



**"Not a minute on the day,  
not a penny off the pay"**

# **The 1926 Miners' Lock Out and General Strike**

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Boldon Methodist Church soup kitchen 1926

# The role of Unite's legacy unions across the North (NEYH) region during the 1926 General Strike (GS)

Packed with coal mines and heavily industrialised, the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside region played a major role in the 1926 General Strike (GS), which was the second such strike in Britain, the first occurring in 1842 when half a million workers, stretching from Dundee to Cornwall, participated in a strike over pay and extending the right to vote.

The background to the 1926 GS was the national lock-out, on 1 May, of around 1.2 million miners who had refused to agree to the coal mine owners demands for reductions in pay and conditions.

During WWI, the knowledge that private enterprise was unable to provide the products needed to keep the fires of war burning resulted in the Government intervening in, including taking control of, several major industries. These included coal.

Once the conflict ended, the Government skilfully handled the pressure it was under to nationalise the coal industry by setting up a Royal Commission, led by Mr Justice Sankey, that subsequently dismissed this proposal.

Partly influenced by syndicalism, some in the trade union movement viewed the GS as an offensive instrument to attack the capitalist system. This would eventually lead to its overthrow and possible replacement by a new system - Communism - which was being put into practice following the 1917 Russian Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union, which was a federal union of multiple national republics, the first self-declared socialist state.

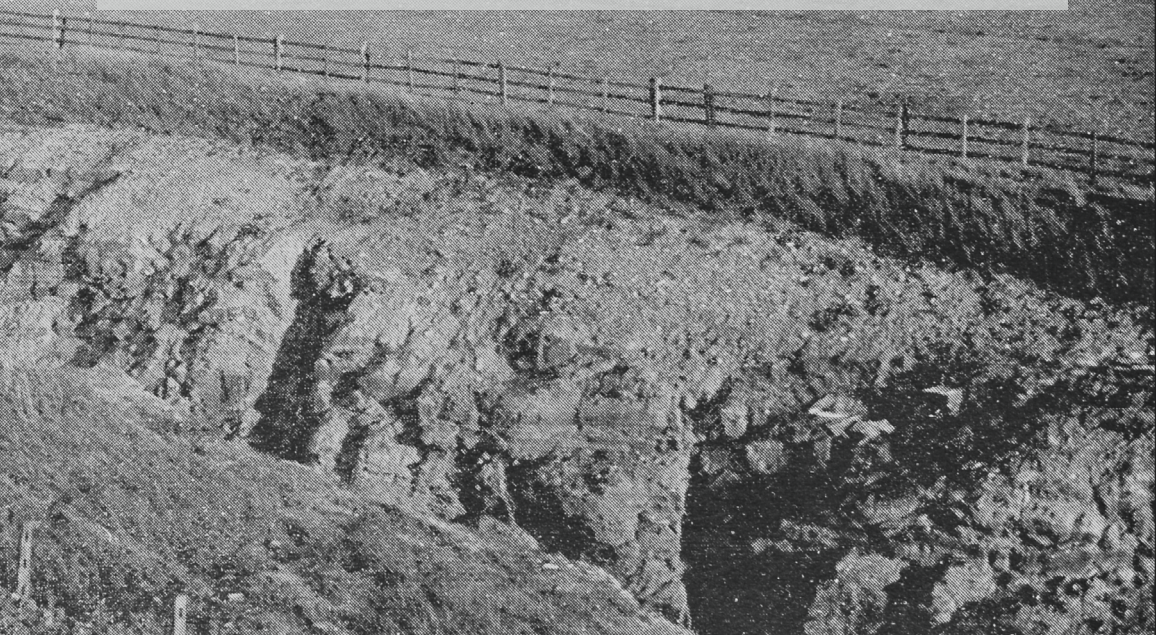


## th East, Yorkshire and Humberside S) and the Miners' Lockout

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was highly active throughout the 1926 GS and some party members played leading roles.

In 1921, and with the coal industry set to be handed back to its owners, who were insisting on cutbacks in pay and conditions, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) appealed to the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Transport Workers' Federation (TWF) to bring the general strike idea to life by joining them on strike. When the suggestion was rejected by both bodies the miners subsequently suffered a historic defeat on "Black Friday." (15 April 1921)

Britain's coal exports continued to fall over the following years. In the summer of 1925, the coal owners informed the MFGB that coal was being produced at a loss and that they intended again to reduce pay and conditions dramatically while also reorganising the industry through a capital investment programme. Jobs would be lost.





## Conflict delayed

When the MGFB refused to negotiate wage reductions or longer working hours, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) - which had taken on during that summer the coordinating role of the strike, ultimately successful, by a quarter of a million textile workers across West Yorkshire – brought together a meeting of unions representing various groups of transport workers such as the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), then headed by Ernest Bevin.

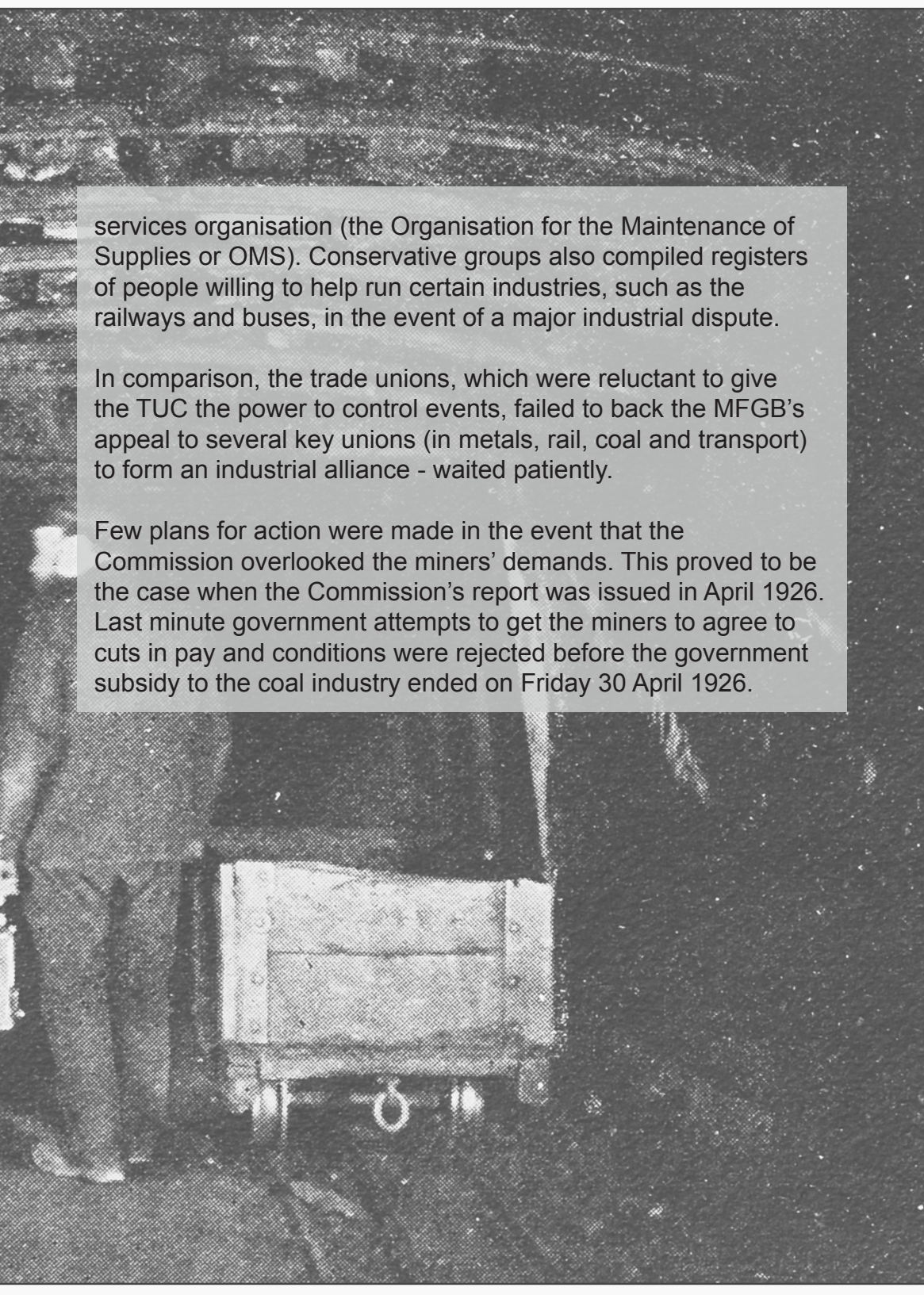
Transport workers agreed to support the miners by imposing an embargo, stopping all movements of coal, then the main means of power generation. On 31 July 1925, a coordinated strike of mine, railway and transport workers was due to begin.

