered to enrol as special constables, provided they could serve as a body under their own officers." 44.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

event of a serious strike. Long before the General Strike even occurred, the government prepared for the showdown. This was not true of the trade union leadership. They were paralyzed by fear until the strike was upon them. But it wasn't just miners being hit by massive cuts, strikes among the seamen also flared up as their wages were reduced by £1 a month with the express consent of their union leader, Havelock Wilson. "So far as I am concerned" said Wilson, "there will be abuse heaped on me in tons. I do not hear. I am not there. I am safely fixed in a place called St. George's Hall. What does it matter to me if a fellow on a ship is cursing me and saying I ought to be shot?"[39] In response, seamen at Avonmouth decided to hold up the Piako, an 8,000-ton vessel belonging to a New Zealand shipping company, until the wage cut was cancelled. Both Southampton and Bristol were affected as well. And the *Western Mail* revealed that:

> [a] resolution was also passed condemning the action of Mr. Havelock Wilson, President of the Seamen's and Firemen's union in leaving for Canada during such a critical period. The opinion was expressed that someone from the rank and file should take over the leadership. At Southampton the crew of the 15,000 ton royal mail steam packet Arlanza, which is due to leave for Buenos Ayres on Friday refused to sign on at the reduced rate. The crew of the same company's 3,000 ton vessel Glamorganshire also refused to sign on.[40]

The *Western Mail* railed against the workers reactions. Although the membership had for years been either unwilling or unable to oppose Wilson's leadership they were now willing to rebel.

The quest to drive down wages was in full throttle. The owners of the shipping companies employed similar tactics, as did the owners of other industries. Foreign shipping carried the bulk of the grain to the United Kingdom. The *Western Mail* reported, "It is estimated that at the present time 60 percent of the grain is carried in

---

[39] The *Workers' Weekly*, October 2, 1925.
[40] The *Western Mail,* September 1, 1925.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

foreign ships. Before the war British shipping was predominant."[41] Foreign workers receiving lower wages reduced the salary of British workers. Moreover, the Liverpool exchange denied support to the seamen when they applied for the dole. Told that they were not really seeking employment, their benefits were suspended for six weeks.

The engineering industry was suffering from the same fate. Employers asked for 50 hours of work for the day shift instead of 47, and 52.5 for the night shift instead of 47. "The maximum bonus for any week of 50 hours or over would be 12s and it would decrease if less than the 50 hours were worked."[42] Only one shilling would be paid immediately, the other eleven would come six months later and the rate of overtime would be reduced. By 1925

> the AEU journal for the current month, March, says in 'the dispute at present existing at the Government factory at Feltham, the men are on strike against the action of the War Department in giving notice to 52 men, 31 of whom are AEU members in order that their places might be filled by soldiers. The Factory is engaged upon the manufacture and repair of transport lorries for army purposes. The number of skilled men engaged gradually rose to 100. They were paid the district rate of wages, plus certain piecework bonuses. After a period the authorities decided that it was a military depot, and that it was their intention to introduce a system of substitution of military for civilian labour to the extent of 50 per cent…[43]

Unemployment was a serious problem in all of these industries. In a letter to the Sheffield Employment Exchange Cecil Wilson of the LP ask what chance there was for men of 60 years of age to find employment. The reply went as follows: "'No applications are received at the Sheffield Exchange for workmen over 60 years of age in any trade. Whilst there are several thousand workmen below the age of 60 unemployed, it is improbable that any inquires will be made for the older men." In discussing a

---

[41] Ibid,
[42] The *Daily Herald,* April 24, 1925.
[43] WCML, A Minority Movement Report, 3331 886, F16 Box 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

particular case, Mr. Wilson exclaimed that this man who had held a job for 33 years was told, 'he is not genuinely seeking work'."[44] And according to Lieut. Cmdr. Kenworthy, Liberal MP: "In Hull, we have been suffering from the most terrible depression in shipping and fishing and in the coal export trade. We have had 10,000 unemployed for years. The housing conditions in the worst part of my constituency are beyond belief."[45] In March, *Hansard reports,* "the average unemployment is 10 per cent or 11 per cent and yet, appalling as that figure is, we know that in certain trades and in certain parts of the country unemployment reaches 20 per cent and in other trades and districts as in the case of the building industry on the North East Coast it reaches as much as 50 per cent."[46] During the same month there were over 250,000 women workers seeking employment. One in three women was disallowed benefit.[47] On the word of employers alone workers were denied benefits. Those who became sick were denied benefits. Training for disabled ex-servicemen was cut. Grants for relocation were cut. The employers were waging war against the British working class.

Vernon Hartshorn who argued that the capitalist press was whipping up unnecessary fear that revolution was about to occur, sympathized little and understood less clearly than did the employers the extent of the workers' bitterness. He attempted, as did the rest of the TUC leaders, to dissuade people of this feeling, and once again tried to explain that there was nothing unconstitutional in what the trade unions were attempting to do. And even at this point, knowing that the government's subsidy would run out (May, 1926) and knowing that a strike was likely, the leadership did not prepare any sort

---

[44] Wilson, L.P. *Hansard,* H.C., March 18, 1926, 636.
[45] Kenworth, L.P., *Hansard*, H. C., April 21, 1926, 1325.
[46] Thomson, *Hansard,* H.C., March 18, 1926, 626.
[47] Wilkinson, *Hansard*, H.C., March 18, 1926, 654.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of strike plans until April 29 and then they only hatched a sketchy plan. The miners, and not their leaders, were beginning to organize defense guards through their lodges for fear that they would be forced to confront the British fascists as well as government forces.

In order to make good on their pledge that there would be no challenge to the government or to capitalism, the TUC leadership did everything in its power to keep the strike as apolitical as possible. MacDonald denounced the militants as enemies. They implored the government to ameliorate the crushing poverty of the workers. Demonstrating a genuine frustration with the government, but not being in charge of it and thus not being responsible for its policies, the LP was free to criticize. Fear that the masses of workers would find the system, not just the sitting government unacceptable and wage an industrial struggle that could possibly bring the entire state into collapse, was inducement to take the negotiations more seriously. The lesson of Russia had not been lost on the either the LP or TUC leaders.

By 1924 the CP built the Minority Movement, with tremendous support, especially among the miners. Hoping to challenge the leaders at its annual Trade Union Congress in Scarborough (1925), the Minority Movement afforded the Communist Party important credentials.[48] Two members of the all-Russian trade union council attended with other visitors from various international trade union organizations. According to the *Western Mail,* when the

> delegates arrived they were confronted with the line of seamen drawn up, displaying sandwich boards bearing the words, 'Seamen's dispute: no wage reduction: down with Havelock Wilson and the shipping federation…The

[48] Morris, *The General Strike*, 162. The government thus became worried about revolutionary activities. "The Communist Party in this country was small…but we thought it was gaining in strength and we knew that by consistently taking the lead in industrial disputes it would gain a secure hold on certain parts of the trade union movement. We were particularly worried by the strength of the minority movement in the mining industry and by the attempts to organize the unemployed."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> delegates of the National Sailors' and firemen's union were greeted with cries of 'Traitor' from those sandwich board men at mid-day.[49]

Resolutions of all kinds in opposition to wage cuts, support for Russia, opposition to British imperialism in India, support for a decent standard of living for their workers were just a few of the demands raised at this historic congress. Delegates discussed such questions as capitalist mismanagement and even passed a resolution declaring

> that the trades' union movement must organize to prepare the trades unions in conjunction with the party of the workers, to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. At the same time the Congress warned the workers against all attempts to introduce capitalist schemes of co-partnership, which in the past had failed to give the workers any positive rights, but instead had usually served as fetters, retarding the forward movements.[50]

But caught up in their enthusiasm, the militants (especially the CP) missed an important feature of the congress. The trade union leaders were not revolutionary and thus did not wish to challenge the government. Accordingly, J.R. Clynes (General Workers) rose. "I do not fear to throw such weight as I have on the side of caution…He spoke quietly and very slowly. I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is my own. The proposals are hasty. The General council should take a year to frame these proposals and then submit them."[51] Clynes was not the only union leader to object to the radical nature of the congress, and while the militants felt that they had gained some successes, they misunderstood what had actually occurred. It would have been necessary to concretely challenge the traditional leadership, and not just hope that they would somehow comply with the will of the body. Even Wilkinson's plea for workers' solidarity was defeated. "Mr. Hallsworth moved and Mr. Callaghan (both of the Distributive Workers' Union) seconded a resolution to accept affiliation of the National Unemployed Workers'

---

[49] Ibid, September 6, 1925.
[50] Ibid, September 10, 1925; Also read Scott Nearing's *British Labor Bids for Power.*
[51] Ibid, 21.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Committee. Objection was offered on the ground that many of the Committee's members were not trade unionists."[52] Something as fundamental as worker solidarity, which would have militated against the employers' ability to pit one section of the working class against the other, should have been standard trade union activity. But, even that concept was not an obvious one. The fact that the unemployed council was run by the communists was an even greater incentive for leaders such as Thomas and Clynes to oppose the resolution. The union leadership had not changed since Black Friday. The Communists were unwilling to face this fact. Even where there was disagreement about the success—or the lack thereof —of the Scarborough conference within the CP itself, this had little impact on its ability to frame future interventions. The problem plagued the CP throughout the period of the general strike and would be an important reason for its failure.

By September the clashes with the fascists had already occurred in London. Three thousand demonstrators challenged them at King's Cross. Once again, according to the *Western Mail,* "the crowds grew large and the number of reds congregated on the other side of the road until, by the time they were half way down Penonville Road, the thoroughfare was completely blocked and the procession had become a mob."[53] Fearful that the situation was spinning out of control the government decided to arrest 12 Communists after ransacking their office. According to *Hansard,*

> the police received information last night that the Deptford Branch of the Communist Party, in conjunction with the National Unemployed Workers' Committee, and the International Class War Prisoners' Aid, were to hold a committee meeting with a view of organizing a mass procession, in which they estimated some thousands of men would take part, into the heart of London tonight. I [Sir Joynson Hicks] am told by the police that anything of that kind at

[52] The *Daily Herald,* September 3, 1924.
[53] *Western Mail,* September 15, 1925.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> the moment would be likely to lead to a breach of the peace, and acting under the provision I have directed the police not to allow that procession.[54]

Not surprisingly the Emergency Powers Act was employed to restore order. But at the trial hundreds of people arrived to show their solidarity with those who were arrested. "The crowd included many young men and women wearing red rosettes and badges, while one young man unfurled a red flag and a section of the crowd sang 'the Red Flag.' Two men paraded with sandwich boards on which were such inscriptions as 'release Hannington' and 'workers must say neither raids nor arrests can stop us.'[55]

> Some 25,000 London workers on Sunday welcomed the released communists and called for the freedom of others at the greatest meeting yet held on Clapham Common. After hearing speeches from leaders of all sections of the labour movement, the great crowd formed behind their banners and marched to Wandsworth…George Lansbury and Johnnie Campbell aided by megaphone shouted a message of encouragement to them, and following speeches from the released comrades and George Lansbury, the crowd sang the 'Red Flag' and the 'Internationale'.[56]

The government was taking no chances.

> Not only Communists but left wing ILPers and active Trade Unionists have been dealt with. The arrests have been of a mass character in some places whose strike committees have been arrested. At Birmingham the TU Emergency Committee (including several Labour Magistrates, TU officials, and J. Stracher, editor of the *Socialist Review* was arrested. In the same city the entire local committee of the CP was arrested. [57]

Protests were heard in the Rhondda because in West Wales Assizes, anthracites miners and Communists had been arrested and jailed. The South Wales Miners' Union prevailed upon the TUC and the LP for their support in this matter. In thiscircumstance even

---

[54] Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard,* H.C., May 5, 1926, 299.
[55] *Daily Worker*, October 24, 1925.
[56] Ibid, March 19, 1926.
[57] The *Workers' Weekly*, May 21, 1926. "They Must Release the Prisoners! Ruthless Mass Arrests."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

MacDonald, who so clearly hated the CP had to come to its aid.[58] The sentences were steep. Five received a sentence of 12 months imprisonment and the remaining received six months for refusing to sever relations with the CP and its doctrines. Moreover, in the midst of all this the CP was actively organizing an unemployed demonstration that was to take place in June 1925. In response to Communist activity, Harry Pollitt, a CP leader, was kidnapped by five fascists in March, and the *Daily Herald* van was hijacked and crashed by members of the National Fascists in October. The result of the two trials found Pollitt's kidnappers not guilty, and the hijackers were merely charged with a breach of the peace. Middle-class people applauded the outcome because of what they perceived as "hooliganism provided, of course, it was directed against the 'Reds.'[59] As the crisis deepened the British middle class, worried about stability, flocked to the Specials, which was an adjunct to the military and to the police. Daily the situation grew more intense, and still the union leadership remained in denial. However, to their credit, the Edinburgh Labor Party, the TUC General Council, the Labour Party and a variety of other trade union bodies all condemned the treatment of the Communists and demanded the right of free speech. In addition, the Anglo-Russian Committee was set up in 1925 to develop relations and areas of cooperation between the British and the Russian working classes. The CP staked much of its hope on the committee. Not wishing to jeopardize what appeared to be friendly relations between the two bodies refused to criticize the General Council too severely. This factor was at least in part responsible for the defeat of the general strike and as a consequence the intensification of attacks against workers.

---

[58] Farman, *The General Strike,* 37. "A furious MacDonald publicly called it a 'disservice' to prosecute the Communist Party at such a time and warned that its 'potentialities for sedition' had only been increased."
[59] Ibid, 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 13: THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE NATIONAL MINORITY MOVEMENT

> I can assure this House [House of Commons] that, as far as the Communist party is concerned, our policy has been from the first in this miners' issue to back up the miners, to work along with the miners' organizations, and to help them in every possible way in order that they may be able to realize what they demand. We have not attempted to put forward demands, but we have always desired and attempted throughout the whole controversy for the last 12 months to back up the miners at every stage that they take in preserving their wages, and in a general way the whole of our education has not pivoted on any idea of a revolution amounting to the overthrow of the capitalist system or introducing even nationalization by degrees, but it has merely acted behind the workers' movement in order to safeguard the fall in their wages which the masters are seeking to get.

Mr. Saklaatvala, CP MP, May 3, 1926

There was no other left-wing organization that played as significant a role in the strike as did the Communist Party. The Minority Movement members, overlapping with members from the CP, were dedicated working class people who fought unceasingly for the rights of their fellow workers. But their political views were often confused and inconsistent, preventing them from taking advantage of the significant possibilities that the strike afforded them, namely the chance to put forward an alternative program to the one that was espoused by the traditional trade union leadership. In 1919, when the working class battled the police in the streets of Glasgow there was no coherent alternative for workers to consider. But in the General Strike and the time leading up to it, the CP attempted to organize an opposition, which actually managed to gain the ear of one the most important sections of the working class — the miners. Although there were Minority Movements organized in other industries, there were none as important as that of the miner's union. The purpose, then, of this section is to look at how the MM and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CP behaved, and to try to understand their impact on the workers' movement. The second half of this inquiry will be to examine the events in the Soviet Union and their impact on the very small and very new CPGB.

By 1924 Lenin was dead. Much of the possibility for revolution in Europe had subsided by 1921. The German uprising was crushed in 1923, and although discontent was still widespread, especially among German workers, the likelihood of another revolution was slim. The impact of the Russian Civil War and the decline in revolutionary activity internationally took its toll on the Soviet Union as well. By 1924 a faction fight was brewing within the Soviet Union's CP that would have profound ramifications for the world's working classes. Trotsky and Stalin represented different wings of the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky continued to encourage world revolution, while Stalin, the more conservative of the two, declared that internationalism meant solely the defense of Russia. Stalin argued, in 1924, that Soviet Russia had achieved socialism. Although the top leadership was aware of the struggle that was rocking Russia, the debate was kept from the ranks of the British Party and consequently shaped the politics of all the CPs including the one in Britain.

The Zinoviev letter became a scandal for the LP, although it was proven to be a forgery. Since MacDonald handled the incident poorly, the Tories were able to capitalize on it, souring Labour's view on Communist affiliation. This then fed into the LPs decision at the Liverpool Conference in 1925 to exclude the Communists from membership. And although Lenin warned the CP that entering the LP was a tactic in order to engage workers, while ultimately **exposing** [my emphasis] the leadership for its defense of British capitalism, the CP's goal began to shift believing that it could win the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"left" labour leaders in order to gain support for Russia by pressuring the British government to open up trade relations. This policy was a contributing factor in the shaping the CPGB's politics between the years 1924–27. Consequently, this strategy was reflected in its relationship to the LP and the TUC through the support it gave to the Anglo-Russian Committee and in the almost uncritical support it offered to the General Council. The two major theoreticians, Palme Dutt and J.T. Murphy debated the philosophical underpinnings of Communist politics, with Dutt taking the position that although, initially enamored with the LP, he was now convinced that it was a

> 'broken instrument' and warned the CP that it had to wage an unceasing ideological warfare against it; otherwise the masters of empty rhetoric would succeed in diverting working class militancy. It was imperative that the CP maintain absolute independence from this phony left which was bound to be discredited. By contrast, Murphy argued that the LP, far from being a decaying political force, was "increasing in strength as the workers become more class-conscious", and was "inevitably destined to be driven closer and closer to our party.[1]

Darlington argues that Murphy took a much softer position on the LP because he was influenced by the new direction that the Russian party was taking. Zinoviev claimed that there was now an alternative road to revolution in Britain, that is, other than building a revolutionary party.

> At the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in June/July 1924 Zinoviev, referring to the CPGB and its leaders, such as Bob Stewart and Arthur MacManus, made this cryptic comment: In England, we are now going through the beginning of a new chapter in the labour movement. We do not know whether the Communist Mass Party of England will come, whether only through the Stewart-MacManus door-or through some other door. And it is entirely possible, comrades, that the Communist Mass Party may still appear through still another door—we cannot loose sight of that fact.[2]

---

[1] Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of JT Murphy,* 128.
[2] T. Cliff and, D.Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* (London:Booksmarks:1986), 151.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Murphy thought an alliance with Left LP members could provide such a door even arguing that the "bourgeois politics which dominate it today [will] be cleansed from its ranks."[3] Even after the CP was banned from the LP, Murphy pulled the National Left – Wing Movement together around the *Sunday Worker* newspaper, which had a circulation of 100,000, and brought together local Labour parties that declared that they would not support the ban. This was a radical departure from the politics of Lenin who argued always for an independent Communist Party giving only critical support to the left-wing leaders. The primary duty of all Communists now, according to Murphy, was to defend Soviet Russia. An open attack on the leadership of the Communist International would, he believed, encourage the imperialists in their struggle to undermine Soviet Communism. Arguing that Lenin and Trotsky were really at odds for 25 years Murphy set the stage for the defense of Stalin in his struggle with Trotsky, and defended the Russian state through all of its twists and turns, necessarily opposing the fight for world revolution.[4]

In 1925 the Anglo-Russian Committee was set to organize joint discussions between the Russian government and the British trade union leaders. The Soviet government hoped to foster relations with the left-leaning leaders, making it difficult for the Communists to criticize them. Convinced by Stalin that remaining on the committee was ultimately correct; the CPGB continued to pursue the relationship. Even after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, the Eighth Congress of the CPGB, held in October 1926, continued to endorse the same failing policy. "The attempt of the 'Left' elements in the Comintern to get the Russian unions to withdraw from the Anglo-Russian Committee

---

[3] Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of JT Murphy,* 131.
[4] Ibid, 141.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is absolutely incorrect. The Anglo-Russian Committee is not a union between the leaders, but a union between the millions of trade unionists of Russia and Britain" proclaimed Murphy.[5] But unfortunately, his analysis was a complete misreading of the situation. The TUC used the Anglo-Russian Committee to feign the appearance of a left leaning organization and when it no longer needed the Committee it broke off relations with the Russians. As much as the Russian leaders hoped to maintain a relationship and pressured the CPGB to tone down its criticism of the British labour leaders, the General Council was the one to break off relations with the Russians, arguing that they should not interfere with the internal workings of British trade unions. And yet the CP called for 'All power to the General Council' prior to and during the strike. They insisted that the GC, which represented the left-wing as well as the right-wing leadership, could be convinced to comply with Communist Party positions. And even after the General Strike was sold out, the CP called for "the closest relations between all bodies concerned affiliated or non-affiliated... regular meetings to be held to keep the men informed and keep up their moral...[6] The working class had been completely defeated and felt what amounted to as extreme bitterness and anger against their leadership. Calling for "the closest relations" with the union leaders was a misjudgment of the worst proportions. After the complete capitulation by the GC during the general strike it is unlikely that millions of workers felt anything other than a sense of betrayal, anger, demoralization, and hatred for their leadership.

