BULLETIN

NO. 1

CAUTION.

WHEREAS it has been represented to us from several quarters, that mischievous and designing Persons have been for some time past, endeavouring to induce, and have induced, many Labourers in various Parishes in this County, to attend Meetings, and to enter into Illegal Societies or Unions, to which they bind themselves by unlawful oaths, administered secretly by Persons concealed, who artfully deceive the ignorant and unwary.—WE, the undersigned Justices think it our duty to give this PUBLIC NOTICE and CAUTION, that all Persons may know the danger they incur by entering into such Societies.

ANY PERSON who shall become a Member of such a Society, or take any Oath, or assent to any Test or Declaration not authorized by Law—

Any Person who shall administer, or be present at, or consenting to the administering or taking any Unlawful Oath, or who shall cause such Oath to be administered, although not actually present at the time—

Any Person who shall not reveal or discover any Illegal Oath which may have been administered, or any Illegal Act done or to be done—

Any Person who shall induce, or endeavour to persuade any other Person to become a Member of such Societies,

WILL BECOME

Guilty of Felony,

AND BE LIABLE TO BE

Transported for Seven Years.

ANY PERSON who shall be compelled to take such an Oath, unless he shall declare the same within four days, together with the whole of what he shall know touching the same, will be liable to the same Penalty.

Any Person who shall directly or indirectly maintain correspondence or intercourse with such Society, will be deemed Guilty of an Unlawful Combination and Confederacy, and on Conviction before one Justice, on the Oath of one Witness, be liable to a Penalty of TWENTY POUNDS, or to be committed to the Common Gaol or House of Correction, for THREE CALENDAR MONTHS; or if proceeded against by Indictment, may be CONVICTED OF FELONY, and be TRANSPORTED FOR SEVEN YEARS.

Any Person who shall knowingly permit any Meeting of any such Society to be held in any House, Building, or other Place, shall for the first offence be liable to the Penalty of FIVE POUNDS; and for every other offence committed after Conviction, be deemed Guilty of such Unlawful Combination and Confederacy, and on Conviction before one Justice, on the Oath of one Witness, be liable to a Penalty of TWENTY POUNDS, or to Commitment to the Common Gaol or House of Correction, FOR THREE CALENDAR MONTHS; or if proceeded against by Indictment may be

CONVICTED OF FELONY,

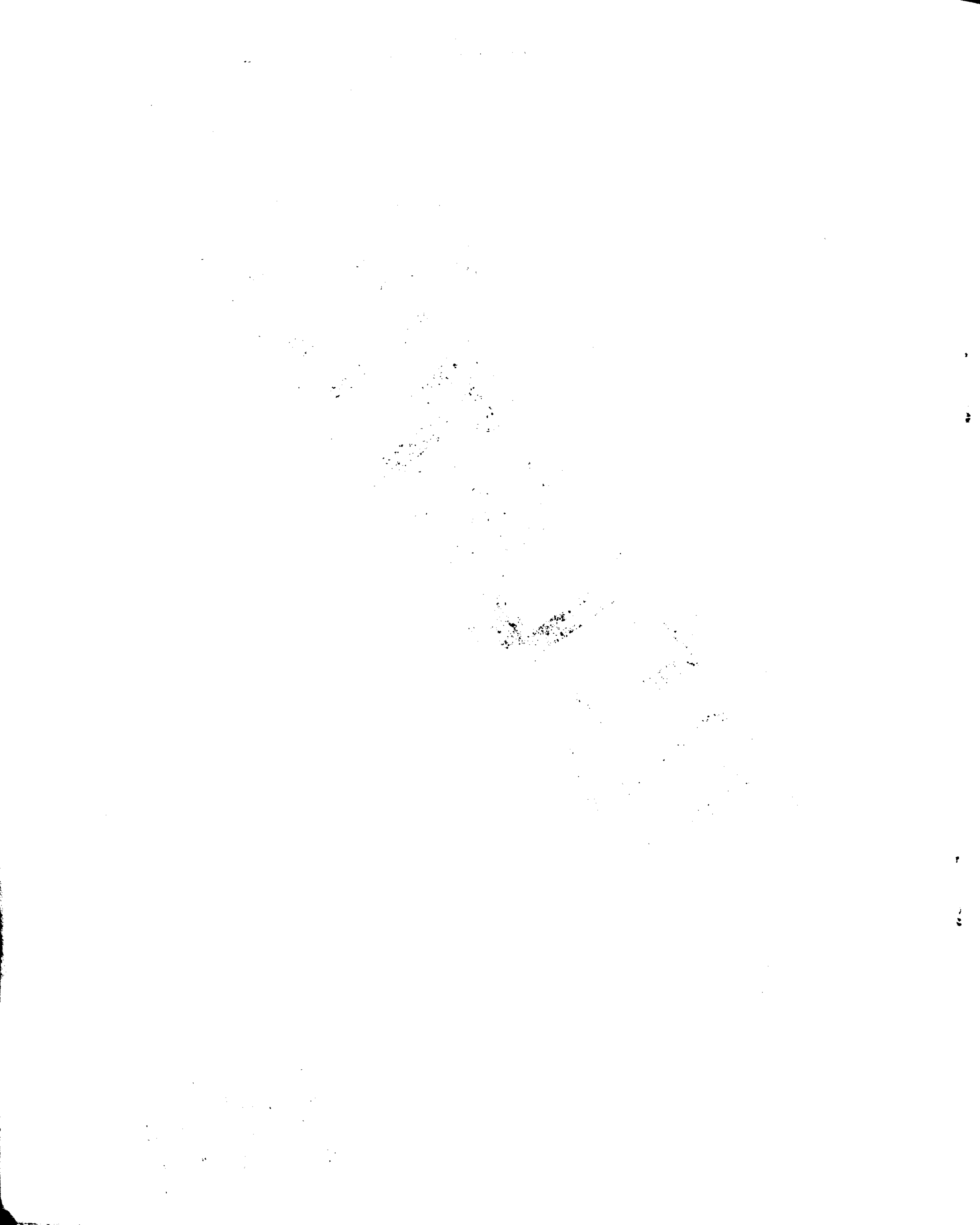
And Transported for SEVEN YEARS.

