BOLSHEVIK BRITAIN: AN EXAMINATION OF BRITISH LABOR UNREST IN THE WAKE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, 1919

THESIS

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The conclusion of the First World War brought the resumption of a struggle of a different sort: a battle between government and labor. Throughout 1919, government and labor squared off in a struggle over hours, wages, and nationalization. The Russian Revolution introduced the danger of the bolshevik contagion into the struggle. The first to enter into this conflict with the government were the shop stewards of Belfast and Glasgow. The struggle continued with the continued threats of the Triple Alliance and the police to destroy the power of the government through industrial action. This thesis examines the British labor movement during this revolutionary year in Europe, as well as the government's response to this new danger.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 did much more than liberate the proletariat from the yoke of bourgeois oppression in Russia. It also sent shock waves throughout industrialized society and created an international panic based on fear of red revolution. The workers seemed to be mesmerized by the writings of Karl Marx, the founder of the modern communist movement, and were swept up in this tidal wave of revolutionary tumult which seized continental Europe. Yet Great Britain, the most industrialized of European nations, and the nation Marx had studied in developing his theories of industrialization and class warfare, appeared to have avoided the entire conflict. Throughout the first year following the First World War, while the rest of Europe struggled with its communist agitators, Great Britain seems to have remained aloof, her workers apparently unaffected by the shockwaves coursing through continental Europe.

The truth is otherwise. Throughout 1919 in Great Britain, government and labor squared off in an bitter debate over reform and revolution. Each labor demonstration against the established order was seen as the possible beginning of a Bolshevik revolution, and the cabinet was expected to contain it and end it as quickly as possible.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the British labor movement during 1919, the first full year following the Great War, and to examine briefly the revolutionary factions within it. The activities of the Triple Alliance, consisting of the National Union of Railwaymen, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and the National Federation of Transport Workers, whose power seemed invincible, will especially be targeted. This thesis will also probe the reaction of the British Government, most visibly seen through the cabinet, to the labor movement and explore the members' feelings as to the likelihood of a revolution taking place.

The primary source of greatest value for this topic is the British Cabinet Records. CAB 23 has proven extremely useful. It contains the cabinet minutes, which give a great deal of insight into the fears, hopes, and prejudices of the various cabinet ministers. CAB 24 contains the various government reports issued during 1919. The most useful reports for this study have been the biweekly report the Minister of Labour, Sir Robert Horne, prepared, "The Labour Situation" and the biweekly "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom" compiled by the Home Secretary, E.S. Shortt. These reports describe the events which occurred in Great Britain on a continuing basis. "The Labour Situation" tends to be straightforward, whereas the Home Secretary's report is somewhat reactionary. Occasionally, the reader becomes convinced the Home Secretary believed every worker in Great Britain who voiced a complaint

must be in league with Lenin to overthrow Parliament. Also of use were the Parliamentary Debates (Commons) covering this period. This record shows the government's public facade as opposed to their private opinions expressed in the cabinet records.

Other sources of value were the newspapers, especially The Times(London), The Labour Leader, and the Manchester Guardian. These papers offer a different perspective on the various situations during the year 1919. The Times(London) offers a conservative perspective on a daily basis and The Labour Leader presents a weekly examination of events with a liberal bias. The Manchester Guardian, while being liberal, offers a perspective of events away from the capital. The number of available autobiographies of labor leaders of this period is woefully lacking, although William Gallacher's Revolt on the Clyde offers some interesting points from the view of a labor activist and The Diary of Beatrice Webb presents the situation from a labor politician's viewpoint.

The most useful secondary materials for this project came from the Economic and Social History of the Great War, British Series. The many volumes of this series provide a great wealth of information on labor, but sadly for this project, many stop in 1918. The work of greatest value from this series is G.D.H. Cole's Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry (1914-1921). Also of use from this series is Sir R.A.S. Redmayne's The British Coal-Mining Industry During the War and Cole's Workshop Organizations. Another work for

anyone interested in British labor during this period is The Post-War History of the British Working Class by Allen Hutt.

The second chapter of this thesis, "The British Soviet", examines the shop stewards movement in the early months of 1919. In Belfast and Glasgow, the shop stewards organized large general strikes in an effort to achieve a reduced working week, which they argued would aid in the reabsorption of the ex-servicemen into the work force.

In Belfast, the drive for a 44-hour week was organized by the shipyard workers, who were joined in their drive by the city's electrical and gas workers. The combination of these parties gave the strikers considerable control. The shipyard workers represented a large section of the city's work force and the inclusion of the gas and electrical workers gave the strikers control over the city's transportation, heating, and lighting. The workers set up a soviet to control the many new functions of government they had inherited and to negotiate their demands.

The Glasgow movement was begun by the shop stewards in the shipping industry and despite a poor initial response, quickly grew to over 100,000 strikers. The Glasgow strike attracted the more radical leaders, such as David Kirkwood and William Gallacher, for it had long been known for its revolutionary population. The Clyde workers, as the Glasgow workers were known, quickly set up a workers' soviet and began to negotiate with the British Government.

The cabinet remained calm during the strikes, refusing

to deal with any but the men's duly elected trade union representatives, who had already expressed their disapproval for the strikes. However, when news reached the cabinet of a riot having broken out in Glasgow between workers and police, the government quickly responded with the occupation of the town by soldiers of the realm.

With the military watching the city, the strike on the Clyde quickly dispersed. The Belfast strike continued a few more days before a similar solution was performed there too. This period represented the best chance of the workers to stage a revolt against the government, and that it did not occur is a statement to the skillful manipulation of the events by the British Cabinet.

The third chapter, "The Government Gamble", examines the threatened strike by the Triple Alliance and the cabinet's response. During the war, the member unions of the Triple Alliance had come under state control. Following the conflict, these unions urged the government to retain this control and nationalize their industries. The cabinet opposed such action, but was in no position to deal with a strike of such magnitude. The nation's coal stocks were low, and the industrial rebirth could ill afford the effects of a halt in transportation and railway networks.

In an effort to delay the threatened strike, until government was in a better position to deal with such a threat, the cabinet proposed a Coal Commission to examine the miners' claims. The cabinet also proposed promising

negotiations with the railwaymen and transport workers in an effort to alleviate tensions. Moreover, the cabinet attempted to assist the economic recovery through the National Industrial Council composed representatives of trade unions and employers. The goal of this body was to bring these parties together to propose desirable labor legislation through means other than a strike.

The result of this action succeeded in delaying the Triple Alliance, and many other unions, from proceeding with a strike which would have crippled the government. As the government position grew stronger, workers became aware there was little chance the government would pass the commissions recommendations into law.

"The Labor Offensive", the fourth chapter of this thesis, is an examination of the situation facing the cabinet in July 1919 as a result of their delaying tactics. Relations with the Triple Alliance became strained as the unions accused the government of having reneged on their pledge. The Yorkshire miners went out on strike against a proposed cut in the piece rate wages. London Bakers walked out in opposition to the owners' position on night baking. Even more alarming was the proposed strike by the National Union of Police and Prison Officials over the union's recognition of the right to strike. The cabinet responded by invoking the Defense of the Realm Act, threatening to dismiss any member of the police force who went out on strike against the nation.

The cabinet was also threatened by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain's continued clamoring for government recognition of its pledge to uphold the findings of the Coal Commission. The miners argued the cabinet was bound to honor the findings of the commission, which they declared supported nationalization. The government responded that no clear case had been made for nationalization and proposed and scheme of amalgamation, which would grant some control to the miners.

Yet before the miners could consult with the Triple Alliance, the National Union of Railwaymen went out on strike in response to their perception of government's failure to seriously negotiate the problem of wages in the railway industry. The cabinet responded quickly, having been in position to take on one of the nations larger industrial unions and defeat it as an example to all unions. Without adequate warning, the transport workers and miners could not immediately go out on strike in support of the railwaymen. The resulting stand off lasted nine days, but in the end the railwaymen were forced to return to negotiations and the cabinet had the victory they so dearly wanted.

The final chapter, "The New Attitude in Labor", covers the last three months of 1919. The cabinet's success in dealing with the railway strike forced many labor leaders to evaluate the strike's failures and to propose new solutions to the apparent weakness of trade unions in combating the government. The trade unions themselves chose to continue

negotiations with the government rather than risk a strike against such odds. The cabinet remained vigilant against possible lightning strikes and evaluated what duties it should perform during the next major strike.

As for the Triple Alliance, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain opened a national propaganda campaign to convince to general public of the benefits of nationalization of the mines, and force the cabinet to acquiesce to their demands. The National Union of Railwaymen began to make progress in their discussions with the government, eventually accepting a scheme of amalgamation of the railways. The National Federation of Transport Workers considered the option of striking during this last quarter, but eventually decided to send their proposals to the Court of Inquiry.

CHAPTER II

THE BRITISH SOVIET

At the conclusion of the First World War Europe attempted to recuperate from the upheaval caused by five years of bloodshed. Yet the cessation of military hostilities did not bring peace. Rather, the Russian Revolution and the reaction to it created a fear of a class war. While European society attempted to return to normality, the masses learned of the workers' revolution and the glorious future to be attained once the workers seized the means of production. Throughout Europe the badge of honor for a labor activist in some circles was to be called a Bolshevik. In almost every factory in Europe, the successes of the Revolution were spoken of. The leaders of Western Europe watched in horror as the Red Army in Russia defeated the counter-revolutionary Whites. The Spartacists in Germany, beginning in December 1918, attempted to liberate the workers and forced a civil war in the streets of Berlin. In March 1919, communists under Bela Kun captured control of Hungary nation. Even the United Kingdom, separated from the continent by the Channel, began to see the effects of the revolutionary mindset in its workers.

Of the European nations involved in the Great War, Great Britain emerged the least scathed from the fighting. No

battles had been fought on the home islands and therefore, there was little physical damage to agriculture or industry. Unlike the French, Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and Russians, troops of the British Empire never revolted on a large scale against the authority of their commanders. Trades unions and capitalists managed to work together during the conflict with only a few major disagreements flaring up between them. In addition, the war brought about a truce between the various political parties who came together to support the war effort.

Yet the announcement of the armistice with Germany on 11 November 1918, shattered this cooperation. The Labour Party, feeling themselves stifled within the coalition government, voted on 14 November 1918 to withdraw from the coalition and take its position in the opposition.[1] Moreover, the prime minister's own party, the Liberal Party, had split over the decision to remain within the coalition and several members had walked out on the government. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, announced elections to be held on 14 December 1918. The coalition leaders sought to secure the election of those who had remained loyal through the issuance of coupons, as had been done following the Boer War. These coupons served as a mark of approval from the government, and voters were encouraged to vote for only these candidates. But many members of Parliament opposed such election engineering. They feared that should the government

[1] Alan Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin (London: Heinemann, 1960), 89

deprive Labour of its just percentage of seats through a khaki election, resentment might be fostered within the labor unions by individuals "disposed to adopt revolutionary tactics".[2] But despite such ominous forewarnings, Lloyd George and the coalition proceeded with the election, gaining a sweeping victory in the membership of the new Parliament. The Sinn Fein of Ireland were the next closest party followed by the Labour Party and then the non-coalition Liberals.[3]

The results of the rushed Khaki Election did little to boost organized labor's morale. As if in answer to those who spoke against such electioneering, the shop stewards began to mobilize their forces for a bitter struggle with the government. Because their elected union leaders had failed to bring about reform during the war, large numbers of laborers turned away from the trade unionists to the shop stewards who spoke of the glories of the coming proletarian revolution and who promised immediate and needed reforms.

The establishment uneasily watched the rise in labor unrest and worried that their own nation might sink into the mires of a Bolshevik civil war. The employers began to fear their employees planned for them a fate similar to their colleagues in Russia. The result was a straining of relations between capitalists and labor as the workers sought to return to the prewar weapon of the trade union, the strike, in an effort to achieve their goals.

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[2] Henderson, 7 November 1918, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 110, col. 2440-41

[3] The Sinn Fein boycotted all Parliamentary proceedings in protest to British rule in Ireland.

January 1919 saw the dawn of a new age in labor activities in the United Kingdom. The nation was dazed as workers from various unions in Belfast and Glasgow, perceiving little chance of labor reforms passing through the khaki parliament, took matters into their own hands and struck for a reduced working week with no restrictions on wages. The strikes quickly assumed the characteristics of a general strike as unions with no ties to each other began to join the strikers in their crusade against continued conservative labor legislation.

The strikes began on 26 January 1919 in Belfast when shipyard workers informed employers that work would cease if the demand for a 44-hour work week was not granted. The subsequent denial of this demand pushed some 40,000 shipyard workers into the streets and began a two-month long struggle for control of the city. Joining the shipyard workers in their struggle were Belfast's electrical and gas workers.[4] With the inclusion of the latter group, industry and public transport were halted and the city plunged into darkness when the remaining generators were diverted to providing power to hospitals and other essential services.

Even more threatening to the cause of industrial peace was the rebirth of the Clyde Workers' Committee. Glasgow had become the Petrograd of the British labor movement and as such was well known for its "revolutionary ebullations" and its "outburst[s] of 'Red Flag' agitation".[5] It, therefore,

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[4] "Belfast Strike" The Times, 27 Jan. 1919.

[5] "Glasgow Awaking" Manchester Guardian, 31 Jan. 1919.

produced little surprise when the Clyde workers joined with Belfast in demanding a shorter working week through the issuance of a "Call to Arms". This document, based on the reports of the shop stewards in various industries, called for a maximum 40-hour work week to alleviate the unemployment situation. They argued that by reducing the number of hours a single worker could work, the number of employees needed to perform that job would increase. To achieve their demand, the Clyde Workers' Committee called for a general strike to commence on Monday, 27 January 1919.[6]

The great strike on the Clyde began its first day less auspiciously than its promoters had hoped. The movement failed to attract either utility or tramway workers. City services remained uninterrupted. Despite drawing out some 50,000 shipyard and associated workers, plus another 6,000 workers in Leith and Edinburgh, the strike forced no yard to stop production during the strike's first day.[7]

On the second day of the strike in Glasgow, Britain was rocked by the news that the Belfast Strike Committee had seized real control of that city and was ruling as a soviet over the local officials. The strike committee received petitions for use of electrical power and worked with police to maintain law and order in the streets. Meanwhile, the Clyde strike continued to grow and began to threaten continued production in the shipyards and engineering works.[8]

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[6] "Unofficial Strikes" The Times, 28 Jan. 1919.