While informing workers of strike activity around the country through its distribution of literature, generally under a variety of different names, the Communists

---

[5] Ibid, 146.
[6] Organ of Railway Communist Group, no. 16, May 12, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

often left workers without any way to proceed. For example the *Young Striker* (CP flyer) called for the ousting of the *Forgers' government* [the Tory government] by the TUC, and for the nationalization of the mines without compensation and under workers control'[7] but, as in past practice, it never explained how this was to be achieved. Its approach to organizing workers was very similar to the approach taken by the syndicalist who organized strikes during the war. Strikes would get larger and larger, putting pressure on the TUC to do its job and on the government to relent. The question of state power was never addressed. That would have necessitated a discussion about revolution. And yet, incredibly, the CP, even after the strike was called off, still continued to call for full powers to the General Council. Sometimes revolutionary, sometimes reformist the CP spread illusions in the trade union leaders and in the left-wing of the Labour Party. Many of these people were persuaded by Lenin that Bolshevism was the truly revolutionary approach but much of that remained on the surface. The organization was a victim of its past. At the unity talks (1920) the primary groups in attendance were the SLP and the BSP. The SLP reluctantly united with the BSP although it had difficulty with the idea of joining the LP, setting in motion a difficult relationship for years to come. The BSP on the other hand, contained such people as William Gallacher, one of the first to support the Stalinization of the CP. From his early days he was politically unsophisticated. For instance, in discussions on the Clyde during the war he would only entertain strike motions over industrial issues, while refusing to address important

[7] *Young Striker*, May 1926; On 11 May, their slogans were still 'Hold tight-that's right. When in doubt-come out. All power to the General Council. Join the Communist Party and stiffen the militant action of the Trade Union Movement" E.W. Edwards, "The Pontypridd Area" in Morris' *The General Strike*, 437; Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag,* 51. "Even in its initial formation the NMM declared that its aims were to gain a £1 increase in wages for instance while calling for workers' control of industry at the same time. This mixture of maximal and minimal demands precludes any systematic approach when dealing with the employers and with capitalism in general."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

questions such as stopping the war. J.T. Murphy an SLP leader and a leader in the new Communist Party while at least willing to discuss the general conditions brought about by the war, he would not raise the question of stopping it, although the SLP organ, the *Socialist,* continually ran anti-war articles. From early on the CP was perceived by many as the organization that would "be the connecting link between the miners' unofficial movement and the official movement among dockworkers, seafarers, railway and transport workers, and at the same time being attached to a centralized and disciplined national Communist Party, connect South Wales rebel activities with those of the rest of the country."[8] Alf Cook, the Party's South Wales' organizer, supported this perspective. Cook put forward the approach that the CP should be a conduit between different militant groups rather than build a revolutionary party and offering a revolutionary perspective.

The leadership's insecurity over theoretical questions, fear of being alienated from what they saw as the first workers' revolution and their innate syndicalist approach, resurfaced during the 1925–26 period, which resulted in the suppression of revolutionary politics for their syndicalist type of trade-union militancy. The CP entered the General Strike as a critical but loyal ally of the General Council. The Communists misunderstood the fundamental nature of trade unionism, that is, that it had made its home within the confines of capitalism and was therefore called upon to negotiate contracts and not make a revolution. The unions never claimed to be anti-capitalist. Neither the right wing nor left-wing union leaders believed that worker' institutions should be used to upset the status quo or should be used to raise the specter of revolution. It blamed the downfall of the General Council on the predominance of right-wing union leaders.

---

[8] Woodhouse, *Marxism and Stalinism in Britain*, 56.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The "left" tendencies were fairly effectively dealt with by the election of Thomas to the General Council in place of Marchbank, and of other Right-wing reactionaries to strategic positions. The death of Fred Bramley, the Secretary, probably had a weakening effect on the General Council as far as the "Left" policy was concerned. The General Council dominated by Thomas and Co., effectively sabotaged all decisions which were even suggestive of having emanated from the Minority Movement.[9]

The CP had taken on an importance far beyond its numbers.[10] "September, 1924, a 'Red Week' of recruiting, resulted in an increase of 750 members, and the establishment of forty-five new factory groups. Further recruits flowed in after the trial of the twelve Communist leaders at the end of the year."[11] The upsurge in working-class activity, allowed the Communists to make important inroads into the workers' movement while making a name for itself, and establishing a reputation as the most serious fighters for the working class. In August 1924, the first annual conference of the Minority Movement was held, with 200,000 workers represented. The conference called for the setting up of factory committees, which would move to become an instrument for workers' control. And as local centers of militant leadership it called for the setting up of workers' councils. A resolution was even passed to make the General Council the true leadership of the trade-union movement although the CP denied the fact that this would make the GC revolutionary. But by 1925 Stalin was looking for a détente with Britain, which he hoped would take place through the Anglo-Russian Committee. By the time the GS was called, the CPGB was thoroughly in tow, and rather than putting forward

---

[9] WCML, F16 Box 14, Third Annual Conference of the NMM, August 1926.
[10] C.J. MacFarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development until 1929,* (London:MacGibban and Kee Ltd:1966), 133. "The Communist Party emerged from the 1924 Congress with a strengthened leadership and an agreed policy on organization. By March 1925 fifty factory groups had been formed, almost all of them in the previous six months, and two months later the number had risen to sixty-eight embracing 10 per cent of the total membership, which was then 5,000. London had made the greatest advance with 20 per cent of its membership in thirty two factory groups which issued twenty-two factory papers having a total circulation of 5,000 copies a fortnight."
[11] Ibid, 135.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

revolutionary politics, that is politics that criticized the trade union leadership, their main focus was to attempt to push these leaders to the left. The March 27, 1926, *Workers' Weekly* expresses this sentiment. 'The General Council of the TUC must be made to function as the militant general staff of the whole working-class. The National Minority Movement only exists to push the Trade Union movement into militancy, and not to usurp its functions.'[12]

In order to comply with the new directives Murphy suggests that the Communists ceased to put themselves forward as the alternative because: "Our party does not hold the leading positions in the Trade Unions, it is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the government. It can only advise and place its forces at the service of the workers-led by others."[13] Therefore the Communists would not council the workers to remove their own union leaders even though their history proved that they would not endorse direct action and time and again undermined every challenge that workers waged against their employers. In December 1925, a National Left-Wing Conference was held under the aegis of Tom Mann, (CP), Councillor Joe Vaughan (LP executive) Joseph Southall ((ILP), Alex Gossip (furniture workers) and William Paul (editor of the *Sunday Worker*). Says Brian Pearce: "the aim of the Left-Wing Movement was proclaimed to be

---

[12] The *Workers' Weekly,* March 27, 1926. According to Pearce in "Early years of the CPGB," *Essays on The History of Communism in Britain*," 167, at the second annual conference of the National Minority Movement, in August, stress was laid on the granting of full powers to the General Council, with only a brief and vague reference to "obligation...to use that power to fight more effectively the battles of the workers", contrasting with the careful indication of the need to develop the control from below, lest the General Council use any increase in its powers to betray the workers, which had been a feature of the previous year's decisions."

[13] *Workers Weekly,* July 24, 1925.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

'not to supersede the Labour Party, but to "re-mould it nearer to the heart's desire" of the rank and file'.[14]

The April 30, 1926 issue of *Workers' Weekly* made it quite clear that that they believed the impending strike was nothing other than an enlarged version of an important strike. "To entertain any exaggerated views as to the revolutionary possibilities of this crisis and visions of new leadership 'arising spontaneously in the struggle', etc. is fantastic."[15] Murphy sided with Stalin against Trotsky, who argued that the CPGB should not criticize the trade union leaders too severely. In fact, Radek, when visited by the Conservative MP, Robert Boothby in Moscow, advised him to go home but added: "Make no mistake, this is not a revolutionary movement. It is simply a wage dispute."[16] According to the CPSU, revolution was simply not on the agenda since no revolutionary movement existed. Unless one was willing to break with the Communist International it was nearly impossible to oppose this point of view. On the authority of the Russian Party, the CPGB divided the leaders into a right- wing and a left- wing, which would prove fatal. Purcell, Swales, Hicks and Cook were all good leaders to be guided into revolutionary activity, but people such as Thomas, Bevin, Citrine et al., were leaders who needed to be watched, although the CP never specifically said what they were going to do. Despite the certainty of the CP that the left-wing labor leaders were different from the right-wing leaders, at the Liverpool Conference, the Communists were delivered a decisive blow when they were excluded from joining the LP, and the left-wing leaders

---

[14] Pearce and Woodhouse, "The Communist Party and Labour Left," *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain,* (London:New Park Publications:1975), 180. "It was reported at the Conference that nearly a hundred divisional and borough Labour Parties had suspended operation of the Liverpool decision. About fifty of these Labour Parties associated themselves with the National Left-Wing Movement, and Left Wing groups were organized in many others."
[15] *Workers' Weekly,* April 30, 1926.
[16] Symons, *The General Strike,* 136.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

made no attempt to defend them. This is most clearly demonstrated in the Communists' muddled position on the question. Pollitt, a founding member and leader maintained:

> In view of the overwhelming decision for complete solidarity registered at Scarborough, the new General Council will simply have to prosecute more vigorously the fight on behalf of the workers. True, the right-wing of the Council is strengthened by the return of one or two people who do not give support to the idea that we are engaged in class struggle, but I think that the mass pressure from behind will force even them to tow the line.[17]

Moreover Pollitt argued: "there was 'just a little danger of overstressing this point…The Russian trade union leaders are interested leaders who have proved their worth to the working-class movement and in whom we have complete confidence."[18] The *Sunday Worker* dutifully reported the opinions of even the right-wing trade union leaders without comment. We read on May 10:

> In reply to Lord Balfour's statement that the strike is directed against the constitution, the General Council states that such statements seem to be made to obscure the issue and inflame public opinion against the TUC. All that the TU movement desires is to obtain justice and equity for the miners. Mr. Poulton says that the GC would consider a suggestion of calling off the general strike if the lock out notices in the mining industry were lifted.[19]

Although this was not strictly a CP paper, the comments of these trade union officials deserve a critical response. The CPGB, however, had given up its desire to question the Russian leaders, and, as a result, tied British workers to the policies of the TUC leadership.

> Although we knew of what treachery the Right Wing leaders were capable, we did not clearly understand the part played by the so-called 'left' in the union leadership. In the main they turned out to be windbags and capitulated to the Right Wing. We were taught a major lesson; that while developing a move to the left officially, the main point in preparing for action must always be to develop a class-conscious leadership among the rank and file.[20]

---

[17] *Sunday Worker*, September 20, 1925.
[18] Pearce, "Some Past Rank and File Movements," *Essays on the History of Communism*, 121.
[19] *Sunday Worker*, May 10, 1926.
[20] Woodhouse, "Marxism and Stalinism in Britain," *Essays on the History of Communism,* 99.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It was not just the fact that the CP was woefully inadequate theoretically; the leaders supported the view that in order to protect Russia it was necessary to abandon their criticism of the trade union leaders who had demonstrated their unwillingness to fight for the membership time and again. The Scarborough Conference was the rationalization for this approach. While the union leaders appeared to take militant and even anti-capitalist positions, they nevertheless refused to accept any more power which would have been required to wage a fight on behalf of the miners. There were no concrete proposals that would hold the leaders' feet to the fire. Still the CPGB saw the Conference as a tremendous victory. Trotsky noted of Scarborough: "It should be thoroughly understood that leftism of this kind remains left only so long as it has no practical obligations. But as soon as the question of action arises, the left wingers respectfully cede the leadership to the rights."[21] By March 5, Trotsky warned: All shades of leaders of the British labor movement fear action, because the historic hopelessness of the position of British capitalism directly confronts any important problem of the labor movement. He also explained:

> It must be clearly understood that all the traditions, the organization customs, and the ideas of all existing groupings of the labour movement—in various forms and under various slogans-predispose them either to direct betrayal, or to compromise, or else to a policy of wait—and-see with reference to the compromisers and complaints about the traitors.[22]

And yet the CP looked to Scarborough as proof that at least the left-wing would lead a struggle in May. Even people like George Hardy, a leading member of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party had no intention of transplanting the leadership of the General Council with the leadership of the masses of workers.

---

[21] Trotsky, *Trotsky on Britain*, 165.
[22] Ibid, 166.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> We sent out from Minority Movement headquarters instructions to our members to work for the establishment of Councils of Action in every area. We warned, however, that the Councils of action were under no circumstances to take over the work of the trade unions…The Councils of action were to see that all the decisions of the General Council and the union executives were carried out.[23]

In other words the TUC leaders were to stay firmly in command. And yet it was still not obvious to the CP that the GC, right- or left-wing, had no intention of waging a successful struggle. So when the struggle was inevitably lost the Communists were even surprised at the extent of the sell out.

> We warned our readers of the weakness and worse of the Right Wing on the General Council–but here we confess that reality was far exceeded our worst forebodings…The CP had in fact consistently warned the workers that such was likely to happen, but even the CP can be forgiven for not believing it to be possible that once the struggle had begun these leaders should have proved themselves such pitiful poltroons as to surrender at the very moment of victory. [24]

Caught unawares by people who never disguised their true feelings about the GS the CP continued to be incapable of understanding that the GC never meant to wage a concerted fight against the employers. Since the Stalinist wing of the Russian Party was effectively in power, Trotsky's warning about the Anglo-Russian committee was not heeded. And although Dutt on May 12 sent out telegrams attacking the left-wing trade union leaders, by May 29 the central committee had toned down this critical assessment. The *Sunday Worker* even allowed George Hicks, a member of the General Council, to use its pages to proclaim the General Strike as a "great victory", which had shattered the "moral prestige" of the capitalist class.[25]

In their book *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle: The General Strike of 1926* Cliff and Gluckstein criticized the Minority Movements (with the exception of the

---

[23] *Workers' Weekly*, April 9, 1926.
[24] Ibid, May 21, 1926.
[25] *Sunday Worker,* June 13, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Miners' Minority Movement) overemphasis on passing resolutions in the unions as opposed to organizing the rank and file. They argue that: "it lacked the same rank-and-file input but retained its orientation on the official union apparatus."[26] According to these authors, it was not surprising that "the hard, thankless grind of daily shopfloor agitation should be discarded in favour of the easier tasks of winning resolutions and affiliations."[27] Although this criticism was not completely correct, — the membership did much in the way of organizing rank and file workers,[28] they were much more oriented toward the union leadership, that in some circumstances, members of the Minority Movements even opposed spontaneous walkouts by workers. This self criticism was found in the *Workers' Weekly.*

> The Officials of the Transport and General Workers' Union (including members of our own party and supporters of the RILU) we regret to say, have, during the last ten days been using the whole apparatus of the union to drive men back to work who wanted to fight. Party, revolutionary pledges, responsibility of leadership, have all been forgotten or given second place...This is no new phenomenon.[29]

And in the face of hostile employers and union officials 100,000 workers remained solid in their fight for higher wages. But *All Power* the monthly magazine published by the British section of the Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions (1922) was critical of the strikers because they argued that unauthorized walkouts divide workers. According to the CP "Unofficial strikes begin wrong because they leave the machinery of organization in the hands of those who oppose the strike. And unofficial strikes begin

---

[26] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 106.
[27] Ibid,
[28] Assistant chief constable of Liverpool to Dixon, August 27, 1925. "In a note written by the assistant chief constable in Liverpool in 1925 to the Home Office he said in connection with the seamen's strike, is that the Communists or others take independent and unauthorized action before an actual strike starts in order to force the issue, and by establishing pickets of their own often succeed, largely by intimidation, in compelling a stoppage of work."
[29] *Workers' Weekly,* April 21, 1923.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wrong because from the very nature careful plans of campaign cannot be elaborated and clear objectives aimed at."[30] While it is true that the apparatus remains in the hands of the leaders when unofficial strikes are called, it is also true that such a massive strike being called at all is quite remarkable in itself, and it should have indicated that workers were beginning to press for higher wages once again. The Communist Party should have encouraged workers to pressure their union leaders to call massive actions in defense of their living standards, but rather it promoted the policy that "immediate steps should be taken in all unions to so circumscribe their officials with regulations as to ensure them faithfully carrying out the wishes of their members."[31] But it was as unlikely that people such as CT Cramp, who never demonstrated much revolutionary fervor, would have been willing to carry out the wishes of his membership even before the GS occurred. The *Worker* continued to carry this theme into 1924.

> Unless the broad popular masses can be reached and quickened through the activity of the left-wing, the enlightened officials are weighted down and cannot move… The business of the Minority Movement is not merely to wrangle positions for those who support its policy; it is the more fundamental task to capture the rank and file, recreating the will to fight. Only by those who go into positions of authority in the union movement having behind them a solid basis of rank-and-file support will we be able to make progress.[32]

Not only is there an unqualified support for the left-wing trade union leaders, but there is no mention here of program— that is, demands that should have been placed either on the union leaders or on management, nor did they have a vision of what ultimately should have been done or what role the ranks should have played under the circumstances. After Red Friday, what might have been acts of theoretical naiveté turned into full-blown policy.