COUNTY OF DORSET.
Dorchester Division.
February 22d, 1834.

C. B. WOLLASTON,
JAMES FRAMPTON,
WILLIAM ENGLAND,
THOS. DADE,
JNO. MORTON COLSON,

HENRY FRAMPTON,
RICHD. TUCKER STEWARD,
WILLIAM R. CHURCHILL,
AUGUSTUS FOSTER.

G. CLARK, PRINTER, CORNHILL, DORCHESTER.



NORTH WEST GROUP
FOR THE STUDY OF
LABOUR HISTORY

SECRETARY:
J.P.H. CARTER
79 ERROL STREET
LIVERPOOL 17
051-727-3422.

BULLETIN NO: 1

P. 1 The General Strike in Manchester Ruth & Edmond Frow
P. 6 The General Strike on Merseyside Ron Bean
P. 11 The Decline of Chartism in S.E. Lancashire and N.E. Cheshire 1850 - 1870 Neville Kirk.
P. 16 Chartism in the North West Dr. I Prothero

OBJECTS OF THE GROUP

a) To bring together those interested in labour History in the North West.
b) To encourage and help organise such interest.
c) To assist in the preservation of existing records.
d) To organise support for these aims by such means as lectures, exhibitions, pamphlets, books, etc.

Membership shall be open to all those actively interested in aims of the Group.

The annual subscription shall be 50p per individual, £1.00 per institution, student members and retired members 25p. This shall fall due on 30th April, each year.

The Bulletin will be published annually and contain reports of conferences as well as articles on all matters of interest. The Bulletin is issued free to members. Additional copies and copies for non members available from the Secretary price 12p

The General Strike in Manchester (summary)

Manchester was not a storm centre of the General Strike because the basic industry was engineering and the first call did not include most of the engineering workers Local organisation was accepted as a responsibility of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council. This had formed itself into a Council of Action nine months before the strike took place. The Executive of the Trades Council actually constituted the operative Council of Action. It is a peculiarity of the situation that Manchester was expected to be one of the trouble spots and that was the reason for the early organisation, but in fact there was comparative calm throughout the nine days. However, the first and last arrests of the General Strike were made in the area. The authorities were also well prepared and the officers and members of the City Council constituted an Emergency Committee to ensure the maintenance of food supplies and other essential services.