[7] "The 40-Hour Strike on the Clyde" The Manchester Guardian, 28 Jan. 1919 and "Partial Strike on the Clyde" The Times, 28 Jan. 1919.

[8] "A Strikers 'Soviet' in Belfast" Manchester Guardian, 29 Jan. 1919.

Seven hundred delegates representing workers from Scotland and London attended a conference and threatened the nation with a unified strike. The conference unanimously accepted a resolution that:

> This conference pledges its support of the Joint Committee and urges it to prosecute the strike with the utmost vigor until the Government is forced to open negotiations with the Committee. When this is done the Committee should submit the Governments' proposal to the rank and file with a view to a satisfactory settlement being arranged on the basis of the 40-hour week for all time, piece, and lieu workers without any reduction in wages.[9]

The British Government was firmly convinced it must not play into the hands of the strikers. They believed all efforts should be made to calm public fears lest the belief "that universal unrest and discontent exist(s)" spread though the populace and encourage the strike leaders to attempt bolder and more widespread activities.[10] Furthermore, it was decided the cabinet must lead this campaign of defiance against the strikers. They acknowledged they must remain aloof from the strikers' demand to negotiate a settlement. Sir Robert Horne, Minister of Labour, noted the government was legally bound not to "actively interfere in the settlement of these strikes over the heads of the Union executives".[11] Yet this made a settlement all but impossible because in going out on strike, the workers had rejected the traditional union leadership for that of the shop stewards.

Despite its bold exterior, the British Government had

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[9] "No Signs of Peace" Manchester Guardian, 29 Jan. 1919.

[10] "A Revolutionary Section" Manchester Guardian, 29 Jan. 1919

[11] War Cabinet 522, 30 January 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO.

cause for alarm. Reports came in almost daily telling of new Bolshevik plots to seize Great Britain and create a workers' state. Cabinet members regularly heard of radicals like John McLean, a Scottish nationalist, who believed the proletarian revolution would begin with a general strike within the year and as workers went into the streets they would then seize the reigns of government, either peaceably or forcibly. There were also reports about the Industrial Workers of the World, whose members were seemingly responsible for the spread of anarchism.[12] News of shop steward David Ramsey who spoke of "spreading the principles of Bolshevism and emulating the example of our Russian and German comrades and bringing about a revolution in this country" created a certain degree of uneasiness in government circles as well.[13]

In Belfast the situation remained unchanged as the workers' soviet continued to control all real power while city officials stood helplessly by. The Clyde strikers, who had grown to a force of over 100,000 by 29 January, decided to attempt to start negotiating with the British Government. On Wednesday, 30 January, a large section of the strikers marched into Glasgow's George's Square, which contained the municipal offices, and some eleven strike leaders met with the Lord Provost. The strike leaders informed the Lord Provost of their desire to meet with representatives from the

[12] "The Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom and Abroad", G.T. 6713, 28 January 1919, CAB 24/74, PRO.

[13] "Persecution of Seditious Speakers",G.T. 6755, 5 February 1919, CAB 24/74, PRO.

cabinet with the goal of achieving a 40-hour work week with no reduction in wages. The strike leaders, including Messrs. Shinwell, Kirkwood, and Maclean, M.P. for Govan, informed the Lord Provost they wished him to convey their desires to the cabinet. It was agreed the strike committee would give the Lord Provost until Friday, 31 January, to get a response. The strike leaders promised there would be serious repercussions if they did not receive a response by then.[14] Meanwhile, during the rally outside the municipal offices, several strikers attempted to hoist a red flag in the square, but police, who had moved in front of the crowd to protect the City Chambers, prevented their doing so, and shortly thereafter the crowd began to disperse.[15]

The following day Andrew Bonar Law, the Privy Seal, read the Lord Provost's telegram to the cabinet. Bonar Law announced that after careful consultation with Sir Robert Horne it had been decided to send a reply clearly stating the government's position against interference in this matter. The cabinet faced a crisis situation. They could not grant the strikers' demands, but the continued growth of the strike threatened to spread across the nation. The government had to act. Discussion in the cabinet quickly turned to the best means to secure control of Glasgow so they would not be faced with another Belfast. Robert Munro, the Secretary for Scotland, proposed the use of special constables who could continue city services if the utility workers joined the

[14] War Cabinet 522, 30 January 1919,CAB 23/9, PRO.

[15] "100,000 Workers Idle on the Clyde" The Times, 30 Jan. 1919.

strike. General William Robertson noted their were nineteen infantry battalions stationed in Scotland, which could be made available if the situation warranted their use, either through the declaration of martial law or in accordance with the King's Regulations. At the mention of the use of troops, Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, argued care should be taken in deciding when to use troops. Churchill elaborated, "By going quietly at first we should get the support we wanted from the nation, and then troops could be used more effectively". But, he added, "The moment for their use has not yet arrived."[16]

There was agreement with Churchill's statement. Bonar Law confessed his desire to have a representative of the cabinet in Glasgow to assess the situation. That person would be able to request a military presence when necessary. Austen Chamberlain, convinced that a minority of the strikers were holding the majority hostage, pointed out the "duration of the strike depended largely on the amount of effective protection which could be given to those who were unwilling participants, and to the Government's success in counteracting the terrorism of the minority".[17] The general feeling therefore was that action was necessary, but they must assume a wait and see attitude.

As for provocation, the government did not have to wait long. On Friday, 31 January, a large crowd formed in George's Square to await the government's reply to the strikers'

[16] War Cabinet 522, 30 January 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO.

[17] Ibid.

demands. The square was quickly filled and strikers began to fill the surrounding streets. The strikers' deputation entered the Glasgow City Chambers to meet with the Lord Provost and to receive the government's answer. While Willie Gallacher, a strike leader, addressed the crowd, the police moved in and drew their batons. The police, in response to threats by the strike leaders to disrupt tramway services, had been ordered to clear the streets so tramway services could be maintained. After reading the Riot Act, a legal requirement that the people be informed of the need to disperse, the police surged into the crowd to create a corridor for the trams. Although many people had not heard the Riot Act being read, the sound of batons hitting human bodies enlightened them as to what was occurring. The crowd retaliated by throwing bottles and stones at the charging police. A riot began in the streets of Glasgow for control of George's Square. Only an appeal from strike leaders David Kirkwood and William Gallacher, who had both been arrested earlier for inciting to riot, for the strikers to restore order and march to Glasgow Green saved the situation from becoming more bloody.[18]

Whether the workers were truly bent upon a riot is unknown. Robert Munro, declared "it was a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike-it was a Bolshevik rising".[19] The government's Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organizations stated, "It is now known that the

[18] "Industrial Unrest" Labour Leader, 6. Feb. 1919 ., "The Labour Ferment" The Times, 1 Feb. 1919.

[19] War Cabinet 523, 31 January 1919,CAB 23/9, PRO.

disorder on Friday, 31st January, the intention was to seize the Municipal Buildings in Glasgow, but the police were too strong for them".[20] Willie Gallacher, however, wrote later that "A rising was expected. A rising should have taken place. The workers were ready and able to effect it; the leadership never thought of it."[21]

As a result of the riot, the government now had the excuse it needed to restore order without the danger of losing public support. On the evening of 31 January the government began to pour troops equipped with machine guns and tanks into Glasgow. Soldiers armed with rifles and fixed bayonets were stationed on each street corner. As one newspaper pointed out, "Glasgow had become Berlin in less than 12 hours."[22]

The government's action in Glasgow did win popular support among the population. Many people, who feared a Bolshevik takeover, were overjoyed the cabinet had authorized such strong measures. Some even called for such actions to be taken in all such instances. The Chief Secretary for Ireland passed on a telegram from the Lord Lieutenant requesting that the government allow the use of troops to settle the problems in Belfast.[23] The cabinet, however, turned down this request feeling the conditions in Belfast might still be solved without government intervention. Moreover, unlike the Glasgow

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[20] "The Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom and Abroad", G.T. 6816,10 February 1919, CAB 24/75, PRO.

[21] Willie Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), 234.

[22] "Frightfulness in Glasgow" Labour Leader, 6 Feb. 1919.

[23] War Cabinet 525, 4 February 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO

situation, the Belfast strike had continued to be a nonviolent undertaking, depriving the government of a necessary excuse.[24]

Furthermore, the cabinet could waste little time with distant Belfast because London, the capital city, was about to erupt into a cauldron of labor tumult itself. The London tube workers threatened to walk out on 4 February if their demand for a thirty minute meal break with pay was not granted. Even more alarming was the warning of the London electrical workers to send the city into darkness if the Clyde demand for a 40-hour week was not settled favorably. Indeed, government interference in the Glasgow strike may have been supported by the general populace, but among the nation's organized laborers, that action was seen as government treachery. The government faced the possibility of the nation's unions walking out if troops were used against strikers again.

Many unions passed resolutions pledging to support the Clyde workers. In Manchester, the engineers voted to support the drive for a 40-hour week, as did the Scottish Trade Unions' Congress. Moreover, the Dublin Trades' Council considered a general strike throughout Ireland in favor of the 40-hour week.[25] The movement for a 40-hour week continued to grow amongst labor, even as the government attempted to crush the unrest on the Clyde.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] "Anxiety in Dublin", The Times, 3 Feb.1919, "Manchester Demands 40-Hour Week", The Times, 3 Feb. 1919, "Developments in Glasgow", 27 Jan. 1919, The Times

Despite the seriousness of the situations in Belfast and Glasgow, the circumstances in London demanded the government take a position. The cabinet considered the possibility of using the military with lorries to transport the population dislocated by the tube strike. However, Mr. Blain, the General Manager of the London General Omnibus Company, reported to the cabinet that such action would cause the city's bus drivers to strike in support of the tube drivers. The government was therefore helpless to interfere in the tube dispute.[26]

The electrical union proved much simpler to deal with. As Thomas Jones observed, "They [the electrical workers] were so clearly in the wrong that the public would readily condone the use of the army and navy to man the power stations."[27] The cabinet decided to extend the Defense of the Realm Act to include electrical workers, and thereby made it a crime for the electrical workers to strike. In the event, the electrical workers walked out anyway, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Birkenhead, asked that volunteers man the electrical stations rather than depend on the army. He pointed out the government was "proposing to count on the skilled artisans in the army", a great many of whom were associated with these men in civilian life, and it was his opinion that these men represented "the part of the army upon which the least reliance could be placed".[28] Furthermore, the

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[26] War Cabinet 527, 5 February 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO.

[27] Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, ed. Kieth Middlemas (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 75.

[28] War Cabinet 527, 5 February 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO.

First Lord of the Admiralty, Walter Long, who was convinced the present trouble was a communist-conceived action, mentioned he "had just returned from one of the naval ports where there had been a little trouble, which was of a purely Bolshevist nature."[29] It was decided to avoid using troops to replace strikers unless absolutely necessary.

With the amendment of the Defense of the Realm Act, the electrical strike fizzled. Only a few workers walked out and their presence was not missed. The tube strike was settled on 7 February, three days after it had begun, when employers and laborers reached agreement over the disputed meal break. Moreover, the military occupation of Glasgow began to take its toll as workers, now convinced the strike was doomed to failure, began to return to work. The strikes in Edinburgh and Leith ended on the 7th as well. On 11 February Glasgow's Joint Committee issued the following statement:

> The Joint Committee, having fully considered the whole position of the strike, and due consideration being given to the attitude of those officials of certain trade unions in supporting the Government and the employers against the workers in their demand for 40- hours, recommend a full resumption of working by all strikers on Wednesday, February 12, until such time as we can perfect the organization of our forces with a view to making our claim for 40-hours on a national basis and enforcing it by a national strike by all workers in the near future.[30]

Having won their battle on the Clyde, the government began to attempt to settle the dispute in Belfast. On 17 February the government authorized a similar solution to the Belfast strike by ordering the military to retake control of

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[29] Ibid.

[30] "End of Glasgow Strike" Labour Leader 13 Feb. 1919.

the city, restore authority to the civil government, and to operate the city services until the strike was ended. The Belfast strike survived only four days more. The cabinet had succeeded in winning what it viewed as its first major conflict with the British Bolsheviks.

Yet the government understood the battle was far from over. New reports reached the cabinet asserting that Bolsheviks operating out of Sweden had announced they now had several agents working in Britain attempting to stir up trouble between the workers and the bourgeois. Investigators were examining the possible financing of strike leaders by foreign governments, especially Germany and Russia. Even more alarming was an intercepted German cable to German agents in occupied Germany which suggested the Germans were merely toying with the communists and had the goal of infecting the West with Bolshevism. The cable stated the German goal was to "subdue our enemies, England and France, by spreading it [Bolshevism] amongst the ranks of their armies with the hope that the German lion may reawaken".[31] Although few in the cabinet may have taken this report as an imminent danger, they understood a real danger could arise from labor. The cabinet had managed to defeat the attack of the shop stewards, yet the shop stewards still controlled a large portion of the workers and were not backing down their revolutionary tenor.

The result of the strikes in Belfast and Glasgow proved

[31] "Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom and Abroad" G.T. 6816, 10 February 1919,CAB 24/75, PRO.

to be a major setback for the shop steward movement. Despite their success in seizing control of the community, especially in Belfast, they had achieved no great victory over the government. Their success had been less than what the trade union leaders might have been able to achieve. Indeed many laborers who had supported the shop stewards, now began to turn to trade union leaders. The nation's unions were now beginning to come forward on long dormant demands, left filed away since the outbreak of the Great War, such as the nationalization of key industry. Even more threatening, the cabinet would have to deal with the possible strike of the Triple Alliance of coal, railway, and transport workers. If these three unions went out in a unified strike, the economy would come to a standstill, and the government would be forced to give into any demands. Moreover, danger also was present within the nation's police force as the National Union of Police and Prison Officials began to speak of joining their brother laborers on the picket lines in the battle against capitalism. The cabinet had little time for congratulations. The Lloyd George government had to find a way to keep labor talking with business and not walking out against it.

