THE GENERAL STRIKE IN YORK, 1926

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Abbreviations

C.I.B.	Cabinet Information Bulletin
C.S.C. Bulletin	Central Strike Committee Bulletin
Co-op. Min.	York Co-operative Society Minutes
Con. Min.	York Conservative Association Executive Committee Minutes
Gazette	*Yorkshire Gazette*
Herald	*Yorkshire Herald*
H.O.S.R.	Home Office Situation Report
Lab. D.M.	York Labour Party Delegate Committee Minutes
Letter	Letter from the Central Strike Committee York to the T.U.C. 7 May 1926
N.U.D.A.W. Min.	York Branch National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers Minutes
PRO	Public Record Office
Press	*Yorkshire Evening Press*
R.C.A. Min.	York Number 1 Branch Railway Clerks Association Minutes
S.T.	Supply and Transport Committee of the Cabinet
YCL	York Central Library

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Introduction

Among the changes wrought by the first world war on the British economy and society was the increased industrial and political power of organised labour. The emergence of the Labour Party as a national party and a series of bitter industrial confrontations in the immediate post-war years were demonstrations of these changes and resulted from the pent-up desire for reform – encapsulated in the slogan of a 'fit country for heroes to live in' – and of working class reaction to perceived pressure on living standards generated by the switchback movement in money wages.

York's socio-economic characteristics were broadly comparable to other county boroughs except for occupational structure. It was a middle class Conservative city, of about 84,000 inhabitants characterised by both a high level of white collar employment and a highly-organised and unionised working class centred on the confectionery and, in particular, the railway industries.[1] As early as the 1880's local railwaymen had started to become detached from middle class Liberalism. In 1890 the Trades Council was formed and by 1906 Labour was able to field a parliamentary candidate. The increasing primacy of economic issues in electoral politics since the war had helped the Labour Party and in York, against a backcloth of strikes, persistent unemployment and a severe housing shortage, it had pushed the Liberals into third place by 1923.

The commonsense view of Tom Jones of the Cabinet Secretariat, who believed that 'Bolshevik propaganda in this country is only dangerous in so far as it can lodge itself in the soil of genuine grievances', became obfuscated as rhetoric became confused with reality and the result was a widespread fear of revolution.[2] This reaction to the post war conflicts, of which the General Strike was the industrial coda, was not confined to the environs of Whitehall, and a key political issue in York after 1918 was anti-socialism. 1926 was no exception

and in January one writer to the local press looked forward to the time when the two anti-socialist parties '. . . would be united for Constitutionalism against Communism, for loyalty against disloyalty and for 'I love my Country' against 'I hate my Country''. Another summed up a common view when he commented that there was no difference between the Labour and Communist parties and that 'Socialism, Communism and Trade Unionism appear to be inseparable'.[3]

The General Strike was to be the testing ground for the belief that the labour movement's leaders were revolutionaries supported by a militant rank and file bent on overthrowing parliamentary government. York, which counter-balanced a predominant white-collar labour force with a well-organised industrial sector, makes an interesting case study of revolutionary intent, loyalist and strike support (seen in terms of volunteer recruitment and striker solidarity), organisation and disruption.

The local struggle against 'revolutionary socialism', which was normally focussed on elections, became concentrated in the months before the strike on the Co-operative Society, which was widely thought to be dominated by the 'Red Menace' and certainly most of its directors were active in the labour movement. The leader of the Conservatives on the City Council had suggested in 1925 that action ought to be taken against the influence of socialism on the society, but little was done until Central Office intervened.[4] The Conservative Association eventually fielded five candidates for the Society's board and two for the educational committee and arranged for the distribution of a circular and 4,000 Central Office leaflets. It also organised a correspondence in the local papers.[5] The *Yorkshire Evening Press* (*Press*) lent its support to the campaign, which started early in 1926,[6] but the board, acting on legal advice, disqualified the candidates for canvassing.[7]

The timing of the campaign, which appears to have been carefully orchestrated by Central Office, was significant, in that it occurred as the government was improving the machinery for dealing with a national emergency, and it was designed to weaken the links between the co-operative societies and the labour movement which had proved to be of importance in earlier industrial disputes.[8]

One of the reasons for establishing a Royal Commission and the granting of a subsidy to maintain wage levels in the coal industry was to give the government time to prepare to face a general strike, and during 1925-1926 the emergency machinery was improved and numerous skeletal local committees were established or re-vamped.[9] Despite this activity there remained a general worry that loyal volunteers would not come forward to aid the civil powers in an emergency and, because several members of the Cabinet recognised the provocation involved in official recruiting prior to a crisis, this doubt remained.[10] The issue was partly avoided by the formation of the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (O.M.S.) in September 1925 which was blessed by the Home Secretary personally, despite the doubts of his own civil servants, though official relationships remained cold.[11]

The York branch of the O.M.S. was formed in February 1926 when a large advertisement appeared in the press which followed the organisation's national policy by stressing its non-political nature but added a twist of its own:

> 'In July 1925 a Coal Strike was threatened, and the Country was in imminent danger of a General Strike, the avowed object of which was to overthrow the properly elected government, and substitute therefore a government chosen by a Revolutionary element largely composed of aliens!'.

The address given was that of the Thirsk and Malton Conservative Association though the connection was not mentioned.[12] If the anti-labour tone was typical then it is no surprise that the majority of the O.M.S. volunteers were from the towns of the English rural and non-industrial heartland.[13]

Meanwhile the Royal Commission failed to understand the long-run demand problem of the industry and basically recommended productivity improvements (reorganisation) and reduced costs (wage reductions) but was against higher output (longer hours). The miners and the owners showed little willingness to compromise and the government was passive, failing to produce any specific recommendations or to put pressure on the owners.[14] The strike therefore began at midnight 3 May.

In York attitudes to the coal dispute were irreconcilable. One side held that subsidies and nationalisation were the way

to 'national bankruptcy' and that costs in the industry, and hence wages, would have to be reduced because it was making a loss.[15] The other side believed that the miners, 'whose lives are mainly an unhealthy, dangerous and unwholesome sameness', should not be 'further degraded just because economic conditions for the moment do not allow profit [to] the capital owner', and that nationalisation would prevent 'the paupering of workers in an industry in order to ensure a profit'.[16]

Local response to the extension of the coal dispute to other industries paralleled those at national level. The morning daily paper the *Yorkshire Herald* (*Herald*) thought that the miners, or rather their leaders, were bent on imposing socialism on the industry and the country, and this was linked to a belief in Labour's revolutionary aspirations.[17] On 3 May the paper stated that the General Strike was 'tantamount to an attempt to seize the reins of government and is very near the border line of treason to the State' adding the clarion call:

> '. . . democracy must unite to resist the overbearing encroachments of the T.U.C. on its personal and national liberty'.[18]

Writing after the strike Lady Thomson, the Anglican wife of the Conservative Association's treasurer and head of the firm which published the *Press* and the *Herald*, complained that the bishops of the Established Church 'either did not know or else refused to see that there was a dangerous possibility of Revolution'.[19] This echoed the tone of her husband's papers which stressed the constitutional and revolutionary threat of the strike, with the *Herald* boldly stating that the real issue 'is whether this country intends to be ruled by the Trade Union Congress or by its own duly elected and Constitutional Parliament' and, after attacking the 'Communists and their Socialist allies', concluding that it was 'surprised that the members of the Junta responsible . . . have not been arrested on a charge of treason'.[20] (The government did not go quite that far but it did intercept some of the mail of the T.U.C. and of Purcell, as well as putting Bevin under surveillance).[21] The Chief Constable of the York police also took the possibility of violence seriously and he wrote to the Home Office about the arming of policemen 'when acting singly'.[22]

Labour, on the other hand, saw the strike as a sympathetic defensive action in support of the miners. This view was buttressed by a belief, hammered home in the local pages of the Co-operative journal *The Wheatsheaf*, that if the wages of miners 'go down, then wage reductions will follow in every other industry'.[23] In York the various parts of the labour movement were linked together through overlapping membership and a shared *raison d'être* of reform, personified in the electoral politics of the Labour Party.[24] The party took up a pro-U.S.S.R. stance which was based mainly on the belief that Anglo-Soviet trade was the precursor of a general revival in trade which it viewed as the best way out of the depression.[25] For similar reasons it wanted drastic revision of the economic terms of the peace treaty. In other areas it was liberal and pacifist, supporting Indian aspirations and the abolition of the death penalty, but opposing Military Sunday and the local tattoo.[26] However though the party's views on the Treaty of Versailles, on India and on Ireland cannot have endeared it to a diehard Conservative Party, it was not an extremist organisation.

