

THE COALMINING LOCK-OUT OF 1926, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE  
TO THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE POOR LAW.

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SUMMARY

This study is largely concerned with the experiences of the locked-out miners and their families during the national coalmining dispute of 1926. Enthusiasm for the stoppage amongst rank-and-file miners varied considerably from one mining district to another and an attempt is made to identify and account for both intra and inter-regional variations in solidarity. From quite early in the dispute the danger of widespread destitution in the coalfields presented perhaps the most immediate threat to solidarity. Particular attention is therefore paid to the efforts made to overcome this threat and to the sources of relief available to mining communities in 1926. Various forms of community and individual self-help are looked at in some detail as is the operation of the Poor Law, which played such a crucial and controversial role in the dispute.

In some districts local co-operative societies provided considerable relief to mining families in the form of extended credit both to the miners' unions and to individual members. In others, retail societies demonstrated little or no apparent sympathy for the miners. Relationships between the co-operative and trade union movements during the General Strike and continuing mining dispute are examined at some length and an attempt is made to account for the differing responses of co-operative societies called upon to assist the miners in their struggle.

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Preface

For more than fifty years the General Strike of 1926 has continued to hold an almost siren-like fascination for labour historians. An ever-growing number of studies at both the national and local levels has attempted not only to detail the events of the nine days, but also to analyse the causes and consequences of the national stoppage.<sup>(1)</sup> And quite rightly so, for few would strongly disagree with Professor Clegg's assessment that the General Strike 'was without doubt the most outstanding single event in the history of British industrial relations ...'.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet the coalmining dispute which precipitated the General Strike and which developed into arguably the most bitter and prolonged industrial stoppage of the century, has, at the national level at least, been relatively neglected. With the notable exception of a few local and regional studies, the continuing lock-out in the coalmining industry has but rarely achieved much greater status than that of an 'extra' on the well-trod stage of the General Strike.<sup>(3)</sup>

To suggest that the present study travels far along the road to providing a definitive account of the lock-out in 1926 would not only be grossly conceited but also patently inaccurate. Nor is it intended as a blow by blow account of negotiations between the trade unions, government and employers, which have been more than adequately covered in other works. But it is hoped that what follows will throw additional light on some aspects of both the General Strike and mining dispute which have so far not received the attention they deserve. Particular reference will be made to the role of the Co-operative Movement and the Poor Law authorities during the coalmining dispute and to attempts at 'self-help' by the locked-out miners and their families. An attempt will also be made to identify and account for both inter- and intra-regional variations within these three main areas of interest.

To give a full list of the persons and institutions providing assistance in the preparation of this thesis would be virtually impossible and I must, therefore, at the very real risk of unfair omission single out several names for special mention. I am particularly indebted to the executive officers of the Brightside and Carbrook, Derby and Burton, Doncaster, Leeds Industrial, Mansfield and Worksop, Rotherham, and Royal Arsenal co-operative societies, who allowed me unfettered access to the records on their premises. From within the co-operative movement I also received generous help from Roy Garratt, Information Officer and Librarian at the Co-operative Union, G.J. Melmoth, Secretary of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and Stephen Drodge, Librarian at the Co-operative College in Loughborough.

Numerous librarians at county record offices and public libraries aided my research and I owe a special debt of gratitude to Freda Crowder of the local studies department at Rotherham Reference Library and Ms C. Coates at the T.U.C., both of whom expertly answered my seemingly endless enquiries with no outward show of irritation. I also wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. David Martin, for his invaluable guidance during the preparation of this study and Audrey Rixham who typed the manuscript. Finally, more praise than I can adequately express is owed to my wife, Patricia, for her unstinting encouragement and support.

- (1) For a useful if now dated bibliography of works relating to the General Strike, see H. Smith, Remember 1926: A book list, 1926.
- (2) H.A. Clegg, 'Some consequences of the General Strike', Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society, 1954, p.2.
- (3) Gerard Noel's The Great Lock-Out of 1926, 1976, which relies heavily on secondary sources and newspaper articles, stands almost by default as the most useful account of the mining dispute.

Abbreviations

A.E.U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.S.L.E.F.	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Fireman
A.U.B.T.W.	Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers
A.U.C.E.	Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees
B.L.P.E.S.	British Library of Political and Economic Science
C.M.A.	Cleveland Miners' Association
Cu.M.A.	Cumberland Miners' Association
C.P.G.B.	Communist Party of Great Britain
C.U.R.F.	Co-operative Union Relief Fund
C.W.S.	Co-operative Wholesale Society
D.A.D.	Doncaster Archives Department
D.M.A.	Derbyshire Miners' Association
Du.M.A.	Durham Miners' Association
D.R.O.	Durham Record Office
I.C.A.	International Co-operative Alliance
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
I.S.T.C.	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
L.C.M.F.	Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation
L.C.S.	London Co-operative Society
L.M.A.	Leicestershire Miners' Association
L.R.D.	Labour Research Department
M.F.G.B.	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
M.M.M.	Miners' Minority Movement
M.R.C.	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick Library
Natsopa	National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants
N.A.U.S.A.	National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants
N.C.L.C.	National Council of Labour Colleges
N.C.M.A.	Northumberland Colliery Mechanics Association
N.C.P.S.	National Co-operative Publishing Society
N.D.G.C.J.S.C.	Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee
N.M.A.	Nottinghamshire Miners' Association
Nd.M.A.	Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association
N.R.O.	Northumberland Record Office
N.S.M.F.	North Staffordshire Miners' Federation
N.S.P.C.C.	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

N.U.C.O.	National Union of Co-operative Officials
N.U.D.A.W.	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
N.U.G.M.U.	National Union of General and Municipal Workers
N.U.R.	National Union of Railwaymen
N.U.V.B.	National Union of Vehicle Builders
N.W.M.A.	North Wales Miners' Association
O.M.S.	Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
R.C.A.	Railway Clerks' Association
S.C.W.S.	Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society
S.H.M.U.	Scottish Horse and Motormen's Union
S.I.C.	Special Industrial Committee
S.M.A.	Somerset Miners' Association
S.M.F.	Scottish Miners' Federation
S.W.M.F.	South Wales Miners' Federation
T.G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers' Union
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
T.W.C.C.A.D.	Tyne and Wear County Council Archives Department
U.R.T.W.A.	United Road Transport Workers Association
W.C.R.M.W.C.	Women's Committee for the Relief of the Miners' Wives and Children
W.G.W.U.	Warehouse and General Workers' Union
W.M.A.	Warwickshire Miners' Association
Y.M.A.	Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association

## CHAPTER 1

RANK-AND-FILE RESOURCES AND SELF-HELPRegional Variations in Militancy

The national coalmining dispute of 1926 commenced at midnight on 30 April and developed into one of the most prolonged and bitter stoppages in the history of British industrial relations. Although the inevitability of defeat was acknowledged by delegates to a Miners' Federation Conference on 19 November, resistance to the terms and conditions demanded by many employers was not finally extinguished until 23 December, when the last of the new district-based wage settlements had been negotiated. Amongst the miners and their leaders enthusiasm for and commitment to the stoppage varied significantly from one coalfield region to the next. In Durham and South Wales and, to a slightly lesser extent, Yorkshire and Northumberland, the miners remained remarkably solid and the numbers returning to work before the middle of November were relatively small. In Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and the Midlands, on the other hand, the drift back to the pits began as early as the end of July and by early September had reached considerable proportions.

Our understanding of the factors influencing these regional variations in appetite for the stoppage has been considerably widened during the last twenty years by the appearance of many local studies of mining labour history. Several accounts of the lock-out of 1926 have suggested, for example, that in terms of rank-and-file solidarity a clear distinction can be made between the major coal-exporting regions and the inland coalfields which mainly supplied the British domestic market. Rank-and-file determination to resist a settlement was weakest, it is argued, in the inland coalfields where the relative stability of the domestic market allowed the owners to offer comparatively favour-

able terms. Many owners in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, unlike their counterparts in other districts, did not post notices terminating existing contracts of employment on 30 April 1926, when the government's temporary subsidy to the coal industry was due to expire. For the miners in these areas the stoppage was more a sympathetic strike in support of the export districts than a lock-out and involved from the start, suggests Dr. Williams, a sacrifice that many colliers were extremely reluctant to make<sup>(1)</sup>. This reluctance was then exploited by the owners who, in a determined effort to reopen their collieries as quickly as possible, frequently reminded the miners that they were not locked out and could return to work on roughly the pre-stoppage wage rates. It was inevitable, concludes Dr. Griffin, 'that demoralization should spread amongst the rank-and-file miners in counties like Nottingham, where relatively favourable terms could be arranged without difficulty'<sup>(2)</sup>.

In the less profitable coal-exporting regions very few attempts were made to entice the miners back to work with offers of attractive terms. Under the prevailing economic conditions, owners in the coal-exporting areas were unable to increase their proceeds significantly without greatly reducing costs, and perhaps inevitably conceived such reductions in terms of wage cuts and a longer working day. Rank-and-file determination to resist the owners' terms was strongest in the northern coalfields and in South Wales, it is argued, because the miners here had more to lose by a settlement than those in other mining districts. In South Wales, where about 75 per cent of output went to foreign markets 'no other major coalfield could match the cuts in average wages per shift ranging from 15 per cent for piece-workers to 41 per cent for single continuous shift men. Moreover the subsistence wage, which provided guaranteed minimum shift earnings to the lowest paid men was to undergo effective emasculation by a reduction from  $8/0\frac{3}{4}$ d per shift to  $6/8$ d.'<sup>(3)</sup>

Essentially, then, it is argued that rank-and-file solidarity during the lock-out tended to be weakest in those coalfields in which the miners had least to lose and strongest where they had most to lose from a settlement on the owners' terms. Generally, this appears to offer a plausible explanation for variations in rank-and-file solidarity during the dispute, but in the case of one important coalfield area at least, some qualification is required. In Yorkshire the settlement terms demanded by most owners were far less draconian than in many districts, and a number of colliery companies, including the powerful Markham Group, were prepared to continue working on existing contracts of employment. Yet Yorkshire was one of the last three mining districts to return to work in 1926 and the degree of solidarity shown by its rank-and-file miners during the lock-out has been emphasised by Dr. Neville: 'Given the close proximity of the Yorkshire coalfields to those of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and the relatively attractive offers made by some colliery companies, especially in the Doncaster area, the solidarity of the Yorkshire miners was arguably as remarkable as that exhibited by the Durham colliers.' (4)

It has also been suggested that regional variations in rank-and-file solidarity during the dispute can to some extent be explained in terms of the influence exerted by the miners' leaders in the various coalfield districts. Dr. Griffin points to weakness within the leadership of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association (N.M.A.) contributing to widespread rank-and-file demoralisation in the district, and certainly two of the main opponents of a stoppage in the mining industry and subsequently forceful advocates of an early return to work were Nottinghamshire's Frank Varley and George Spencer.<sup>(5)</sup> Conversely, Dr. Neville argues that the Yorkshire miners' determination to resist the owners' terms in 1926 was an indication, not only of their 'traditional solidarity built up over several decades', but also of 'the influence of

Smith, Jones, Hall, and other Y.M.A. leaders'.<sup>(6)</sup> Although it would clearly be rash to claim that the response of rank-and-file miners was not influenced by the stance of their leaders, there are perhaps grounds for suggesting that the extent of this influence has sometimes been exaggerated. In South Wales it seems that the miners' resolve owed little to the example shown by the leadership of the South Wales Miners Federation (S.W.M.F.). In his study of rank-and-file movements in the South Wales coalfield, M.G. Woodhouse concludes that 'until the last month of the lock-out, the S.W.M.F. membership displayed a degree of militancy and bitter opposition to the local owners, the intensity of which frequently astonished the leadership of the S.W.M.F.'.<sup>(7)</sup> In Durham, too, rank-and-file miners appeared at times to be far more determined to resist a settlement than their leaders. Even at the end of November, when most other districts had returned to work, a majority of Durham miners ignored the advice of their leaders and voted to hold out against the owners' terms.<sup>(8)</sup>

Several regional studies of the lock-out have emphasised the importance of other factors in influencing rank-and-file response in the various coalfield areas. It is suggested, for example, that the lack of solidarity shown by the Nottinghamshire miners can be attributed in part to the fact that many of them 'lived in urban communities and so lacked the cohesive spirit of the close-knit mining village characteristic of most districts'.<sup>(9)</sup> Yet another explanation is offered by Woodhouse, who claims that in South Wales the Miners' Minority Movement (M.M.M.) played a major part in maintaining rank-and-file solidarity.<sup>(10)</sup>

Although none of the factors so far considered can be dismissed as unimportant in influencing miners' attitudes during the lock-out, they do not of themselves provide an entirely satisfactory explanation for the variations in rank-and-file solidarity. Such explanations

relate largely to factors influencing the miners' resolve to resist a settlement, and say little or nothing of their ability to carry out that resolve. During the protracted struggle of 1926 the continued determination of miners to resist a settlement, however unfavourable the terms of that settlement might have been, inevitably depended to a very large extent upon the success with which they were able to feed themselves and their families. There were limits to the extent to which ordinary miners were prepared to endanger the health of their families, and in even the most traditionally militant areas it was feared that widespread destitution could precipitate a scramble back to work. In those districts in which rank-and-file solidarity rested on more shaky foundations, this danger was obviously much more acute. In order to explain satisfactorily rank-and-file response during the lock-out, therefore, it is necessary to discover the extent to which the miners in the various coalfield areas were successful in overcoming this threat to solidarity.

### Strike Pay

Britain's one million miners and their dependents were far from favourably placed to survive what, following the collapse of the General Strike on 12 May, gave every indication of developing into a prolonged and bitterly-fought struggle with the owners. The last major mining dispute in 1921 had in many districts left a legacy of rent arrears and other debts to be repaid from earnings already eroded by periods of unemployment and short-time working. Under such circumstances only a small minority of miners in the more prosperous districts were fortunate enough to have substantial savings to fall back upon in 1926. (Although, traditionally, the vehicle for miners' savings was the local co-operative society, Patrick Renshaw's suggestion that the miners 'usually had big savings invested with them',<sup>(11)</sup> appears to be somewhat exaggerated.)

From the outset, then, the most immediate problem confronting mining communities during the lock-out was that of overcoming the very real threat of destitution. Little financial support could be expected from the ordinary strike funds of the district miners' organisations, which had been severely depleted during the post-war years of industrial unrest. The Nottinghamshire Miners' Association, for reasons which are not readily apparent, was in particularly dire financial straits in 1926. The Association entered the dispute 'practically penniless' having only just repaid debts incurred during the national stoppage of 1921.<sup>(12)</sup> At a meeting of the N.M.A. Council on 17 May 1926 it was reported that even if the Union's assets were mortgaged to the hilt they would yield little more than the equivalent of half-a-week's strike pay. Nottinghamshire miners did in fact receive one week's strike benefit later in the month, thanks largely to the generosity of their neighbours in the Derbyshire Miners' Association (D.M.A.), who sanctioned a grant of £10,000 to the N.M.A.<sup>(13)</sup> After this the miners in Nottinghamshire received only very small and irregular sums from contributions made to the N.M.A. by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (M.F.G.B.) and other organisations.

Dr. Griffin has argued that the inadequacy of union resources in Nottinghamshire helps to explain why the N.M.A. Council, 'alone of the district organisations, was urging the Federation to negotiate terms for a settlement as early as the middle of May'.<sup>(14)</sup> But, in reality, the resources of few other district or county organisations were substantially more healthy than those of their Nottinghamshire counterpart. With more than 40,000 members, the funds of the Northumberland Miners' Association, which amounted to less than £42,000 on 1 May 1926<sup>(15)</sup>, were clearly inadequate to withstand a dispute of any duration, despite

optimistic noises from the Association's financial secretary, Ebby Edwards, who stated that the financial position of the union was considerably better than it had been at the beginning of the fourteen weeks' dispute in 1921.<sup>(16)</sup> During the first week of the lock-out in 1926 the Association was able to pay the official rate of 12s to its adult members, 6s to half-members under 18 years of age, 2s for each child and a rent allowance of 5s.<sup>(17)</sup> By the second pay-out on 25 May this scale had been reduced by half, and with the exception of the rent allowance which remained at 2s, was halved again for subsequent payments on 14 and 28 June.<sup>(18)</sup> By this stage the Association's resources, which had been supplemented by grants from other sources including donations from the Russian trade union movement<sup>(19)</sup>, were all but exhausted. Only two further payments were made to the miners in Northumberland, on 9 August and 5 September, and these amounted to no more than a few shillings. The Association's inability to provide its members with regular dispute payments very nearly precipitated in Northumberland a move by the union leadership in the direction already taken in Nottinghamshire. A Special Council meeting on 29 May considered a resolution recommending the M.F.G.B. Executive Committee to enter into negotiations with the coal owners and the Government with the aim of securing the best terms possible for a national settlement on the lines of the Coal Commission's Report. Any settlement proposals issuing from these negotiations were then to be submitted for approval to a national conference and to a ballot of the Federation's membership.<sup>(20)</sup> The resolution was defeated by the narrow margin of only 3 votes, although at a subsequent lodge vote the proposal was overwhelmingly rejected by 389 votes to 30.<sup>(21)</sup> (Thus providing a further illustration of the limited nature of the influence exerted by trade union leaders.)

Across the border in Durham, the miners fared little better as far as union dispute payments were concerned. By 5 June the Durham Miners' Association (Du.M.A.) had made only two payments of 10s to full members and 5s to half members, with the second disbursement made possible only by a grant of £36,000 from M.F.G.B. headquarters. Only the Association's death benefit fund now remained intact and any further payments to members were dependent upon donations from the M.F.G.B. and other sources. Between 24 June and the end of September the Association made five further relief payments amounting to 22s for full members and 11s for half members. (22)

In South Wales it was recognised from the outset that the resources of the S.W.M.F. were totally inadequate to provide more than token relief to the union's 150,000 miners and their dependents. The official lock-out scale was thus suspended by the Federation's leadership and responsibility for the organisation of relief was placed in the hands of the district lodge committees. (23) To the district lodges' own meagre resources were added irregular and steadily diminishing grants from the M.F.G.B., S.W.M.F. and other sections of the labour movement. Because of the localised nature of trade union relief in South Wales, lock-out payments, while they lasted, tended to vary from one district to the next. Nowhere do the rates appear to have been particularly high, ranging from 9s at Port Talbot to 7s6d at Senghenydd and only 4s to 5s in the Pontypool area. (24)

Even the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association, which was better placed than most other county organisations at the outbreak of the mining dispute, had still not recovered from the depletion of its funds in 1921, when £381,963 had been disbursed by the Union in lock-out pay. (25) Total assets on 1 May amounted to £584,198 and this sum was subsequently boosted by grants totalling £75,000 from the M.F.G.B. and by a £65,000

overdraft arranged on the Association's properties.<sup>(26)</sup> But even this sum was sufficient to provide the 190,000 Yorkshire miners with lock-out pay for only a very limited period. For the first four weeks of the dispute payment was made at the rate of 20s for adult members, 10s for half members, or 'pit lads', and 2s for members' children. During the fifth week, by which time almost £600,000 had been distributed in lock-out pay, the Association instructed its local officials to pay only half-benefits until further notice, in an attempt to conserve its rapidly dwindling resources.<sup>(27)</sup> Although benefits were further reduced during the following week, to only 5s per full member, 2s6d per half-member and 6d for members' children, by 12 June the funds of the Y.M.A. were finally exhausted. From this date the Association was able to make only sporadic payments, largely from loans negotiated with various organisations, including the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (£20,000), the National Union of Textile Workers (£3,000) and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association, Accrington (£10,000). The extent of inter-union solidarity represented by these loans was not allowed to interfere with sound business principles, however, for the Association was charged interest ranging from 4 to 4½ per cent.<sup>(28)</sup> In all, including administrative costs, the Y.M.A. disbursed £1,048,418 in lock-out pay in 1926, of which over £190,000, or roughly 15 per cent, represented sums borrowed by the Association and repayable after the return to work.<sup>(29)</sup> Fully paid-up\* members of the Y.M.A. received

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\* A fairly large number of miners, through no fault of their own, received no lock-out pay from the Y.M.A. during the dispute. The Yorkshire coalfield was one of the largest and most important in the country and had for some time been attracting miners who had been unable to find regular employment in their own areas. During the stoppage there were some 1500 new arrivals in the Doncaster area alone who had not yet qualified for lock-out pay. R.G. Neville, op. cit., p.718.

a maximum of £7.2.0 during the lock-out (half-members £3.11.0), equivalent to two years and eight months union contributions.<sup>(30)</sup> In addition, a number of local miners' unions, including the Brodsworth, Askern and Bullcroft branches of the Y.M.A., were able to make occasional but fairly small lock-out payments to their members following the exhaustion of Association funds.<sup>(31)</sup>

Experiences in the other major coalmining districts followed a similar pattern, with M.F.G.B.-bolstered county funds being generally sufficient to provide no more than a few weeks' lock-out pay. In Derbyshire the county funds were not finally exhausted until the end of July, but even here regular weekly lock-out payments to the miners had been discontinued much earlier.<sup>(32)</sup> In a few areas, but most notably in the Durham coalfield, local miners' lodges or branches were prepared to provide additional relief at the cost of mortgaging their property and other assets. But the assistance afforded in this way was on only a modest scale and usually reserved for those miners who had failed to qualify for alternative sources of relief. The miners' unions were thus unable to provide substantial financial assistance in any of the mining districts and any regional variations which may have existed are therefore of little significance. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that the Nottinghamshire miners seem to have received less assistance from this source than those in any other area.

### Communal Feeding

From quite early in the dispute, then, the miners were unable to call upon their unions for further financial assistance and were obliged to seek alternative sources of relief. Some of the most notable attempts effectively to relieve distress were those organised by the local mining communities themselves. Communal feeding schemes were established everywhere and the soup kitchen became probably the most familiar

institution in most mining districts during the lock-out. It is interesting to note that Dr. Griffin, in his study of the Nottinghamshire miners, assesses the impact of communal feeding schemes in the following terms: 'Relief of this kind was a help but it did no more than touch the edge of the problem. Indeed, if anything, soup kitchens tend to increase demoralization rather than add to it. For a man who is proud of his role as his family's bread winner, the thought of his children queuing up (like so many paupers) for soup or rice pudding and prunes must be galling to say the least.'<sup>(33)</sup> Now if this is an accurate assessment, it is clear that the impact of communal feeding schemes in the Nottinghamshire coalfield differed considerably from that experienced in many other mining districts.

The most startling contrast is provided by the experience of South Wales, where communal kitchens were established in almost every mining village. Many of them were run by local miners' lodges, often with the assistance of local co-operative societies. Far from increasing rank-and-file demoralization, communal feeding centres in South Wales appeared to play a vital role in maintaining the morale of the miners and their families during the stoppage. Paul Jeremy's account of the lock-out graphically captures the atmosphere created by communal feeding schemes in South Wales:

From these communal centres the men drew more than nourishment. By bringing together each day large numbers of men undergoing the same privations, the kitchen fostered a spirit of common struggle vital to morale. A lot of men overcame the frustration of enduring long idleness with no money by becoming enthusiastically involved in the elaborate task of keeping the vital kitchen running, with grocers to be cultivated, coal to be secured for providing hot meals, checks on who was entitled to feed at the kitchen, money to be raised from somewhere or other and numerous

other tasks.<sup>(34)</sup>

Until their funds finally dried up during the last month of the dispute, many kitchens were able to provide the miners and their families with a fairly substantial meal every day. Jimmy Griffiths, a member of the executive committee of the S.W.M.F. in 1926 and later president of the South Wales miners, recalls the feeding centres with obvious affection:

We had special permission to dig for outcrop coal to fuel the kitchens and appealed to all those who had allotments to make gifts to the kitchens so that there would be one good solid meal every day, good broth with veg and bits of meat. Now you must not think of these as charitable soup kitchens; I had seen such soup kitchens in the East End when I was at college. After the meal there would be meetings, and every official was under obligation to be present. Then there would be singing, carnival band competitions, a combination of things to develop fellowship. A spirit developed which I do not think that I have seen or experienced on any other occasion except perhaps during the Blitz in the Second World War. To continue in this way, day by day, displayed a remarkable courage and the fine thing was that this daily meal brought the women into it. They were in the kitchens, cooking in rotation, and then they attended the meetings; they were part of the strike and ... while the women support a strike, the men cannot easily be driven back... As it was, we went through the whole six months in our area without a single breakaway, mainly due, I think, to the fellowship engendered by that one meal a day.<sup>(35)</sup>

In nearly every colliery district in Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland communal feeding schemes were introduced during the first few weeks of the stoppage. Until the later stages of the dispute

communal kitchens in these areas provided assistance on a remarkable scale to the locked-out miners and their families. One soup kitchen in the Yorkshire mining village of Thurcroft near Rotherham had by the middle of September, when it was forced to close owing £600 to the bank and £300 to local tradespeople, distributed more than 246,000 meals.<sup>(36)</sup> Priority was given to the feeding of miners' children, especially in those districts where local education authorities were reluctant to take advantage of recent legislation enabling the provision of free school meals to necessitous children. Volunteer 'relief' or 'feeding' committees in the numerous mining districts of Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield provided thousands of local children with free meals every day. At Barnburgh, miners' children were given breakfast each morning before school, consisting usually of cocoa, bread, butter and treacle.<sup>(37)</sup> In most districts the meals appear to have been fairly substantial, and in July the children of miners at Tickhill near Doncaster were said to be 'looking better fed than ever'.<sup>(38)</sup> Such observations were far from uncommon, and give some indication not only of the achievements of communal feeding schemes during the lock-out, but also of the living standards prevailing in many mining areas before the stoppage began.

Because of the voluntary aspect of communal feeding schemes the average cost of the meals provided was maintained at a remarkably low level. At Armthorpe it was calculated that the local distress committee operated the soup kitchen at a cost of just under  $1\frac{3}{4}$ d per head.<sup>(39)</sup> When multiplied a thousand-fold or more each day, of course, such costs became extremely difficult to meet. By the middle of June the total cost of feeding children in the mining village of Bentley near Doncaster was approaching £31 per day and placing a severe strain on local resources.<sup>(40)</sup> The ingenuity, determination and tireless devotion with which mining communities struggled to meet the costs of keeping

feeding centres open has become part of working-class folk-lore.

Supplies of meat, vegetables and other foodstuffs were begged, borrowed, and occasionally stolen from local farmers and tradespeople. Many miners were avid allotment gardeners, and the combination in 1926 of a very fine summer and unexpected leisure time produced above average yields of vegetables, some of which found their way into communal pots. Coal-picking or outcropping by volunteers supplied the fuel for cooking on premises which were often provided free of charge by such organisations as local co-operative societies, councils, working men's clubs and the British Legion. A seemingly endless array of fund-raising schemes was devised and operated by the beleaguered mining communities. Raffles, collections, flag-days, pit-pony races, sports days, boxing tournaments, cricket and football matches, concerts, whist-drives, carnivals, dances, glee parties and a host of other social events served the dual purpose of raising valuable funds and providing the miners and their families with entertainment and recreation. Special mention in this connection should be made of the numerous miners' brass bands, choirs, and jazz bands which spent long periods of the stoppage in 1926 engaged in exhausting fund-raising tours of the non-industrial areas. One such jazz band, composed of Markham Main colliers from Armthorpe, possibly aroused the curiosity if not the sympathy of punters attending a prestigious June-meeting at Ascot racecourse, where the social whirl remained undisturbed by events in the coalfields. The band's four-day sojourn to the temple of the sport of kings realised the non-too princely sum of twenty-five pounds.<sup>(41)</sup> Generally, however, miners' bands and choirs proved to be popular and prolific fund-raisers, and a small number of them, aided by the resources of an organisation called the Women's Committee for the Relief of the Miners' Wives and Children, undertook extensive tours of Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>(42)</sup>

In many coal-producing districts, feeding schemes were actively supported not only by the miners themselves, but also by other sections of the community. To their credit, a lead in this respect was often given by local newspapers, regardless of their views on the merits of the miners' case. Early in June the Rotherham Advertiser, which had maintained from the outset that the terms available in South Yorkshire were 'exceptionally fair and reasonable', announced its intention to support local feeding schemes: 'Though distress has not yet shown itself in an acute form in Rotherham, the circumstances of many families are gradually getting worse. The domestic cupboard is becoming bare and numbers of children are on short rations. In order to assist in the work of providing meals for women and children who are feeling the pinch of poverty, we have decided to open an Advertiser Fund.'<sup>(43)</sup>

In nearby Sheffield, similar schemes were initiated by the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and the Sheffield Independent, with the latter's appeal expressed in a typical example of the uninspired verse to be found in the pages of most popular newspapers of the period:

You may sympathise with the miner  
 And think his cause is just  
 You may feel sorry for the owner  
 Whose profits may go 'bust'  
 You may weep for the poor old dealer  
 Who's got no coal to deal  
 You may pity the hard-hit taxpayer  
 Who's got some cause to squeal  
 But think of the innocent kiddies  
 Whose laughter is turned to a sob  
 They're hungry, ill-clad, starving  
 For them - we want a 'bob'.<sup>(44)</sup>

Appeals of this kind were fairly effective in the early stages of the stoppage but as the dispute dragged on contributions tended to dwindle to a mere trickle. Many schemes initiated by the local press shared the fate of the Northern Echo's 'shilling fund' which was wound-up in August having realised approximately £500.<sup>(45)</sup>

In close-knit mining communities genuine concern for the physical condition of the miners and their families tended to override all other considerations and to elicit support for feeding schemes from perhaps unexpected quarters. The large-scale and well-publicised donations of nationally-known firms like Crestona, Cadbury, Fry and Rowntree were outstripped in importance by the numerous and regular contributions of vegetables and other foodstuffs from local farmers and tradesmen. Occasionally practical assistance even came from representatives of the coal-owners themselves, although the suggestion that in Rotherham 'Countess Fitzwilliam is making herself personally responsible for the feeding of the children of the miners employed at the Earl's collieries',<sup>(46)</sup> was a ludicrous exaggeration.

Particularly active, of course, in support of the miners' communal feeding schemes were the various arms of the local labour movement, and other essentially working-class based organisations. Regular contributions to local relief funds and communal kitchens were received from many of those trade union branches whose members were fortunate enough to remain in full-time employment throughout the mining dispute. The efforts of Communist Party members in Rotherham, who organised door-step, branch, and shop-floor collections in aid of the miners<sup>(47)</sup>, were emulated by their comrades throughout the coalfields. In many districts local co-operative societies became involved in communal feeding schemes, sometimes by opening feeding centres of their own, but more frequently by allowing voluntary relief organisations free use of the cooking and dining facilities on their premises. Assistance of

this kind was particularly prevalent in several districts in South Wales where it was reported that the communal feeding of miners and their families was being undertaken almost exclusively by local co-operative societies. The Ynysbwl Society alone was running fourteen feeding centres financed from funds sent into the area by the Miners' Federation and other organisations.<sup>(48)</sup> At the end of July it was reported that communal kitchens at Cross Hands had served more than thirty-thousand meals during the previous six weeks, with all the food being provided by the Gorslas Co-operative Society 'at extremely low cost'.<sup>(49)</sup> Similar services, though on a more modest scale, were provided to their members by British Legion and Working Men's Clubs. In South Yorkshire the ex-servicemen's organisations opened feeding centres in Askern, Bentley and Elington, and distributed rations or food vouchers from their premises in Woodlands, Denaby and Conisbrough.<sup>(50)</sup> In Bentley, where the Legion had fed 1,700 children a day during the 1921 lock-out, their soup kitchen received material assistance from the district council.<sup>(51)</sup> Working Men's Clubs, which from their foundation in 1862 had flourished in all the coalfield areas, operated in much the same way.

Considerable attention was devoted in the columns of local newspapers in South Yorkshire and the North East during the stoppage to the communal feeding schemes operating throughout the mining districts. Such accounts reveal a commitment to co-operative endeavour from which few sections of the community remained aloof. To the efforts of those organisations already discussed were added the support of local religious institutions, boy-scout groups, St. John's Ambulance Brigades, public houses and Women's Co-operative Guilds. Thus the impact of communal feeding schemes in these areas and in South Wales too, contrasts sharply with the picture painted by Dr. Griffin of the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Even allowing for the possibility that Dr. Griffin has

overestimated the positively harmful effect of feeding schemes in Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands generally, there can be no doubt that they were of far less assistance to the miners here than in other coalfield areas. In order to remain effective, feeding schemes, as we have seen, required not only the active involvement of the miners themselves, but also the continued support of all sections of the community. In the mixed urban communities in which many Nottinghamshire miners lived, assistance of this kind was far less likely to be given than in the close-knit mining villages typical of other coalfield districts.

### Boot Funds

Another important manifestation of community spirit and co-operative action in 1926 was the network of 'boot hospitals' or boot-repairing schemes which sprang up in most mining districts. Worn-out boots that would normally have been discarded or repaired in the conventional way, were now patched up by amateur cobblers with materials borrowed or donated locally. Barefoot or inadequately shod children presented no new phenomenon in mining districts and 'boot funds' like the one inaugurated by Barnsley's Education Committee in 1922, were still in operation.<sup>(52)</sup> The problem of inadequate footwear, serious in itself, had wider implications during the dispute of 1926, for if bootless children were unable to attend school they would not receive free school meals where these were available. The extent of the problem was recognised by the Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children, which distributed about 34,000 free pairs of boots during the stoppage and in September inaugurated boot-repairing schemes through its local committees.<sup>(53)</sup> Applications to local boot funds for free or subsidised footwear increased steadily as the early winter months brought no sign of an end to the deadlock. Free boots

issued to local schoolchildren from the Barnsley Education Committee's special fund increased from 875 pairs in 1924 to 1162 in 1925 and 2317 in 1926.<sup>(54)</sup>

The funds required to maintain such schemes in operation were raised largely by local voluntary effort. The scale of the problem was such, however, that it could not be solved by voluntary effort alone, and in some districts attempts were made to provide for shoeless children by recourse to the Poor Law. On 5 July Rotherham Board of Guardians referred to the Ministry of Health for sanction a Finance Committee recommendation that, where necessary, free boots should be distributed to 'the children attending school of men who are in receipt of strike relief'.<sup>(55)</sup> The Ministry of Health did not greet this proposal with any great enthusiasm, however, and lost no time in communicating this fact to the Rotherham Union. A letter dated 8 July indicated that it had not yet become necessary to make a general provision of this kind in other Unions, and went on to warn that 'the Minister does not consider the Guardians will be justified in the introduction of a new practice of the kind proposed.'<sup>(56)</sup> This indication of ministerial disapproval appears to have proved decisive, for although the Board resolved that the matter be left with the Union Clerk to deal with, no scheme for the distribution of children's boots was introduced in Rotherham during the stoppage. In the North East, a similar initiative by the Gateshead Union was also quickly discouraged by the Ministry of Health, and news of this development was instrumental in persuading the nearby Sunderland Union to reject a proposal that free boots be provided to local needy children.<sup>(57)</sup>

But in South Shields the local Board of Guardians remained either oblivious or unresponsive to ministerial policy on this question. On 21 October the Union's Finance Committee reported that 'our attention has been drawn to certain cases of necessitous schoolchildren at Hebburn,

who are much in need of boots, and in connection with which we understand that a certain number have already been supplied from voluntary funds, which are now exhausted, leaving a large number of urgent cases requiring attention.'<sup>(58)</sup> When this report was considered at a meeting of the full Board a week later, grants were sanctioned to local boot funds of £100 in Hebburn and £75 in Jarrow.<sup>(59)</sup> It is also reported that the South Shields Board of Guardians made their own arrangements to distribute free boots and even enlisted the aid of the Chief Constable, to whom they paid £10 for his services.<sup>(60)</sup> Footwear distributed in this way was easily distinguishable by the presence of a hole punched at the top of each boot. The purpose of this was not, we are assured, 'to inflict the stigma of receiving relief, but to ensure that the boots were worn and not pawned'.<sup>(61)</sup>

Intervention of this kind by local Poor Law authorities appears to have been the exception rather than the rule and by October the arrival of colder weather was making fresh demands on local boot funds already close to exhaustion. Shoelessness in the coalfields was now assuming alarming proportions and stories abound, some perhaps apocryphal, of determined parents carrying shoeless children to school on their backs during the lock-out.