CHAPTER III

THE GOVERNMENT GAMBLE

With the end of the strikes in Belfast and Glasgow, the British Cabinet could claim their first victory over an alleged Bolshevik movement. Their tactic of non-involvement with the strikers forced the strikers' demands to be perceived as a matter between employers and employees. Moreover, the cabinet's employment of military troops to suppress any militant activities, secured against any Red Revolution springing up from these communities. Despite success, the cabinet faced a tough campaign against the forces of labor. Almost immediately, workers began to criticize government's reliance on the military to deal with strikes. Further worries about the loyalty of the army continued to grow as soldiers' demands for rapid demobilization continued.

One of the greatest fears of the British Cabinet was not a bloody revolution in the streets of London, but rather a labor strike of such magnitude that the government would be forced to concede any demand, including political demands, thus removing all power from Parliament and placing it in the hands of a workers' soviet. In March 1919, many in the cabinet feared they faced just such a situation. The Triple Alliance, consisting of the National Union of Railwaymen, the

Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and the Transport Federation, which had joined forces during the Great War, now planned to flex its muscle to achieve the demands of its members. Such a move could destroy British industry. The stoppage of only railway and transport services was threatening, because it would isolate factories and production centers, and thereby halt production. If a coal strike, which directly affected everyone, were included in the equation, it would force the government to grant all demands or face the likelihood of a revolution. Either way, labor would usurp the power of Parliament. To avoid such a position becoming a reality, the government turned to its only acceptable option; it would have to bluff labor and delay matters until the government could defeat the threat in an open confrontation.

During the First World War, the railways and mines had come under government control. Triple Alliance desires made the threatened strike unique because the government would be acting less as negotiators than as owners. Because one of the major demands of the railwaymen and the miners was nationalization, or permanent government ownership, this double role of the government was especially complicated. As separate negotiations between the government and the leaders of the three unions progressed, nationalization quickly became a major obstacle to any agreement.

The railwaymen entered negotiation believing they would be granted their demand for nationalization. Just three

months earlier Winston Churchill, Minister for War, had asserted, "But I cannot imagine any step so important as the taking over of the railways as a State concern."[1] The miners held no such illusions, and early on negotiations between the government and the miners crumbled when both sides refused to adjust their positions. The nightmare of a Triple Alliance strike loomed, for if one member of the associated unions struck, then the remaining two unions were pledged to support such action through a walkout of their own. A special conference was called by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain for 12-13 February at Southport. The issue for the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was whether to strike for (1) a 30 percent increase in pay, (2) a six hour day, (3) full pay for those members unemployed by demobilization, and (4) nationalization.[2] The cabinet reacted spiritedly toward a possible miners' strike, the prime minister even secretly proposing blockading food supplies for the miners once the strike began.[3] This was rejected because such an act would increase sympathy for the miners and might even be the touch stone for a General Strike against the government. To keep the nation stable, the members of the cabinet knew they must avoid a headlong fight with the mobilized forces of the

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[1] Winston S. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897-1963, Vol. III, ed. Robert Rhodes James (New York: Chelsa House Publishers, 1974), 2648.

[2] G.D.H. Cole, Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry (1914-1921), (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), 72.

[3] War Cabinet 531A, 12 February 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO.

Miners' Federation of Great Britain.[4] The miners announced the strike vote tallies on 25 February. The number of those approving the strike referendum was 611,998, while those opposed was 104,997, giving the Federation leaders a mandate of almost 6 to 1 to call a strike.[5]

Even without the miners' threat, the labor situation throughout Great Britain was bleak. Although the Clyde and Belfast strikes had been defeated, they were not complete failures. Movements sprang up elsewhere throughout the home islands demanding a shorter working week. Additionally, demands for increased wages, the recognition of various unions, and demobilization of troops began to gain strength and momentum. In an attempt to deal with this turmoil, the government called into being two conferences, the Coal Commission and the National Industrial Conference. The cabinet hoped this would prove to be a shrewd maneuver for without making any promises of change, the government hoped labor would try to use these avenues for change.

The Coal Commission was the government's last maneuver to avoid a cataclysmic miners' strike. The Coal Commission was empowered to review and propose increases in wages, reductions in hours, inequalities between the grades of labor, financial and physical organization of the industry, and the best future organization of the mines

[4] Although the M.F.G.B. was made up of a majority of coal miners, it should be noted membership also included those employees in stratified ironstone, clay, or lead mines, as well as employees of by product and coke oven plants.

[5] "The Labour Situation", 28 February 1919, G.T.-6901, CAB 24/76, PRO.

(nationalization[1] , federation, or maintaining private ownership).[2] The Commission was composed of a chairman and twelve members, of which four would be chosen by the Miners' Federation, two jointly by the Miners' Federation and the government, while the government and the coal mine owners would each appoint three members. Given the enormous weight of the questions to be discussed and the equal numbers the miners would have within the Commission's membership, the Miners' Federation agreed to establish the commission and agreed to a delay in the mandated strike until after the first report of the Coal Commission was presented on 20 March 1919.

The March 1919 membership of the Coal Commission is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1[3]

Hon. Mr. Justice Sankey (Chairman)

Labor side:		Employers' side:
Mr. Robert Smillie	Appointed by	Mr. Arthur Balfour Govern-
Mr. Herbert Smith	the Miners'	Sir Arthur Duckham ment
Mr. Frank Hodges	Federation.	Sir Thomas Royden nominies
Sir Leo Chiozza Money		
		Mr. Evan Williams
Mr. J. T. Forgie	Agreed upon	Mr. R. W. Cooper Coal
Mr. Sidney Webb	the Government &	Mr. R. H. Tawney owners
	the Miners' Federation.	

Despite on both sides agreeing on the Commission's

[1] The Miners' Federation of Great Britain viewed nationalization to mean state ownership, but miners' control.

[2] Cole, 74-75.

[3] Ibid, 74.

membership, not everyone in the government was pleased. In fact, during a meeting of Parliament, J.R.P. Newman, M.P., asked if the prime minister had noticed that among the Coal Commission's members were "a member of the Committee on War Munitions, a Director-General of aircraft production, a member of the Shipping Control Committee, two teachers of Socialism, and an unsuccessful candidate of the Independent Labour Party at the recent General Election".[9]

Meeting in the King's Robing Room at the House of Lords, on 3 March 1919, the Coal Commission began its inquiry. From the opening stages the miners' representatives took the offensive. They intended to prove five points: (1) the lack of adequate wage growth during the war; (2) the reasons for, and practicability of, reducing working hours; (3) the deplorable conditions the miners faced in housing and their working environment; (4) the excessive profits the coal owners had made during the war; (5) the impractibility and wastefulness of the present system of private ownership.[10] The miners' representatives seized the initiative. They continually forced the witnesses brought before the Coal Commission to admit the unacceptable conditions in which the miners were forced to exist, and many persons began to see the investigation as a trial of the capitalist system.[11] As public support for their cause grew, the miners came to

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[9] J.R.P. Newman, 6 March 1919, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 113, col. 604.

[10] Cole, 79.

[11] The press, especially the small labor publications, coverage of the Coal Commission continually presented the Commission as an Inquisition of the system of coal ownership.

believe the government would have little choice but to grant all the miners' demands.

While the Coal Commission met, the National Industrial Conference, the other government committee, charged with reducing labor disputes by keeping labors' mind on national change in working conditions, rather than their petty differences with local managers, was convening elsewhere in London. The National Industrial Conference consisted of delegates from all Employers' Associations and some, but not all, trades unions. Some trades unions, like the National Union of Railwaymen, chose to continue private negotiations for their demands and boycotted the National Industrial Conference. In the National Industrial Conference, which began its meetings on 27 February 1919, labor grabbed the reins in an attempt to keep the owners off balance. The owners proved cooperative, agreeing to receive demands like one for a universal 48-hour week. The owners were also willing to discuss how working conditions might be improved. That agreement however,was merely to propose those changes to the government, not to implement them.

The Conference proved disheartening to some of the owners. Among the workers' delegates were those who professed the new creed of the worker: solidarity and militancy. Indeed, on the opening day of the conference William Marston, of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials, declared his organization's new found position in labor by stating "the days were past when Government could use the

Police as a tool against any other section of the nation".[12]

As the Coal Commission and the National Industrial Conference met, the workers continued to work, but they did not abate their demands. The miners, especially, made it clear that if government refused to agree to the reforms suggested in the upcoming Coal Commission report, which the miners believed would favor them, then they would strike to attain their demands. This placed the government in an unenviable position. The Coal Commission they created, rather than discrediting the miners' position, had resulted in even more public support for the miners.[13] Furthermore, as dangerous as a Triple Alliance strike was, there was now the added danger that such a strike might start a workers' revolution. Even in the House of Commons, stories were told of links between labor, most notably the shop stewards, and the Bolshevik government in Russia "having for its object the fomenting of labour trouble and the expropriation of the bourgeois class in Great Britain".[14]

Though Red Revolution remained a fear, the direct concern for the cabinet remained the possible coal strike. The Miners' Federation had earlier delayed posting their strike notices until 22 March. Two days after the issuance of the Coal Commission's first report the Miners' Federation continued to hint that if nationalization was not granted

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[12] "The Labour Situation",12 March 1919,G.T.-6974, CAB 24/76, PRO.

[13] Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secretes 1919-1931, vol II (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 74.

[14] J.R.P. Newman, 17 March 1919, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 113, col. 1735.

they would have no recourse other than to strike. A tense situation developed as meetings continued with the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Federation. Negotiations with the transport workers were proceeding well, but with the railwaymen, they were proving increasingly difficult. The railwaymen were refusing to accept a cut in their wages. The Minister of Labour, Sir Robert Horne, admitted that if the Miners' Federation walked out, the National Union of Railwaymen would join them. If, however, the miners continued working with the government, the railwaymen would most likely continue their negotiations.[15] The cabinet's attitude towards a possible strike was almost unshakeable. Andrew Bonar Law, who was acting as Prime Minister in the absence of David Lloyd George, who was then serving as the chief British delegate to the Paris Peace Conference, declared, ". . . both miners and railwaymen are servants not of the employers, but of the State; that a strike would be against the State, and the State must win and must use all of its power for that purpose,otherwise it would be an end of Government in this country".[16] As it had with the Glasgow and Belfast strikes, the cabinet discussed the possibility of using soldiers as a precaution against any outbreaks of violence or disorder during the possible miners' strike.

In an effort to curtail the severity of a strike, the government made still another offer to the railwaymen on the

[15] War Cabinet 546,19 March 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO

[16] War Cabinet 548, 20 March 1919, CAB 23/9, PRO

eve of the issuance of the First Report of the Coal Commission. The cabinet extended a new offer which included a continuation of the war wage for an agreed period, standardization of wages within a district (men who worked the same job in the same area, but for different companies had often been paid vastly different sums), time-and-a-quarter wages on night work and overtime, and time-and-a-half for Sundays.[17] Such a plan would prove far more palatable to the National Union of Railwaymen and make it less likely they would leave the negotiations and risk losing everything. The government's bluff continued uncalled.

On 20 March the Coal Commission issued its First Report. It proved to be not one, but three separate reports, representing the diversity of its membership. One report was signed by Robert Smillie, Herbert Smith, Frank Hodges, Sir Leo Chiozza Money, Sidney Webb, and R. H. Tawney. This report reflected the demands of the Miners' Federation. It called for an increase in wages of 30 percent and for a six hour day. It added that ". . . nationalization ought to be, in principle, at once determined".[18]

A second report, reflecting the interests of ownership, was signed by the three owners' representatives. This report avoided the issue of nationalization. It did call for a wage increase of 1s,6d. per day for adults and 9d. per day for juveniles and a reduction of the working day to seven hours.[19]

The last report, signed by Sir John Sankey and the

[17] "The Railway Situation", 19 March 1919, G.T.-7063, CAB 24/77, PRO.

[18] Cole, 86.

[19] Ibid.

remaining members, was an attempt to mediate the other two reports. Sankey's report urged a wage increase of 2s. per day for men and 1s. for juveniles and a decrease to seven hours a day, with the option for a further reduction to six if economic conditions at the end of 1920 allowed it. Further, to improve the living conditions of the miners, a levy of 1d. per ton was to be applied, which would be used to improve housing and other necessities. As for the profiteering by the owners, all future profits were to be limited to 14d. per ton. With regard to the issue of nationalization, Sankey's report condemned the existing system, stating that "some other system must be substituted for it, either nationalization or a measure of unification by national purchase and/or joint control".[20]

The government reacted swiftly to the issuance of the three reports. Andrew Bonar Law guaranteed to take whatever steps necessary to carry out the report issued by the Coal Commission's Chairman, Justice John Sankey. Law further hailed the Coal Commission's work in researching and writing these reports. Yet, Law added a warning to those miners who favored a strike, arguing "if a strike takes place, of course the Commission inevitably comes to an end; it is quite obvious it cannot go on sitting under such circumstances".[21] Law made it clear if a strike took place, the government would use whatever means were available to crush such action.

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[20] Ibid., "Coal Industry Commission Interim Sankey Report", 15 April 1919, G.T.-7121, CAB 24/78, PRO.

[21] Andrew Bonar Law, 20 March 1919, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 113, col. 2346.

Thus the miners were warned: strike and lose everything that might otherwise be gained.