---

[30] *All Power*, August 1923.
[31] The *Worker*, February 9, 1924.
[32] *The Worker*, February 9, 1924.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Comes a real working-class crisis, and what happens?...The leadership passed into the hands of good proletarians like Swales, Hicks, Cook and Purcell. And this proletarian leadership and the proletarian solidarity it was capable of organizing and demonstrating was the real big thing that come out of the struggle. These comrades must be encouraged and strengthened the united movement they represented must be developed and stimulated so that it may be possible to pass form defensive to offensive action.[33]

In the Minority Movement Conference of 1925 there were "883 delegates present, from 547 organisations. Fifty-two trade councils-including important centers like Manchester, Sheffield, Coventry and Leeds-were represented by 84 delegates. There were 265 Provincial delegates. The number of workers represented was 957,000."[34] This was not only larger than the Minority Conference the year before, but it was quite impressive in the numbers of workers that it represented. But nowhere in the speakers' addresses was there a political program, a way forward, or even discussion about how to reform or change the union structure so that it reflected the wishes of the membership to a greater degree. Serious battles were going on in the mining towns—workers were either arrested or beaten by the police, but the Minority Movement pamphlet incredibly is devoid of any concrete program. Regarding left-leaning union leaders, George Hardy said in 1926:

> On the one hand [we] try to bring non-Communist left-wing union officials closer to the Communist point of view, by being very lenient with them, by being very persuasive, by long discussion, by trying to influence them in every way. Yet, on the other hand, when our party members become trade union officials, there is a tendency sometimes to say: 'Now that you are a Communist trade union official, you must do as we lay down, and every part of our policy must be put into operation.' Comrades, this is an impossible attitude towards trade union officials who are Communists. We must not put the comrades in an impossible position. The attitude will lose influence for the party...A Communist trade union official, loaded up with details, who even drifts away from the party line, should not be regarded because of this alone as a hopeless right-winger.[35]

---

[33] *Workers' Weekly,* August 7, 1925.
[34] WCML, 331.886, F16 Box 14, NMM pamphlet.
[35] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 136.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Communist Party call for "All Power to the General Council" was not missed on someone like Walter Citrine who pointed out the irony. [36] Passing resolutions was proof enough for Minority Movement members that the leftwing was serious about waging a struggle against the tremendous blows that the working class would soon be facing, and proof of the fact that they were fundamentally different from Thomas and Clynes. All sorts of anti-capitalist resolutions were raised and passed, but with no teeth—many of them remained only paper resolutions. The CP was completely caught off guard by Liverpool. But as far as the leadership was concerned, their job was merely to continue to push these slightly confused but basically supportive leaders to the left. This approach not only embodied severe misconceptions about the trade union left, but also about the Labour left. The CPGB put its hopes on the left-wing movement, which they hoped would allow them entrée into the LP. It maintained that the next Labour government should aim at the overthrow of the capitalist class. But this was as far from reality as anything could have been to believe that it was possible, or that the Labour left was at all interested in setting up a socialist society. Labour had threatened to call upon the Emergency Powers Act when it was in office, had the workers who were striking not gone back to work. It was therefore unlikely that anyone involved in the LP at the time would have fought for a socialist society. Murphy insisted, however, "that our party, the majority of whose members are inseparable from the Labour Party by virtue of their union membership, will grow to a mass Communist Party."[37] Workers engaged much more in political dialogue given the impending struggle with their employers, but it can

[36] LSE, MF 219 reel no 1. Walter Citrine's response to a communist in his writings was "How can you reconcile the slogan of 'Don't trust your leaders' with that of 'All power to the General Council,' which the Communist and Minority Movement are now so strongly advocating."
[37] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 157.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

be suggested that the LP was not the organ by which extreme social change was to occur. The leaders of Labour were mild socialists at best, and for the most part sought social change through Parliamentary reform. In fact it was Ramsay MacDonald who wholeheartedly supported the Samuel Report[38] and, moreover "Mr. J.R. MacDonald has been writing to the *London Times*, suggesting that the Government should withdraw support from OMS and pledging himself and his colleagues to do the work the OMS is being organized to do—i.e. Maintenance of essential services."[39] In other words MacDonald encouraged strikebreaking.[40]

The Communists' attitude toward the TUC was similar. George Hardy in *Workers' Weekly* declared that if the TUC was to sell out the miners, then "Should they use that power wrongly, it only means that we have got another additional task before us of forcing them in the right direction, which direction they will ultimately have to take."[41] To indicate their complete confusion on the matter, Ben Turner of the GC wrote: "I don't think you [CP] were just to the General Council of the TUC. You divided us into left-wingers and right-wingers…[But] the absolute unanimity of the General Council in declaring the General Strike off did not divide us into left wingers and right-wingers."[42] Even A.J. Cook, ex-Communist Secretary of the miners' union, and Minority Movement leader, prevented any change in policy by the General Council or any assessment of its position, because it had entered into an agreement with the Miners' Federation at

---

[38] Ibid, 173. "Ramsay MacDonald rushed to declare that the report was 'a conspicuous landmark in the history of political thought…the stars in their courses are fighting for us."
[39] *Workers' Weekly,* October 17, 1925.
[40] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle*, 130. By December 1924 the Comintern was insisting that one of the most important prerequisites for the development of the CBGB as a real mass party would be the cyrstalisation of a left wing within the Labour Party.
[41] Ibid, 165.
[42] *Sunday Worker,* May 23, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bournemouth in September that there should be no full-scale discussion of the GS while the miners were still out. A resolution moved by two prominent NMM members to refer back to the General Council's report on the strike was lost after Cook intervened to urge that "there should be no washing of dirty linen in public while the miners were still on strike."[43] "Even though over the next few months the CP and NMM did campaign for the formation of factory committees, and for trades councils to set themselves up as 'Councils of Action' to coordinate the General Strike at the local level, they did little to break out of the limitations placed on the rank-and-file by the trade union apparatus,"[44] wrote Ralph Darlington. The Councils of Action proposed by the CP were often toothless since, for the most part, they deferred to the TUC leaders rather than responding to the crisis on their own. Alternatively, the CP could have fought for leadership itself, but chose not to, leaving the field open for the officials' to betray. Murphy and the CP in general had many contradictory attitudes toward serious political questions. "There should be no rival body to the Trades Council…We should avoid rivalry and recognise the General Council as the General Staff of the union directing the unions in struggle."[45] But not everyone in the ranks shared this view. A prominent member of the CP wrote:

> It is my considered opinion, in the light of after-happenings, that if the workers of Britain had been equipped with a leadership at all equivalent to their splendid courage, resolution and sense of solidarity, May Day, 1926, would have been the opening day of a proletarian revolution. Unhappily, history shows us by many examples, that, if such a chance is missed, it takes long and many years before it can be induced to return.[46]

The Minority Movement wanted to move the Federation (SWMF) into taking a more militant stance and in addition held onto its old syndicalist outlook. They felt that

---

[43] Ibid,
[44] Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy,* 117.
[45] *Workers' Weekly,* October 16, 1925.
[46] Pearce, "British Communist History," *Essay on The History of Communism,* 144.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

political change would come through the building up of a strong left wing trade union movement. According to Mel Thomas, a communist miner:

> There were big discussions going on in the party at the time and a lot of people felt that all we were becoming were left wing trade unionists, and that not enough attention was given to building a party. Although the party in numbers was getting bigger, there was a big difference between that and building a party, really building a party you see. And that not enough attention was being paid frankly, I subscribed to that view anyhow. Had more attention been paid at that time to building a party making it a real revolutionary party, we probably would still have a big branch here now, instead of becoming left wing propagandists and left wing trade unionist.[47]

In the end the labor movement witnessed the most devastating blow that it had suffered in some time. The leaders were to blame for the fiasco, but the CP, lacked good judgment in supporting the leadership to the extent that it did. The membership although dedicated, hard-working people knew little about the Soviet intrigues that helped shape the politics of the British Section of the Communist International.[48]

---

[47] SWML, Mel Thomas, Aud 283.

[48] MacFarlane, *The British Communist Party,* 176. "In fact the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in Moscow declared that the British Communist Party was complimented for its clear and correct leadership in the miners' struggle and specifically commended, instead of criticized, for its exposure of Cook's mistakes and the left leaders on the TUC General Council. The resolution was apparently a compromise to avoid any major difference of opinion between the British party and the Comintern. Such a conflict would have been highly inconvenient in view of the importance attached by Stalin to the political events in England and the confidence of the British leaders in their own ability to lead the class struggles there. It would also have been incongruous for the Communist International to launch a major censure on the policy of the British party at the same time as they were condemning the Russian opposition for, amongst other things, carrying out unwarranted attacks on that party on these very issues which existed for the formation of a mass revolutionary left wing movement in Britain under the leadership of the Communist Party."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 14: THE GENERAL STRIKE

> 'Am I to say,' he [JR Thomas] demanded, 'to the general managers of the railway companies, many of whom it is known are close friends of my own, 'Because you are on the other side you are to be treated as lepers so far as we, the labour Party, are concerned?' The whole thing is absurd and ridiculous. Such a policy could only lead to class antagonism, and in the end it would be disastrous to the country.[1]

The above statement issued by JR Thomas is indicative of why the General Strike of 1926 failed. The extensively covered period has a large historiography containing varying reasons for its failure. Julian Symons asserts in *The General Strike: A Historical Portrait* that the strike was doomed from the beginning. According to Symons, the miners' "total intransigence was a total error. They would have done better to accept the Samuel Commission Report in Principle, and try to pin down the Government on its details."[2] For Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein "the working class lacked that crucial subjective element needed to turn a defensive action into an offensive one, a ruling-class attack into a revolutionary upheaval."[3] As far as Perry Anderson's *English Question* there is hardly any space dedicated to the subject at all. The most important event in modern British working class history is given one paragraph quoting GDH Cole rather than developing any independent analysis. Anderson restates the usual question "Can its defeat be attributed simply to 'betrayal', as in standard accounts on the Left—was victory ever conceivable?" The answers is surely that the Strike could not but have failed for there never existed the political will to carry it through. Anderson claims that Cole's description of the two camps says everything.

> When the moment came, …it was the workers who drew back. The inherent constitutionalism of the main body of the labour movement never asserted itself

---

[1] Phillpott, *The Right Hon. JH Thomas,* 174.
[2] Symons, *The General Strike: A Historical Portrait*, 232.
[3] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 286.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> more plainly than in the great 'unconstitutional' movement known as the 'General Strike.' Since the other side was willing to be so bellicose the only real chance of success lay in frightening the government into surrender or persuading it into compromise…All things considered the strikers from the first had little real chance of winning.[4]

Nowhere in Anderson's description of the inevitable failure of the strike is there a distinction between the leaders and the workers. Since this is Cole's description it is not only legitimate to disagree with his lack of precision, but it can only be interpreted as share condescension on Anderson's part and a rationale for support of his position that Marxism had passed the working class by and large and that British workers were and continue to be conservative. It is thus not possible to take Anderson's assessment at all seriously given all the available evidence to the contrary.

Patrick Renshaw puts forward a contradictory position. On the one hand he contends:

> Despite traditional views, many of these strikebreakers came from the ranks of the working class, from other trades hit by the strike call, or from unemployed men. And just as radio broadcasting helped the Government when the strikers stopped the Press, so trucks, lorries and private cars showed that a complete stoppage of the railways, which would have brought the life of the nation to a standstill in general earlier, was no longer so effective.

But on the other hand writes Renshaw:

> Together with the million miners who had been locked out this meant that over three million workers were involved-more than half the country's trade unionists. Messages from all over the country poured into the TUC headquarters, showing that the response had been virtually unanimous…Even strikes in single industries generally have a weakness somewhere. This strike, which involved many industries had been poorly planned, should have been patchy from the very start. Instead it was solid. In a situation of mass unemployment, millions of men were prepared to put their jobs and pension rights at risk, not in their own cause, but in support of the miners. It was a remarkable demonstration of working-class solidarity.[5]

---

[4] Anderson, *English Question*, 37-38.
[5] Renshaw, *Nine Days That Shook Britain*, 171 *and* 174-75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The General Strike will be debated among historians for years to come. It is my contention that in order for the strike to have been successful, an uprising at the very least would have had to occur. Contrary to the GC view which argued that the strike was purely industrial, there is no doubt that the government correctly viewed it as a political threat. The problem for the working class was not only the leadership of the GC but the CP could provide no effective alternative leadership to the officials although it had significant support among the working class. This was the crux of the failure thus setting the tone by which the employing class would deal with the workers throughout the period of the post-war depression. Although the poorer, less efficient mines were doing worse economically, many of the larger, more efficient coal companies were making much higher profits than before the war, and yet the miners were forced to call on the rest of the labor movement to defend its meager wages. "The net profits of six big coal merchants increased from an average of 1 1/4d per ton pre- war to 11 1/2d per ton post-war. The subsidy has given a profit of 1s 6d per ton to the owners."[6]

For nine days 3.5 million workers were directly involved in a solidarity movement that put into sharp focus all of the important forces shaping Britain. By the time the strike was called off even more workers were attempting to join the ranks. The miners were still locked out, absolutely refusing to take pay cuts. The owners, equally as adamant about imposing the cuts, refused to rescind the notices. The fight was inevitable and opposition to it by the Tories was equally so. Sir Alfred Mond, in an address in Birmingham, admitted that Capitalism was on trial. "Our whole industrial system is being challenged," he said, "not merely by wild and foolish people, but by serious thinkers and

[6] *Workers Weekly,* March 19, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by serious economists."[7] And yet, although the capitalists believed that the strike had made the situation precarious, not only was the industrial system not challenged but the workers, especially the miners were forced to suffer one of the worst defeats since the failure of the Chartist movement. The trade union leadership and the LP leaders (aside from the failure of the CP to challenge these leaders) were entirely responsible for this monumental failure. Forced into calling a strike the TUC looked for every opportunity to find a way out. The fact that plans had not been made until right before the strike was to occur is an indication that the leadership not only feared its implications, but it had no intention of seeing it through.

Frankly, it was the Communist Party that displayed the most confused role of all the principle players. The capitalists from the beginning solicited the support of the government who willingly arrayed all of its forces against the strikers. The TUC and specifically the GC made it clear that they really did not want this strike all along. Their record over the years had demonstrated that they were unwilling to wage a fight that would guarantee better living conditions because that fight would have required the magnitude of a general strike if it were to be successful. But the Communists did not see it coming. Not only did they express their belief that the GC would conduct a successful fight, but they called for even greater power to the GC even though it declined to accept it. The CP encouraged workers to put their faith in the GC while at the same time advising workers to watch their leaders. There was, unfortunately no suggestion that these leaders would betray and that in order to wage a successful struggle they needed to be replaced. The failure of the strike attests to this terrible strategy.

---

[7] The *Daily Herald,* April 19, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

So, as of May 1, the miners would once again be locked out of the mines and the union leaders were forced to face that reality with a strategy that could not save them. Knowing in July that the subsidy would run out in May there was no preparation for the strike. According to Vernon Hartshorn,

> There are men, both inside and outside the Parliament, who, to my own knowledge, were keenly anxious for a standup fight with the organized working class at the end of July. Since then their numbers have been greatly increased by the provocative propaganda of the press, and wild men on the other side have uttered foolish challenges that add to the danger of a perilous situation. Now there appears to be a general feeling that the fight must come next May.
>
> A revolution can, of course, be precipitated over mere names, distortions of circumstances, and mutual class threats, and if a revolution ever takes place in this country it will be caused largely by the capitalists and their propagandists inciting the Government into treating the solidarity of the workers in defense of their standards of living as essentially revolutionary and anti-constitutional. Such a policy is sheer madness, even from the standpoint of the constitution.
>
> Before dealing with the problems of the coal industry these 'constitutionalists' want to dispose the question 'Are we to be governed by Parliament or a Soviet?' 'On the other hand, we have representatives of the workers openly declaring that the determination of the miners and other trade unionists to resist the terms recently proposed by the coal owners was but the opening attack which is to develop into the great battle for the overthrow of the possessing classes…'[8]

The subsidy that Prime Minister Baldwin had granted to the mine owners was a nine-month subsidy with no chance of renewal. The mine owners did nothing regarding reorganization[9] in those nine months adding to the suspicion that the owners wished to incite the miners to strike prompting Hartshorn to discuss the real reason for the lockout.

---

[8] *Western Mail,* September 5, 1925.

[9] LSE, Beveridge Report Coal Commission, MF 277, 676-677, May 7, 1926. "Mr. Viant claimed that the reason that the mines were so unprofitable was because "abnormal dividends were being paid. It was undesirable to have these abnormal dividends appearing in the balance sheets, and ways and means had to be found whereby an apparently lower dividend might be shown. The device adopted was that of giving bonus shares as was done in the majority of industries in this country. Bonus shares were given to no less an extent than between £40,000,000 and £50,000,000. The result is that dividends have to be produced at present upon a capital which was never invested in the mines at all, and even some of the so-called uneconomic pits are only uneconomic because of watered capital in the form of bonus shares; They are inclined to suspect, many feel convinced, that when coal is sent from the collieries to other businesses

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> With unblushing effrontery he (Mr. Philip, official of Mining Association) made known the fact that the coalowners of Britain propose to devote the next nine months, not to a genuine effort to get the mining industry out of the muddle into which they have brought it, but to conducting a propaganda, the object of which is to produce civil war in Britain. 'The mining Association,' says Mr. Gee, 'has no illusions as to the possibility of a lasting settlement until the constitutional issue is faced...It will be the endeavor of the Mining Association, during the respite purchased by Mr. Baldwin, to expose the public to ramifications and activities of our English "Reds" the methods by which they control the Miners' Federation and other unions, and their policy towards industry and the State.[10]

Hartshorn's interview in the *Western Mail* suggests that all the way back at least to September (if not further) the employers expected a showdown with the miners. If, in fact, the union leadership was aware of the situation why did they not act to avoid the catastrophe? At the Scarborough Conference upon Mr. Clynes exclamation that he feared his own class more than he did the capitalists, the GC declined to accept any more power than it already had. That was the general consensus. From the evidence so far it can be argued that the union leadership was so firmly entrenched in the system that they did not wish to jeopardize the relationship of forces. The surprise then, was not what the union leadership had done, but how the Communists responded to this otherwise well-known assumption. By the first week in May

---

financially connected with them – and nearly one-fourth of the coal is transferred in this way-the price accepted by the collieries is often below the true market value; as a result their own wages, which are regulated by the receipts of the industry are artificially lowered, and a part of the profits actually made by the employers is concealed; they know from their working knowledge that many of the collieries are less efficiently managed than others, and think that their losses are their own fault; they believe that output is often hindered by the failure of the management to supply the brewer sufficient tubs, or other requirements, to enable him to get the best results; they have, in some cases, daily experience of the waste of their own time, and therefore the additional costs out the colliery, that are due to long traveling underground; sometimes they know that this waste is caused by the bad layout of the mine, owing to the leases of coal being dependent upon the boundaries of land-owners' estates. They point to the slow progress in making more scientific use of the coal. They point to the large difference between the price of coal at the pit-head and the price to the consumer, and believe that much of this is due to wasteful methods of railway transport, to an excess of middlemen and to their high profits. They continually dwell upon the payment of royalties to land-owners in return for no service, ad payment which is equal to an average charge of two shillings every week upon the wages of every man and boy employed in the industry."

[10] Harthorn, *Hansard,* May 5, 1926, 358.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> long files of armoured cars,...chocked the country roads in Surrey. 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. Sentries guarding Royal residences have exchanged their usual ceremonial dress for Khaki and carry 150 rounds of ammunition in their packs.[11]

Workers in all sorts of industries determined that the justness of the miners' cause would not go unanswered.[12] The strike was to begin at 12 am May 3/4 but according to the General Council not all of industry was to shut down. The first line of defense already involved over three million workers but some of the other major industries, such as engineering were saved until later.