On the first day, Tuesday, May 4th, the all night trams stopped running as the day dawned. From the start, the transport workers were solid in Manchester. Work also stopped on the Docks and the Ship Canal. The discipline of the workers astonished the employers who had predicted a state of chaos and confusion. Throughout the strike, the Manchester Guardian was printed in Attenuated form and the Evening Chronicle appeared on one page duplicated sheets. It was on the first Tuesday that the first arrest was made. The Communist Party in London had produced an emergency bulletin called, 'The Workers' Daily'. Richard Stoker, a business man who owned a car, travelled to London to collect supplies of the bulletin for the North West. He arrived at the

Continued ...

Margaret Street Socialist Hall in Openshaw and was met by a group of Young Communist League members. The bundles were being unloaded into the Members' Room when the Police arrived. While they questioned Stoker and searched the car, the youngsters took as many bundles as they could from the Members' Room and hid them under a pile of coke in the cellar. By their action, some of the broadsheet were saved. The following day, Dick Stoker was sentenced to two month's imprisonment. The incident was fully reported in the Scotsman of May 6th.

Reports in the British Worker for the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday indicate that the City was quiet and that a remarkable degree of solidarity was maintained. A thousand Special Police were enlisted in the local force. Local opinion demanded a North West edition of the British Worker. Ellen Wilkinson and J.F. Horrabin sent a report to the T.U.C. saying that the position was absolutely solid but that the local movement was demanding news.

On Saturday, May 8th Fenner Brockway was sent from London to organise a Manchester edition of the British Worker. Brockway commented that it was a historical occasion because for the first time a British newspaper was being produced under workers' control. Plans for the first edition were carried out on the Sunday ready for publication on Monday morning. On Sunday large and peaceful meetings were held in Platt Fields, Gorton and Blackley. The Government showed evidence that they intended to enforce the unloading of grain from ships in the Docks when they began to organise beds, blankets and pillows at Salford Docks.

The first edition of the Manchester Edition of the British Worker was duly printed in 50,000 copies on Monday, May 7th. It was well received. The second day's edition was issued in 100,000 copies and supplies were taken to Derby, Liverpool, Preston and Colne.

Continued ....

The phone constantly rang with requests for more copies, but paper had to be rationed.

On Tuesday. 11th the second line of strikers was called out and that included the engineers and the ship yard workers. This brought Manchester fully into the picture as there were, for example, four thousand workers at the Metropolitan Vickers factory in Trafford Park alone. During the day there was one of the few incidents in which hostile action was taken. A lorry carrying bedding and milk churns and driven by student volunteers was overturned in Market Street and set on fire by the crowd. The employers also began to take aggressive action. The Manchester Tramways men were given until 10. a.m. the following day to return to work or lose their job. Out of a force of five thousand, only twenty nine did report. The others went to Hyde Road Depot to gather in strength and then march through the City. However, as they gathered, the news was conveyed to them that the T.U.C. had called off the strike. Some of the men went into work and a full service was resumed next day. In Salford, where the Tramway Committee had behaved in a far more aggressive manner towards the men and claimed the right to decide who should be re-instated, there was no resumption of work. The chaos and confusion resultant on the calling off of the Strike was reported by Brockway. His opinion was that the General Strike had been led by people who did not believe in it ' and they - not the workers - cracked'. The Manchester Evening Chronicle was printed on 14th and among the items of local news was the report that Salford Police had arrested several men alleged to be Communists.

These arrests were made in connection with a leaflet that the Communist Party nationally had issued. It was called 'The Great Betrayal'. The method of dissemination was to send a copy to each locality and leave it to the local organisation to produce supplies for it's area.

Continued ....

'The Great Betrayal' called on the working class to refuse to return to work until the Government guaranteed that the miners would receive their rate of pay with no reduction. Jack Forshaw, Secretary of the Salford Branch of the Communist Party, was responsible for the duplication of the leaflet locally. During the strike he had removed a sum of money amounting to one hundred pounds that the Branch had collected towards the purchase of local premises and he put it into an account in his daughter's name for safety. He went to take it out of that account and return it to the account in thename of the local Party Branch and actually had it in his pocket when he called in his house to find the Police were already there. They had found the duplicator and supplies of 'The Great Betrayal' and they arrested Jack Forshaw. He was a diabetic and needed medical attention and special food. This he was refused. He was kept in an unheated cell until the Monday when he was charged with having in his possession a document likely to cause disaffection among the civilian population. He was fined the exact sum of £100 that he had on him when arrested andalso sentenced to a month's imprisonment. Although the Workers' International Relief obtained bail a few days later, Jack Forshaw had already contracted pneumonia and died while on bail.