In the face of such a threat, the Miners' National Conference met in London on 21 March to decide whether to postpone the strike scheduled to begin the following day, or to go out on strike. The miners agreed it was in their best interest to ask Law for a reply stating the exact government intention regarding the Coal Commissions Reports, which they did. Law responded clearly:

> The Secretary of the Miners' Federation
>
> 11, Downing Street
> Whitehall, S. W.
> 21st March 1919
>
> Dear Sir- Speaking in the House of Commons last night I made a statement with regard to the Government policy in connection with the Report of the Coal Industry Commission. I have the pleasure in confirming as I understand you wish me to do, my statement that the Government are prepared to carry out in the spirit and in the letter the recommendations of Mr. Justice Sankey's Report.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> A. Bonar Law [4]

Upon receiving this letter, the Miners' Executive Committee decided to postpone the strike day to day until they could take a full vote of the membership. On 26 March the Miners' Executive Committee decided to settle the question on whether to accept or reject the government's proposal through a national ballot. Through Law's guarantee to enforce the Sankey Report, the miners understood that the cabinet had

[4] Cole, 89.

accepted, at least in principle, the idea of nationalization of the mines. This ensured miners' support of the proposal. The resulting ballot showed 693,864 miners in favor of continuing the Coal Commission and only 76,992 for going out on strike.[5]

As the Miners' Federation prepared to return to the Coal Commission, the cabinet awaited the issuance of the report of the Committee of the National Industrial Conference. Being an all labor intensive report, it could have much greater import than the Coal Commission Report because its recommendations would show the government what the typical workers desired, and therefore, areas in which the cabinet could work to continue to keep the majority of workers satisfied.

This report, issued on 4 April, unanimously recommended that the government (1) create a maximum working week and suggested a 48-hour week as most acceptable; (2) constitute by law, for all occupations, a minimum wage, which could be decided upon after careful research had been completed; (3) extend the Wage (Interim Regulation) Act, which would fix wages where they were at the signing of the Armistice, until 21 November 1919; (4) create a National Industrial Council consisting of an equal number of employer and labor, and in addition the formation of a Standing Committee from such a council to investigate and act over conditions of labor and to inform both government and the public as to the pros and cons of various labor activities. Additionally, the report cited the reason for labor unrest stemmed from organized

[5] Ibid., 91.

labors' determination to subvert the existing capitalist industrial system. Yet at the same time, the National Industrial Conference's report recommended government and employers recognize the authority of new trade unions, such as the National Union of Police and Prison Officials and the Railway Clerks Association, to represent their members at any negotiations between labor and management.[6]

Maintaining peace between labor and management became a quest for the cabinet, for they believed the longer it could delay a labor dispute, the less likely it was that the strike might turn into Red Revolution. Yet the continual reports which flowed into the cabinet showed the possibility of a workers' rebellion erupting at any time. One such report told of groups of highly trained revolutionaries backed by the Bolsheviks with untold amounts of money, eager to assist in any labor dispute, regardless of its revolutionary ideals, in the belief that such action would inspire the masses to a revolutionary awareness " out of which in due time Bolshevism in all its nakedness can be born".[7] Government therefore knew it must guard itself against a major labor outbreak until it was sufficiently in control. Additionally, questions began to surface about the leaders of the various unions. In the House of Commons, H.W. Bottomley questioned the Home Secretary, E.S. Shortt. He asked if the Home Secretary was aware the leaders of the Miners' Federation and the Transport

[6] "Report of the Committee of the National Industrial Conference", 4 April 1919, G.T.-7057, CAB 24/77, PRO.

[7] "Memorandum on The Aims and Strategy of Bolshevism", 12 April 1919, G.T.-7128, CAB 24/78, PRO.

Federation, Messrs. Smillie and Williams, respectively, were "openly urging the workers of the country to emulate the example of the Russian Bolsheviks and bring about a revolution".[8]

It was in such an atmosphere the cabinet viewed the May Day demonstrations with a watchful eye. In Ireland the 1 May holiday completely shut down industry because workers took the opportunity to celebrate their revolutionary solidarity. The major celebrations in Great Britain were in London, Glasgow, Coventry, Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester, Leeds, Paisly, and Kilmarnock. The largest demonstration, that in Glasgow, drew a crowd of between 50,000-100,000 laborers. A decree was read announcing the end of capitalism in Great Britain and the commencement of the workers' revolution. The decree further stated the British workers should send "their fraternal greetings to the European Soviet Republics and the Workers of the World".[9] Yet such activities produced little action from the workers. The cabinet continued to gamble that as long as the workers saw the National Industrial Conference and the Coal Commission continue to work for the betterment of working conditions there would be no serious labor problems.

It was a gamble which appeared to be paying off. In May, the only danger facing the government was a possible Police strike. The National Union of Police and Prison Officials had

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[8] H.W. Bottomley, 14 April 1919, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 114, col. 2558.

[9] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 7 May 1919, G.T.-7218, CAB 24/79, PRO.

been formed during the First World War and had even gone on strike during the summer of 1918 in an effort to secure higher wages and union recognition. At that time the government had little choice other than grant its demands, but in so doing, the cabinet had included several qualifiers, the most important was a provision forbidding the National Union of Police and Prison Officials from ever again going out on strike.

The more radical members of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials viewed these restrictions as unacceptable restraints. They saw the union as the final step before a workers' revolution could take place. Once the police force had been radicalized to see their role in capitalist society as the enforcers of bourgeois will, the police would reject such a role and join the workers in overthrowing the existing economic and political system and setting up a socialist society. These radicals chose to start with small issues and build them up until the entire police force was ready to strike against the perceived injustices.

The National Union of Police and Prison Officials had begun to raise its voice with labor in the National Industrial Conference, and it continued to show itself as a new force allied with labor rather than capitalism. On 4 May the union organized a demonstration in London's Trafalgar Square. This rally was called to demand the reinstatement of a fellow police employee and union member, Police Constable

Spackman.[10]

P.C. Spackman had a spotless record of ten and a half years with the Metropolitan Police Force and had received two commendations for service. He had been dismissed for being unfit and grossly insubordinate. Spackman's only crime,according to the union, was putting into writing what so many of the union's representatives had verbally stated.[11]

Surrounding the towering monument to Admiral Nelson, the police displayed banners stating "Tyranny is not discipline", "Kill P[r]ussianism at home", and "Let the punishment fit the crime"[12] . The union's general secretary, Mr. J. Haynes, called Police Commissioner Sir Neville Macready's dismissal of Spackman an attack on the National Union of Police and Prison Officials. Haynes went on to point out that the Ex-Kaiser's Government had seen fit to recognize Germany's police union in 1915 and asked, "Where is the autocratic Government - here or on the Continent?"[13] . The square began to vibrate with calls for the ouster of Sir Neville Macready and for complete recognition of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials by the government.[14]

The union continued to protest the firing of Constable Spackman, and they brought up other grievances. A growing number of police began to call for a strike to secure their demands, which included higher wages and greater union

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[10] "Police Rally" The Times, 5 May 1919.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

representation on the police review boards. The Union leaders began discussions with the Triple Alliance asking for their support should the National Union of Police and Prison Officials be forced to strike to secure their demands. The executive committee of the union, in keeping with their view of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials as a true trade union, removed the clause in their by-laws prohibiting any strike action and inserted a provision requiring a 2/3 majority of union membership to call a strike.[15]

The Policemen's union set 31 May as a date for a major rally in Hyde Park to decide on whether to strike. During the preceding week, radical members began holding police rallies, calling for (1) full union recognition, (2) the reinstatement of Police Constable Spackman, (3) wage and pension increase, (4) elimination of military-style control of the police force. The radical membership used these rallies to inflame the emotions of the average policeman and to build support for a strike.

The cabinet responded to the threat the National Union of Police and Prison Officials was presenting with an open hand on the one side and a club on the other. The Home Secretary proposed issuing a preemptive statement on the morning of 31 May clearly stating to the police the government position that no employee of the state has a right to strike against the state. Therefore, any policeman who

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[15] "Police Union and Police Pay", 26 May 1919, G.T.-7329, CAB 24/80, PRO.

failed to report for duty, unless excused by the police physician, would be terminated from any future police duties with no possibility of being rehired and with the revocation of any time which might have been earned toward his pension.[16] As a counterweight to this threat, the Home Secretary proposed a resolution in the cabinet granting the police a raise in pay and offering Representative Committees in which the police might state their grievances, provided the union agreed not to strike and restored the previously omitted clause of the union rules prohibiting the union's right to strike.[17]

The government position succeeded in scaring most police and prison officials into submission by attacking their pocketbooks. Only the youngest of the police were willing to risk their pensions and moreover the government did seem willing to address the grievances of the average policeman. The policeman's union did receive the necessary 2/3 majority in balloting on the strike issue (of the 55,183 ballots issued, 44,539 were in favor of a strike),however, many of the union's membership accused the executive committee of electioneering in an effort to force a strike on the issue. The result of the standoff was that the government had broken the power of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials, and the union's membership began to decline.[18]

Although the government had succeeded in avoiding a

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[16] "The Labour Situation", 28 May 1919, G.T.-7361, CAB 24/80, PRO.

[17] War Cabinet 572A,28 May 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO.

[18] "Police Union and Police Pay", 26 May 1919, G.T.-7329, CAB 24/80, PRO.

major strike from the largest unions, the situation remained very tense. Workers continued to demand higher pay, fewer hours, especially demanding a 44 or 40-hour week be adopted, nationalization of large industry, as well as an increased deduction of £250 on the income tax. The workers on the Clyde continued their activities, including a formal declaration of a program to achieve victory for the laboring class. This program included the arming of workers, the forming of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the creation of a Red Army, nomination of superiors in military formations, social and sexual equality, creation of a soviet government, and expropriation, i.e. nationalization, of all land, property, mines, industry, communications, and transport.[19]

Support for nationalization continued to grow among Great Britain's labor unions. With the Coal Commission dealing with the issue of nationalization of the mines, several labor unions took the opportunity to express their solidarity with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The Amalgamated Society of Beamers, Twisters, Drawers, and Machine Workers, the Ellington branch of the Northumberland Miners Association, and the Buckhill Lodge of the Cumberlain Miners, Association all passed bills in favor of nationalizing the coal mines. Yet the opposition to coal mine nationalization also grew. The Bradford Dyers Association, the Directors of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, the South Wales Copper Trade Employers' Association, other local Chambers of Commerce as well as a meeting of shareholders in

[19] "The Labour Situation", 4 June 1919, G.T.-7420, CAB 24/81, PRO.

various Colliery companies approved resolutions opposing nationalization in any form. Nationalization was proving to be a dividing line through British society.[20]

Labor continued to work for more than just nationalization. Labor began to express its voice more often on political issues. Organizations such as the National Union of Railwaymen, the South Wales Miners' Federation, the London Labor Party,and the Municipal Employees' Association passed resolutions against continued military conscription. At the Cambrian Colliery more than 4,000 miners went on strike as a result of the government's refusal to increase the income tax deduction and to protest the arrest of two miners for non-payment of taxes. In addition, several unions, including the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades Federation, the Boilermaker Society and even the Glasgow dressmakers passed demands for a 44-hour week.[21] Even the army was proving unmanageable. Soldiers storming the Epsom Police Station killed a police sergeant in attempting to liberate fellow soldiers whom the police were detaining.

With the victories on hours and wages, if not on nationalization, labor appeared to be winning its battle with government, although it was by no means victorious. The cabinet continued to believe the longer it could delay any strike from one of the nation's major labor unions, the

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[20] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 10 July 1919, G.T.-7671, CAB 24/83, PRO.

[21] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 26 June 1919, G.T.-7566, CAB 24/82, PRO.

better position the government would have to deal with it without the danger of a workers' rebellion taking place. It was faced with the reality of having to appear to be granting labors' demands to improve working conditions, while at the same time working with industrialists on finding what measures were necessary to increase production and return Britain to her prewar position of dominance in international trade. It was under such a guise the government received the Second Report of the Coal Commission.

The Second Report of the Coal Commission proved even more varied than the First Report had been. This report contained four separate reports on the issue of nationalization of the coal mines. The first report, signed by the Chairman, Justice Sankey, argued for state acquisition of all seams of coal, the establishment of a system of councils, on national, district, and local levels, composed of members from miners, consumers, and technical personnel to work toward nationalization of the mines within a three year period. The newly nationalized mines would be placed under the administration of a Minister of the Mines.[22]

A second report signed by the three owners' representatives along with Arthur Balfour and Sir Allen Smith accepted the concept of government acquisition of the mineral rights, but wholeheartedly opposed any form of unrecompensated nationalization. These members preferred a system of joint committees to oversee the operation of the

[22] "The Labour Situation", 25 June 1919, G.T.-7567, CAB 24/82, PRO.

mines, without any powers other than that of recommendation.[23]

A third report agreed with Justice Sankey's report on a great many points. It was, however, opposed to the Chairman's position with regard to the payment to the owners for the loss of mineral rights. The authors of this report, the six men chosen by labor, believed the government should simply nationalize the mines without recompense. The six labor members believed that the owners had exploited labor for a long time, and it would be unjust to reward them with a monetary settlement.[24]

The final report, that signed by Sir Arthur Duckham, was loosely in agreement with the report of the owners' representatives, yet it disagreed with that report on one major point. Although it, too, opposed unrecompensated nationalization, it proposed a system of collectivization in the mining districts constructed on the basis of statutory companies. The reports showed a unanimous decision for state ownership of the coal seams, and a seven-to-six majority in favor of unrecompensated nationalization.[25]

While the cabinet considered the Second Report of the Coal Commission, the members realized they were on shaky ground. The support for nationalization was growing rapidly among labor circles. Although the greatest threat of coal strangulation was past, as coal stocks were no longer at famine levels, the threat of a Triple Alliance strike, combined with a lingering doubt about the loyalty of the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "The Labour Situation", 25 June 1919, G.T.-7567, CAB 24/82, PRO.

police and the army, forced some members of the cabinet to publicly announce their acceptance of some form of national control. The cabinet finally began examining a weakened version of Sir Arthur Duckham's proposal, which earned the dubious nickname of Duckham and water. This version never succeeded in winning any real support from anyone.

The National Industrial Conference and the Coal Commission were great successes for the British government. They were not successes because they achieved great reforms in industry, because most of the changes recommended by these committees were never passed into law. They were successes in that they managed to keep labor at the bargaining table rather than on the picket line. The cabinet knew the weakness of their position in opposition to labor, especially the miners, in March 1919, yet they gambled that the workers were more willing to gain their demands through negotiations than to risk their employment through a strike. The government set up the committees to give the appearance government was willing to grant much needed labor reform, while in actuality the government was buying time until they were in a strong enough position to challenge one of the nation's major trade unions and defeat it as an example to all other unions.