On midnight on 31 July 1925, however, Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government announced it was again establishing a Royal Commission to examine the problems of the coal industry. The Commission would provide its final report at the end of April the following year and meanwhile the government would provide the coal industry with a subsidy to cover the gap between the production and market price of coal. This labour movement "victory" on a Friday became popularly known as "Red Friday".

The Royal Commission, which did not contain anyone from the trade union and labour movement, simply pushed the problem into the following year. The coal owners were confident their views would be backed by the Commission, whose remit was "to inquire into and report upon the economic position of the Coal Industry and the conditions affecting it and to make any recommendations for the improvement thereof."

Meanwhile, the government updated the secretive emergency



A grainy, black and white photograph serves as the background for the text. It shows the lower half of a person standing on the left, wearing dark trousers and light-colored shoes. In the center, there is a small, rectangular object on wheels, possibly a cart or a box, with a handle or ring visible at the bottom. The background is dark and indistinct.

services organisation (the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies or OMS). Conservative groups also compiled registers of people willing to help run certain industries, such as the railways and buses, in the event of a major industrial dispute.

In comparison, the trade unions, which were reluctant to give the TUC the power to control events, failed to back the MFGB's appeal to several key unions (in metals, rail, coal and transport) to form an industrial alliance - waited patiently.

Few plans for action were made in the event that the Commission overlooked the miners' demands. This proved to be the case when the Commission's report was issued in April 1926. Last minute government attempts to get the miners to agree to cuts in pay and conditions were rejected before the government subsidy to the coal industry ended on Friday 30 April 1926.



## The miners are locked out

Standing behind the slogan, "Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay", hundreds of thousands of miners were immediately locked out of their workplaces by the Mining Association (MA) which terminated all mineworkers' contracts and stated they were seeking to "obtain liberty of action."

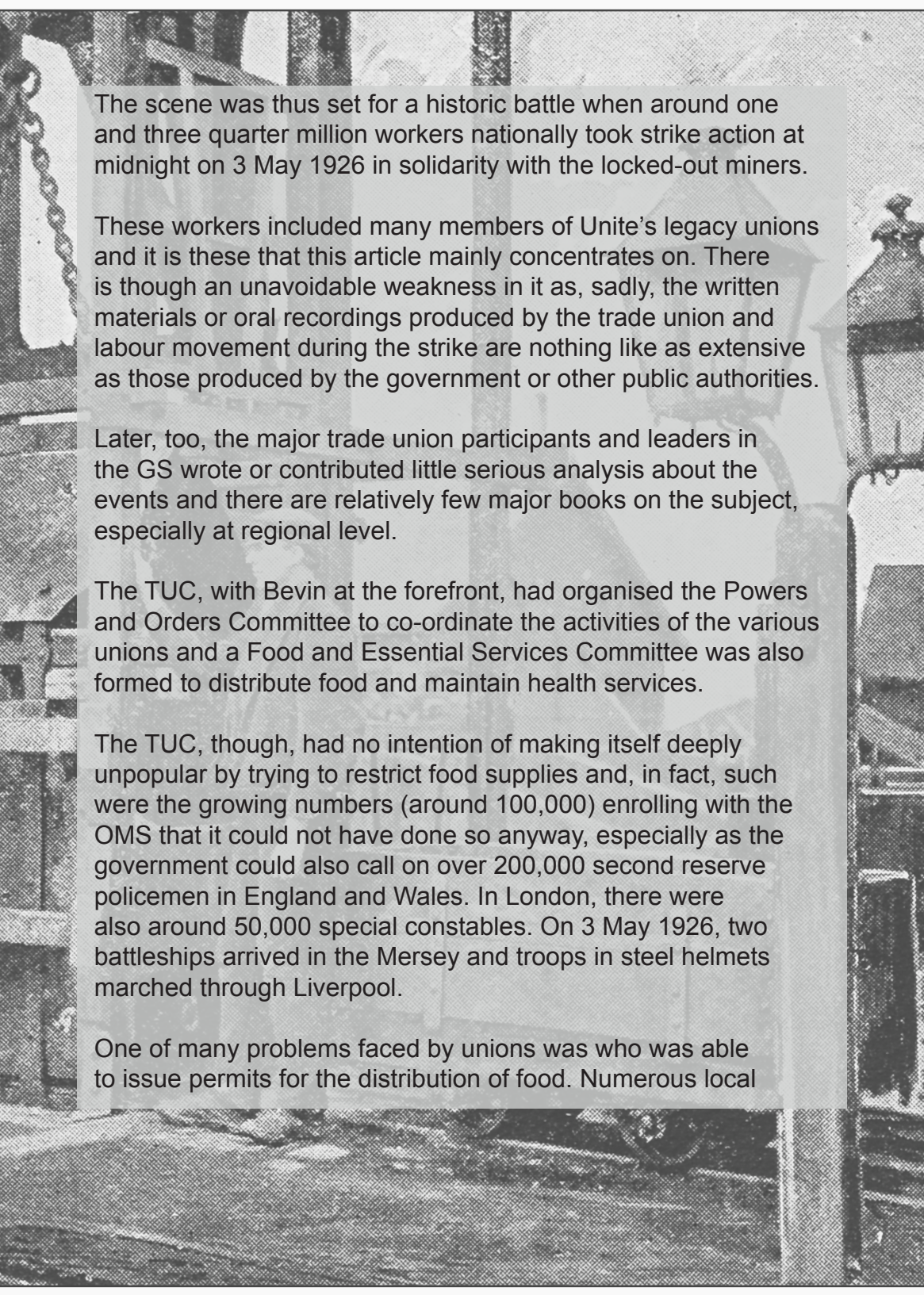
On May Day 1926, the TUC leadership organised a meeting at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London and established a negotiating committee to defend the miners with Bevin imploring everyone "to fight for the soul of labour and the salvation of the miners."