In 1920 and 1926 York Labour Party endorsed the refusal of Conference to allow the Communist Party to affiliate, and this rejection symbolised the repudiation of revolutionary methods.[27] Furthermore, the actions of Labour representatives should have shown the Conservatives the essential moderation and respectability of the local labour movement, just as MacDonald's government should have shown them the real nature of labourism. Labour's acceptance of the Lord Mayoralty and the vice-chairmanships of Council Committees were symbols of its determination to abide by the fundamental political norms, and of its acceptance of the legitimacy of the political system. Furthermore, on key issues Labour differed little from the other two parties because basic values were shared. Labour Guardians wanted unemployment and poor law benefits raised, partly for humanitarian reasons and partly because they thought that low relief levels tended to push down unskilled wage rates, but held in common with Conservatives the implicit view that there was a need to identify and penalise the idle because of the dis-incentive effect of relief. The key difference between Labour and Conservative Guardians was not the principle of

Test Work or means testing but over the level of relief. In housing there was also a consensus with most politicians campaigning for more houses; all parties accepted similar judgements about allocation which were based, not on need, but on the ability to pay so that the ratepayers' subsidy could be kept low.[28]

Incidents and their interpretation

The question of revolutionary intent may be answered by a discussion of the nature of local incidents during the strike. The papers were clear in their views. The *Press* noted that there had been 'countless acts of sabotage and savagery up and down the land'[29] and its sister paper agreed, going so far as to describe Mussolini as the saviour of Italy who had overcome 'the danger which had bled the country almost white' and had shown '. . . that the canker of revolution can be dealt with only by a firm and vigorous hand, and sometimes by the use of methods outside the constitution'.[30] The editor saw no ambiguity in saving the constitution from extra-constitutional attacks by extra-constitutional means.

Historians who have mentioned events in York during the General Strike have tended to give credence to the views of the press about the nature of violence. Farman wrote that 'at York police and strikers fought for possession of a level crossing' and his description of a second local incident states that the 'police baton-charged a crowd who were trying to rescue an arrested comrade'.[31] The latter incident is also mentioned by Renshaw who wrote that a 'mob tried to release a prisoner'.[32]

The first of these confrontations occurred on Thursday 6 May as a train approached two level crossings on the outskirts of the city. After being briefly held up at the first it moved towards the Burton Stone Lane crossing where between 200 and 300 people, mainly men, were waiting. Extra police arrived under Chief Officer Williams who, with P. C. Perkins, opened and fastened the gates, but as the train moved forward the catch on one of them was lifted causing it to swing back against the engine. The impact smashed the gate and its top bar knocked Perkins to the ground in front of the approaching train from

where the badly shaken policeman was rescued by a local coal merchant. The 'very hostile' crowd fled. Significantly, no arrests were made.[33]

Information on the strike was fed to the Cabinet's Supply and Transport Committee by ministries and the emergency organisation based on regional civil commissioners. These official reports were given to the public via the B.B.C., the *British Gazette*, and other newspapers.[34] The Home Office Situation Report's description of the above incident is given in full to show the style and content of the reports and hence the quality of the information being received by the government:

> 'At York police were obliged to disperse strikers who were holding up a train at a level crossing. The gates were smashed and a constable thrown in front of the train but rescued'.[35]

The *British Gazette's* description of the episode on 8 May is a verbatim quotation from the Home Office report with the crucial addition of 'Order has been restored', and Farman's inference from that account is understandable but probably unfair considering that no arrests were made.[36]

The clashes in York during the strike were those endemic to any major industrial dispute, consisting of confrontations between strikers and those doing their jobs or remaining at work, but they were not overtly political. The first day was typical with the striking transport workers organising 'strong picket forces' to 'deal with promiscuous road traffic' which was running because of weak unionisation among busmen.[37] There were several incidents and two arrests were made but 'no damage was done and no disorder occurred'.[38] Similar clashes between bus crews and pickets continued, but the development by the police of a mobile motor-cycle reserve, which quickly appeared when conflict threatened, was so effective that this trouble gradually dwindled.[39]

On the railways the flashpoints occurred over the movement of goods and the blacklegging of railway clerks. One kind of confrontation was typified in an incident when 20 pickets tried to interfere with a convoy of four lorries returning to the L.N.E.R. goods yard in Leeman Road. The escort of two policemen was reinforced, and a Mr Coupland was arrested and

later convicted of unlawfully preventing the proper use of a railway lorry and fined £2.[40] Coupland was a railway carter as were two of the drivers involved and the episode is more one of frayed tempers than revolutionary violence.[41] From the start of the strike the railway offices were picketed, with those men going to work being initially only subjected to shouts and gibes. At lunchtime on 7 May, however, there was a slight scuffle.[42] On the following day, a Saturday, several hundred pickets were present and a minor incident occurred when two clerks appeared and one lost his hat. A strong police contingent, under the Chief Constable, pushed the crowd back, which meant that part of it moved towards Lendal Bridge and the strike headquarters in Rougier Street. A bus waiting at the terminus in Rougier Street had some of its windows broken and a young engine cleaner was arrested. As he was escorted along the road a 'menacing' crowd followed and the police drew their truncheons. A police sergeant was hit on the head by a half brick and a journalist was 'roughly handled, struck and kicked'.[43] This was the other incident mentioned by Renshaw and Farman, who presumably obtained their information from the *British Gazette* which reported it as follows:

> 'A large crowd at York which tried to interfere with clerks going to work on the railway had to be dispersed. The crowd tried to rescue a man arrested for stoning a bus, and the police had to use their batons. The police will not allow further crowds to assemble. Many specials have been sworn in.'[44]

The police version is virtually identical, but does add that the 'Chief Constable has been lent horses by the military for his mounted men, 90 specials have been sworn in and 100 also enrolled.'[45] The *Press* seized on this incident and concluded its attack by asking

> '. . . do these men who are jeering, insulting and violently attacking the men who, in this crisis have been found faithful, what do they care for liberty? . . . These strikers seem to us to be the incarnation of hatred. It is no use dealing gently with a mob like this.'[46]

However, the strikers too were very concerned and at the meeting of the Strike Committee of the R.C.A. held immediately after the incident:

> 'Mr Doughty drew attention to the methods adopted by some of the pickets and said he would regret any appearance of violence in picketing. From other reports from members of the Committee it seemed that the position had been aggravated by the action of some of the police, and it was suggested that some representation should be brought to bear on the police authorities. Mr Farrar agreed to put our point of view forward at [the Central Strike Committee].'

The railwaymen went on to discuss the suggestion 'of the formation of a special constabulary for the keeping down of violence in picketing' and agreed to take the opportunity 'at all meetings to emphasise the need for order on the part of those on strike.'[47]

On the next working day, 10 May, extra police were on duty, including for the first time mounted ones, and the crowd was kept back, with that part of the city's walls overlooking the offices being closed. The officers of the Central Strike Committee (C.S.C.) urged the crowd in Rougier Street to disperse, which it soon did.[48] The combination of increased policing, appeals for order by both police and strikers and the better control and organisation of the pickets resulted in little further trouble at the offices, though the Road Commissioner laconically reported that isolated cases of intimidation continued to occur elsewhere.[49]

The degree of conflict in York may be judged from the fact that only nine summonses were issued for activities during the strike. Those not already mentioned were heard on 17 June. During the sitting the chairman of the magistrates saw Alderman Dobbie, the Labour Group Leader, sitting in the packed courtroom and, in a conciliatory gesture which was to arouse criticism, invited him to sit on the bench.[50] At that sitting Coupland was again charged, this time with intimidating two volunteer and two blackleg carters on 15 May, though a further summons, also for intimidation, relating to an incident eight days earlier was withdrawn. He was fined with costs a total of £5 11*s*. One other summons for intimidation was dropped because the principal witness was in prison. The most important case, because of the possible political undertones, was that involving George Huggins, the president of the large local N.U.R. shopmen branch, who was charged with intimidating a blackleg foreman. The case was dismissed as little illfeeling had been shown and because the Chief Constable implied that it had not been a very serious incident.[51]

Despite the fears expressed and the tone of the newspaper reporting, there was a lack of serious trouble in the city during the strike and certainly the Lord Mayor went out of his way to thank the C.S.C. for its efforts in maintaining order, sentiments which the Chief Constable endorsed.[52] The real atmosphere may also be judged from the story of two railway clerks. One spent his mornings helping to produce strike bulletins and the other acted as a special constable, but they spent the afternoons sculling together on the river.[53]