CHAPTER IV

THE LABOR OFFENSIVE

Although the Lloyd George government had managed to avoid any large scale fight with labor until the nation was in a favorable position to combat a full scale labor attack, the cabinet was faced with the reality that it had not removed labor's threat, but only delayed it. The workers continued to demand fewer hours, higher wages and improved working conditions. Yet economically, Great Britain was slow to return to its prewar position of dominance in the world market. Industrialists claimed that the reason for this failure lay at the feet of the workers. The reduced working week already granted to labor,the industrialists argued, had resulted in a decline in productivity. By reducing the hours worked, British products would remain overpriced and uncompetitive on the world market. They would remain so as long as British workers demanded such exorbitant wages.

Accepting most of the capitalists' arguments, the cabinet faced an unfavorable situation. Restoring Great Britain to its prewar economic position was a pressing need for the Lloyd George government. That took precedence over labor's cries for eradication of social maladies. Yet to ignore Labor's pleas completely could lead to a number of undesirable results. Strikes would do nothing but injure the

economic rebirth seriously. Extremists argued avoiding labor's pleas would simply force the workers into the streets to achieve their destiny of establishing a workers' state through a bloody revolution. The moderate scenario, the most probable one should government avoid addressing workers' demands, was not promising to the cabinet either. This position foresaw such action eventually resulting a vote of no confidence against the government and an election which would result in the first Labour government in English history. The cabinet could not cave in to labor's demands with any hope thereafter of restarting the British economy, nor could it avoid addressing these issues and remain in power long enough to achieve this goal. Therefore the cabinet was forced to adopt the only means available to it. The government would have to continue the delaying actions it had been using until the economy had returned to its prewar position. Then the cabinet could grant some of labor's demands.

As the first half of 1919 passed, the cabinet found itself faced with several labor crises which would not dissipate. On 8 July the government passed the Police Bill. This bill called for the elimination of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials and for the formation of a Police Federation, non-trade union organization, to oversee police arbitrations. In response, the members of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials held a rally on 13 July at Holborn Stadium. They demanded that the government quit

interfering with a union, of which the government themselves had allowed the creation. The government had no right, the protesters claimed, to attempt to replace the National Union of Police and Prison Officials with another organization that would merely oversee the complaints of the police. Union members, moreover, returned to their earlier cry for justice for Police Constable Spackman.

At the same time, miners began to protest the government announcement it would have to raise the price of coal by 6s. per ton owing to increased cost of production. Workers throughout the country claimed it was a deliberate government ploy to discredit the miners and their drive for state control of the mines, and to injure Labour candidates seeking political office in the by-elections of Bothwell and Swansea.[1]

The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, at its annual conference on 15 July, vowed to continue its drive for nationalization. The miners' President, Robert Smillie, stated the nation was "witnessing an example of 'direct action' in the House of Commons" whereby the capitalists were "using the whole of their political influence to prevent nationalization of the mines".[2] In addition to moving forward with the nationalization program, Smillie vowed to continue efforts to force the Government to end conscription, which, he held, was propping up the capitalist system by providing

[1] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 17 July 1919, G.T.-7742, CAB 24/84, PRO

[2] "The Labour Situation", 16 July 1919, G.T.-7746, CAB 24/84, PRO

large numbers of troops to crush the workers.[3]

As the annual conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain began, 150,000 Yorkshire miners went on strike. At issue was the West Yorkshire owners withdrawal of an offer of a 14.3% increase on piece rates. The withdrawal came as a result of a national agreement between the leaders of the Miners' Federation
of Great Britain and the government over the maximum increase for piece rate workers. The Sankey Report had called for a maximum of 10%, whereas the miners had demanded 14.3%. The government and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain had compromised at a 12.5% increase for piece rate workers which would balance against reduced hours. This agreement resulted in a strike of the West Yorkshire Miners' Federation because the local mine owners had agreed at 14.3% before the national agreement and the Yorkshire miners felt they were being treated unfairly for being able to reach a settlement with the mine owners.[4]

The Yorkshire strike proved to be a double-edged sword for both the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the government. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, though not opposing the right to strike by any of its federated unions over a perceived grievance, felt the Yorkshire miners' decision to strike could interfere with the national miners' movement for public control. If the miners were perceived in the public mind as greedy kulaks, rather

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

than loyal workers downtrodden by the capitalists, public support for the miners could wane and their present chance for nationalization might slip away.

The government's position was just as difficult. Having just announced an increase in the price of coal, an increase the miners argued was unnecessary, the government could not claim there was not enough money to pay the Yorkshire claim. Moreover, Yorkshire was responsible for a great part of the coal produced in Britain, coal that would be needed for a revitalization of industry. Yet government could not grant the Yorkshire miners' demand. If the government granted the Yorkshire miners their claim of 14.3% on piece rates, after signing an agreement with the miners' national representatives, every local branch of every union in Great Britain would have the right to strike for self-betterment at the expense of the nation.

The cabinet responded quickly to this new attack by labor. It was noted there would be little assistance from the mine managers, who were not even going to the mines, or the mine owners, who felt "a big strike had got to come and the present was a good opportunity to bring matters to a head."[5] The Prime Minister agreed with the owners' position and felt that, with the popular support the government now enjoyed against the miners, the government would win. The Prime Minister continued stating that the government must be sure of support from the owners. If the owners began to support the miner's claim, the miners could very well beat the

[5] War Cabinet 596A, 21 July 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO

government, which he believed would certainly result in a soviet government in Great Britain with all real power " at the headquarters of the Miners' Federation in Russell Square."[6]

To deal with the immediate situation, the Home Secretary, E.S. Shortt, stated some 3,500 sailors were being brought to Yorkshire to handle the pumps to prevent the mines from flooding. This step was seen as necessary for although the pumpmen had remained on site. The Yorkshire Miners' Federation was forced to call them out because an agreement had not been reached by 19 July. The Prime Minister sent the Minister of Labour, Sir Robert Horne, and his staff to Yorkshire to assess the situation before any major steps were taken. As for the possibility of physically restraining the miners, the Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, pointed out there were 16 mobile columns in Britain and if necessary the government could draw on the four divisions in Germany.[7]

After quickly assessing the situation in Yorkshire, the Secretary of Labor reported that in light of the reduced local output of coal, railway services in the area would soon have to be restricted. He needed to meet with the mayors of the Yorkshire district to discuss the possibility of restricting electricity, lighting, water, and gas.[8] As for a full scale fight with the Yorkshire miners, it was noted that both Yorkshire mine owners' associations were now willing to

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] War Cabinet 597, 22 July 1919, CAB 23/11, PRO

concede to the men and grant the 14.3% increase. This meant, if such news became public, the populace would see the government position as an attempt to discredit the miners. It would lead the public to rally behind the miners.[9] The government chose to remain opposed to this increase because the mines were still under the government's control, and therefore, the increase would come out of the government's, not the owners', coffers.

The cabinet began to focus its campaign not against the physical presence of the miners, but rather against their image in the public perception. In the House of Commons, on 22 July, Andrew Bonar Law, who had demonstrated a clear understanding of the miners' demand for a 14.3% increase during the cabinet meetings on this matter, accused the Yorkshire miners of launching a strike for nationalization and against the 6s. increase in the price of coal. Continuing the assault on the miners, the government portrayed the miners as irresponsible, claiming that because of the union's actions a large number of mines were in danger of flooding, and thus turning the Yorkshire district into a rural, agricultural area.[10]

As the cabinet continued to deal with the Yorkshire miners' strike, the cabinet was also having to deal with other issues which were proving just as volatile. The most critical was a threatened walkout of the nation's police

[9] War Cabinet 598, 23 July 1919, CAB 23/11, PRO

[10] G.D.H. Cole, Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry (1914-1923), (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), p.107. As for the mines flooding, it should be noted that this just was not true, in fact very few mines were ever in any real danger from flooding.

force by the National Union of Police and Prison Officials. Although the National Union of Police and Prison Officials had been proving themselves a nuisance for most of the year, the union was now agitating against the recent passage of the Police Bill. The union demanded the removal of sections 1,2, and 3 of the Police Bill because these sections called for all police to leave the union and for the creation of a new non-trade union organization, a Police Federation, to handle police complaints. Labor leaders, who saw the National Union of Police and Prison Officials as a fellow trade union united in the common cause against capitalist oppression, demanded that the government halt its attacks on the National Union of Police and Prison Officials and urged all workers to fight this "direct attack on Trade Unionism."[11]

As police continued to talk of striking to win their demands, the cabinet stood firm on its earlier statement of 30 May 1919, which refused to allow anyone employed as a public servant to strike and threatened any such striker with dismissal and complete loss of pension. Despite these warnings,the police called a lightning strike and walked out on 1 August. The initial results were dismal: only 240 men in seventeen divisions chose to walk out.[12] The cabinet quickly released a statement announcing the termination of employment and forfeiture of pensions of all police employees who chose to remove themselves from duty and join the strike. Yet the action of these few strikers drew a great deal of support

[11] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 31 July 1919, G.T.-7857, CAB 24/85, PRO

[12] War Cabinet 605,1 August 1919, CAB 23/11, PRO

from labor, the most notable being a lightning strike of the railwaymen at Nine Elms in support of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials. By 6 August 1,136 police had walked out in London, 932 in Liverpool, as well as hundreds of others throughout the country.[13] By this time, however, the leaders of the National Union of Police and Prison Officials realized they had failed to draw out enough police to force the government to grant their demands. The government had managed to hold its ground and not negotiate with the National Union of Police and Prison Officials because, in the cabinet's view, these men were no longer employed by the nation's police and therefore had no right to negotiate on behalf of employed police personnel. The stand-off resulted in a virtual collapse of the strike by 7 August. Trade unionism was dead among Great Britain's police force.

On the second day of the Police strike, the cabinet faced another serious labor problem. In London some 6,000 bakers took to the streets and nationally 20,000 bakers began to walk picket lines rather than bake bread.[14] The Cabinet was forced to deal with this situation before it became too critical. Through pressure on the owners, the Cabinet was able to end the bakers' strike quickly, with most bakers returning to work by 11 August.

Although the strikes of the Yorkshire miners, police, and bakers were all serious, because each provided necessary services to the nation, the cabinet was still faced with the

[13] "The Labour Situation", 6 August 1919, G.T.-7912, CAB 24/85, PRO
[14] Ibid.

greatest crisis of all, the possible strike by the Triple Alliance. Whereas some labor organizations could threaten to bring down an entire industry, only a strike by the Triple Alliance could bring down the nation. Moreover, the Triple Alliance did not limit itself to purely economic questions. This organization was prepared to strike on political issues as well. At the delegate conference of the Triple Alliance on 23 July, the representatives of the three unions-the National Union of Railwaymen, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and the Transport Workers' Federation-voted 217 to 11 to begin examining the possibility of using the strength of trade unions to deal with such political issues as forcing government to end conscription and to end intervention in Russia.[15]

The government understood the seriousness in facing the Triple Alliance as a whole. The best chance the cabinet had was to create a situation whereby it faced a threat from only one of the three factions. If it could soundly defeat that one section, it would serve as a warning to the other two factions. With the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Workers' Federation both conducting favorable negotiations with the government, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain seemed the logical choice. Summer resulted in a reduced demand for coal, so a surplus of coal existed despite the Yorkshire miners strike, and the government had been winning the propaganda war against the Yorkshire miners. The cabinet felt it would hold the upper hand in any contest

[15] "The Labour Situation", 23 July 1919, G.T.-7792, CAB 24/84, PRO

against the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The issue for the contest had already been decided on by both sides: nationalization of the coal mines.

Nationalization had always been an issue for the miners, yet until the Second Report of the Coal Commission, the miners had always viewed this possible event as a distant aspiration. Sankey's Coal Commission had changed all that for the miners, who now saw nationalization a goal obtainable in the present. Miners stressed a majority of the Coal Commission's members, including the chairman chosen by the government, believed nationalization of the coal mines was the proper course of action, and therefore began to push wholeheartedly for state ownership of the coal mines. In the cabinet, a great deal of debate had taken place after the issuance of the Second Report of the Coal Commission. G.N. Barnes put forward a report favoring a proposal, similar to Sir Arthur Duckham's report, calling for a test of nationalization in a limited area, while dividing the rest of the industry into amalgamated zones.[16] From the House of Commons came a petition signed by representatives from all political parties calling on the cabinet not to grant state control to the miners as, in the members' view, no real case had been made for state control during the Coal Commission's examination of the industry.[17] Labor continued to pass resolutions in favor of coal mine nationalization. The cabinet now would have to state its position on the issue

[16] "Coal Commission Reports", 29 July 1919, G.T.-7826, CAB 24/85, PRO

[17] "Nationalization of the Coal Mines", 30 July 1919, G.T.-7849. CAB 24/85, PRO

publicly.

On 5 August the cabinet met, ostensively to discuss the future of the nation.[18] The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, observed that Bolsheviks had succeeded in gaining control of the trade unions and a large part of the press. The cabinet, therefore, had to be careful in any decision it made about the future organization of industry. Due to the war, he added, a great many laborers had been trained with guns, and guns and ammunition were readily available throughout the country. To prevent any armed rebellion by good people who had been taken in by the Bolshevik lies, the prime minister said Parliament needed to initiate a propaganda movement to discredit the Bolsheviks in the press and to show the public the weakness of the Bolshevik's arguments. As for the coal mines, he continued, the cabinet had only three real choices: (1) Mr. Justice Sankey's scheme of complete state control, (2) a Port of London scheme, which called for a buying out of the owners and the setting up of a management board made up of producers, consumers and workers to run the mines by districts or (3) nationalizing the mineral rights and amalgamating mining interest as suggested by Sir Arthur Duckham.[19]

Two days later, on 7 August 1919, the cabinet met again to discuss the coal mines situation and to decide which one of the prime minister's proposals should be adopted. The discussion was lively, with most ministers opposed to any

[18] War Cabinet 606A, 5 August 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO

[19] Ibid.

scheme of formal state control. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austen Chamberlain, declared that buying out the coal owners could bankrupt the nation if the mines did not turn a profit, because the government would have to make up the difference from the Treasury. A.H.Illingworth, the Postmaster General, announced that, in his experience, people worked better for private enterprise than for the state. Andrew Bonar Law asserted that the government should come out against state control. He believed the miners would complain, but probably not strike, and even if they did, the present, rather than the dead of winter, would be a better time to face it. G.N. Barnes pointed out that the government had created the Coal Commission and many in the general public felt the government was duty bound to adopt the commission's conclusions. Agreeing with Barnes, G.H. Roberts, the Food Controller, proclaimed the cabinet should not forget the real danger was a Triple Alliance strike, which could force the government to either submit or call elections. Yet their voices were drowned out by the remaining members of the cabinet, who were opposed to nationalization and sided with Bonar Law in believing that if a strike had to come, now was the time for it. The cabinet voted in favor of a resolution proposing nationalization of mineral rights and changing the system of operation of the coal mines to a resemblance of Sir Arthur Duckham's scheme, but opposed nationalization of the mines.[20]

Although the strike of the Yorkshire miners had come as

[20] War Cabinet 607A, 7 August 1919, CAB 23/15, PRO

a surprise to the government, the cabinet stood firm in refusing to negotiate with the miners over the heads of the owners. On 18 August, the Yorkshire miners began to return to work, because the issue of the 14.3 % increase for piece work had been settled in the miners' favor.