There were six other men arrested at the same time as Jack Forshaw on the same charge. They were later bound over in their own sureties. Thomas Hamer, of Altrincham, was less fortunate, He was sentenced to six month's imprisonment. These cases were almost certainly the last that were heard under the Emergency Powers Act. So Manchester, which was exceptionally quiet during the General Strike, saw the first and last arrest under the Regulations. Fenner Brockway asked himself why the T.U.C. began the strike if they were not prepared to take it to a successful conclusion. He said, 'Of course a General Strike must be revolutionary; it is of necessity a conflict between the workers and the capitalist state.

Continued ....

The strike of 1926 was led by a General Council who did not realise this when they reluctantly authorised the struggle, and they drew back from it as soon as they understood its full implications. A.J. Cook, the miners' leader, explaining how the strike had been called off without the miners having been consulted said, 'those of us who saw the shattering effect it had on British capitalism a and the stride forward in solidarity made by our own people realise that the General Strike did not fail!

EDMOND and RUTH FROW

The trade unions on Merseyside were ready for a General Strike in 1926, should one be forced upon them, and Liverpool was one of the few regions in the country where preparations had been made in advance for such an eventuality. In July 1925, the Liverpool Trades Council, anticipating a prolonged struggle in the mining industry, set up a Provisional Council of Action to act in accordance with instructions received directly from the T.U.C. Thus, in Liverpool machinery for the co-ordination of the various unions functioned from the first day of the General Strike , whereas elsewhere in the country it frequently had to be improvised. This Council was constituted on 2nd May 1926 as the Merseyside Council of Action for an area comprising Liverpool, Bootle Birkenhead and Wallasey. It was a federal organisation including representatives of all the major trade unions and each local (sub) council of action together with the secretaries of the trades councils and Merseyside's three Labour M.P.s The Council was in continuous session from the begining of the strike until its termination, printing bulletins, issuing permits and calling meetings. During the strike half a million bulletins were issued, seventy two meetings were held and in many cases huge overflows had to be held in open spaces. Grouped around the Council of Action were the respective strike sub-committees for the transport, building and distributive, trades which maintained contact with the council through liaison officers. Later there was some criticism of the T.U.C.'s failure to grant full responsibility for the conduct of the strike to local councils. The Merseyside Council's report to the T.U.C. after the strike had ended stressed that the main weakness of the Council was the channel of communication with the T.U.C. in that directives cam via the strike committees of the individual unions and not directly from the T.U.C. to the Council and then to the Committees. There was 'a lack of definate instructions and contact with the T.U.C. General Council. Any instructions received were indirect'.

Continued........

The response of the Merseyside trade unions to the strike call was described as 'magnificent' by the secretary of the Trades Council, and with nearly one-third of the employed population out, was undoubtedly well above average. Postgate has classified those centres for which he had detailed reports according to their solidarity and staying power. He placed Liverpool and Birkenhead in Class I, that is where the response was 'unexpectedly and amazingly fine' (90-100%) and Bootle in Class II, where the strike was 'Wholly effective'. But it was not just the 'expected' unions that showed solid support, The railway clerks for instance, although they later wavered, had the highest response for this group in the country (95%) and the distributive workers showed an 'unprecedented response. The Teacher's Labour League provided financial support for the strike as well as speakers. On the tramways, however, although Birkenhead and Wallasey trams stopped completely, only a momentary and partial stoppage of trams was achieved in Liverpool. Similarly the workers at Lister Drive power station - the main electricity supply - were all back at work by 6th May.

Although most transport services ceased and the rail stopage in the area was almost total some services were treated by the Council of Action as utilities and permitted to continue to operate. The Mersey ferries for instance were held to be 'essential to the movement of food.'

Other essential services continued and were regulated by means of union (transport) permits until the system was abandoned largely because of its abuse through mislabelling as 'food', metal, machinery, or even blacklegs. The Seamans Union was not directed by its executive to come out but a successful local attempt was made to bring out the Liverpool branch

Continued..............