Loyalist groups and organisation

The forces available for the maintenance of order and essential services consisted of the police and the military, supported by volunteers. The police had a strength of just over 100 with no first reserves,[54] though there were 47 specials and about 20 pensioners who could be called upon.[55] By 7 May, when specials were first used, 50 had been enrolled and the number continued to rise, especially after the Chief Constable's appeal the next day, but their use was restricted.[56] It is clear that the regular force was able to cope with the local situation, especially after it had developed its mobile reserves, though in 1927 16 first reserves were recruited.[57] Four companies of the Civil Constabulary Reserve were established in the area.[58] York's strength was 85 men but there is no evidence to suggest that they were ever used.[59]

York was an important garrison town with two regular battalions which could have aided the civil authorities. Though the soldiers of the 1st Border Regiment were given lectures on how they were to behave if called upon, and an inlying picquet of company strength in full marching order was mounted each evening, they were never used during the strike. Most of their time was spent in rehearsing for the forthcoming military tattoo.[60] The cavalry battalion spent the time in a similar way, though a detachment was sent to Pontefract from 5 until 18 May.[61] As part of the general military movements the 39th Bombing Squadron came to York on 4 May, but its only use was as a spectacle for the strikers who held daily meetings on the open space called the Knavesmire where it was quartered.[62]

Ordinary labour was recruited in differing ways during the strike. The Volunteer Service Committee (V.S.C.), under the chairmanship of Councillor Leonard and aided by an appeal from the Lord Mayor, recruited people for work of a 'definite national character'. The railway company also recruited workers but the Council does not appear to have done so.[63]

There were two groups trying to recruit in the city before the strike. The first, the O.M.S., claimed to have submitted the names of 100 potential volunteers to the friendly V.S.C. at the start of the strike and that some were called upon at once. The British Fascists, the other recruiting agency, had a similar appeal to that of the O.M.S. Its policy embraced loyalty to the King, the Constitution, Christianity, and the Empire, and included strict public economy, an oath of allegiance for public servants, the abolition of socialist sunday schools, and the restriction of aliens for the 'gradual purification of the British race.'[64] Though the programme of the B.F., a compound of several popularist strands, was close to the beliefs of the local Conservative Association its overtures were rejected because an internal row in 1925 had badly damaged the respectability of the organisation.[65] However, despite this setback the B.F. claimed to have provided 200 volunteers.[66]

The achievements of the O.M.S. and the B.F. in recruiting volunteers before the strike, even if the figures claimed are accurate, have to be compared with the results of the official machinery of the Volunteer Service Committee. By noon of 4 May 500 people had already come forward in response to an appeal issued the day before.[67] After the strike the V.S.C. claimed that 3,000 had been enrolled, though not all had been used.[68] The L.N.E.R., which started to recruit on 4 May and continued to do so until after the strike was called off, stated that it had obtained 15,000 volunteers in its North Eastern Area alone, of which 700 were accommodated in York.[69] More specifically, on 11 May the company claimed for its North Eastern Area a figure of 12,000 of which 3,288 had been used, but three days earlier it had only placed 3,000 volunteers throughout the company. Even allowing for an improvement in services after that date both the area and total figures seem rather high.[70] However, even if all the recruiting figures are

perhaps on the high side it is clear that the fears of the Conservatives were much exaggerated because, once the strike started, more volunteers came forward than could be used – whereas the pre-strike recruiting attempts failed – and the police were able to maintain order without assistance.[71]

The York Council, despite protests from the Trades Council, followed the circular issued in November 1925 which instructed local authorities on their responsibilities under the government's emergency plans.[72] Its major duties were the running of the municipal electricity generating station and the regulation, in conjunction with a committee, of coal supplies to the consumer.[73] The local power workers were as confused and divided by the instructions issued by the T.U.C. as they were elsewhere.[74] Though they were unable to persuade Alderman Shipley, the Electricity Committee Chairman, to cease supplying power to industrial users they did manage to stop the municipal trams from running by threatening to strike.[75]

The Coal Committee's arrangements for domestic coal were satisfactory and the stocks of local merchants were not commandeered, though supplies were reduced to one hundredweight per week.[76] However, from the start of the strike power was reduced by 50%, as a way of conserving coal stocks, except for newspaper and food processing concerns. The result was drastic, and as early as 4 May the city's confectionery firms – major employers – went on to a three-day week. On the next day Cravens and Rowntrees closed and they were soon followed by Terry and Sons. (Though Rowntrees did add that a shortage of transport had played a part in their decision, which was ironic because the company had encouraged its maintenance engineers and transport workers to obey the strike call).[77]

The government received no complaints from York concerning the operation of the machinery for supplying food, a fact which reflected the weakness of trade unionism in the food and distribution sector and perhaps explains the strike's shortness.[78] There was at first a shortage of lorry drivers but this was soon overcome, and the only remaining problem was the embarrassment of the chairman of the local haulage committee who had to admit that his own men were on strike.[79] Prices were controlled and were only allowed to rise when seasonal factors

or transport costs were involved, and the only increase in the city was that of lard which rose by ½*d*. per pound. The flour position was so satisfactory that a special train was sent from York to Newcastle to relieve that city's shortage.[80]

Strikers and Organisation

The strength of organised labour in York may be seen in the response to the strike call which was loyally obeyed by practically all transport workers, engineers and printers and a proportion of the building trade operatives, with other groups, including boilermakers, striking 'in sympathy and without instructions'.[81] The T.U.C. duly recorded that 'All workers want to be 'out' and helping the struggle'.[82] It is estimated that over 7,000 were on strike of which 6,000 were railwaymen.[83] There is little to suggest that there was any significant weakening as the strike progressed and Postgate and his co-authors were right to put York into category one of their classification.[84]

The two weak links among railwaymen were the lower-paid unskilled manual workers, who were the most vulnerable to unemployment and replacement, and the clerical and supervisory staff. Though unionisation among white collar railwaymen was relatively weak the performance of the local R.C.A. branch was impressive, especially if one considers the income and status of the membership and that many stood to lose pension, seniority and other rights by striking.[85] Deflation, unemployment and falling money incomes had significantly changed the attitude of the membership; whereas in 1921 the branch had refused to follow the national executive's strongly recommended advice for industrial action, in 1926 only a handful voted against the strike motion.[86]

Considerable pressure was applied to the strikers, especially to the railway clerks, and it had some effect. On 6 May a deputation went to the Strike Committee of the R.C.A. because:

> '. . . they were very concerned about a message which had come over the wireless to the effect that the Prime Minister had said that negotiations would be resumed when the strike was called off, and they were anxious that the attitude of the men should not hinder any possibility of negotiations being opened.'

They eventually accepted the assurance '. . . that although the strike would not be called off until the Miners' lock-out notices had been withdrawn, yet nothing was being done to hinder the opening of negotiations.'[87]

Table 1 Numbers on Strike in York, May 7

National Union of Railwaymen	4,422
Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen	556
Railway Clerks' Association	416
Transport and General Workers Union	208
Typographical Association	190
National Union of Vehicle Builders	200
Sheet Metal workers	40
National Union of Printing, Bookbinding, Machine Ruling and Paper Workers	200
Electrical Trade Union	60
Amalgamated Engineering Union	240
Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers	170
National Federation of Building Trade Operatives	108
Plumbers	60
Builders' Labourers	100
Lithographers	40
	7,032

Notes (a) The numbers listed by unions total 7,010.
(b) 75% of the bookbinders were female.
(c) On May 8th the No 1 Branch of the R.C.A. reported that 384 members of that branch and the No 3 branch were entitled to strike pay. The difference is presumably explained by those railway clerical staff who were on strike but not entitled to strike pay usually because they were not members of the union. (On 5th May, the Strike Committee had decided not to pay non-members who were on strike.) See: R.C.A. minutes 5, 8 May 26.

Source: C.S.C. to T.U.C. 7 May 26, figures attached (Letter).