### Coal-Picking

Of all the methods of communal and individual self-help available to the locked-out miners and their families in 1926, none aroused more controversy or bitterness than the practices of coal-picking and out-cropping. The spectacle of women and children collecting pieces of coal for domestic fuel on colliery waste tips was far from unusual even in normal times, but during periods of industrial dispute in mining areas, such activity was organised on a much more intensive scale. Whilst women and children continued to scavenge waste tips many of the

miners themselves took busmen's holidays by working outcrop seams of coal. From a trade union point of view this was perfectly acceptable provided that all the coal produced in this way was used for domestic heating and cooking purposes or to fuel communal kitchens. The great temptation was, of course, to work outcrop seams of coal for sale, particularly during the later stages of lengthy disputes when hardship in mining communities was at its peak and coal shortages produced a steady stream of potential buyers.

During the mining lock-out of 1921 outcropping for commercial purposes was widespread and this manifestation of private enterprise seriously alarmed the miners' unions. At the commencement of the dispute in 1926, therefore, the Miners' Federation and the county and district organisations made clear their opposition to such practices. So concerned was the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Council to avoid a repetition of events in 1921, that even before the General Strike began a notice was issued to the union's local officials and members outlining the case against commercial coal-picking and outcropping:

In past disputes the question of our men picking and selling coal reached rather large proportions, and serious difficulties have arisen on account of them selling the same to tradespeople and others. We sincerely hope the coal which our men pick will be expressly for themselves, and that they will not gather any for the purpose of filling carts, wagons, or any other vehicles to be sent out of the places where the coal is picked.

Our members must remember that on this occasion we are asking the whole of the trade union movement to help us, and if we ourselves do anything which violates the principles for which our allies stand in this lock-out it may mean that bad feeling may arise, and we shall not progress through the lock-out as

harmoniously as we shall if our men strictly carry out this instruction.<sup>(62)</sup>

The concern for trade union niceties expressed in the second paragraph of this notice possibly brought a wry smile to the lips of miners' officials after the General Strike had been called off in view of their later pronouncements on the 'principles' of some of their erstwhile allies. However, in the heady days of the General Strike solidarity was the watchword and a bulletin issued on 8 May by the Rotherham Central Joint Strike Committee suggested that the best way to carry out the Y.M.A.'s instructions was 'not to work any outcrop coal or do any picking at all'.<sup>(63)</sup> In Rotherham, at least, this rule of thumb prescription went unheeded. Coal-picking on the tips of the town's Silverwood Colliery, which employed more than 3,200 men and boys in 1926, commenced as early as the second day of the General Strike.<sup>(64)</sup> In the following weeks similar activity, sometimes on a fairly large scale, was reported at other pits in the district. According to the evidence of a police constable at Rotherham's West Riding Court in May, between 500 and 600 people were engaged in coal-picking at the clay pit of a local brickmaker.<sup>(65)</sup> The colliery tips provided 'pickers' or 'scratters' with a great deal of useful fuel and in an article dated 23 October 1926 the Rotherham Advertiser suggested somewhat plaintively that in a large number of the town's poorer homes 'there are bigger and brighter fires than in the dwellings of the supposed well-to-do residents. They were burning what is locally known as "Jubilee"<sup>(66)</sup>, which in appearance looks like black mortar.' Home comforts such as these were not always derived without costs, however, for in May a twelve year old girl was suffocated by a fall of earth whilst coal-picking at a Carr House disused quarry.<sup>(67)</sup>

Five miles or so away in Sheffield's High Hazel Park at Darnall, it was reported that 500 miners were at work on an extensive series of outcrops which involved the digging of more than 40 pits in rows over the entire length of the field. In some of these undertakings the miners displayed considerable ingenuity: 'It is obvious that these miniature pits are made by expert hands. Some of them are more than 20' deep. One miner has erected a very serviceable winding arrangement made partly out of an old mangle with effective gearing so that even a child can wind the coal-filled buckets.'<sup>(68)</sup> Coal picking and outcropping, though usually on a less ambitious scale, were carried on in all South Yorkshire's mining districts. Manvers Main Colliery tip attracted coal pickers from as far afield as Goldthorpe, Bolton-on-Dearne, Mexborough, Denaby and Conisborough, and by the middle of July had yielded 'some hundreds, perhaps thousands of tons of coal.' During the twelfth week of the lock-out coal-picking at the Manvers tip was stopped owing to the considerable damage done to adjacent railway lines which in some places had been buried under heaps of rubble thrown by the pickers.<sup>(68a)</sup> At the end of September it was reported that in the county as a whole 4,417 men were occupied in this way<sup>(69)</sup>, though how what was sometimes a clandestine activity could be measured with such precision is not clear. Because of its proscription by the Y.M.A., outcropping for commercial purposes was invariably engaged in surreptitiously, and an example to illustrate this point is provided by J.A. Peck: 'On one night, after the local tips had yielded no more coal, a group of Rotherham miners walked seven miles to an Elsecar tip carrying picks, shovels and sacks. They worked furtively throughout the night, filling their sacks with coal and just as dawn was breaking an accomplice with a lorry fetched them all back and was paid with sacks of coal for his trouble'.<sup>(70)</sup> It is virtually impossible to gauge the extent of commercial outcropping and coal picking in Yorkshire during the stoppage since instances of such

activity generally came to light only when those participating were disturbed by the authorities or by irate fellow-miners. But given the relative paucity of such instances it would appear reasonably safe to conclude that by far the largest part of the coal picked or outcropped in Yorkshire was for the use of the miners and their families rather than for sale.

In Nottinghamshire the 'unusually large number of men' involved in outcrop working right from the start of the dispute had increased to at least 1,700 by early August.<sup>(71)</sup> As Dr. Griffin suggests, this figure was probably an underestimation since at one colliery alone 400 of the 450 men normally employed were working outcrop seams. Activity of this kind was particularly widespread in places like Strelley, Kimberley and Eastwood in the exposed coalfield on the western side of the county, and some of it was organised on a commercial basis. Some of these undertakings were organised by teams of 'free colliers', whilst 'in other cases one man had the contract for one or a group of pits and acted for all the world like a "big" butty of the eighteenth century.'<sup>(72)</sup> One character to profit from outcrop working in this manner at Eastwood was Joseph Birkin, a member of the N.M.A.'s Executive Committee.<sup>(73)</sup> Outcropping in parts of the adjacent county of Derbyshire also commenced very early in the dispute. On 8 May it was reported that miners at Clay Cross 'have located an outcrop seam, and all sorts of vehicles, including an icecream barrow, convey the coal to the miners' homes'.<sup>(74)</sup> Elsewhere in the county coal-pickers were at work in Staveley and Eckington, but outcrop working on a large scale did not become widespread until after the General Strike had been settled.<sup>(75)</sup>

Coal-picking and outcropping for commercial purposes, though perhaps more prevalent, were by no means confined to the so-called 'weaker' or less militant coalfields. One of the most remarkable

accounts of commercial activity during the lock-out in fact emanates from the traditionally militant north-eastern mining village of Wardley, which in the nineteen twenties gloried in the name of 'Little Moscow'. The miners of Wardley elected as their union secretary George Harvey, 'a self-proclaimed Bolshevik', and boasted a lodge banner emblazoned with the hammer and sickle and portraits of Lenin, Connolly and A.J. Cook.<sup>(76)</sup> But these outward indications of socialist commitment apparently concealed a healthy regard for the tenets of private enterprise:

During the 1921 and 1926 strikes Harvey organised teams of men to griddle and shovel the pit-heaps for coals, which were sent away for sale after the fair coal had been separated from the slag. It was worked in the style of bord and pillar in two-hour shifts. Lorries were hired and the coal was sold to hospitals and factories. Thousands of tons were shifted in this way: the money went to Harvey's soup kitchen to feed the men and their families. Old Wardley men say that because of Harvey's fine organizational capacity they fared not much worse during these strikes than while they were actually working. The men working on the heap were getting £2 per week, as much and sometimes better than they earned at the colliery.<sup>(77)</sup>

Although there may be an element of 'distance adding charm' to such reminiscences, they do indicate that even in the most militant districts some miners were prepared to defy M.F.G.B. and district union instructions by commercially exploiting accessible coal deposits. Evidence of commercial activity can in fact be found in many of the regional studies of the lock-out in Northumberland, Durham and South Wales. In general terms, then, coal-picking or outcropping for domestic fuel supplies was widespread in all mining districts. Commercially motivated

activity was also present in all the coalfields, but with the possible exception of parts of the East Midlands, the numbers of miners involved were relatively small.

The response of coal-owners and the authorities to coal-picking and outcropping varied considerably from one area to another, as did the response of the district unions and local mining communities when commercial operations were suspected or exposed. Mine-owners in some districts attempted to prevent the miners and their families from picking colliery waste tips whilst others like Earl Fitzwilliam in South Yorkshire were quick to sanction such activity on their property.<sup>(78)</sup> Occasionally the owners were prepared to be even more co-operative. In Rotherham, Newton and Chambers Ltd. of the Thorncliffe Collieries and Iron Works, not only permitted the miners in their employ to work an outcrop seam of coal, but also supplied them with quantities of timber to shore up the workings.<sup>(79)</sup> Outcrop workers at Craghead in the north eastern coalfield were similarly encouraged with gifts of timber from the local colliery company.<sup>(80)</sup> Such gestures could be interpreted either as acts of beneficence on the part of the mine-owners, or as attempts to undermine solidarity by encouraging what could develop into blackleg activity. In view of the owners' rather poor track-record in the benevolence stakes it is perhaps not surprising that the latter interpretation was commonly favoured by the miners' leaders.

As far as police attitudes are concerned the picture is rather a confused one, for although outcropping was technically an offence the law was not universally enforced. In South Yorkshire the police often 'turned a blind eye', but occasionally arrests were made with the result that outcropping 'usually took place at night time by candle light to avoid detection'.<sup>(81)</sup> It may be that the police in this area were reluctant to interfere unless coal-picking or outcropping threatened

a breach of the peace or resulted in a complaint of trespass from the landowner. Contemporary records of Rotherham borough police throw no light on the matter since they contain no specific reference to policy on the question of outcropping.<sup>(82)</sup> Police authorities in parts of Derbyshire apparently took a firmer line, for Dr. Williams suggests that in Chesterfield the police 'wisely decided to prohibit all outcrop working from the start of the strike'.<sup>(83)</sup> But a report from the local emergency food officer dated 22 July indicates that if such a policy was indeed adopted then the efficiency of Chesterfield constabulary left much to be desired: 'The increasing amount of "outcrop" coal working by miners in the Chesterfield district appears to be giving rise to marked bitterness among that section of miners not so engaged. This has not at the time of writing entailed any necessity for protective measures by the local authority.'<sup>(84)</sup>

Police action was perhaps most effective in districts where outcropping was organised on a somewhat smaller scale than was the case in the Derbyshire coalfield. Andrew Beattie, a retired miner from Wath-on-Dearne near Rotherham, recalls how his brief flirtation with outcropping during the stoppage was prematurely curtailed by the long arm of the law:

My wife had two sisters living in Bradford, working in the mills, and we blew off there for five weeks and we were living with them, living on them. One day me and the brother-in-law and two or three others were out walking on some moor and I saw where there had been an old outcrop where coal had been worked at some time or other. Coal was at a premium then and after I'd got a pick and shovel we went back to this place where I thought there was an outcrop. We started digging and found a seam of coal about two foot thick. It was a blazing hot summer

so we took our shirts off and started hewing the coal. After we'd thrown about two tons out on to the side the bobbies spotted us. Well, it was no good running, they'd caught us red-handed and made us leave the coal and bugger-off. I looked like getting a summons because when the police found out that I was an unemployed miner they said, 'You what!, a miner and you didn't know you were doing wrong?' 'No', I said, 'we didn't know we were doing wrong.' Well my father was pally with the Inspector of police at this place just outside Bradford. They took my name and address and all that, but I never heard anything about it. I think it was my father's influence with this bloke. (85)

Throughout the stoppage the M.F.G.B., county miners' organisations, and many of the local lodges and branches viewed outcropping activity with disapproval and did their best to discourage it. But, as we have seen, the influence of the county associations was varied and limited, and generally declined during the later stages of the stoppage, when colder weather made more urgent the need for fuel. The impotence of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association was such that on 5 July the Council appealed to the Mines Inspectorate, local councils and police forces to prevent outcropping, 'since its own efforts to discipline its members had had no effect'. (86) At the local level a number of miners' unions sought similar solutions to the problem of outcropping and coal-picking especially where commercial activity was a threat. During the first week of the stoppage Brodsworth Main branch of the Yorkshire Minerworkers' Association forwarded a resolution to the local colliery company asking them to prohibit coal-picking on the tips and sidings, on the grounds that in the past 'unscrupulous persons have made large sums of money by employing children to do the work rather than it being

done by persons in actual need.'<sup>(87)</sup> Not all Y.M.A. branches shared such anxieties, however. On 25 May miners at Thorne, only a few miles from Brodsworth, appointed a deputation to approach the management for permission to pick coal on the colliery tip.<sup>(88)</sup>

Outcropping activity in most districts reached a new peak in October. The M.F.G.B. responded by organising an intensive propaganda campaign in all mining areas where work had resumed in the pits or where outcropping was widespread.<sup>(89)</sup> Speakers of the calibre of A.J. Cook spearheaded this campaign but its impact was both modest and transient. Within the mining communities themselves outcropping generally excited hostility only when the coal was clearly being procured for commercial purposes. Dr. Williams has indicated that in the Derbyshire coalfield such hostility was generally expressed only in the form of peaceful demonstration: 'At Shirland a procession of 3,000 people, headed by jazz bands and miners carrying their lodge banners, heard speeches by Sales, Spencer, Hicken and Hall ... Hall asked the miners "not to interfere with the Shirland Colliery or the outcrop workers".'<sup>(90)</sup>

In some districts the mining communities exhibited less forbearance than their Derbyshire counterparts and 'direct action' was sometimes employed to deter commercial outcropping. On 14 May the Doncaster Gazette reported that coal pickers had been busy on the banks at Hickleton and Manvers Main Collieries and that a disturbance had occurred, 'carts being upset, when some people endeavoured to remove quantities of coal to sell outside the district'. Only a few days later in nearby Rotherham, 'strict measures' were taken with the owner of a lorry which came from Sheffield with the object of removing a load of coal, though what form these 'measures' took was not made clear.<sup>(91)</sup> The presence of a vehicle at outcrop workings was a fairly reliable indicator of commercial activity and lorries were frequently

the focus of hostile attention. Will Paynter, former N.U.M. general secretary, recalls that in the Rhondda valley during the lock-out 'you could dig in almost anywhere and find coal, ... and people were prepared to come in with lorries and take it away. There was more than one lorry tipped down the side of the mountain.'<sup>(92)</sup> In Northumberland on 22 October more than fifty men left a special meeting of the Pegswood Miners' Branch to join a similar number of miners who were marching from Ashington to interrupt commercial outcropping at Primrose Valley near Morpeth. After tipping several coal carts into the River Wansbeck, the demonstrators 'manhandled' the outcroppers and removed all timber from the workings to prevent them being re-opened later.<sup>(93)</sup>

Outcroppers were described as 'traitors of the worst class' by J. Gilliland and J. Swan of the Durham Miners' Executive, and it was in the North East that some of the more violent protests against outcropping occurred. Fisticuffs ensued when peaceful persuasion failed to deter a gang of men engaged in outcropping at Bedlington in Northumberland and demonstrating miners eventually resorted to the use of dynamite to demolish the workings.<sup>(94)</sup>

Because it carried the same kind of stigma as blacklegging, outcropping for flagrantly commercial ends could thus prove to be an extremely hazardous pastime, and in most districts was engaged in by only a small minority of miners. Coal-picking for domestic or communal fuel supplies, on the other hand, was almost universally regarded as a perfectly respectable, and indeed vital, aspect of life in the besieged mining communities. But within these two extremes lay a confused 'grey area' in which the distinction between commercial and non-commercial activity was often blurred. The barter of outcropped coal and even its sale to provide additional food supplies or other necessities was sometimes viewed with tolerance if not approval. This element of differentiation or interpretation may help to explain the

fact that responses to outcropping could vary significantly not only from one coalmining region to another, but also within apparently 'similar' mining districts.

### Alternatives

Coal-picking or outcropping, of course, were not the only forms of individual self-help available to the more enterprising or perhaps more desperate miners in 1926. Surrounding woods and forests provided ideologically less suspect but no less illegal sources of fuel. During the trial in August of seven Rotherham miners charged with damaging trees in the Maltby Wood, it was stated that more than 700 trees had been felled in the wood since the dispute began.<sup>(95)</sup> It was later estimated that woodland in the Maltby area alone was deprived of no fewer than 1,800 trees during the lock-out, a loss which made a lasting impression on the village skyline.<sup>(96)</sup> Doncaster's West Riding Court on 19 October heard a number of cases involving 'wilful damage to trees' on various estates in the district. The agent for the Owston estate said in evidence that more damage had been done there in the last week than in the previous three-months. The magistrates in Doncaster showed less leniency than their Rotherham counterparts, who in August had merely administered token fines to the offenders. Five Rossington men found guilty of damaging local trees were sent to prison for fourteen days.<sup>(97)</sup>

Pea-picking, potato-pulling, harvesting, hay-making and other seasonal farm-work offered temporary employment to a fortunate few, but 'moon-lighting' activity of this kind was viewed with some suspicion in mining communities. Where the rewards for such labour took the form of meals or foodstuffs it was generally tolerated, but the receipt of money wages smacked too much of blacklegging to be widely condoned. Deteriorating conditions in the coalfields were inevitably accompanied

by an increase in criminal activity. Much of this consisted of the petty larceny of coal supplies and it is not without irony that colliery companies attracted a great deal of attention from would-be pilferers. In July several local miners were prosecuted at Doncaster West Riding Court for stealing coal from the colliery yard at Bentley and were each fined twenty shillings.<sup>(98)</sup> Loaded railway wagons awaiting dispatch in colliery sidings proved to be particularly vulnerable, though as the reports of the emergency food officer in Chesterfield reveal, 'moving targets' were by no means safe:

Coal stocks at the Turnoake Colliery, Chesterfield, are being moved by road transport into the Sheffield district for industrial purposes. A certain amount of pilfering from the vehicles by groups of irresponsible youths and men has been taking place as the lorries left the colliery premises near the Borough boundary. The Police have now the matter in hand and have put a stop to such irregular proceedings.<sup>(99)</sup>

Many of the offences for which miners were prosecuted during the lock-out were of a very minor nature and clearly born of desperation. When charged in August with the theft of four sacks of potatoes from a local allotment, a Barnsley miner is reported to have said, 'It's a fair cop, but my kids want some snap'. He was fined one pound with payment suspended until after the dispute had been settled - an indication suggests J.A. Peck 'of the sympathy felt by the Bench to the miner'.<sup>(100)</sup> Albert Hay, a young miner from Castleford would no doubt have appreciated a sympathetic hearing when he appeared before Doncaster Borough Bench accused of stealing a bicycle. Hay admitted the offence, but pleaded to the magistrates in mitigation that he had not eaten for three days before he took the bicycle and 'had to do something to get food.' He was fined forty shillings, but having no

money to pay the fine, elected to serve twenty-eight days' imprisonment.<sup>(101)</sup> It is also noticeable that as the number of coal thefts increased during the later stages of the dispute, so did the severity of the penalties imposed by the courts. Sentences of fourteen days' imprisonment were meted out to most of the men found guilty at Doncaster in October of stealing coal from the premises of Markham Main Colliery.<sup>(102)</sup>

The list of larcenous offences with which miners were charged during the stoppage is nothing if not varied. To those of stealing coal, wood, bicycles and farm produce can be added housebreaking, and the theft of copper, brass, lead and a variety of livestock ranging from homing pigeons to sheep and horses. 'Poaching', 'night-poaching' and 'trespassing after game' also appeared on charge sheets with some regularity in all mining districts. In his reminiscences of the dispute Hywell Jeffrey, a retired miner from Seven Sisters in South Wales, recalls that there 'was a lot pinched off the railways, but nobody pinched off each other'.<sup>(103)</sup> With but a few notorious exceptions it would appear that the latter part of this claim could with justification be made of every mining community in 1926. One such exception was Colin Smith of Cowpen, who was suspended from the Executive of the Northumberland Miners' Association in October following the discovery that he had misappropriated local charity funds.<sup>(104)</sup> John Pettit, a miner from Bentley, no doubt similarly endeared himself locally by stealing coal and groceries from the Bentley Ward soup kitchen, offences for which in July he was imprisoned for four weeks.<sup>(105)</sup>

- (1) J.E. Williams, The Derbyshire Miners: a study in Industrial and Social History, 1962, p.696.
- (2) A.R. Griffin, The Miners of Nottinghamshire 1914-1944: a history of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Unions, 1962, p.169.  
See Appendix A and B for examples of circulars distributed by Nottinghamshire colliery companies.
- (3) P. Jeremy, 'Life on Circular 703: The Crisis of Destitution in the South Wales Coalfield during the Lockout of 1926', Llafur, vol. 2 no. 2, 1977, p.66.
- (4) R.G. Neville, 'The Yorkshire Miners 1881-1926: A Study in Labour and Social History', Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1974, p.733.
- (5) A.R. Griffin, Mining in the East Midlands 1550-1947, 1971, p.239.
- (6) R.G. Neville, op. cit., p.733.
- (7) M.G. Woodhouse, 'Rank and File Movements among the Miners of South Wales, 1910-1926', Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1969, p.362.
- (8) F. Webster, 'Durham Miners and Unionism, 1831-1926: a Sociological Interpretation', M.A. thesis, University of Durham, 1974, p.292.
- (9) A.R. and C.P. Griffin, 'The Non-Political Trade Union Movement', in A. Briggs and J. Saville, Essays in Labour History, 1918-1939, 1977, p.135.
- (10) M.G. Woodhouse, op. cit., p.366.
- (11) P. Renshaw, The General Strike, 1975, p.236.
- (12) A.R. Griffin, op. cit., p.239.
- (13) J.E. Williams, op. cit., p.708.
- (14) A.R. Griffin, op. cit., p.239.

- (15) Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association, Report and Balance Sheet of the Northumberland Miners Relief Fund May 1st 1926 to July 6th, 1927.
- (16) A. Mason, 'The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham, 1918-1931, with special reference to the General Strike of 1926.' Ph.D. thesis, University of Hull, 1967, p.361.
- (17) MH57/115, P.R.O.
- (18) J. Davison, Northumberland Miners History 1919-1939, 1973, p.71.
- (19) During the course of the dispute all the county miners' associations received grants from a national Miners' Relief Fund organised by the M.F.G.B. Donations to the fund were received from numerous individuals and organisations in Great Britain and abroad, but by far the largest sums were sent by trade unionists in Soviet Russia, provoking an inevitable 'Red Gold' protest from the British Government. By 30 August the national fund had raised £879,578 of which £517,000 had come from Russia. R. Page Arnot, The Miners: Years of Struggle, 1953, p.479.
- (20) A. Mason, op. cit., p.362.
- (21) ibid.
- (22) ibid., pp.362-3, 422.
- (23) P. Jeremy, op.cit., p.67.
- (24) M.G. Woodhouse, op. cit., p.367.
- (25) J.A. Peck, The Miners' Strike in South Yorkshire 1926, 1970, p.17.
- (26) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.
- (27) ibid.
- (28) ibid.
- (29) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association, Annual Report, 1927, p.11.
- (30) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association, Minutes 1927.

- (31) Doncaster Gazette, 2 July, 9 July 1926.
- (32) Daily Reports of the Local Emergency Food Office, G/P/109/20,  
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- (33) A.R. Griffin, The Miners of Nottinghamshire, p.170.
- (34) P. Jeremy, op. cit., p.90.
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- (36) Rotherham Advertiser, 18 September 1926.
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- (39) *ibid.*, 18 June 1926.
- (40) *ibid.*
- (41) Doncaster Gazette, 25 June 1926.
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- (43) Rotherham Advertiser, 5 June 1926.
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- (51) Bentley-with-Arksey Urban District Council Minutes 1926,  
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- (52) County Borough of Barnsley Education Committee, Triennial Report  
1924-1927, p.9.

- (53) M. Phillips, op. cit., p.79.
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- (55) Rotherham Union Minutes 1926.
- (56) *ibid.*
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- (58) South Shields Union Minutes 1926, T.W.C.C.A.D., ACC.T81/33.
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- (61) *ibid.*
- (62) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.
- (63) Strike Bulletin No.3, 8 May 1926, issued by Rotherham Central Joint Strike Committee.
- (64) Rotherham Advertiser, 8 May 1926.
- (65) *ibid.*, 15 May 1926.
- (66) This name was possibly derived from the fuel's similarity in appearance, if not taste, to a popular local libation, 'Jubilee Stout'.
- (67) Rotherham Advertiser, 29 May 1926.
- (68) Quoted in J.A. Peck, op. cit., pp.22-4.
- (68a) Doncaster Gazette, 23 July 1926.
- (69) R.G. Neville, op. cit., p.729.
- (70) J.A. Peck, op. cit., p.24.
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- (72) A.R. Griffin, The Miners of Nottinghamshire ..., p.171.
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- (74) British Worker, 8 May 1926.

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- During the interwar period several militant localities were dubbed 'Little Moscow'. See S. Macintyre's study, Little Moscows, 1980.
- (77) D. Douglass, op. cit., p.284.
- (78) Rotherham Advertiser, 29 May 1926.
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- (80) A. Mason, op. cit., p.421.
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- (83) J.E. Williams, op. cit., p.702.
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- (85) Conversations with Andrew Beattie, retired miner.
- (86) A.R. Griffin, The Miners of Nottinghamshire ..., p.165.
- (87) Doncaster Gazette, 7 May 1926.
- (88) Thorne Branch of the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association, Minutes 1926.
- (89) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.
- (90) J.E. Williams, op. cit., p.716.
- (91) Rotherham Advertiser, 29 May 1926.
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- (93) J. Davison, op. cit., p.77.
- (94) A. Mason, op. cit., pp. 421, 434.
- (95) Rotherham Advertiser, 28 August 1926.

- (96) K.J. Barron, 'A study of a mining community during the 1926 dispute', n.d., unpublished essay, p.42.
- (97) Doncaster Gazette, 22 October 1926.
- (98) Doncaster Gazette, 9 July 1926.
- (99) Daily Reports of the Local Emergency Food Office to the Divisional Food Officer, Chesterfield Town Clerk's Department.
- (100) J.A. Peck, op. cit., p.24.
- (101) Doncaster Gazette, 2 July 1926.
- (102) *ibid.*, 22 October 1926.
- (103) R.A. Leeson, op.cit., p.105.
- (104) J. Davison, op. cit., p.77.
- (105) Doncaster Gazette, 16 July 1926.

## CHAPTER 2

POOR LAW ADMINISTRATION DURING THE LOCK-OUT (I)Background

Communal and individual schemes of self-help, whatever form they took, enabled only a very small number of mining families to survive the lock-out without recourse to sources of assistance available under the poor law. In this section an attempt will be made to assess the impact of poor law relief in 1926 and to identify and account for possible regional variations in its administration.

The edifice of poor law regulations operating in the 1920s, though creaking alarmingly under the weight of mass unemployment, still rested largely on foundations laid down by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Central supervision of the poor law system had passed via the Poor Law Commission, the Poor Law Board and the Local Government Board to the Ministry of Health, but day-to-day administration at the local level remained the responsibility of elected boards of guardians, with the financial burden of relief being shouldered not by the Exchequer but by local ratepayers.

In matters of policy at the national level a theoretical commitment was maintained to the Amendment Act's twin-pillars of 'less eligibility' and the 'workhouse test', though the rigid application of these principles had long been tempered by considerations of practicality and more recently by the intrusion of humanitarian sentiments. Adherence to utilitarian principles was further undermined following the Local Government Act of 1894 which, by removing the rating qualifications governing the election of guardians, enabled working-class men and women to serve on local poor law boards. Working-class representation on local boards of guardians increased only steadily until 1918 when the Representation of the People

Act, by abolishing the regulation disfranchising recipients of poor law relief, enhanced the electoral prospects of working-class candidates. By the mid 1920s the composition of local boards in many industrial towns and cities had undergone considerable transformation and in some cases representatives of the property-owning classes had lost or almost lost their predominance.<sup>(1)</sup> Boards of guardians on which representatives of the labour movement formed a majority could usually be relied upon to administer their responsibilities to the poor with as much generosity as the law allowed and with scant regard to the sentiments of local rate-payers.

In some Labour-controlled poor law unions the granting of large-scale unconditional and relatively generous relief to the unemployed during the first two decades of the twentieth century was motivated by more than a natural desire to defend the living standards of working-class families. It formed part of a general strategy aimed at forcing central government to accept responsibility for the relief of unemployed workers generally, thus precipitating a break-up of the existing poor law system. Indeed, as revealed by a Ministry of Health report compiled shortly after the mining dispute of 1926 had been settled, this objective was interpreted in government circles as part of a more sinister threat to the stability of local government machinery:

The attempt was only one of a series of offensives directed by a certain political clique against various of the more vulnerable points of the system of local government, and it is more than possible that their aims extended beyond the transference to the Exchequer of the cost of unemployment. It is not suggested that industrial troubles since the war can be wholly ascribed to this small band of agitators, but it is a fact that where such troubles have occurred, advantage has invariably been taken of them to

direct action against the local government authorities. The clique is numerically no doubt of little account, but by means of an efficient system of intelligence and assumption of plausible slogans, it in fact controls a large body of persons who would promptly dissociate themselves from the real aims of the clique if these aims were openly avowed. (2)

As far as the poor law system was concerned, the chief centre of disturbance and major thorn in Ministry of Health flesh had for many years been the East London borough of Poplar. Crisis point was reached in 1921 when the Labour-dominated Poplar metropolitan borough council, led by George Lansbury, refused to honour the precepts of London County Council on the grounds that the rating system imposed inequitable burdens on the city's poorer boroughs and unions. It was unjust, argued Poplar's socialist councillors, to expect the poorer East End boroughs, which derived their poor law revenue almost entirely from property of a low rateable value, to bear the full brunt of relieving relatively large numbers of distressed inhabitants whilst their wealthier West End counterparts escaped almost unscathed. This act of defiance by the Poplar councillors eventually led to their imprisonment, but more significantly, 'resulted in a distinct victory for the revolutionaries'. (3) Legislation introduced later in the year authorised metropolitan boards of guardians to charge part of the costs of outdoor relief to the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund, thus spreading the burden over the whole of London.

Militant and ideologically motivated defiance of central government policy in matters of poor law administration came at all close to matching Poplar's example in only a handful of neighbouring East End unions such as West Ham, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Greenwich, and in parts of South Wales and the North East. Locally elected boards of guardians in many working-class areas, however, earned the Ministry of

Health's disapproval in the years leading up to the General Strike by granting unconditioned outdoor relief to the unemployed and by adopting what were regarded as over-generous scales of relief. Shortly before the national stoppage, for example, the Labour controlled Gateshead board of guardians was reported to have 'adopted extravagant rates of relief and attempted to obtain from the Minister of Health authority to overdraw to meet the extra cost involved. On being refused, they proceeded to levy a supplementary rate of alarming amount.'<sup>(4)</sup>

Thus the gradual adoption by Labour dominated boards of Poplar-inspired policies was by the early 1920s not only alarming the central poor law authority, but also greatly antagonising local ratepayers as the costs of relief escalated sharply with the advent of mass unemployment. The scale of this increasing burden on ratepayers is clear from the following tables, the first of which gives details of national expenditure; the second provides an example of an area with a high level of unemployment in the 1920s.

TABLE 2.1: EXPENDITURE OUT OF THE RATES ON POOR LAW RELIEF.

YEAR	PER HEAD OF POPULATION	TOTAL	EXCHEQUER CONTRIBUTIONS
1913	8/2½d	£11,591,000	£2,485,000
1919	9/10	14,712,000	2,519,000
1920	12/6½	19,479,000	2,585,000
1921	17/0¼	27,170,000	2,567,000
1922	22/3¼	37,396,000	2,644,000

Source: The Reform(!) of the Poor Law, Labour White Papers, No.32, January 1927, p.5.

TABLE 2.2: THE NUMBER OF PERSONS IN RECEIPT OF POOR LAW RELIEF AND THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF POOR RATE LEVIED IN THE PONTYPRIDD AND MERTHYR TYDFIL POOR LAW UNIONS.