> It is easy to underestimate what this meant. A trade union is not an army, which obeys order without question. Hundreds of thousands of strikers were risking secure jobs at a time of mass unemployment, pensions for which they had been paying all their working lives. 'The response to the call for a national strike was a remarkable demonstration of working-class unity and of unselfish support for the miners.' Only the 'first line' workers employed in transport, the railways, printing, iron and steel, metal and chemical industries, building and power stations were called out. The 'second line' workers in such industries as engineering, shipbuilding, textiles, woodworking, the Post Office and distributive trades, were instructed by the TUC to remain at work for the time being.[13]

> At a meeting in Coventry I [S. Nearing] addressed a meeting of many thousand workers, mostly engineers, who were indignant because many of them had not been called out. Thousands of non-union men came out on their own, while union men stayed at work, according to orders champing on the bit.[14]

Arthur Cook, a one-time member of the Communist Party, was now the Secretary of the Miners' Union and a leader within the Minority Movement who coined the phase *not a*

---

[11] Renshaw, *Nine Days that Shook Britain,* IX.
[12] Bagwell's *The Railwaymen,* 472, points out "More railwaymen came out in sympathy with the miners on May 4, 1926, than had struck in support of their own demands on September 26, 1919." Bagwell, 477, also writes, "The Great Western enrolled 5,620 persons in their recruiting office (the General Meeting Room) at Paddington but only utilized 2,234 of them. Although it recruited elsewhere on the system, the total number of amateur drivers employed at the end of the strike was only 760 compared with the normal complement of 6,202, 97.6 percent of whom were still on strike on May 14."
[13] Renshaw, *Nine Days that Shook Britain,* 167.
[14] Nearing, *The British General Strike,* XV; Charlesworth, A., Gilbert, D., Randall, A. Southall, H. and Wrigley, C., An *Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain 1750-1900,* (New York:St. Martin's Press:1996), 140.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

penny off the pay and not a second on the day. Although not an official Communist anymore, he was largely supported by the CP. Cook was a passionate militant, but in the end he too could not be consistent politically. Definitely on the left wing of the labor leadership, Cook would not advocate for a socialist society, though his pamphlet *Miners' Next Step* called for the nationalization of the mines under workers' control. Whether Cook continued to personally support this demand as Secretary of the miners' union, it played no part in his everyday work during the period of the general strike. Faced with the British military ranged against the strikers Cook did not call for the arming of the working class, rather he declared that the military could not shovel coal. His response to many of the problems facing the strikers was cavalier, that is when faced with the possibility of shortages of food and necessities he asserted that it was possible to hoard cans of food. He said in response to its tremendous financial cost:

> I am going to get a fund, if I can, that will buy grub so that when the struggle comes we shall have 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.[15]

The miners, however, were not masters of their own fate and they had not beaten the strongest government in the world and Cook confidentially admitted that he believed that the miners would have to take a wage cut, although he would not admit that to the membership. Arguing that the miners were in a week condition Cook exclaimed "While a lot of our chaps won't agree with me we shall have to have a national minimum not only with pluses above it, but minuses below it."[16] Herbert Smith, the President of the miners union, also agreed that there was a possibility that wages would be cut. He failed to

---

[15] Farman, *The General Strike,* 32.
[16] Morris, *The General Strike,* 199.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

criticize the TUC for their half-hearted approach to the strike and for their calling this strike purely industrial when in fact it was clear that to meet the government's challenge it would have been necessary to explain the political nature of the strike. Smith assured management that, "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."[17] Moreover, when the miners were ultimately defeated after staying out for seven months once the GS was called off Cook was unwilling to allow other workers to examine the policies of the miners union to learn where some of the problems might have occurred. He was a pragmatic leader not prone to examining the problems that would be facing the miners at such an undertaking.

Some organization was now needed to take the place of the defunct Triple Alliance that fell apart after the 1921 debacle. The General Council became that official body that would coordinate the strike activity. But the miners had no representation on the Council and therefore had little say, although MacDonald, who had nothing to do with the strike, was represented on the General Council. To be sure there were differing points of view, views that span the gamut of political perspectives, but in no way can one argue that a communist perspective was entertained by the union leaders nor were they willing to take the necessary steps to win this struggle. Even regarding the question of food, there was no plan. The food coops refused to advance food to the strikers because the bill had never been paid by the TUC for the previous strike (1921) and the TUC was unwilling to advance that kind of money in this conflict.

The Government was much more united in its approach to the General Strike. No question about it, it had to be defeated. The connection between the government's

[17] Crook, *The General Strike,* 348.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

policies and the needs of the mine owners became apparent leading the working class to believe that the government was waging a class war. As a demonstration of this feeling the "The Plymouth Strike Committee News Sheet of May 11, …reporting the exclusion of Labour from an Emergency Committee set up by the Plymouth Town Council, refers to the reason given by the capitalist spokesman 'that there were matters in connection with this situation which the Labour members of this Council ought not to know". That is, the comment ends- "IT IS CLASS WAR!'"[18] Demonstrating the truth of this statement, Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary coordinated the police and the military to undermine the strike.[19] And yet reality notwithstanding during an interview at the Royal Academy banquet he prayed that the dispute "…may be conducted in friendliness and amity". But the real attitude of the government was reported in an "official Conservative Government newspaper, which had been thundering for a week about the necessity of waging 'total war' and demanding 'unconditional surrender'."[20] As a result of the government's plan to undermine the strike on May 4 it sent into the East End of London a convoy of 105 Army lorries which were loaded with food and which were to be unloaded onto the docks under the protection of machine guns before being driven to Hyde Park, which had become a center of food storage for the duration of the strike. On the same day 170 more lorries were sent and the next day "a much larger armoured convoy of 267 lorries broke the strikers' dockland blockade. 'The sullen mass of strikers, the *New York*

---

[18] Burns, *The General Strike,* 44.

[19] PRO, CAB 23/53 54(26), Oct. 27, 1926. "By an order of October 19, Joynson-Hicks empowered police chiefs to prohibit meetings without reference to him if they believed they might lead to a breach of the peace: he was also authorized by the Cabinet to warn chiefs of police in mining areas to keep a careful watch in order to prevent the march of large bodies of miners intended to prevent miners from working, since this form of intimidation appeared to have been particularly successful."

[20] Renshaw, *Nine Days that Shook Britain*, Introduction; According to Marquand "at the end of September, Baldwin told the House of commons that he and his colleagues had 'got pretty well to the end of our powers of mediation,' and made it clear that, for all practical purposes, the Government's only policy was to wait until the miners were beaten."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

World reported, 'were awed by the military...backed...by enough artillery to kill every living thing in every street in the neighbourhood."[21] Ninety-eight thousands Specials were enrolled throughout the country, 11,000 in London alone. By the end of the strike there were about 200,000 Specials enrolled. Cyril Parry a Welsh miner, was confronted with

> shopkeepers and solicitors and what we'd call then the upper middle class...and they used to take bus load of them to the Anthracite back and forth. The reception was hostile. According to Parry ...there were riots up in the Ammanford area for weeks I think...And the result of that was I couldn't remember the actual figure of boys that were jailed as a result of this, but it went on into the sixties, eighties and hundred people being tried and jailed.[22]

Winston Churchill made it clear that the military would be completely backed by the government. But the military front was not the only area that concerned him. Due to the strike, newspaper workers virtually shut down the press since it was largely owned by employers who espoused anti-working class views, prompting the Chancellor to set up the *British Gazette*, which was published with the express purpose of attacking the unions. But many of the owners were able to obtain limited supplies of paper and with a managerial staff were able to publish limited runs. In the light of these circumstances the GC made a serious mistake in eliminating its own press. BBC radio had also been commandeered by Churchill who made it an organ of the government's propaganda war on the strikers.

Arrests of Communists and revolutionaries were widespread and the Government took measures to prohibit banks from transferring money from overseas, especially from Russia and European socialist and labor organizations hoping to give aid to the strikers.

---

[21] Ibid, XX; *An Atlas of Industrial Protest In Britain*, 141.
[22] SWML, Cyril Parry, Aud 333 May 20, 1974.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Raids on the *Daily Herald* took place by the police, seizing all the copies for May 4. After the police raided its office, the workers stood outside

> lustily singing the Red Flag…I could not help reflecting on how easily a riot could be started, Citrine noted in his diary…Here were these people, normally friendly and peace-loving, suddenly converted into militant, menacing elements by the precipitate action of the police and the authorities. Men who probably had never heard the Red Flag sung before were joining in with gusto.[23]

Ironically, the *Daily Herald* was shut down and replaced by the *British Worker,* which had it been printed would have said 'Message to all Workers' The General Council of the Trade Union Congress wishes to emphasise the fact that this is an industrial dispute."[24] The paper then goes on to caution the workers to be peaceful. The *Weekly Worker* was subject to the same kind of raids by the police and thus the CP was forced to move its printing press from location to location. But unlike the GC the CP hoped to mount a political challenge to the government. The Emergency Powers Act was invoked again, giving the Government the opportunity to close down any opposing point of view. Moreover, anyone who attempts, or who does anything calculated "to cause mutiny, sedition, or disaffection among any of His Majesty's Forces, or among members of any police forces, or any fire brigade, or among the civilian population, is guilty under the act." [25] The Emergency Powers Act coupled with the Prevention of Crimes Act not only undermined civil liberties but in so doing the employers were able to undermine the strike. Over 1000 people were arrested based on these laws alone. Strikers were arrested for picketing, speaking, publishing strike bulletins, demonstrating and for any other action that might have helped workers mount a struggle against the government's war on them. It would appear that the Government had no intention of allowing the workers to

---

[23] Farman, *The General Strike,* 134.
[24] Johnston, *Hansard,* H.C., May 6, 1926, 557.
[25] Joynson-Hicks, *Hansard,* H.C., May 5, 1926, 295.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

win this strike; rather, it had every intention of playing hardball. This was the height of class warfare, at least on the part of the employers. And yet, given the seriousness of the attacks the members of the GC continually argued that the strike was just an industrial dispute. Although it was clear that politics framed every move the Government made, the union leadership refused to admit the political nature of the strike. The government rightly charged that the strike was political, that is, decision-making about a variety of aspects of running a city was left in the hands of the strike committees. This strike was political not only because the government chose to intervene but because the workers took over much of the decision making regarding many aspects of the running of the economy. Once that occurred the strikers raised the ante—it was no longer just an industrial dispute, its implications were much broader.

Since over 3 million workers were on strike the Government had to create a force of voluntary workers. Fear understandably gripped the TUC leaders who were uninterested in challenging the government on any grounds, let alone on a political level. Each incident ultimately went into the final decision that the strike had to be called off. Even in the truncated versions that remained of the British dailies, the government attacked the General Council with great vehemence. Conservative members of the Commons went as far as to ask for the names of the striking workers. Mr. W. T. Kelly (LP) argued in response to this request that "that could have been for one purpose, and one purpose only. It was very plain from the tone in which he made his request that it was that he, along with others, might be able to take part in a victimization of those people who have seen fit to join in this particular strike."[26] Adding his voice to the detractors, the

[26] Kelly, *Hansard,* H.C., May 7, 1926, 667.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Bourne, denounced the strikers as sinners. During a High Mass in Westminster Cathedral he declared:

> There is no moral justification for a general strike of this character. It is a direct challenge to lawfully constituted authority…It is therefore a sin against the obedience which we owe to God, who is the source of that authority…All are bound to uphold and assist the Government, which is the lawfully constituted authority of the country, and represents, therefore, in its own appointed sphere, the authority of God Himself.[27]

Naturally, this speech was given maximum coverage in both the *British Gazette* and on the BBC news.

The OMS, organized by 1925, joined with the government to help it break the strike. And while the government argued that it gave it no financial support, the OMS mobilized thousands of people to undermine the strike. But people such as Lord Hardinge, a former Viceroy of India, and Lord Jellicoe, who had commanded the British Fleet at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, were in the forefront of the organization attempting to lend it credibility. Those joining the organization were to maintain the essential services in event of a strike. Along with the efforts of the OMS, the West Scotland Economic League (WSEL) an organization of Scottish manufacturers provided propaganda, lectures and campaigns to undermine the influence of communists and socialists in the unions.[28]

Censorship was imposed on incoming and outgoing telegrams from TUC headquarters. Arthur Cook's hotel room was searched and letters addressed to the TUC

---

[27] Farman, *The General Strike,* 147.

[28] Duncan and McIvor, 146-147. "Combating the Left:Victimisation and Anti-Labour Activities on Clydeside, 1900-1939." "Periods when the labour movement achieved a high public profile, such as during the General Strike, 1926, and the Hunger Marches of the 1920s and 1930s, were also phases of unprecedented activity for the regional Economic Leagues. Though no precise details have emerged of the activities of the WSEL during the General Strike, the General Council reported that its affiliated regional Leagues were playing an active role in strikebreaking, encouraging the enrolment of volunteer workers, providing lorry drivers and transporting foodstuffs, publishing news sheets and leaflets attacking 'the pernicious influence of the reds' and propagating the League's new slogan: 'every man is a capitalist'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were opened. The police paid close attention to the Communists, organizing raids on their London and provincial offices. 1,200 of its members were brought to court. Enormous fines were imposed on the strikers. Sir John Simon (Liberal) exclaimed in a speech to the House of Commons "every railwayman who was on strike in disregard of his contract was personally liable to be sued in the County Court for damages, and every trade union leader was liable in damages to the uttermost farthing of his personal possessions."[29] Trade union funds, which had been granted legal immunity in the 1906 Trades Disputes Act, were no longer to be granted immunity.

University students were employed to become strikebreakers as well. Middle class students, instinctively hostile to working class activity, attempted to play a role in undermining the strike. But all were not so compliant. The students at University College, London were asked by the Provost Sir Gregory Foster and the College Secretary, Dr. W. Seton, one of the founders of the OMS, to support Government efforts to bring the strike to an end and insisted on everyone joining the organization. "As a bait to loyal, students, this service would be remembered and taken into consideration during examinations. This promise drew many recruits, a great many of whom feared victimization by university authorities if they failed to enrol in support of the Government." [30]

In contrast to all this preparation, the union leadership not only did relatively little, but it waited until the end of April to do anything at all. Thomas, disturbed at the fact that workers forced the TUC into the strike in the first place, stated after it had begun that the Trade Union Congress was quite willing to accept the findings of the Samuel Commission and argued that the strike should cease. According to Thomas, "so far as the

---

[29] Symon, *The General Strike,* 120; David Dutton. *Simon: A political biography*, 77.
[30] The *British Worker,* May 5, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

General Council of the Trade Union Congress was concerned, which is the only body responsible for the general strike, we had already told the Prime Minister that we accepted the formula, that is the word used for the exchange of documents, and were prepared to take that risk."[31] Arthur Pugh, a moderate, had taken over for A. B. Swales who had been a left-wing trade union leader. Moreover, Fred Bramley, the one-time General Secretary of the TUC and a left-wing leader, died, making room for Walter Citrine to take his place. Citrine was a cautious moderate who strove to make no radical changes in the TUC. Bevin, Purcell and the Strike Committee drew up hasty plans[32] so near to when the strike was to be called that many of the instructions were at best confusing, and most often contradictory. Not wanting to deal with the implications of the strike,[33] but having to do something, the TUC published its own newspaper to disseminate information to the strikers. But unlike the Government's approach, the TUC shut down its own paper, putting into print the *British Worker* instead. Far from exciting reading, any perspective that might have been in disagreement or might even advance news that promoted workers' activities during the course of the strike was to be kept out of the pages of the newspaper. The GC kept it under tight control.[34] On Sunday, May 9, arguments still continued about the Glasgow edition, which had been printed with material not included in the original *British Worker*. E. B. Poulton telephoned to the man handling the paper in Glasgow, and offered to make an arrangement by which a blank

---

[31] Thomas, *Hansard,* H.C., May 5, 1926, 344. They were referring to the Samuel Commission report.
[32] *The British Worker*, May 7, 1926. George Lansbury, MP even went as far to agree that the union would voluntarily, and without any compulsion, agree that the "strike should not apply to any essential services, such as light, and the conveyance of food, and other things which are absolutely necessary to the State." *An Atlas of Industrial Protest*, 140.
[33] *Hansard*, H.C., May 11, 1926, 865. Mr. Clynes was quoted by Sir J. Simon as saying that: "You cannot do it without anticipating a condition of civil war."
[34] The GC requested the NMM not to issue a daily bulletin and not to hold any meetings; Morris, *The General Strike*, 402.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

page would be left on the London copy of the paper so that a page of Scottish news could be included. "We have a report lying on my desk now, saying that your people are wanting to extend the strike in all kinds of ways", Poulton said. "Will you see that all that stuff is kept out and nothing proactive put in?" The Glasgow edition, again, appeared too late to be of much use.[35]For many days no news entered the more rural areas of Britain.

Moreover, the GC refused to allow local trade councils to be set up by local strike committees. So frightened was the GC of the "hotheads," that many of its directives were geared towards putting down any potential threat that might have arisen, especially since many of the Councils of Actions had been operating under CP leadership for at least a year. Trade councils had become the nucleus of the strike in many places although the GC opposed them. Some of the local leaders, sharing the same attitudes, acted in as undemocratic a fashion as people such as Thomas, Bevin and Citrine. In Dunfermline the Council of Action had to rename itself a strike committee and the editors of the Cambridge Strike Bulletin were forbidden to mention 'Government provocation and the words "Council of Action!" In other areas the determination to avoid any kind of revolutionary connotation took more dramatic forms. The Widnes NUR branch ended its meetings with *God Save the King* and the Dover Strike Committee requested strikers to sing *Rule Britannia* instead of the *Red Flag* when marching through the streets."[36]

This was no ordinary strike. The government understood that and so did the union leadership. But unlike the government the union leaders were unwilling to deal with the consequences of such an enormous outpouring of support for the miners. The TUC even

---

[35] Symon, *The General Strike,* 172.
[36] Farman, *The General Strike,* 153. The question of recognition of trade union strength, already accepted as a reality by authorities, was discussed in Symon's book as well. 132.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

returned £200,000 offered to British workers by their Russian counterparts.[37] Moreover, since the GC was unwilling to deal with many of the questions that faced workers daily, the latter were forced to deal with these questions themselves. Not willing to follow the advice of the GC, workers carried on the strike in a way that would meet their genuine demands. For instance, workers organized mass picketing on a large scale, in many places taking command of the streets, which they controlled by means of barricades. Workers resisted the brutal treatment by the police and in some cases besieged the police in their stations. Some town halls were occupied, and the beginnings of workers' own food services even appeared. All sorts of local bulletins, many produced under conditions of illegality, appeared in increasing numbers. Trades Councils and Strike Committees began to act as the source of authority for the working class.[38]

What began as a "simple" show of support for the miners in nine days turned into a situation where workers, in many places, were actually taking responsibility for the day-to-day events and making decisions about the institutions under their control. The problem of dispensing permits, of food distribution, of the organization of meetings and picketing, the problems of the police and fascists were just some of the issues that involved ordinary workers during the strike. Already by May 1 out of grave concern that the situation was going too far, Walter Citrine offered Baldwin an agreement for the distribution of essential goods. Citrine agreed that: "should the government desire to discuss the matter with the General Council they are available for that purpose." But the idea that any ruling government would consider sharing control, essentially entering into

[37] According to Gilbert £832,000 got to the miners although Morris in *The General Strike,* in addition to my own findings, have found that the gift was sent back.
[38] J.A. Mahon, *Trade Unionism,* (London:Victor Gollanez Ltd:1938), 51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a dual power situation, would be suicidal. Therefore, Churchill declined the offer. He told the House of Commons:

> I readily recognize the offer which was made to convey food and necessaries 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 endeavouring 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?[39]

Workers' defense corps in some of the towns was set up in self-defence against police attack.[40]

> In the Welsh coalfields great meetings for the miners' wives are being held in many places. Mrs. Andrews reports 500 women present at Gelli and about 2,000 women at Tonypandy-both in Rhondda West. At the same meeting the women were anxious to demonstrate out of doors…At Ferndale Rhondda east about 1,000 women were present at a meeting and made a procession of a similar kind…In the Ogmore division assembled meetings of women were held at Nantymoel, Ogmore Vale and Caeraw at all of which at least 500 were present. At Treechy the numbers were considerably larger.[41]

Workers who had simply been going to work and trying to make a living were in a position in many cases of running a dual government. Employers approached workers asking for permits to ship their goods. Motor vehicles owners had to get permission from the trade councils to move their vehicles in the coalfields. For example

> The Edinburgh *Strike Bulletin* reported the formation of the establishment of a Food Permit system. 'There has been a constant stream of applicants at the Offices and many business firms have been on the doorstop. All kinds of businesses are represented. The committee insists, however, upon certain conditions which many firms find irksome. Permits are only issued to those men who are members of Transport union, and no departure is made from this rule. The committee believed that in a few days practical control of real traffic will be in their hands, and that the OMS…will find their occupation gone.'[42]

---

[39] Churchill, *Hansard,* H.C., May 1, 1926.
[40] Farman, *The General Strike,* 156. The communists had captured the movement in Camden Town and "there were nasty scenes…on Saturday when the police drew their batons'." This was reported to the G.C. by C.G. Ammon who served as a junior minister in the Labour Government.
[41] Warwick University, Miners' MSS 127/NU/GS/3/100, Wives in Wales.
[42] Klugman, "Marxism, Reformism and the General Strike", 90.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The OMS had proven ineffective and in some circumstances the local government was forced to approach the strike committees to get anything done. Working class solidarity was practically complete. Reports were coming in from everywhere that pointed to this overwhelming solidarity. Even the Orangemen outside of Glasgow participated in the GS. For a place riddled with sectarian violence this was no small feat. Margaret Bondfield found Tories supporting the strike. Reporting from Shrewsbury on 8 May, Ellen Wilkinson and J.F. Horrabin noted: "Huge meeting. Everyone amazed at the way in which the call has been answered. Prominent members of local Conservative Party among the strikers…Everyone said, nothing like this could have been imagined in Shrewsbury.".[43] About the determination of the miners there should be no doubt. Arthur Jones (LP) states: "The men who fought from 1914 to 1918, 40,000 of them have come back and are in the East End, are quite as ready to put their back to the wall in opposition to those who want to force wages down, as they were to fight the Germans."[44] There were even soldiers who refused to take part in the suppression of the strikers. Citrine's memoirs point to the fact that the

> strike committee had received a deputation from Aldershot, and from what I could gather it was reported that the East Lancashires had been confined to barracks for refusing duty. The Bedfordshires are also stated to be in the same position, as they had petitioned the Commanding Officer not to use them in an industrial dispute. The Welch Guards are said to be similarly confined.[45]

"Bevin mentioned that Norton Griffiths, who is in the same building as the T&GW offices (Central Buildings atWestminster), had told him today that the Government are

---

[43] The list of support came in from everywhere. In addition, workers from around the world were pledging their money and support for the miners' struggle. Farman, *TheGeneral Strike,* 15. "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."