McVey, the Liverpool secretary, was suspended by the Union and later eighteen Liverpool officials were dismissed for their 'unconstitutional action'. The chemical and metal-refining industries of Widnes and Runcorn continued to operate as did the giant Lever plant at Port Sunlight.

The inescapable conclusion is that even on Merseyside with its peculiar labour situation and its history of disputes, the strike was by no means 'General'. Furthermore, there are some indications that from the unions' point of view the difficulties of maintaining the strike increased. Those Liverpool tramwaymen, for instance, who had little sympathy with the T.U.C.'s position were soon back at work. In the case of the general workers, the District Secretary of the N.U.G.M.W. had apparently not anticipated a rail stoppage but promised, if necessary to use his influence with the railway unions to transfer coal stocks needed for Pilkingtons Glass Works at St. Helens. When the strike was declared he criticised the town's Trades Council leaders for encouraging it. There is also some limited evidence that those men who wanted or needed more money than strike pay provided or who disagreed with the local policy of their union enrolled as volunteers in their own industry, or occasionally in another. A number of Liverpool dockers were said to have enrolled at the Town Hall and some T.G.W.U. members took the jobs of tugboatmen on strike. Sometimes entire union branches wavered: for example the railway clerks initially so enthusiastic, had a meeting arranged in order to 'buck them up'. These doubts and defections, however, did not constitute a drift back to work that would threaten to break the strike. For Merseyside, at any rate, it is difficult to accept the view of the T.U.C. General Council that the movement back to work 'was sufficient to create serious perturbation by the time the strike was called off.

Continued...........

It was the superior organisation of the authorities rather then the drift back to work which was themajor factor.

The response to the call for volunteers was considerable with 20,000 offering their services in Liverpool alone. It seems difficult to believe, however, that the majority of these were white-collar workers already in employment, students or strikers willing to work away from their own firms. The only concentration of white-collar workers for which evidence can be found was in the Liverpool docks, where half of the 3,500 volunteers said to be working ther on 11th May were shipping clerks. It would therefore appear probable that the majority of 'official' volunteers were previously unemployed. This assertion is supported by the numbers of unemployed who were found jobs after the strike because they had acted as volunteers. A bureau to assist those seeking work (ranging from ships' captains and skilled engineers to dock labourers) had found jobs for 5,650 of them by the end of June, but even this number was said to be a 'small fraction' of all the unemployed who had volunteerd. Furthermore, had not so many of the volunteers been previously unemployed fewer difficulties of reinstatement of strikers would have arisen - which, couples with the vindictiveness of local employers - became a severe problem on Merseyside.

At the start of the strike some local labour leaders had come to see the dispute in a wider context than the immediate situation in the mining industry. It was said

> 'The day has come when the working
> classes of the country have thrown
> down the gauntlet to capitalism,
> the haves and the have nots are
> arrayed against each other.'

and, 'in the name of international socialism say now that you are going to destroy the system of capitalism'. Defeat was therefore difficult to accept and it was not conceded without reluctance.

Continued......

On Merseyside feeling was intense and railway workers, ship-repairers, dustmen, tramwayment, dockers (in Garston), slaughterhouse and milling employees prolonged the strike after its official termination because they themselves, or some group with whome they were in sympathy, refused to accept the terms offered.

To summarise: the response to the strike call and the degree of solidarity both during the strike and itself and in the difficult reinstatement troubles were very strong. However, the problem of reinstatement was severe because the bulk of the volunteers had previously been unemployed. For the majority of the non-striking public the day-to-day inconvenience caused by the strike was not very great. The unions were unable to achieve a total traffic standstill as they had one in the 1911 strike.

This failure to shut down much local transport, particularly the ferries and the Liverpool trams, not only had an obvious practical effect but also meant that the city did not look as though it might be undergoing a civil war. Strikers at one point were urged to refrain from using the trams in view of their 'demoralising effect'. Ther is evidence that a major local consequence of the failure of the strike, followed by the introduction of anti-union legislation the following year, was a move away from pressure on the industrial front towards pressure on the political. In the forthcoming local elections of November 1926 on Merseyside Labour was to make substantial headway on Merseyside, as elsewhere in the country.

RON BEAN

THE DECLINE OF CHARTISM IN SOUTH-EAST LANCASHIRE AND NORTH-EAST CHESHIRE 1850-1870

R. Harrison has characterised the aims of the national labour movement in the 1860's as: 'Diminished interest in the overthrow or radical reconstruction of existing society, together within an increasing steadiness and inflexibility of resolve to be more fully incorporated within that society'.