FINAN- CIAL YEAR	PONTYPRIDD UNION		MERTHYD TYDFIL UNION	
	Number of per- sons in receipt of poor law re- lief on 1 Jan- uary in the financial year	Rates in the £ of overseers' contributions out of the poor rate to the common fund of the union	Number of per- sons in receipt of poor law re- lief on 1 Jan- uary in the financial year	Rates in the £ of overseers' contributions out of the poor rate to the common fund of the union
1911-12	7,059	s. d. 1. 1½	4,289	s. d. 1. 7
1912-13	7,754	1. 8½	4,691	1. 11¼
1913-14	7,634	1. 4¼	4,704	1. 11¾
1923-24	18,164	6. 7¼	11,573	8. 1½
1924-25	22,364	5. 5¾	15,994	7. 7½
1925-26	32,097	6. 5	21,882	7. 5

Source: Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons,  
1927, vol.203, cols. 1351-2.

#### The Merthyr Tydfil Judgement

Nothing during this period could be guaranteed to add more fuel to the flames of this alarm and antagonism than suggestions that Labour controlled boards of guardians were using, or rather misusing, public funds by relieving workers involved in industrial disputes. Recently constituted ratepayers' and property owners' protection associations argued that the act of relieving striking workers contravened existing poor law legislation, but in reality the legal position was far from clear.

The most authoritative pronouncement on the legality of affording poor relief to strikers and their dependants emanated from a court case initiated in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The action

was brought at the instance of the Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Company against the guardians of the Merthyr Tydfil Union who had been affording relief to miners involved in the coal strike of 1898 in South Wales. The company, which was one of the largest employers and ratepayers in the district, sought a declaration from the courts that the relief of strikers, who were held to be able to maintain themselves and their families, was a breach of the guardians' statutory duties. To the company's disappointment the action was dismissed by judge J. Romer largely on the grounds that it was not unlawful for boards of guardians to provide relief in cases of urgent necessity, even though that necessity arose from a refusal to work. Judge Romer further ruled that although the courts had jurisdiction in an action by ratepayers to restrain the improper application of the rates, such an action could not be brought to determine whether the guardians had been right or wrong in giving relief to certain cases. The proper course in such cases was to object to the expenditure before the auditor of guardian accounts and if dissatisfied with his decision, to appeal to the Local Government Board (later the Ministry of Health).<sup>(5)</sup>

In 1900, however, these findings were drastically amended in the Court of Appeal by the Master of the Rolls, Lord Lindley, in what became known as the 'Merthyr Tydfil Judgement'. Lord Lindley ruled that relief under the poor law could not legally be granted to able-bodied men who were physically fit to work and able to obtain employment at wages sufficient to support themselves and their families, but who refused to perform such work. The only circumstance in which men directly involved in an industrial dispute might lawfully be relieved was if they became so reduced by want as to be physically incapable of work. The men could then be charged with neglecting to maintain themselves and prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act of 1824. The judgement went on to state that a strike did not create a case of urgent necessity for relief within the

meaning of the terms of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, or give to the men collectively any right to relief which they would not enjoy individually. The wives and children of strikers and workers who through no fault of their own had been made idle by the industrial action of others remained unaffected by the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. If destitute, they became eligible for poor relief but in the case of strikers' wives and children the strikers again fell foul of the Vagrancy Act, this time for neglect of family.<sup>(6)</sup>

On a number of occasions during the period 1900 to 1926 first the Local Government Board and then the Ministry of Health felt it necessary to cite the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement for the guidance of local boards of guardians called upon to provide relief during industrial disputes. In practice, however, it was never possible to take entirely effective action to enforce these terms since it was realised that the difficulties raised by the judgement were so serious as to make it almost unworkable. Perhaps the judgement's major weakness from the central authorities' viewpoint concerned the ruling that relief was illegal to men who were unable to obtain work at wages sufficient to support themselves and their families, since it placed boards of guardians in the position of having to express an opinion on the merits of a particular dispute. This weakness was most clearly highlighted during the lengthy mining stoppage of 1921 when in a number of colliery districts Labour-dominated boards of guardians dissented from the view expressed by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, that the dispute was a strike. Not unreasonably, the Labour boards argued that since the miners had in fact been locked out by the colliery owners, they were unable to obtain work and were therefore eligible for relief. To some extent this premiss could be challenged by indicating that some colliery proprietors had posted notices at pit-heads declaring their readiness to employ the men at reduced rates of pay. But this left unaffected the argument that

the work so offered would not provide wages sufficient to support the miners and their families. The administration of poor relief, therefore, increasingly became a political question as boards of guardians granted or withheld relief in accordance with their views on the merits of the dispute and on the proper standard of living for the workers involved.

The admission that men could lawfully be relieved if through want they became physically incapable of work added still further to the difficulty of enforcing uniform interpretation of the judgement. The fact of destitution or 'incapacity' could only be determined by the guardians in the exercise of their fairly wide powers of discretion and this provided recalcitrant boards with ample opportunity to resist the central poor law authorities' recommendations. During the 1923 dock strike, for example, Poplar board of guardians in granting relief to strikers and their families openly declared 'that they were not concerned with the causes of destitution but merely with the fact of destitution'.<sup>(7)</sup> Even where local boards of guardians demonstrated less sympathy with the aims of organised labour in their interpretation of the judgement, their power to prosecute a striker for neglecting to maintain himself or his family was of very little practical use. The Vagrancy Act of 1824 was not only cumbrous, since it had to be applied separately and substantiated by investigation in every individual case, but it also presupposed that the board of guardians instituting the proceedings was in a position to determine the dispute on its merits and to establish that a specified individual was in a position to obtain work. Experience had shown that it was extremely difficult to secure convictions under the Act even when there was no strike question involved.<sup>(8)</sup>

A further source of confusion and embarrassment for the central poor law authority stemmed from the judgement's ruling that it was lawful

to relieve strikers' wives and children but not the strikers themselves. Not only was discrimination along these lines practically impossible to put into operation, but it also ran counter to a cardinal principle of poor law administration - that in determining the eligibility and the extent of eligibility of any applicant for relief, the household should be regarded as an indivisible unit and the whole of the household's resources should be taken into account. Clearly if outdoor relief was afforded to the wife and children it was scarcely possible to prevent the striker receiving a share of that relief and thus the effect of not relieving the striker directly was to reduce the resources of the whole household below the level generally considered necessary to relieve destitution. If, as happened in a number of Labour-controlled poor law unions during the mining dispute of 1921, boards of guardians chose in such circumstances to add the striker's share of relief to that of his wife and children, there was technically no longer any illegality and it proved extremely difficult to establish that excessive relief had been granted. In contrast, an attempt was made by certain poor law unions in mining areas to prevent strikers enjoying a share of relief granted to their dependants by the provision of relief to wives and children entirely in kind, with meals being provided through local soup kitchens. The guardians in one unnamed Midlands union went so far in their efforts to observe the judgement's obvious intention to separate the man from his family as to offer strikers relief in the workhouse as a condition of out-relief to their families.<sup>(9)</sup> This practice itself involved a breach of the law as established by the judgement, however, and the enforcement of such conditions does not seem to have been at all widespread. The only effective and legal method of enforcing the separate treatment advocated in the judgement was to admit strikers' families into the workhouse, but as the Ministry of Health reluctantly conceded, 'this course would probably violate public sentiment even if the necessary accommodation was available.'<sup>(10)</sup>

Because of the many practical difficulties involved, the power of the Minister of Health to intervene in cases in which poor relief was known to have been granted to striking workers was limited rather than strengthened by the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. It was open to any ratepayer or group of ratepayers to apply for an injunction to restrain local guardians from administering relief to strikers, and the Poor Law Department of the Ministry of Health would certainly have welcomed such action in the hope that it led to a revision of the judgement. But it was difficult for the Department openly to encourage ratepayers to adopt such a course since this would undoubtedly have been interpreted by the labour movement as political action designed to deprive strikers of the benefit of poor law relief. In the event, no opportunity to revise the law regarding strikers and relief presented itself and at the commencement of the mining dispute in 1926, therefore, the Ministry of Health was obliged to make the best of its very limited powers to enforce observance of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. The only line of administrative action open to the Poor Law Department at the outset of the dispute, then, was to advertise the actual state of the law, to enforce compliance as far as this was possible, and in the last resort to rely upon the district auditors to disallow any illegal expenditure on the part of local boards of guardians.<sup>(11)</sup> Department officials were only too aware, not only of the difficulties involved in enforcing compliance with the judgement, but also of the restricted powers of district auditors to deter or even recover illegal guardian spending. Although relief to strikers had been disallowed on a number of occasions prior to the national stoppage in 1926, the net results of intervention by district auditors had from the Ministry of Health's point of view proved far from satisfactory. Disallowances could not be made until the audit of accounts which generally took place long after the dispute had been settled, and even when these were confirmed by the

Minister of Health it proved impracticable in many cases to surcharge the responsible guardians with the whole cost of the illegal relief. The amounts surcharged were often determined more by the capacity of the individual guardians to pay than by the extent of their illegalities. And as Ministry officials noted, some boards of guardians 'would prefer the notoriety of distraint to the ignominy of having to repay the amount of relief illegally administered.'<sup>(12)</sup> Moreover, the systems adopted by some boards, of granting relief on loan and of tacitly relieving the striker by paying increased grants to his wife and children made it extremely difficult for the auditor to establish that illegal payments had in fact been made. In practice, the auditor could only disallow relief as excessive if it clearly exceeded prevailing wage rates in the area or was patently only a clumsy camouflage for the illegal relief of strikers.<sup>(13)</sup>

### Circular 703

Such difficulties notwithstanding, and in accordance with policy worked out during the nine months or so preceding the national stoppage, the Ministry of Health on 5 May 1926 issued a circular to all poor law unions in England and Wales reminding boards of guardians of their powers and responsibilities during industrial disputes. Circular 703 attempted first of all the far from easy task of clarifying the state of the law regarding the relief of striking workers:

With regard to the limits within which relief may be given to persons who are destitute in consequence of a trade dispute, the Minister desires to draw attention to the declaration of the law contained in the judgement of the Court of Appeal in Attorney-General versus Merthyr Tydfil Guardians (1900).

The function of the Guardians is the relief of destitution within

the limits prescribed by law and they are in no way concerned in the merits of an industrial dispute, even though it results in applications for relief. They cannot, therefore, properly give any weight to their views of such merits in dealing with the applications made to them.

The questions for the consideration of the Guardians on any application for relief made by a person who is destitute in consequence of a trade dispute are questions of fact, namely, whether the applicant for relief is or is not a person who is able-bodied and physically capable of work: whether work is or is not available for him and if such work is not available for him, whether it is or is not so unavailable through his own act or consent.

Where the applicant for relief is able-bodied and physically capable of work the grant of relief to him is unlawful if work is available for him or he is thrown on the Guardians through his own act or consent, and penalties are provided by law in case of failure to support dependants, though the Guardians may lawfully relieve such dependants if they are in fact destitute.<sup>(14)</sup>

The circular suggested that boards of guardians would probably find it necessary to adopt some defined scale of relief during the stoppage or where they already had a scale in operation to review its provisions and consider whether any modifications were desirable. More significantly, the circular went on to recommend its own maximum scale of relief, which for 'ordinary' cases of destitution arising out of unemployment coincided with the prevailing unemployment insurance benefit scale of 18s weekly for a man, 5s for a wife, and 2s for each child. In cases where the man was on strike and not therefore entitled to relief, it was recognised that dependants' allowances would necessarily have to be increased but these should not exceed 12s for the wife and 4s for each child up to a maximum of 32s weekly.<sup>(15)</sup> These amounts were

roughly equivalent to rates prevailing during the mining stoppage of 1921, after allowance had been made for the subsequent fall in the cost of living. The Ministry of Health hoped that the recommendation of a maximum scale would not only lead to uniformity in the administration of out-door relief, but would also discourage boards of guardians from adopting 'extravagant' scales of relief. The restriction of the recommended scale to that adopted for the payment of unemployment insurance benefit was clearly aimed at checking the practice, widespread in some districts, of supplementing unemployment benefit with additional relief. Exceptions could be made to the scales of outdoor relief adopted by boards of guardians in cases of sickness or other special need, but it was stressed that at least half of all 'emergency relief' afforded as a consequence of the national stoppage should be given in kind.

Attention was also directed in the circular to the possibility of instituting some form of communal feeding for strikers' dependants along the lines of schemes adopted in a number of colliery districts during the mining dispute of 1921. A recommendation was also made for close co-operation between boards of guardians and local education authorities in the matter of providing meals for schoolchildren, with the warning that 'the powers conferred on local education authorities by the Education Act 1921 in regard to the provision of meals were not intended to be so used as to throw the burden of the relief of destitution upon the Education rate'.<sup>(16)</sup> Schoolmeals and communal feeding schemes for strikers' dependants were forms of relief favoured by the Ministry of Health since, provided that the costs were taken into account by the guardians, they effectively prevented abuse of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement's requirement that strikers' wives and children should be relieved but not the strikers themselves.

### The Minister's Scale

The response of local boards of guardians to the 'suggestions' and 'recommendations' contained in Circular 703 varied considerably from area to area, particularly during the initial stages of the dispute. In a number of poor law unions there was a tendency at the outset to adopt emergency scales of outdoor relief significantly higher than the one recommended by the Ministry of Health. Particularly troublesome to the Ministry in this respect were boards of guardians at Chester-le-Street, Gateshead, Lanchester and Sedgefield in the North East, Rotherham and Hemsworth in Yorkshire, and Bedwellty, Llanelly and Pontypridd in South Wales.<sup>(17)</sup> Many, though by no means all, of the poor law unions adopting higher than recommended scales were in traditionally militant mining areas with boards of guardians dominated or strongly influenced by representatives of the labour movement. Whatever their political complexion, however, the vast majority of poor law boards in mining districts were in no position to resist effectively for long determined pressure from the Ministry to reduce 'extravagant' scales of relief. Poor law unions in nearly all industrial areas had since the collapse of the post-war boom in the summer of 1920, laboured under the Herculean task of relieving rapidly growing numbers of unemployed families from local rate revenue considerably eroded as a consequence of the depressed state of industry. In order to continue fulfilling their statutory obligation to relieve destitution, boards of guardians were left with no alternative but to borrow from the banks on the security of future rate yields and, when this source eventually dried up, to apply to the Ministry of Health for financial assistance. In response to this development a committee was set up by the Ministry of Health in November 1921 under the chairmanship of Sir W.H.N. Goschen, K.B.E., and with Ismay of the Treasury as secretary. The Goschen Committee's terms of reference were 'to consider applications made by Poor Law authorities in Great Britain for loans out of the Vote for

relief of unemployment, and in cases where they are satisfied that such authorities are unable to meet claims upon them for relief either from rate monies or from loans otherwise obtained to make recommendations to the Minister of Health or Secretary for Scotland with regard to the amount of any loan from the Vote and the conditions attaching thereto.<sup>(18)</sup>

At the commencement of the General Strike many poor law unions, already heavily in debt to their bankers or the Ministry of Health<sup>(19)</sup> and now faced with demands for relief on an unprecedented scale, were obliged to seek further loans. The financial difficulties experienced by boards of guardians thus presented the Ministry of Health with an ideal opportunity to insist upon closer conformity to the recommended relief scale as the price for sanctioning overdrafts or granting loans. In most cases Ministry officials did not have long to wait before they were able to take full advantage of this opportunity. Guardians in the Yorkshire coalmining union of Hemsworth decided at the outset of the dispute to grant emergency relief on a scale of 24s weekly for strikers' wives and 4s for each dependant child. But by the middle of May when the union's resources had already been severely depleted by emergency relief payments totalling nearly £2,000 per week, the Hemsworth board was compelled to seek financial aid.<sup>(20)</sup> On 17 May the Ministry of Health was requested to sanction a loan of £10,000 and at the same time authority was sought by the guardians to make a weekly relief payment of 15s to single miners living in lodgings. The Ministry's response to this approach and to news of the scale of emergency relief in operation at Hemsworth was outlined in a tersely-worded telegram dispatched to the union clerk on the following day: 'Minister cannot accept proposal as to scale of relief or proposal to relieve unmarried miners, and cannot sanction financial facilities unless both proposals are reconsidered.'<sup>(21)</sup> Some undertaking satisfactory to the Ministry of Health was apparently given by Hemsworth's guardians, for the board was later authorised to

borrow up to £10,000 on the understanding that the terms of Circular 703 were strictly observed. Ministry officials reacted angrily, therefore, when in applying for further overdraft sanction at the end of May, Hemsworth guardians indicated, somewhat artlessly, that they had reduced their scale in the manner stipulated except to dependants of trade union members not in receipt of strike pay, who they were relieving at the rate of 22s weekly for married women and 4s for dependant children.<sup>(22)</sup> The Ministry's immediate reply to Hemsworth's guardians was that their policy was contrary to the understanding upon which the earlier borrowing sanction had been given and was a clear evasion of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. No further facilities would be afforded to the board until existing policy was revised 'and a definite written undertaking given to the Minister'.<sup>(23)</sup>

Given the extent of their financial difficulties, the guardians at Hemsworth had little option but to bow reluctantly to Ministry pressure. The recommended scale was adopted and by the time a settlement was reached in the Yorkshire coalfields the board had received Ministry of Health sanction for overdrafts totalling more than £53,000.<sup>(24)</sup> Events in almost all the other poor law unions initially adopting scales of relief higher than the one recommended in Circular 703 conformed so closely to those experienced in Hemsworth as to render needless any detailed separate treatment. Before the end of May, boards of guardians at Chester-le-Street, Gateshead and Lanchester had been compelled to lower their scales in the face of Ministry threats to withhold financial facilities, and Sedgfield guardians fell into line shortly afterwards.<sup>(25)</sup> Although minor skirmishes were reported on occasion throughout the lock-out, by the middle of June the Ministry of Health was able to assert with considerable justification and, no doubt, some satisfaction that the scales of relief contained in Circular 703 'had found general acceptance'.<sup>(26)</sup>

By recommending a maximum scale of relief and making conformity a condition of loan sanction or other financial aid, the Ministry of Health was thus able to achieve in some part and fairly speedily its objectives of administrative uniformity and the prevention of 'excessive' relief scales being adopted in certain unions. But as Ministry officials were later obliged to concede, these objectives were not secured entirely without cost. In a number of mining districts relief scales prevailing before the General Strike, or adopted at hastily-convened board meetings during the early days of the national stoppage, were substantially lower than the maximum scale recommended in Circular 703. In such districts the Ministry's recommendations received a mixed response. Where boards of guardians were not unsympathetic to the plight of the locked-outminers and their families it was recognised that the recommendations afforded an opportunity legitimately to raise existing scales of relief, by treating the maxima laid down in the Circular as the ordinary rate to be applied. In less sympathetic or, as the Ministry would have it, 'better administered' unions, the effect of suggesting a definite maximum scale was to embarrass local guardians in their attempts to combat ever-growing demands for more liberal treatment in the way of relief for miners' families.<sup>(27)</sup> From the commencement of the dispute, miners' dependants were urged in the labour press to apply immediately for poor law relief and where prevailing scales were lower than the one recommended in Circular 703, to demand implementation of the 'Minister's scale'. A typical example of such exhortations can be found in a bulletin published on Wednesday 12 May by the Islington Trades Council:

#### IMPORTANT

The wives of men on strike or locked out who are in necessity, are urged to apply to the Guardians for relief.

The following are the scales of relief as laid down by the  
Ministry of Health:-

12/- per woman

4/- per child

(half to be given in kind)

THERE IS NO MORE DISGRACE IN TAKING GUARDIAN RELIEF than in  
taking Unemployment Insurance pay or National Health Insurance.

YOU PAY FOR ALL !!

Your Guardians will want to give you less than these amounts ...

INSIST ON THE ABOVE SCALE. (28)

Just how many poor law unions chose or felt obliged to increase existing scales of outdoor relief following the receipt of Circular 703 is not clear, but included in their number were the Welsh unions of Newport and Wrexham, and Castle Ward and Sunderland in the North East. The scales for miners' wives and children in Castle Ward and Sunderland at the beginning of the dispute were 8s and 4s and 10s and 2s respectively, but these were subsequently raised to the level of the 'Minister's scale' in the case of Castle Ward, and to 12s and 3s in Sunderland. (29) But Ministry of Health officials were not unduly dismayed by the extent of such reaction to the recommendation of a maximum scale. A memorandum compiled in February 1927 summarizing the effects of the mining dispute on the administration of poor relief, concluded that any disadvantage resulting from the recommendation 'was more than counterbalanced by securing lower scales in some of the more extravagantly administered Unions.' (30)

The 'general acceptance' by boards of guardians of the Ministry's recommended scale, however, did not necessarily guarantee either uniformity of administration or the prevention of 'extravagant' relief. Even in areas where the model scale of relief was theoretically in

operation from the outset, practical results could vary considerably from one union to another. By adding, on the one hand, certain extras such as allowances for coal and rent, or by deducting, on the other, such items as strike pay, the cost of school meals and the earnings of other members of the family local boards of guardians could materially increase or lessen the amount of actual assistance afforded. An active policy of inflating relief payments by the addition of unauthorised allowances could, however, be neither easily concealed from the prying eyes of the Ministry's inspectorate, nor convincingly defended if detected. Such a practice would undoubtedly have been condemned as a clumsy attempt to circumvent the recommendations contained in Circular 703 and have invited swift Ministry sanctions against the offending boards. When in October 1926 the Barnsley and District Property Owners' Association asked Barnsley's board of guardians to allocate a certain portion of emergency relief specifically for the payment of house rent, the clerk to the union pointed out 'that Relief Regulation Order 1911 prohibited the Board from complying with the request'.<sup>(31)</sup> Available evidence suggests overwhelmingly that the practice of supplementing relief payments with allowances, particularly allowances for rent, was adopted by very few local boards of guardians.<sup>(32)</sup> The requirement that such items as additional family income and the cost of supplementary forms of assistance should be deducted from the scale of relief was, however, much more difficult to police and presented loop-holes of which a number of local boards were only too eager to take advantage.

### Lock-out Payments

An early source of embarrassment to the Ministry of Health in this respect concerned the lock-out payments made by many of the miners' district and county organisations and the extent, if any, to which such grants could justifiably be deducted from the scale of relief. Having

already stressed that strikers were excluded by the Merthyr Tydfil judgement from the right to poor law relief, the Ministry could hardly rule that the value of lock-out payments was deductible in full from the amount of relief afforded to miners' dependants. Instead it was grudgingly conceded that a 'reasonable' part of any lock-out payment made by the miners' unions 'must be regarded as available only for the man and was not to be deducted from the scale of relief'.<sup>(33)</sup> The precise amount to be exempted was to some extent left to local discretion but it is clear that Ministry officials were briefed to make sure that wherever possible 'reasonable' was interpreted by boards of guardians in an appropriately modest fashion. At a meeting in June of the Worksop board, W.J. Turton, one of the Ministry's general inspectors, stressed that all available means should be taken into consideration when assessing relief entitlement, but advised somewhat cryptically that if 'a moderate part of the strike pay is not available for the wife and children, it might be ignored'.<sup>(34)</sup> In at least one colliery district the guardians, apparently without inviting subsequent rebuke or even comment from the Ministry of Health, adopted the legally dubious policy of refusing to grant any relief at all to the families of miners receiving lock-out payments.<sup>(35)</sup> But in many poor law unions boards of guardians were anxious that the miners should be allowed to retain the lion's share of the relatively small and increasingly irregular trade union grants. When pressed directly for guidance on the matter Ministry officials appear to have indicated that miners in receipt of trade union allowances might, with ministerial approval, retain for their own maintenance sums not exceeding ten shillings weekly. Following an interview in London on 10 May with H.W.S. Francis and E.J. Strohmer of the Ministry, Sheffield guardians decided, when assessing relief, to ignore the first ten shillings of 'strike pay' in the case of adults and five shillings in the case of youths receiving the lower rate of lock-out

allowances.<sup>(36)</sup> At a special meeting on 1 June a similar decision, 'subject to the sanction of the Ministry of Health', was reached by guardians in the nearby South Yorkshire mining union of Barnsley.<sup>(37)</sup> Not all local boards demonstrated quite so much concern for ministerial approval, however, for although the ten-shillings exemption ceiling was adopted by some poor law unions in County Durham, in others lock-out payments made by the Durham Miners' Association were ignored completely in calculating the relief entitlement of miners' dependants.<sup>(38)</sup>

Even had the policy of disregarding trade union grants when assessing relief been widely adopted by boards of guardians in all coal-mining areas, neither the benefits to locked-out miners nor the costs to local ratepayers would have proved at all substantial. Regular lock-out payments by even the wealthiest miners' unions were maintained for only a few weeks before being stopped completely or replaced by much smaller and more infrequent grants. It is extremely difficult, therefore, to understand Ministry of Health reaction to events in the Durham poor law union of South Shields. Unlike many of their counterparts in neighbouring unions, South Shields guardians had kept well within Ministry guidelines by allowing miners to retain only six shillings out of each of the two ten-shilling grants made before 5 June by the Durham Miners' Association.<sup>(39)</sup> Only on the rare occasions when the Association was subsequently able to make further grants of five shillings from funds collected largely by public subscription did the South Shields board instruct its relieving officers not to take account of lock-out payments when assessing claims for relief.

It was following one of these occasions that the board incurred the Ministry's displeasure. At an extraordinary meeting of the board on 2 July it was discovered that relieving officers in the union's Hebburn district, unaware of the guardians' latest ruling, had already deducted from the relief given to miners' dependants the full value of a

recent trade union grant. In the interests of fairness the South Shields board made the seemingly reasonable decision that the five shillings deduction should be refunded. The Minister of Health, however, responded less than enthusiastically to news of this decision. A typically long-winded communication, dated 26 July 1926, outlined in none too convincing fashion the Minister's objections to the board's concern for retrospective justice:

The Minister is informed that the Guardians will have before them at an early meeting a proposal that where, in the past, relief has been reduced because the money received by the man has been regarded in its entirety for the support of his wife and dependants, a refund ... should be made to the man. I am to point out that nothing ... would justify a payment of this kind. The Guardians did in the past relieve the present necessities of the applicants and they cannot now reopen a decision given on a consideration of the facts then existing. A decision ... affecting future relief in such a case where a further application has been made is of course upon a different footing, but such a decision cannot have regard to past facts in such a way as is suggested by the proposal before the Guardians. (40)

The content of this communication was submitted to the South Shields board at a meeting on 27 July, by which time the decision to refund the five shillings deducted from relief payments to the dependants of Hebburn's miners had apparently not yet been carried out. In an evident attempt to encourage reconsideration the chairman of the board of guardians, W. Corrie Grant, drew attention to the union's extremely precarious financial position and warned that an application would shortly have to be made to the Ministry for further overdraft sanction. Corrie Grant suggested that ratification of the decision to refund would

not only reduce the prospects of obtaining further authorisation to overdraw, but also expose the board to the considerable risk of sur-charge by the district auditor.<sup>(41)</sup> The chairman's gloomy prognostications did not unduly dismay the guardians, who by 17 votes to 10 resolved that the refund should proceed, but they clearly alarmed relieving officers in the union's employ. Early in August relieving officers from all of South Shields four poor law districts conveyed their anxiety to the union's clerk and indicated that in the absence of any lawful authority to refund 'they could not see their way to become personally responsible for any consequences that may follow'.<sup>(42)</sup> Instructions to refund deductions would be ignored, the officers warned, unless endorsed in each individual case by the initials or signature of a member of the union's district committees. Several members of these committees were later reported to have indicated their willingness to provide the required authorisation, but just how many of Hebburn's miners eventually received their five-shillings refunds is not known. Given the trifling sums involved and the doubtful merits of its case, Ministry of Health intervention in South Shields on the issue of refunds was no doubt interpreted by the local labour movement as both petty and vindictive and gave credence to charges that ministerial impartiality during the mining dispute was no more than a myth.

(1) In 1922, 14 of the 16 Gateshead borough representatives on the 36-strong Gateshead Poor Law Union Board were Ratepayers' Association candidates. By 1925 all 16 were Labour members and in April 1925 Labour captured 31 of the 36 places on the Board., F.W.D. Manders, 'The Last Days of the Poor Law - an example from the North-East', paper presented at the 1979 Economic History Society Conference. The advance of Labour in local

guardian elections should not be exaggerated, however.

According to the Webbs, the number of Labour-dominated boards during the 1920s never exceeded 50 out of a total of 620., S. and B. Webb, English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part II: The Last Hundred Years, 1929, pp.851-2.

- (2) P.R.O. MH57/94.
- (3) *ibid.* For a recent account of these events, see N. Branson, Poplarism, 1919-25: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt, 1973.
- (4) P.R.O. MH57/94.
- (5) The Law Times Reports, Vol. LXXXII (1900), pp.662-8.
- (6) *ibid.*
- (7) P.R.O. MH57/94.
- (8) *ibid.*
- (9) *ibid.*
- (10) *ibid.*
- (11) *ibid.*
- (12) *ibid.*
- (13) *ibid.*
- (14) P.R.O. MH57/115; the circular was reproduced in The Labour Year Book 1927, pp.265-6.
- (15) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (16) *ibid.*
- (17) P.R.O. MH57/115, MH57/116, MH57/118.
- (18) P.R.O. MH57/126.
- (19) Two not untypical examples may serve to demonstrate the scale of this indebtedness: During the period 1921-25 Sheffield Poor Law Union borrowed from the Ministry of Health four sums totalling £1,228,000 of which more than £750,000 was still outstanding on 31 March 1925. On 1 May 1926 the loan debts

of the much smaller Bedwellty Union in South Wales stood at £700,000. B.J. Elliott, 'The last five years of the Sheffield Guardians', in Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society, Vol.10, 1971-77, p.133; P. Jeremy op. cit., p.68.

- (20) Doncaster Gazette, 28 May 1926.
- (21) *ibid.*
- (22) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (23) *ibid.*
- (24) Poor Law Annual, 1928-29, p.157.
- (25) P.R.O. MH57/118. In the Scottish coalfields, too, attempts by Labour-controlled parishes to adopt scales of out-door relief higher than the one recommended by the Ministry of Health's Scottish counterpart, the Board of Health, were similarly blocked; see Ian Levitt, 'The Scottish Poor Law and Unemployment, 1890-1929' in T.C. Smout (ed.), The Search for Wealth and Stability, 1979, p.277.
- (26) P.R.O. MH57/94.
- (27) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (28) Islington Bulletin No.7, 12 May 1926, British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES) Coll. Misc. 140 M214.
- (29) P.R.O. MH57/118,  
Sunderland Board of Guardian Minutes, T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC209/486.
- (30) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (31) Minutes of the Guardians of the Barnsley Union, 26 October 1926.
- (32) Reports from all coalfield areas in 1926 indicate that throughout the eight months or so of the stoppage a very large majority of miners were unable to pay any rent at all and were therefore heavily in debt when they eventually returned to work. Accumulated rent arrears recorded for colliery houses owned

by Earl Fitzwilliam in the villages of Rawmarsh and Greasbrough on the outskirts of Rotherham increased from less than £45 in May to more than £455 in November. (Earl Fitzwilliam's Collieries Ltd., Rents Book 1921-1932, Sheffield City Archives, NCB876.) The repayment of rent arrears amounting in some cases to more than £30 represented an extremely heavy burden for miners who had been forced back to work at reduced rates of pay. In an attempt to recover rent arrears as quickly and efficiently as possible many coalmining companies made regular weekly deductions from the wage packets of their colliery house tenants. Sometimes this procedure was organised on a reasonable and humane basis, but this was not invariably the case. In South Yorkshire, a suggestion put forward by the Yorkshire Mineworkers' President, Herbert Smith, that not more than 2s6d arrears should be deducted each week from miners' wages appeared at first to have been favourably received by representatives of the South Yorkshire Coal Trade Association. But although some colliery companies asked only that 1s arrears should be paid each week, 'rent-and-a-half' was demanded from many miners in the district, including those living in houses owned by Earl Fitzwilliam. Where this was the practice severe hardship often resulted even in those districts where the collieries were working at close to full production. At a number of pits in South Yorkshire as elsewhere, however, the miners resumed work on short-time and hardship became so acute that the colliery proprietors had little alternative but temporarily to reduce the amount of rent arrears demanded. Nevertheless, despite repeated protests and angry threats from Herbert Smith to the owners' association, many miners continued to be stopped one-and-a-half

week's rent or even more from their wages until the arrears had been cleared. (Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Joint Committee Minutes, 1926-27.)

- (33) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (34) Worksop Union Minutes, 18 June 1926.
- (35) Co-operative News, 29 May 1926.
- (36) Sheffield Union Minutes, 12 May 1926.
- (37) Barnsley Union Minutes, 1 June 1926.
- (38) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (39) South Shields Union Minutes, 10 June 1926, T.W.C.C.A.D. ACCT81/33.
- (40) *ibid.*, 27 July 1926.
- (41) *ibid.*
- (42) *ibid.*, 5 August 1926.