[44] Jones, *Hansard,* H.C.. May 6, 1926, 467.

[45] LSE, MF 221.G.S. Citrine, reel 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

very disturbed about the condition of the Navy and the Army."[46] Emile Burns, another contemporary, wrote: "The Government could not trust the "loyalty" of the forces who knew the inhabitants and the working conditions in the area; and, therefore, where police attacks were to be employed, men from distant areas were drafted in, and probably carefully fed with anti-strike propaganda before being used."[47] The literature indicates that in almost every instance strikers were solidly behind the strike, and if there were defections there weren't many or they were offset by workers who were constantly clamoring to come out in support. Crook writes that in London: "Practically all dock workers were out from the start, and the narrow streets around the wharves were packed with strikers." Even the supervisory personnel supported the strike. "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."[48] "The strikers exerted a stranglehold over London's tramway services from beginning to end of the strike. There were never more than a hundred trams on the road on any one of the strike's nine days,"[49] writes Julian Symons. Councils of Action were organized in Motherwell, Scotland where they had elected a Communist MP four years previous to the strike. The Council of Action was in total control with all trade union and working-class parties represented. In his article "The West of Scotland," Paul Carter discusses the Council of Action which

> organized subcommittees for picketing, food, transport and propaganda, and daily open-air meetings were held. Motherwell had the second largest railway depot in the whole of Britain at that time, and not a single engine moved out of the sheds.

---

[46] Ibid,
[47] Emil Burns, *The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action,* (London:Labour Research Department:1926), 73.
[48] Ibid, 417, 394.
[49] Symons, *The General Strike,* 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> After the strike the local paper commented: 'Motherwell, red and revolutionary Motherwell has been a perfect mode of peace and quietness…it was also one of the towns where solidarity was the keynote all during the conflict.'[50]
>
> A major feature of the Lanarkshire Councils of action was the strong Communist party influence. The Chairman of the Joint Committee was a Communist, together with seven other members of the forty-man committee. Airdrie and Coatbridge had a Communist Chairman and several other Communists on the Council, as well as some right-wingers. Both the Chairman and the Secretary of the Cambuslang Council of Action were Communist Party members, and the secretary was also an active member of the Parish Council Bellshill had a Communist chairman and it was reported that all the Communist Party members in Shotts were on the village Council of Action. Local Communist Party strength appears to have gone hand in hand with a high degree of strike activity in the county.[51]

In another article, "Manchester Diary it is reported that 50,000 copies of the *British Worker* was reproduced." Commenting on the workers' hunger for the news Fenner Brockway said: "we could have sold three times as many, but we have only paper for 300,000. The paper caused a great sensation in the streets."[52] The intensity of the experience of the General Strike led many people, very quickly, to understand politics in a way that they may have not before the strike began. Workers, who were initially angry but not necessarily political, became much more so.[53] A touch of humor was supplied by a humble pram labelled "The Workers Daimler," where a derelict motor car dragged by two cart horses in which sat a miner carrying a placard declaring 'both broke." Bands playing the "Red Flag" led the procession. Perhaps the most popular tableau was one which featured a hearse carrying the label "Death of Capitalism," followed by a vehicle on which the "birth of Socialism" was illustrated."[54] The authors of these articles

---

[50] Skelley , ed., Paul Carter, "The West of Scotland, *The General Strike, 1926,"* 116.
[51] Ibid, 117.
[52] Skelley, ed., *The General Strike,* Edmund and Ruth, "Manchester Diary," 165.
[53] Morris, *The General Strike* 116. "On a Royal Commission setup to ostensibly represent both employers and workers Beatrice Webb commented. It was "like those of a revolutionary tribunal, sitting in judgment on the capitalist owners and organizers of the nation's industries."
[54] Skelley, ed., Peter Wyncoll "The East Midlands", *The General Strike,* 177.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

demonstrated the prominent role that the Communists played in cities across Britain, and their importance in the strike committees and Councils of Action.

But the GC provided no leadership to the General Strike. Only beginning to strategize by the end of April, they shed little light on the kind of strategy workers needed to adopt in order to wage a successful struggle. Consequently instructions were often unclear because they were not thought out. Often they were contradictory leaving different unions to decide what steps individual members should take. "Difficulties of interpretation arose from the General Council's decision to let each union act separately when calling out its members. Typical of these was the confusion that came from the order calling out all building workers, 'except such as are employed definitely on housing and hospital work'."[55] Unions disagreed about how to interpret these instructions. The question whether light and power should both be shut off became an incident that was to plague the GC because many of the workers were given incomplete instructions about what power was to be left on and what was to be shut off.[56] The question of permits and who was to remain in building sites were all practical issues that flowed from a basic lack of preparation. And while the GC was so contradictory in its instructions and while it argued that it, and only it, had the right to negotiate for the miners, it also suggested that each individual union bring out its membership in its own way. Unwilling to admit that

---

[55] Symon, *The General Strike,* 65.

[56] Regarding the question of power Crook in *The General Strike,* 370, argues that the GC had a confused position and therefore gave impossible orders to the strikers involved. "For instance the GC exclaimed that '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."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the government was mounting its forces to defeat the unions, the leaders advised workers to keep on smiling and plant flowers in their gardens.

Every union was advised to find its own course and no union was sanctioned for not supporting the strike. But when the Tower Hill and Mersey branches of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union voted to go out in support their leader, Havelock Wilson, opposed the strike and went to Court to ask for an injunction against those branches "on the grounds first that a two-thirds majority of all members ashore was required for a strike call, and second that the strike was contrary to law."[57] Wilson, historically supporting the employers, once again sided with management against the entire working class and sought revenge against those workers who supported the strike. Those chapters that voted yes and went out in response to the GC's call were suspended for a year from the Union.

Among the myriad questions that had to be dealt with was the issue of violence and intimidation by government authorities. According to the *Scottish Worker*

> The Coatbridge Police raided the Strike Committee's premises while the Committee was dealing with three applications for transport permits. The police asked those present to stand up and give their names and addresses and ages. They requested the Committee to give the authority for their actions. The reply was—The General Council of the British Trades Union Congress. The police then stated that in all probability the members of the Committee would be charged with sedition or with a contravention of the E.P. Act. All the documents and bulletins were taken away. The Committee reported what happened to the General Council of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, who advised them to carry on as before. The Committee is again in action. This is the first police interference with an official Strike Committee in Scotland.[58]

The advice of the officials was to carry on as if government reprisals were not an issue for the workers. But this was not the first time that the police force crossed the line in

---

[57] Symon, *The General Strike,* 121.
[58] *Scottish Worker,* May 11, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intimidating workers. Moreover, the officials stressed that workers should not allow themselves to be provoked by agent provocateurs, but it did not deal with the real question of the state employing force against the strikers. Since much of the violence against strikers was never publicized in the *British Worker,* workers around the country did not know the extent of victimization by the military or the police. Instead officials encouraged strikers to organize soccer games with the local police. Moreover, the GC attempted to find some rationalization for the government's position of troop deployment in places such as Scotland and Wales. The result was that workers were disarmed. According to the union officials, "this has been done, …solely in order that the detachments may be available should the necessity arise, to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order and in the protection of life and property."[59] In response to the lack of attention to the issue of police and military intervention, some of the workers, as already mentioned, set up their own defense guards, but in other situations they were left defenseless and were thus beaten by police. "Wholesale arrests, mounted-and foot-police charges, and a general increase in severity of sentences 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 authority."[60] On the Victoria docks where volunteers were attempting to unload food gates and buildings were guarded by a battalion of Grenadier Guards who were fully armed, "There were also hundreds of naval ratings, mostly from Chatham, who took over the cranes. At the East India Docks a mass of strikers outside the gates was intimidated by the sight of bluejackets manning a machine gun that was directly

[59] *British Worker,* May 3, 1926.
[60] Symon, *The General Strike,* 422.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pointed at them."[61] In fact there were over three thousand arrests in the nine days of striking.

As a response to the employers' attempt to use blackleg labor, vehicles were set ablaze. One such incident was in London's East End. "Vehicles suspected of carrying goods or office workers to and from the City were stopped and quite frequently wrecked. Several vehicles were set alight, others thrown into the river. After a night of fierce street battles, thirty civilian casualties were taken to Poplar Hospital. One man allegedly died of his injuries early on Wednesday morning."[62] R. Page Arnot, who was a member of the CP, recorded the events. On the 5th day of the strike, Arnot writes:

> More collisions between police and strikers in various parts of the country; riots at Glasgow, Hull, and Middlesborough; baton charges at Newcastle and Preston. Chief Civil commissioner announces many arrests. Special message from Prime Minister guaranteeing protection for blacklegs. Home Office report states: "The Communist Party continues to circulate false reports with a view to creating alarm. Their Headquarters at Birmingham were raided last night and a number of persons who were printing a paper, called the Birmingham Worker, were arrested.[63]

International solidarity became a key point in the strike. Workers on the Continent assured British workers that they would place an embargo on coal so that none would reach Britain.

> Edo Finmen, secretary of the International Transport Federation, telegraphed the Transport Unions of France, Belgium, Holland and Germany to stop the export of coal to Britain and to prevent the bunkering of British ships. The order also forbade seamen to take jobs on British ships. Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Finnish Transport unions promptly offered their help. The unions of Denmark

---

[61] Ibid, 192-193.

[62] Farman, *The General Strike,* 192. "Plymouth Corporation's attempt to run a skeleton tram service on Saturday morning led to clashes between strikers and mounted police and the service was withdrawn after a warning from the local strike committee that it 'would no longer be responsible for the good order of our people'."

[63] R. Page Arnot, *The General Strike May 1926: Its Origin and History,* (New York:Augustus M. Kelley:1967), 193; this is also discussed in Robert M. Rayner's *The Story of Trade Unionism: For the Combination Acts to the General Strike,* (London:Longman, Green, and Co.:1929), 247.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and Holland began the embargo on British ships and on coal for Britain even before instructions were received from the International.

This was also true of the German Transport Union, which refused to handle coal for England, and refused to bunker British ships and took measures to prevent ships from carrying strikebreakers.

> The International Miners' Federation, acting on the same principle, placed an embargo on all coal intended for England. The Central Council of Russian Trade Unions decided upon a general levy of a quarter of a day's pay. Even before this decision was reached, however, collections were being taken in all the principal industrial centers.[64]

Money came in from around the world. The International Federation of Trade Unions sent $5000. Support came from Africa, Asia, Australia, Japan, India, and Korea as just a few of the many places where workers were inspired by the British working class' struggle against their employers. The support was varied but widespread. "The Russian contribution of £1,161,459 2s 6d. to the British Miners' Relief Fund amounted to 87 percent of all overseas donations…There was widespread and enduring belief that the Russian support had been vital…"[65]

On May 12, nine days after the strike began, one day after the GC called out the second line of defense, the strike was called off. The TUC met with Sir Herbert Samuel in the home of Sir Abe Bailey, a South African mining millionaire and friend of JR Thomas. The miners' fate was sealed. The TUC "negotiated" a settlement behind the backs of the miners. The two miners' leaders who could have possibly been involved with the negotiations were either sick or out of town. Robert Smillie, although a socialist, he had accepted defeat in the previous miners' strike and left town during these crucial negotiations. Not only was there no guarantee that the mine owners would accept this

---

[64] Nearing, *The British General Strike,* 105-6.
[65] Francis and Smith, *The Fed,* 53. There appears to be some discrepancy on this question.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

agreement, but the miners won no wage gains and the hours of work were increased. Reorganization, stressed in the report, was to begin but no help was forthcoming for the miners. In a desperate attempt to find some grounds to terminate the strike Sir Herbert Samuel was asked by the union leaders to reintroduce his original report. Not only, however, had nothing changed regarding the mine owners; that are, they continued to strive for concessions from the miners, but Samuel was never asked by the government to introduce his report. In fact, he was told to stay in Italy and not return for negotiations. The mine owners would settle for nothing less than a complete victory over the miners.[66] The workers were not to save face even if the Samuel Report were accepted as a basis for an agreement. According to Ben Turner, a member of the Council

> The decision to call off the general strike was unanimous…It was decided not from fear of arrest (I never heard of the rumor 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.[67]

And yet in the May 12 issue announcing the end of the strike, the *British Worker* also wrote that Samuel promised nothing. In a letter from Herbert Samuel to Mr. Pugh, the former wrote: "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."[68] No assurances were given and yet the GC behaved as if the miners had won some sort of victory and was subsequently surprised by the fact that the employers were unwilling to be as generous as

---

[67] Crook, *The General Strike,* 437.
[68] *British Worker,* May 12, 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Baldwin had promised. That is he assured the union leaders that there would be no victimization or reprisals against the returning strikers. But unaware of how catastrophic this defeat would be Bevin upon meeting with the Prime Minister

> persisted in trying to get a definite assurance from the Premier that the strikers would be protected against victimization, but he was 'gently rebuked' and the deputation, bewildered and dismayed, were in the street again by ten past one. Bevin's comment on the interview was: Thousands will be victimized as a result of this day's work.[69]

It is difficult to know which is worse; the complete disregard for the consequences of calling off the strike by the officials who were summarily escorted into the street ten minutes after they pronounced their capitulation or Bevin's capitulation to the deputation when he claimed that he was aware that workers would be victimized by the sellout. Thomas, once again unwilling to mount any concerted response against the employers to defend his own membership, declared: "It is an agreement which in my judgment is not only satisfactory, but will set an example for others to follow."[70] When the miners refused to accept the agreement, Thomas asked Cook to accept the word of a British gentleman that the agreement that was arrived at would be fair to the miners. "You may not trust my word, but will you accept the word of a British gentleman who has been Governor of Palestine?"[71] Neither Cook, nor Herbert Smith were either considered or even knew about the fact that these negotiations were taking place. Both Cook and Smith demanded to be involved, and yet, although the miners would be profoundly impacted by the decision of the Council, Bromley responded: 'By God, we are all in this now and I want to say to the miners, in a brotherly comradely spirit, but straight that this it is not a miners' fight now. I am willing to fight right along with them

---

[69] Bagwell, *The Railwaymen,* 484.
[70] Ibid, 490.
[71] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle*, 245.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and to suffer as a consequence, but I am not going to be strangled by my friends'[72] Moreover, Bromley attempted to blame the failure of the strike on the mineworkers. Complaining about the ingratitude of the strikers Bromley said: "After all the sacrifices made by other unions, the miners both deserted their comrades who were fighting for them, and themselves."[73] Even months later it was virtually impossible to get the leaders of GC to explain their decision to terminate the strike. Eventually, when the GC did explain their position they argued that

> 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. The Council cannot but regret that so great a demonstration of loyalty by the Trade Union movement found so little practical appreciation or response on the part of those for whom the sacrifice was made.[74]

There was an attempt to blame the miners for their own defeat. In fact it was suggested that the miners should have shown more appreciation and that the leadership should not have been obligated to explain its motivation for ending the strike. As far as the GC was concerned it had the right to make the final decision. Disbelief, anger and bitterness were the overwhelming responses to the news by hundreds of thousands of workers. Telegrams and letters indicating that the strike should be resumed flooded into the TUC headquarters.

> May 13: 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 were 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.[75]

---

[72] Ibid, 219.
[73] Nearing, *The British General Strike,* 108.
[74] Ibid, 111.
[75] Crook, *The General Strike,* 448.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

From the Central Disputes committee: Sheffield – May 15, 1926

> That this meeting of the Sheffield Central Disputes Committee expresses it keen dissatisfaction at the action of the General council of the TUC in approaching the Prime Minister for the purpose of unconditionally calling off the General Strike. That policy was, in our opinion, altogether unwarranted so far as the morale and determination of the workers was concerned, and outrages the solidarity of the workers, and leaves them exposed to the attacks of the employers by reason of the surrender being unconditional resulting in there being no guarantees that men resuming work will resume on the conditions prevailing prior to the strike being declared. In the absence of official information, this meeting, therefore, demands an immediate investigation into the circumstances …to the above action, and whilst deploring that the united front has been destroyed, pledges its support to all trade unionists who are continuing the struggle.[76]

Ned Gittins, a miner remarked: "You could feel the, you know, the severity of it, going right through everybody you know. We thought, oh here we are. Because each of those days, the nine days of the GS, as each day was coming along were noticing the strength and unity of the workers was getting that much better each day. So when this what-you-call happened, well, it created dismay and…"[77] A Jewish worker in London remarked that: "…it was a strike that would have [been] won but was sold by the national organizers, people like Jimmy Thomas who was General Secretary of the railway workers and Ernest Bevin …"[78] The miners were forced to go it alone. Thomas had been absent at the Saturday proceedings in Bryanston Square since he was a guest at a luncheon party at Wimborne House, the residence of Lord and Lady Wimborne. But not believing that the decision could have gone against the miners, they thought that either victory had been achieved,[79] since there would have been no other explanation for this to occur, or regarded the announcement as a hoax but later thought that they must have

---

[76] LSE, Citrine memoirs, Reel 8, Central Disputes Committee Sheffield.
[77] SWML, Ned Gittins, 231/246, April 4, 1975.
[78] Jewish Museum, Philip Yason, Tape 102.
[79] Morris, *The General Strike,* 97 "Harry Watson 'had visions of street parties and all kinds of gaiety, thinking that miners had won and the Government and coal-owners had given in. It was hours later when we found out that there was no agreed settlement that miners were still locked out. It was hard to believe at first. It was a betrayal, nothing short of betrayal'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

received a favorable deal. Thus the Altrincham Express strike sheet reported on May 13 that there was a huge victory meeting was held since the strikers believed that that would have been the only possible explanation for the termination of the strike. It was reported that: "The general Council has terminated the strike because they are convinced that the miners are now assured of a square deal-and-The miners wish to thank the General Council, the trades union movement, and all who have supported them, for their splendid help."[80] During a public meeting that was held in Altrincham Public Hall:

> This euphoria was dispelled during the meeting when a representative of the Printers' Union reported that the *Daily Mail* and *Thompson's Weekly* had refused to reinstate men unless they left the Union and that as a result, work had not been resumed. When the railwaymen added their bad news and other Unions still in dispute confirmed the situation, the Strike Committee immediately resumed its continuous session and printed an issue of the paper "The Altrincham Express", that they had published each day of the strike.[81]

The GC had grown fearful of its own success. Workers refusing to give in were even at the end coming out in droves. The capitulation had been complete. The employers and the government were then able to make workers' lives even more miserable than before the strike. The consequences were devastating. Even more serious was the fact that the leadership said nothing about how the workers were to return to work. Every union was in charge of its own membership. Victimization was inevitable and in some cases the union was almost broken. Workers, when facing their employers upon returning to work, were told in many instances that their services were not needed or that their wages were reduced. The Government could not reassure the workers either. In a statement issued by Baldwin it was clear that he personally opposed any victimization but there was little that he could or would be able to guarantee. "His

---

[80] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 249.
[81] R. and E. Frow, *The Communist Party in Manchester,* 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

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."[82] Symon contends that the men were so angry that

> in Glasgow men marched in procession, carrying placards which said 'Down with Thomas. Alarm-fear-despair-a victorious army disarmed and handed over to its enemies, said the Hull Strike committee. Twenty-four hours after the General Council had declared the strike terminated, the number of strikers had increased by 100,000 and their good temper was turning to violence. The General Council claimed that: the General Strike has ended. It has not failed.[83]

Workers were in many cases transferred or sacked outright. About victimization Nearing points to a variety of humiliating demands workers had to accept in order to be reinstated in their jobs.