It was announced "no person in the first grade [these were in printing, iron and steel, heavy chemicals, building, electricity and gas, railway, road transport and docks) must go to work at starting time on Tuesday morning, that is to say if a settlement has not been found."

A second line of workers in industries such as engineering, shipbuilding and textiles was held in reserve. Only the first two were subsequently called out on Wednesday 12 May, the day the GS was called off.

Over May 2nd and 3rd 1926, the TUC Industrial Committee, established on 14 April to prepare concrete proposals for strike action, sought to negotiate an agreement with the government before the latter withdrew from discussions. In the Cabinet there was a reactionary group including the likes of Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain, keen to take a strong line with labour.





The scene was thus set for a historic battle when around one and three quarter million workers nationally took strike action at midnight on 3 May 1926 in solidarity with the locked-out miners.

These workers included many members of Unite's legacy unions and it is these that this article mainly concentrates on. There is though an unavoidable weakness in it as, sadly, the written materials or oral recordings produced by the trade union and labour movement during the strike are nothing like as extensive as those produced by the government or other public authorities.

Later, too, the major trade union participants and leaders in the GS wrote or contributed little serious analysis about the events and there are relatively few major books on the subject, especially at regional level.

The TUC, with Bevin at the forefront, had organised the Powers and Orders Committee to co-ordinate the activities of the various unions and a Food and Essential Services Committee was also formed to distribute food and maintain health services.

The TUC, though, had no intention of making itself deeply unpopular by trying to restrict food supplies and, in fact, such were the growing numbers (around 100,000) enrolling with the OMS that it could not have done so anyway, especially as the government could also call on over 200,000 second reserve policemen in England and Wales. In London, there were also around 50,000 special constables. On 3 May 1926, two battleships arrived in the Mersey and troops in steel helmets marched through Liverpool.

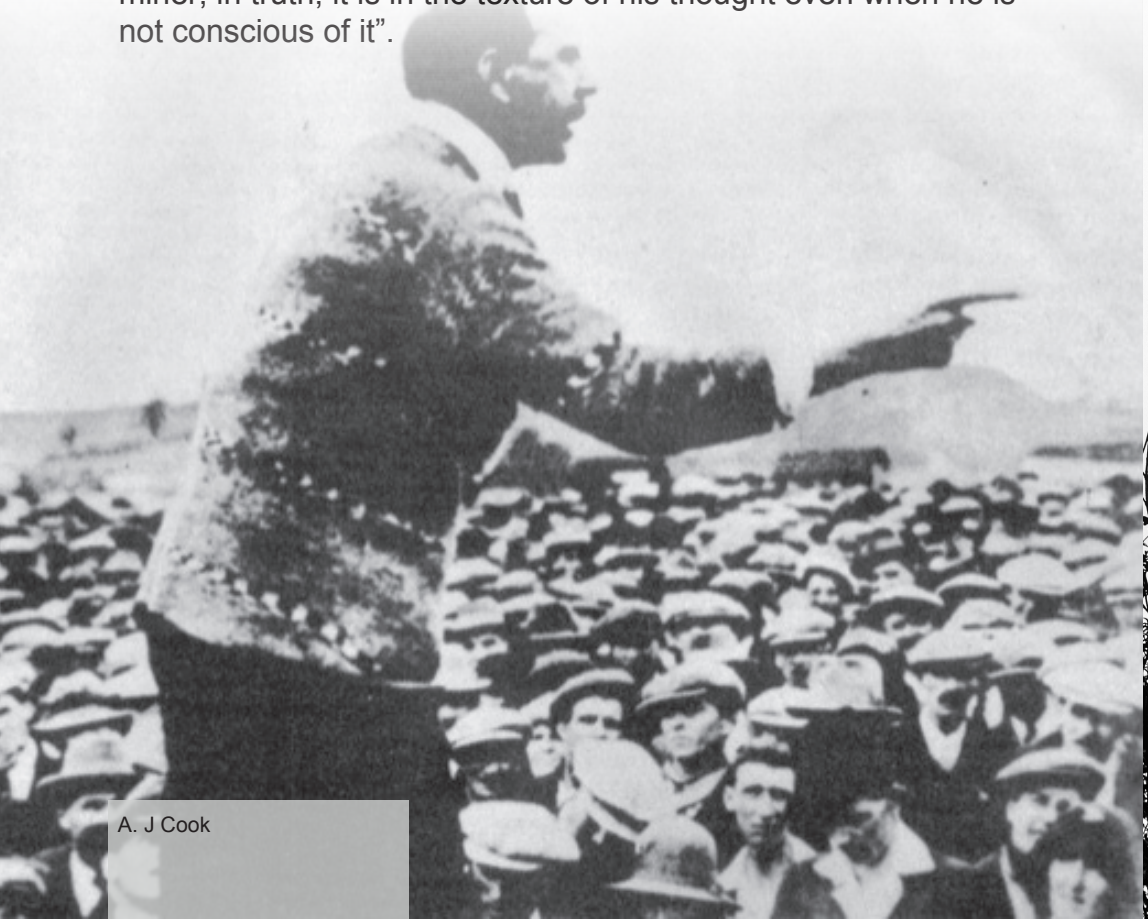
One of many problems faced by unions was who was able to issue permits for the distribution of food. Numerous local



Councils of Action, such as in Bradford, had sprung up spontaneously and were issuing permits before it was eventually agreed that only local transport committees, based upon transport unions, would have such powers.

As the GS started, miners mounted picket lines at locked gates and right across the NEYH region – around 150,000 were employed in the pits in Durham, 181,000 in Yorkshire and West Riding and 58,000 in Northumberland – there was no difficulty about gathering pickets to ensure that the strike was enforced.

The miners were determined to protect their jobs and conditions. Jack Lawson was the miners' MP for Chester-le-Street in 1926. He later commented accurately that the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) "is an integral part of the life of the Northern miner; in truth, it is in the texture of his thought even when he is not conscious of it".



A. J Cook



The DMA had been at the forefront of the fight for a shorter working day and Durham's coalface workers (mainly hewers) worked between six and six-and three-quarter hours underground. This was a tradition untouched since a district agreement of 1890 and their example had been important in convincing the Sankey Commission of the viability of a seven-hour day.

Underground working ponies enjoyed a welcome break from the dark when they were brought out of the mines and fussed over and overfed by miners, who loved the animals.