## CHAPTER 3

POOR LAW ADMINISTRATION DURING THE LOCK-OUT (II)School Meals

A less transient and potentially more acrimonious source of conflict between the Ministry of Health and local boards of guardians centred on the emotive issue of free school meals. Legislation introduced in 1921 conferred discretionary powers on local education authorities to provide school meals to children who through lack of food were unable to take full advantage of the education provided. School feeding as a form of relief was given cautious approval by the Ministry since, provided the costs were taken into account by local boards, it conformed to the Merthyr Tydfil judgement's requirements that only strikers' dependants should be relieved during industrial disputes. The extent to which county council and county borough education committees exercised their discretionary powers to provide school meals varied significantly from one area to the next. In the North East, where considerable use of these powers had been made during the lock-out of 1921, the Northumberland Education Committee decided on this occasion that large-scale school feeding as a matter of course would not be introduced and this stance was maintained throughout the stoppage despite repeated protests from the county's mining trade unions. The Northumberland Committee did provide school meals to necessitous children but on only a very small scale and, except in special circumstances, only after local boards of guardians had agreed to defray the cost. By 3 December 1926 some 230,000 school meals had been provided by the Committee for about 1,100 children at a total cost of £2,118. About £950 of this was recoverable from local boards.<sup>(1)</sup> This contrasts very sharply with the picture in

neighbouring Durham where the Labour-controlled County Council very quickly instituted school feeding on a large scale and apparently without either consulting local boards or inviting them to contribute to the cost. Figures presented in the House of Commons by the Duchess of Atholl on 24 March 1927 reveal that between 1 May and 26 December 1926 the Durham County Education Authority provided the staggering total of 19,387,504 school meals at an estimated cost of £283,781.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, school meals were provided in the county by local education authorities at Hartlepool, Felling, Hebburn, Gateshead, South Shields, Sunderland and West Hartlepool.<sup>(3)</sup> More than 300 feeding centres were established by the Durham Authority and meals were provided not only for children attending the county's elementary schools, but also for pre-school groups between the ages of three and five. Durham County's Medical Officer of Health estimated that no fewer than one hundred thousand children were provided with breakfast and dinner five days a week throughout the whole of the mining dispute.<sup>(4)</sup>

In many Durham poor law unions the guardians were extremely reluctant to make deductions from relief scales on account of meals provided by the education authorities with the result, as Ministry officials ruefully observed, that the resources of the miners' families in these districts were brought above the scale recommended in Circular 703. Furthermore, it produced from the Ministry's viewpoint the equally unpalatable effect of transferring part of the burden of poor law relief from boards of guardians to local education authorities and by this means to the Exchequer. The Ministry attempted, therefore, by applying financial pressure wherever necessary, to persuade reluctant boards of guardians not only to deduct from their relief scales the full value of meals provided to strikers' children, but also to refund to local education authorities the amounts deducted. In the case of particularly debt-ridden poor law unions like Gateshead, the guardians

decided that they had little alternative but to comply immediately and fully with Ministry wishes.<sup>(5)</sup> Generally, however, the Ministry was far from satisfied with the results of its endeavours in County Durham to enforce deductions. Sunderland guardians at the end of August flatly refused a Ministry request to make deductions, on the grounds that the relief scale operating in the union was a shilling per child below the scale recommended in Circular 703, thus making allowance for any meals supplied.<sup>(6)</sup> The South Shields board, after deciding in June that deductions should be made, revoking this decision in July, procrastinating in the face of clear Ministry displeasure in August and refusing later in the same month to make any further deductions, eventually succumbed to mounting pressure from the Ministry by agreeing to make a deduction of one shilling from relief scales in respect of each child receiving school meals.<sup>(7)</sup> Events in a number of Durham poor law unions followed a similar pattern, with deductions introduced or increased by boards of guardians during the later stages of the stoppage, but often on a scale that did not fully recoup the cost of meals provided. In Easington, for example, Ministry 'exhortations to economise' led to deductions on account of school meals being increased from 1s to 1s6d per week, although the Ministry had recommended sums of 2s or 2s6d.<sup>(8)</sup>

A long way behind Durham in the provision of meals came the counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire. In Lancashire some 2,180,646 meals were provided by the County Education Authority at an estimated cost of £24,436. Local authorities in St. Helens, Wigan and Burnley also introduced relatively large-scale feeding schemes during the lock-out.<sup>(9)</sup> Ministry of Health officials reported that in Lancashire as in Durham there appeared to have been a failure or partial failure on the part of local boards of guardians to deduct the cost of meals from scales of relief, 'with the result that assistance given to miners' families was actually higher than the scales provided'.<sup>(10)</sup> In the

West Riding of Yorkshire extra expenditure on school meals by the education committees of the county council, and the seven county borough councils was estimated at £30,000 with child welfare centres providing additional milk and such items as baby food at a cost of nearly £10,000.<sup>(11)</sup>

The scale, quality and efficiency of school feeding operations in Barnsley were noted with some pride in the triennial report of the town's education committee published in 1927:

As a result of the Industrial Dispute in 1926, many children in attendance at Elementary Schools within the Borough were unable, owing to insufficiency of food, to take full advantage of the education provided for them, and the Committee in exercising their powers under Section 85 of the Education Act, provided free meals for these children on an extensive scale from May 10 until shortly before Christmas, 1926.

Free meals, which consisted of breakfast and dinner, prepared in accordance with a carefully selected dietary were served at 22 Feeding Centres every day (including school holidays) to all children who were in need of food, and who came from households to which the total income did not exceed 6/- per head after deducting the rent payable, and under these arrangements 1,118,071 meals were supplied at a cost of £11,465.18.10, or at an average cost of 2.46 pence per meal. As a result of the splendid manner in which the voluntary helpers who worked under the supervision of teachers discharged their arduous duties, the Committee found it unnecessary to engage professional cooks and consequently 94 per cent of the total expenditure represented the actual cost of food.<sup>(12)</sup>

Throughout much of the stoppage Barnsley's board of guardians resolutely refused to comply both with requests from the West Riding Education

Committee to contribute to the cost of meals supplied to schoolchildren and from the Ministry of Health to take the value of such meals into consideration when determining the amount of relief to be afforded to the families of striking miners. Such was the degree of unanimity on the latter issue, that at a meeting of the board on 14 September a motion that 'a reduction be made in the amount of Emergency Relief granted to children who are being supplied with meals by the Local Education Authority' failed to attract a seconder.<sup>(13)</sup> Barnsley's guardians continued to resist until well into October, when they finally agreed to deduct the value of school meals from relief payments as a condition for receiving a further loan of £30,000 from the Ministry of Health.<sup>(14)</sup> Nevertheless, in May 1927 the Barnsley Board turned down yet another request from the West Riding County Council to reconsider their decision not to make any contribution to the cost of providing school meals during the lock-out.<sup>(15)</sup> Similar appeals from the County Council to Rotherham's board of guardians fell on equally stony ground.<sup>(16)</sup>

Information from other coalmining areas, not so much on the scale of school feeding operations, but on board of guardian response to their implementation is fairly patchy. In parts of Leicestershire, North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire extra school meals were provided by local education authorities and though, with the exception of Nottingham, Basford and Chesterfield, deductions were not generally made from relief scales, the financial costs involved were not considered sufficiently serious to alarm the Ministry of Health. In the Welsh poor law unions there appears to have been great variation in the extent to which this form of assistance was invoked, with the Ministry reporting that in many cases no additional use of school feeding was made.<sup>(17)</sup> At their peaks, however, the numbers of schoolchildren fed by Glamorgan and Rhondda education authorities during the lock-out were exceeded only in Durham and Lancashire.<sup>(18)</sup> In some Welsh unions children whose

parents were being relieved by local guardians were excluded from school-feeding schemes, whilst in others poor law relief was refused in cases where children were being fed by the local education authority.

There is evidence that parents in a number of mining districts withdrew their children from school feeding schemes rather than either suffer deductions from their total relief entitlement, or enter into commitments to repay the cost of meals once work was resumed in the pits. (19)

The Ministry of Health's later appraisal of its decision to recommend school feeding as an appropriate source of relief during the stoppage was, minor difficulties notwithstanding, an almost entirely favourable one:

There seems no doubt that this form of assistance was found most valuable both in insuring that the children did not suffer in the course of the dispute and in securing that the assistance provided for them did in fact reach those for whom it was intended and was not shared, as was often the case with food tickets and relief in kind, by the strikers themselves. (20)

The former of these perceived beneficial aspects of school feeding presented the Ministry of Health with an extremely useful propaganda weapon, and in fact some fairly extravagant claims were made concerning the condition during the coal stoppage of those children who received school meals. The Ministry claimed, for example, 'that there is abundant evidence supported in many cases by the reports of the County Medical Officers that privation among children was not only practically non-existent during the dispute, but that actually the children were better nourished and healthier than usual'. (21) Certainly, during the early and middle stages of the dispute in particular, testament to the wholesome effects of school feeding on children's health was forthcoming from

a variety of quarters. As might be expected, much of the more favourable comment originated in County Durham where school feeding was most extensively carried on. Towards the end of June 1926 the county's N.S.P.C.C. inspector claimed that the children under his care were not as yet adversely affected by the mining dispute 'except in the matter of clothing and boots' and that he was unable to quote any case 'where difficulty has been experienced in obtaining necessary food or milk where recommended'.<sup>(22)</sup> Also optimistic was an article in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle in July, which observed that distress in County Durham was less apparent than in neighbouring Northumberland and suggested that this could be explained to a large extent by the provision in the former county of school meals by the education authorities.<sup>(23)</sup> This view was endorsed by Durham County's Medical Officer of Health in his report for the quarter ended 30 September 1926:

Despite the industrial dispute in the coal trade, which has continued during the whole of the past quarter, the mortality statistics are the most satisfactory in my experience. Not only is the total death-rate the lowest on record for the third quarter of the year, but the death-rate from the chief infective diseases and the infant mortality rate are, with one or two exceptions, the lowest in my experience, while the phthisis and acute lung diseases death-rates are the lowest I have ever recorded in any quarter. The very favourable climatic conditions experienced during the past quarter have no doubt favourably influenced the health of the county, and I have not the slightest doubt myself that the steps which have been taken to safeguard the health of our young population by providing suitable meals in necessitous cases have been fully justified from the health standpoint.<sup>(24)</sup>

Reports from other mining districts where local authorities exercised their powers to provide school meals also tended to indicate that the condition of miners' children during the lock-out presented no great cause for alarm. In Doncaster the School Medical Officer, Dr. D. Lechmere Anderson, reported that children attending the town's elementary schools during the stoppage were 'generally well nourished, only three children being recorded as suffering from malnutrition', with forty-nine other children apparently enjoying a less debilitating condition brought about by 'sub-normal' nutrition.<sup>(25)</sup> School feeding arrangements in both Adwick-le-Street and Bentley-with-Arksey near Doncaster 'worked satisfactorily' claimed the Medical Officer of Health, A.B. Dunne, 'and until the closing phase of the struggle there were few evidences of malnutrition'.<sup>(26)</sup>

Ministry of Health claims that miners' children were better fed during the lock-out than when their fathers were regularly hewing coal, if true, spoke volumes for the miners' case in resisting the imposition of wage reductions and longer working hours. But spokesmen representing both the labour movement and the various relief agencies at work in the coalfields were quick to counter that the Ministry's claims were clearly exaggerated. Optimistic pronouncements issued by the N.S.P.C.C. on children's health during the stoppage were also hotly challenged. There can, of course, be no doubt that school feeding schemes, especially those operating in County Durham, provided a very important source of relief in 1926. But even in Durham they were unable entirely to prevent hardship and distress amongst children and it is not difficult to cast doubt on the Ministry's claim that local opinion, including the evidence of school teachers and medical officers of health, 'was unanimously to the effect that the physique of the children improved during the dispute especially in areas in which school meals were provided'.<sup>(27)</sup> In South Shields, for example, the local medical officer of health reported

that 'the adverse effect of the industrial depression was especially noticeable in certain of the schools, where many of the children were below the average physically. Those suffering from anaemia, debility, and malnutrition, were unfortunately far too numerous.' (28)

### Single Miners

Perhaps the most difficult and pressing problem faced by boards of guardians in all mining areas during the lock-out was how to deal with single able-bodied miners, especially those who lived in lodgings. Married miners and single miners living in the parental home, though themselves denied relief under the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement, were able to share, however meagerly, any allowance made to their families. But unmarried miners living in lodgings very often were left with virtually no means of support. During the early weeks of the stoppage many boards of guardians, either in ignorance or defiance of the law, yielded to local pressure by affording emergency relief to single miners. In some poor law unions this policy was hastily abandoned when boards of guardians were informed by the Ministry of Health of the error of their ways. In others, including Barnsley, Bedwellty, Bridgend and Cowbridge, Chester-le-Street, Easington, Houghton-le-Spring, Penistone and Stoke and Wolstanton, the Ministry found it necessary to remind the guardians that loans and overdrafts could be sanctioned only on the explicit understanding that the requirements of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement were fully observed. (29) With one or two notable exceptions, to be considered in some detail later, open defiance by local boards on this question was but short-lived. Guardians in a number of mining districts, however, were able, by adopting less openly defiant tactics, to relieve fairly substantial numbers of single miners on a more or less regular basis throughout the dispute.

At the centre of much of the agitation to relieve single miners during the national coal stoppage were the local relieving officers, who alone under the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement were empowered to afford relief in cases of 'sudden or urgent necessity'. It was clearly the intention of the judgement that such powers should be used only sparingly and with the 'utmost discretion'. Relief in kind sufficient only to relieve 'immediate needs' could legitimately be given by relieving officers, and then not until it had been established that the applicant was so reduced by privation as to be physically incapable of work.<sup>(30)</sup> Boards of guardians in a number of poor law unions decided quite early in the dispute that the question of granting relief to single miners should be left to the discretion of relieving officers to deal with as cases of sudden or urgent necessity. In some cases this course of action was adopted simply as a means of ridding the guardians themselves of the onerous task of dealing with demands for relief from large numbers of increasingly desperate single miners. But in others it was seen by local guardians as a possible means of circumventing the regulations excluding single miners from relief. Where the latter motive prevailed it was with varying degrees of subtlety made clear to relieving officers that they were expected to exercise their discretionary powers to the advantage of single miners. Frequently board of guardian expectations in this respect took the form of fairly broad hints to relieving officers that they might regard a certain amount administered at regular intervals as necessary to relieve a condition of unfitness for work. On rarer occasions they took the form of explicit instructions from the guardians requiring relieving officers to relieve single miners on a specified scale regardless of their physical condition. In Houghton-le-Spring, where the board of guardians comprised 37 Labour members and only 9 'moderates', relieving officers were allegedly given verbal instructions as early as 21 May to relieve all single men involved

in the dispute at a flat rate of 10s per week. Houghton's relieving officers were extremely reluctant to carry out these instructions and did so only after considerable pressure had been exerted by the board's Labour members. One officer who was prominent in resisting the guardians' demands was apparently threatened at a board meeting 'with a holiday on a medical certificate'.<sup>(31)</sup> Ralph Barras, another of the union's relieving officers, later reported that Houghton's guardians had been actively inciting local miners to apply for poor law relief and 'to make things unpleasant' for the officers if relief was refused. Barras complained that he himself had on one occasion been threatened by a man with a stick, who in the presence of board members promised to 'sweep the road with him'. The guardians did nothing to support him, complained Barras, who apparently became so concerned for his personal safety that he took to carrying in his pocket a 'life preserver' given to him by a local colliery manager.<sup>(32)</sup>

Similar complaints of coercion were made by relieving officers in the neighbouring poor law union of Chester-le-Street, where 47 of the 59 guardians were representatives of the Labour Party. (Miners' representatives alone totalled 39.) At a meeting of the guardians at the commencement of the national stoppage the Labour majority voted themselves into an 'emergency committee' which in effect assumed complete control of the union's affairs. This committee quickly summoned the union's relieving officers, who were informed that regardless of ministerial directives on the matter it was expected that single miners would continue to be relieved on the scale already in operation. The officers were then allegedly warned that if they failed to carry out the guardians' wishes they could 'expect something' at the next board meeting.<sup>(33)</sup> Subsequently, an individual member of the Chester-le-Street board was sentenced to three months' imprisonment without the option of a fine for having while in office obstructed a relieving officer in the

performance of his duty. The guardian had threatened 'not to let the Relieving Officer go until he had relieved single men', and had presented him with a written direction to this effect headed 'Instructions from Trotsky', and addressed to the 'Relieving Officer of Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Death'.<sup>(34)</sup>

The position of relieving officers in poor law unions like Chester-le-Street and Houghton-le-Spring was clearly an unenviable one. Continued refusal to relieve single miners invited hostility both from disappointed applicants and from boards of guardians on whom the officers relied for promotion and increases of salary. The unlawful provision of indiscriminate relief to able-bodied single men on the other hand would have exposed relieving officers to ministerial displeasure and to the possibility of surcharge. In the North-East concern amongst relieving officers about their role during the mining dispute became so acute that on 26 July 1926 a deputation from the National Association of Relieving Officers was sent to interview officials of the Poor Law Department at the Ministry of Health. After cataloguing their tribulations during the stoppage the deputation suggested that the Ministry of Health should make itself responsible for the appointment and remuneration of relieving officers thus removing them from the influence of guardians who wished them to break the law. H.W.S. Francis, Assistant Secretary at the Ministry, made sympathetic and supportive noises but could offer the relieving officers little in the way of practical assistance. Francis did, however, agree to consider another of the deputation's suggestions, that a letter of instruction to relieving officers should be circulated throughout the country.<sup>(35)</sup> This suggestion was in fact acted upon in August when the Ministry issued to poor law unions in mining districts Circular 725 reminding relieving officers of their statutory duties and responsibilities. The circular stated that relieving officers were in the service of locally elected boards of guardians and were bound to

carry out any lawful orders given by them. But it went on to warn that in dealing with any application for relief the relieving officer must act upon his own responsibility and in an independent capacity. If in performing an unlawful act the relieving officer was acting under the instructions of the guardians this was no protection to him from the consequences of the act for which he was personally liable. Perhaps in anticipation of the anxiety that his information would arouse, the circular concluded by indicating that relieving officers could not be dismissed by local boards of guardians without the consent of the Minister of Health.<sup>(36)</sup>

Nowhere was ministerial intervention to bolster the resolve of relieving officers more necessary than in ~~Chester-le-Street~~, where despite the union's long-standing financial difficulties the guardians continued to instruct their officers to relieve single men. Already £50,000 in debt at the commencement of the dispute, ~~Chester-le-Street~~ guardians were repeatedly obliged to approach the Ministry for further overdraft sanction. In May the guardians obtained authority to extend their borrowing by £20,000, but in June were informed by the Ministry that further overdraft sanction was conditional upon both a reduction in the union's poor law expenditure and the discontinuation of illegal relief payments to single miners. A guardian deputation to the Ministry on 11 June protested strongly against any conditions whatever being imposed on their obtaining further sanctions, but reluctantly promised to recommend the full board to rethink its policy on the question of relief to single men. On the strength of this assurance the ~~Chester-le-Street~~ board received in successive weeks sanction for two further overdrafts of £10,000 each. When it was reported on 25 June, therefore, that single miners were still being relieved in the union, Chamberlain received the news with some annoyance and drafted the following letter to the board:

The Minister is informed by the General Inspector that the guardians are relieving single strikers in lodgings by granting 6s twice a week to all who state that they are destitute. This would appear to be a breach of the undertaking given to the Minister. The Minister will not, of course, be prepared to consider favourably any proposal for further financial facilities unless the guardians undertake to leave such cases to apply to the relieving officers to be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law as laid down in the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. (37)

According to Chamberlain, the guardians' letter of reply was essentially conciliatory and contained an undertaking to leave entirely to the discretion of relieving officers the question of relief to single destitute miners. Consequently, two further sanctions to overdraw were given, one for £10,000 and the other for £9,000, but these sums were quickly exhausted and on 22 July the board was obliged to send another deputation cap-in-hand to the Ministry. Chamberlain later alleged that in the course of conversation at this meeting it was admitted by the deputation that the union's relieving officers were anxious to obey the law, 'but found it extremely difficult to do so when guardians went to public meetings and said that they had given the relieving officers instructions to grant relief to these men'. (38) The independence of relieving officers in Chester-le-Street was further undermined as a consequence of the board's policy of appointing from among the ranks of the single miners themselves the additional relief staff required during the stoppage to deal with the vastly increased number of applicants. Cuthbert Laws, one of the union's full-time relieving officers, later alleged that many of the 400 men who packed the Picture Hall at Birtley in response to a guardian appeal for temporary assistants were unable to read or even write their names. (39) Law's suggestion that it would be more appropriate to apply to the unemployment exchange for unemployed

clerks was rudely dismissed by the assembled guardians, who proceeded to select assistant relieving officers from the applicants thronging the Picture Hall. Whether there is any substance to Law's subsequent claim that many of those selected were relatives or friends of the guardians is not known, but it is clear that the newly-appointed assistant relieving officers generally responded to appeals for relief from single miners with considerably more sympathy and generosity than was felt necessary both by the union's full-time officers and by the Ministry of Health.

Towards the end of July, Chamberlain sent letters to Chester-le-Street's relieving officers reminding them of the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement, and to the union's board with the promise that if the guardians were prepared to 'withdraw their opposition to the relieving officers complying with the law' then he was prepared to provide sanction for a further loan.<sup>(40)</sup> Again the guardians appear to have indicated acquiescence, for on 30 July a Goschen loan of £16,000 was made available, the banks having by then refused to advance any more money to the board. But only a fortnight later Chester-le-Street's guardians passed the following resolution re-affirming their commitment to the practice of relieving distressed single miners:

That in the opinion of this board, its action in relieving single persons is legal and proper, that the board regrets inability either to desist from such policy or to find the necessary money to carry it out, and calls upon the Ministry of Health to immediately produce such funds.<sup>(41)</sup>

Chamberlain responded to this call by directing the union's relieving officers to discontinue illegal relief payments to single miners and by making what turned out to be a final appeal to the guardians to comply with the law. With the union's increasingly critical financial position

by now becoming a major consideration, the guardians once more wavered and at a meeting on 23 August resolved to leave the question of relief to single men entirely in the hands of the relieving officers. This brought forth another Goschen loan of £25,000, but within a matter of days the Chester-le-Street board was once again embarked on a now irreversibly self-destructive collision course with the Ministry of Health. Instrumental in the guardians' latest and final policy reversal on the question of relief to single men may have been the influence of a mass demonstration of miners called to protest at the board's recent decision to leave the matter to the discretion of relieving officers. Accompanied by colliery bands and carrying local lodge banners, a crowd of some five thousand miners marched on the town to acquaint the board with the extent of distress in the district.<sup>(42)</sup> Later the same day, 26 August, the board decided to suspend three of the union's relieving officers who had allegedly refused to grant relief to single miners, and followed up this action with a written request to the Ministry for a further loan of £35,000.<sup>(43)</sup> The Ministry's response to this request was swift and not altogether unexpected. Chester-le-Street's erring guardians, meeting together on 30 August for the last time in their official capacity, were read the contents of a letter from the Ministry reinstating the three suspended relieving officers and stating that preparations were already under way to supersede the existing board.<sup>(44)</sup> Accordingly, on 30 August Chamberlain made an order under the recently introduced Boards of Guardians (Default) Act<sup>(45)</sup>, suspending the union's elected guardians and appointing in their place the Ministry's District General Inspector, N.B. Batterbury. (Batterbury was later replaced by a board comprised of three new guardians appointed by the Ministry.) Inevitably, supersession heralded a much harsher regime in the union and for the remainder of the dispute relief, not only to single miners but to all applicants, was far more stringently administered. At

the end of August 10,951 cases were being relieved by the old board but by the end of the lock-out this number had been steadily reduced to 8,135.<sup>(46)</sup> The fate of Chester-le-Street's unmarried miners, post-supersession, was eased to some extent when arrangements were made between local miners' lodges and co-operative societies for food to be supplied on credit to single men.

A crucial consideration in determining the legality or otherwise of relieving single miners during the lock-out was the state of health of the men themselves. Under the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement relieving officers, as we have seen, could legally only afford relief to strikers who through want had become physically incapable of work. If relieving officers had doubt as to the extent of a miner's incapacity they were encouraged by the Ministry of Health to refer to the appropriate district medical officer for an opinion. Where this advice was followed responsibility for the authorisation of relief to single miners thus to some extent devolved upon the district medical officers, who generally accepted the duty with a marked absence of enthusiasm. In July a resolution was submitted to the Rotherham board by local medical officers strongly protesting against the action of the guardians 'in placing on them responsibilities with regard to the administration of relief to single men'. The medical officers argued that a decision could not be made on medical grounds alone since malnutrition did not show certifiable signs 'until serious damage may have been done to the health of the individual'.<sup>(47)</sup> Such doubts were all the more strongly felt in those areas where the numbers of cases referred to the district medical officers were too large to permit proper examination. Medical officers were also concerned that their involvement exposed them to the kinds of abuse and intimidation already experienced in some mining areas by relieving officers. Less than twenty-four hours after its introduction in Houghton-le-Spring, the practice of examining applicants for

relief was discontinued by medical officers when two of their number were violently assaulted by a crowd, presumably for failing to make satisfactory diagnoses. (48)

Generally, where boards of guardians or relieving officers insisted upon the medical examination of applicants, there inevitably followed a decline in the numbers of single men relieved during the stoppage. But medical officers in a few mining districts were prepared to be fairly generous in the issue of certificates which stated that through lack of food many single miners were physically unfit for work. This practice appears to have been particularly widespread in the Sedgefield union in County Durham where the numbers of single men relieved on medical certificates tended to increase as the dispute progressed. During one period, district medical officers in this union were reported to have certified as incapable of work 75 per cent of the single miners referred to them, with one officer certifying every one of the 342 men he examined. (49)

It is possible that the actions of medical officers in Sedgefield, and other mining unions where certification was above average, were inspired in part at least by feelings of sympathy with the cause of the locked-out miners. A more likely explanation, however, lies in the fact that many doctors practising in mining communities derived practically the whole of their income from panel patients and may have felt compelled to provide medical certificates to single miners wherever possible.

### The Workhouse

A fairly characteristic feature of the stoppage in those mining districts in which outdoor relief was either refused or curtailed was the mass demonstration by single men demanding admission to the union workhouse or 'institution'. Born of desperation, most of these demonstrations were intended to compel boards of guardians to concede outdoor relief rather than actually to gain admission to the workhouse, which in

popular imagery still smacked of the Bastille. Occasionally these outbursts of popular protest met with some small though usually short-lived success. At the end of May food vouchers were distributed to a number of marching single miners by Rotherham workhouse officials when it was discovered that the 'house' could not accommodate all those demanding institutional relief. Several days later an emergency meeting of Rotherham's board of guardians decided that in view of the acute accommodation shortage at the union's Alma Road institute single miners living in lodgings should be given a weekly food ticket to the value of ten shillings.<sup>(50)</sup> After considering correspondence from the Ministry of Health, however, which pointed out that relief to able-bodied strikers, whether given inside or outside the workhouse, was equally illegal, the board rescinded this decision and, as we have seen, responsibility for the relief of single miners in the town was eventually thrust upon the unwilling shoulders of the district medical officers. Subsequent demonstrations by single miners in Rotherham demanding either outdoor relief or admission to the workhouse achieved no tangible results. The reception afforded to one such demonstration is recalled by T.H. James in his unpublished account of the Rotherham branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain:

Over 400 young miners marched from West Melton to the Rotherham Workhouse seeking admission as they were destitute. The same afternoon we were holding a committee meeting at our headquarters when word was brought to us that the marchers were being refused admittance. We immediately closed our business and went along to Alma Road. We sized up the situation, called to the men to move to the spare ground across from the Workhouse, and addressed the young miners. Acting upon our suggestion they formed up once more and proceeded to march on to the Police Station to seek an interview with the Chief Constable. Selecting a small deputation,

we went inside the station and suggested that he prevail upon the Workhouse Master to give the men accommodation for the night. He declared he was powerless to act in the matter and whilst this discussion was going on we heard a great roar from outside. The discussion of our deputation with the Chief Constable was ended by that worthy saying "put them out" and we were pushed into the street, to be confronted by the spectacle of the mounted police charging the assembled marchers. The men broke their ranks and many of them fought the police, who patrolled the streets of the town until late in the evening. (51)

Poor law institutions in Stoke and Wolstanton, Basford, Doncaster, Cannock, Monmouth, Prescot, Oswestry, Wigan, Wrexham, Westbury-on-Severn, Whitehaven and Mansfield were also at the centre of noisy and sometimes heated demonstrations by single men demanding relief. Whilst very few if any boards of guardians were persuaded by these demonstrations to grant large-scale unconditional outdoor relief to single miners, it was decided in a number of poor law unions to offer institutional relief. Guardians in Whitehaven were, according to Ministry of Health reports, 'stampeded' during the early days of the dispute into admitting 473 single men and women to the union's workhouse without insisting upon the obligatory medical examination of applicants. A considerable number of these initiates to the workhouse regime quickly became disenchanted and either discharged themselves at the first available opportunity or simply absconded. (52) This natural reluctance to remain for long within the workhouse walls did not pass unobserved by the poor law authorities and it may be the case that a few local boards willingly signed admission orders in an attempt to discourage single miners from applying for relief. Following a hostile demonstration outside the Stoke and Wolstanton workhouse the guardians agreed to issue orders of admission, and emergency arrangements were made to accommodate about 1,500 single men in the

institution. Tented accommodation was hastily erected in the workhouse grounds, additional working tools were made available, and a reserve list of ex-policemen was drawn up for duty as labour masters. Only seven of the district's single miners accepted the offer of workhouse hospitality, however, and within twenty-four hours all seven had applied for discharge.<sup>(53)</sup> Ministry of Health reports boast of similar results in the poor law union of Cannock, where the guardians had during the early stages of the dispute allegedly 'given way to the agitators' to the extent of granting to single miners out-relief in kind amounting to eight shillings weekly on condition that they performed a day's 'test-work'.<sup>(54)</sup> When the illegality of this policy was pointed out to the board the guardians immediately stopped all out-relief to single men and prepared a considerable amount of temporary accommodation at the workhouse. A subsequent demonstration of some 500 single miners demanding admission to the workhouse thus found the guardians well-prepared. Of the 200 or so single men who elected to go before the union's relieving officers, 172 were granted admission orders and 168 of these eventually entered the workhouse. Within a fortnight all the men had taken their discharge and there quickly followed in the union a series of cuts in the emergency relief scale and a steady fall in the numbers receiving outdoor relief.<sup>(55)</sup>

Ministry of Health response to these and similar developments in poor law unions like Westbury-on-Severn and Nuneaton revealed not for the only time during the dispute a predisposition to adopt double standards. Under the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil judgement relief in the workhouse could not legally be given any more freely than outdoor relief and whilst as a matter of emergency it was recognised that it might be expedient to admit first and examine later, the law required that all inmates should be medically examined and, if found fit to work, discharged. Where it was felt that the offer of indoor relief was actually discouraging claims for relief from single miners, however, Ministerial condemn-

ation of the practice was, to say the least, lukewarm. A Ministry assessment of events in Stoke and Wolstanton, for example, concluded that the 'firm and reasonable, though perhaps not strictly legal, attitude of the Guardians was thus justified by its results'.<sup>(56)</sup> And more generally the Ministry was clearly not too dissatisfied with the overall impact on poor law administration of offers of indoor relief during the mining stoppage:

Generally, it is gathered that the use of Admission Orders was not popular with most Boards of Guardians as a means of combatting the demand for the relief of strikers but in a number of cases where a firm policy of refusing all other forms of relief to single men was adopted the treatment had the effect of checking this demand and of considerably reducing the numbers in receipt of relief.<sup>(57)</sup>

Furthermore, the marked reluctance of single miners to enter the workhouse, or to remain once admitted, was interpreted by the Ministry of Health not as a comment on the quality of life in poor law institutions, but as being 'significant of the absence of real privation'.<sup>(58)</sup>

Ministry of Health officials were later obliged to concede that despite determined efforts throughout the mining dispute they never entirely succeeded in discouraging a number of local boards from relieving single miners: 'Even at the end of the dispute certain Boards of Guardians were known to be acting not entirely in accordance with the requirements of the law in this matter.'<sup>(59)</sup> Just how many single miners were afforded outdoor relief during the stoppage and for how long is unclear, since relevant statistical evidence is sparse. In tabular form below are extracts from perhaps the only available estimates of the numbers of single miners relieved during the lock-out. They are derived from statistical reports compiled by the Ministry's District Inspectors.

TABLE 3.1: NUMBER OF SINGLE MINERS RELIEVED IN SELECTED POOR LAW UNIONS.

COUNTY	POOR LAW UNION	NO. OF SINGLE MINERS RELIEVED	COUNTY	POOR LAW UNION	NO. OF SINGLE MINERS RELIEVED
DURHAM	Chester- le-Street	4,118	NOTTINGHAM	Mansfield	16
	Houghton- le-Spring	2,270		Basford	49
	Sedgefield	2,293		Worksop	288
YORKSHIRE	Hemsworth	2,721		Nottingham	240
	Pontefract	1,683	DERBYSHIRE	Chesterfield	99
	Rotherham	2,759	GLAMORGAN	Pontypridd	104
	Wakefield	1,889		Merthyr Tydfil	28
		Bridgend and Cowbridge		1,477	

Source: P.R.O. MH57/118. See Appendix F for table showing the ratios of single men to total industry workforce in mining counties and county boroughs.

Too much reliability should not be placed on the accuracy of these figures, but considered alongside the daily reports and other Ministry of Health files they clearly indicate that the practice of relieving single miners was more prevalent and persistent in parts of Durham and Yorkshire than in other coalfield areas. But it should not be imagined that even in Durham and Yorkshire life for the majority of single miners during the stoppage was anything but desperately hard. Only about one in six of the single miners in these two counties received any poor law relief at all and in many cases much of this may have been of only a temporary or sporadic nature.<sup>(60)</sup>

Of special concern during the stoppage, both to the labour movement and to the various relief agencies at work in the coalfields, was the predicament of the several thousands of young men aged between 14 and 18 years who were normally employed in the mining industry. Neither

the Merthyr Tydfil judgement nor Ministry of Health Circular 703 made any provision to exclude this age-group from the requirement that poor law relief should not be made available to striking workers. Yet full union membership and the attendant right to a voice in industrial policy was open only to miners aged 18 and over. Representatives of the labour movement argued that since pit lads had no vote in union affairs and were therefore not responsible in any way for the occurrence of the dispute, they should qualify for poor relief. On 10 June a deputation from the Parliamentary Labour Party headed by Sidney Webb put this line of argument to Neville Chamberlain, who agreed to seek an opinion on the matter from the 'Law Officers of the Crown'. The gist of the subsequent legal advice given to Chamberlain was announced in July:

I am advised that the fact that boys under 18 engaged in the mining industry have no voice in determining whether a trade dispute shall be begun or continued does not affect the application to them of the law as laid down by the Court of Appeal in the Merthyr Tydfil judgement.

The question has also been considered whether the position is any different in the case of boys under 16 who for certain purposes under the Poor Law are regarded as children. I am advised that the mere fact that a boy is under 16 is not a justification for the grant of relief: but the age of a boy is obviously an element to be taken into consideration in deciding whether he is unable to support himself.<sup>(61)</sup>

This ruling was greeted with derision by the labour movement, and the Ministry of Health's inflexible adherence to it throughout the stoppage served only to reinforce the widely-held view that Chamberlain's intention was 'to starve the miners back to work'.

- (1) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (2) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol.204, cols.583-4.
- (3) *ibid.*
- (4) A. Mason, *op. cit.*, pp.392-3.

According to the figures given in the House of Commons on 24 March 1927, the highest number of children provided with meals in any one week in County Durham was only 64,746.

Mason suggests that the Commons figures perhaps did not take account of the three-to-five year olds.

- (5) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (6) Sunderland Board of Guardian Minutes, 26 August 1926, TWCCAD.  
ACC 209/486.
- (7) South Shields Union Minutes, 10 June, 8 July, 12 August, 20 August,  
2 September 1926, TWCCAD ACC T81/33.
- (8) A. Mason, *op. cit.*, p.372.
- (9) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol.204, Cols.583-4.
- (10) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (11) *ibid.* Schemes to provide free or 'assisted' supplies of milk were particularly welcome in mining districts during the stoppage.