As for the broader issue of state control of the mines, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain had assumed a wait and see attitude, because the government, in reply to the miners' queries stated the issue was still under consideration. Yet on the same day that the Yorkshire strike ended, the prime minister informed the House of Commons of the cabinet's position. Lloyd George announced that because all the members of the Coal Commission were in agreement, the government would purchase the mineral rights, but since no case had been made for government ownership of the mines, he would propose an amalgamation of mining interests to be completed within two years.[21]

The miners felt the government had betrayed them, because they had not called the Coal Commission into being; the government had. Many miners felt that the findings of the commission had favored the miners and not the owners, and the government was ignoring the commission's findings and supporting the owners anyway. The Miners' Federation called a special conference for 3 September to discuss their options to this alleged governmental betrayal. This meeting would be followed by a conference of the Triple Alliance on

[21] David Lloyd George, 18 August 1919, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 119, col. 2001-2007

4 September.

In the meantime, problems continued to mount for the Cabinet. Rumors told of revolutionary labor leaders storing arms in Glasgow. Trouble with the railwaymen again erupted when negotiations between the government and the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen passed resolutions calling for drastic action. In the Shipbuilding and Engineering Trade Unions a ballot of members on the issue of a 44-hour week without reduction in pay passed 520,655 votes to 16,307.[22] Moreover, the question of the military's loyalty was again brought up when some 200 troops refused to embark from Southampton for service in France because they feared they might be sent to Russia.[23]

Yet these were isolated incidents. Of greater danger to the government was the possibility of the nation's workers unifying around a single issue. The Trades Union Congress was one organization which could unite many of Britain's labor force. The 51st Annual Trade Union Congress was scheduled to meet on 8 September. At the delegate conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, the delegates approved a resolution denouncing the government plan for reorganization of the mines and further stated:

> "We do not at this stage recommend the miners take industrial action to secure the adoption of the Coal Commission report, but we invite the Trade Unions' Congress to declare that the fullest and most effective

[22] "The Labour Situation", 20 August 1919, G.T. 8037, CAB 24/87, PRO and "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 21 August 1919, G.T. 8036, CAB 24/87,PRO

[23] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 28 August 1919, CAB 24/87, PRO

> action be taken to secure that the Government shall adopt the majority report of the Commission as to further the governance of the industry."[24]

This resolution took responsibility for a coal strike out of the hands of the miners and placed it into the lap of the Trade Union Congress. This created a tough situation for the Trade Union Congress, which had, over the years, passed many resolutions in favor of nationalizing various industries. The situation was different this time because a strong vote for nationalization would have far-reaching effects. The National Union of Railwaymen was agitating the government to fulfill its election pledge to nationalize the railways, and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was using the Sankey Commission to drive home their claim for nationalization of the mines. Therefore a vote for nationalization could be the signal for a general strike. If the Trade Union Congress, which represented all the major trade unions in Great Britain backed the claims of the railwaymen and the miners, all the unions represented by the Trade Unions' Congress might walk out in support of the demand for nationalization.

The 51st Annual Trade Union Congress opened in Glasgow on 8 September. Eight hundred and thirty-five delegates, representing almost five million workers, convened. During his opening speech, the organization's president, G.H. Stuart-Bunning, defended the Parliamentary Committee's position in not calling a special congress at the summons of the Triple Alliance. Stuart-Bunning reminded the members that

[24] "The Labour Situation", 3 September 1919, G.T. 8107, CAB 24/88, PRO

the congress had never adopted the general strike as a tool for dealing with industrial matters, and it certainly could not adopt such a policy for purely political matters such as nationalization. If such a plan of action was adopted, he argued, the government must fight, "and that meant revolution".[25]

Stuart-Bunning's urging of caution set the tone for the Trade Union Congress. Although the congress voted overwhelmingly for a resolution supporting the miners in their quest for nationalization and their rejection of the government scheme, the only action the congress authorized was for the Parliamentary Committee and the executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to call upon the prime minister for the express purpose of conveying to the prime minister the need for government to change its policy on this matter. Before adjourning, the Trade Union Congress dealt with other issues concerning the laboring class. In response to a rally the National Union of Police and Prison Officials held in London's Hyde Park, the Trade Union Congress passed a resolution supporting the recognition of the policemen's union. The congress also passed a resolution opposing conscription and intervention in Russia.[26]

Following the Trade Union Congress, the labor situation appeared more relaxed. Workers seemed to be more inclined toward peaceful negotiation than revolutionary strikes. The government could not have asked for a better response from

[25] "The Labour Situation", 10 September 1919, G.T. 8138, CAB 24/88, PRO

[26] Ibid.

the Trade Union Congress than the answer the Miners' Federation of Great Britain received to its question. Divisions had appeared in the congress during the discussion of direct action, with the proponents ending in the minority. Even the resolutions supporting the National Union of Police and Prison Officials and opposing conscription and intervention carried no threat of a strike in them.[27] Labor appeared to be in control over its moderate and conservative leadership once again. Yet this apparent lull was broken by the announcement that the railwaymen were dissatisfied with the present negotiations and were contemplating a strike to achieve their demands.

In an attempt to avoid a strike, Lloyd George met with the executive of the National Union of Railwaymen to discuss where the breakdown in the talks had occurred and to return the railwaymen to the negotiating table.[28] On 25 September the executive of the National Union of Railwaymen called upon the prime minister.[29] The president of the National Union of Railwaymen, J.H. Thomas, explained to the prime minister that his union did not want an excessive wage increase. What they wanted a settlement like the one reached between the government and the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. That agreement standardized wages upward by taking the highest paid member of a particular

[27] "Report on Revolutionary Organization in the United Kingdom", 18 September 1919, G.T. 8192, CAB 24/88, PRO

[28] "Deputation to the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George from the Executive of the National Union of Railwaymen", 26 September 1919, G.T. 8236, CAB 24/89, PRO

[29] Ibid.

grade and adding the 33/- war wage. J.H. Thomas added that, because the government's offer, presented to him as the final offer, did not contain this provision, his forces had begun to mobilize for a strike. He would, however, postpone the strike if negotiations showed any hopeful signs.

The following day, the prime minister presented the government proposal. Lloyd George said the government offer was very fair. It proposed at least a 100% increase over the prewar wage for every grade, and additional increases for Sunday and overtime pay, along with a reduction in daily working hours to eight. Yet J.H. Thomas stood firm, reminding the prime minister that the National Union of Railwaymen had already rejected this offer. If the government offered nothing new, he had little choice but to call a railway strike. In closing, Thomas added the strike "was not a dispute between the railway companies and ourselves, but that it was a dispute between the railwaymen and the Government".[30]

At midnight 26 September, the National Union of Railwaymen walked off the job and brought the nation's primary transport system to a halt. The government reacted swiftly, issuing a statement to the press showing what the cabinet's offer to the railwaymen had been and defending this offer as more than fair. The cabinet created a special committee headed by the Minister of Transport, Sir Eric Geddes, to deal with the problems created by a strike of this magnitude. The President of the Board of Trade, Sir Auckland Geddes, ordered all export of coal to be stopped. G.H.

[30] Ibid.

Roberts, the Food Controller, informed the cabinet that although the situation was not yet critical, there was only a two-to four-week supply of food. As for the maintenance of order, it was reported the military was ready to aid the government whenever called upon, although the mobility of these forces would be restricted owing to the sale of many of the military's motor lorries.[31]

Although the National Union of Railwaymen had chosen to strike without using the strength of the Triple Alliance, the cabinet was not free from that danger. The miners were upset over the recent government rejection of the demands for state control, and the transport workers were reaching a stalemate in the negotiations with government of a salary increase. On 1 October the leaders of the National Federation of Transport Workers, Railway Clerks' Association, Electrical Trade Union, Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, and National Federation of General Workers organized a meeting. They planned to organize a sympathetic strike to aid the National Union of Railwaymen. These men agreed that if the railwaymen and the government had reached no settlement by 7 October, they would join their forces to those of the National Union of Railwaymen. With such forces arrayed, the government would surely lose its battle with the railwaymen. Although these labor leaders had enough strength to threaten to break the government, they chose to call upon the prime minister first to urge him to reestablish negotiations with the National Union of

[31] War Cabinet 626, 26 September 1919, CAB 23/12, PRO

Railwaymen and settle the strike before the 7 October deadline when they would be forced to unleash their forces.

After adjourning their meeting, the labor representatives went to 10 Downing Street, the official residence of the prime minister, and met with Lloyd George. They claimed they wanted to end this crisis as soon as possible. The labor representatives asserted that the men within their unions were eager to take on the government, and it was the representatives' desire to see this did not happen. Arthur Henderson, of the Ironworkers' Union, acknowledged the government forces were well organized to defeat such a strike. Much of the war machine was still readily available, but if such methods were employed, "the Government would only be at the beginning of their trouble".[32] In an effort to avoid such an eventuality, the labor spokesmen urged the Prime Minister to reopen negotiations with the railwaymen. The National Federation of Transport Workers president, Ernest Bevin, emphasized that the strike was a economic dispute, not a political one. Moreover, he informed the prime minister that a remark Lloyd George had made the previous Saturday- that the dispute was the result of an anarchists' conspiracy- was encouraging labor to rally around the railwaymen. The prime minister replied he had said that the railwaymen had a legitimate grievance, but he believed a small band of extremists had engineered the dispute to force a fight between labor and government. Lloyd George announced that while he would like to meet with the

[32] War Cabinet 627, 3 October 1919, CAB 23/12, PRO

executive of the National Union of Railwaymen, it was against government policy to join in negotiations with workers who were out on strike. He did suggest it might be possible to enter into a dialogue with the National Union of Railwaymen in an effort to bring the strike to a quicker end.[33]

Two days later, on 3 October, the labor delegation returned to 10 Downing Street, accompanied by J.H. Thomas of the National Union of Railwaymen. The railwaymen offered two proposals for government consideration. They asked the government to raise the minimum wage for railwaymen from 40s a week to 50s and asked the government to agree not to change the wages, that had been increased as a result of the war wage, until 31 December 1921. Lloyd George rejected these proposals. He claimed he would not deal with any specific issues until the railwaymen ended their strike; once the men had returned to work he would consider these proposals as a basis for reopening negotiations.[34] The result was a stalemate, with the National Union of Railwaymen demanding concessions before they returned to work and the government refusing to grant any concessions until the railwaymen did return to work. Lloyd George offered to continue the negotiations, but on a broad basis, avoiding specific issues until the strike was ended, which was accepted by the labor delegation.

While negotiations continued in private, a propaganda

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[33] "Deputation to the Prime Minister from Various Trade Unions; re: Strike of the National Union of Railwaymen", 1 October 1919, G.T. 8295, CAB 24/89, PRO

[34] War Cabinet 627, 3 October 1919, CAB 23/12, PRO

war took shape in public. The National Union of Railwaymen called for a special trade union conference to consider the use of sympathetic strikes on 7 October to aid the railwaymen. That meant a general strike against the government. The cabinet reacted quickly to this threat, calling for the formation of a Citizen Guard to defend the nation from this radical conspiracy. In the public's perception, the tension continued to mount, while in private solutions were being found.[35]

On 5 October a settlement was reached between the National Union of Railwaymen and the government. The settlement granted to railwaymen a minimum wage of 51s as long as the cost of living remained above 110 percent of prewar standards. The war wage would be extended until 30 September 1920, at which point its continuance would be considered based on the cost of living. In addition, negotiations would resume and be completed by 31 December 1919.[36]

Both sides were able to claim a victory. The government could claim they had succeeded in preventing a general strike, managed to maintain order, and defeated one of the nation's largest unions. The National Union of Railwaymen could not make such grandiose claims. In the public perception of events, they had been defeated. The union victory had been a pocketbook victory, with the chance at more gains in the continuing negotiations with the

[35] "The Labour Situation", 8 October 1919, G.T. 8290, CAB 24/89, PRO
[36] Ibid.

government.

Following the success of the Coal Commission and the National Industrial Conference, the government had been placed into a difficult position.It had managed to avoid a strike from any of the nation's larger unions, yet the other unions continued to strike and plagued the economic rebirth of Great Britain following the First World War. The strikes of the Yorkshire miners, bakers union, and policemen's union each demonstrated how much even the smaller unions could interfere with this economic renaissance. The strike of the National Union of Railwaymen gave the cabinet a chance to defeat one of the largest unions as an example to all other unions.That the strike was peaceful and over a genuine trade union dispute pointed that the era of revolutionary trade unionism was passing, and trade unionism was returning to more traditional means and demands.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW ATTITUDE IN LABOR

As the government approached the final quarter of 1919, the labor situation began to quiet down. The coming of winter was beginning to force labor indoors. Without open-air forums, many of Great Britain's most radical labor revolutionaries, found themselves without a ready audience and began to retreat into obscurity. The workers, who had once filled the parks and city squares to hear their oratory, were now not willing to brave the blustery winds of winter, even to visit the public houses and theatres to hear speeches about the glories of a socialist state. The settlement of the National Union of Railwaymen's strike did little to encourage the workers in believing such a state was any nearer to establishment in Great Britain than it had been before the war began five years prior.