Two days later the *Herald*, after bluntly stating that the strike's leaders were attempting 'to usurp the functions of the British Parliament', commented that they were 'now feeding like fighting cocks and smoking the biggest cigars in London', which prompted Mr Hope to ask 'if the Executive Committee at the R.C.A. Headquarters are on strike pay during the strike.'[88]

The *Herald* also stressed that the government would protect from victimisation those who returned to work in defiance of 'this treasonable strike.'[89] Simon's speech, attacking the legal basis of the strike, was supported by the press and endorsed by the Conservative Association which issued 5,000 leaflets that ended:

> '. . . CONSEQUENTLY as the strike is illegal a Trade Unionist will not lose his benefit by refusing to go on obeying the order to Strike.'[90]

This was not only bad law but faulty strategy because provocative leaflets were hardly likely to endear the party to that growing portion of the working class electorate which saw the trade unions as one of the key defences of their living standards.[91]

Despite the numerical dominance of the railwaymen, which did tend to make the strike appear very much their own concern, the organisation and leadership in York was shared.[92] The Central Strike Committee (C.S.C.) was composed of delegates from all striking branches plus four members from the Executive Committee of the Trades Council with the Chairman and Secretary of the latter performing the same duties on the C.S.C.[93] The Co-operative Society was crucial to the strike's organisation in terms of inter-union communications and liason because it rented out rooms which enabled the C.S.C., the N.U.R. Joint Branches Committee, the R.C.A. and the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers to have offices in the same building.[94] The Society's help, which was not typical, extended to accepting N.U.R. vouchers, as it had done in the railway strikes of 1919 and 1921, and the granting of credit to union branches whose cheques had not arrived, thereby allowing strike pay to be distributed.[95]

To run the strike the C.S.C. established various sub-committees responsible for differing aspects including pickets, the issuing of food permits and the production of a daily

bulletin and newsheet. Ad-hoc committees were also set up ranging from one, composed of representatives from the railway unions, which issued an appeal to blacklegs, to another which went to the blind school to investigate their request to carry out some urgent work.[96] The individual unions tended to parallel this type of organisation.[97]

One important problem which faced the leaders of the strike was how to inform their members of what was happening in other areas. The C.S.C. by means of dispatch riders was able to link York with other towns and the news so obtained was passed on through a twice daily bulletin.[98] This system had one triumph when the *Birmingham Railway News* was able to correct a government statement published locally that York's tramwaymen had returned to work.[99] Both the N.U.R. and the R.C.A. also issued bulletins, with the latter's twice daily publication being aimed at making members aware of the position from day to day.[100]

Besides dispatch riders and telegrams from Eccleston Square and from the head offices of the individual unions, the strikers had to depend on the papers and the radio for news.[101] One important example of this was the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement, arising from the appeal for moderation drawn up by Anglican and Nonconformist leaders on 6 May, which was mentioned by the B.B.C. on the following day.[102] The C.S.C. picked it up from the radio, as it was not carried by the *British Gazette* or the local papers, and were able to use it tellingly.[103] The committee were, however, aware of the dangers inherent in relying on the media for news, issued strong warnings to that effect and were very keen on obtaining copies of the *British Worker*.[104] Interestingly, even when the press did approach the strikers, about an inaccurate story 'anxious to put it right,' they received little co-operation.[105] Milner has caught the atmosphere with his comment that 'I remember particularly that we regarded newspapers with suspicion and had much more faith in verbal exposition of the tide of events.'[106]

Another important function of the Strike Committees was the provision of activities designed to keep the strikers occupied and their morale high. The C.S.C. held meetings every afternoon, starting with a march through the city to the Knavesmire,

which not only got the marchers away from the strike headquarters but demonstrated their strength and solidarity. The highlight of the series was that addressed by Paling, a member of the General Council and a Labour M.P., who denied that there was any constitutional threat, commented on the 'miserable wages' paid to the miners, and attacked the government for its pro-mine-owners stance.[107] The individual unions involved also held meetings for the purpose of maintaining morale and it was for the same reason that the R.C.A. sent and received deputations from branches in other areas.[108] The C.S.C. also organised social events including a rugby league match in aid of the County Hospital, a seven-a-side tournament with a cup presented by the L.N.E.R. athletic club, and daily football matches and concerts.[109] At all activities organised by the strikers the opportunity was taken to stress the need for picketing and good order, and the C.S.C. 'succeeded in keeping the majority of men out of trouble.'[110]

Permits for the movement of food fully tested the strike organisation and showed how the inept behaviour of the T.U.C. could be overcome. On 1 May the General Council of the T.U.C. gave outline approval for the establishment of a permit system and three days later local Strike Committees were allowed to act as they saw fit. However, control passed to the General Transport Committee (G.T.C.), composed of representatives from the transport unions, which on 7 May, ordered the rescinding of all permits and only later agreed to allow Co-operative Societies to move bread and milk.

In York the transport men of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (N.U.D.A.W.) came out according to instruction but then returned to work under the permit system devised by the C.S.C.[111] The control was tight with the Co-operative Society's General Manager reporting that it had been difficult to get 'permits for moving even our own goods to our own shops.'[112] News of the formation of the G.T.C. and its decisions did not reach York until 10 May and when it did the C.S.C. asked its constituent bodies to discuss 'the attitude we should adopt in regard to food transport permits for the Co-operative Society'. It also sent representatives to their meetings to persuade them to agree to the continuation of permits as

well as hastily asking London for further instructions.[113] The Co-operative Society's board heard independently that 'for all fresh supplies, distributors will have to rely on government transport' and was told that its employees 'would not handle food stuffs conveyed by government transport.' The board decided to send a deputation to the C.S.C. which was told that the committee was in the process of consultation and that meanwhile permits were still being issued.[114]

The confusion was compounded on 11 May when the N.U.D.A.W. branch received a telegram informing them of the G.T.C. decision that all transport men 'should be on strike excepting men employed by the Co-operative Society solely for the purpose of delivering milk and bread direct to their members.' Tranter, a N.U.D.A.W. Co-operative Society director, told the board that these instructions from the union had to be carried out unless the C.S.C. 'could tell them that they are acting wrongly.' The board sent another deputation to the C.S.C. to ask for a continuation of the general permit system. The C.S.C. decided, because the instructions 'meant a stoppage of food supplies to the people who were out on strike,' to tell the branch to instruct its transport workers to remain at work. The local committee of the N.U.D.A.W. discussed the position at great length and decided:

> '. . . that the Central Strike Committee were in authority locally, as the General Council was nationally, that it would be in the interest of the people on strike, if their instructions were carried out, and they agreed to do so.'[115]

The C.S.C. tacitly ignored decisions coming from the T.U.C. and was, when forced, prepared to back its own judgement against that of London. The effective functioning of the C.S.C. and the organisational integration of the strike would not have happened without a high level of trust between the various interested bodies which had been developed over time through overlapping membership and which was further helped by the close proximity of the C.S.C., union headquarters and the Co-operative Society. It says much for labour in the city, and this was by no means typical, that it was able to mobilise a considerable body of support and to organise effective picketing, information and permit systems with the minimum

of confusion, violence and delay.[116] Furthermore, the machinery worked despite the fact that several leading labour leaders were absent from York on national business and with the strikers handicapped by poor communications with, and unclear directions from, London. In addition real power was not formally placed in the hands of the C.S.C.[117]

The impact of the strike

The importance attached to the running of trains may be gauged from the propaganda battle waged over the railway service. *The British Gazette*, which noted that the London and North Eastern Railway 'announce train services in practically all districts,' set the tone for the local papers with the *Press* going so far as to state that before 9.00 am on 7 May the station was 'almost as busy as an ordinary morning.'[118] Figures on the number of trains running in the North Eastern Area of the L.N.E.R. were carried by both daily papers.[119] However, when these are compared with the norm it becomes clear that the real position was poor. What is surprising is that the strikers failed to make this comparison, though they did make one effective point when they commented on the slowness of the trains. The C.S.C. informed the T.U.C. that one had taken 13½ hours to reach London from York – the *Press* admitted 12 hours – and this was given wide publicity when it was reported in the T.U.C. bulletin on 10 May.[120]

Though the lack of trams was only a minor factor in the city's economic dislocation it was seen as a major defeat by loyalists because local authorities tended to regard the 're-establishment of tramway services as an objective second only in importance to the maintenance of law and order.'[121] The inability of the committee to run a service therefore rankled during and after the strike, and there was a strong feeling that the men ought to have been penalised.[122] At the June Council meeting the committee's chairman assured members that the guaranteed week had been withdrawn and 20 seasonal employees dismissed because the continuation of the coal strike meant only a limited service was running. The ensuing debate was noisy, but the Council thought that trying to recover the £3,000 lost revenue would be impossible and a majority probably

Table 2

(a) Number of trains running in General Strike on the L.N.E.R. north of Doncaster (North Eastern Area).

	Passenger	Goods
Normal	1,959	1,070
4 May	22	0
5 May	126	5
6 May	176	4
7 May	226	5
8 May	247	12
10 May	330	30
11 May	349	40
13 May	402	80

(b) Number of railway men available for duty during the General Strike on the L.N.E.R. north of Doncaster.

	Total	Clerical & Supervisory	Drivers	Firemen	Guards	Signalmen	Shunters	Shopmen	Other grades	Power Station Staffs
Normal	58,130	10,200	3,100	3,100	1,800	2,700	1,800	16,400	19,000	30
5 May	7,189*	4,761*	29	9	27	223	12	306*	1,822*	-
6 May	7,691*	5,435	44	12	38	225	15	333	1,586	3
7 May	8,499	5,570	36	50	68	273	13	575	1,905	9
8 May	8,238	5,503	38	10	47	242	11	511	1,867	9
10 May	8,365									
11 May	8,607									
13 May	8,833									

* Figures incomplete.