In order to qualify for such supplies in Rotherham it was necessary to attend regularly at one of the town's various welfare centres, where three child welfare consultation clinics were held every week. (County Borough of Rotherham, Report by the Medical Officer of Health, 1926, p.59.) The Ministry of Health had sanctioned £650 for expenditure on milk for the year 1926-27, but so large was the number of applicants during the early stages of the dispute that it quickly became apparent that this sum would be inadequate. The Borough Treasurer informed the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee in the middle of June that £284 had already been spent on milk supplies

and that if continued at this rate expenditure for the year would amount to almost £1,900. When approached for sanction of a supplementary estimate the Ministry replied that any additional expenditure incurred beyond that already approved would have to be found wholly out of the rates, and recommended that the provision of milk arising out of the dispute should anyway be dealt with by the local board of guardians. (Rotherham Maternity and Child Welfare Committee Minutes, 22 June 1926.) In July the council decided that in future anyone in receipt of poor law relief would no longer be eligible for assistance under the milk scheme, and although the Ministry later approved a further estimate of £400 the scheme was gradually curtailed in an attempt to eke out available funds. At the beginning of the dispute free or assisted milk had been available to expectant and nursing mothers and to children up to the age of five. But by 6 October no child over the age of nine months was eligible for assistance under the council's scheme. (County Borough of Rotherham Council Minutes 1926.) Nevertheless, Rotherham's Medical Officer of Health, William Barr, was convinced that the scheme had been of immense benefit to a large number of children during the dispute. Total attendances of children at the welfare clinics in 1926 were 66 per cent higher than those in 1925 and it was estimated that two-thirds of all the town's infants under one year of age had attended during the year. Perhaps the most remarkable statistic, however, concerns the number of children between the ages of one and five who attended the consultation clinics. No fewer than 2,351 children in this age group attended, mainly for the purpose of applying for free or assisted milk, and this represented a 500 per cent increase on the corresponding total

in 1925. (Report by the Medical Officer of Health, 1926, p.59.)

- (12) County Borough of Barnsley Education Committee, Triennial Report, 1924-1927, 1927, p.8. Barnsley Library.
- (13) Minutes of the Guardians of the Barnsley Union, 14 September 1926.
- (14) *ibid.*, 23 October 1926.
- (15) *ibid.*, 24 May 1927.
- (16) Rotherham Union Minutes, 29 March, 24 May 1927.

Barnsley and Rotherham were not exceptional in this respect. Reports from the various poor law districts reveal that it was not usual for local education authorities to be re-imbursed the cost of school meals provided to the children of recipients of relief. This state of affairs the Ministry of Health reluctantly accepted, feeling that 'any attempt to enforce repayment would have prejudiced the value of school feeding and thereby given some colour to the campaign which was inaugurated by the extremists to accuse the Government of starving the women and children'. The efforts of the Poor Law Department were thus directed, not with outstanding success, towards the 'proper valuation of the meals and the deduction of the amount from the Guardians' scale'. P.R.O. MH57/94.

- (17) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (18) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, vol.204, cols.585-6.

For full particulars of provision and cost of school meals during the lock-out see Appendix D.

- (19) P.R.O. MH57/118 and Marion Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp.48-9.
- (20) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (21) *ibid.*
- (22) Quoted in W.R. Garside, *op. cit.*, p.271.

(23) P.R.O. MH57/94.

Editorial comment on the extent and level of distress during the lock-out should be regarded with some scepticism. It was not unusual for newspapers unsympathetic to the miners' cause to understate the adverse effects of the stoppage on the health of the miners and their families. A classic case appeared in the Morning Post of 23 June 1926, which in referring to North Durham as 'the Strikers' Utopia' argued that in Chester-le-Street miners' larders were fuller than when the pits were working and that the striking miners received so much assistance from local boards of guardians that they were able to sell excess poor relief vouchers in order to provide money for drink and gambling.

(24) Details in P.R.O. MH57/116.

(25) Nineteenth Annual Report to the Education Committee of Doncaster by the School Medical Officer for the year ending December 31st 1926, pp.11-12.

(26) Adwick-le-Street Urban District Council, Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1926, p.5.

Bentley-with-Arksey Urban District Council, Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health and Sanitary Inspector, 1926, p.5.

(27) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(28) Quoted in A. Mason, op. cit., p.400.

(29) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(30) P.R.O. MH57/116.

(31) *ibid.*

(32) *ibid.*

(33) *ibid.*

- (34) P.R.O. MH57/94. Chester-le-Street's offending guardian is unlikely to have been the originator of Chamberlain's sardonic nick-name, which appeared with some regularity during the lock-out in the pages of the left-wing press.
- (35) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (36) Details of the circular can be found in Rotherham Union Minutes, 30 August 1926.
- (37) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, vol.204, cols.1190-1.
- (38) *ibid.*, cols.1191-2.
- (39) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (40) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol.204, col.1192.
- (41) *ibid.*
- (42) A. Mason, *op. cit.*, p.381.
- (43) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol.204, Col.1193.
- (44) Chester-le-Street Union Guardian Minutes, 30 August 1926, DRO. U/Cs 14/- 14/2.
- (45) For full details of the Act, see Appendix E.
- (46) Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, p.263.
- (47) Rotherham Union Minutes, 26 July 1926.
- (48) Arrangements were then made (as in Chester-le-Street) by the local miners' lodges for food to be supplied on credit by co-operative societies, and the number of single miners in receipt of poor law relief fell to about 30.  
Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, p.263.
- (49) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (50) Rotherham Union Minutes, 31 May 1926. Rotherham's workhouse was extensively rebuilt in 1894 on its original Alma Road site to accommodate 600 inmates. The number of persons afforded institutional relief in 1926 tended to increase throughout the stoppage, from 629 during week ending 1 May to 697 during week

ending 11 December. It was not unusual for the number of recipients of indoor relief to increase during the winter months and part at least of the increase noted in Rotherham during the mining stoppage, therefore, probably reflected the normal seasonal fluctuation.

(51) T.H. James, op. cit., p.11.

The Chief Constable referred to by James had the rather unlovely name of Weatherhegg. Nick-named, none-too-affectionately 'Weatherpig', he was remembered by a number of Labour activists in Rotherham as a stern man who displayed little sympathy with the locked-out miners.

(52) P.R.O. MH57/94, MH57/118. Only some twenty homeless and destitute single miners remained in the institution until the end of the national dispute.

(53) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(54) P.R.O. MH57/118.

(55) *ibid.*

(56) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(57) P.R.O. MH57/118.

(58) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(59) *ibid.*

(60) Patrick Renshaw would perhaps argue that this view is unduly pessimistic. He suggests that 'for young, unmarried men the strike was not always such a desperate experience. In fact, in retrospect it was often remembered, like the miners' strike of 1921, as an enjoyable period.', P. Renshaw, op. cit., p.238. Whilst accepting that for young single miners a period of enforced leisure might have had its compensations their rosy memories may in part be instances of 'distance lending enchantment to the view.'

(61) P.R.O. MH57/115.

## CHAPTER 4

POOR LAW ADMINISTRATION DURING THE LOCK-OUT (III)The Demand for Relief

Despite its evident inadequacies and limitations poor law relief for nearly all mining communities in 1926 represented the ultimate cushion against utter destitution and an early return to work in the pits on the employers' terms. Applications for poor law relief increased dramatically almost from the outset of the General Strike and remained at unprecedented levels throughout most of the coalmining dispute. The impact of the stoppage on poor law figures in England and Wales can be seen from Table 4.1, which has been drawn from various sources including quarterly statements issued by the Ministry of Health. Indoor relief figures were not to any great extent affected by the stoppage, with the marked increase occurring almost entirely in the numbers receiving 'domiciliary' or out-door relief. During the four months preceding the General Strike there had been some reduction in the number of persons in receipt of relief but by 8 May the total had risen to 1,358,783, an increase of 136,772 over the previous week. By the following week the total had increased by a further 750,545 and on 22 May the number of persons receiving relief totalled 2,440,629, almost exactly double the total of 1 May.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle from the May figures the effect of the General Strike as opposed to the effect of the mining stoppage. In theory, the lock-out should not have seriously affected the figures for the first week or two at least, since the miners in many districts should have had a fortnight's pay in hand at the beginning of the dispute, and the effect of the General Strike on the figures should not have lasted long enough to overlap to any considerable

TABLE 4.1: TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS IN RECEIPT OF POOR LAW RELIEF  
IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

Date	Institutional <sup>1</sup>	Domiciliary	Total
<u>1925</u>			
End of October	216,969	1,053,210	1,270,179
" November	221,582	1,075,982	1,297,564
" December	222,494	1,101,820	1,324,314
<u>1926</u>			
End of January	226,243	1,062,595	1,288,838
" February	225,628	1,040,684	1,266,312
" March	223,326	1,016,764	1,240,090
" April	220,759	1,007,890	1,228,649
1 May			1,222,011
8 May			1,358,783
15 May			2,109,328
22 May	219,528	2,221,101	2,440,629
29 May	218,884	2,136,386	2,355,270
5 June			2,337,312
12 June			2,336,642
19 June	217,844	2,187,201	2,405,045
End of June	217,349	2,203,389	2,420,738
" July	215,764	2,252,690	2,468,454
" August	216,401	2,249,811	2,466,212
" September	217,829	2,178,445	2,396,274
" October			
" November			
" December			1,483,619

<sup>1</sup> Excluding lunatics in county and borough asylums, persons in receipt of domiciliary medical relief only, and casuals.

Sources: The Labour Year Book 1927, p.248.

The Labour Year Book 1928, p.282.

P.R.O. MH57/118, 4525-17.

Eighth Annual Report of Ministry of Health, 1926-1927,

pp.112-17.

extent the rise due to the mining stoppage. In practice, however, there was in a number of mining districts a scramble for poor law relief from the very early days of the lock-out. In Northumberland and Durham, for example, Ministry of Health officials estimated that at least 16,000 miners were granted relief in the first two weeks of the dispute and a further 50,000 were relieved in the fortnight following.<sup>(1)</sup> As Table 4.2 reveals, early recourse to poor law relief appears to have been much more marked in Durham than was the case in Northumberland. In Houghton-le-Spring the number of persons in receipt of relief on 15 May

TABLE 4.2: NUMBER OF PERSONS RECEIVING POOR LAW RELIEF IN CERTAIN NORTH EASTERN UNIONS.

	INCREASE OVER APRIL FIGURES	
	2nd Week of May	3rd Week of May
All Northumberland Unions	1,000	8,000
Certain Durham Unions, viz:-		
Aukland	3,200	3,400
Chester-le-Street	5,500	8,000
Durham	100	4,100
Easington	3,600	7,200
Houghton-le-Spring	2,600	4,700
Sedgefield	-	3,300

Source: P.R.O. MH57/118.

had increased by 421.7 per cent over the figures for 1 May, and on 22 May had increased by 666.5 per cent. Even larger percentage increases were recorded in Easington (416.1 on 15 May and 767.2 on 22 May).<sup>(2)</sup>

During the three weeks following 22 May steady reductions were recorded in the total numbers receiving poor law relief and it seems likely that these reductions, which occurred mainly in London and the

larger towns and cities, were indicative of the declining impact of the General Strike. As conditions deteriorated in the coalfields, however, greater demands were made on the poor law authorities, and by 19 June the upward trend was resumed, the numbers receiving relief having increased by 68,403 over the previous week, bringing the total to 2,405,045. Except for a slight fall during the week ending 24 July, the numbers continued to rise steadily until 14 August when the total stood at 2,490,167, a number equivalent to 640 per 10,000 of the estimated population of England and Wales.<sup>(3)</sup> From the high water mark recorded in August the numbers receiving relief declined (at a somewhat more rapid rate than they had risen), until on 11 December the total fell below 2,000,000 for the first time since 8 May. Thereafter the total continued to decrease each week to 26 March 1927, when 1,240,550 persons were afforded relief, a net increase of only 460 compared with the corresponding period in 1926.<sup>(4)</sup>

The average number of persons ordinarily in employment but compelled to fall back on out-door relief during the year ending March 1927 (which encompassed the whole of the mining dispute) amounted, with their dependants, to 1,217,083, or 313 per 10,000 of the population. The corresponding figures for the previous year were 478,454, or 123 per 10,000 of the population. In March 1926, just before the outbreak of the dispute, the average number of persons in receipt of domiciliary relief stood at 540,400; in August, when the peak was reached, the average number for the month was 1,757,124, or 452 per 10,000 of the population, an increase for that period of 1,216,724. By March 1927 the average had fallen to 545,685, an increase of 5,285 on the average for March 1926.<sup>(5)</sup>

These figures, of course, include unemployed workers from industries other than mining. Statistical returns from local boards of guardians were not always sufficiently detailed to allow the Ministry of Health to

extract separate particulars of miners and their dependants.<sup>(6)</sup> Nevertheless, extensive statistical tables were compiled by the Ministry with particular reference to 78 poor law unions in England and Wales in which coalmining was a dominant industry and which accounted for about 85 per cent of the total mining population.<sup>(7)</sup> These tables are reproduced in the Appendix and give a very clear picture of the vital role played by the poor law in many mining communities during the lock-out. They reveal, for example, that for long periods of the mining stoppage in poor law unions like Hemsworth, Houghton-le-Spring, Chester-le-Street and Easington more than 40 per cent of the total population were receiving outdoor relief. In such unions possibly 85 per cent or more of mining families were dependent upon the poor law for their survival.

### The Backlash

Quite simply, continued resistance to a settlement on the owners' terms depended to a considerable extent upon the continuation of relief payments to miners' families and, inevitably, its crucial role during the lock-out ensured that poor law administration remained at the centre of intensely bitter controversy for much of 1926. Ratepayers and property owners' protection associations argued not only that the growing burden of rate-funded relief payments was crippling local ratepayers, but also that, by supplementing trade union strike funds, such payments were prolonging unnecessarily the stoppage in the mining industry. Typical in its hand-wringing style was a resolution unanimously passed in September 1926 by the South Shields Property Owners' Protection Association and subsequently submitted to the guardians of the South Shields Union:

This meeting, representing over 700 owners of property, views with great alarm the further proposed increase in the local rates,

caused chiefly through the relief granted to miners' wives and families, and beg to urge that the time has arrived when such relief should be substantially reduced, as the great majority of the ratepayers find it impossible to meet the ruinous demands now made upon them. The Board is reminded that in numberless cases the rates have to be paid where rents are not being received, while tenants who are not directly concerned with the mining dispute and who are, in many cases, earning less wages than the miners decline to accept, have to bear this added burden ... (8)

In many unions, however, the substantial reductions in outdoor relief being demanded in September by South Shields ratepayers had already been in operation for some time, and this gave rise within the labour movement to allegations that certain boards of guardians, with Ministry of Health compliance, were deliberately attempting to starve the miners into submission. (9) That a number of boards did, as we shall see later, attempt to bring the dispute to an early conclusion by reducing or stopping altogether out-relief to miners' families, cannot be in doubt. More difficult to corroborate is the charge of Ministry of Health complicity in such endeavours. Not unexpectedly, Ministry officials strongly denied that the Poor Law Department had in any way encouraged local boards of guardians to so reduce their scales of out-relief as to make it impossible for the miners to remain on strike:

The campaign for the reduction and abolition of scales of relief, which preceded if it did not induce the termination of the dispute, was in no way promoted by the Department. No effort was made to reduce scales below the level contemplated by the circular of May. All that was done was to secure the proper valuation and deduction of family income. (10)

But as the Ministry was so often at pains to stress, 'the level contemplated by the circular of May' was expressly defined as a maximum scale of relief; a scale which, by the Ministry's own admission, had by the middle of June 'found general acceptance'. Subsequent Ministry demands for 'economy' as a condition for sanctioning further overdrafts or loans, therefore, had the effect in many debt-ridden unions not only of securing the deduction of family income, but also of reducing relief scales considerably below the recommended maximum, to levels regarded by many observers as wholly inadequate to support the miners' families.

In a number of mining districts, however, local boards of guardians required no prompting from the Ministry of Health to reduce their scales of emergency relief during the mining dispute (though their actions may well have been emboldened by the Ministry's liberal use of financial sanctions against recalcitrant boards elsewhere). As early as the first week in July there began a movement originating in several north Midlands poor law unions drastically to reduce the scale of relief payments to miners' dependants. In the case of Lichfield, which was in the van of this movement, both the savagery of such reductions and the reason for their introduction were made clear in a local newspaper report of 9 July:

A drastic step which will lead to the discontinuance of relief to miners' families, mostly resident in Cannock Chase, was taken to-day by Lichfield Board of Guardians, who decided that the scale of relief of every strikers' family which was at the maximum of 16s. 6d. should be reduced by half during next week and that that amount should again be reduced the following week and then discontinued .... The proposition was made by Mr. Shelcross, who said the miners would never go back to work as long as the Guardians looked after their wives and children. (11)

Though it may be suspected that the Ministry of Health did not altogether disapprove of the motives of the Lichfield board on this occasion, the decision to discontinue entirely relief to miners' dependants went well beyond what even the Ministry considered to be legitimate means of economising on poor law expenditure. When Arthur Greenwood drew attention to the Lichfield case in the House of Commons on 13 July, Sir Kingsley Wood outlined the response of the Ministry of Health by quoting from a letter already dispatched by the Ministry to the Lichfield board of guardians:

I am directed by the Minister of Health to state that his attention has been drawn to the statement in the Press to the effect that the guardians of the Lichfield Union propose, at an early date, to discontinue the grant of relief to the dependants of persons affected by the present industrial dispute. It is, of course, for the guardians or for the relieving officer, when he receives an application which he regards as one of sudden or urgent necessity, to determine whether a particular applicant for relief is destitute and to what extent relief, whether indoor or outdoor, is required to meet that destitution. It appears, however, to the Minister that the maintenance of a general resolution such as is reported is incompatible with an intention on the part of the guardians to discharge the functions of their office, which exists for the necessary relief of destitution, and I am to request that further consideration be given to this matter before the date upon which, if the report received is correct, the resolution referred to would come into operation. (12)

This correspondence was considered at a meeting of the Lichfield board of guardians on 23 July and it was decided that relief to miners' dependants should be continued but on the much diminished scale of 2s.6d.

for a wife, with supplements ranging from 1s to 1s.6d. for each child up to a maximum allowance of 8s.6d. regardless of family size.<sup>(13)</sup>

Over the following weeks a growing number of local boards, mainly in Midland poor law unions, followed Lichfield's lead. At a specially convened meeting of the guardians of the Mansfield Union on 6 September it was resolved that relief to miners' wives and children be reduced by 25 per cent immediately, by a further 25 per cent on 13 September, and discontinued altogether from 20 September.<sup>(14)</sup> In the nearby Basford union the weekly allowance paid to miners' wives was reduced from 12s to 10s on 7 September and to only 7s.6d. a fortnight later.<sup>(15)</sup>

It is interesting to note the reaction of the Ministry of Health to news of reductions of this magnitude, since it seemed clear to nearly everyone who cared to give much thought to the matter that relief scales now operating in poor law unions like Lichfield were totally inadequate to relieve distress. The Ministry view of relief reductions was clearly outlined in a synopsis of the dispute as it affected poor law expenditure, compiled shortly after work had resumed in the pits:

Theoretically it would be hard to produce any defence for such procedure. In some cases there were 50% cuts, sometimes to be followed by a further 50%. These cuts were clearly not due to a desire to make relief correspond to need, but to an intention of shaking the miner to action which would terminate the dispute. This was not properly speaking the business of the Guardians, though it was only natural that the state of local finances should induce a state of mind which estimated expediency more highly than theory. It was not easy for the Department to intervene, as the precise amount and method of relief is entirely a matter for the Guardians. The Minister is by statute debarred from intervening in any individual case for the purpose of ordering relief.<sup>(16)</sup>

Viewed in even the most favourable of lights such a justification for non-intervention was indicative of a marked lack of consistency on the part of the Ministry since, as we have seen, no such reluctance was in evidence on those occasions when it was felt that excessive relief scales were being paid.

Unchecked by the Ministry of Health, the downward trend in relief scales, particularly in the Midlands, gained rapid momentum. In only Chesterfield, Nottingham and Worksop of the north Midlands mining poor law unions was the full 'circular scale' preserved throughout the lock-out.<sup>(17)</sup> Recognising that nothing short of a complete cessation of all forms of relief would precipitate Ministerial intervention, a number of boards deliberately attempted to discourage applications from miners' families by abandoning out-relief except in cases of 'sudden or urgent need'. Instead, relief only within the workhouse was to be available. Between 28 September and 11 November 1926 boards of guardians in 24 poor law unions are known to have resolved that out-relief should not ordinarily be given to miners' dependants, and by the end of the dispute this number had increased to at least 27.<sup>(18)</sup> Such a policy was legally defensible under the existing poor law, but as Ministry of Health records reveal the Poor Law Department was discouraged by considerations of political expediency from offering active encouragement to local boards along these lines:

Considerations of mere expediency were sufficient to prevent the endorsement of this policy by the Department, who were often requested to do so. Many Boards of Guardians in the North already regarded the Department's efforts to enforce the law as attempts to reduce the miners to surrender. If the Department had strained the law in this direction, all efforts to secure administrative efficiency and economies during the past three

months would have been wasted, for advanced Boards would have held themselves absolved from their undertakings and embarked upon an orgy of waste which would have rendered it necessary to make widespread use of the Default Act. The constantly increasing tension in the coalfields called not only for increased economies, but also for an increasing conviction on the part of the extreme Boards that the Department was concerned to enforce the law impartially. (19)

Non-endorsement of the policy of ending out-relief to miners' families was far from sufficient to convince 'extreme boards' or the labour movement generally, however, of the Ministry's impartiality. Nothing less than repudiation of the practice would have moderated mounting criticism of the Ministry's role in the mining dispute.

The practical effects of the policy of ending out-relief were much as hoped for by the initiating boards of guardians. Very few miners were prepared to subject their families to the rigours of the workhouse regime and applications for relief from miners' dependants inevitably declined. (20) The fairly rapid decline in out-relief during the latter stages of the mining stoppage was remarkably localised. It occurred in those areas in which the drift back to work was most marked. In the ten weeks ending 23 October 1926 the numbers in receipt of out-relief in the North Midland poor law district decreased by nearly 80 per cent. (21) By this date approximately half the miners in the area were back at work and this encouraged a number of local boards to claim that, by progressively reducing scales of relief and eventually suspending out-relief altogether, they had successfully 'broken the strike'. Whilst acknowledging the Ministry of Health's point that it is difficult to judge with any accuracy how far the decline in out-relief was the cause and how far the effect of the drift back to work, it would appear that such claims were far from groundless. Morale in the Midland coalfields had given

the MFGB executive considerable uneasiness from the early stages of the mining dispute and possibly only widespread outcropping kept the miners in this area out so long. Divided leadership, rapidly dwindling resources and the offer of relatively favourable terms by the owners provided temptation enough to induce some miners to return to work. The ending of out-relief and the offer of the workhouse for many others provided the final push.

In attempting to account for the general reduction in relief scales after the middle of August and the accompanying decline in the number of persons receiving out-relief, the Ministry of Health played down the significance of its own role:

The decline in the number of persons in receipt of out-relief ... may partly be explained by the constant pressure of the Department in the direction of economy. It cannot, however, be contended that even when miners began to return to work the economic circumstances of the bulk of the population were so readily improved as the figures might suggest, and there can be no doubt that the main cause of the decrease was the collapse of the miners' moral credit. Public opinion was no longer on their side. The political pendulum had swung, and many Boards of Guardians were inclined to take advantage of the change either as a matter of pure expediency or for reasons as political as those of the Communist Boards. Perhaps the change was less a true change of opinion on the merits of the dispute as a public recognition that both parties to the dispute had adopted the tactics of trench warfare and were prepared to prolong the dispute indefinitely to the detriment of the public. The Board of Guardians were clearly in a position to throw their weight against the miners and the state of local finances apart from political opinion was enough to induce them to take action. The predominant

danger was no longer the waste of the poor rate, except in certain parts of the country, but the danger that the natural revulsion of opinion might induce Boards of Guardians to fail to perform their statutory duty to relieve destitution .... (Poor Law figures) exhibit primarily the changing attitude of the general public towards the miners' cause. So far as waste had hitherto prevailed, it must be cut away. So far as sympathy with the miner had led to generous treatment, it must be modified by consideration for the ratepayers' position, even if it is not entirely alienated. The main desire was to terminate the dispute, and some Boards were as disinclined to be scrupulous about the manner of termination as others had been about the manner of fostering it in its early stages. Poor law figures accordingly slumped ... (22)

Such an assessment, if it had any validity at all, was largely relevant to only a number of poor law unions in the Midlands, Lancashire and the West Country, and even here there is little evidence to support the Ministry's contention that public opinion generally had swung sharply against the miners. In the majority of poor law unions in the North East, South Wales and, to a slightly lesser extent, Yorkshire the miners retained the sympathy and support, certainly of the working class generally and often of other sections of the community as well. In these areas there was relatively little inclination to discontinue out-relief or in many cases even to reduce scales. Generally such economies as were secured were almost entirely due to the imposition of conditions by the Ministry of Health for sanctioning board of guardian borrowing powers or loans. As a consequence, pressure on the miners in these districts to accept a settlement on the owners' terms was somewhat less insistent than in those areas in which significant scale reductions and the discontinuance of relief were fairly commonplace.

### Regional Variations

In concluding this section on the Poor Law in 1926, two aspects are perhaps worthy of further consideration: the nature and causes of regional variations in the administration of poor relief during the lock-out; and the role of the Ministry of Health.

Although it is not difficult to highlight intra-regional variations in the administration of poor relief during the stoppage<sup>(23)</sup>, these do not detract from the significance of the variations from region to region, which appear to have been far more pronounced. Generally, relief scales from the outset were relatively low in the Midland, Lancashire and West Country coalfield areas, and in the Midlands particularly poor law relief was drastically reduced or stopped altogether long before a settlement was reached in the mining dispute. Scales in the North East, Yorkshire and South Wales, on the other hand, were relatively high and reductions, often enforced by the Ministry, were far less severe than in most other districts. This, and other evidence relating to the provision of school feeding schemes and concern for the plight of single miners, tends to suggest that the Poor Law in most mining districts of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire and South Wales was administered more humanely during the lock-out than elsewhere.

In seeking to account for these regional variations in the administration of emergency relief in 1926 it is tempting to point to the significance of the differing political complexions of the boards involved. This certainly appears in part at least to provide a plausible explanation for the administrative differences, since Labour-dominated boards generally were understandably more receptive to appeals for relief from the mining community than 'Independent' or Conservative boards, which tended to be more concerned with the interests of ratepayers. The vast majority of Labour controlled boards in mining districts were to be found in Durham and in South Wales where, according to one account of the lock-out,

Labour guardians 'dominated all but one of the key Poor Law Unions in the coalfield.'<sup>(24)</sup> In no poor law union in the Midland coalfields, on the other hand, does the labour movement appear to have been at all strongly represented, with the local boards of guardians being described variously as 'Independent', 'Moderate', 'Conservative', or, as in the case of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, 'unsympathetic'.<sup>(25)</sup>

Labour domination of the local poor law apparatus, of course, by no means represented a passport to generous relief for the beleaguered miners or their families. Even had local boards been free from the financial constraints imposed as a consequence of their indebtedness, the provision of adequate relief to all who were in need of it in 1926 required a disregard for the law which only the most determined or cavalier of boards were prepared to contemplate. And, by the same token, the absence of strong labour representation on local boards did not inevitably herald a regime of unbridled parsimony. In Chesterfield scales prevailing throughout the lock-out compared very favourably with those operating in most districts of Durham and South Wales, yet Labour members were out-numbered on the board of guardians by about five to one.<sup>(26)</sup>

Another variable in the poor law function in 1926 appears to have been the degree of homogeneity present within the various mining communities. As a rule, the more close-knit and cohesive the mining community the greater was the assistance provided by the local board of guardians. This positive correlation has been noted by Patricia Ryan:

As might be expected those Guardians which attempted to exercise their powers in the interests of the miners tended to be in areas such as Durham and South Wales where the mining communities were isolated and homogeneous and the Miners' Associations and Labour Party well established and in control of the machinery of local

government. In more industrially mixed areas, such as the Midlands, Lancashire and the rural West Country, the miners' organizations were correspondingly weaker and Labour as a whole was often in a weak position.<sup>(27)</sup>

Ryan also, however, emphasises the importance of 'demand factors' in accounting for the regional variations in poor law administration:

In addition, both the Durham and South Wales coalfields were extremely depressed even before 1926, with correspondingly high rates of unemployment and pauperism. Both the South Wales Miners' Federation and the Durham Miners' Federation had practically exhausted their strike funds in the period from 1921 to 1925, and were consequently able to give very little in the way of strike pay... Consequently miners in these areas had far fewer resources to fall back on during the seven months of the dispute, and recourse to the Guardians was a matter of sheer economic necessity.<sup>(28)</sup>

Had 'sheer economic necessity' been a particularly significant factor, however, we should have expected to find somewhat greater poor law provision than actually occurred in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, where the miners received virtually no financial relief from their trade union.

In summary, therefore, poor law administration in 1926 tended to vary according to the political complexion and extent of indebtedness of local boards of guardians; and according to the intensity of social and economic pressures exerted on the boards, which in turn varied with the form of community in which the miners and their dependants lived.

The Role of the Ministry of Health

As far as the role of the Ministry of Health in the mining dispute is concerned, the conflicting arguments are clear. On the one hand, the miners' leaders and the labour movement generally argued that both the Ministry's interpretation and rigid enforcement of the existing poor law were part of a deliberate attempt to 'play the owners' game' by starving the miners back to work. This the Ministry vehemently denied, and protested that its only concern was to administer the law impartially:

Although the Merthyr Tydfil judgement was not administratively satisfactory, it was the accepted interpretation of the law, and it was therefore the Department's duty to maintain it against one extreme of policy as against the other... The Department made every effort to secure a moderate policy and incurred the resentment of extremists on both sides.<sup>(29)</sup>

But, as we have noted, the Ministry was far more relentless in its endeavours to prevent the distribution of 'extravagant' relief than it was to ensure that reactionary boards fulfilled their legal obligation to relieve distress. When this apparent inconsistency was pointed out by representatives of the labour movement, the Ministry countered by observing that even where boards of guardians stopped out-relief altogether, it 'apparently produced no serious hardship in any of the Unions affected'.<sup>(30)</sup> This suggestion both the miners' unions and the voluntary relief organisations at work in the coalfields strongly challenged, and although evidence on the extent and degree of suffering in mining communities is not conclusive, claims that serious hardship was absent in 1926 were clearly extravagant.

It was the duty of local guardians during the stoppage to relieve destitution, but as the Ministry itself indicated, this involved some interpretative difficulty:

In spite of legal definitions, the word "destitution" remains elastic, and is interpreted by individual Boards of Guardians in accordance with their political attitude or the requirements of the moment. General advice, which is all the Minister can give, is necessarily equally elastic. Good administration can only be secured by the appointment of such local authorities as will be prepared to interpret "destitution" in the spirit of the time, with regard to circumstances and in accordance with the practice of other local authorities. (31)

An entry in the diary of Neville Chamberlain dated 20 June 1926 not only makes clear the Minister's view of the extent of destitution in mining communities, but also perhaps gives some indication of the 'circumstances' to which local boards were expected to have regard:

(The miners) are not within sight of starvation, hardly of under-nutrition, so well are they looked after by the guardians... they are living not too uncomfortably at the expense of the ratepayer, while the nation is gradually overcome by creeping paralysis. (32)

Shortly before using his powers under the Default Act to dismiss the West Ham Guardians, Chamberlain confided to his diary, 'I shall go in and stop in now till I get some results... I am not much moved by abuse nowadays, so long as it comes from the enemy.' (33) Whether or not the miners, too, were regarded by Chamberlain as 'the enemy', it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that under his direction the Ministry of Health over-stepped the boundary separating impartiality from partisanship. 'Stringency' and 'economy' were seen as the bedrock of 'sound administration' in 1926, and the poor law was interpreted by the central authority more in the spirit of 1834 than of the twentieth century.

- (1) P.R.O. MH57/118.
- (2) Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, p.117.
- (3) *ibid.*, p.113.
- (4) *ibid.*
- (5) *ibid.*
- (6) This information was given in the House of Commons in March 1927 by Neville Chamberlain in reply to a question by George Lansbury, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, Vol.203, Col.549.
- (7) For a full list of the 78 poor law unions classified by the Ministry of Health in 1926 as 'coal mining unions' see Appendix G.
- (8) South Shields Union Minutes, TWCCAD, ACC T81/33. Similar resolutions of protest were submitted to the Board by Shields and District Chamber of Trades, Master Bakers and Confectioners' Association, South Shields Municipal Association, South Shields Branch of the National Federation of Hairdressers, South Shields and District Off-Licence Holders Protection Association, North and South Shields District Pawnbrokers Association, South Shields Branch of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents and Stationers, South Shields and District Grocers and Provision Dealers Association, South Shields and District Centre of the British Undertakers' Association.
- (9) On 29 July 1926, for example, the following resolution was passed: That this Joint Meeting of the Trades Union Congress General Council and the National Executive of the Labour Party emphatically protests against the action of the Minister of Health in acquiescing in reduced scales of out-relief, in exploiting the financial stringency of Boards of Guardians

to compel them to reduce scales of relief as a condition of approval of the necessary loans, and in permitting certain Boards of Guardians to discriminate in their scales of relief between miners' wives and children and other applicants; and recognising this administrative policy as an unwarranted attempt to force a settlement of the mining dispute by increasing the hardships and privations of the miners and their dependants, calls upon all sections of the Labour Movement and the general public to redouble their efforts to provide means to prevent starvation on the coal-fields.

Quoted in Labour Bulletin, September 1926, p.56.

(10) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(11) Quoted in Labour Bulletin, Vol.II, June 1926-May 1927, p.55.

'Looking-after' was perhaps an over-statement, since rates prevailing at the time of these proposed reductions were far from generous and considerably below the maximum scale recommended in Circular 703. The Lichfield scale was 5s for a wife and 2s.6d. per child up to a maximum of 16s.6d. whatever the size of the family.

(12) Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1926, Vol.198, Cols.374-5.

(13) *ibid.*, Cols.2313-14.

(14) Mansfield Union Minutes, PUM 1/36, Nottinghamshire Record Office.

In the event, Mansfield guardians voted, on a week to week basis, to continue emergency relief payments to miners' dependants until 16 October.