Harrison's viewpoint holds true for south-east Lancashire and north-east Cheshire, where the changes in the labour movement were essentially twofold. First, in the Chartist years working people had felt a profound enstrangement from, and developed an impressive critique of, laissez-faire capitalism. Richard Pilling's defence at Lancaster in 1843 epitomised working class anger and outrage: 'I have seen so much of this system; I have seen so much of the brutality of the purse-proud liberal masters, so much of the sufferings of their slaves, both old and young, that I would cheerfully venture my life to-morrow to put an end to the damnable system, a system which if not stopped will snap every tie by which society should be bound.' By the 1860's class conflict and working class criticisms of the social system were more muted. Although trade unionists and co-operators could still denounce the 'tyranny of capital,' a widespread belief had arisen that working class emancipation would be achieved within the existing social framework, with a minimum of class conflict, and less by a direct assault upon the social system than from cultivation of habits of industry, sobriety and thrift. In short, emancipation would issue more from personal reform than from broad structural changes in society. Working class leaders such as Ernest Jones were careful to play down the language of class conflict and social levelling. Workers wished in their own word's 'to rise in society', 'to march in the van of progress', rather than overturn society. Second, this narrowing of focus facilitated the convergence of working class and left-wing Liberal politics.
The aims of this paper are: a) To outline possible areas of research, which can deepen our understanding of the transition; b) To look in more detail at one crucial theme in the process of social change 1850-1870, namely the culture and social attitudes of the 'respectable' stratum within the working class.

Continued......

In relation to the first consideration, three areas must be explored more fully than has hitherto been the case. First, did increased political and social moderation issue from the knowledge that financial gains from mid-Victorian economic expansion had filtered down to the working class, or at least to the upper sections of the working class? The vast weight of historical opinion has answered this question in the affirmative. However, the researches of the Manchester Education Aid Society in the 1860's and the recent researches of G. Barnsby and J. Foster should act as a warning of premature assumptions of increased prosperity. The incidence of poverty among working people in Oldham probably fell little from the 1840's to the 1860's. From 1850-1870, real wages in the Black Country did not rise above the 1850 level, except among building workers. Furthermore, we need to know a lot more about the complex interactions between economic, cultural and social behaviour. While not wishing to devalue the crucial importance of economic forces in moulding consciousness, a one-dimensional approach to the problem obscures the complexity of behaviour, and leads to crass economic reductionism. To see Chartism simply as a response to 'distress', and its demise as the 'natural' outcome of economic growth is to undervalue the impressive intellectual critique of capitalist society which working men had developed, and which economic growth in itself could not totally erase.

Second, was moderation the result of improved relations between workers and employers? My research would suggest that while tensions were never far below the surface, and while the period witnessed some bitter industrial struggles, (notably the weavers strikes of 1853 and 1861) tensions were eased. Trade unions increasingly adopted a more conciliatory stance towards employers in terms of language and trade union practice. The development of 'good industrial relations' became the aim of the cotton unions as much as the skilled unions. Strikes were undertaken as a last resort, and support for arbitration was widespread. Employer responses to trade union peace offerings varied. Some remained resolutely anti-union: some reluctantly recognised unions after years of bitter struggle, However, a considerable number of large employers played down orthodox political economy in favour of stability; Unions were recognised, and Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration set up. Welfare capitalism was also practised by some employers. Seaside trips for workers were financed from employers pockets, dinners and tea parties held, and reading rooms and libraries built.

Continued....

During the Cotton Famine some employers ran their mills at a loss; donated generously to the local relief funds; and provided their workers with free food and clothing. Employee appreciation was demonstrated by the growing number of occasions on which workers made presentations to their employers, and paid glowing tributes to the new-found employer spirit.

Third, divisions within the working class became more marked than feelings of class solidarity. We will examine one aspect of this central proposition when we look at the position of the 'respectable' working man. However, a significant and much neglected dimension of internal working class fragmentation, was conflict between English and Roman Catholic Irish Workers. Relations between English and Irish workers had rarely been easy during the Chartist period. In the twenty years between 1850 and 1870 they assumed crisis proportions. Cultural, economic, and religious tensions were exacerbated by massive Irish immigration into northern mill towns after the Famine; by the Pope's attempt to set up a Catholic hierarchy in England, and by the feverish and highly effective propoganda of Protestant street preachers. The upshot was endemic conflict,which reached its ugly zenith in the Murphy riots of 1868. Such fending had a debilitating effect upon class unity, and prepared a popular base for Toryism and the resurgent Orange movement.