The L.N.E.R. was 'practically closed' on Sunday, 9 May.
Source: PRO CAB 27/221; 27/332, Cabinet Information Bulletins, 3b, 4a, 5a, 6a, 8, 9a, 10a, 12a.

agreed with Shipley about the relative importance of electricity and trams.[123]

If the loyalists lost the battle over the trams they had a decided triumph in another area when journalists, distribution staff and volunteers were able to produce both the *Herald* and *Press*, albeit reduced in size.[124] To add insult to injury the *Press* even carried a Co-operative Society's advertisement, which had been inserted prior to the strike, on page one on 5 May! Advertisers did manage to adjust to the new situation and one advertisement addressed to Mr Trader, asked: 'If transport difficulties are worrying you, why not cut them right out by purchasing a Van or Lorry?'[125] A full sized paper was produced on 12 May, though the terms were not finally settled until two days later.[126]

More generally the effect of the strike was serious with a sharp rise in unemployment, especially short-time working, which resulted mainly from those laid off because of the loss of power.

Table 3

Unemployment in York during the General Strike

Those on short-time in brackets

Week ending:	26 April	3 May	10 May	17 May	24 May	31 May
Men:	1,423 (622)	1,363	4,301 (3,005)	1,559 (119)	1,727	1,646
Women:	448 (249)	398	3,020 (2,798)	462 (244)	402	355
Boys:	136 (1)	125	278 (158)	134 (17)	134	118
Girls:	71 (12)	50	846 (814)	56 (22)	42	32

Notes: The figures relate to insured workers and are on the low side because many workers, particularly in the distribution sector which was badly affected, are excluded. Those on strike are also excluded.

Source: *Press* 28 April; 5, 12, 19, 26 May; 2 June.

The end

The T.U.C. was desperate to find an honourable settlement and accepted Samuel's intervention with alacrity. Their naive reliance on the Samuel memorandum[127] was encouraged by Thomas, who probably had an ulterior motive for getting an early settlement,[128] and so the strike was unconditionally called off on 12 May. MacMullen of the Ministry of Labour raised several important questions about this decision:

> '. . . why did the General Council, before they called the strike off, not make more certain that the Samuel terms would be agreed to by the government? And why when they met the Prime Minister was their attempt to impose any conditions at all with regard to work so very half-hearted?[129]

The ending of the strike with nothing gained was greeted in York with disbelief and distress, but when the news was confirmed pickets were withdrawn and Rowntrees immediately announced that work would resume the following day.[130]

The failure to obtain proper assurances about the return to work was important to a railway town because the companies were not conciliatory. They had already, with the government's consent, refused to pay the men their arrears of pay and this had upset the York railwaymen.[131] More ominously Jones recorded in his diary on 10 May that the companies 'wanted power to select the men who should return after the Strike so as to eliminate undesirables', and on the same day the companies agreed to harsh reinstatement terms.[132] On the morning of 12 May the L.N.E.R. posted a notice in York stating that when the strike was over the number of men needed would 'be materially reduced' and that preference would be given to those 'who have remained at work or who offer themselves for re-employment without delay.'[133] It is hardly surprising that this notice 'rather mitigated' the news of the strike's end.[134]

The three railway unions decided to put the return to work instruction to mass meetings on the evening of 12 May, but earlier in the day, because some returning men were told that 'they would be sent for when required' and 'would then have something to sign', they sent a deputation to see the Divisional General Manager. The deputation failed to obtain the assurance that 'everyone would return to his old post on the old conditions',

so the unions took up the attitude that they could not return until it was given.[135]

On the following day, 13 May, the atmosphere in the city was 'infinitely more tense than at any other time during the strike', with angry crowds at the strike headquarters expressing their bitterness and a refusal to return to work until all railwaymen were reinstated and all volunteer labour, which the L.N.E.R. was still recruiting, was withdrawn.[136] More pickets than before were in place and the printers and engineers were still out, as were the tramwaymen who made it plain that they were 'standing fast with the railwaymen'.[137] Rumour abounded in the tense atmosphere, including one that half of the railwaymen would not be taken back. As the company continued to insist that returning men sign new conditions of service[138] so the men remained out, and it was agreed that the C.S.C. would hold back instructions sent to branches in regard to the resumption of work.[139] The C.S.C. wanted to maintain a united front as a defensive measure against the L.N.E.R. and other large employers who were standing out, and the protection of the labour movement was publicly offered to those who found it difficult to return to work. In private a sub-committee was established to meet the Lord Mayor and discuss how the city's employers could be got moving.[140]

To cap everything on that confused day, an assistant manager at Rowntrees turned away lorries, belonging to the chairman of the local Road Haulage Committee, on the 'ground that the drivers and their employer were blacklegs.' This was reported directly to the Supply and Transport Committee of the Cabinet which instructed the Civil Commissioner to take up the matter strongly with Rowntrees, and he reported the next day that the difficulty had been 'satisfactorily adjusted'.[141]

On 14 May tension eased with the L.N.E.R. putting up a conciliatory notice assuring the men that there would be no loss of seniority or reduction in wages, and as the first trams passed along Railway Street they were cheered by the strikers, though most of the printers and engineers remained out.[142] Meanwhile the three railway unions who were acting together at the national level managed to secure better, though still humiliating, terms from the companies and they wired their branches

accordingly.[143] In York the settlement was obeyed immediately, probably because the full terms were published the same day in the *Press* and their inevitability accepted.[144]

Nevertheless, there were snags caused by the continued use of volunteers and the slow pace of reinstatement, which resulted in the N.U.R. trying to link up with branches elsewhere in the North Eastern Area in an attempt to bring pressure to bear on the company. By 16 May however the R.C.A. felt that there 'was genuine desire on the part of the management to get re-instatement as quickly as possible'.[145] After this date the situation rapidly improved, and even on the railway nearly one-half of the normal service was running on Monday 17 May, and the C.S.C. was prepared to admit in public that complete re-instatement would take time because of the continuation of the coal strike. On the following day the re-instatement of over 50 per cent of local railwaymen symbolised that the strike was over, and the city returned to normal.[146]

Aftermath and assessment

The hopeless struggle of the miners continued until November with consequent repercussions.[147] The railways were affected by both the decline in freight traffic and the reduction in services requested by the government in order to conserve coal.[148] Railwaymen lost their guaranteed week which resulted in short-time working in York for groups as disparate as cleaners and clerks.[149]

The attitude of the L.N.E.R. is revealed by its policy of recording the strike record of all its employees, which in York was done by putting an asterisk against those who had remained 'loyal'.[150] The operation by the company of Clause 4 of the settlement, which stated that 'it may be necessary to remove certain persons to other positions without loss of income', was designed to weaken the R.C.A. Its application to the three supervisory staff and ten stationmasters who had joined the strike locally was attacked by Walkden, the union's General Secretary, because it was 'never the intention that all station-masters be removed' but only those 'where the attitude of the public was against them' or where 'they had intimidated the staff'.[151] The R.C.A. was quite unable to resolve any Clause 4

case and eventually removed some of them from its official list, much to the annoyance of the York branch which continued to complain about the 'gross injustice' suffered by members until 1929.[152] Under Clause 5 of the settlement, which stated that it 'shall not extend to persons who have been guilty of violence or intimidation', there were two cases involving local R.C.A. members. (One was Mr Oliver, an activist and member of the Strike Committee, who was accused of 'intimidation and use of bad language' having clashed with a blackleg during the strike.)[153] However, there is no record of either man being prosecuted and it appears that a verdict of guilty rested in the eyes of the company rather than in the courts.