(15) Basford Union Minutes, PUB 1/39, Nottinghamshire Record Office.

(16) P.R.O. MH57/94. Further self-justification for non-intervention was provided by the Ministry's suggestion 'that the general lowering of scales throughout the country which occurred about the middle and towards the end of the dispute ... seems to

argue that the maximum scales fixed were unduly high'.

(P.R.O. MH57/118.)

(17) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(18) The Labour Year Book, 1927, p.268; Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, p.119. A full list of the poor law unions stopping out-relief to miners' families does not appear to be available, but included in their number along with Bolton, Monmouth and Westbury-on-Severn, were the Midland unions of Cannock and Lichfield in Staffordshire; Tamworth, Nuneaton and Atherstone in Warwickshire; Basford and Mansfield in Nottinghamshire; and Belper in Derbyshire.

(19) P.R.O. MH57/94.

(20) *ibid.*

(21) In some cases miners' dependants, either through desperation or perhaps in futile attempts at brinkmanship, briefly sampled workhouse hospitality. At Belper in the Derbyshire coal-field, for example, about half of the 500 or so people who marched to the local institution gained admission, but most of them were reported to have broken out by climbing the workhouse walls whilst being taken to the baths in accordance with house regulations. Sixteen men, thirteen women and twenty-seven children remained one night. Four of these 'escaped' next day and the rest took their discharge on the day following. (P.R.O. MH57/94.)

(22) *ibid.*

(23) Chesterfield, Nottingham and Worksop in the north Midlands, for example, where the boards of guardians preserved the full circular scale for the duration of the stoppage, appear to have been out of sympathy with the district generally, as was the Pontypool Union in Monmouth, where substantially lower

scales were adopted than prevailed in surrounding districts. Of Pontypool, a Ministry of Health report records that 'a standard of strict administration had been established which it was not practicable and possibly not even desirable to maintain in the country generally'. (P.R.O. MH57/94.)

- (24) P. Jeremy, *op. cit.*, p.67.
- (25) A.R. and C.P. Griffin, *op. cit.*, p.135.
- (26) A report in May 1926 from the Ministry of Health's inspector for District 10, W.J.T. Turton, O.B.E., included a suggested explanation for the Chesterfield board's apparent generosity to the miners' dependants:

It seems that the Guardians are taking no account of the Merthyr Tydfil case... The Clerk's view appeared to be that the Guardians were doing their best in a difficult situation; edge of revolution; miners not much to live on. If any good is to be done the Guardians will have to be given something they can quote to put the blame on in deserting the starving miners. The Board of 60 contains about 12 Labour and their real trouble seems to be lack of backbone. (P.R.O. MH57/118.)

- (27) P. Ryan, 'The Poor Law in 1926', in M. Morris, The General Strike, 1976, p.369.
- (28) *ibid.*, pp.369-70.
- (29) P.R.O. MH 57/94.
- (30) *ibid.*
- (31) *ibid.*
- (32) Quoted in K. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, 1946, p.158.
- (33) *ibid.*, p.140 (entry for 26 June 1926).

## CHAPTER 5

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE GENERAL STRIKE (I)Relations with the Trade Union Movement

Throughout the course of the coalmining dispute of 1926, and indeed for a considerable period after its conclusion, relations between the leaders of the co-operative and trade union movements were far from happy. Much of the discord stemmed from the resentment of co-operators at what they considered to be the unfair treatment of co-operative societies by trade unions during the nine days of the General Strike. One of the movement's main grievances was that co-operative society employees were called out by the T.U.C. on the same terms as workers employed by private traders. As a relatively large proportion of their employees were trade union members<sup>(1)</sup>, co-operative societies were more adversely affected by the General Strike than comparable private undertakings, within which trade union organisation was generally much weaker. The relative strength of trade union membership within co-operative undertakings can clearly be seen from Table 5.1.

Disruption of Production

Co-operators were extremely annoyed that some of the activities normally undertaken by societies were disrupted or even stopped completely, whilst their 'capitalist competitors' were able to carry on with the use of non-union labour. Thus it was felt that the co-operative movement was being unduly penalised during the General Strike for its loyalty to trade unionism. This feeling was particularly intense within the Co-operative Wholesale Society (C.W.S.), which since 1922 had required every new employee to be a trade union member. During the

TABLE 5.1: PERCENTAGE OF UNION ORGANISATION AMONG WORKERS IN THE WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADES (1921).

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>RETAIL TRADE</u>	
	<u>CO-OPERATIVE WORKERS</u>	<u>OTHER WORKERS</u>
London	99.5	0.1
South-Eastern	89.2	0.1
South-Western	59.9	0.5
Wales & West Midlands	89.0	4.0
Lancs. & W. Riding of Yorks.	94.3	4.5
North-Eastern & West Midlands	<u>81.0</u>	<u>1.7</u>
England & Wales	<u>84.0</u>	<u>1.9</u>

<u>BRANCH OF TRADE</u>	<u>WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE</u>	
	<u>CO-OPERATIVE WORKERS</u>	<u>OTHER WORKERS</u>
Wholesale	94.6	4.4
Retail	<u>84.0</u>	<u>1.9</u>
Wholesale and Retail	<u>84.6</u>	<u>2.4</u>

Source: The Producer, Vol.x, no.7, May 1926.

following three years the C.W.S., under pressure from trade unions, trades councils, and the management committees of a number of the more progressive retail societies, was pushed somewhat reluctantly along the path towards compulsory trade unionism for the majority of its employees. On 3 March 1925 the Secretary of the C.W.S., Robert Lancaster, went so far as to issue a warning 'that all eligible employees failing to join their appropriate Trade Union by Saturday, 28 March, 1925, will immediately be given the requisite notice to terminate their services with this Society'.<sup>(2)</sup>

It is clear that many co-operators believed that, by not only recognising but also actively encouraging trade unionism within their

organisation, co-operative societies were entitled to expect more favourable treatment than private traders from those trade unions involved in the General Strike. It quickly became apparent, however, that neither the T.U.C. nor the individual trade unions concerned were prepared to grant immunity to co-operative societies by allowing their employees to remain at work during the national stoppage. The General Council of the T.U.C. justified this decision by arguing that 'it was difficult to make exceptions, and that disunity might have arisen among the Trade Unionists affected if Co-operative employees had been allowed to remain at work'.<sup>(3)</sup>

The first co-operative enterprise to be affected directly by the coal mining dispute was the C.W.S.-owned Shilbottle Colliery near Alnwick at the northern end of the Northumberland coalfield. As a relatively small and run-down pit, Shilbottle had been purchased for £50,000 by the C.W.S. towards the end of 1916.<sup>(4)</sup> The sinking of two new shafts was commenced in 1922, and by 1926 capital expenditure totalling £400,000 had transformed the pit into a model colliery around which the Society had built a new village of 170 houses. The pit was regarded, by the C.W.S. at least, as the most up-to-date in the country. Shilbottle's virtues were extolled by the colliery's management during a dispute over wages at the pit in October 1925: 'It is electrically equipped throughout, no ponies are employed underground and the mine is dry and well ventilated and altogether the workmen's conditions are ideal.'<sup>(5)</sup>

The C.W.S. was not a member of any employers' federation and, unlike most private colliery owners in the district, did not post notices locking out its employees, who could have remained at work on the comparatively favourable terms and conditions prevailing before the dispute commenced. Wages at Shilbottle were nearly fifteen per cent higher than the recognised county rates, and the Society was the only colliery proprietor in the country to give its miners a weeks holiday with pay.<sup>(6)</sup>

But, to the apparent dismay of the C.W.S. directors, the colliery's 470 men decided to remain loyal to the Northumberland Miners' Association and came out in sympathy with the locked-out miners at other pits in the county. The C.W.S. clearly felt that this display of solidarity on the part of Shilbottle's miners was made only reluctantly, in response to instructions issued by the Miners' Federation. In June this impression was reinforced by a report from the colliery's manager which suggested 'that many of the men are anxious to resume (probably 75 per cent), although no move in this direction has been made by the local Union leaders'.<sup>(7)</sup> In response to a request from the manager, directors of the C.W.S. agreed that 'in the event of a request being made by the Union for their men to resume, it will be in order for him to take them on, on day-to-day contracts at the old rates and conditions, until a settlement of the dispute is arrived at'.<sup>(8)</sup>

Despite their conviction that a majority of the men wished to resume work, the C.W.S. directors did not consider it advisable at this stage to post notices re-opening the pit. But at a General Committee meeting on 8 July the Society made public its policy in the event of an initiative from the colliery's employees: the pit would reopen on the basis of rates operating before the stoppage, but these would be subject to revision when a national settlement was eventually reached.<sup>(9)</sup> This offer provoked no immediate response from the men and there was no serious threat of a breakaway until early in October when, by 110 votes to 71, the miners decided to enter into negotiations with the management.<sup>(10)</sup> Such negotiations did not materialise, however, for at a subsequent meeting a motion calling for the miners of Shilbottle to stand by the Northumberland Miners' Association was passed by 111 votes to 77. This new-found determination was but short-lived and at a meeting on 27 October the men, by 155 votes to 38, decided to return to work and Shilbottle became one of the first collieries in the county to resume

normal production.<sup>(11)</sup>

Given the comparatively favourable terms available at Shilbottle, the miners' decision to remain out until the end of October represented a remarkable display of trade union solidarity. This remains the case even when allowance is made for the fact that the C.W.S. directors resisted the temptation to adopt the rather crude but effective propagandist tactics popular with a number of owners in other mining districts. Within the militant mining communities typical of the North East, however, 'backsliders' were not readily forgiven, and that Shilbottle's workers had remained solid for almost six months counted for little with those miners who continued to resist the temptation to return to work. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Northumberland Miners' Association on 18 October it had been decided that any branch returning to work before a national settlement was reached should cease 'to be regarded as part of our Association'.<sup>(12)</sup> In line with this decision Shilbottle Branch was immediately expelled from the Association when it was discovered that production had resumed at the pit. Nevertheless the Association's executive committee paid tribute to the stand taken by the branch officials during the lock-out, and in December 1926 agreed to the reorganisation of the branch.<sup>(13)</sup>

Several other co-operative society operations were also quickly disrupted as co-operative employees working in the 'first line' of trades answered their unions' call to support the strike. Painters, builders, wheelwrights, joiners, motor mechanics and other tradesmen ceased work at many societies, although some concessions were made by local trade unions in a number of areas. At the Ashington Industrial Society in Northumberland the joiners agreed 'to come in and make coffins as required for funerals'.<sup>(14)</sup> Similarly, motor mechanics employed by the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society arranged a rota system amongst themselves in order to allow one man each day to undertake running repairs

on Society vehicles authorised to transport essential foodstuffs during the stoppage.<sup>(15)</sup>

The number of co-operative society employees involved directly in the General Strike, in fact, was relatively small. A large proportion of co-operative workers were employed in the retail distribution of foodstuffs, which remained largely unaffected by the T.U.C.'s strike call. In a survey of more than 1,300 co-operative societies conducted by the Co-operative Union<sup>(16)</sup> in January 1927, 126 societies replied that some section of their employees had ceased work during the national strike. The number of employees reported to have been involved in these stoppages totalled only 3,400<sup>(17)</sup>, out of an estimated workforce of more than 209,600.<sup>(18)</sup>

The co-operative society affected most seriously during the General Strike was the C.W.S., which in addition to its role as distributor of a wide range of goods and services was also involved in a number of relatively large-scale manufacturing activities. (In 1926 the C.W.S. listed its productive activities as 'manufacturers of boots and shoes, flour, soap, starch, candles, tobacco, biscuits, sweets, butter, margarine, lard, preserves, flannels, woollen clothing, silesias, corsets, furniture, hardware, brushes, printers and colliery proprietors'.)<sup>(19)</sup> Directors of the C.W.S. were dismayed to discover that production had ceased at their Birmingham-based cycle factory and that their printing works at Longsight, Reddish, Warrington, Leicester and Pelaw had all come to a standstill. The Leicester printing works also incorporated a box-making plant, and the stoppage here created a scarcity of boxes which in turn hindered production at the town's boot and shoe works. This proved extremely vexing to the Society's directors, for private box makers continued to work normally throughout the General Strike.<sup>(20)</sup> C.W.S. building operations also were held up in several areas, and at Garston the crew of the Society-owned S.S. Fraternity were ordered by their

union to leave the boat. Work ceased on 7 May at the C.W.S. tobacco factory in Manchester due to shortage of supplies, and production at several of the Society's huge flour mills was also disrupted.

The co-operative movement's anger and frustration at the T.U.C.'s refusal to exempt co-operative undertakings from industrial action during the national stoppage at one stage threatened seriously to disrupt production in the North of England of the British Worker, the T.U.C.'s official organ during the General Strike. In Manchester, where the task of producing and distributing the newspaper was placed in the hands of Fenner Brockway, the Board of the Co-operative Printing Society refused to print the British Worker 'on the ground that it was not permitted to print other papers'.<sup>(21)</sup> Before Brockway could proceed it was necessary not only to locate a printer willing to undertake the work but also to obtain the co-operation of transport workers, paper makers, and the regional strike committee. These requirements were eventually fulfilled and publication of the Manchester edition of the British Worker went ahead, ironically with the assistance of another co-operative enterprise, when the plant of the Co-operative Publishing Society was placed at Brockway's disposal.<sup>(22)</sup> This arrangement was later jeopardised, however, when printers threatened to 'black' the Co-operative News, the official journal of the co-operative movement. Recognising that such action could provoke the Co-operative Publishing Society into withdrawing its offer of assistance, Brockway managed to persuade the printers to carry on handling the Co-operative News and no further problems were encountered.

In Newcastle, however, the attempts of A.W. Dawson, the T.U.C. Publicity Committee's representative, to overcome the backlash of co-operative resentment met with considerably less success. On arriving at Newcastle on 8 May, Dawson proceeded to the premises of the Co-operative Printing Society, only to discover that the office was locked.

Subsequently, he learned that on the previous evening the local strike committee had decided to support a local Labour paper rather than the British Worker, and that upon hearing this decision the Printing Society's manager had closed down the works. After persuading the strike committee to reverse its earlier decision and the local secretary of Natsopa to provide volunteers to assist in the production and distribution of the paper, Dawson then attempted to secure the assistance of the Co-operative Printing Society. This was not forthcoming, however, for the works' manager had received instructions from the Society's executive in Manchester that he was not to handle the British Worker.<sup>(23)</sup> Undeterred by this setback, Dawson then made overtures to the manager of the C.W.S.-owned printing works at Pelaw, but once again his efforts proved fruitless. Directors of the C.W.S., annoyed at the disruption to co-operative operations in the Newcastle area, 'retaliated by refusing to print the British Worker'.<sup>(24)</sup> The first Newcastle issue of the T.U.C.'s newspaper did not appear until 11 May, the penultimate day of the General Strike.<sup>(25)</sup>

### The Permit Question

Another major source of co-operative discontent during the General Strike was the difficulty encountered by societies in many districts in obtaining permits from local strike committees to move foodstuffs, coal and other commodities. Although all transport workers were called out in the first line of trades, the T.U.C. at the outset of the stoppage was prepared to authorise the movement of certain essential goods including food and milk and medical and surgical supplies.<sup>(26)</sup> The T.U.C., however, was anxious to ensure that these essential supplies should be handled and transported only by strikers with special permits, and not by Government-recruited volunteers or other blacklegs. A notice signed by Ernest Bevin of the Transport and General Workers'

Union appeared in the second number of the British Worker, stating that permits were not to be issued by individual trade unions, officers, or trades councils: 'The only competent authority to deal with permits is the Joint Transport Committee composed of representatives elected by the Transport Unions, including the N.U.R., A.S.L.E. & F., & the R.C.A.'<sup>(27)</sup> The notice ordered the establishment of such a committee in any district where one had not already been set up, and went on to demand that 'all existing permits must be reviewed by the Transport Committee at once'.<sup>(28)</sup>

In many areas, however, joint strike committees or councils of action had been formed at the commencement of the stoppage and had already established their own permit committees. Despite Bevin's instructions, permits continued to be issued, not only by strike committees and councils of action, but also by individual trade unions. Given the T.U.C.'s failure to formulate any clear guidelines during the early days of the General Strike, this multiplicity of issuing committees inevitably militated against the emergence of a uniform policy on the question of permits.

Nowhere was this lack of uniformity more apparent than in the response of local committees to co-operative society requests for permission to transport supplies. Not until 10 May did General Council instructions make any specific reference to special treatment for co-operative societies, with the result that during the early days of the strike policy on this question was left largely to the discretion of local strike committees. In some districts strike committees were prepared to deal sympathetically with co-operative requests for permits, whilst in others societies were not singled out for preferential treatment. Co-operative society drivers were highly unionized and in most, though by no means all, cases would not contemplate attempting to move any load without receiving the sanction of the local strike committee or council of action. This meant that in districts where strike committees

were reluctant to issue any permits at all, co-operative societies were placed in a more difficult position than private traders employing non-union drivers, who generally were much more ready to blackleg during the strike. Typical of co-operative complaints during the early stages of the stoppage was that of the Bolton Society, whose members could not be supplied with coal 'because the strike committee stopped everything. Yet Co-operators saw the loaded lorries of private dealers pass their doors'. (29)

When on the second day of the national stoppage C.W.S. directors were notified of acute transport difficulties in places like Newcastle, London and Manchester, representations were immediately made to the T.U.C. Although the General Council gave an undertaking to facilitate the distribution of essential C.W.S. supplies, it quickly became apparent that the Society's attempts to secure the release of food supplies were still being frustrated. On 5 May the Secretary of the C.W.S. in Manchester sent the following telegram to the General Council:

My Directors instruct me to enter emphatic protest and to express their surprise that your promise not to interfere with the distribution of foodstuffs is not being kept. We have numerous instances of foodstuffs on rail held up en route. Urge your immediate action. (30)

Details of this telegram were also communicated to the Ministry of Transport, urging that the Society's difficulties should receive 'special attention'. (31) (This development was greeted with some concern by Newcastle members of the Board, who felt that it was advisable to 'exhaust all the possibilities through the medium of the T.U.C. General Council before approaching the Ministry of Transport'.) (32)

Meanwhile, in response to a circular letter requesting information from local societies, the Co-operative Union was being inundated with

reports from all over the country complaining of similar transport difficulties. The Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society, for example, sent the following telegram to Albert Alexander, Secretary to the Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Union and Member of Parliament for the Hillsborough division of Sheffield:

Transport men decline to deliver flour from mill to shops as instructed by Bevin. Can you obtain permit to deliver. Stocks in shops low. Reply urgent. (33)

When they approached the General Council for assistance in overcoming such difficulties, representatives of the Co-operative Union were informed that certain powers, including the release of foodstuffs and the maintenance of transport services, had now been deputed by the T.U.C. to specially constituted local committees. The Co-operative Union representatives were advised that all co-operative societies requiring concessions should consult the appropriate committee, 'who would deal with each case on its merits'. Co-operative societies were immediately informed of the details of these discussions in a circular letter from the Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Union and were urged to act upon the General Council's advice. (34)

In a number of districts there followed a temporary easing of transport restrictions as co-operative society deputations to local strike committees were successful in securing permission to move essential supplies. This was the case in Leeds, where at a meeting of the board and managers of the city's Industrial Society during the afternoon of 5 May, it was reported that the local strike committee had agreed to remove the embargo on flour deliveries, and that both flour and coal were now reaching the society's shops. (35) As James Millar's recollections of the General Strike reveal, similar concessions were made in Edinburgh, although the co-operative deputation could hardly have been

delighted with its treatment at the hands of the local strike committee:

After a few days a number of the co-operative societies across the water in Fife became desperate for supplies of food from the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale warehouses in Leith. A deputation from the SCWS directors came to the office and asked to meet the Central Strike Committee, which controlled the issue of permits. They were not allowed to walk into the Miners' board room, where the strike committee sat permanently, but were stopped on the stair by two stewards and referred to me in the office. Never had the board members received such a stiff reception. I explained to them that the stewards had been quite right as their instructions were to let no one pass but to refer would-be callers to the office on the floor below. I had no difficulty in getting the strike committee to receive the directors. They put their case for food for industrial Fife and were told that they could have permits for one lot of vans. They must have thought, quite rightly, that that was the last lot of permits they would get, for I afterwards heard that they loaded up every vehicle they had and the cavalcade set off with a car in front with the permits so that the goods could get to their destinations with the utmost speed just in case policy changed and the traffic was stopped.<sup>(36)</sup>

In Bradford, too, co-operative society requests for permission to move food supplies seem to have met with a sympathetic response from the local council of action, though not before such requests were thoroughly scrutinized. Victor Feather, who many years later was to become General Secretary of the T.U.C., recalled how, as an eighteen-years old junior employee of the local (Girlington) co-operative society, he was given authority to sanction permits on behalf of the Bradford Council of Action:

It is quite amusing now, looking back, although I took it seriously at the time, that the boss of the City of Bradford Co-operative Society, a very elevated person, had to send along the vouchers to the Council of Action for signature and I was signing them - and I was at that time a third counter-man, one move up from the errand boy and flour boy! I signed after inquiring what the load was - flour or butter to be picked up at the station and so on. It wasn't a question of the boss sending them across and me automatically stamping them. I probably asked more questions about his requests than anybody else's because Caesar's wife has to be above suspicion. (37)

However, because of the widespread abuse of the permit system in some districts, local strike committees began to reduce drastically the issue of permits, not only to private traders but also to co-operative societies. This was the case in Newcastle where, prior to the formation of the Northumberland and Durham General Council and Joint Strike Committee (N.D.G.C.J.S.C.) on 4 May, the question of transport permits had apparently created considerable confusion:

One Transport Union on the first day of the general strike had called out all men concerned with the transport of food but had given permits for the transport of building materials; another Transport Union had rigidly stopped all transport of building material but was continuing to give a certain number of permits for the transport of food. (38)

During the early days of confusion, C.W.S. applications for transport permits seem to have been dealt with fairly sympathetically, and this may explain the Newcastle directors' reluctance to involve the Ministry of Transport. At a meeting with Newcastle members of the C.W.S. General Committee on 4 May, C.R. Flynn, the Northern Divisional Officer of

N.U.D.A.W., explained that a strike committee was being organised which would assume authority for the issuing of permits for transport facilities. Until this committee was ready to function, Flynn proposed to act independently and promised that if the C.W.S. representatives supplied him with a list of employees for whom they required permits, he would see that they were provided.<sup>(39)</sup> Flynn was as good as his word, for at a meeting of Newcastle directors on 5 May, it was reported that he 'had supplied us with permits for all our Traffic Department men who are handling foodstuffs'.<sup>(40)</sup>

But, as Flynn later reported, transport arrangements in the north east had by the third day of the national stoppage become increasingly complex, 'as applications for permits began to pour into each separate union's District Office, to each local body (Council of Action, Trades Council, Local Transport Sub-Committees, &c.)'.<sup>(41)</sup> The newly formed Joint Strike Committee's determination to introduce a uniform transport policy was made firmer by the discovery that the abuse of permits 'was beginning to reach gigantic proportions in the course of Wednesday afternoon. Unscrupulous contractors or employers were conveying any and every sort of goods under the aegis of "Food Only" or "Housing Materials Only"'.<sup>(42)</sup> The Joint Strike Committee responded to this discovery by deciding that all existing permits for the movement of building materials should be withdrawn and that no new ones should be issued. At the same time the Strike Committee decided not to discontinue the issue of food permits, though this decision was soon reconsidered when the Committee was informed that volunteers from the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (O.M.S.) were being used to unload foodships at Newcastle docks. Members of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (N.U.G.M.W.), already employed at this task under permit from their union, refused to work with blackleg labour and immediately came out on strike. During discussions between Sir

Kingsley Wood<sup>(43)</sup>, Civil Commissioner for the Northern Division, and representatives of the Strike Committee, Wood gave an undertaking that volunteers would not be used to handle food cargoes, but refused to withdraw them from the docks completely.<sup>(44)</sup> Kingsley Wood is also alleged to have proposed a system of dual control of the docks by representatives of the Strike Committee and the Government's Supply and Transport Organisation, although this was later denied officially in the House of Commons. The full Strike Committee refused to agree to trade union members working in conjunction with O.M.S. volunteers and when negotiations broke down, decided 'that we now use the discretionary powers vested in us by the T.U.C. and withdraw all permits today'.<sup>(45)</sup>

When directors of the Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society were informed that all existing permits for the transport of foodstuffs were being withdrawn after 7 May, they immediately appointed a deputation 'to wait upon the local strike committee, in order to endeavour to get them to reconsider the position'.<sup>(46)</sup> The deputation later reported that, as a result of their interview with the Joint Strike Committee, permits had been obtained for the transport of bread and milk supplies, on the understanding that they were carried only by trade union members.<sup>(47)</sup> In his report of these proceedings, C.R. Flynn, who had been appointed Secretary of the N.D.G.C.J.S.C., outlined the Committee's reasons for deciding to issue these permits:

Our embargo on food transport had been generally effective, but particularly so in the case of the Retail Co-operative Societies, whose highly organised staffs ceased work to a man. This meant that those private traders who were in a position to convey essential foods, either by owner drivers or by non-unionists were placed in a position of superiority to the Co-operative Societies. On the other hand the picketing, we were informed, was least

effective in the Gateshead and Newcastle area and most effective in the out-lying district. Accordingly the Committee had an interview with the Newcastle Co-operative Society and it was agreed to release their Bread and Milk for the period of the week-end, to the extent of 15 bread vans and a larger proportionate number of milk carriers. This was done by special permit valid for two days only. A similar arrangement was reached with the Gateshead Society.<sup>(48)</sup>

These concessions, however, were not extended to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which still was unable to receive or despatch supplies. In an interview with the Strike Committee, Mr. King, one of the members representing the Society, put forward a well-prepared case for the removal of the embargo on transport, in order that the retail societies could be supplied with foodstuffs. He argued that the C.W.S. in Newcastle had hesitated to move in the direction of accepting help from any other source in view of the close connection between the co-operative and trade union movements, and that the embargo would have the effect of driving the Society's trade into outside channels. 'The C.W.S.', he went on, 'was catering largely for trade unionists, and it was in their power to help us'.<sup>(49)</sup>

For the Joint Strike Committee, Flynn replied that their only object was to give the maximum of support to the miners. Their main attention was directed to industrial strategy, and 'whether that created invidious positions was something they had to learn by experience of application'.<sup>(50)</sup> Flynn went on to explain that so far as the co-operative movement was concerned, they had found themselves, in the initial stages of the stoppage, in the difficulty of not having a proper alliance - a working arrangement - with the movement. They were still discussing ways and means of overcoming these difficulties, and as an

interim arrangement had raised the embargo on all stocks held by the retail societies. When they came to the Wholesale Society, however, 'they had quite another problem and one not easy of solution'.<sup>(51)</sup>

At this point, Flynn gave a brief account of the part played by the O.M.S. in influencing the Committee's decision to withdraw all permits, and then went on to explain the implications for the C.W.S.: 'It might be possible to say that certain goods in the C.W.S. Warehouse have been handled wholly by Trade Unionists and were clean goods. If the C.W.S. now had a permit to dispose of these goods, the problem would arise in regard to future supplies, on the question of blackleg labour handling them.'<sup>(52)</sup> Flynn then asked for a response from the Society's directors to allegations 'that a pact had been made between the O.M.S. and the C.W.S. so far as No.1 Warehouse was concerned'.<sup>(53)</sup> For the Society, Thomas Liddle<sup>(53a)</sup> claimed that the C.W.S. had no knowledge of any such arrangement, and Mr. King pointed out that there was no blackleg labour at the Dunston Mill, yet the unions had refused to allow any flour to be loaded. Flynn replied to this remark by stressing that 'if flour ordinarily conveyed by rail was to be now conveyed by road it resolved itself into blacklegging the railway men'.<sup>(54)</sup>

Another Society spokesman, John Oliver<sup>(55)</sup>, complained that if the concessions made to retail societies represented the limit to which the Strike Committee was prepared to go, the movement would be unable to supply its members. Flynn countered by remarking that if the Strike Committee had arrived at the limit of their concessions then it would have been discourteous on their part to have granted the deputation an interview. The position was constantly changing, and the matter was not closed so far as they were concerned. They were merely tiding retail societies over with the idea of ascertaining whether, in the meantime, they could find a proper formula, and they were not going to do anything by which the co-operative movement was going to be treated

at a disadvantage compared with anybody else.<sup>(56)</sup> The Joint Strike Committee's chairman, James White, Northern Area Secretary of the T.G.W.U., brought the interview to an end by admitting that although the embargo on transport applied generally in Northumberland and Durham, he was aware that it affected the co-operative movement to a greater extent than outsiders. He suggested that the C.W.S. should appoint a small sub-committee to confer with the Strike Committee with the object of finding a solution to the difficulties.<sup>(57)</sup>

During the first two or three days of the General Strike, the T.U.C., too, was becoming alarmed at the growing number of 'situation reports' alleging that the permit system was being abused: 'Toy rocking horses, bedding for blacklegs, and even coal were labelled FOOD ONLY, and local strike committee permits were being imitated. "People are often found masquerading as loaves of bread", remarked the Westminster Worker.'<sup>(58)</sup> On 6 May, Ainsworth Farrer, Secretary of the Paddington Labour Party and Trades Council, reported that during a demonstration a L.N.W. railway van, marked "Food Only" had been found to be 'laden with barbed wire and a British Fascisti hiding under a tarpaulin...'.<sup>(59)</sup> There were also suggestions that even co-operative enterprises were involved in this kind of deception. 'At Woolwich', it was reported, 'a 5-ton lorry of coke was seen going into the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Preserve Factory labelled "Coke for Hospital". It came out with the "Coke for Hospital" rubbed out, but still visible.'<sup>(60)</sup>

The T.U.C. General Council responded to such reports by taking steps to restrict the issue of permits at the local level. On 5 May, responsibility for all aspects of transport during the General Strike was placed in the hands of a newly constituted National Transport Committee, consisting of representatives of all the transport unions, and operating from the headquarters of the N.U.R. at Unity House. (Previously, responsibility had been in the hands of the Food and Essential Services

Committee.) A notice issued by the General Council to inform local strike committees of this development also ordered a complete review of all permits already issued.<sup>(61)</sup> Such a review was necessary, argued the National Transport Committee, for three reasons:

- (1) The Government's refusal to accept co-operation of the Trade Union Movement in connection with the conveying and distribution of food.
- (2) The gross abuse of permits which have been issued by committees.
- (3) The attitude adopted by certain police authorities in declaring that the permits already issued are illegal.<sup>(62)</sup>

Only two days later, on 7 May, the General Council decided that it had no alternative but to rescind all permits. It explained its position in these terms:

The General Council offered to assist in the distribution of food supplies in a letter sent to the Prime Minister before the strike was declared, but this offer was ignored, not even an acknowledgement being sent to the Council. But several local bodies made arrangements with local strike committees and permits were issued by the latter. It has now to be reported that the Government has ordered such permits to be withdrawn in many places. In order to avoid any conflict between the authorities and men on strike the Council has felt it necessary to withdraw its permits in these cases.<sup>(63)</sup>

When this decision was announced by the General Council it brought a howl of anguish from the co-operative movement's leaders, who were quick to recognise that the implications of a complete embargo on the transport of food were likely to be far more serious for co-operative societies than for private food retailers. These implications were

outlined in the editorial columns of Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, the monthly journal of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society:

This decision involved a stoppage, not only of transport to and from warehouses and to shops, but a complete cessation of deliveries from bakeries and dairies and to co-operative families. Interpreted literally by trade unionists in co-operative service, the T.U.C. new resolution would have brought to a standstill on the morning of Friday, May 7th, every co-operative food delivery service in the Metropolitan area, and at a later date, as the telegrams duly arrived, in the country also. (64)

The movement's anguish was also tinged with disbelief at the news that the General Council's instructions made no provision to exempt co-operative societies from the embargo on transport. A.V. Alexander, M.P., responded by convening at the House of Commons an unofficial meeting of representatives of the C.W.S. and retail societies in London. At this meeting a deputation was appointed to attend at Unity House in order to seek clarification from the National Transport Committee. The deputation's worst fears were quickly confirmed by the Committee:

... all "permits" were useless; telegrams had already gone; transport would stop tomorrow; bread which was already baked would apparently remain in the bakehouses. In vain did we plead for 24 hours' respite in which to consider the new position and to inform our members. It was pointed out that in the circumstances of a society like the Royal Arsenal, which had only two large bakeries, it was a physical impossibility for members to be asked to walk to the bakehouse to collect their own bread, and if transport was to be withdrawn, how was milk to be placed within reach of more than 100,000 families which depended upon the regular

knock of the milkman in the morning? But the transport committee had come to their decision; their orders had been issued and there was no turning back, and London co-operators left confused and dejected. (65)

The deputation's pleas were not altogether in vain, however, for after considering the matter in private session, the National Transport Committee decided that it perhaps was advisable to make some concession in order to retain 'the good feeling of the Co-operative Movement'. (66) It was agreed, therefore, that roundsmen employed by the four London co-operative societies should be allowed to resume work in order to deliver bread and milk to their customers. (67) At first, the Committee insisted that this arrangement should apply only to the London societies, and it was not until Alexander persuaded Arthur Henderson, M.P., to intervene that the concession was extended to include the provincial societies. (68)

These concessions, of course, did nothing to alleviate the difficulties of the C.W.S., which was unable to persuade the National Transport Committee to ease its restrictions on the movement of bulk supplies. On Friday 7 May, the Board of the C.W.S. appointed a special emergency committee comprising Joseph English, Walter Charter, Thomas Arnold and Sir Thomas Allen, all Society directors. (69) On the following day this committee was granted an interview with the General Council. At this meeting the General Council confirmed the National Transport Committee's decision to order the withdrawal of permits and informed the emergency committee that, with the exception of the concessions already made to retail societies, it could offer no direct assistance to the co-operative movement. According to the minutes of the C.W.S., Ernest Bevin then stated that 'he quite realised the position in which the Society was placed and that their instructions would be that the C.W.S. should go to the Government for assistance'. (70)

- (1) A trade union for co-operative employees was founded in 1891, and from 1895 was known as the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees. By amalgamation with the Warehouse and General Workers Union in 1921 it became the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (N.U.D.A.W.), J. Hamilton, The Co-operative Movement, 1924, p.31.
  - (2) C.W.S. Memorandum, copy in N.R.O., 1758/12.
  - (3) G.D.H. Cole, A Century of Co-operation, 1944, p.300.
  - (4) P. Redfern, The New History of the C.W.S., 1938, p.185.
  - (5) Shilbottle Colliery Records, N.R.O., 1758/12.
  - (6) Co-operative News, 17 July 1926.
  - (7) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 18 June 1926.
  - (8) *ibid.*
  - (9) *ibid.*, 8 July 1926.
  - (10) Co-operative News, 16 October 1926.
  - (11) *ibid.*, 30 October 1926.
- Some discrepancies appear in the accounts of this meeting. According to Redfern (*op. cit.*, p.271), it took place on 30 October 1926 and the voting was 135 to 38. But as a report of the meeting appeared in the Co-operative News on the morning of 30 October, this version is possibly the more reliable of the two.
- (12) Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association Minutes, 1926.  
N.R.O. 759/68.
  - (13) *ibid.*
  - (14) Ashington Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926.  
N.R.O. 1794/23.
  - (15) Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Board Minutes, 1926.