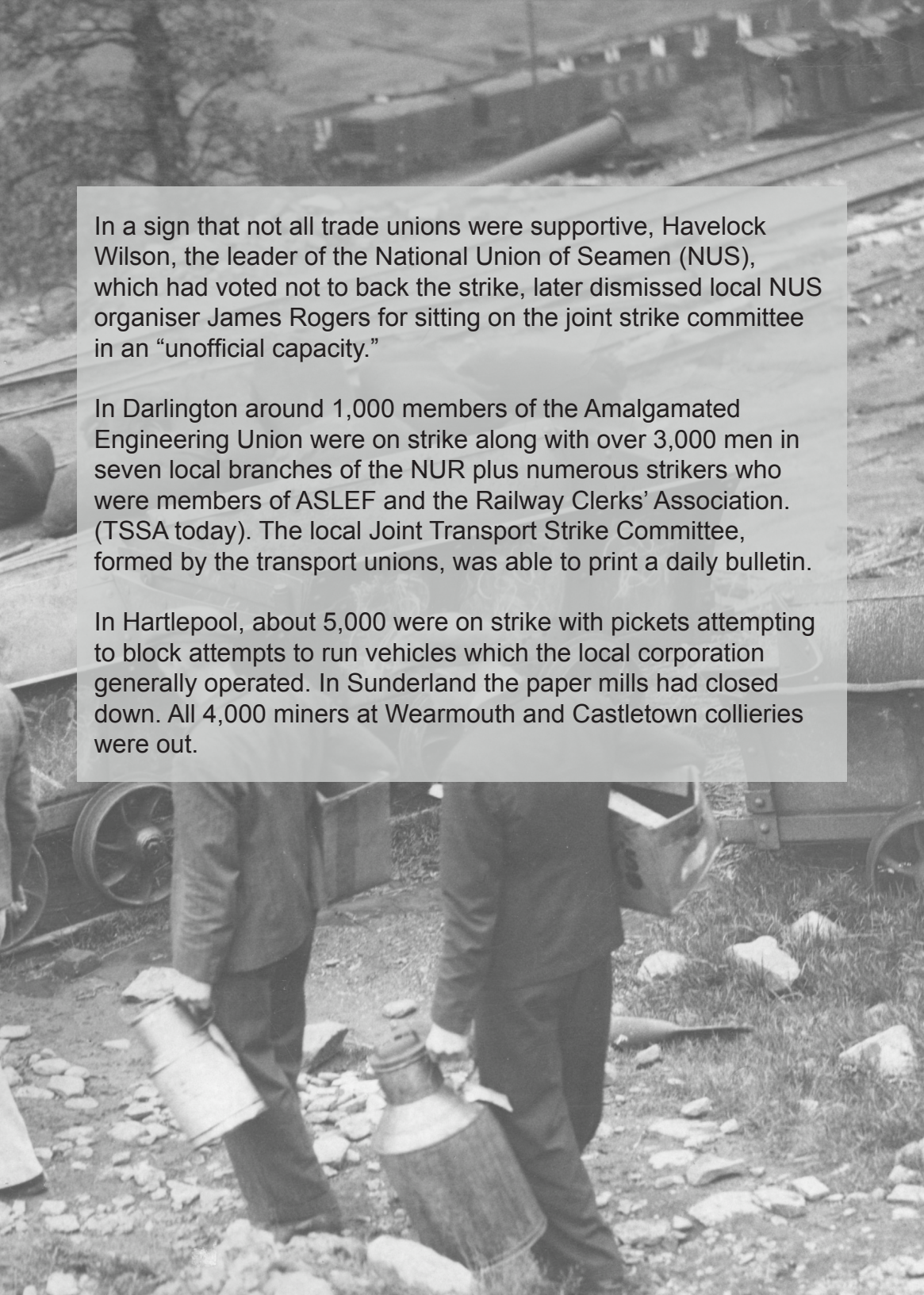
## Hundreds of thousands enthusiastically back the General Strike call

The strike was enthusiastically backed by the overwhelming majority of trade unionists asked by their unions to take part and, to keep them informed, the TUC set up a Publicity Committee to counter government propaganda. There were no cases of grave disorder reported as the strike began and across the NEYH area the GS was received with calmness. Nevertheless, police were drafted to Durham from West Riding, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk

A TUC newspaper, the British Worker, went into production on Wednesday 5 May 1926. It was distributed by print workers through the trade unions and their dispatch riders. Circulation in London reached half a million but that failed to satisfy national demands. Other editions were produced, including in Leeds, where around 40,000 had responded immediately to the strike call, and Newcastle where the trade union movement locally worked to set up its own central strike committee for a large part of Northumberland and Durham. This was no easy task as each union often jealously guarded its independence.

The joint strike committee in Newcastle consisted of 14 organisations, including Newcastle Trades Council and the TGWU. It published the Newcastle Workers' Chronicle. It backed strikes by workers in the electricity supply industry aimed at cutting off electricity supplies to local industry. This, though, proved ineffective when scab labour was brought in and, while the strike did not last long enough for coal stocks to be exhausted, electricity had to be rationed as was later the case when miners were on strike in the 1970s.





In a sign that not all trade unions were supportive, Havelock Wilson, the leader of the National Union of Seamen (NUS), which had voted not to back the strike, later dismissed local NUS organiser James Rogers for sitting on the joint strike committee in an “unofficial capacity.”

In Darlington around 1,000 members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union were on strike along with over 3,000 men in seven local branches of the NUR plus numerous strikers who were members of ASLEF and the Railway Clerks’ Association. (TSSA today). The local Joint Transport Strike Committee, formed by the transport unions, was able to print a daily bulletin.

In Hartlepool, about 5,000 were on strike with pickets attempting to block attempts to run vehicles which the local corporation generally operated. In Sunderland the paper mills had closed down. All 4,000 miners at Wearmouth and Castletown collieries were out.



## Tension and conflict with police

In Middlesbrough, the Trades Council Secretary reported that 10,964 men were on strike with a further 3,250 blast furnace men unemployed as a result of the strike.