Other local employers do not seem to have operated in quite such a deliberate way as the L.N.E.R. Some victimisation did occur; the most notable casualty being the Trades Council Secretary who lost his job.[154]

The most serious aftermath was the effect on local unionism. The Workshop Supervisors branch of the R.C.A. collapsed and the membership of the main branch fell from 645 in April to 440 in December 1926. It was not to recover until the thirties.[155] The Trades Council had reduced affiliations and income, and it too was not to recover for a decade.[156] Part of the problem was the cost of the strike to unions and their branches which led A.S.L.E.F. 'when it was in extreme financial difficulties' to withdraw from the council.[157] It is perhaps significant that leadership passed away from the Trades Council after the strike, with the protests about the Emergency Powers Act coming from the I.L.P., the N.U.R. number three branch and the Joint Branches Committee.[158] But it was not a complete defeat, and in one area trade union membership was widened when instrument makers at Cooke's allowed allied workers to join the A.E.U.[159] The Trades Council's fund for the miners was successful with £893 13*s.* 11*d.* being raised, and the involvement of at least ten of the city's workingmen's clubs showed the widespread sympathy that existed for the miners.[160] The Co-operative Society also contributed generously to miners' relief funds and, unlike the rest of the labour movement, refused to handle foreign coal.[161]

The strike's end was accompanied by a continued attack on

trade unionism which became linked to an onslaught against extremists, bolsheviks and the U.S.S.R.[162] Even the local musical society was caught up and hastily, after a thirteen year gap, reintroduced the singing of the national anthem at its choral concerts.[163] The Conservative Association joined in by circulating 14,000 broadsheets and Marriott, the city's M.P., demanded extensive changes in trade union law which his party endorsed.[164] The Association gained some support and its income rose, though not all middle class opinion shared its hardline stance.[165] The Council of Christian Congregations and the Committee of the Peace Makers Pilgrimage, which represented various women's groups, appealed for moderation both during and after the strike.[166] The result of the municipal elections suggests that the Conservatives' continued fears were thought to be exaggerated and, though the strike was not an overt issue, there was a 2% swing to Labour and a net gain of two seats.[167]

The strike demonstrated at both the national and local level the unreality of those who feared organised labour. The strikers had responded out of loyalty and general sympathy with the miners, the constitutional issue having hardly weighed at all.[168] The particular structure of York, which meant that both sides could make appeals to a considerable body of potential support, resulted in the recruiting agencies being rather overwhelmed with volunteers on the one hand and the strike call receiving widespread and sustained backing on the other. However, the leaders of the strike were just as determined as the police on seeing order maintained and it is difficult to portray the local incidents as anything but insignificant. Essential services were maintained in York without difficulty and the police kept order, especially once special constables were used on non-sensitive duties, without recourse to the military. However, economic disruption was severe because of the loss of power, and the railway service was rudimentary.

The success of the C.S.C., which was an impressive example of improvisation, resulted from the sensitivity of the railwaymen to the needs of the other unions, the realisation of the importance of entertainment and information to the individual striker, and the strength of personal ties forged through shared beliefs

which were re-inforced by membership of the Trades Council and the Labour Party. It was aided by the active help given by the local Co-operative Society over credit and accommodation. The use by the C.S.C. at the end of the strike of its only weapon – solidarity – to protect individuals and weak unions highlights the inept handling of the return to work by the T.U.C.

The crucial feature of 1926 was the loyalty of organised labour both to its leaders and to the norms and values of the political culture. The local Conservatives in their muted municipal election campaign, during which the strike was not mentioned, appear to have grasped the first point though uncertain of its electoral consequences, but their continued strident stress on constitutionalism suggests that the second was not fully understood by them immediately.

Attitudes to the events of 1926, transmuted into a belief either that Baldwin saved the nation or that the miners were the victims of rapacious employers, were to be, along with unemployment, crucial factors in the growing class polarisation of the electorate which occured after the strike and, helped by Marriott's continued attacks on the legitimacy of labour's organisations, were to lead to Labour capturing the city in the General Election of 1929.[169]

Notes to text

[1] 38.6% of York's occupied males were 'middle class' in 1921 which put it well above the minimum of 20% for a middle class constituency. M. Kinnear, *The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey Since 1885*, (1968), pp. 122-123. See also H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910*, (1967), p. 308.

[2] K. Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary*, (1969) vol. 1, p. 73. For the government's fears of revolution see also pp. 73-74, 78-80, 96-103, 133-151; S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, (1972) vol. 2, pp. 144-145, 225-227.

[3] *Press*, 30 Jan; 11 Feb. See also 6, 23, 24, 26, 27 Feb.; 2, 28 March. [Dates refer to 1926 unless otherwise stated].

[4] *Ibid.*, 1, 5 Feb. 1925; YCL, Con. Min., 20 April, 9 June 1925.

[5] YCL, Con. Min., 14 Sept., 9 Nov., 21 Dec. 1925, 11 Jan. Help was received from Councillor Raine a director and convert from Labour.

[6] *Press*, 28, 29, 30 Jan., 1, 2, 3, 5, Feb.; leader, 5 Feb.; replies 29 Jan., 5 Feb. Co-op. Head Office, York., Min. 19 Feb., 5, 12 March.

[7] Co-op. Min. 11 Feb., 29 June.

[8] For details of the relationship see K.C.J. Knowles, *Strikes* (Oxford, 1952) p. 76.

[9] G. A. Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* (1976) pp. 61-66; PRO CAB 27/260 Proceedings of the Cabinet Committee on Supply and Transport, *passim*. (S.T.)

[10] See Steel-Maitland's realistic comments PRO CAB 24/175 CP 462.

[11] *The Times*, 1 Oct. 1925; PRO CAB 27/261 Home Office Notes to the Supply and Transport Committee 27, 28 Oct. 1925; HO 45/12336 Report 2 Nov. 1925.

[12] *Press*, 25, reprinted 26,27 Feb.

[13] The chiefs of the Metropolitan and Liverpool Police were unwilling to have anything to do with the O.M.S. (PRO HO 45/12336. Report on the O.M.S. 21 Nov. 1925) and in the 20 county boroughs with the worst socio-economic conditions on Buckatzsch's index only 4 had branches whereas 11 of the top 20 did. E. J. Buckatzsch, 'An Index of Social Conditions in the County Boroughs in 1931', *Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Statistics*, vol. 18, no. 12, 1946.

[14] Phillips, *op. cit.* Chapter 5. For a short statement of the miners' position see Middlemas, *op. cit.* vol. 2, pp. 9-10, 49-51.

[15] *Press*, 15, 21 Jan.: 17, 18 Feb. Even the wage fund was resurrected: *Ibid.* 20 Jan.

[16] *Ibid.*, 22 Jan.

[17] *Herald*, 1 May; see also *Press*, 9, 25 Feb. For a discussion of parallel views in the national press see K. Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike* (1926) pp. 28-29, 63-66.

[18] *Herald*, 3 May.

[19] Quoted in S. Mears, 'The Churches' in M. Morris (ed.), *The General Strike* (1976) p. 331.

[20] *Herald*, 4 May, see also 8, 12 May; *Press* 8, 11, 12 May.

[21] PRO HO 46/252 Register of Correspondence, volume 3, 1926, Disturbances, 4, 17 May. The relevant file HO 45/493263 is still closed.

[22] *Ibid.*, HO 46/252, 8 May. HO 45/491932 is still closed.

[23] *Wheatsheaf*, June 1926, p. ii, see also May 1926, p. i. This argument was first put in York by A. J. Cook at a meeting attended by Alderman Dobbie, the national president of the N.U.R.: *Press*, 5 April.

[24] The chairman and secretary of the Trades Council were active in Labour politics and the former was also a director of the Co-operative Society. The party chairman, the Rev. G. S. Woods (later a Labour M.P.), was vice-president of the society. The party's three secretaries were keen trade unionists and one, besides being president of the N.U.D.A.W. branch, was also a Co-operative Society director.

[25] In 1919-1920 it demanded the withdrawal of British troops and, with the Trades Council, established a Council of Action. YCL, Lab. D.M. 18 June 1919; 18 Aug. 1920; 16 Nov. 1921; 15 Feb. 1922; 16 May 1923.

[26] *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1921; 17 Jan., 16 May 1923; 19 June, 20 Aug. 1924; 16 Sept. 1925; *York and District Trades Council Annual Report, 1921*.

[27] YCL, Lab. D.M. 20 Oct., 15 Dec. 1920, 17 March, 21 April, see also R.C.A. Min. 19 April, in possession of secretary T.S.S.A. York No. 1 Branch; N.U.D.A.W. Min. 8 March, in possession of secretary York Co-operative F197 U.S.D.A.W. Branch.

[28] In 1930 the Labour Group did agree that medical and sanitary conditions should take priority when allocations were made 'provided the sub-committee are satisfied that the applicant is in a position to meet the rent', YCL Labour Group Minutes 4 Jan. 1930.

[29] *Press*, 1 June; see also 2, 18 June.

[30] *Herald*, 14 May; see also 13 May.

[31] C. Farman, *The General Strike, May 1926* (1972) pp. 232, 239.

[32] C. P. Renshaw, *The General Strike* (1975) p. 18.

[33] *Press*, 6 May. The rescuer was later presented with a gold watch by the Chief Constable.

[34] PRO HO 45/12431 Report of Davidson, 24 June. The *Gazette* had to verify non-official information with the relevant government department and the news bulletins of the B.B.C. were approved by Davidson and 'uncensored' news not broadcast. See also PRO CAB 27/260 S.T., 5, 11 May.

[35] PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (no. 5) 6 May.

[36] *British Gazette*, 8 May. This did appear in the Situation Report but related to another minor incident in which arrests were made.