(16) Co-operative Union - a central advisory body established in 1869 and providing affiliated co-operative societies with a number of services including legal guidance.

(17) Report of the 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.51.

The information collected by the Co-operative Union was presented in tabular form and on many aspects of the Co-operative movement's role during the lock-out provides the only available source of statistical evidence. These statistical tables will be referred to at some length in the following pages and it is necessary at the outset, therefore, to be aware of their possible shortcomings. Perhaps the most serious of these is that of the 1,303 societies which were asked to furnish information, replies were received by the Co-operative Union from only 771. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the 771 responding societies supplied answers to all or only some of the questions asked.

From the historian's point of view, the Co-operative Union's report of its findings presents another disappointing aspect, in that some of the information collected appears to have been suppressed. The Co-operative Union's motives for conducting a survey of its affiliated societies were two-fold. Firstly, the United Board of the Union was anxious to seek an interview with the General Council of the T.U.C. in order to discuss both the events of the recent national stoppage and, more generally, the whole question of the position of co-operative societies in industrial disputes. In preparation for this intended interview the United Board wished to obtain full particulars of the way in which societies were affected by the mining stoppage and of the assistance given by societies to the miners, their dependants, and to the miners' organisations.

Secondly, it was intended that details of any assistance given by societies, 'if found suitable', should later be used for propaganda purposes. Clearly, some of the information supplied by the societies was felt by the Co-operative Union to be far from suitable for such a purpose; thus in the words of the Report:

In the opinion of the Board it is not desirable that full particulars of the detailed information received from societies should be published, as its publication would probably serve no useful purpose and might possibly create misunderstandings and friction between the Co-operative Movement and the Trade Union Movement which ought, if possible, to be avoided.

ibid., p.50.

- (18) Employment figures for May 1926 are not available, but according to The People's Year Book, 1928, p.27, co-operative employment in 1926 totalled 209,616.
- (19) C.W.S. Ltd., Annual Returns 1925-27, P.R.O. F.S. 18/3
- (20) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (21) T.U.C. Library, General Strike Collection, Box H.D. 5366.
- (22) F. Brockway, Towards Tomorrow, 1977, p.72.
- (23) T.U.C. Library, General Strike Collection, Box. H.D. 5366.
- (24) ibid.
- (25) J.F. Clarke and J.W. Leonard, The General Strike, 1926, University of Newcastle upon Tyne Archive Teaching Unit No.7, 1971.
- (26) T.U.C. Library, General Strike Collection, Box H.D. 5366.
- (27) The British Worker, 6 May 1926.
- (28) ibid.
- (29) Co-operative News, 15 May 1926.

- (30) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (31) P.R.O. Cab 27/331 S.T.(24) Series.
- (32) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (33) Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society, Board Minutes, 1926.
- (34) Details of this circular are given in the Minutes of the Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society, TWCCAD ACC 120/144, and of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society.
- (35) Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Board Minutes, 1926.
- (36) J.P.M. Millar, 'The 1926 General Strike and the N.C.L.C',  
Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History,  
No.20, Spring 1970, pp.43-4.
- (37) Quoted in M. Morris, op. cit., p.59.
- (38) C.R. Flynn, An Account of the Proceedings of the Northumberland & Durham General Council & Joint Strike Committee, 1926, p.4.  
Copy in T.U.C. Library, Box 130.
- (39) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (40) *ibid.*
- (41) C.R. Flynn, op. cit., p.6.
- (42) *ibid.*, p.7.
- (43) Sir Kingsley Wood (1881-1943)  
Unionist M.P. for Woolwich West from December 1918.  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, November 1924  
to June 1929.
- (44) C.R. Flynn, op. cit., pp.7-10.
- (45) *ibid.*, p.10.
- (46) Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926.  
TWCCAD ACC 120/44.
- (47) *ibid.*
- (48) C.R. Flynn, op. cit., p.11.
- (49) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.

- (50) *ibid.*
- (51) *ibid.*
- (52) *ibid.*
- (53) *ibid.*
- (53a) Thomas Liddle (1863-1954)  
 President Hartlepool Co-operative Society 1905-36; C.W.S.  
 Board Member 1920-32.
- (54) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (55) John Oliver (1861-1942)  
 President Gateshead Co-operative Society, 1907-16;  
 C.W.S. director, 1915-31.
- (56) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (57) *ibid.*
- (58) Quoted in R.W. Postgate, E. Wilkinson, J.F. Horrabin, A Worker's  
 History of the Great Strike, 1927, p.34.
- (59) T.U.C. Library, General Strike Collection, Box H.D. 5366.
- (60) *ibid.*
- (61) The British Worker, 6 May 1926.
- (62) *ibid.*, 7 May 1926.
- (63) *ibid.*, 10 May 1926.
- (64) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, July 1926.
- (65) *ibid.*
- (66) T.U.C. Library, Box 131.  
 Record of Procedure of Strike Organisation Committee.
- (67) *ibid.*
- (68) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (69) Walter Thomas Charter (1871-1932), C.W.S. Board Member.  
 Thomas George Arnold (1866-1944), C.W.S. Director 1916-34;  
 Secretary Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society 1902-16.  
 Sir Thomas Allen (1864-1943), C.W.S. director 1910-33.
- (70) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.

## CHAPTER 6

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE GENERAL STRIKE (II)Relations with the Government

There can be no doubt that the decision to withdraw all permits dealt co-operative societies a more severe blow than comparable private undertakings, because of the higher degree of unionisation amongst co-operative employees. Several accounts of the General Strike, however, have suggested that the relative position of co-operative societies was also worsened by their aversion to seeking government assistance in overcoming transport difficulties. Margaret Morris, for example, has argued that 'other traders could turn to the Supply and Transport Committee food officers to help them get supplies, but not the Co-operative Societies, so that if permits were refused they were at an immediate disadvantage compared with their competitors'.<sup>(1)</sup> Similarly, in his account of the activities in the North East of the N.D.G.C.J.S.C., W.H. Crook assesses the impact on co-operative societies of the decision to withdraw all permits in the following terms: 'All that resulted, on subsequent days, from this decision to withdraw permits, was the placing of the ordinary trader, who relied upon volunteer aid and Government protection, in a position of superiority to that of the Co-operative Societies, who could hardly appeal for Government aid and "blackleg" labour.'<sup>(2)</sup>

By apparently relying too heavily upon the assumption that their connections with the labour movement in some way inhibited co-operative societies from collaborating with the Government's emergency organisations, both Morris and Crook seem to have overlooked considerable evidence to the contrary. Christopher Farman, in his account of the General Strike, also appears to have fallen into the same trap: 'Unlike other

trading enterprises, the Co-ops were given no Government assistance in obtaining their supplies and, where the strike committee insisted on cancelling all permits, it was usually the Co-ops which suffered most.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is now clear, not only that the movement's leaders approached the Government for assistance during the General Strike, but also that a number of wholesale and retail societies both sought and received Government aid to move supplies. In his 'official' history of the C.W.S., Percy Redfern acknowledges that recourse was made to the Government's services, but gives the impression that this step was considered only after the Society's emergency committee had been 'practically rebuffed' at their meeting with the General Council on 8 May.<sup>(4)</sup> In fact, there had been discussions between the Government and representatives of the co-operative movement on several previous occasions.

As early as 15 January 1926, the General Committee of the C.W.S. had resolved:

That we appoint a deputation of six members ... to wait upon the Government with a view to ascertaining the position of the Co-operative Movement in regard to supplies in the event of a national stoppage in the mining industry, and the consequent dislocation in food production, transport and distribution.<sup>(5)</sup>

The outcome of this approach was such that, at a Cabinet Meeting on 29 January, the President of the Board of Trade, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, was able to inform his colleagues 'that the Wholesale Co-operative Society, while unable for internal reasons to enter into a formal agreement, was prepared informally, in the event of a strike, not to discriminate against any consumer provided that the Government would not discriminate against the Society, and, in addition, to exercise its good

offices with its retailers'.<sup>(6)</sup> The President of the Board of Trade was given Cabinet authorisation to make arrangements on this basis, and received a deputation from the C.W.S. on Wednesday 3 February 1926. The minutes of the C.W.S. do not give details of this meeting, merely recording that the report of the deputation to the Board of Trade was submitted, considered, and received by the General Committee.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the following weeks contact was maintained between the Board of Trade and the C.W.S. and on 29 April the General Committee accepted an invitation to appoint representatives to serve on the eleven divisional area committees (later reduced to ten) created as part of the Government's emergency plans in readiness for a possible national stoppage.<sup>(8)</sup> During the General Strike itself, discussions between the Government and representatives of the co-operative movement were initially held on 6 May, when Cunliffe-Lister met A.V. Alexander, who in the Labour Administration of 1924 had served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade under Sidney Webb. At this meeting Alexander was informed of the Government's emergency plans for safeguarding and distributing food-stuffs and other essential supplies during the national stoppage:

The Government realised the need for protection being afforded, and they had completed a plan which will include such protection to any extent required in connection with movements from Docks, Quaysides, etc., and will also arrange for that protection to be carried completely through by means of convoys.<sup>(9)</sup>

Cunliffe-Lister then gave Alexander an assurance that the Government would treat the C.W.S. quite impartially in the matter, and that if Government services were required by the Society, 'it would be afforded equal service and equal protection'.<sup>(10)</sup>

Government Services and the C.W.S.

Following their unsuccessful attempt on 8 May to persuade the General Council to reconsider its decision to rescind all permits, the C.W.S. emergency committee decided to arrange an immediate meeting with the Board of Trade. At this meeting, which was attended by Sir Alfred Faulkner, the Chief National Food Officer, the C.W.S. representatives informed Cunliffe-Lister that 'they had told the T.U.C. that they intended to carry on their work of feeding the people, and to apply for any Government assistance which might be necessary for this purpose'.<sup>(11)</sup> In his account of the General Strike, G.A. Phillips has suggested that the C.W.S. decision 'to ask for the assistance of government agencies where necessary to maintain their services ... may have been taken in order to put pressure on the T.U.C. to be more indulgent to its supposed ally and associate'.<sup>(12)</sup> The evidence seems to suggest, however, that by this stage the C.W.S. directors were already resigned to the fact that assistance on any significant scale from the General Council would not be forthcoming - particularly when it is remembered that Bevin apparently had already suggested that the Society should seek government aid.

Cunliffe-Lister welcomed the C.W.S. decision to approach the Government, expressing the view that, under the circumstances, it was the only one open to the co-operative movement, and he promised that the Government 'would lend all assistance in its power'.<sup>(13)</sup> The C.W.S. deputation was informed that the Government had used troops to take over the Victoria and Albert Dock and Silvertown area of London, and that a convoy of more than a hundred wagons had already been moved. Cunliffe-Lister advised that details of all intended C.W.S. cargoes and consignments should be submitted to the local food officer concerned, in order that the necessary protection could be arranged and convoys formed.<sup>(14)</sup>

It was made clear that as far as possible the Society's own drivers and wagons should be used and that if the drivers were willing they should be enrolled in the Government's voluntary organisation. If the Society then discovered that it did not have enough drivers to undertake normal operations, application for volunteer drivers could be made to the Hon. Horace Woodhouse, C.B.E., Food Officer for the London and Home Counties Division.<sup>(15)</sup>

The Society's emergency committee gave an undertaking to observe these recommendations and then went on to emphasise the importance of ensuring that the Government's offer of assistance was applied to other areas as well as London. Cunliffe-Lister agreed to make the necessary arrangements and on Sunday, 9 May sent to all chairmen of the various Volunteer Service Committees copies of the following telegram, under the rather cryptic signature 'Seaweed Parl.':

Co-operative Wholesale Society have applied to Government for assistance and have been promised some assistance in obtaining transport, labour, and protection as would be granted to any other food traders. Government is anxious to give every possible help to any wholesale or retail society which applies for help and requests that all possible attention may be given to such applications.<sup>(16)</sup>

Following a communication from Cunliffe-Lister, the Secretary for Scotland undertook to inform the Lord Advocate of the action taken in England and to request that similar action should be taken in Scotland.<sup>(17)</sup>

The General Committee then proceeded to circularise its regional branches with details of the discussions with Cunliffe-Lister, and instructed them to apply, where necessary, for government assistance in moving supplies of food. This move by the C.W.S. directors was undoubtedly seen in government circles as a highly significant development, and

the reasons for regarding it as such were possibly two-fold. Firstly, it added authority to official claims that the Government, and not the T.U.C., had control over the distribution of food and other essential supplies during the General Strike. And, secondly, the Government may have seen the C.W.S. decision to collaborate with what the T.U.C. regarded as a strike-breaking organisation as an indication of a split in working-class ranks.<sup>(18)</sup> The former consideration was seen as a particularly important one, at a time when the Government was under pressure as a consequence of allegations that in the North East the O.M.S. organisation had broken down in the face of determined trade union opposition. The Government was delighted, therefore, with a report on 9 May, from Major-General Sir R.A. Kerr Montgomery, Food Officer for the Northern Division, which embraced the counties of Northumberland and Durham. Upon receiving a copy of Cunliffe-Lister's instructions to divisional food officers, Montgomery had arranged an immediate meeting with local representatives of the C.W.S. At this meeting he had made it clear that before any assistance could be given, the C.W.S. 'must sever the connection which had hitherto existed between them and the T.U.C. administration and work loyally with the Government through the Government's services'.<sup>(19)</sup> Montgomery's report that the C.W.S. representatives had unanimously agreed to accept these terms evoked the following comments in a Board of Trade bulletin: 'As the majority of the members of Co-operative Societies are Trade Unionists, the decision of the Co-operative Societies to work with the Government's emergency organisation instead of under the T.U.C. permit system, is an event of outstanding importance.'<sup>(20)</sup>

However, in the North East at least, the Government's satisfaction was somewhat premature. When the C.W.S. deputation returned to their headquarters in Newcastle to report on the meeting with Montgomery, the matter of accepting Government assistance at this early stage was

'adversely commented upon' by several members of the Society's Committee. After some discussion it was decided that before any further approach was made to the Government, the Society's manager should be interviewed in order to ascertain the full extent of the supply problem. (21)

Elsewhere, however, there was no apparent reluctance to make use of Government services. By 11 May, the C.W.S. General Committee had received reports from regional branches in London, Manchester, Cardiff and Bristol confirming that the instruction to seek Government assistance had been complied with. (22) In his memoirs, Cunliffe-Lister was to pay tribute to the attitude adopted by directors of the C.W.S. during the national stoppage:

If the Society was ready to co-operate with the Government, I was anxious that it should have as full an opportunity as any other trade organisation to play its part. I met some of the directors and put the position to them. It was not an easy decision for them to take; but, after full consideration, they came back and said that they were clear where their duty lay, and throughout the strike they co-operated fully with us. (23)

#### Government Services and the Retail Societies

The Government was anxious that the retail co-operative societies, too, should be given every opportunity to take advantage of the emergency services. In some districts local government organisations had actually approached co-operative societies with offers to provide assistance before the meeting between Cunliffe-Lister and representatives of the C.W.S. had taken place. On Saturday 8 May the general manager of the Newcastle upon Tyne Society reported that an offer had been received from the Town Clerk 'to assist us in getting supplies and making deliveries'. (24) Similarly, the Felton and District Society in Northumber-

land was approached by an agent of the O.M.S. with an offer to supply foodstuffs to the Society.<sup>(25)</sup>

During the period between the withdrawal of all permits by the T.U.C. and the termination of the General Strike, retail societies in a number of districts gave serious consideration to the advisability of requesting government assistance, or accepting offers of help where these had already been forthcoming. Concern at the difficulties facing co-operative societies during the national stoppage was particularly widespread in the Manchester area. On Saturday 8 May Alfred Whitehead, chairman of the Co-operative Union's Central Board, received a deputation from the Beswick Society urging him to call a conference of Manchester district societies 'to deal with the dispute as affecting the T.U.C. and the Government'.<sup>(26)</sup> When Whitehead approached the General Committee of the C.W.S. for guidance, he was advised that such conferences were unnecessary, as an emergency committee already had the matter in hand and 'it would be better to be guided in policy from London so as to avoid over-lapping'.<sup>(27)</sup> The C.W.S., of course, did not have the authority to determine the policies of individual co-operative societies, and on this occasion the General Committee's advice was ignored. On Tuesday 11 May the North Western section of the Co-operative Union called a special emergency conference of societies in the Manchester area 'to consider developments in regard to the General Strike'. This meeting was clearly regarded as an important one, for twenty-six societies were represented at the conference, in most cases by their full committees. An emergency committee was appointed and given authority to act, 'on request, on behalf of any society or societies experiencing difficulty in obtaining supplies or in dealing with Government officers or strike committees'.<sup>(28)</sup>

Discussion during the meeting centred on three main issues:

(a) the paramount importance of continuing to supply cooperative

consumers;

(b) application for Government transport where necessary;

(c) the question of appealing for co-operative volunteers in the event of distributive employees refusing to handle foodstuffs conveyed by Government volunteers. (29)

No firm decisions were reached and the question of accepting Government transport was left with the emergency committee to make suggestions or recommendations as circumstances dictated. It was revealed during the discussions, however, that 'one or two societies had already asked for this assistance, and others were contemplating doing so'. (30)

When deciding whether or not to make use of government services during the General Strike, local co-operative societies appear to have been influenced by various considerations. It is possible, for example, that some societies declined to apply for government or O.M.S. assistance because of their connections with the labour movement and their reluctance to become involved with any strike-breaking organisation. It is unlikely, however, that this consideration was a decisive factor in determining co-operative society policy on the question of government assistance during the national stoppage. Ideological commitment to the labour movement was far more tenuous in some districts than in others, and it was not unknown for the management committees of some local societies to show open hostility to the aims of organised labour. At the commencement of the General Strike, for example, the head of the London Wholesale Co-operative Society went so far as to write to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, urging him 'to stand firm on the position he had taken up'. (31)

An examination of the replies to a survey of trades councils conducted by the Labour Research Department at the end of the General Strike suggests that the management committees of many other societies

were also less than fully committed to the aims of the Strike and the labour movement generally. In Bolton the council of action, which comprised the secretaries of all local unions affected by the Strike, reported that the co-operative society was 'largely a Conservative body, and non-sympathetic'.<sup>(32)</sup> In Finsbury and Stratford-on-Avon the local societies were described respectively as 'not very sympathetic' and 'not very sympathetic with Labour Party', whilst the council of action in Dunfermline complained that they had encountered 'great difficulty at times with certain members of the Board of Management, owing to their not even being Trade Unionists themselves'.<sup>(33)</sup> Clearly, then, in districts where the management committees of local societies were comprised largely of Liberal or Conservative elements, aversion to the principle of collaboration with the government was far less likely to be an important consideration than in districts where strong traditional links existed between the co-operative and trade union movements.

Even in industrial and coalmining districts, however, where the members of co-operative society boards were more likely to be trade unionists themselves, or more susceptible to trade union influence, recourse to government 'strike-breaking machinery' was by no means automatically ruled out. However sympathetically they may have viewed the stance adopted by trade unions during the General Strike, co-operative societies remained anxious to ensure that their normal business activities were disrupted as little as possible. If, as a consequence of what was regarded as ill-advised T.U.C. policy, this could not be achieved, then many societies felt that they had no alternative but to consider applying for government assistance. An excellent example of the way in which co-operative attitudes were dominated by business considerations is provided by an account of events in Birmingham, where strong traditional links existed between local trade union branches and the co-operative movement:

Balancing the needs of its members on one hand with an overall support for the General Strike on the other, the Birmingham Co-operative Society... agreed that, if it proved necessary, it would make use of Government sources of supply and transport. (34)

One of the most important factors influencing such a decision, then, appears to have been the relationship at the local level between co-operative societies and strike committees or councils of action during the nine days of the General Strike itself. Co-operative societies were much more likely to seek government assistance in areas in which strike committees were reluctant to issue permits, and particularly where the instruction of the T.U.C.'s National Transport Committee to rescind all permits was rigidly enforced. It was in the North East, for example, where the N.D.G.C.J.S.C. had from the start of the General Strike succeeded in enforcing a fairly effective embargo on the transport of food supplies, that co-operative society requests for government assistance seem to have been most common, particularly during the latter stages of the stoppage. Records of the many discussions between representatives of North Eastern societies and the Joint Strike Committee in Newcastle reveal, however, that in most cases such requests were made only reluctantly and not until it was felt that no alternative course was available.

Following their fruitless approach to the Joint Strike Committee on 9 May, Newcastle members of the C.W.S. General Committee called a meeting of representatives of Newcastle district societies in order to formulate a joint policy on the question of government assistance. At this meeting on Monday 10 May it was agreed that the C.W.S. and retail societies should appoint a joint deputation to make a final approach to the Joint Strike Committee before seeking government aid. (35) During the course of the meeting a telephone call was made to the Strike Committee's headquarters at Burt Hall in Newcastle, in order to ascertain

whether there had been any change in the Committee's policy towards co-operative societies. Upon hearing that the transport embargo still operated on all supplies other than bread and milk, it was agreed that delegates should confer with their respective committees in order to establish whether a further appeal to the Strike Committee was felt to be worthwhile. Another conference was arranged for the following afternoon in the boardroom of the C.W.S. headquarters in Blandford Street, and all retail societies in the district were urged to send representatives. (36)

The proceedings of this conference, which was attended by more than one hundred delegates representing forty-five societies, reveal that there was by no means unanimity on the appropriate policy to be adopted. On the one hand, a 'hard-line' was advocated by representatives of the West Stanley and Felling societies who disagreed 'with any overtures whatever being carried on with the Strike Committee now operating in Newcastle', and urged that an immediate request be made for government assistance. (37) On the other, was the view put forward by representatives of the Newcastle upon Tyne Society, that every alternative avenue should be explored before such a step was taken. The Newcastle Society representatives recommended 'that we send a deputation to interview Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, and Mr. Arthur Henderson, and any other responsible member of the Labour Party available, with the request that they should jointly, along with Mr. Alexander, M.P., put the Co-operative case before the T.U.C.'. (38) In the event, it was decided to send another deputation to the Joint Strike Committee, 'to ask if they had definitely and finally decided to maintain the embargo on Co-operative transport, and if so, to intimate that the societies had no other option than to seek the aid of the authorities in this matter'. (39)

As we have seen, the Joint Strike Committee was well aware of the

difficulties faced by co-operative societies in the North East, and despite its reluctance to authorise the movement of any vehicles, had already relaxed its general embargo on transport to allow the delivery of bread and milk supplies by co-operative employees. The Strike Committee was not, however, prepared to make any further concessions, and its slowly hardening attitude towards subsequent requests for the removal of all restrictions on co-operative transport is apparent from C.R. Flynn's account of the Committee's proceedings, which is worth quoting at some length:

In the evening (Saturday, 8th May) the Joint Strike Committee discussed once more, and this time at great length, the question of releasing food transport for the Co-operative Societies. It should be clearly understood that there was not, so far as could be ascertained at that time during the strike, any shortage of the essential foods in any village, but the feeling expressed at the Conference of Councils of Action was something that had to be reckoned with and met as far as possible. An alarmist fears of a food shortage were only less serious than an actual food shortage. On the other hand the Committee had its instructions from the Trade Union Congress General Council and from the Union executives. Between these instructions on the one hand and the local feeling on the other the Committee's business was to find a correct line of policy, and that line once found, to pursue it steadily but carefully.

Before proceeding to deal with the line adopted by the Committee it must be realised that one apparently obvious solution had been already ruled out, or if not ruled out left so far on one side as to make it very difficult to adopt. This was the provisioning of the strikers by means of the Co-operative movement. This policy, had it been possible to follow it to the full and from

the beginning, would have been part of the general strategy of the general strike, and the kernel of that strategy would have been the struggle for food control... This policy, however obvious and expedient it might seem, could not be adopted at the beginning for several reasons, viz:-

1. The Trade Unions had no permanent or even provisional arrangements with the Co-operative movement or any representative part of it.
2. The C.W.S. Directors had in the earlier spring issued a note refusing credits in advance and by this act had most definitely been ranged, at any rate in public opinion, on the side of the Government and the Capitalists as against the coal miner and their possible allies the other Trade Unions.
3. The same absence of detailed preparation, to which we have already referred, had of course precluded any local arrangements being come to between the Co-operative Societies and local Trade Unionists.

So that as a result of these reasons, the policy which from a strategical viewpoint might seem the best one, was almost out of court at the time of the strike and could only be brought into court by a laborious and painful process of discovering that every other solution contained more difficulties than this particular policy. The general strike, however, had run its course before the final stage of any such process could be reached.

These points, however, will serve to illuminate the discussions which took place on the Joint Strike Committee on the Saturday night, and of other nights both before and after ... On the one hand there was the necessity of seeing that our own people were fed and the immediate necessity of dispelling the alarmist rumours

of shortage. There was equally the necessity of seeing that the ranks of the Transport workers and others concerned in the production and distribution of food were not broken by any unwarranted or excessive supply of permits. ... It was clear on the Sunday that the Co-operative Wholesale Society and possibly the Retail Societies had before them the very difficult choice of closing down many of their activities or of openly becoming suppliants for the aid of a strike breaking organisation. The dilemma was a difficult one and the members of the Joint Strike Committee, all of them co-operators, had the utmost sympathy with the plight into which the Co-operative movement was thrust. It appeared possible that at any rate a partial solution, a day to day solution or even an hourly solution might be devised by means of a Sub-Committee. It was equally apparent that any general yielding on the question of removing the embargo on the food supplies was at the moment completely out of the question. Still less was it possible to accept the suggestion put forward very strongly by some of the Co-operators that supplies of coal should be released for transport. In fact it might be said that applications of this kind, that is for transport of coal, served only to make the problems confronting the two bodies more difficult in that it tended to persuade the trade unionists that they could not rely upon the co-operators to exhibit the sympathetic understanding of the aims and purposes of the general strike, into which the movement had been forced. Without a sympathetic understanding of that kind the best efforts to solve the dilemma in which the Co-operative movement found itself were likely to prove fruitless.

On the Tuesday the C.W.S. Directors made their final appearance before the Strike Committee. By this time, however, the hands of the Committee were tied. Their discretionary power had been

taken away; the telegram from the Trade Union Congress had restricted all permits whatsoever other than the necessary supply of bread and milk to the Co-operative Societies. The Secretary of the Joint Strike Committee had to make it clear to the C.W.S. Directors that the Joint Strike Committee was impotent to afford them any further relief or to take any further steps towards the progressive realisation of that strategy which alone could guarantee nothing more than a favourable draw for the strikers.<sup>(40)</sup>

By this time, members of the C.W.S. emergency committee sitting in London, were becoming increasingly frustrated at the reluctance of the Society's Newcastle branch to comply with their instructions to seek government assistance. On the morning of Tuesday 11 May transport difficulties had finally brought production to a standstill at the Society's huge flour mill at Dunston-on-Tyne. When news of this reached London the emergency committee immediately telephoned the Newcastle branch with instructions to follow the procedure adopted in London and to apply for government labour. The Newcastle directors were informed that the Board of Trade was becoming alarmed at reports that private traders in the Newcastle area were short of flour. Consequently, the Board of Trade had arranged to send relief supplies of flour by train, none of which was intended for co-operative stores in view of the large stocks held at Dunston. 'If we do not move quickly at Newcastle and obtain transport facilities', warned the emergency committee, 'Dunston Mill will probably be commandeered by the Government.'<sup>(41)</sup> The emergency committee was infuriated, therefore, when it discovered that instead of complying with these instructions, the Newcastle directors had taken part in a further abortive approach to the Joint Strike Committee at Burt Hall. The emergency committee then resolved:

That we express the feeling of this committee that the action taken

at Newcastle Branch has weakened our position considerably, having regard to the representations we are making to the Government and Police at this end and which had been conveyed all over the country and in view of the Board's decision on this subject last week.<sup>(42)</sup>

Faced with pressure of this kind from the C.W.S. Board in London, the Society's Newcastle directors were left with little alternative but to take immediate action. When the Newcastle conference of societies was informed of the co-operative deputation's failure to make any further impression upon the Joint Strike Committee, it was decided that the C.W.S. should seek government assistance and 'that Retail Societies should do all in their power to render whatever assistance was possible'.<sup>(43)</sup> As far as the C.W.S. is concerned, an appeal for government assistance proved unnecessary, for on the morning of Wednesday 12 May it was reported that all drivers employed at the Society's Newcastle traffic department had decided to resume work. At the same time loaders at the Dunston Mill decided that, contrary to instructions from their union, they would agree to perform their normal duties.<sup>(44)</sup> This apparently was not an isolated instance of disaffection on the part of unionised co-operative employees in the North East. A number of retail societies in the Newcastle area decided to make a final appeal to their own transport workers before seeking government or O.M.S. assistance to move supplies. In the case of the Newcastle upon Tyne Society this manoeuvre seems to have proved successful, for at a meeting on Wednesday 12 May the Society's transport workers voted in favour of an immediate resumption of work.<sup>(45)</sup> Although the precise timing of this decision is not known, the meeting was scheduled to take place during the morning of 12 May and it seems likely, therefore, that the decision, as in the case of the C.W.S. transport workers, was made before the General Council's announcement that the national stoppage was to be called off.

Elsewhere in the North East a number of retail societies clearly felt that further approaches to their own employees were either futile or inappropriate, and decided to act upon the resolution passed at the Newcastle conference. At a special meeting of the Throckley District Society's committee on 11 May, a motion 'that should employees be prepared to work, we acquiesce with their desire' was defeated, and it was resolved 'that we now apply to the O.M.S. for their services to supply us with the necessary transport to keep the members supplied with food-stuffs'.<sup>(46)</sup> On the same day the committees of the Seaton Valley and Windy Nook societies authorised their managers to make similar approaches to the government or O.M.S.<sup>(47)</sup>

In other districts, too, local strike committee reluctance to exempt co-operative societies from transport restrictions resulted in requests for government assistance. The local Provident Society in Derby, it was reported, 'had a poor time with the local strike committee', which during the General Strike 'did not allow it a single permit to bring in foodstuffs'.<sup>(48)</sup> When all the society's transport workers were called out on 11 May the board requested the local food officer to provide assistance.<sup>(49)</sup>

In replies to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, a total of thirty-two retail societies claimed to have made use of volunteer labour during the national stoppage.<sup>(50)</sup> Although, if accurate, this figure represents only a relatively small proportion of retail societies (1,303 societies were circularised), it gives no real indication of the number of societies which gave serious consideration to the question of seeking government aid, but ultimately took no action in this direction. This is immediately apparent from the minutes of the Newcastle conference of retail societies on 11 May, which reveal that only two of the more than one hundred delegates eventually voted against the resolution to seek government assistance if the Joint Strike Committee refused to revise

its policy on transport.<sup>(51)</sup> Thus in the North East alone, the committees of at least forty-four retail societies were apparently committed in principle to collaborating with government or O.M.S. services. Yet nationally, as we have seen, only thirty-two societies later claimed to have utilised volunteer labour.

#### The Labour Movement's Response

Whilst not overlooking the possibility that the Co-operative Union figure understates the number of societies making use of 'blackleg' labour, it therefore seems clear that a number of societies, although not opposed to collaboration on ideological grounds, in fact made no approach to the government for assistance. The reasons for this lack of action on the part of some societies were possibly three-fold. Firstly, a number of societies, as we have seen, made final appeals to their own employees to return to work and where these were successful, as in the case of the Newcastle upon Tyne Society, recourse to government services was obviously not required. Secondly, the decision to seek government assistance, in the North East at least, was not finally taken until Tuesday 11 May, and some societies may have been in the process of making such an approach when the national stoppage was called off on the following day. Thirdly, there can be no doubt that co-operative applications for government or O.M.S. assistance would have been far more common had societies not been obliged to give careful consideration to the possible response of their employees to such a move. It is clear, for example, that some societies were reluctant to risk the possibility of aggravating an already difficult situation by making use of volunteer labour. This was, partly at least, the case at the C.W.S.-owned Dunston flour mill, which had been instructed by the trade union involved not to issue flour to retail societies during the stoppage. Here, the manager decided to defer the introduction of police-protected

volunteer labour because he feared a general strike of all his employees and wished to continue grinding operations for as long as possible.<sup>(52)</sup>

The movement's leaders, too, were afraid that trade unionists in the employ of retail societies would cease work completely rather than handle goods supplied by 'blackleg' labour. From the moment that the decision was made in principle to seek government assistance, therefore, determined efforts were made to minimise the risks involved. At a meeting between the National Transport Committee and representatives of the C.W.S. and London societies on 7 May, the co-operative deputation put forward the suggestion that N.U.D.A.W. should be instructed to allow retail employees to remain at work, 'even though they had to handle goods delivered at our place by Government service'.<sup>(53)</sup> The Transport Committee explained that it had no authority to issue such instructions, but promised to put the deputation's suggestion before the General Council. The General Council considered this proposal on 7 May, and after interviewing Mr. Stanson, a N.U.D.A.W. official, the union was requested that co-operative shop assistants should be allowed to remain at work, even when called upon to handle goods brought by government lorries.<sup>(54)</sup> In a telephone conversation with J. Marchbanks, the National Transport Committee secretary, A.V. Alexander was informed of this decision and given an assurance that it would apply equally to Wholesale Society employees handling foodstuffs.<sup>(55)</sup>

In fact, reports of the meeting between the C.W.S. emergency committee and the General Council on 8 May, suggest that Marchbank's assurance was somewhat premature. Ernest Bevin informed the committee that the General Council had not yet considered the question of C.W.S. warehousemen handling bulk supplies transported by government labour, but promised that the matter would be discussed as soon as possible. Nevertheless Bevin is said to have 'made it clear that they did not desire any step to be taken which would interfere with C.W.S. premises

or the movement of goods, and that he would issue instructions to his people who had been wonderfully disciplined, with a view to obviating any necessity for Government protection of C.W.S. premises'. (56)

Later that evening, Alexander again called at Eccleston Square to inform Bevin that, as suggested by the General Council, directors of the C.W.S. were proposing to accept government assistance. Alexander explained that the Government had informed representatives of the C.W.S. that large numbers of drivers belonging to the T.G.W.U. were remaining at their ordinary jobs for the conveyance of foodstuffs, and had suggested that the Society's own men should be given the opportunity of doing so. Alexander then went on to ask Bevin what would be the attitude of the T.G.W.U. after the dispute, if C.W.S. lorry drivers continued to carry foodstuffs, 'bearing in mind that they would be doing their own work'. (57) Bevin's uncompromising reply left no room for doubt:

'they would be blacklegging anyway, and I can give no guarantee or undertaking of any kind - It is up to you! (58)

The diligent Alexander then proceeded to the Board of Trade in order to ascertain the position of employees remaining at work who did not enrol with the Government's volunteer service. He was given an assurance by Alfred Faulkner, the Chief National Food Officer, that equal protection would be given to all employees who remained at work, regardless of whether or not they were enrolled with the volunteer service. (59)

During the next two days, as we have seen, the C.W.S. emergency committee finalised its arrangement with the Government, and no further contact was made with the General Council until 10 May, when the following letter was despatched to Ernest Bevin at the T.U.C.'s headquarters in Eccleston Square:

With reference to our interview with you on Saturday, we now beg to inform you that we have accepted Government service for the

movement of bulk supplies on the lines we discussed on Saturday. We therefore ask you to be so kind as to issue instructions as you promised, to your men, to refrain from interfering in any way with the movement of C.W.S. goods by Government labour, or to interfere with C.W.S. premises. (60)

On 12 May a reply was received from Walter Citrine, Acting General Secretary of the General Council, stating that the emergency committee's request had been communicated to the whole of the country, and advising that if the Society encountered any difficulties, representations should be made to the relevant local strike committee. (61)

Having renounced all responsibility for the maintenance of essential food supplies during the national stoppage, then, the General Council was perfectly satisfied to withdraw from the field and allow the Government to get on with the job. It was no part of the Council's strategy to obstruct the Government in this task, and it was made clear that both wholesale and retail co-operative societies should, if they so wished, be allowed to utilise volunteer labour without interference from the trade union movement. On this issue, however, rank-and-file opinion did not invariably accord with the General Council's view, and instances of 'interference' were by no means rare. Hostility towards the utilisation of volunteer labour by societies was expressed by trade unionists from both within and without the co-operative movement, and interference thus tended to manifest itself in various forms.