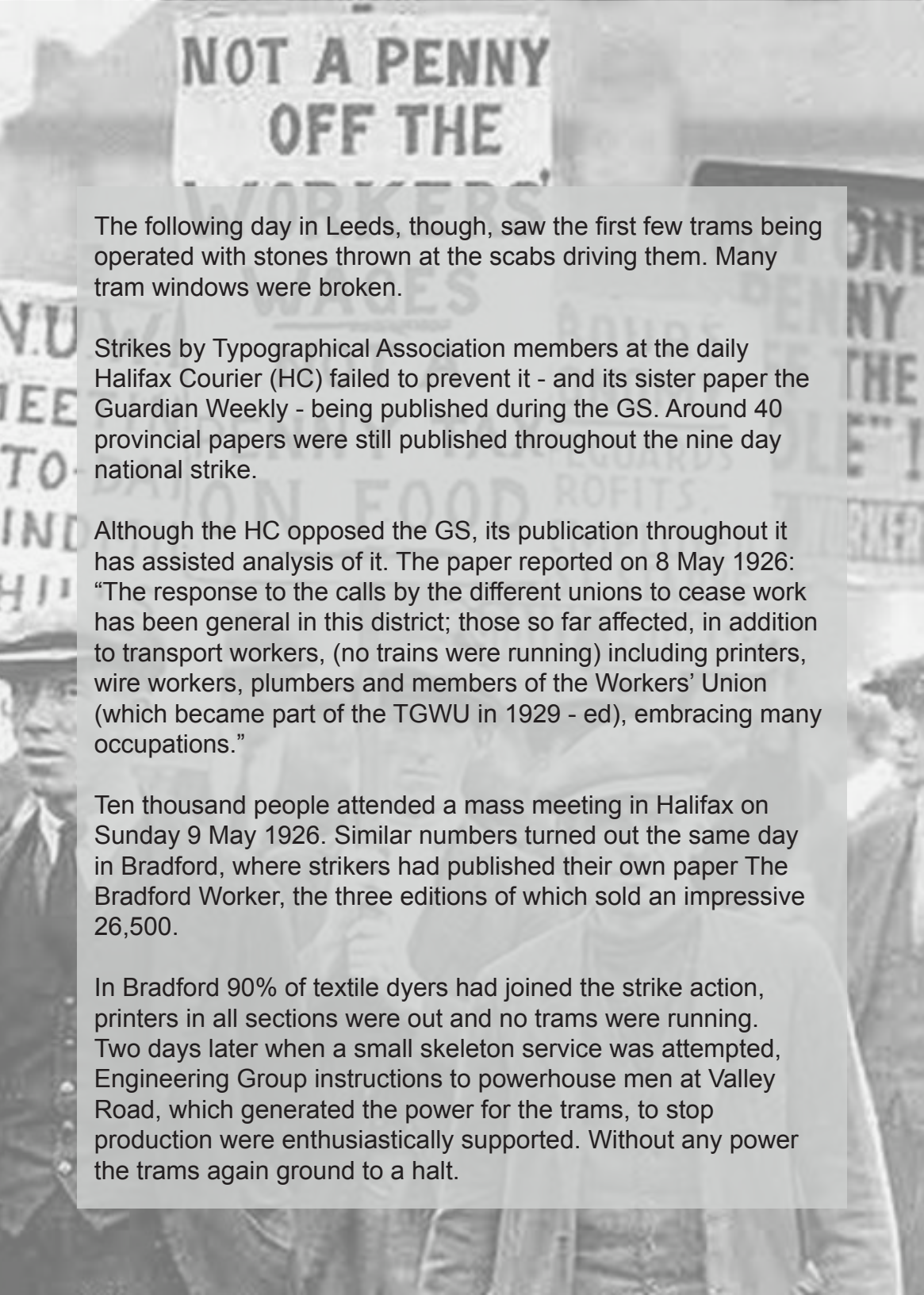
The solidarity of workers considerably surpassed anything previous seen in the area. Tensions overspilled at one point when large, unorganised crowds of several thousand people attempted to stop a train in Middlesbrough on 6 May. Police drew batons in an attempt to disperse the crowds.

There were also disturbances further down the coast in Hull where 25,000 plus had withdrawn their labour. Strike breakers were enrolled at the City Hall on 7 May. A large crowd objected and, when the police charged at them using their batons, a fierce fight broke out. There were similar scenes the following day when tramcars were run by volunteers. Across the city, strike pay was distributed at the Trades and Labour Club in Kingston Square and Owen Hall in Baker Street. Large queues of workmen besieged both locations.

Conflict with the police also took place in Newcastle and in Leeds where a Workers' Defence Corps was organised to provide for self-defence in the event of clashes with the police. Pickets had ensured that 100% were out on the railways and 98% on road transport.

In South Yorkshire, Sheffield's iron, steel and engineering firms, including Vickers, were closed as soon as the strike started at 23.59pm on Tuesday 4 May 1926.



The background image is a grayscale photograph of a protest. At the top, a large sign reads "NOT A PENNY OFF THE WORKERS' WAGES". To the right, another sign partially shows "ONE NY THE E". In the lower right, a man in a cap is visible. The text of the document is overlaid on this image.

The following day in Leeds, though, saw the first few trams being operated with stones thrown at the scabs driving them. Many tram windows were broken.

Strikes by Typographical Association members at the daily Halifax Courier (HC) failed to prevent it - and its sister paper the Guardian Weekly - being published during the GS. Around 40 provincial papers were still published throughout the nine day national strike.

Although the HC opposed the GS, its publication throughout it has assisted analysis of it. The paper reported on 8 May 1926: "The response to the calls by the different unions to cease work has been general in this district; those so far affected, in addition to transport workers, (no trains were running) including printers, wire workers, plumbers and members of the Workers' Union (which became part of the TGWU in 1929 - ed), embracing many occupations."

Ten thousand people attended a mass meeting in Halifax on Sunday 9 May 1926. Similar numbers turned out the same day in Bradford, where strikers had published their own paper The Bradford Worker, the three editions of which sold an impressive 26,500.

In Bradford 90% of textile dyers had joined the strike action, printers in all sections were out and no trams were running. Two days later when a small skeleton service was attempted, Engineering Group instructions to powerhouse men at Valley Road, which generated the power for the trams, to stop production were enthusiastically supported. Without any power the trams again ground to a halt.



Despite the crippling lack of preparation nationally and regionally across NEYH it is clear, even from the relatively limited information available, that members of all unions called upon to back the miners had rallied wholeheartedly to the cause.

At the same time, there appeared to be no backtracking by the government in its own determination not to retreat. On this, they retained the backing of the coal owners and the capitalist class in general. Volunteers of varying levels of competence were also being increasingly used to replace strikers at workplaces such as the docks, buses, trams and on the railways. Troops were also drafted in to ensure that the government was firmly in control of essential services.

Any outbreaks of disorder had been contained and food supplies, protected in many cases by the police and army, were returning to normal with foodstuffs arriving at docks being unloaded and transported subsequently from there by strike breakers.

The government had also made contingency plans to introduce emergency legislation that would have made sympathetic (“secondary”) striking more difficult and was relentlessly promoting through its own mouthpiece, the British Gazette, the argument that the GS was a direct challenge not only to its own authority but to the constitutional order in general.



## TUC General Council fearful of the fight

As the vast majority of the TUC General Council, which from the start had shown only lukewarm commitment to the GS, never had any revolutionary intentions then such Government plans and charges helped pile pressure on them into seeking a settlement.

NUR leader, Jimmy Thomas, in particular had never wanted to back the GS and had throughout the action sought to mislead the TUC General Council into believing that his ongoing semi-clandestine negotiations with Lord Samuel contained a compromise solution that the Government would support.

This was not true. (Thomas said on 13 May in the House of Commons that ending the strike was needed before “It got out of hand.” ) With hundreds of thousands of workers from across many different industries and unions set to join in the strike action on Wednesday 12 May, the TUC General Council, unable to get the miners to agree to new reduced terms and conditions, caved in and immediately called the strike off without even receiving any guarantees from the government on such issues as victimisation.