[37] *York Central Strike Committee Bulletin* No. 2, 5 May.

[38] PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (No. 4) 5 May, see also (No. 3) 4 May, *Press*, 4 May. Two men, one a tramway employee, were convicted under the Emergency Regulations for preventing passengers from boarding a bus and were fined £2: *Press*, 13 May; *Gazette*, 15 May; YCL, Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction, York, volume 4, 1926, 13 May.

[39] *Gazette*, 15 May; *Press* 5, 6, 8 May.

[40] *Press*, 6 May; *Herald*, 18 June; YCL, Reg. Summary Jurisdiction, 19 June. The T.G.W.U. held up food lorries at Castle Mills bridge causing much inconvenience: *Herald*, 8 May.

[41] Few of the volunteers appear to have been middle class.

[42] *Press*, 5, 6, 7 May; *Herald*, 8 May.

[43] *Ibid*, 8 May. The youth was leniently fined, because of his age, two days later for preventing the proper use of a bus and for causing £8 worth of damage to it.

[44] *British Gazette*, 11 May.

[45] PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (No. 7) 8 May.

[46] *Press*, 10 May.

[47] R.C.A. Min., 8, 10 May.

[48] *Press*, 10 May 26.

[49] PRO CAB 27/332 C.I.B., Ministry of Transport, (No. 10), 12 May 26; *Press*, 10, 11, 12, 13 May; *Herald*, 11 May; C.S.C. Bulletin 11 May, quoted in E. Burns, *The General Strike, May 1926: Trades Councils in Action* (1926, reprinted 1975) p. 53.

[50] Dobbie, who had been an ex-officio magistrate during his term as Lord Mayor 1923-1924, sat but did not adjudicate: *Herald*, 18 June; *Press*, 21 June.
[51] Register, volume 5, 1926, 17 June: *Herald*, 18 June; *Press*, 18, 21 June. It is likely that the N.U.R. paid for the defence of all the accused.
[52] *Press*, 17 May, *Gazette*, 15 May.
[53] Interview with Mr C. E. Benton.
[54] These were paid men who occasionally worked full-time as policemen.
[55] PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (No. 4) 5 May; *Report of H.M. Inspectors of Constabulary, 1926* (H.M.S.O. 1927) Table 1 (Constabulary).
[56] By then 90 had been sworn in and 100 enrolled (They could not be used until they had been sworn in). PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (no.5) 6 May; (no. 7) 8 May; *Press*, 6, 7 May; *Gazette*, 15 May.
[57] *Constabulary, 1927* (H.M.S.O. 1928) Table I.
[58] This was created during the strike from territorial units and ex-military men known and trusted by the local units, but it was a force of 'paid whole-time . . . sworn-in Special Constables' under the direction of the police : PRO CAB 23/52 Cabinet Conclusions 7 May.
[59] *Press*, 12 May; Information from Major H. Spencer, secretary of the P.O.W. Own Regiment of Yorkshire Regimental Association.
[60] Lt. Col. R. E. May, curator of the Regimental Museum of the Border Regiment and the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, in a letter to the author.
[61] Regimental Archives, quoted by Major T. A. Ferrier, M.B.E., M.M., curator Home Headquarters Queen's Royal Irish Hussars, in a letter to the author.
[62] *Herald*, 7 May.
[63] PRO HO 45/12336 484910 Hardinge to the Home Secretary 21 May, attached 'Answers to Circular Letter' of the O.M.S. 11 May.
[64] *Yorkshire Fascist Weekly*, 4 Sept.
[65] The B.F. lost the licence for its club in a welter of embarrassing publicity. A further reason for the Association's attitude was that the B.F. had been founded by people independent of the party, in particular the authoritarian C.S. Walker, whereas other fringe groups shared their leaders with the Association. (Walker later left politics and turned his abilities in another direction by becoming secretary of the Glen Allotment Association.) YCL, Con. Min. 12 July; *Press*, 26, 29, 30, 31 Oct 1925.
[66] Though it did claim to have increased its membership by the end of 1925: *Press*, 5, 29 Jan. 7 May; *Herald*, 4 May.
[67] *Ibid.*, 3, 4 May.
[68] By 5 May 900 had enrolled, over 1,000 by 6 May and 2,250 two days later: *Press.*, 5, 6, 19 May; *Herald*, 6 May; *British Gazette*, 8 May.
[69] *Gazette*, 22 May; *Press*, 4, 12 May; *Herald*, 6 May.
[70] The North Eastern Division had only 25,000 volunteers in total (Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 130) and it is unlikely that 15,000 were railway volunteers. Given the 25,000 figure the local V.S.C. claim also appears high: PRO CAB 27/331 C.I.B. (no. 6a) 8 May; *Herald*, 13 May.
[71] It was claimed that York's response was larger 'in proportion to the population than in any other place in the country': *Gazette*, 15 May.
[72] PRO HO 46/252, 1 Feb.
[73] The committee was composed of coal merchants with a representative from the Council. The Council delegated its general duties to the Finance and General Purposes Committee which in turn appointed a sub-committee with *de facto* executive powers: *Council Minutes 1925-1926*, p. 612.
[74] Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141, 214-215.

[75] Shipley was a former Labour Alderman who had been expelled for blacklegging in the 1919 railway strike. *Press*, 8 June; PRO CAB 27/331 H.O.S.R. (no. 6) 7 May.
[76] The Co-operative Society was allowed to hold on to one half of the city's stock. Its General Manager was to complain that certain officials were issuing more coal than the regulations allowed: Co-op. Min. 3, 7 May.
[77] *Press*, 5 May; Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, Memorandum of Smart's Interview with Dr. C. H. Northcott.
[78] The local N.U.D.A.W. branch was virtually confined to the Co-operative Society where a closed shop was operated. Phillips, *op. cit.* pp. 159-160.
[79] The shortage was met by volunteers and by sending drivers from Huddersfield: PRO MT 45/245 X/K4685; *British Gazette*, 8 May; PRO CAB 27/331 C.I.B. (no. 3) 5 May.
[80] PRO CAB 27/332 C.I.B. (no. 8) 10 May; (10) 12 May; (11) 13 May. Rowntrees eased the sugar shortage in the North Eastern Division by handing over some of its own supply: (no. 6) 8 May.
[81] *Gazette*, 15 May; C.S.C. Bulletin, no. 2, 5 May; Letter.
[82] T.U.C. Bulletin, no. 7, 10 May.
[83] *Gazette*, 15, 22 May; Letter.
[84] The number on strike did not peak in York until 8 May. R. W. Postgate, E. Wilkinson, J. F. Horrabin, *A Workers' History of the Great Strike* (1927) pp. 27, 31 94-95.
[85] Knowles, *op. cit.* p. 21 footnote 3.
[86] Out of a membership of 637 the number on strike of the number 1 branch were: 4 May (351), 5 (362), 6 (367), 8 (384), 11 (293), though 33 members refused to draw strike pay because they objected to the T.U.C. 'joining with the miners in holding up the country', but about 30 non-members also struck; the supervisory number 3 branch did not join the strike though a few individuals did. R.C.A. Min. 9, 14 April; May 26 *passim*.
[87] *Ibid.*, 6 May. See also the one column letter from loyal clerks and the union's reply: *Press*, 10 11 May; *Herald*, 13 May.
[88] *Herald*, 8 May; R.C.A. Min. 9 May.
[89] *Ibid.* 6 May. The *Press* carried a similar appeal reprinted from the *British Gazette: Press* 6, 11, 12 May.
[90] The only surviving, though incomplete, copy is in the Conservative Association's Minute Book. YCL, Con. Min. 24 Sept.; *Press*, 12 May.
[91] Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-109.
[92] C. F. Milner in a letter to the author.
[93] Letter.
[94] The railway unions made the original booking and the C.S.C. offices were those of the Labour Party which were released for the duration. Lab. D. M. 16 June; *Press*, 3 May; R.C.A. Min. 4 May; Co-op. Min. 11 May.
[95] Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 55 and chapter 5 *passim*; Co-op. Min. 3, 7 May.
[96] R.C.A. Min. 4, 7, 8, 9 May.
[97] The R.C.A. also had a social sub-committee: *ibid.* 4, 5 May.
[98] *Ibid.* 4 May; Letter; C.S.C. Bulletin no. 1, 4 May; nos. 4 and 5, 6 May; no.6, 7 May.
[99] Postgate et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[100] These were distributed to members in outlying areas in conjunction with the C.S.C.: R.C.A. Min. 4, 7, 10 May.
[101] See the quotation from the *Northern Echo*: C.S.C. Bulletin, no. 8, 8 May.
[102] He was not allowed to broadcast immediately, but Phillips (*op. cit.* p. 144) is

wrong to say that the statement was not broadcast: B.B.C. Written Archives Centre, Transcript of News Bulletins.