> 1) The trade unions had to admit that in calling a strike they committed a wrongful act against the companies, and agree that the Companies do, by reinstatement, surrender their legal rights to claim damages arising out of the strike from strikers and others responsible. 2) The unions undertake not again to instruct their members to strike without previous negotiations with the companies. 3) To give no support of any kind to their members to take any unauthorized action. 4) Not to encourage supervisory employees in the Special Class to take part in any strike. And although the companies agreed not to reduce anyone's salary that was not the case. Finally they insisted that the settlement shall not extend to persons who have been guilty of violence or intimidation.[84]

The Department of the Admiralty wasted no time in retaliating. "Attention is drawn to the provision of the Regulations 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

---

[82] Symon, *The General Strike,* 213.
[82] Baldwin, *Hansard*, H.C., May 13, 1926. Thomas, *Hansard*, H.C. May 13, 1926, 1055. After the strike was called off and it was obvious that the government intended to make the strikers pay, Thomas said with much surprise, "I now come to this curious situation, to which I want to draw the attention of the House. Let the House keep in mind the phrase 'Total Surrender.' No one on the other side of the House who has the facts dare deny that at this moment there are over 100,000 men more unemployed or on strike at this moment than there were when we declared the strike off yesterday. ..There are actually men who have come out that had gone back. The result of that is that you have 4,000,000 men at this moment out of work." Thomas must have believed that this was some kind of threat to the employers although he had already called the strike off.
[83] Symon, *The General Strike*, 216.
[84] Nearing, *The General Strike,* 59.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

all previous service."[85] Anger and demoralization gripped the British working class. Miss Mavis Llewellyn and woman living in a mining town during the strike said:

> And you see, after twenty six, so many of those, Federation was one, and they were all over the coalfield the same, who were victimised and never got work back in the pits. You see, after nineteen twenty six there was such demoralization and such discontent and dissatisfaction because the men, miners had been let down that they left the Union…And the Spencer's Union, the scab union we called it, was being organized in these valleys, and this man had come and offered Fred a job as an organizer for this new union.[86]

Many workers, especially on the railroads, went back out again until their jobs were secured.

> The Salford tramwaymen held a mass meeting in the evening and decided not to go in to work because the management was only prepared to take back the workers as and when required. So solid was the local action against victimization that Stanley Baldwin was forced to issue a statement that he would not countenance any attempt by the employers to force down wages or launch an attack on trade unionism.[87]

According to the Parliamentary Papers: Miss Wilkinson asked the Prime Minister, whether he is aware that in spite of the appeal to the Prime Minister, Wholesale Newsagents' Federal still refuse to meet the representatives of that union, and, as a result, over 2,500 men are still out,"[88] "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."[89] The *Manchester Guardian* set up a company union. Members belonging to the Amalgamated Engineering Union who supported the strike were sacked when they returned to work and

---

[85] Thomas, *Hansard,* H.C., May 13, 1926, 1053.
[86] SWML, Miss Mavis Llewellyn, Aud. 98.
[87] Skelley, ed., *The General Strike,* E and R Frow, "Manchester Diary," 168; The Merthyr Tydfil judgment called for the debarring of relief to those trade unionist engaged in the dispute. Patricia Ryan, "The Poor Law in 1926" in Morris' *The General Strike*, 372.
[88] Wilkinson, *Hansard,* H.C., May 17, 1926, 10.
[89] Cliff and Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle,* 252.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were replaced by non-union members.[90] Returning to work was devastating, but it could have been much worse had the workers not organized to go back together. Membership declined in the unions by more than 500,000. Union funds decreased markedly from £12 ½ million to £8 ½.

For the next seven months the miners were forced to go it alone. By the end of November after suffering near starvation and a humiliating defeat, district settlements replaced national ones, the eight-hour day had been imposed by Parliament and wages had been reduced below the 1921 level.[91] The Trade Disputes Act and the Trade Union Act (1927) were passed in the House of Commons, which were designed to prevent sympathetic strike action; "it substituted 'contracting-in' for 'contracting-out' and forbade established civil servants to join unions that were affiliated to the TUC."[92] Relations with Russia were also broken off as a result of the defeat. Unemployment kept the wages down and competing company unions, such as the Spencer union now rivaled the MFGB. Along with the miners the rest of the trade union movement were devastated for years to come. Violence, even after the strike did not end.

> There were several attempts to sabotage trains near Newcastle. Although no passengers were seriously hurt, several were taken to the hospital and several more attempts were made to sabotage trains during the next few days. A large crowd which demonstrated outside Gateshead Police Court on 13 May during the trial of Lawther and Bolton was baton-charged by police and numerous arrests were made.[93]
>
> 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

---

[90] National Library of Scotland, Amalgamated Engineering Union, Acc. 4516 (6)

[91] On November 15 Beatrice Webb wrote in her *Diary*: "The Miners' Federation delegate meeting surrendered yesterday to the Government terms – the worst possible terms- barely better than unconditional surrender to the employers-and they surrendered in the worst possible way. They refuse responsibility but refer the terms to the districts with a recommendation that they be accepted-which means that some districts will accept and others will not."

[92] Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 448.

[93] Farman, *The General Strike,* 180.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> 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. [94]

Police raids hit South Wales terribly hard. They raided houses and confiscated documents. In one such incident the police numbered 5 and the crowd made a hostile demonstration marked by much booing and singing of the "Red Flag". Communists were arrested. Workers protested the lack of relief given by the Board of Guardians. Fines, arrests, beatings by the police lasted through December. Mrs. Elvira Bailey (Treorchy) [on November 3] given 2 months for throwing a stone at policeman. Rhondda Stipendiary said: 'I find that the women have been taking too prominent a part in these disturbances and I must impose a penalty that will be a deterrent to others.'[95] And yet even at the Bournemouth Congress in September in the midst of this repression against the miners the General Council not only felt no need to discuss the strike, but it kept everyone else from doing so as well. During the last days of its appearance the British Gazette carried quotations from CT Cramp and JH Thomas as arguments against the continuance of the Strike. On May 11 and 12 the Gazette displayed this quotation from Thomas: "I have never disguised, and I do not disguise now, that I have never been in favour of the principle of the general strike." "The tragedy of this strike consists in just this fact," wrote Ellen Wilkinson,

---

[94] Crook, *The General Strike,* 454; without defense guards people were vulnerable to all types of retribution by the authorities.

[95] General Strike and Miners' Lockout, Selection of Reports from *South Wales News* and *Western Mail;* Gilbert quotes Cook in *Class, Community, and Collective Action,* 193. When speaking about the women Cook said, "I cannot pay them too high a tribute. They are canvassing from door-to-door in the villages where some of the men had signed on. The police take the blacklegs to the pits, but the women bring them home. The women shame these men out of scabbing…The women of Notts and Derby have broken the coalowners'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that it was led by men who did not believe in it, who could not want it to succeed. There was a very English scene in the House of Commons on the day the strike was declared. The great railway leader blowing his nose vigorously, and in tears exclaiming: 'I love my country as well as the gentlemen opposite,' and the Premier also in tears declaring that his work was in ruins. But behind the weeping Premier stood Churchill and Amery, prepared to go to any lengths; while the tearful labour leaders was the strongest man on his side, and he had just declared that it would be a catastrophe if the strike he was about the lead should succeed.[96]

According to Kingsley Martin:

> 'The TUC was beaten before the strike began. It had been bluffing, and, as an opponent of the TUC has since remarked, 'You can't get the same concession twice from the same bluff.' The TUC stood as a combatant in a war which had been forced upon it and which it feared to win. The forces of Labour were commanded by Socialist reformists, and the forces of the Government by class-conscious believers in the inevitable conflict.[97]

The Labour Party, which played no role during the strike, was now embarrassed by its failure to do anything positive. Moreover, it did not denounce the Baldwin government for the part it played in precipitating the crisis. In fact, behind the backs of the trade unions the LP maintained continued negotiations with Baldwin and the conservative government. Snowden continued to concern himself more with the health of industry than the well-being of the workers. One of the criticisms that he raised even after the strike was over was that the government did nothing to alleviate the pressure on the coal industry. The Finance Bill proposed that taxation on the coal industry be continued. But always the free trader, Snowden asked: "what is the Chancellor of the Exchequer doing to lighten the burden upon industry? He is doing absolutely nothing in this Bill; as a matter of fact, he is increasing the burden upon industry." And in the same speech Snowden, although even-handed about lockouts and strikes, argues that: "industrial disputes leading to stoppage of work are barbarous methods of trying to deal

---

[96] Nearing, *The British General Strike*, 134.
[97] Martin, *The British Public,* 58.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with industrial matters."[98] And yet even after the strike was defeated and workers were victimized for striking, Philip Snowden discussed what he believed to be the barbarous nature of strikes to those very people who victimized the workers. And Ramsay MacDonald, head of the Labour Party, not only endorsed the view that "there shall be no revision of the previous wages rates unless there are sufficient assurance that the measures of reorganization proposed by the Commission will be effectually adopted', but during the same session MacDonald protested that he was misunderstood about the question of the subsidy. "Let me say that I never said, and have never suggested, and no one ever suggested, that a subsidy, or any assistance, should run until the reconstruction itself was in full working order...It is not a question of helping until reconstruction has taken place, but of helping until reconstruction has been agreed upon."[99] Moreover, MacDonald sympathized with the Government's invocation of the Emergency Powers Act even though it was devastating to the livelihoods of mllions of workers. June 2:

> I know perfectly well that a Government faced with conditions such as the Government was faced with a week or two ago is bound to ask for emergency powers. I never shirked stating that had we been in the position the Government was then, whatever view we should have taken of the matters that brought about emergency, we should have had to issue those Regulations, and when the Attorney-General said, in the course of the previous Debate, that he had only taken the regulations that we left behind, he stated the truth.[100]

And although MacDonald complained about some of the unfairness that had arisen due to the regulations, he supported Baldwin's use of them. Over three million workers had been defeated and were being victimized by their employers and the miners remained on strike and although Philip Snowden castigated Mr. Hopkinson (Member for Mossley) as a spokesman of the mine owners whose "speech was intended to whitewash the Mining

---

[98] Snowden, *Hansard,* H.C., May 20, 1926, 470, 467.
[99] MacDonald, *Hansard*, H.C., June 1, 1920, 614.
[100] Ibid, June 2, 1926, 746.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Association of Great Britain"[101] the very next day Ramsay MacDonald made a speech supporting Baldwin's right to employ the Emergency Powers Act.

When the miners' strike was called off in November their conditions of existence were most tenuous. Wages had been lowered to starvation levels and their hours had been increased. Many thousands of miners were unemployed. In order to cohere a relief effort Dr. Marion Phillips wrote *Women and the Miners' Lock-out* to drive home the distress found in the mining towns of Britain. Their circumstances were dire and the government was vindictive. All relief was on loan.[102]

The General Strike of 1926, one of the most important events in British working class history, ended not only in failure for the workers who risked all to defend their pitiful standard of living, but the failure of the strike allowed the employers to diminish their standard of living for years to come.

[101] Snowden, *Hansard*, H.C., June 1, 1926, 714.
[102] Her book demonstrates the un-mitigating poverty that plagued the miners and their families after the defeat of their 7-month long strike.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 15: CONCLUSION

The British working class lost the most important fight of its life. Both the government and employers conspired in their defeat. But I would argue that it was ultimately because the union leadership called off the strike in the manner elaborated coupled with the fact that the Communist Party did not prepare for this eventuality that the strike was defeated. The question of what would have happened to British society had the strike not been aborted will be discussed as long as the debate over the 1926 General Strike holds interest for historians.

The labor leadership, accepting the limitations of capitalism, was unwilling to jeopardize its institutions. Union leaders such as JR Thomas and Havelock Wilson preferred to socialize with the upper class rather than their own membership forging even tighter allegiances to the ruling class. Time and again they expressed their pleasure in organizing functions involving the employer class, while consequently discouraging their members from taking strike action. Because British leaders wished to hobnob with the employers and the aristocrats, workers displayed their disgust for this kind of behavior. To varying degrees these leaders downplayed the workers' struggles and sought political approaches to their outstanding problems or just sought accommodation with the employers. We have seen that the working class was consistently willing and committed to fight and yet was met each time with a leadership unwilling to engage in strike action. Lower wages generally were the result of this strategy. Union leaders understandably feared that strike activity might have gotten out of hand which would have opened up the opportunity for the more militant leaders to displace them. These leaders benefited handsomely from their status as union presidents and were unwilling to relinquish their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

positions. Thus, by the time one of the most promising struggles against capitalist rule that is, the General Strike occurred, the General Council assured its defeat by calling it off at the height of its power. The leadership accepted capitalism as a fait accompli thus undermining the strike and assuring its defeat. To successfully win the general strike a revolutionary situation would have had to occur. Although a successful revolutionary challenge did not occur this does not then mean that the working class was any less desirous of one. So even though Anderson argues that "a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat," Philip Snowden, who represented the more conservative wing of the LP, was forced to concede that

> society is divided into two classes. Those who own and those who work for the benefit of those who own. No community can claim to have established the primary condition of human freedom and to have provided the conditions of human development which permits land and the instruments of production to be a private monopoly excluding the vast majority of people from access to the use of these instruments… [1]

Therefore, Snowden's grudging and euphemistic acceptance of "socialism" represented the deep yearnings of the working class to achieve a more fulfilling life. British workers had few illusions that their lives would improve substantially under capitalism. Britain, the first industrialized nation, organized a working class that worked in the mines and on the railroads placing millions of workers into an industrial situation that starkly posed the class nature of that society. Workers' grievances were not being redressed through the workings of the system and because of the war and the "nationalization" of industry they reasoned that it would be necessary to put all industry under the control of the state. Therefore sometimes workers called for joint government, workers' control and sometimes they called for outright workers' control. With the success of the Russian

[1] [1] Snowden, *The New World Order*, 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Revolution these mixed, inchoate, ambiguous feelings broke out in support of organizing a socialist society. *Full Up and Fed Up,* a compilation of miners' attitudes and feelings about their jobs, about capitalism and Russia, is replete with discussions of miners who admired the Bolsheviks and wished to emulate their revolution in Britain.

Added to the millions of male industrial workers who had already achieved a significant degree of class consciousness were women who went into the workforce to satisfy the demands of industry when the men went off to war. As a result many women who had not necessarily been as politically conscious became much more so. And while Susan Pedersen argues that class, especially in the case of British women workers, is not necessarily the sole measure by which an historian should evaluate the historicity of a particular period, I believe I have demonstrated in this study that not only had women gone into industry in the millions, but they most emphatically identified themselves as workers. Women resisted leaving their jobs although the union leaders refused to support them. Women became emboldened and went out on strike, sometimes alone and sometimes with men, to force the government to pay higher wages. Women became shop stewards and went into unions in droves. It is indeed class that defined them whether the government or the union leaders or the feminists would concede that point. And most importantly many became militant socialists fighting for a socialist society.

Alastair Reid argues in "The Impact of the War on British Workers", that:

> What working people shared during the war was not an increasingly homogeneous class position but rather a common experience of institutional changes… Thus the one persistent thread running through all the occupational experiences discussed so far has been the wartime expansion of trade unionism, a point which can hardly be stressed enough.[2]

But even he recognized that:

---

[2] Reid, "The Impact of the War on British Workers," in *The Upheaval of War,* 227.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The unions most centrally involved in the war effort began very rapidly to raise non-industrial issues when they made demands on the government… in which he adds furthermore, even those not immediately involved in war production could see demonstrated for the first time on a national level the validity of a socialist claim that private enterprise was not the only viable form of economic organization, and the growing interest in socialist ideas was consolidated and heightened by the dramatic events in Russia in 1917.[3]

It is class-consciousness which had become predominant in the years this study seeks to unravel. Trade unionism took great strides, but political consciousness, especially after the Russian revolution, took a great leap to the left. Hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrated in support of the Bolsheviks and discussions, especially in the mines, took place over political issues. Although many historians claim that British workers were essentially bound to their country, i.e., that the experience of the war had not changed them fundamentally, or as in the case of Anderson that the political culture of Britain from the inception of its bourgeois revolution left nothing but a conservative legacy, there is much evidence to the contrary. It is not correct to argue, as Carsten does, that had the government or the employers fulfilled their functions as employers and as the government, then the working class would not have protested. War is a terrible experience for the society that engages in it. Even before the war, the working class had demonstrated enormous anger against its living conditions, understanding full well that their employers hoped to procure large profits while undermining the living conditions of its workers. Proletarian Sunday schools were set up all over the country to discuss Marxism. The working class by and large thought of itself as socialist. That meant several things, but most particularly, it meant there was a strong belief in the abolition of private property and that the state should own and control the means of production for the

---

[3] Ibid. 229.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

good of the whole. The Russian Revolution congealed what had been an amorphous sense of anti capitalism among the workers.