Boldon Colliery locked-out miners



# Victimisation

Subsequent pleas to employers, especially on the railways, for there to be no victimisation were mainly disregarded. Some employers such as the Manchester Guardian newspaper snapped up the opportunity to derecognise unions. The paper denounced trade unions as “instruments of industrial war.... which when practised on a sufficiently large scale is almost indistinguishable from civil war.”

Conflict with the State was inevitable it was stated. Other papers printed even worse things with the Daily Mirror comparing strikers to “a foreign foe in 1914.”

In Hull, over 30,000 workers including railwaymen, printers, dockers and engineers remained on strike after 12 May in support of the reinstatement of 150 victimised tramway workers who had found their jobs taken by strike breakers. At the Bradford textile company of Henry Ayrton and Co at Westbrook Mills, 15 trade union members were sacked when they attempted to return to their jobs.

Huge numbers of workers were disappointed at the strike being called off. The Sheffield Central Dispute Committee expressed its “keen dissatisfaction” and “pledge[d] its support to all trade unionists who are continuing the struggle”. 80,000 workers had been on strike in Sheffield and the committee continued to function for another 3-4 months, being mainly involved in seeking funding support for the miners.

Funds were needed (in fact the amounts, even though boosted by support from the Soviet Union, donated thereafter were much less than required) but it was only by sustained mass strike action that the miners could possibly have won.



Urged on by the MA, the Government, with the support of the House of Lords, passed new legislation on 8 July providing for a temporary extension of hours on the basis of eight per day for miners. The mine owners announced new employment terms based on the 8-hour day.

## Isolated

The miners had been left to fight on alone.

Joseph Foster, interviewed in April 2005, recalled events in Burnhope in 1926, when he was 14, as “being a terrible time. I saw the worst of the strike. No clothes, no shoes, no food... families couldn’t make ends meet.

“Even today, I have a lot, a lot of sympathy for the poor old miners. I saw it all. I saw them... One chap lost his leg, Frankie Bennett. Billy Mordue, he was a good footballer, he lost from his ankle down there. They never had, they had nothing at all. They had, they had nothing to grasp on to. It was from one thing down and down and down all the time actually. You must remember they were out of work a long, long time.”

Interviewed in November 2004, Eveline Johnson of Trimdon Station, said that miners’ wives “managed the best way they could, and in every way they could you know. But there were soup kitchens of course.

“There was good camaraderie down there. They would do anything for each other. They all stuck together - the pitmen - down the pit. They worked for each other.”

Foster remembered an incident in which a delivery van was tipped over by four striking miners, Ted Close, Harry Hobbs, Jim

Hobbs and Frankie Armstrong who had all been left angry after they had been forced to dive out of the way when the van was earlier driven at them. The events led to soldiers being sent to Burnhope. "They were walking about with bayonets, with guns."

Large numbers of men previously associated with the armed forces were sent to reinforce the police across mining communities. In fact, violence largely ceased across most northern mining communities after the end of May until the late autumn, when the noticeable back-to-work movement naturally caused friction.

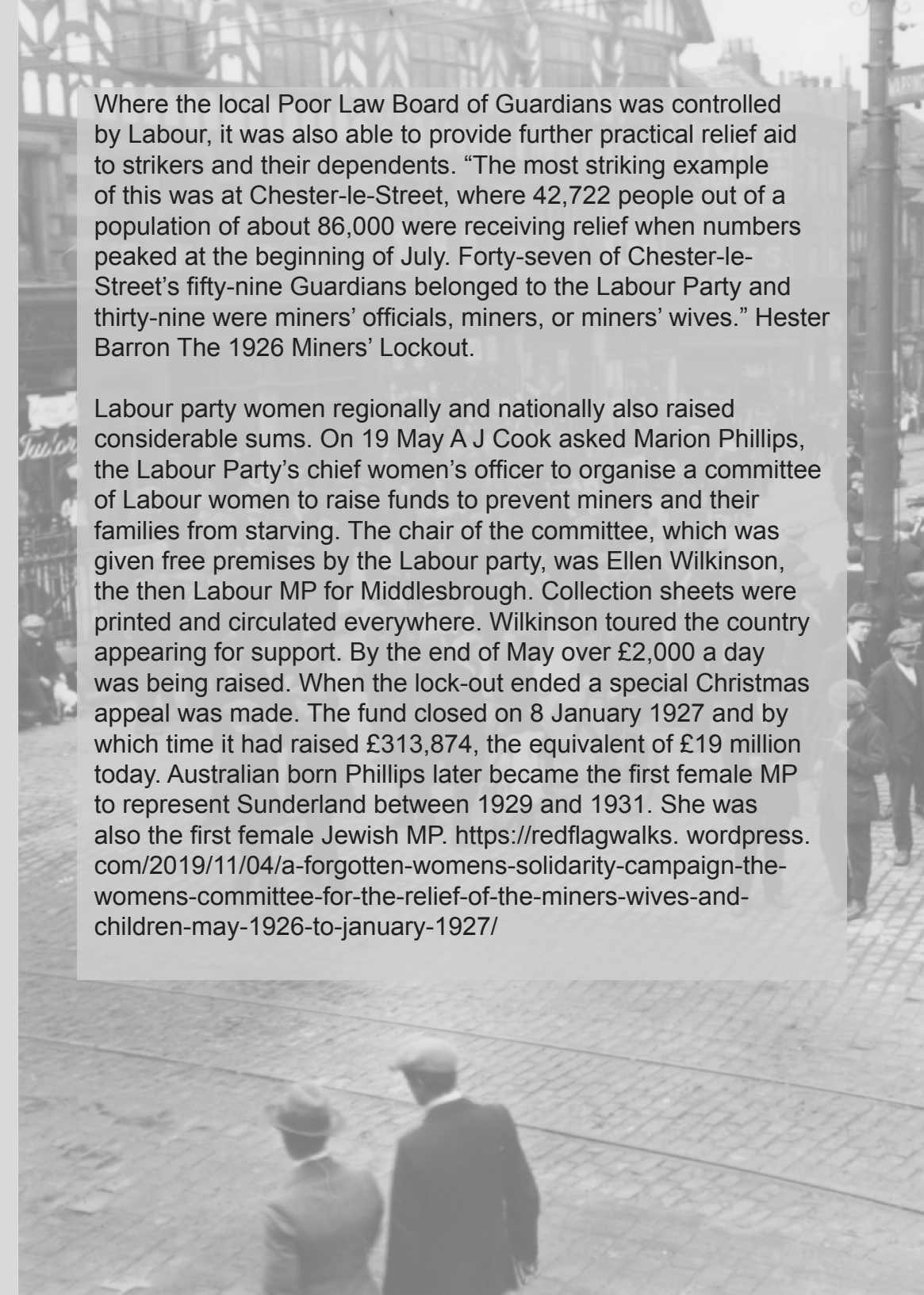
## **Labour authorities provide practical relief**

Considering the hardships being experienced this was fairly remarkable. It helped that many local authorities across NEYH were Labour led as it meant they could instruct their Education Committees to commence school feeding arrangements. Durham County Council provided several million more free meals to school children than any other county in Britain. The estimated total cost was nearly £300,000.