The other aspect of working class fragmentation was the growing divide between the 'respectable'stratum and the rest of the working class.
Historians have generally explained the narrowing of focus in the mid-Victorian years in terms of the substantial gains by the upper sections of the working class. Constant exercise in the habits of industry thrift, and sobriety had as its reward improved economic and cultural standing. 'Respectable' working men had acquired a stake in society. They became more interested in rising in society and cultivating the trappings of 'respectability', than in either radically transforming society or in allying themselves with their less fortunate proletarians. The 'respectable' workers became entrapped in a value system largely defined on middle class terms. Did the Lancashire and Cheshire experience conform to this pattern?
The culture of respectability in Lancashire and Cheshire had a long occupational tail, While few unskilled workers were found in cultural and educational institutions, and while the skilled and craft groups attended in large numbers, semi skilled cotton operatives were present in some force.

continued.....

Commitments to education, independence, personal decency, mutuality, industry thrift and good homelife were the distinguishing features of the culture.

Indiscriminate labelling of this culture as being either 'bourgeois' or 'Petit bourgeois' is misleading and simplistic. Industry and thrift, for example, rather than being the springboard for 'sucess' often constituted practical day to day safeguards against downward mobility. One slip and the world of 'respectability' could become the world of the gutter and the gin-palace. Similarly, the thirst for education could be geared as much to the quest for working class emancipation and independence as to a desire for upward social mobility. The ability of working men to think for themselves was seen as the best form of defence against the forces of paternalism and deference.

Conceptualisation can only be undertaken with a reasonable amount of certainty when given an historical dimension. In the Chartist years the working class culture of self-help and 'respectability' was couched within an egalitarian. anti-laissez-faire social perspective. 'Respectability', at least in South East Lancashire, did not forge the link for an alliance between workers and bourgeois radicals. The sense of class was too strong to allow this. The thrifty, industrious worker was more sympathetic to the Chartist demands for radical social reconstruction than to the pious self-help pleadings of Bright and Cobden. Education, which lay at the heart of Chartism, was one tool to be used in the struggle for emancipation. Similarly, the sober worker was more likely than the non sober to have his wits about him, to be less likely to be duped by ruling class propaganda. In the eyes of 'respectable Chartists, a social and cultural vision which had as its cornerstone the fulfillment of human needs, stood little hope of realisation in a society whose god was the market place. From this source stemmed much of the revolutionary potential of Chartism.

In the post Chartist period we are treading more slippery ground. We should pay particular attention to twofactors. First, working class demands took on much narrower meanings. The demand for working class emancipation, so often voiced by co-operators and trade unionists, did not signify any fundamental challenge to the social system. Rather, working class institutions were more intent on coming to terms with society, and sharing in its benefits.

Continued ....

Second, while the culture of self-help was characterised by ambivalence, it became increasingly allied to a philosophy of success. The insistence on independence, on self-respect, on opposition to paternalism, and on collective improvement through self-help was still in evidence, but was overshadowed by the beliefs that industry and thrift were the keys to improvement, and that poverty was caused less by the unfairness of the social system than by personal failings. Anti-capitalism was submerged in the euphoria of 'sucess by personal privation'. The 'respectable' workers were visibly embarraseed by, and divorced themselves from the non-respectable.

The path or an alliance between the 'respectable' workers and the bourgeois radicals was clear.

One factor in particular was responsible for the transition; self-help had worked. It had enabled workers to build up prosperous co-operative societies, to live in good homes, and to partake of some of the benefits of a civilised existence. The cultural vision of the 'respectable' worker was at hand. In the eyes of working class leaders, a society once dominated by capital had been forced to accept the presence of labour. England, even in the eyes of Ernest Jones, was well on the way to becoming a democratic, pluralistic society. The 'Co-operator' summed up this new-found contentment: 'Englishmen have much to be thankful for, in as much as there is probably no country on the face of the globe where sober, industrious young men can do soon raise themselves to ease, comparative independence and comfort as in England.'