Not all people who referred to themselves as socialists supported the Russian version of socialism, or considered themselves to be revolutionary. But the fact that the Labour Party incorporated Clause IV into its program, that is, nationalization of property with some sort of workers' involvement, meant that the question of who controls what was now up for grabs. Many workers, especially in mining towns, understood full well what the Russian Revolution meant for them. "The term *Little Moscow* struck a chord because in the last analysis they believed, however accurately, that the Soviet Union offered an example that was preferable to the conditions they were experiencing in capitalist Britain."[4] Communist literature sold widely, and a number of leaders of the Miners' Federation came from these areas. Communists were the major factor in the organization of Councils of Action, which became the institutional form by which questions of unemployment and relief were addressed. Notwithstanding the miners' penchant for being antiestablishment, especially after the decline of religious institutions as the center of mining towns, the rest of the working class suffered hardships as well during the war, which opened the way for tremendous turmoil in Britain. Thus John Foster states that in 1919, "the Clyde district committee of the Boilermakers had unilaterally announced May Day as a holiday without any attempt at negotiation. The 100,000 attending again passed resolutions of support for the Russian Revolution, demands for British withdrawal from Russia and for a socialist revolution in Britain."[5]

---

[4] MacIntyre, *Little Moscows,* 20, referring to the towns of Mardy, Lumphinnans and the Vale of Leven. According to *An Atlas of Industrial Protest,* 153, "very often terms such as 'Red village' or 'Little Moscow' were used both disparagingly by the press and with reactive pride by many inhabitants."
[5] Foster, "Strike Action and Working Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919." 57.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

These attitudes were not confined to workers in Scotland and Wales. English workers participated as well in these momentous struggles. Resolutions condemning Britain's imperialist invasion of Russia and Ireland came in from all parts of Britain. The East End of London, housing thousands of Jews and other immigrants who opposed the war and supported the Russian Revolution, joined up with dockworkers to protest the deplorable conditions facing working people. The Jolly George incident, which opposed British intervention in the war between Russia and Poland, was organized by English dockworkers.[6]

These experiences and attitudes, never really being lost and unemployment never really abating, led to the 1926 General Strike, which was the most massive response of working people since the Chartist Movement. Three and one half million workers went on strike and 100,000 more came out even after the strike was called off, giving one an idea of the profound frustration felt by working-class people who wished to defend the living standards of their own as well as miners' livelihoods. And although the General Council tried to keep the strike an industrial strike only, hoping against hope that the specter of politics would not enter into the equation, this could not be accomplished. No matter how much Thomas, Bevin, Clynes, and the rest of the General Council tried to assure the government that this strike was not anti-constitutional, Baldwin claimed that it was. The government understood the implications of the mounting offensive, and brought about pressure on the trade union officials. Once the government identified the General Strike as political, all bets were off. These trade union officials— afraid to admit the

---

[6] Samuel, MacColl and Cosgrove. *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935:Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America,* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul:1985). Even the Workers' Theatre Movement, which had been previously associated with the Labour wing of the Socialist movement, moved in the direction of the Communists with an emphasis on class struggle.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ramifications of this enormous event, yet understanding that the government meant this to be a showdown—capitulated, delivering to workers their most devastating defeat to date. The working class lost this strike because it was unprepared for the humiliating defeat that it was handed by its leaders. In 1919 Lloyd George said to the TUC leadership that the government could have been beaten then had the union leaders wished to do so. By 1926 the working class had even more reason to bring down the government but the trade union officials (these were largely the same leaders as in 1919) remained unwilling to undermine the status quo.

The issue then of whether Bolshevism was an ideology that British workers could have identified with will be debated for some time. But this dissertation is attempting to address not whether Bolshevism per se would have been the choice of most workers, but whether the working class, because of the Russian Revolution was inclined to fight for a society that reflected their needs as workers. That is, were they willing to overthrow capitalism and institute a workers' state. For people such as George Barnes, workers were solid, believing in constitutional change, but he too feared the possibility of more radical behavior if workers' problems were not redressed. Socialism, I would argue, was an idea whose time had come, even to British workers. The logic of the amalgamations, the call for nationalization or socialization, was without doubt a major demand of the working class. The Russian Revolution, hailed by hundreds of thousands, made this even more likely. The failure of the Communist Party to intervene in a meaningful manner was at least part of the reason for its lack of success. Again to quote Trotsky:

> The Minority Movement was reduced to zero; the Communist Party retuned to the existence of a negligible sect. In this way, thanks to a radically false conception of the party, the greatest movement of the English proletariat, which led to the General Strike, not only did not shake the apparatus of the reactionary

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> bureaucracy, but, on the contrary, reinforced it and compromised Communism in Great Britain for a long time.[7]

Thus, the combined failure of the union leaders and the Communist Party: one deliberately undermining workers' struggles, and the other, incompetent to the task of making a revolution, resulted in British workers' most serious defeat and led to their subsequent demoralization for years to come.

[7] Cliff, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle*, 281.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

1. Manuscript Sources and Archives

Trade Union Papers
University of North London
Trade Union Papers

Glasgow Caledonian University
The Scottish Trades Union Congress

National Museum of Labour History, Manchester
Miscellaneous Trade Union Papers

Hull University
Open the Books

University of North London,
Trades Union Congress Papers

The Working Class Movement Library, Salford
Communist and Communist Party papers

Fawcett Library, London.
The Pankhurst Papers

South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea
Oral History Project

Warwick University
Assorted trades union documents and CP documents
Report on the Annual Trades Union Congress

Jewish Museum, London
Oral History Project

The Reorganisation of Industry, Ruskin College (London:1916)
Hansard, Parliamentary Debates 1910-1926

2. Official Papers

Public Record Office
PRO MEPO
PRO CAB
PRO HO
PRO FO

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Report on discontent in the military
Intelligence Notes 1913-16 (State Paper Office)

Scottish Record Office
Glasgow HO

The Garton Foundation, *Memorandum on the industrial Situation After the War* (London:Harrison & Sons:January 1919)

NYPL
Great Britain Sessional Papers 1917
Parliamentary Debates 1910-1926 otherwise known as *Hansard*

University of Glasgow,
Strathclyde Highton Papers
Ministry of Labour 1924-1926

British Library
Report on the Reorganization of the Communist Party

Colindale houses the, London
British Press

London School of Economics
Citrine Papers
Beveridge Papers, assorted CP papers and assorted trade union papers

3. Newspapers and Journals

All Power, 1923
The British Worker, May 3-12, 1926
British Socialist, 1913 -1919 (London)
The Call 1911-1922 (London) paper of the BSP
Camberwell Worker, May 1926
The Jewish Chronicle, 1917-1918
The Communist, 1920-22 (London)
The Daily Herald, 1911-26 (London)
The Daily News
The Daily Worker, paper of John MacLean
Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, 1920-1921 (London)
Dockers' Record, 1915-1921
Durham Miners 'Association, Monthly Circular- (1910-15) Durham
East London Observer, 1917-1918
Ex-Service Man: an Independent Journal, 1918-1920 (London)
The London Observer, 1917-1918
The Forward, 1914-1920
Homsey Journal, February 11, 1921

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Industrial Syndicalist, 1910-1913
Justice, 1911-1916 British Socialist Party
Labour History: Society for the Study of Labour History
The Labour Leader, 1911-1922 paper of the ILP
Labour Women, 1919
*The Manchester Guardian,*1910, 1921, 1924-1926
New Left Review, 1979
The Nation, August 25, 1925
The National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (paper of the CP) 1921
Poalei Zion, 1920 paper of the Jewish Socialist Party
The Railwaymen, 1920-1921
Rhondda Socialist, 1911-1913
Rhondda Leader, 1912
The Scottish Worker, 1926
The Seamen, 1917-1919
The Socialist, 1911-1921 paper of the SLP
South Wales Worker, 1913-1914
Sunday Worker, 1925-1926
The Times 1910-26 (London)
The Tribunal, 1916-1920
Vanguard, 1919 John McLean's paper
The Western Mail, 1924-1926
The Worker, 1919-1924 paper of the National Workers Committees
The Worker, organ of the Clyde Workers' Committee 1915-1917
The Women's Dreadnought, 1913
The Workers' Dreadnought, 1915-1922
The Workers' Weekly, 1925-1926
The worker, paper of the CP, 1921-1924
Young Striker, May 1926

4. Autobiographies and Memoirs

Addison, Christopher, *Four and Half Years,* (London-Hutchinson & Co, 1934)
_____ ,*Politics From Within 1911-1918,* Vol. II, (London:Herbert Jenkins Limited:1924)

Aldred, Guy, *John MacLean: Martyr of the Class Struggle,* (Glascow:The Bakunin Press:1932)

Askwith, Lord, *Industrial Problems and Dispute,* (London J. Murray, 1920)

Angell, Norman, *After All, (New* York:Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951)
Bell, Thomas, *Pioneering Days,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart, 1941)
_____, *John MacLean: A fighter for Freedom,* (Communist Party, Scottish Committee:1944)

Brockway, Fenner. *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform,Press, Prison and Parliament,* (London-George Allen & Unwin Ltd.:1942)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Burnett, John, ed. *Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British working-class people 1890-1920,* (Bloomington:Indiana University Press:1974)

Coats, Ken. ed., *Tom Mann's Memoirs,* (London:MacGibbon & Kee:1967)

Cole, Margaret, ed., *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924.*, (London:Longmans, Green and Co.:1956)

Cook. A.J., *The Nine Days*, (London:Cooperative Printing Society Ltd.:1926)

Craik, William W., *The General Strike: A Study of Labor's Tragic Weapon in Theory and Practice,*(Chapel Hill:The University of North Carolina Press:1931)

Dollan, P.J., *7he Clyde Rent War,* (Glasgow:Civic Press:1925)

Eddy, Sherwood, *The New World of Labor,* (NY:George H. Doran Company:1923)

Eyre-Todd, *Mobocracy or towards the Abyss*, (National Citizens Union, 1922)

Frow, R. & E., *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-1926*, (Manchester:North West History Group CPGB)

George, David Lloyd, *War Memoirs,* (Boston, Little, Brown, & Co., 1937)

Gallacher, William, *Revolt on the Clyde: An Autobiography,* (New York:Lawrence& Wishart:1936)

_____,*The Clyde in Wartime: Sketches of a Stormy Period,* (Glasgow:Collet's Bookshop)

_____,*The Rolling of Thunder*, (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1947)

_____ed., *Lenin on Britain*, (NY:International Publishers:1934)

Goodrich, Carter L., *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics*, (London:Pluto Press:1975)

Graves, Robert, *Good Bye to All That,* (NY:Anchor Books:1929)

Haddow, E.M., *My Seventy Years,* (Glasgow: E. Gibson, 1943)

Horner, Arthur, *Incorrigible Rebel,* (London:MacGibbon & Kee: 1960)

Hutt, Allen, *Post-War History of the British Working Class*, (NY:Coward-McCann, Inc.:1938)

Johnston, Thomas. *Memoir,* (London, Collins: 1952)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kirkwood, David, *My life of Revolt,* (London: GG Harp: 1935)

Lewis, C. Day, ed., *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*(London: A New Directions Book:1964)

MacKenzie, Norman, *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Vol III. Pilgrimmage 1912-1947,* (Cambridge- Cambridge University Press: 1978)

Mann, Tom, *Memoirs,* (London:MacGibbon & Kee: 1937)

McGovern, J, *Neither Fear nor Favour,* (London-Blandford Press: 1960)

McShane, H. & Smith, J. *Harry McShane: No Mean Fighter,* (London:Pluto Press: 1978)

Maclean, John, M.A., *Sack Dalrymple, Sack Stevenson: Let Labour Revenge Bloody Friday*, (Glasgow:John Maclean, MA:1919)

_____,*In the Rapids of Revolution essay, articles and leter 1902 -23,* (London:Allison & Bushby:1978

Pankhurst, Sylvia, *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England during the First World War*, (London:The Cresset Library:1931)

Paton, John, *Left Turn!,* (London:M. Seeker & Warburg, Ltd.: 1936)

Phillpott, H.R.S., *The Right Hon. J.H. Thomas: Impressions of a Remarkable Career*, (London:Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd.)

Roberts, Robert, *The Classic Slum:Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Ce*ntury, (London:Penguin Books:1971)

Sassoon, Siegfried, *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon*, Arranged by Rupert Hart-Davis, (London:faber and faber:1983)

Shinwell, Emanuel, *Conflict without Malice,* (London:Odhams: 1955)

_____, *I've lived through it All,* (London:Gollancz: 1973)
Smith J., Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter,* (London-Pluto Press: 1979)

Smillie, Robert, *My Life for Labour,* (London:Mills and Boon: 1924)

Thompson, Willie, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991,*(London: Pluto Press, 1992)

Thorne, Wil, *My Life's Battles,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart: 1989)

Toole, Millie, *Mrs. Bessie Braddock, MP,* (London:Robert Hale Limited:1957)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Watson, W. F., *Should The Workers Increase Output*?, (London:E. London Workers' Committee:1920)

Webb, S. & B. *The History of Trade Unionism,* (London:Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd.:1926)

William, Whiting, *Full Up And Fed Up,* (New York:Garland Publishers: 1921)

5. Contemporary Books, Pamphlets and Articles

Auld, George P., *The Dawes Plan and The New Economics,* (NY:Doubleday, Page & Co.:1927)

Aldred, Guy, *For Communism: A Communist Manifesto,* (Glasgow, Kirkwood & Co: 1935)

Anderson, Adelaide, M., *Women in the Factory:An Administrative Adventure, 1892 to 1921,* (London:John Murray:1922)

Andrews, I.O., *The Economic Effects of the World War on Women and Children,*(Oxford:OUP:1921)

Angell, Norman, *The British Revolution and The American Democracy,* (New York:BW Huebsch.1919)

Arnot, Page. R., *The General Strike May 1926:Its Origin & History,* (NY:Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers:1967)

Askwith, Lord, *Industrial Problems and Dispute,* (London -.John Murray:1920)

Barker, Bernard, ed., MacDonald, Ramsay, *Political Writings*, (NY:St. Martin's Press:1972)

Barnes, George, *Industrial Conflict:The Way Out,* (London:Sir Pitman & Pitman & Sons:1924)

Beveridge, William, *Full-Employment in a Free Society,* (NY:WW Norton & Co. Inc.:1944)

_____, *Power & Influence,* (NY:The Beechhurst Press:1955)

Blake, Robert. ed., *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig: 1914-1919,* (London:Eyre& Spottiswoode:1952)

Blanshard, Paul, *An Outline of the British Labor Movement,* (New York:Doran, 1923)

Brown, Geoff, ed., *Industrial Syndicalist, (Manchester:Spokesman Books: 19 74)*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Burns, Emile, *The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action,* (London:Labour Research Department:1926)

Charlesworth, A., Gilbert, D., Randall, A. Southall, H. and Wrigley, C., *An Atlas of Industrial Protest in Britain 1750-1990,* (NY:St. Martins Press:1996)

Clayton, Joseph, *The Rise and Decline of Socialism 1884-1924,* (London-Faber & Gwyer, 1926)

Clarke, Tom, Northcliffe *In History:An Intimate Study of Press Power,* (London:Hutchinson & Co. Ltd:1950)

Cole, G.D.H., *Workshop Organization,* (London:Oxford:1923)

_____,*Trade Unionism and Munitions,* (London -Oxford Press, 1923)

_____, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement:1900-1927*, (NY:The MacMillan Company:1927)

_____, *A History of the Labour Party*, (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd:1948)

Cole, Margaret, ed., *Beatrice Webb Diaries. 1924-32,* (NY:Harcourt, Brace and Co.:1946)

Craik, William W, *The Central Labour College 1909-2 I, A Chapter in the History of Adult Working-class Education,* (London-Lawrence & Wishart, 1964)

Crawford, Helen, 1950?, (Caladonian University)

Dangerfield, George, *The Strange Death of Liberal England,* (NY:Harrison Smith and Robert Hass:1939)

David. Edward, ed., *Inside Asquith's Cabinet:From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse,* (NY: St. Martin's Press:1977)

Dickie, J.P., *The Coal Problem: A Survey:1910-1936,* (London:Methuen:1936)

Dowse, Robert., E. ed., *From Serfdom to Socialism,* (Rutherford:Fairleigh Dickinson University Press:1974)

Drake, Barbara., *Women in Trade Unions*. Trade Union Series No. 6., (London:George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.:1920)

Dutt, Palme, R., *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.:1953) Eddy, Sherwood, *The New World of Labor,* (NY:George H, Doran Co., 1923)

Edwards, Ness, *History of the south Wales Miners' Federation Vol. I.,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1938)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Evans, David, *Labour Strike in the South Wales Coalfield,* (Cardiff:Educational Publishing Company:1911)

Furniss, Henry S., *Memories of Sixty years,* (NY: D. Appleton and Co. 1931)

Gleason, Arthur, *What the Workers Want:A Study of British Labor,* (NY:Harcourt, Brace and Howe:1920)

Gray, Howard L., *War Time Control of Industry: The Experience of England,* (NY:The MacMillan Company:1918)

Greenwood, George A., *England Today*, (London:George Allen & Unwin, Ltd:1922)

_____, *In Socialism and Society*, (London:ILP:1905)

Hammond, Thomas T., *Lenin, V.I. On Trade Union and Revolution*, (NY:Columbia University Press:1957)

Hannington, Wal, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-3,* (New York:Harper & Row:1935)

_____,*Industrial History in Wartime,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart Ltd:1940)

Henderson, Arthur, *The Aims of Labour*, (London: (London:Headley Bros.:1918)

Hobhouse, LT, *Labour Movement,* (London - TF Unwin, 1903)

Hobson, J.A., *Confessions of An Economic Heretic*, (London:George Allen & Unwin Ltd.:1938)

Hodges, Frank, *Nationalization of the Mines,* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, Inc.: 1920)

Jackson, T. A., *Solo Trumpet:Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1953)

Keynes, John M., *Essays in Persuasion,* (London:Rupert Hart-Davis:1952)

Kirkaldy, Adam, M.A., *Labour, Finance, and the War,* (London:Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd.:1916)

Lubin, L. and Everett, H., *The British Coal Dilemma,* (New York-MacMillan, 1927)

Lees-Smith, H.B., ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Labour Movement,* Vol. III, (London:Caxton Publishing Company, Limited:1928?)