Jack Lawson: "As on the former occasion [1921] there was one gleam of sunshine in the gloom of the 1926 lock-out. The bairns were fed in schools, and well fed, too . . . The County Council saw that nothing was lacking, and Peter Lee and his colleagues in the midst of all their troubles and anxieties had the satisfaction of knowing that they at least saved children from the carnage of industrial war."

Peter Lee, who began work as a miner at aged 10, was the chairman of Durham County Council and agent of the DMA. The town Peterlee is named after him and it is the only one named after a trade unionist in Britain.





Where the local Poor Law Board of Guardians was controlled by Labour, it was also able to provide further practical relief aid to strikers and their dependents. "The most striking example of this was at Chester-le-Street, where 42,722 people out of a population of about 86,000 were receiving relief when numbers peaked at the beginning of July. Forty-seven of Chester-le-Street's fifty-nine Guardians belonged to the Labour Party and thirty-nine were miners' officials, miners, or miners' wives." Hester Barron *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*.

Labour party women regionally and nationally also raised considerable sums. On 19 May A J Cook asked Marion Phillips, the Labour Party's chief women's officer to organise a committee of Labour women to raise funds to prevent miners and their families from starving. The chair of the committee, which was given free premises by the Labour party, was Ellen Wilkinson, the then Labour MP for Middlesbrough. Collection sheets were printed and circulated everywhere. Wilkinson toured the country appearing for support. By the end of May over £2,000 a day was being raised. When the lock-out ended a special Christmas appeal was made. The fund closed on 8 January 1927 and by which time it had raised £313,874, the equivalent of £19 million today. Australian born Phillips later became the first female MP to represent Sunderland between 1929 and 1931. She was also the first female Jewish MP. <https://redflagwalks.wordpress.com/2019/11/04/a-forgotten-womens-solidarity-campaign-the-womens-committee-for-the-relief-of-the-miners-wives-and-children-may-1926-to-january-1927/>

## Defeated

However, now left to battle on alone, the miners were to be badly defeated. More miners took the heartbreaking decision to go back to work and starvation levels meant the strike was called off in November. In Durham only ten thousand (equivalent to 5.7%) returned before the decision to end the strike was taken, this was the lowest percentage of any area. (In Yorkshire the figure was 35,500 and in Northumberland was 8,700)

Victimisation meant many miners remained unemployed, some permanently. Those back working were humiliatingly forced to accept longer hours, lower wages and district wage agreements.

The miners' leader, A.J. Cook, said of the TUC: "They threw away the chance of a victory greater than any British labour has ever won."

This view was widely shared by sections of the trade union and labour movement at the time, although not by Ernest Bevin.

The miners would never again trust the TUC.

Newcastle Workers' Chronicle: "Never in the history of workers' struggle – with one exception of the treachery of our leaders in 1914 – has there been such a calculated betrayal of working class interests"; the Council itself said: "To hell with the Constitution ... next time we must not be unprepared".

Many miners felt betrayed and demoralised after 1926 and said "never again." The bills had accumulated including for rents for the colliery houses the miners rented from their employers, who insisted on being paid before they would re-employ strikers.

As regards the coal industry, the Prime Minister said that negotiations would be resumed, and the Government would consider as to what steps should be taken.

In reference to the general position, he stated to the members of the Trades Union Council that the sooner they got in touch with employers and got their men back to work the better. Everyone should now co-operate in seeing that industry should be set going again and made pro-

Mr. Cook made the following official statement yesterday afternoon:—

"The Miners' Federation Committee, after the decision of the Council, when they were in the position of the previous position. The following telegram has been sent to all districts:—

"Miners must not resume work pending the decision of the National Conference convened for Friday next at the Kingsway Hall, London, 10 a.m. Secretaries."

A minute or two after the meeting had closed, a little procession of the Trades Union Council members, accompanied by a band of music, proceeded to the Kingsway Hall, London, 10 a.m. Secretaries."

The miners are taking immediate steps to re-open negotiations.

The news was not, at first, greeted with cheers or any demonstration, but with quiet rejoicing and goodwill. By a curious coincidence, however, a food

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People for many years afterwards asked "Are you working?" rather than "How are you?" Following the end of the GS, the Baldwin government passed the anti-trade union Disputes and Trade Union Act in 1927. This prohibited sympathetic strike action but, in practice, when workers were united it proved much less formidable than it sounded.

The Act, which was to be swept away after WWII by the Attlee Labour Government, also forced trade unionists to opt in to paying the political levy, rather than opt out, to the Labour Party, whose leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald had not wanted a GS. This caused the numbers affiliated to Labour to drop from 3.2 million to 2 million over the following two years.

None of which prevented Labour, campaigning on the theme of "Labour and the Nation" winning the most Parliamentary seats for the first time ever at the 1929 General Election, which was fought against a background of rising unemployment with the GS still fresh in the mind of voters. MacDonald was able to form a minority administration thanks to Liberal support.

I am of opinion that the proposals embodied in the Memorandum are suitable for adoption and are likely to promote a settlement of the differences in the Coal Industry.

I shall strongly recommend their acceptance by the Government when the negotiations are renewed.—Yours, &c.

HERBERT SAMUEL.

A. Pugh, Esq.,  
President, General Council,  
Trades Union Congress.

The reply of the Trades Union Congress General Council was in the following terms:—

Sir Herbert Samuel,  
London. May 12, 1926.

Dear Sir.—The General Council having carefully considered your letter of today and the memorandum attached to it, concurred in your opinion that it offers a basis on which the negotiations upon the conditions in the Coal Industry can be renewed.

They are taking the necessary measures to terminate the General Strike, relying upon the public assurances of the Prime Minister as to the steps that would follow. They assume that during the resumed negotiations the subsidy will be renewed and that the lockout notices to the Miners will be immediately withdrawn.—Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR BURN.

The British Gazette, and the multiplication of its issue within a week to the stupendous total of 2,500,000!

Let us tell the story, which opens on Monday, May 3, under the shadow of a General Strike to be declared at midnight—a strike of which the master-stroke was to be the shutting down of the newspapers.

The Government were alert to the emergency, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer called to the Treasury on Monday the representatives of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association (representing the London Press) and of the Newspaper Society (representing the Provincial Press). But he obtained from the conference little comfort or encouragement. Its members were unable to agree to the suggestion that they should co-operate in the production of a common emergency news-sheet, and the conference broke up indecisively.

At this juncture, the Editor of the *Morning Post* wrote to Mr. J. C. C. Davidson, M.P., the Deputy Civil Commissioner for London, saying that, with the co-operation of the Government, he would undertake to produce a four-page bulletin paper, to the number of 100,000 daily, and suggesting that if there were any difficulty, the Government should commandeer some big newspaper office (that of the *Morning Post* or another) and order so many papers to be produced.

Late that night important visitors to

For measures had already been taken to meet the emergency which had arisen.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George, had rung up Lord Beaverbrook to help him to get the type set; and Lord Beaverbrook responded by lending the service of the *British Gazette* man without whom it is not possible to say the situation could not be saved. This was Mr. Sydney Long, the night Superintendent of the *Daily Express*—a man of experience and rare skill in the technical side of the printing, working for years as a compositor, he had become master and then night Superintendent of Lord Beaverbrook's paper.