The railway strike and the settlement thereafter proved a major victory for the British Government. The strike proved the government was capable of defeating a major industrial union. Yet the strike also proved to be a reminder to government, for it illuminated the fact that industrial unions were still capable of, and in many instances solely concerned with, striking over legitimate labor disputes and not just revolutionary ideals.

For the labor leader interested in more than just industrial harmony, or even fair wages and hours, the National Union of Railwaymen's strike proved the need for a better system of organization among labor. The failure of the railwaymen's strike proved to these radical leaders of labor, more than anyone else, that even the large industrial unions could not oppose the government by themselves with any real hope of victory. They viewed the railwaymen's strike as a definite defeat for labor, but a defeat to be studied. Through such examination these labor leaders hoped to learn what measures would be necessary for the nation's organized labor to defeat the government in the next crisis, which they were sure was coming soon.

The most immediate solution to the problem of cooperation within trade unions offered by the radical section of workers was the establishment of a General Staff for labor.This organization would operate in much the same way as the military's version, coordinating the activities and responsibilities of the various unions during a strike. Although the General Staff would lack any true authority, it could be used as a warehouse for ideas and essentials necessary for a prolonged strike. In an effort to explore the potential use and the necessary equipment such an organization would require, labor leaders formed a United Advisory Board of Trade Unionists and Co-operators.[1]

Moreover, these radical leaders also proposed an

[1] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", 8 October 1919, G.T.- 8304, CAB 24/90, PRO

affiliation with the co-operatives in Great Britain for the expressed purpose of providing their unions with a sure supply of food in the event of a general strike. One of the greatest fears of trade unionists was that the government, being unable to break the strikers' resolve through the usual tactics of intimidation, might resort to blockading food supplies to the strikers and their families. Indeed such action had been considered, though rejected, by the cabinet during the preparations in March 1919 for the threatened strike by the Miner's Federation of Great Britain. Yet through association with the co-operative societies, the unions would no longer have to worry about this threat of government intervention in food supplies, because the co-ops would prove a ready source of food.[2]

For the cabinet, these new ideas clearly created some worry as to the likelihood of a major struggle with workers for control of the government. The General Staff would give the entire trade union movement unity and strength to battle the government. Moreover, the joining of co-operatives with labor was even more disturbing, for it was believed in most government circles that the Bolsheviks owed much of their success to their alliance with the Russian co-operative societies.[3] Yet such dangers, though perceived as a great threat, were still distant possibilities. More immediately, the cabinet faced the assault from the Triple Alliance, as well as continued problems from the policemen's union and the

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", G.T.-8304, 8 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

engineers.

The Triple Alliance was proving to be a problem for government which would not abate. The cabinet had bluffed the Miners' Federation of Great Britain into not striking with the Coal Commission, had granted monetary concessions to the Transport Workers' Federation to prevent them from striking, and had defeated the National Union of Railwaymen when they did walk out on strike, yet these unions refused to retreat from their various demands. The most threatening of these unions was the Miners' Federation of Great Britain which continued to lobby for nationalization of the mines. At the Trades Union Congress in September 1919 it was agreed the leadership of the Trades Union Congress should lead a delegation on behalf of the miners to speak to the prime minister on the issue of nationalization of the mines.

On 9 October, representatives from the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress and the Executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain met with Lloyd George and several members of the cabinet to discuss this issue at length. Robert Smillie, President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, pointed out that the miners had not been in favor of a coal commission, but had agreed to it only after the government urged them to do so, with the understanding the government would adopt whatever recommendations the commission passed. William Brace, a labor representative, emphasized to Lloyd George that the miners were only asking the government to respond to the Sankey Report's plan for an

experimental nationalization during the next three years. They were not demanding immediate nationalization. Brace also pointed out the Home Secretary's pledge that the government would support nationalization if the Sankey Report called for such action.[4]

The Prime Minister responded by saying that in his opinion only four members of the Coal Commission could be considered open-minded- Sankey, Duckham, Smith, and Balfour- and of these only Sankey endorsed the principle of nationalization. Moreover, Lloyd George argued that he and Bonar Law, the actual voices of the government, had never made a pledge to support nationalization. He claimed the Home Secretary's statement did not constitute a pledge on behalf of the government. Finally, Lloyd George asserted the Duckham plan of amalgamation, which the government supported, granted sufficient voice to the miners in the realms of control and safety, and he believed the miners were throwing away an excellent opportunity which could lead to nationalization in the future.[5]

The resulting deadlock between the government and the miners over nationalization forced the miners to reconsider their strategy for forcing the government to liberate them from capitalist oppression. The Trade Union Congress agreed to convene a special congress to consider what measures the trade union movement should take in support of the miners'

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[4] "Deputation from the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee & the Executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to the Prime Minister", G.T.-8305, 9 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

[5] Ibid.

demands. As for the cabinet, there seemed little reason to proceed with the Duckham scheme: the miners opposed it and the cabinet was not inclined to endorse nationalization. This meant the Coal Commission had, in the end, achieved no real change in the existing structure of mine management, despite a majority of the members condemning that system. There was little left for the government to do but await what decision the miners and the Trade Union Congress arrived at for pursuance of this issue.

Yet the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was not the only trade union clamoring for nationalization. The National Union of Railwaymen continued their drive for state ownership of the railways. On 14 October the Executive of the National Union of Railwaymen met with the Prime Minister to discuss the issue of wages, which had brought on the recent strike, and the union's proposal for nationalization. The union president, J.H. Thomas, claimed the railwaymen could not accept the government's proposal to raise wages based on a percentage increase of the prewar wages because the prewar wages were wholly unsatisfactory. Moreover, Thomas argued, there would first have be a standardization of all grades throughout the industry before a fair settlement with regard to wages could be reached. As for nationalization, the National Union of Railwaymen's plan for control of the railways called for government ownership of the railways, which would be placed under a new ministry, responsible to the House of Commons, called the Ministry of Transport. This

new ministry would be given power over all national transport, including railways, highways, waterways, and airways. The proposal also included the creation of a National Board of Control for the Railways, with membership equally divided between appointed representatives from the House of Commons and elected representatives from the railwaymen, to deal with matters arising in the conduct of industry. The prime minister stated he would consider these proposals carefully before issuing his decision.[6]

Yet, before such issues could be fully considered, government was forced to deal with other labor problems which threatened the uneasy peace between labor and government. The proposal for the formation of a General Staff for labor continued to gain momentum. The trade union side of the Provisional Joint Committee of the National Industrial Conference met to consider the formation of such an organization.[7] Moreover, the National Union of Police and Prison Officials continued to agitate among the nation's labor unions for support of their drive for reinstatement. Some trade unionists, such as A.Oliver of the National Union of Railwaymen, noted the railwaymen, who were then employed by the state, had been reinstated following their strike. That having happened, he added, how could the government justify denying reinstatement to these members of the police

[6] "Record of Proceedings of a Meeting with the National Union of Railwaymen at No. 10 Downing Street on Tues. October 14 at 4p.m.", G.T. -8342, 14 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

[7] "The Labour Situation", G.T. -8331, 15 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

force.[8] The sub-committee of the Glasgow Soviet came back into the revolutionary forefront by attempting a run on the Greenock Provident Bank.[9] Trouble was also brewing over the government's failure to implement a just housing program. That failure resulted in many workers being forced to continue living in crowded and substandard housing throughout the winter. Even more threatening was the workers' reaction to the formation of a citizen guard. Indeed, one speaker in Glasgow went so far as to exclaim "if the authorities proceed with the 'White Guard' the workers should form a 'Red Guard'".[10]

The creation of a citizen guard was posing a serious problem for the cabinet. Though primarily the brain child of the Home Secretary, Eric Shortt, the cabinet generally supported idea. The Cabinet hoped a citizen guard would win popular support as a bulwark against bolshevism. Yet the result of the call for a citizen guard had been quite the opposite. The workers saw such an organization as a direct threat to themselves, and in many areas the formation was seen as an encroachment upon the duties of the Special Constables who traditionally dealt with such matters. As a result of the public outcry, the government decided to abandon the idea of creating such units.[11]

Reports kept coming in to the government about new

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[8] Ibid.

[9] "Survey of Revolutionary Feeling During the Year 1919", C.P.- 462, 15 January 1920, CAB 24/96, PRO

[10] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", G.T.- 8361, 16 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

[11] "Citizen Guards", G.T.- 8394, 23 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

problems or new developments and continuing problems. The South Wales Miners' Federation refused to abate its drive for a full income tax exemption for all incomes under £250, although the Miners' Federation of Great Britain did convince them to await the decision of the Royal Commission that was examining that question.[12] The Amalgamated Society of Engineers passed a resolution calling for a 2d.levy per member to assist the National Union of Police and Prison Officials. This action resulted in a check for £1,914 being issued to the police strikers.[13] The movement for cooperation between trade unions and cooperatives continued to gain ground as the London Council formed. It consisted of an equal number of trade unionist and cooperators. Ex-servicemen began to complain about the employment of women in jobs that veterans could preform.[14] Yet the biggest labor news of October 1919 was the decision of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain not to push the Trades' Union Congress for immediate direct action for nationalization. Instead, the miners announced they would commence with a propaganda campaign to win the support of the general populace for their nationalization program. If the government failed to adopt nationalization after this campaign was completed, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain declared they would have no choice but to proceed with a general

[12] "The Labor Situation", G.T.- 8388, 22 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

strike against the government.[15]

In an attempt to forestall continued labor trouble, the cabinet proposed creating a court of arbitration. This new body, to be called the Industrial Court, would be established for voluntary arbitration of trade disputes. The parties would have to agree to abide by the decision of the court and the use of trade union funds would be prohibited for any strike appealing the court's decision. The court would also have the power to establish Courts of Enquiry to examine disputes and make reports. Moreover, awards already granted to a large percentage of an industry would be extended to the whole industry. As a protective measure for the workers, the cabinet proposed an extension of the Wages (Temporary) Act until 30 September 1920.[16]

The extension of the war wage for another twelve months aided government attempts to keep the industrial peace. That gave the nation's unions a respite to continue negations on wages without their having to be concerned about an approaching deadline. As a result of the failure of many strikes, most notably the railway strike, labor appeared more inclined to continue negotiations rather than move toward the picket line. The cabinet's policy of keeping labor negotiating rather than striking appeared to be working.

Yet labor was not willing to admit a capitalist victory. Labor leaders continued to examine the weakness of previous strikes and to find better tactics. One such solution was

[15] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", G.T. -8400, 23 October 1919, CAB 24/90, PRO

[16] "Industrial Courts Bill", C.P.- 6, 27 October 1919, CAB 24/92, PRO

proposed by the railwaymen. They called for a merger of the National Union of Railwaymen and the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen to increase their strength. The proposal would combine the unions' executive, secure members previously earned benefits, and guarantee officials and staff of no loss of position. Also threatening to the government policy was the continued exploration of the effectiveness a General Staff for labor would have in managing future strikes.[17]

Other movements also threatened industrial peace. The movement for a £250 income tax exemption began to grow among the general population and was only halted by the news that the Royal Commission on Income Tax would exempt all incomes under £210.[18] The engineering trades voted on the issue of amalgamation, with seven unions, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the United Machine Workers, the United Kingdom Society of Smiths and Strikers, the Steam Engine Makers Society, the Associated Brass Founders, North of England Brass Turners, and the London United Metal Turners, voting to unite and form a single union of 380,000 members.[19] Thus, the shop stewards movement, which was traditionally strongest in the engineering trades, was now able to control one of the largest labor organizations in Great Britain. The success of the Labour Party during the Municipal Elections also threatened the government. Several government sponsored

[17] "The Labour Situation", C.P.- 25, 29 October 1919, CAB 24/92, PRO
[18] "The Labour Situation", C.P.- 68, 5 November 1919, CAB 24/92, PRO
[19] Ibid.

candidates were defeated by the labor upswing.[20] Such success showed a weakening in overall popular approval for the government, which had been overwhelming the previous winter.