MacLean, John, *In the Rapids of Revolution: Essays, articles and letters 1902-23,* (London:Allison & Busby:1978)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mahon, John A., *Trade Unionism,* (London:Victor Gollancz, Ltd. 1938)

Martin, Kingsley, *The British Public and the General Strike*, (London:Leonard & Virginia Woolf:1926)

McGovern, John, *Neither Fear Nor Favour*, (London:Blandford Press:1960)

McShane, Harry, *Glasgow 1919:The Story of the 40 Hours Strike*, (pamphlet)

_____, *John MacLean* (1940)

Millar, JPM , *The Labour college Movement.,* (London:NCLC:1932)

Money, Sir Leo Chiozza, *The Triumph of Nationalization*, (London:Cassell and Company, Ltd:1920)

Moyniham, Michael, ed., *People at War 1914-1918,* (London:David & Charles:Newton Abbot:1973)

Morel, Edmund, *Truth and the War,* (New York:Garland Publishers:1972)

Murray, John, *The General Strike of 1926: A History,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.:1951)

Murphy, J.T., *Preparing for Power: A Critical Study of the History of the British Working-Class Movement,* (London:Jonathan Cape:1934)

Nearing, Scott, *British Labor Bids for Power,* (NY:Social Science Publishers::1926)
_____,*The British General Strike: An Economic Interpretation of Its Background and Its Significance,* (NY:Vangaurd Press: 1927)

Perlman, Selig, *The Theory Of The Labor Movement,* (NY:The MacMillan Company:1928)

Phillips. Marion, *Women and the Miners' Lock-Out,* (London:The Labour Publishing Company:1927)

_____,*Capitol and Labor*, (London:Headley Bros. Ltd:1918)

_____, "Women in Industry" *Some Problems of Urban and Rural Industry,* (Oxford:Ruskin College)

Pollen, Arthur, *The Vital Principle in Business,* National Industrial Conference Board, March 17, 1921

Ramsay, Alex, *Terms of Industrial Peace,* (London:Constable:1917)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Rayner, Robert, *The Story of Trade Unionism,* (London:Longmans, Green & Co.:1929)

Robertson, N. & Sams, K.I., *British Trade Unionism: Selected Documents,* Vol 1 197, (Oxford:Basil Blackwell:1974)

Rocker, Rudolf, *The London Years,* (London:Robert Anscombe & Co. Ltd.:1956)

Rothstein, Theodore, *From Chartism to Laboursim: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement,* (NY:International Publishers:1929)

Stansky, Peter, *The Left and War: The British Labour Party and WWI,*(London:Oxford University Press:1929)

Snowden, Philip, *The New World Order*, (London:Castle & Co. Ltd:1921)

Stewart., W. D. *Mines, Machines and Men,* (London:PS King & Son, Ltd.:1935)

Toole, Mille, *Mrs. Bessie Braddock*, (London:R. Hale, 1957)

Trotsky, Leon, *On Britain,* (New York-.Pathfinder Press, 1973)

_____, *History of the Russian Revolution,* Three Volumes. (London:Sphere Books Ltd. 1967)

Unwin, Stanley, *The Six-Hour Day,* (London:Allen & Unwin, Ltd.:1918)

Windrich, Elaine, *British Labour's Foreign Policy,* (Standford:Stanford University Press:1952)

Zangwill, Israel, *Selected Works*, (Philadelphia:The Jewish Publication Society of America:1938)
_____, *The War for the World*, (NY:The MacMillan Company:1917)

6. Secondary Works: Books, Reviews, Journals

Ahmed, Mesbahuddin, *The British Labour Party and the Indian Independence Movement:1917-39,* (NY:Envoy Press:1987)

Alborn, Timothy L., *Conceiving companies:Joint-stock politics in Victorian England*, (London:Ruoutledge:1998)

Aldcroft, Kerek H., *The Inter-War Economy:Britain, 1919-1939,* (NY:Columbia University Press:1970)

Allen, D. & Duncan, R., "Scotland and the Russian Revolution," *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 23. 1988

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Anderson, Perry, *English Question,* (London:Verso:1992)

Arnot, R. Page, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation, (1898-1914.* (London:George Allen & Unwin Ltd.:1967)

_____,*The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1967)

Bagwell, Philip. S., *The Railwaymen:The History of the National Union of Railwaymen,* (London:George Allen & Unwin Ltd:1963)

_____, *The Transport Revolution from 1770,* (NY:Barnes & Noble:1988)

Beer, Max, *A History of British Socialism*, (NY:W.W. Norton & Company. Inc.:1940)

Boston, Sarah, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement,* (London:Davis-Poynter:1980)

Boyce, Robert. W.D., *"British Capitalism at The Crossroads 1919-1932: A study in politics, economics, and international relations,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1987)

Brand, Carl, F., *British Labour's Rise to Power, Eight Studies,* (Sanford:Stanford University Press:1941)
_____, *The British Labour Party Short History*, revised edition, (Sanford:Hoover Intuition Press:1974)

Braybon, Gail, *Women Workers in the First World War:The British Experience*, (London:Croom Helm:1981)

Briggs, A. & Saville, J. *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923,* (London:Archon Books:1971)

Bush, Julia, *Behind the Lines East London Labour 1914-1919*, (London:Merlin Press:1984)

Braybon, G. & Summerfield, P., *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London:Pandora:1987)

Buckman, Joseph, *Immigrants and the Class Struggle:The Jews Immigrant in Leeds 1880-1914,* (Manchester:University Press:1983)

Burk, Kathleen, ed., *War and the State:The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919,* (Londong:George Allen & Unwin:1986)

Callaghan, John, *Socialism in Britain since 1884,* (London:Basil Blackwell:1990)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Carsten, F.L., *war against war: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War,* (Berkeley:University of California Press:1982)

Challinor, Raymond, *The Origins of British Bolshevism,* (London:Croom Helm Ltd:1977)

Chester, L. Fay, Stephen & Young, *The Zinoviev* Letter, (London:Heinemann:1967)

Cliff, T. & Gluckstein, D., *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle:The General Strike of 1926,* (London:Bookmarks:1986)

Cline, Catherine Ann, *Recruits to Labour:The British Labour Party 1914-31,* (Syracuse:Syracuse University Press:1963)

Coates, K., & Coates, Z., *Armed Intervention in Russia 1918-1922,* (London:V.Gollancz,Ltd.:1935)

Coates, K. & Topham, A., *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain:A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control,* (London:MacGibban & Kee Ltd.:1968)

Cohen, Deborah, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939,* (Berkeley:University of CA Press:2001)

Cole, G.D.H., *A History of the Labour Party From 1914,* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd:1948)

Cole, G.D.H & Postgate, R., *The British People 1746-1946,* (London:University Paperbacks:1961)

Cole, Margaret, *The Story of Fabian Socialism,* (Stanford:Stanford University Press:1961)

Collette, Christine, *For Labour and for women:The Women's Labour League, 1906-1918,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1989)

_____, *International Faith: Labour's Attitudes to European Socialism, 1918-39,* (Aldershot:Ashgate:1998)

Constantine, S., Kirby, M. & Rose, M., *The First World War in British History, (London:Hodderheadline PLC:1995)*

Cowling, Maurice, *The Impact of Labour:1920-24,* (Cambridge: At the University Press:1971)

Crook, Wilfrid, H., *Communism and the General Strike,* (Hamden:the Shoe String Press, Inc.:1960)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cronin, James, E., *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain,* (London:Croom Helm:1979)

_____,*Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979,* (NY:Schocken Books:1984)

Cross, Colon, *Philip Snowden,*(London:Barrie and Rockliff:1966)

Darlington, Ralph, *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy,* (Liverpool:Liverpool University Press:1998)

De Groot. Gerard J., *Douglas Haig:1861-1928,* (London:Unwin Hyman:1988)

_____, *Blighty – British Society in the era of the Great* War, (London: Longman:1996)

Dockray, K. & Laybourn, K., *The Representation and Reality of War:The British Experience, Essays in Honour of David Wright.,* (Stroud:Sutton Publishing:1999)

Donnachie, I. & Whatley, C., ed., *The Manufacture of Scottish History,* (Edinburgh:Polygon:1992)

Duncan, Robert, "Motherwell for Moscow," Walton Newold, Revolutionary Politics and the Labour Movement in a Lanarkshire Consistency 1918-1922," *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 28. 1993

R. Duncan and A. McIvor, ed., *McShane, (1891-1988)*

_____, *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-50*, (John Renold:1992)

Dutton, David, *Simon:A political biography of Sir John Simon*, (London:Aurum Press:1992)

Englander, D. & Osborne, J., "Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dobb:The Armed Forces and the Working Class," *The Historical Journal* 21, 3, 1978

Evans, E.W., *The Miners of South Wales*, (Cardiff:University of Wales Press:1961)

Farman, Christopher, *The General Strike: May 1926,* (London:Rupert Hart-Davis:1972)

Ferguson, Niall, *The Pity of War,* (London:Basic Books:1999)

Fishman, William J., *East End Jewish Radicals 1975*-1914, (London:Duckworth & Co. Ltd:1975

_____,*The Streets of East London*, (London:Duckworth:1979)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Foote, Geoffrey, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History.3rd edition*, (NY:St. Martin's Press:1997)

Forester, Tom, *The Labour Party and the Working Class*, (London:Heinemann:1976)

Foster, John, 1917-Scottish Voices. *Scottish Trade union Review*, No. 36. Autumn 87

_____,"Strike Action and Working class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919," *International Review of Social History* Vo XXXV-1990-1991)

Francis, H. & Smith, D. *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century,* (Cardiff:University of Wales Press:1998)

Fraser, E. & Morris, R., *People & Society in Scotland* ,Vol III ed., (Edinburgh:John Donald)

Fraser, Steven, *Labor will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor*, (NY:The Free Press:1991)

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* (NY:Oxford University Press:1975),
Gainer, Bernard, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens act of 1905*, (London:Heinemann Educational Books:1972)

Garside, W.R., *British Unemployment 1919-1939,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1990)

Gartner, Lloyd P., *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914,* (London:George Allen & Unwin Ltd:1960)

Gilbert, Bendley B., *British Social Policy 1914-1939,* (Ithaca:Cornell University Press:1970)

Gilbert, David, *Class, Community, and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850*-1926, (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1992)

Gill, D. & Dallas, G., *The Unknown Army,* (London:Verso:1985)

Graubard, Stephen Richards, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924,* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1956)

_____,"Military Demobilization in Great Britain" *Journal of Modern History* 19, 1947

Graves, Pamela M., *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939,* (Cambridge:CambridgeUniversity Press:1994)

Gregory, Roy, *The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914,* (Oxford:Oxford University Press:1968)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gupta, Sarathi, *Imperialism and The British Labour Movement:1914-64,* (NY:Holmes & Meier Publishers:1975)

Hain, Peter, *Political Strikes: The State and Trade Unionism in Britain,*(London:Viking:1986)

Hannah, Leslie, *The Rise of the Corporate Economy: The British experience,* (Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins University Press:1976)

Hayes, Denis, *Conscription Conflict,* (London:Sheppard Press:1949)

Hinton, James, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1874-1974,* (Amherst:Massachusetts Press:1983)

_____,*The First Shop Steward's Movement,* (London:George Allen & Unwin Ltd:1973)

Hobsbawn, E.J., *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour,* (London:Weidenfeld and Nicolson:1964)

_____, *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays,* (NY:Pantheon Books:1973)

Holton, Bob, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities,* (London:Pluto Press:1976)

Horne, John, *Labour At War: France and Britain 1914-1918,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1991)

Howe, Stephen, *"Anticolonialism in British Politics": The Left and the End of Empire:1918-64,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1993)

Hutt, Allen, *British Trade Unionism: A Short History,* (NY:International Publishers:1953)

_____, *The Post-War History of the British Working Class,* (Coward-McCann, Inc.:1938)

Jeffery, K. & Hennessy, P., *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking since 1919,* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul:1983)

Kadish, Sharman, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution,* (London:Frank Cass:1992)

Kellogg, P. & Gleason, A., *British Labor and the War: Reconstructs for a New World,* (NY:Garland Publishing, Inc.:1992)

Kendall, Walter, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21:The origins of British Communism,* (London:Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kennedy, Thomas C., *The Hound of Conscience:A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship 1914-1919,* (Fayetteville:The University of Arkansas Press:1981)

Kerrigan, Peter, "John MacLean" *Marxism Today,* November 1973

Kettle, Michael, The Allies and the Russian Collapse: March 1917-March 1918, (Minneapolis:Unviersity of Minnesota Press:1981)

Klugman, James, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Formation and Early years 1919-1924,* Vol.1, (London:Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.:1968)

Laybourn, K. & Murphy, D., *Under the Red Flag:A History of Communism in Britain, c. 1849-1991,* (Gloucestershire:Sutton Publishing Co.:1999)

Lamb, Dave, *Mutinies:1917-1920,* (Solidarity:197?)

Lipman,V.D., *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858,* (NY:Holmes & Meier:1990)

_____, *Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950,* (London:Watts & Co.:1954)

Lovell, John, *Stevedores and Dockers Study of Trade Unionism in The Port of London, 1870-1914,* (London:Macmillan:1969)

Lovell, J. & Roberts B.C., *A Short History of the TUC,* (London:Macmillan:1968)

Lunn, Kenneth ed., *Race and Labour in Twentieth-Century Britain,* (London:Frank Cass:1985)

MacDougall, Ian, ed., "Militant Miners" *Scottish Labour History Society,*Vol. 25, issue 1 1990

Macintyre, Stuart, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1980)

_____, *Discovering the Little Moscow Communism and Working Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain*, (London:Croom Helm:1980)

MacLean, Iain, "The Ministry of Munitions, the Clyde Workers' Committee, and the suppression off the 'Forward' an alternative view", *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 6., December 1972

_____,*The Legend of Red Clydeside*, (Edinburgh:John Donald Publishers Ltd:1983)

MacFarlane. C.J., *The British Communist Party,* (London:MacGibban & Kee. Ltd.:1966)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

_____, "Hands Off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920", *Past & Present,* 38 (1967)

Macwhirther, Julie, "Internationalism and the British Labour Movement, 1917-27", *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* December 1972, No. 6

Marquand, David, *Ramsay MacDonald,* (London:Jonathan Cape:1977)

Marwick, Arthur, *Women at War 1914-1918,* (London:Fontana Paperbacks:1977)

_____, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War,* (NY:WW Norton & Co.: 1965)

Mayer, Arno, J., *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919,* (NY:Alfred A. Knopf:1967)

_____, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy 1917-1918,* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 1959)

McIvor and Hugh Paterson, "Combating the Left: Victimisation and Anti-Labour Activities on Clydeside, 1900-1939", *Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950, Essay in Honour of Harry McShane*

McKinlay, A. & Morris. R. J., *The ILP on Clydeside,1893-1932:From foundation to disintegration,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1991)

Middlemas, Robert K., *The Clydesiders*, (NY:Augustus M. Kelley:1968)

Millman, Brock, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain,* (London:Frank Cass:2000)

Morgan, Austen. *J., Ramsay MacDonald,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press"1987)

Morgan, Jane, *Conflict and Order:The Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1987)

Morgridge, Basil, "Militancy and Inter-Union Rivalries in British Shipping 1911-1927, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. VI, (1961), Part 3

Morris, Margaret, *The General Strike,* (Harmondsworth:Penguin Books, Ltd.:1976)

Mowat, Charles Loch, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-40,* (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press:1963)

Murray, John, *The General Strike of 1926:A History,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.:1951)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Newman, Aubrey, ed. *Jewish East End 1840-1939,* (London:The Jewish Historical Society of England:1981)

Ogden. Dennis, *Revolution: 1917-1967, Soviet power-a changing world-the effect on Britain,* (CP Pamphlet:1967)

O'Shea, Stephen, *Back to the Front: An Accidental Historian Walks the Trenches of World War I,* (NY:Walker & Company:1996)

Panayik, Panikos, *Immigration, ethnicity and racism in Britain, 1815-1945,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1994)

Pearce, Cyril, *Comrades in Conscience:The story of an English community's opposition to the Great War,* (London:Francis Boutles Publishers:2001)

Pedersen, Susan, "Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War" *American Historical Review,* Vol. 95 Issue 4, (Oct. 1990)

_____, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State:Britain and France, 1914-1945,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1993)

Pelling, Henry, *A Short History of the Labour Party,* (London:MacMillan & Co. Ltd.:1961)

_____,*The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile,* (London:Adam & Charles Black Ltd:1958)

_____,*The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900,* (Oxford:Clarendon Press:1965)

Pitt, Bob, "John MacLean and the CPGB" (Pamphlet)

Pribicevic, Branko, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922,* (Oxford:Basil Blackwell:1959)

Putkowski, Julian, "Disaffection and Dissent in the British Armed Forces", *Revolutionary History, Volume 8 no. 2*

_____, A2 and the 'Reds in Khaki', *Lobster 1994:No. 27*

Rabinbach, Anson, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity,.*(Basic Books:1990)

Renshaw, Patrick, *Nine Days That Shook Britain: The 1926 General Strike*, (NY:Anchor Books:1976)

Rich, Paul B., *Race and Empire in British Politics,*(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1988)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Robbins, Keith, *The Abolition of War The 'Peace Movement in Britain, 1914-1919,* (Cardiff:University of Wales Press:1976)

Roberts, B.C., *The Trades Union Congress:1868-1921,*(Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1958)

Rosenberg, Chanie, *Britain on the Brink of Revolution:1919*, (Bookmarks:London:1987)

Rothstein, Andrew, *The soldiers' strikes of 1919,* (London:The MacMillan Press Ltd.:1980)

Rowbotham, Sheila, *The Century of Women:the History of Women in Britain and the United States in the Twentieth Century,* (London:Penguin Books:1997)

Samuel, R, MacColl, W & Cosgrove, S., *Theatres of the Left 1880 -1935:workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America:1985,* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul:1985)

Schneer, Jonathan, *Ben Tillett: Portrait of a Labour Leader,* (Urbana:University of Illinois Press:1882)

Segev, Tom, *One, Palestine, Complete*, (London:Little,Brown:2000),

Simon, Brian, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1974)

Shipway, Mark, *Anti-Parliamentary communism: The Movement for Workers Councils in Britain 1917-45,* (NY:St. Martin's Press:1988)

Skelley, Jeffrey, ed., *The General Strike 1926,* (London:Lawrence & Wishart:1976)

Smith, Joan, Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool, *History workshop,* No 17, Spring 1984

Stanley, Beryl, Women in Unrest, 1914-1918, *Labour Monthly,* August, 1940

Slatter, John, ed., *From the Other Shore:Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917,* (London:Frank Cass:1984)

_____, "Learning from Russia: The History of Soviets in Britain, *LRH*, Vol 61. No 1, Spring, 1996

Stearns, Peter N., *Lives of Labor: Work in a Maturing Industrial Society,* (NY:Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc.:1975)

Symons, Julian, *The General Strike,* (London:The Cresset Press:1957)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Tabili, Laura, "We Ask for British Justice":Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain, (Ithaca:Cornell University Press:1994)

Tanner, Duncan, *Political change and the Labour party 1900-1918,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1990)

Taylor, A.J.P., *English History 1914-1945,* (Oxford:Oxford University Press:1965)

Terrill, Ross, *RH Tawney and His Times: Socialism As Fellowship,* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1973)

Tsuzuki, Chushichi, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism,* (Oxford:Oxford University Press:1961)

Tuckett, Angela, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress: The First 80 Years 1897-1977,* (Edinburgh:Mainstream Publishing:1986)

Turner, John, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918,* (New Haven:Yale University Press:1992)

Waites, Bernard, *A Class Society at War England 1914-1918,* (Leamington Spa:Berg:1987)

Ward, Paul, *Red Flag and Union Jack:Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924,* (London:The Boydell Press:1994)

Ward, Stephen R., ed., *The War Generation:Veterans of the First World War,* (London:Kennikat Press:1975)

Weller, Ken, *Don't be a Soldier!,* (London:Journeymen:1985)

White, Jerry, Rothschild *Buildings: Life in an East End tenement block 1887-1920,* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul:1980)

White, Joseph, *Tom Mann: Lives of the Left,* (Manchester:Manchester University Press:1991)

White, Stephen, "Ideological Hegemony and Political Control: The Sociology of Anti-Bolshevism in Britain 1918-20", *Scottish Labour History Society Journal,* No. 9 June 1975

_____, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy 1920-1924,* (NY:Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc.:1979)

Williamson, Philip, *National Crisis and National Government:British politics, the economy and Empire, 1926-1932,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University press:1992)

Wilson, Trevor, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918,* (Cambridge:Polity Press:1986)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Winter, J. M., *The Great War and The British People,* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press:1986)

_____, *Socialism and The Challenge of War:Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-18,* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul:1974)

J. Winter & R. Wall, *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918,* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press:1988)

Woodhouse M.& Pearce, B., *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain,*(London:New Park Publications:1975)

Wootton, Graham, *The Official History of The British Legion,* (London:MacDonald & Evans, Ltd.:1956)

Wright, A. W., *GDH Cole and Socialist Democracy,* (Oxford:Cclarendon Press:1979)

Wrigley, Chris ed., *Local Studies in Labour History*: *Essays in Victorian and Twentieth Century East Midlands History,* (Loughborough:Loughboroug University:1982)

_____, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour:The Post-War Coalition 1918-22,* (NY:St. Martin's Press:1990)

Young, James, D. , *The Rising of the Scottish Working Class,* (London:Croom Helm:1979)

7. Unpublished Dissertations:

Boughton, John, "Working-Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, 1918-1931," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Warwick:1985)

Durham, M., "Origins and Early Years of British Communism, 1914-24," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, (Birmingham:1982)

McKay, John, "William Gallacher Biography," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (Glasgow Caledonian University:Gallacher Collection 1993)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.