Also a leading trade unionist played a leading part in getting the Compositors' Union their charter. It was in his hands that the setting of the *British Gazette* depended. But five columns in the first number were overrest Mr. Long did with his own except for the little brought from the outside by the Stationery Co.

With Mr. Long, came Mr. Evelyn, machine-room overseer, and Mr. chief mechanical engineer of the *Express*. By the courtesy of Sir Caird, Mr. Alfred Hawkins, stereotyper of the *Daily Mail*, for the foundry a

## British Gazette"

### Circulation.

5 . . . . .	232,000
6 . . . . .	507,000
7 . . . . .	655,000
8 . . . . .	836,000
10 . . . . .	1,127,600
11 . . . . .	1,801,400
May 12 2 . . . . .	2,209,000

Minister returned from behind



# Inequality

124,000 miners in Durham were reported in 1929 to have earned a total of £16.3 million. This sum was dwarfed by just 543 people nationally whose incomes at the time totalled £55 million.

Miners were earning 6 shillings and 6d a day (32.5p) and from which they paid 3 to 5 shillings (15-25p) a week in rates whilst some coal-royalty owners in the county were receiving £22,000 pounds annually and paid no rates in the area from which they derived their income.

This grossly unfair distribution of wealth meant the working poor had little to spend on food and on goods and, as a result, businesses were also struggling for income. Sharing the national wealth would have been good for the whole economy.

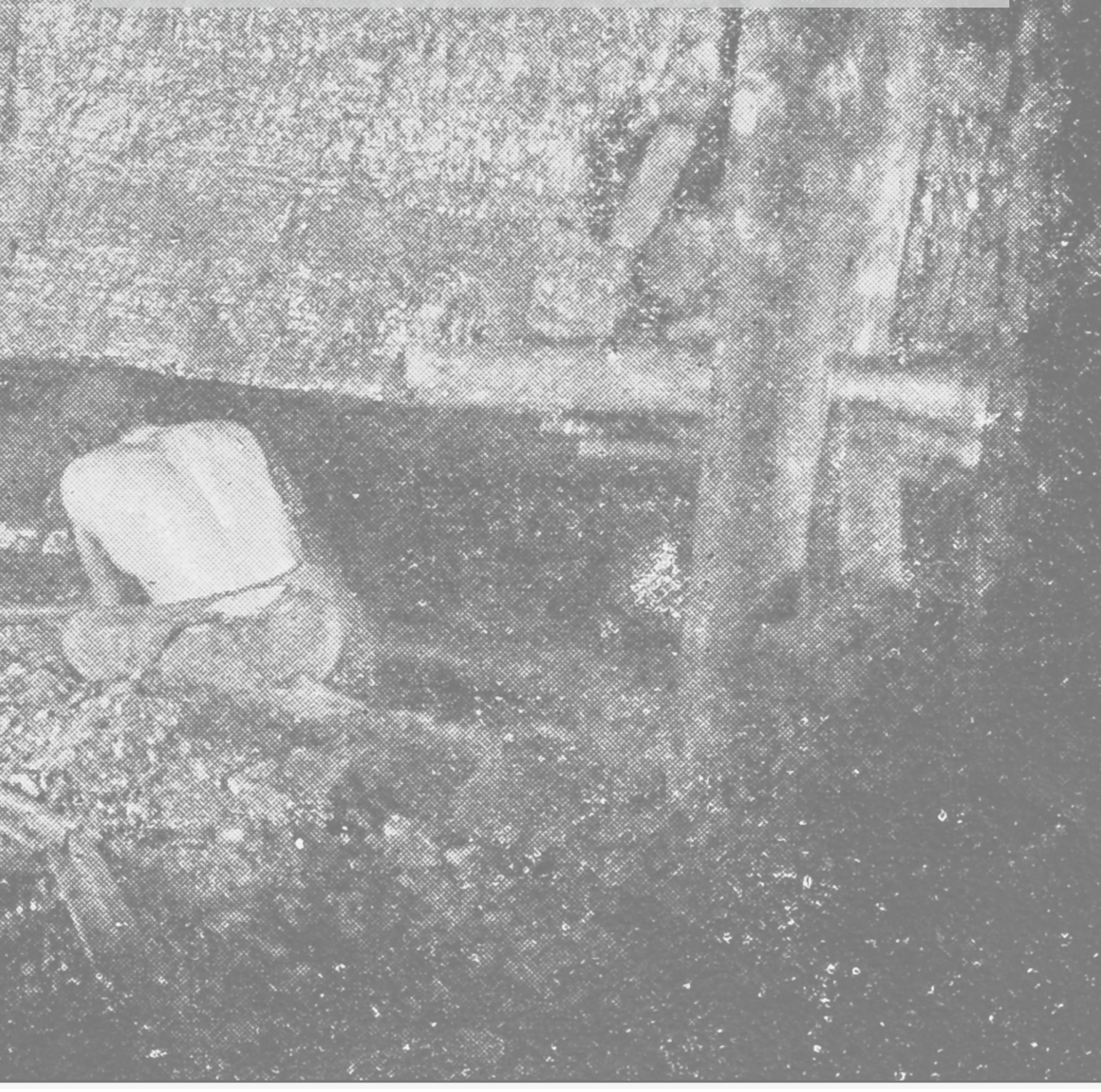
By January 1931, there were considerably fewer men and boys employed in the collieries of County Durham, just 118,000 compared with almost 170,000 (\*) in 1924. Many youths in the county now had no work at all and the 1930s were to be a period of abject poverty and known to miners and their families as "The Hard Times".

Nationally on 12 January 1931 there were 1,878,456 wholly unemployed, 650,264 temporarily unemployed and 107,448 normally in casual employment, a total of 2,636,168, up by 1,159,907 since January 1930.

December 1930 had witnessed one of the worst months for British exports for many years. The managing director of Ashington Colliery, Ridley Warham, reported how difficult it was to sell coal of all sizes with future prospects "not very cheerful."



With so many people out of work, unsurprisingly trade union membership fell dramatically as Britain entered the 1930s, a decade when a general industrial depression would grip the globe. It would lead to the rise of authoritarian regimes and eventually to the horrors of WWII.



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\*This is the generally accepted figure but speaking in January 1931, Mr J Oliver, director of the Co-operative Wholesale Society reported there had, in fact, been 200,000 men and boys employed in County Durham in 1924. The author believes the lower figure is more accurate.

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See also:

Founding The TGWU ([theunitehistoryproject.org](http://theunitehistoryproject.org))

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Mark Metcalf, who is a member of the NUJ and the Football Writers' Association has written a number of booklets for the Unite Education department. These are free to download at:

<https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/07/05/my-booklets-for-unite-education-department/> Mark (phone 07392 852561 or email [metcalfmc@outlook.com](mailto:metcalfmc@outlook.com)) is available to speak at trade union and labour meetings about any of the booklets.

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