NEVILLE KIRK

Chartism is a growth subject in the historical world, and there are clear tendencies in recent Chartist historiography, like emphasis on connexions with other movements and on local variations, the relation to a strong radical tradition, and a more sympathetic interpretation of the contribution of O'Connor (in building up and maintaining a national movement, and seeing the possibilities of alliance with the Irish and the t rades). Another problem that should concern us, though it is often difficult to resolve, is the social composition of the movement.

Based in Lancashire, it is natural to attribute Chartism, a movement unique in early nineteenth-century Europe, to the 'Industrial Revolution'. But if by this we mean the growth of factory industry, we must remember how small a proportion of the working population worked in factories, and adult men were a minority of these. The number of artisans, moreover, was increasing in in proportion to overall population growth until the middle of the century. Nor can we assume that factory workers took a leading part in working in working-class movements; the pattern on the continent was the reverse. The importance of artisans in radical movements is, however, clear. Even in the Plug Riots in 1842 artisan trades in Manchester were prominent in the attempt to give the strikes a Chartist objective.

But the artisans were not a monolithic group. Some benefitted from the economic expansion, such as those in printing and publishing, and we do not find them prominent in radical movements. Others like shoemakers, tailors, cabinet-makers and building workers suffered from changes consequent on greatly increased demand. Others, like handloom-weavers and framework-knitters, were totally degraded. It is these last two catergories that supported Chartism. They suffered from the growth of capitalism, with associated cutting of labour costs, breakdown of controls and apprenticeship, erosion of skills and competition for work from the less skilled men.

Continued............

Competition between masters meamt wage reductions, between men acceptance of these reductions. To meet the evils of capitalism and competition they resorted to trade union action, co-operative production, efforts to limit hours (and so share out work and cut competition) and secure official wage scales, and land schemes to remove the labour surplus. A certain independence, lack of deference, wider horizons due to mobility and level of education enabled them to take part in politics, but they were also pushed by their failure to maintain their position by industrial action alone. Just as they were in opposition to the way society and the economy were going, and in this sense were 'revolutionary'. they had a rather negative view of the state, which they saw as parasitic and aggressive. They wished to reduce its scope and be left alone. Political reform was essentially the sweeeping away of corrupt institutions, after which everything would be better. Politics was therefore to be a spasmodic activity, and as the number of political oppressors was insignificant it would be a quick matter to sweep them aside, once the people realised the true situation and were united.

In this traditional radicalism and resistence to economic change, continuity with the past is most evident, though growing pressures gave an urgency to the 1830's and 1840's and led them to consider new remedies.

But despite the importance of artisans in Chartism, it seems clear that factory-workers also took part. Chartist strength in such places as Ashton, Hyde or Dukinfield was due to the adherence of cotton-spinners and power-loom weavers. Mule-spinners were certainly active in trade unionism and radicalism but with these people, continuity with the future is obvious, and when they came to lead the labour movement it was to be not in opposition to the economic system but in search of a better position for themselves in it. They would not be revolutionary, in economics or politics.

Continued.......

Even at this time mule-spinners were above the level, not only of most factory-workers, but also of many artisans. But at this time also, despite their impressive trade unions, their position was often insecure. Industrial disputes were often bitter and long, and employers combined to break trade unionism. They were not so skilled that they could not be replaced, and there was often a supply of labour in excess of demand. The self-acting mule threatened their employment. These problems could lead into Chartism, while union weakness led to industrial violence. This violence was often of political importance when the forces of authority were weak.

For a time, then, artisans and factory-workers were contained in the same movement that was Chartism. Moreover they had common ground in their concern over labour surplus, desire for limitation of hours (to share out work) and fixed wage scales (to check competitive wage-cutting), and opposition to concentration on the foreign instead of the home market (as this entailed cutting labour costs.)

In the 1840's Chartism seemed to shed its simpler views on the relationships between state and society, and to show more awareness of social and economic complexities. It also had a more positive view of the state as a source of relief. And it showed some signs of regarding politics as a more permanent process. The National Charter Association was in some ways a party, participating in the political system. O'Connor strongly believed in political participation, but it is tempting to see these developments as reflecting the influence of newer industrial workers as against the traditional attiudes of artisans, of adaptation to the new industrial society. But they could also be a reaction to the failures of 1838-1840

Dr. I. Prothero