Despite the relative economic peace industry and government enjoyed, the national economy was still not responding. In an effort to encourage the unemployed to seek work, and to save the government money, the cabinet began to discuss the possibility of ending unemployment relief. They decided to stop funding it on 24 November 1919. Yet, it was decided to continue the out of work donation to the nation's ex-servicemen.[21]

Labor made little response to the end of unemployment relief other than some quiet grumbling. Labor had greater problems to consider. The miners, realizing there was little chance of nationalization without the support of the mine managers, began working on converting the managers to nationalization. In Glasgow, a conference of area co-operatives passed a resolution in support of mine nationalization. The co-operative banks began to see deposits rise as more trade unions began to place their funds into these banks.[22] The movement for a General Staff for labor continued to draw supporters, but many within labor wondered how such a force would truly be used.G.D.H. Cole remarked, "We may be able to make our General Staff at five minutes'

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[20] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", C.P. -70, 6 November 1919, CAB 24/92, PRO

[21] Cabinet 4(19), 7 November 1919, CAB 23/18, PRO

[22] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", C.P. -125, 13 November 1919, CAB 24/93, PRO

notice, but what we cannot make in five minutes is our plan of campaign before and after the Revolution."[23]

In response to labor's organizational plans, the cabinet began to discuss what the government's options were during a strike. The cabinet decided it should concern itself solely with those labor stoppages which posed a serious danger to the nation, such as a coal or railway strike, and not become involved in minor stoppages, for example a cotton strike. To investigate possible strategies for the government to employ during such an eventuality and to inventory supplies in government possession which could be utilized in such a struggle, the cabinet agreed a small organization needed to be preserved.[24] Yet the cabinet understood it had time to develop its strategy because labor still had several items to deal with before it could begin to plan any coherent strategies of its own. The most important of these were the problems with the Triple Alliance stemming from the railwaymen having gone on strike without informing its allied unions. At a meeting on 26 November the Triple Alliance met to discuss the problems facing their alliance and to propose solutions. The railwaymen accepted the miners' suggestion that the organization be notified before any future strikes, but rejected the miners' council to refuse any the governmental offer of limited control of the railways. The meeting resulted the three unions agreeing to work more closely with each other in the struggle against the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Cabinet 9(19), 18 November 1919, CAB 23/18, PRO

capitalists.[25]

The restrengthening of ties among the Triple Alliance, convinced the cabinet to continue working to satisfy the railwaymen's demands and thus keep that union at the bargaining table. On 8 December the cabinet and the railway unions reached an agreement in the future organization to assist in the control of the railways. To deal with wages and conditions of service, a Central Board would be created consisting of five railway managers and three National Union of Railwaymen and two Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen representatives. Local committees were to be established to deal with regional concerns. As for issues unresolved by the Central Board, a National Wages Board would be instituted, comprising four members each from managers, workers, and users, with an independent chairman. The Railway Executive Board would be replaced by an Advisory Commission constituted by twelve general managers and four workers' representatives from the three affected unions, including the Railway Clerks' Association. This settlement was similar to the amalgamation scheme rejected by the miners and gave the railwaymen considerable control in the function of their industry. Moreover, this agreement left only the issue of wages to be settled between the cabinet and the National Union of Railwaymen.[26]

Despite the National Union of Railwaymen's willingness to settle, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain continued

[25] "The Labour Situation", C.P. -218, 26 November 1919, CAB 24/94, PRO

[26] "The Labour Situation", C.P.-285, 10 December 1919, CAB 24/94, PRO

its drive for full nationalization of the mines. In response to its pledge, the Trade Union Congress called a Special Congress to discuss what measures should be adopted by the trade unions to combat the perceived government failure to honor the cabinet's promise to the miners. The congress decided to postpone any action until the miners' nationalization campaign had had time to rally the whole of labor to the cause of mine nationalization. Also discussed at the congress was the formation of a General Staff for labor. The delegates agreed the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress should consult with the Labour Party and the co-operative movement to create offices of research, publicity, and legal advice, which would be placed under joint control.[27] Such a formation brought the idea of a General Staff for labor another step closer towards reality. Therefore, the cabinet was forced to examine possible solutions to the problems such an organization offered. On 16 December the government committee charged with examining the possible government role during a major strike returned with its recommendations. The committee proposed several activities in which the government might involve itself without being accused of strike breaking. These included providing the population with food, lighting, sanitation, and coal, as well as the protection of war supplies and those persons aiding the government in providing essential services

[27] "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom", C.P. -283, 11 December 1919, CAB 24/94, PRO and, "The Labour Situation", C.P. 250, 3 December 1919, CAB 24/94, PRO

to the general public.[28]

Yet because the Yuletide season approached, the cabinet understood these measures were not needed immediately. The trade unions were continuing to negotiate rather than walk out. Despite rumors of lightning strikes, which were to occur right before Christmas, in an effort to thrust the workingman's plight into the thoughts of every citizen, no new strikes erupted. Even the Transport Workers' Federation, whose members were eager to test their strength against the government, chose to first address their question of a 16s. per day minimum wage for dockers and waterside workers to the newly created Court of Enquiry.[29] The year of revolution had passed, a new attitude now existed in labor.

Despite the many threats,the final months of 1919 had brought no major action against the government by labor. The cabinet, through its victory in the railway strike, had demonstrated to the unions the futility of striking against the government. Labor continued to negotiate for their demands rather than strike and risk losing everything that might otherwise be gained. The radical sections of labor contented themselves with studying the failures of the summer's strikes and examining methods to increase the power of the nation's unions in preparation for the next year's labor battles which would finally bring the capitalists machinery down. The Cabinet contemplated what would be its best moves during the attacks which were sure to come when

[28] "Activities which the Government may undertake during a strike", C.P. 305, 16 December 1919, CAB 24/95, PRO

[29] "The Labour Situation", C.P. -374, 31 December 1919, CAB 24/95, PRO

weather improved. Yet as for a Bolshevik Revolution in Great Britain, the summer was over and the opportunity was missed. The real drive behind trade union activities in the future would be no more political than the average worker's wallet.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although the likelihood of an imminent revolution was minimal in January 1919, the Lloyd George government chose to deal with the radical agitators as quickly as possible, rather than allow revolutionaries to continue to gain popular support. Despite the visible signs of unrest in the military, the cabinet avoided dealing directly with the military unrest because demobilization would weed out most of these agitators, and, as civilians, they could be dealt with without danger of a military uprising. The trades union leaders, during these early months, granted the government time to deal with the revolutionary agitators, or shop stewards, who the trades union leadership perceived as a threat to their control of the working class. The result of this armistice was the cabinet would have a brief period to move against the shop stewards before organized labor began to drive for its demands which had been put off in favor of the war effort.

Therefore, the strikes in Belfast and Glasgow provided the government with an opportunity to crush the shop stewards' growing popularity and rechannel the workingmens' demands into the less dangerous realm of the trades union movement. The cabinet quickly announced these strikes were illegal because they had not been called by the legitimate

union leadership, and therefore the government would not negotiate with the strike leaders. The riot in Glasgow's St. George's Square allowed the cabinet to emphasize its power by by placing the city under military control. This action caused the demise of the Glasgow shop stewards, who were fiscally wrecked for years as a result of the failed strike. Moreover, the popularity of the shop steward movement began a sharp decline, and workingmen began to turn to their union leadership for guidance.

Despite having averted a continued growth in revolutionary agitation through the destruction of the shop stewards, the government realized the trades union movement offered a danger almost as great as that of the shop stewards. The trades union leadership had spoken with great respect of parliamentary democracy and had sided with the government against shop steward radicalism, yet the cabinet perceived trades unionism, especially that offered by the Triple Alliance, warily, because these leaders spoke, not of overthrowing the government, but of making the government subservient to trades unions' demands. Even more alarming than the Triple Alliance's treats was the realization by the cabinet that these tactics might very well work.

In March 1919, the nation's coal stocks were near famine levels, and the rail and transport networks were vital to the nation's economic reconversion. The cabinet could ill afford a fight with this union conglomerate. The only choice left to the government was to trick the unions into delaying

any action until the cabinet was in a stronger position and better equipped to combat such industrial action. The cabinet therefore established the Coal Commission and the National Industrial Council to address the grievances of the workingmen and to propose suggestions to the cabinet for greater industrial harmony. This action produced the desired effect of the government in that it delayed the unions from striking at such a critical moment.

While the summer progressed into fall, the British trades unions began to realize the folly of participating in the government's commissions because the government was not implementing the suggestions from these committees into law. The first union to create problems for the government was the Yorkshire miners who went on strike in opposition to the reduction in piece rate workers' salaries by the government. The National Union of Police and Prison Officials also chose this time to come out in opposition to the governmental passage of the Police Bill, which threatened to destroy trade unionism in the police force. The Bakers' Union went on strike over the issue of night baking. In each case the cabinet responded differently to the strikers. The cabinet sided with the bakers against the owners, forcing the owners to accept the Bakers' Union proposals. In the Yorkshire miners' strike, the government attempted to back the owners. Yet in the end, with the acknowledgement that the owners would not oppose the miners' demands, the cabinet was forced to seek a peaceful solution to the problem. But in dealing

with the National Union of Police and Prison Officials, the cabinet stood firm in opposition. The government made clear their position that the police did not have the right to strike, and when some of police went out on strike, they were quickly dismissed from the force.

The cabinet continued its policy of attempting to appease the labor unions through negotiations, but perceived the need to combat one of the nation's major unions and defeat it as an example of the power of the government. Although the Miners' Federation of Great Britain may have been the expected target, the National Union of Railwaymen proved to be the unfortunate victim. The railwaymen went out when they perceived a lack of progress in negotiations with the government. The strike had been called without the notification to their Triple Alliance allies, who were unable to join their brethren on the picket lines rapidly. The cabinet reacted swiftly, organizing alternative means of transport for industry and commerce and lessening the severity of the railway strike. Other unions in the country joined forces and threatened to strike in support of the railwaymen, which forced the government to act swiftly in dealing with the railwaymen, who were eager to settle the issue. The result was still a government victory in that the railwaymen returned to work without winning any of their demands.

The final months of 1919 saw the government return to a position of strength in opposition to the labor unions. The

radical agitators, who had spoke so eloquently of the feasibility of labor bringing down the government, had been proven wrong. The workers had returned to the traditional, conservative union leadership and the nation began to return to the business of reestablishing British domination of world trade.

The year 1919 proved to be a period of trials for the British government. The cabinet had entered the year with a three-fold plan. The first element of this was to destroy the radicalism of the shop steward movement, which although in decline since the announcement of the Armistice with Germany in November 1918, could still prove a dangerous threat if given the right issue. Through its harsh treatment of the Glasgow and Belfast strikes, the
cabinet succeeded in bringing about the demise of the shop stewards. The second element of the government plan called for the reduction of tensions whereby the workers would believe their demands could be met by government without resorting to a strike. The cabinet created the National Industrial Conference and The Coal Commission to serve this purpose.The final stage of this plan was the defeat of a major industrial union at the hands of the government to emphasize to the rank-and-file worker that the government was not as weak as the revolutionary agitators claimed and therein discredit these radicals in the eyes of the workers. It was the railway strike that gave the cabinet the opportunity it desired.

The cabinet was equally fortunate to have in its midst rational men. That Lloyd George listened to the advice of Andrew Bonar Law, Sir Robert Horne, and Winston Churchill is a tribute to his leadership. These men believed a period of labor unrest would follow the war, but such unrest was not a definite precursor to a revolution. Had Lloyd George listened to the council of reactionaries such as E.S.Shortt and Robert Munro, I believe the clashes with labor would have been far more severe and threatening to the government.

Yet the question remains: did the British workers miss an opportunity to overthrow the capitalist system in 1919. Indeed, many labor leaders thought so, including William Gallacher, who, in reflecting on the Glasgow strike, stated "We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution."[26] Yet the facts do not support Gallacher's belief. In my opinion, Great Britain had not suffered the physical damage or economic stress necessary to turn the average worker against the government. Without the shop steward movement, which had been in decline since the end of the war,and was all but destroyed by March 1919, the workers lacked a direct access to the militant labor leadership which would be necessary to create a class consciousness in the workers. This class consciousness was wholly lacking among the British workers, which was demonstrated in the postwar elections in which the Labour Party was only the third strongest party in the new

[26] William Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), 221

Parliament. Moreover, because the union leadership was generally conservative, a strong shop steward movement would be necessary to lead the workers in revolt. Also, the radicals lacked a unity of purpose; they worked independently of each other in their attempts to bring about the socialist revolution. The combination of these factors point out that if the workers had attempted a revolution in January 1919, as Gallacher suggests, they would have been soundly beaten and the government would have, in all likelihood, responded by passing some ultra-conservative legislation. For a revolution in Great Britain to have been successful, I believe the workers and the troops would have to have become far more dissatisfied and be organized along shop steward lines.

Despite its failure to achieve a workers' revolution, the British labor movement continued to make strides towards the demands of 1919. In early 1920 the National Union of Railwaymen completed their negotiations with the government, winning very scanty additions to the wage scale they had rejected in September 1919. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, having ended the nationalization campaign with little result, resolved to strike for state control of the mines. The government vigorously defeated this strike and forced the miners to abandon their dream of achieving government ownership through an industrial strike.

The Lloyd George government, which won the war and prevented revolution, survived only three more years, dissolving in 1922. The resulting election saw the formation

of a Conservative government under Andrew Bonar Law. The Liberal Party suffered during this election. The split between Asquith and Lloyd George in 1916-18, remained unhealed and severely hurt the Liberals. Moreover, the Liberals were also injured by the growing popularity of the Labour Party. The Liberal split and the growing support for Labour resulted in a downward spiral from which the Liberals never fully recovered.

As for the workingmens' movement, the great General Strike, which had been heralded for years as the one power which could break the will of the government, commenced in March 1926. The strike initially began as a strike of some 1,200,000 coal miners over the issue of wages. It was the result of the withdrawal of government subsidies to industry, yet it was quickly joined by several other unions. The government refused to back down on its position. The result was a standoff. The miners continued their strike after the General Strike collapsed, but were eventually forced to return to work at lower wages. The government proved itself able to provide the nation with essential services, whereas labor proved itself to be unable to support its brother workers.

Throughout the interwar years, labor saw its position improve through the growing power of the Labour Party. In 1924 the Labour Party formed a coalition government with the Liberals, yet the coalition quickly collapsed. The Labour Party got control of the House of Commons in 1929. This time

Labour was able to remain in power for two years and continued its influence in a coalition government from 1931-1935. Some labor activists were also able to adjust to the changing perceptions of labor and government. Emmanuel Shinwell and William Gallacher, both of Clyde shop steward fame, were elected to Parliament in 1929 and 1935 respectively. Yet despite these successes, the Labour Party was never strong enough during these years to legislate its platform into law.

The elections of 1945 gave Labour a mandate to implement its program. The government of Clement Attlee was elected on a promise of nationalization. The first step in the program came in 1946 with the nationalization of the Bank of England. Later that year, the government established the National Coal Board, thus nationalizing the coal industry under the Ministry of Fuel and Power. In 1947 the government passed a controversial nationalization bill granting the British Transport Commission control of the nations' railways and road and canal transport. Although the motion to nationalize the railways was generally supported, debate ensued over the nationalization of the road and canal transport system. The Labour government established the British Electric Authority and the Gas Council, giving the government control of the nation's utilities. Finally in 1949 Parliament passed a measure to allow the government to acquire iron and steel industries. Thus, by 1950, the former Triple Alliance unions were granted their dream of nationalization. Moreover, with

the purchase of the iron and steel industries, many of the strongholds of the shop stewards movement were now in the hands of the government.

Although labor's dream of a socialist society was not achieved in 1919, a great many of their aspirations were achieved by the 1950s. The shop stewards' plan for socialism through revolution or industrial action began to appear unrealistic to the workers of 1919. These workers chose rather, to endorse the ideas of the trades unions leadership who spoke for gradual change. By 1950, the radical shop stewards were forgotten and the trades unions' leaders were proven correct: socialism may be achieved through democratic methods.

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