[103] C.S.C. Bulletin, no. 3, 5 May; no. 5, 6 May; no. 7, 7 May; TUC HD 5366 Report of ment it was reported, though his view, that the strike was an attempt by a minority to impose its will on the community, was stressed: *Press*, 10, 11 May.

[104] C.S.C. Bulletin, no. 3, 5 May; no. 5, 6 May; no. 7, 7 May; TUC HD 5366 Report of Visit to York and Doncaster by W. Paling, 11 May.

[105] R.C.A. Min. 6 May. The suspicion of the press was longstanding; see Lab. D.M., *passim*.

[106] Letter from Milner.

[107] *Herald*, 10 May. For other meetings see: C.S.C. Bulletin no. 1, 4 May; no. 4, 6 May. For hostile reports see: *Herald*, 5, 8 May.

[108] R.C.A. Min. 7, 10 May. Though Milner, in a letter to the author, commented that despite regular A.E.U. meetings in a pub 'we felt ourselves very much on the fringe of things'.

[109] *Press*, 10, 11 May; *Herald*, 7 May; C.S.C. Bulletin no. 1, 4 May, no. 5, 6 May.

[110] *Gazette*, 15 May; R.C.A. Min. 9, 10 May. Rowntrees organised a dance for its employees – price 6*d*. dancing to the works band – on 11 May.

[111] N.U.D.A.W. Min. 4 May.

[112] Co-op. Min. 10 May.

[113] O. G. Willey, later a Labour M.P., went on behalf of the C.S.C. to the R.C.A. which agreed 'to loyally co-operate with the Co-operative Society for the transport of food'; R.C.A. Min. 10 May.

[114] Co-op. Min. 10 May.

[115] N.U.D.A.W. Min. 11 May; Co-op. Min 11 May. The C.S.C. also decided to allow the Co-operative Society to move the coal in its bunkers to avoid having it commandeered.

[116] Mr A. Power comments that to organise a similar action in the city would now take considerably longer than it did in 1926. In the 1974 miners strike he was not told for three days, even though he was secretary of the Trades Council, that miners were picketing the York power station and it took him a further four days to provide effective picketing by the labour movement in the city.

[117] Alderman Dobbie, T. H. Gill (National President of the R.C.A.), R. T. Mackereth (A.S.L.E.F.) were in London as members of the railway unions National Strike and Negotiating Committee, and A. Atkinson (N.U.R.) and W. H. Farrar (R.C.A.) were also absent from York. The C.S.C. did use the need to refer everything back to its constituent bodies as a delaying tactic to avoid implementing unpopular decisions.

[118] *British Gazette*, 6 May, see also 8, 11 May; *Press*, 7 May, see also 6, 11 May.

[119] These tended to be rather higher than the figures in the Cabinet Information Bulletins. See *Herald*, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 May; *Press*, 8, 10 May.

[120] The T.U.C. HD 5366, Bulletin no. 7, 10 May; Letter.

[121] Phillips, *op. cit.* p. 212.

[122] *Press*, 8, 11, 15, 24, 26, 27 May; *Herald*, 21 May, 1 June.

[123] *Ibid.*, 8 June.

[124] The Liberal weekly *Yorkshire Gazette*, which had not commented on the general situation on 1 May, was not published on the eighth.

[125] *Herald*, 6 May.

[126] R.C.A. Min. 14 May.

[127] B. Turner, *About Myself* (1930) chapter 27.

[128] It has been suggested in exchange for having city debts of £70,000 settled by Mond: Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, Memorandum of Smart's Interview with D. Chapman.

[129] PRO CAB 27/9 Memorandum on the General Strike (MacMullen).

[130] J. Sherwood, quoted in a letter to the author from Mr R. Buckton; *Press*, 12 May.

[131] PRO CAB 27/9, Memorandum by MacMullen; *Herald*, 7 May.

[132] Middlemas, *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 46; P. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen* (1963) pp. 485-486.

[133] *Press*, 12 May.

[134] PRO CAB 27/332 H.O.S.R. (no. 11) 12 May.

[135] R.C.A. Min. 12 May.

[136] *Gazette*, 15 May.

[137] PRO CAB 27/332 H.O.S.R. (no. 12) 13 May; C.I.B. (no. 12) 14 May; *Press*, 13 May; *Gazette*, 15 May.

[138] PRO CAB 27/332 H.O.S.R. (no. 12) 13 May. Walkden, the General Secretary of the R.C.A., telegraphed that this was 'contrary to Prime Minister's declaration' of no victimisation and urged members to remain out which, later the same day, was turned into an instruction to 'continue [to] strike until we receive satisfactory assurances': R.C.A. Min. 13 May.

[139] R.C.A. Min. 13 May.

[140] Ibid. *Herald*, 13 May.

[141] PRO CAB 27/260 S.T., 14, 15 May; see also *Herald*, leader 14 May. The company has no records relating to this incident.

[142] *Press*, 14 May; letter from Milner.

[143] Ironically the adoption motion at the joint committee meeting was moved by Dobbie and Gill: N.U.R. Executive Committee Minutes 14 May.

[144] There had already been a drift back to work during the day; R.C.A. Min. 14 May; PRO CAB 27/332, H.O.S.R. (no. 13) 15 May.

[145] R.C.A. Min. 16 May; see also 15 May. Postgate et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[146] R.C.A. Min. 19 May; *Press*, 17, 18 May; *Gazette*, 22 May; PRO CAB 27/332 C.I.B. (no. 16a) 18 May.

[147] Even by the end of October only 346,045 out of 955,400 normally working miners had returned (36%): PRO CAB 27/332 H.O.S.R. 26 Nov.

[148] PRO CAB 27/260 S.T. 17 May; CAB 27/9, Memo. by MacMullen.

[149] Drivers and firemen held weekly collections for those not in regular work. In the R.C.A. branch 156 members were on short-time and 31 unemployed in July and in November 123 and 0: letter from Buckton. R.C.A. Min. 19 July ; 15 Nov.

[150] Interview with Mr C. Shaw.

[151] R.C.A. Min. 16 May.

[152] It pointedly refused to invite representatives of the company to its twenty-first anniversary dinner in 1928 though all the officers of the other local railway unions were: *ibid*, 19 Sept. 1928. See also 1927-1929 *passim*.

[153] *Ibid*. 7, 18 May.

[154] Co-op. Min. 4, 11 March 1927. Hutchinson was a temperance advocate and sunday school teacher who later became a paid union official.

[155] Four collectors had resigned by June and another, as well as the secretary, did so at the year's end: R.C.A. Min. 31 May, 21 June, 20 Dec.

[156] From 34 branches and £51 in 1925 to 25 and £64 in 1927: Y.C.L., York and District Trades Council, Balance Sheet 1925 and 1927.

[157] Letter from Buckton. The local R.C.A. paid out £3,967 in benefit: R.C.A. Min. 16 April 1927.

[158] PRO HO 46/252 10, 11, 21 Dec.

[159] Letter from Milner. The Electrical Trade Union also appears to have increased its membership during the strike.

[160] £86 was raised from street collections: *Press* 3, 5, 7 June, 27 Sept., 6 Dec.; Co-op. Min. 4 June; Trades Council Balance Sheet, 1927. The Council refused Labour's

request for a flag day: *Press*, 6, 22 July; *Council minutes 1925-26*, pp. 722, 751, 808-809.

[161] Co-op. Min. 11, 18 June, 16, 23 July, 10, 24 Sept. For hostile comment: *Press*, 31 Aug., 15 Sept.

[162] *Herald*, 13, 14, 15 May, 24 July; *Press*, 13, 14, 17, 18 May, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 June.

[163] *Press*, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30 Nov.; 13 Dec.

[164] *Ibid.*, 14 June, 25 Sept., 22 Nov., Con. Min. 31 May. This casts doubt on the view held by Phillips (*op. cit.* p. 274) that the role of the 'rank and file was in some respects a moderating one'.

[165] Its income rose from £552 in 1925 to £636 in 1926 and subscriptions from £384 to £414. Subscribers rose by 31 to 313: Conservative Association, Statement of Receipts and Payment 1925 and 1926.

[166] *Press*, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, 29 May.

[167] Hatfield was attacked for having been a conscientious objector but not for having chaired the C.S.C.: *Press*, 27 Oct.

[168] PRO CAB 27/9, memo by MacMullen; CAB 27/322 C.I.B. (no. 9a) 11 May.

[169] In 1925 there is no correlation between class and voting, but in 1929 it was 0.742 which is significant at the 0.001 level and the average for the municipal elections 1926-1929 is significant at the 0.05 level.