Having made the decision to transport supplies without the sanction of local strike committee permits, the C.W.S. and later the retail societies attempted to pre-empt opposition from within the movement by giving their own employees the first chance of carrying out the work. On 9 May the committee of the London branch of the C.W.S. issued a statement to its lorry drivers which, by omitting details of the discussions between Alexander and Bevin, appeared to give the erroneous impression that the

men could remain at work with the General Council's blessing:

The Committee of the C.W.S. having given careful consideration to the position of the Carmen, Lorry etc. Drivers, in the unfortunate dispute now proceeding, and being desirous of carrying out the function of providing food supplies to the members of the Retail Co-operative Societies, the large majority of whom are themselves Trade Unionists, have been to the T.U.C. and submitted the case of the Society, and have been informed by the General Council that the Society should go to the Government for assistance, and the only effectual form of service now is Government Service under Government protection. We understand the Society's workers will have the same protection afforded them in their ordinary course of employment as is given to those who have volunteered with the Government to carry on. (62)

At a meeting on 10 May, however, the London branch transport workers made it clear that they would 'refuse to work without permits, or to go to the Docks, even under protection', and the Society's committee was obliged, therefore, to seek government-supplied labour. (63)

Transport employees at most other branches of the C.W.S. responded in a similar manner. At Bristol it was reported on 12 May that all the Society's drivers were out and the depot was operating with volunteer labour and private lorries. At Newcastle, too, most of the Society's drivers remained out until the morning of 12 May, although the transport manager claimed on 9 May 'that about eight of his motor-lorry drivers had signified their intention of continuing at work as they resented the action of their colleagues in deciding to cease work without consulting them'. (64) In Manchester, however, a large number of the Society's transport workers appeared reluctant to withdraw their labour, and this lack of solidarity brought an angry response from the city's trade union

movement. On 7 May, A. Hilton, General Secretary of the United Road Transport Workers' Association (U.R.T.W.A.), called at the Society's Balloon Street headquarters. Hilton informed the transport department's manager that instructions had been received from the Manchester Council of Action, 'to withdraw the whole of the transport workers employed by the C.W.S. in the Manchester area in connection with the distribution of foodstuffs'.<sup>(65)</sup>

After making an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the General Council to countermand these instructions, the C.W.S. directors in Manchester decided to post notices in the Society's various departments, inviting employees to register for volunteer service in the distribution of food supplies. The response to this invitation was such that on 9 May the directors were able to report that since the commencement of the General Strike more than 2,500 tons of foodstuffs had been delivered from Manchester to retail societies in the district.<sup>(66)</sup> From 8 May onwards, the Council of Action in Manchester organised picket lines outside the Society's Knowsley Street garage in an attempt to persuade the drivers to join the strike. The drivers remained unmoved, however, and recognising that 'persuasion' had failed, the Council of Action made plans to reinforce the picket lines outside the garage. The C.W.S. directors were made aware, not only of these plans, but also of local trade union resentment towards the Society and its employees, when a trade union communication apparently found its way into the hands of a Society official. At a meeting of Manchester directors on 12 May it was reported that one of the pickets outside the Knowsley Street garage 'had in his possession a letter, presumably issued by the Strike Committee, in the following terms:

"The C.W.S. is a most serious menace. See that a strong picket is posted on the C.W.S. Garage and Stables on Wednesday morning. This is most important".<sup>(67)</sup>

Although pickets arrived in force on 12 May, the drivers remained at work, and the C.W.S. was able to maintain a fairly efficient transport service in Manchester throughout the national stoppage. In fact, if C.W.S. branches were determined to maintain transport services, by utilising either their own employees or government volunteers, there was little that local trade unions could do effectively to obstruct them. Except in the most remote areas, military or police protection ensured that any potential threat to the movement of supplies was rendered relatively harmless. As far as transport services were concerned, then, C.W.S. branches initially were faced during the stoppage with a choice between two possible courses of action. On the one hand, they could make use of police-protected volunteer labour, at the almost certain cost of alienating the local trade union movement. Alternatively, they could spurn offers of government assistance to the possible detriment of their competitive position vis-a-vis comparable private undertakings. Had such a choice involved no other consideration, there can be little doubt that most C.W.S. branches unhesitatingly would have adopted the former course of action. Before an approach to the government was made, however, it was politic to give careful consideration to the possible reaction of both C.W.S. production workers and retail society employees, who would then be required to co-operate with 'black-leg' labour. As we have seen, at the Dunston flour mill it was felt that such a move would undoubtedly provoke a general stoppage. Here the C.W.S. directors' dilemma was removed when loaders decided to ignore their union's ruling and resume normal duties. At the London branch's Silvertown flour mills on the Thames, however, no such fortuitous circumstance came to the aid of the Society's directors. On 10 May Silvertown's manager reported that he had been compelled to cease milling operations because the warehouse was full. Production could not be resumed until stocks were reduced, and the manager anticipated that the millers would

walk out if government volunteers were brought in. Nevertheless, the London members of the General Committee decided that government labour and protection should be applied for at Silvertown, with the result that the manager's expectations were realised. On 11 May the whole of the workforce at Silvertown walked out with the exception of the manager, mill foreman and office staff.<sup>(68)</sup>

Even where wholesale and retail societies were able to utilise government services without undue interference from their transport and production workers, one further obstacle had still to be overcome. For the General Council's instruction that N.U.D.A.W. members should remain at work even if called upon to co-operate with government volunteers was received at some retail societies with a marked lack of enthusiasm. On 12 May, C.R. Flynn, Secretary of the N.D.G.C.J.S.C. and a national official of N.U.D.A.W., reported that shop assistants at the Seaham Harbour Society's Stores had come out on strike rather than unload goods received in 'blackleg wagons'.<sup>(69)</sup> This was not an isolated occurrence, for it is known that in at least forty-two societies some section of co-operative employees refused, or threatened to refuse, to handle goods brought into warehouses or shops by volunteer labour.<sup>(70)</sup> This represented 'rebellion' on a fairly large scale, given the fact that in most cases recourse to government assistance was not made until the latter stages of the national stoppage. There was a feeling within certain sections of the co-operative movement that, had the General Strike gone on for very much longer, rank-and-file action of this kind by society employees would have been more widespread. This fear was apparent in the Royal Arsenal Society's reaction to the news that N.U.D.A.W. members had been instructed to handle goods received under government protection:

But could any person with a smattering of knowledge of the London

position guarantee that such an instruction would be obeyed?

If the strike had continued many days it was almost a certainty that co-operative business would arrive at a complete cessation. (71)

Not all co-operative societies were preoccupied with such anxieties, however. In a number of districts local strike committees were more receptive to co-operative appeals for preferential treatment during the national stoppage and here the incentives to enlist government aid were obviously less pronounced. Particularly during the early days of the General Strike, it is clear that in several areas the concessions made to co-operative societies 'went well beyond anything approved by the transport union executives'. (72) In Birmingham it was reported that the local Trades Union Emergency Committee 'went out of its way to discriminate in favour of the Co-op', which on one occasion was allowed to transport non-essential supplies to Manchester, even though the General Council had given local strike committees no authority to grant long distance permits. (73) Even in Derby where, as we have seen, the local strike committee maintained a very rigid attitude, the Provident Society was able to move some supplies with the aid of permits issued by the more flexible and sympathetic committees in Leicester and Nottingham. (74)

Following the General Council's decision to restrict the issue of permits, the discretionary powers of local strike committees to discriminate in favour of co-operative societies were inevitably diminished. Several strike committees, however, were clearly unhappy at the General Council's failure to make any special provision for co-operative societies, and as Phillips has quite correctly pointed out, 'the abandonment of the permit was ... at no stage universal or absolute'. (75) In some districts the instruction to withdraw all permits was not rigidly enforced, and strike committees continued to authorise societies to transport essential foodstuffs and occasionally even

other supplies as well. In Sheffield, for example, the Strike Committee 'wrote to Citrine on 10 May seeking permission to grant permits more freely, and meanwhile continued to supply coal as well as food to its co-operative society's customers'. (76)

Even in London, the situation was by no means as serious for the city's retail societies as the gloomy prognosis of the Royal Arsenal's Committee might suggest. The minutes of the Society reveal that during the stoppage offers of assistance 'in the event of interference or trouble delaying the distribution of food supplies' were submitted by both the Lewisham Trades Council and Labour Party, and the Woolwich Council of Action. (77) In fact, the London Transport Committee became so alarmed at the unauthorised issue of permits in the metropolis that on 11 May Walter Citrine was prevailed upon to arrange for the following notice to be given prominence in the next issue of the British Worker:

London Transport Committee

Important Notice

The Above Committee is the only Committee authorised by the National Transport Committee to consider applications for permits. Will all other bodies in London note that they have no power to issue permits. (78)

That the Royal Arsenal and other London societies received an allocation of these unauthorised permits seems clear from an account of the national stoppage in July's edition of Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf:

On several occasions it appeared to be beyond doubt that food supplies must come to a standstill on the following day; but always the seemingly impossible happened, and only on the last day of the strike did a section of the staff concerned with food (heavy transport) cease work.

It is not always clear why strike committees were more accommodating to co-operative societies in some areas than in others. In her study of the General Strike in Sheffield, Sarah Benton has suggested that although there was 'no love lost' between the co-operative and labour movements in the city the strike committee nevertheless continued to assist the "Co-op" because 'the unions retained their idealistic and ideological commitment to its principles, and a practical commitment to its closed shop practice'.<sup>(79)</sup> It is also possible that the stance adopted by some strike committees was itself, in part at least, a response to the attitudes and policies of local co-operative societies during the nine days of the General Strike. As we shall see, societies in some districts provided valuable financial and other assistance to the trade unions involved in the stoppage, and it has been argued that where such aid was given 'permits on a large scale could hardly have been denied.'<sup>(80)</sup> Very clear evidence in support of this view can be found in Christopher Farman's account of events in Coventry during the national stoppage:

In Coventry the Co-operative Society placed a car at the disposal of the council of action, provided the council with duplicating facilities and verbatim copies of wireless reports, and gave an assurance that it would do everything possible to meet the council's demands... In return, the Co-op secured permits for the release of food supplies and was given permission by the Warwickshire Miners' Association to obtain coal from a local pit.<sup>(81)</sup>

Although reciprocal arrangements of this kind were made in many other parts of the country it would be a mistake to assume, as Phillips appears to do, that they were invariably the rule. In Derby, the Co-operative Provident Society allowed the strike committee free use of its Central Hall for fund-raising activities and agreed to grant credit to the extent of £5,000 to local trade unions affected by the stoppage.<sup>(82)</sup>

Yet, as we have seen, the local strike committee clearly did not feel that this placed them under any strong moral obligation to give the Society preferential treatment when dealing with requests for permits to transport supplies. Similarly, many North Eastern societies gave assistance of the kind described by Farman, without receiving quid pro quo concessions from local strike committees and councils of action which, in the main, followed the hard line advocated by the Joint Strike Committee.

In concluding this section, then, it is important to stress that the 'permit question' was an extremely complex and controversial one, and that the attitudes of local strike committees were influenced by various and at times conflicting considerations. In areas like the North East, which had a long tradition of working-class militancy, and where 'the mere rumble of wheels was something that weakened the morale of our men and correspondingly cheered the other side'<sup>(83)</sup>, the desire to stop all transport during the General Strike was tempered only marginally by a genuine sympathy for the difficulties experienced by co-operative undertakings. In other districts, where strike committees or councils of action may have felt less strongly about the need to stop all transport during the strike, attitudes were often determined to some extent by local experience.

Even where strike committees were prepared to discriminate in favour of co-operative societies, however, it quickly became apparent that significant assistance could not be given without seriously contravening the declared policy of the General Council. Although a number of strike committees continued to make concessions, few, if any, were prepared blatantly to disregard the General Council's ruling to the extent that would have been necessary to satisfy the demands of local co-operative societies.

The Impact of the Strike on Co-operative Opinion

That some strike committees had been prepared to make concessions in order to assist societies thus did little or nothing to dispel the general impression within the co-operative movement that it had been unfairly treated by trade unions during the national strike. Indeed, the C.W.S. directors were at pains to point out that the indignities meted out to the Society did not come to an end, even at the conclusion of the General Strike. Although the national stoppage was called off by the General Council shortly after noon on Wednesday 12 May, thousands of railwaymen and other transport workers remained out when it was discovered that railway companies were taking advantage of the 'surrender' to remove 'undesirable' employees. Wholesale Society operations were further disrupted by this development, for although its lorry drivers had returned to work, the Society was unable to secure the release of goods held up by transport workers at Thames-side wharves. On 13 May A.V. Alexander and a group of C.W.S. directors called upon representatives of the T.G.W.U. to request that the Society be excluded from this general embargo on the removal of supplies. In support of this appeal the C.W.S. deputation stressed 'that the Co-operative Movement had endeavoured all the way through to keep as closely as possible to Trade Union labour and to be on good relationships with the Trade Unionists', but went on to point out that 'in the event of a prolongation of the situation which had arisen today, they must keep in mind their imperative duty of feeding their constituents'. (84)

Neither the appeal, nor the thinly-veiled threat produced the desired result, however, and the meeting served only to provide a platform for a number of the union's representatives to air their dissatisfaction with the Society's conduct during the General Strike. Archie Henderson, National Secretary of the commercial road transport section of the T.G.W.U., stated that two points had arisen in connection

with the C.W.S. which now made it extremely difficult for the union to consider an arrangement with the Society. He explained that the union 'had agreed as to resorting to Government labour because they were prepared in the case of Co-operative Societies and the C.W.S. even to stretch a point in order to help, even if goods to be handled had been carried by Government people, blacklegs or the O.M.S.'. (85)

However, continued Henderson, 'they had been severely criticised by their own men for their action and as a result some of their men may not have carried out instructions; nevertheless in the exigencies of the moment they had made the agreement ... and they had to live their action down with their own people'. (86)

The second of Henderson's points placed an even more serious obstacle in the way of alleviating the Society's transport problems, for it involved allegations that the C.W.S. had attempted to blackmail its employees into remaining at work during the strike. Henderson stated that during the stoppage he had received a report 'that the C.W.S. in London had summoned the whole of their road transport people before them and had put the position to them that they were to say "yes" or "no" as to whether they would continue at work, and if the answer were "no" - then they were sacked'. (87) The C.W.S. directors denied absolutely that the Society's transport workers had been subjected to intimidation or threats of any kind, but the union's representatives apparently remained unconvinced. Perhaps chastened by the spectre of victimization on the railways, the Transport Workers' Committee expressed concern at the possible fate of Society employees who had withdrawn their labour during the stoppage:

What proof would they have that the C.W.S. would not keep men out on the pavement and employ, by means of contractors, other labour? (88)

For the C.W.S. delegation, Sir Thomas Allen replied that the Society's directors had made clear their commitment to a policy of reinstatement, not only by dispensing with volunteer labour utilised during the strike, but also by passing the following resolution:

That instructions be given to Managers concerned, that persons who have gone out on strike be reinstated on the resumption of work, as and when their services are required.<sup>(89)</sup>

(What Sir Thomas understandably did not tell the union's representatives was that this rather ambiguously worded resolution was arrived at only after the General Committee had considered and finally rejected a 'hard-line' resolution submitted by the C.W.S. emergency committee:

That instructions be given to all employees concerned that their stoppage from work was a breach of their contract of service, and that their reinstatement under these circumstances must not be taken as a precedent governing subsequent breach of contract.)<sup>(90)</sup>

Thomas added that should the T.G.W.U. refuse to release C.W.S. supplies held up at the wharves, the directors would revert to the position they were in when they interviewed Ernest Bevin and there would be no other course open to them but to apply again for government services. No further progress was made, however, and the proceedings were brought to a conclusion by Harry Gosling<sup>(91)</sup>, the union's Waterways Group Secretary, who explained to the C.W.S. delegation that 'with all the goodwill in the world' it was really not possible to assist the Society.<sup>(92)</sup>

Throughout the period of the dispute in the coalmining industry outbursts of indignation at treatment of this kind by the trade unions continued to erupt with some regularity at co-operative meetings and in the editorial and correspondence columns of the co-operative press. An excellent example of the typically self-righteous tone and barely-

restrained animosity of many of these outbursts is to be found in a letter to the editor of Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, from one Bedford Pollard, resident of Manchester:

Dear Sir - You were good enough some time ago to publish a letter of mine dealing with trade union aggressiveness in the co-operative movement. I wrote then as a co-operator, and again as a co-operator shall be obliged if you will afford me space for some comments on the recent strike. I am not going to fall foul of trade unionism as regards the lightning strike in general, but as a co-operator first and foremost I do fall foul of the T.U.C. in particular for the utter lack of consideration it showed for the co-operative movement which has befriended it, nay has bowed down to its frequently preposterous behests and handicapped itself on its behalf. One would have thought that the least the T.U.C. could have done, if only out of gratitude, and as a slight recognition of favours and concessions, would have been specifically to exempt co-operative societies from the burden of strike conditions. But what did we find? Everywhere co-operative societies were worse hit than private concerns for the very reason that they had loyally observed (foolishly, in my opinion) the dictatorial demands of trade unionists themselves. And so we found C.W.S. employees (working under better conditions with never a grievance - transport workers, printers, millers, colliers, and goodness knows what besides) ordered out - every man jack at the one-eyed order of trade unionists. Not only the C.W.S., but large societies all over the country were condemned to see private traders, who snapped their fingers at trade unions, stealing away co-operative custom.

I am free to state here in a journal issued in a great trade union and labour centre that I have voted labour many times of recent years, but I shall have to be won over before I do so again.

When you have on one side vested interests, profiteers, and privileges, and on the other a democracy lacking the elements of fair dealing and the reciprocation of good-will, it makes one cry with Mercutio "A plague o' both your houses!"<sup>(93)</sup>

In the same publication, an article by the secretary of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, William B. Neville, put forward a less jaundiced but less typical view. Although bemoaning its impact upon the co-operative movement, the article conceded that trade union policy was in many ways a logical response to the circumstances of the General Strike:

And yet it was impossible not to feel that strategically much could be said for the action of the T.U.C. committee. They had offered their service to the Government: the Committee had refused. Now the T.U.C. policy must be to stake all on an immediate stoppage of food supplies, and make the Government bring out its reserves to the last man ... How could the T.U.C. permit C.W.S. mills and factories to carry on and make deliveries without recognising that in so doing they were, in effect, breaking the strike?<sup>(94)</sup>

Generally, however, the response of the co-operative movement's leadership to trade union policy during the General Strike was one of unbridled resentment. Whether such resentment greatly influenced the response of the movement to requests for assistance from the miners' unions during the continuing mining dispute itself, however, is very difficult to judge. In the following sections an attempt will be made to assess both the role of the co-operative movement during the lock-out in the coal-mining industry, and the impact of the lengthy dispute on co-operative trading, particularly in mining and industrial districts.

- (1) M. Morris, *op. cit.*, p.67.
- (2) W.H. Crook, The General Strike, 1931, p.410.
- (3) C. Farman, The General Strike, May 1926, p.165.
- (4) P. Redfern, *op. cit.*, p.267.
- (5) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 15 January 1926.
- (6) P.R.O. Cab 23/52 28(26).
- (7) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 4 March 1926.
- (8) *ibid.*, 29 April 1926.
- (9) *ibid.*, 7 May 1926.
- (10) *ibid.*
- (11) P.R.O. Cab 27/260 S.T. (24) Series.
- (12) G.A. Phillips, The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict, 1976, p.158.
- (13) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (14) *ibid.*
- (15) *ibid.*
- (16) Copy (addressed to 'Seaweed Nottingham') in Borough of Chesterfield Town Clerk's Department, File No. GP/109/3 Voluntary Service Committee Correspondence.
- (17) P.R.O. Cab 27/260 S.T. (24) Series.
- (18) There can be no doubt that the government would have welcomed such a development since the potential role of the co-operative movement as supplier of food and credit to workers involved in large-scale industrial disputes had for a number of years provided a source of concern. The extent of this concern may be gauged from the fact that since 1919 almost any attempt to cement relations between the trade union and co-operative movements was analysed at some length in the pages of the Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office) Reports on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom. P.R.O. Cab 24/32 to Cab 24/182.

- (19) P.R.O. Cab 27/331, ST (24) Series.
- (20) *ibid.*
- (21) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (22) *ibid.*
- (23) The Rt. Hon. the Viscount Swinton, I Remember, 1948, p.44.
- (24) Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926.  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC.120/44.
- (25) Felton and District Co-operative Society Ltd., Quarterly, Half-Yearly and Committee Meeting Minutes, 1926. N.R.O. 362/2.
- (26) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (27) *ibid.*
- (28) Co-operative Union Ltd., North Western Section Minutes, 1926.
- (29) *ibid.*
- (30) *ibid.*
- (31) T. Jones, Whitehall Diary, Volume II 1926-1930, 1969, p.38.
- (32) E. Burns, The General Strike May 1926: Trade Councils in Action, 1926, p.105.
- (33) *ibid.*, pp.127, 180, 123.
- (34) Birmingham Public Libraries, The Nine Days in Birmingham, 1976, pp.14-15.
- (35) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (36) *ibid.*
- (37) *ibid.*
- (38) *ibid.*
- (39) Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926.  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC 120/44.
- (40) C.R. Flynn, *op. cit.*, pp.13-15.
- (41) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (42) *ibid.*
- (43) *ibid.*

- (44) *ibid.*, 20 May 1926.
- (45) Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Ltd., Minutes 1926.  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC.120/44.
- (46) Throckley District Co-operative Society Ltd. Minutes, 1926.  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC.1062/15.
- (47) Seaton Valley Co-operative Society Ltd. Minutes 1926. N.R.O. 920/3.  
Windy Nook and District Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd.  
Minutes 1926. D.R.O. D/CO/WN 14.
- (48) Co-operative News, 22 May 1926.
- (49) Derby Co-operative Provident Society Ltd. Minutes 1926.
- (50) Report of the 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.51.
- (51) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 13 May 1926.
- (52) P.R.O. Cab 27/331 S.T. (24) Series.
- (53) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (54) Record of Procedure of Strike Organisation Committee  
T.U.C. Library Box 131.
- (55) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (56) *ibid.*, 13 May 1926.
- (57) *ibid.*
- (58) *ibid.*
- (59) *ibid.*
- (60) *ibid.*
- (61) *ibid.*
- (62) *ibid.*
- (63) *ibid.*
- (64) *ibid.*
- (65) *ibid.*
- (66) *ibid.*,
- (67) *ibid.*
- (68) *ibid.*

- (69) Record of Procedure of Strike Organisation Committee  
T.U.C. Library Box 131.
- (70) Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.51.
- (71) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, July 1926.
- (72) G.A. Phillips, op. cit., p.200.
- (73) Birmingham Public Libraries, op. cit., p.15.
- (74) N. Newitt, The General Strike in Leicester, 1976, p.8.
- (75) G.A. Phillips, op. cit., p.200.
- (76) *ibid.*, p.201.
- (77) Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Ltd. Committee Minutes 1926.
- (78) T.U.C. Library, General Strike Collection, Box H.D.5366.
- (79) S. Benton, 'Sheffield', in M. Morris, op. cit., p.434.
- (80) G.A. Phillips, op. cit., pp.200-1.
- (81) C. Farman, op. cit., p.166.
- (82) Derby Co-operative Provident Society Ltd. Minutes 1926.
- (83) C.R. Flynn, op. cit., p.7.
- (84) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 20 May 1926.
- (85) *ibid.*
- (86) *ibid.*
- (87) *ibid.*
- (88) *ibid.*
- (89) *ibid.*
- (90) *ibid.*
- (91) Gosling had also been Labour M.P. for Whitechapel and St. Georges  
since 1923.
- (92) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 20 May 1926.
- (93) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, July 1926.
- (94) *ibid.*

## CHAPTER 7

THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION RELIEF FUNDThe Belfast Congress

At the fifty-eighth annual Co-operative Congress, held in Belfast shortly after the General Strike had ended, the policy to be adopted by the co-operative movement in relation to the continuing coal dispute was the subject of several lengthy and sometimes heated debates. To a large extent these debates reflected the divergence of opinion between the movement's leaders and its rank-and-file membership. On the one hand, the leadership appeared content to extend no more than moral support to the miners' cause, and expressed concern that too much valuable Congress time was being devoted to the discussion of industrial, rather than purely co-operative affairs. Within the rank-and-file membership, however, there emerged a strong body of opinion which held that the movement's resources should be utilised to assist the miners in their struggle to resist the imposition of wage reductions and longer working hours.

Discussion of the industrial crisis began during the afternoon session of the first day of Congress, when the following resolution was moved by the Chairman of the Central Board, Alderman Fred Hayward:

That this Congress regrets the present difficulties in the industrial world owing to the mining crisis, and expresses its strong belief that the miners' standard of life should not be reduced. The Congress, however, reaffirms its belief that only by the adoption of co-operative principles can industrial peace be secured, and urges upon all who desire the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth the necessity of organising the purchasing power of the people through the Co-operative Movement

as a constructive method of improving the economic, social, and political conditions of the people.<sup>(1)</sup>

In seconding this resolution, S.F. Perry, Secretary of the Co-operative Party<sup>(2)</sup>, pointed out that every society represented at the Congress was directly faced with the consequences of the mining dispute, and urged that all the resources of the co-operative movement should be given - 'so far as they can reasonably and justifiably be given - to the miners in this great struggle to prevent the standard of life of the miner being lowered'.<sup>(3)</sup>

A number of delegates, however, felt that the resolution amounted to little more than a rather vaguely worded expression of sympathy with the miners, and demanded that assistance of a more practical nature be promised. A Cinder Hill delegate and locked-out miner, W. Stevenson, urged the Congress to take Rudyard Kipling's advice and 'pay, pay, pay'.<sup>(4)</sup> He was supported by T. Scollan of the Paisley Provident Society who, invoking the memory of Robert Owen, argued that 'a nice mild resolution that is not going to offend anyone will not help the situation. I would impress upon all co-operators, irrespective of how they vote, that it is their duty to see that the ruling class is not going to crush our people down to the coolies' level.'<sup>(5)</sup>

Although attempts to move an immediate amendment were ruled out of order, it was eventually agreed that the Standing Orders Committee be given the task of drafting an additional clause to the emergency resolution, authorising the movement to give practical aid to the miners. When the amended resolution was proposed by Alderman Hayward on the following day, however, there was considerable disappointment at the apparent absence of any firm commitment to provide practical assistance. The resolution merely instructed the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Union to ask for a deputation to meet the Prime Minister

in order to urge the Government to accept the proposals contained in the Samuel Memorandum as submitted on 10 May to the T.U.C. General Council and miners' leaders.<sup>(6)</sup>

Several delegates were quick to appreciate the futility of a resolution urging the government to accept the Memorandum which, although unanimously accepted by the General Council as a basis for calling off the General Strike, had already been repudiated by the M.F.G.B. executive on the grounds that it involved the miners accepting the principle of wage reductions. A note of anti-Semitism was allowed to creep into the proceedings when a mineworker, A.R. Davies, of Cefn, expressed regret that the movement's best brains could devise nothing better than 'a Jew's bargain for a solution of the difficulty'.<sup>(7)</sup> His demand that the resolution be rejected was supported by several other delegates in the course of emotional appeals on behalf of the miners. W. Stevenson, who described the amended resolution as 'an insult to this Congress', argued that 'lip sympathy and pious resolutions do not fill miners' stomachs. What the miner wants is a better Friday night.'<sup>(8)</sup> Neil Mclean, M.P. for Govan and a member of the Central Board, also spoke out against the amended resolution:

If the chief men concerned in this dispute at the moment are not going to accept the Samuel Memorandum why on earth should we ask the Congress to accept a resolution asking the Prime Minister to enforce it? What I want us to do is to send something that is not likely to place the miners in an awkward position. They want a satisfactory standard of life: they are being crushed down to a slave level of existence. What the men and women of this Congress have to bear in mind is that if the miners are forced down they will only be the first to be attacked, the rest of the trades will follow. There will be less and less money to be spent in

co-operative circles ... Let us bear in mind the life of the miner, as he is buried in the depths of the mine so many hours a day. He is faced with every risk of mutilation, he is faced with blindness, he is faced with death. Think of the lads under 16 years of age, seventy-two of whom were carried home last year stark and stiff to the mothers who sent them out in the morning, blithe, well, and cheerful. Think of the 100,000 boys of 16 who were maimed, mutilated, and blinded last year. Think of the miners who have to walk miles underground, faced with miles and miles of rock, and with the shadow of death ever on their souls. Refer the resolution back and let the world know that the miners are entitled to a higher standard of life, and that this Congress is prepared to assist them to win that right. (9)

It was eventually decided that three representatives of the mining industry should be nominated to confer with the Standing Orders Committee in order to draft a fresh resolution on the crisis. Later in the day W. Halls, chairman of the Committee, submitted the following resolution which was unanimously approved by the Congress:

That this Congress regrets the present difficulties in the industrial world owing to the mining crisis and expresses its strong belief that the miners' standard of life should not be reduced, and urges the Government to implement the Royal Commission's report with regard to the reorganisation of the industry.

It further resolves that as a practical means of giving assistance to the workers involved in the dispute, the Co-operative Union should organise within the Movement a central fund for the purpose of helping societies and their members to meet the demands made upon them in consequence of the dispute. (10)

The Congress debate on the crisis in the mining industry ended on rather a sour note, however, when despite considerable protest an attempt to move a resolution instructing the United Board to subscribe £5,000 to the newly-created fund was ruled out of order by the President on the grounds that no rule existed to empower such gifts to be made.

### Donations to the Fund

During the first week in June the Co-operative Union sent a circular letter to all its affiliated societies informing them of the resolution passed at the Belfast Congress and appealing for prompt and generous contributions to the fund, 'in order that it shall again be made clear that the principle of "all for each and each for all" is still a principle accepted by the Co-operative Movement in this country.'<sup>(11)</sup>

By the middle of August over £30,000 had been contributed by local societies to the national fund, and donations eventually totalled £38,108.<sup>(12)</sup>

Although all affiliated societies were invited to make donations to the fund, it was anticipated that the largest contributions would come from those societies whose members were not directly affected by the dispute. This proved to be the case, and the societies comprising the Southern Section of the Co-operative Union, in which coalmining was not carried on to any significant extent, accounted for more than forty-two per cent of the total contributions<sup>(13)</sup>, although this section had less than seventeen per cent of the movement's total membership.<sup>(14)</sup> Typical of the response of societies in mining districts to the appeal was that of the Broomhill Equitable Industrial Society in Northumberland, which expressed sympathy with the aims of the fund, but regretted its inability to subscribe owing to the fact that more than ninety per cent of its members were absolutely dependent upon the mining industry for their livelihood.<sup>(15)</sup>

Commenting upon the total amount subscribed to the Co-operative

Union relief fund, the Report of the Central Board to the 1927 Co-operative Congress at Cheltenham concluded that 'when note is taken of the fact that a majority of the societies suffered loss of trade and capital while the stoppage continued, it becomes apparent that co-operative societies made a real effort to help the miners in their severe and protracted struggle'. It is evident, however, that although the response of several societies to the Co-operative Union appeal was indeed an extremely generous one, many others made either relatively small donations or none at all. The C.W.S. (£10,000), the Royal Arsenal Society (£10,000)<sup>(16)</sup>, and the Derby Provident Society (£1,000)<sup>(17)</sup> subscribed between them £21,000 to the fund, leaving only £17,000 or an average of under £13 from each of the more than 1,400 other societies affiliated to the Co-operative Union. It is clear that not all members of the co-operative movement shared the Central Board's satisfaction with the total collected and that the lack of response to the national appeal, particularly from many of the societies not directly affected by the dispute, was observed with some disappointment. Within two of the large London societies this disappointment led to open conflict between the management committees and militant groups within the rank-and-file membership. At the Royal Arsenal Society, the General Committee responded to the Co-operative Union appeal by arranging a series of concerts, dances, public meetings, and other activities, aimed at raising £1,000 on behalf of the fund. At the same time, it was decided to place a resolution on the agenda of the next quarterly meeting, recommending that a donation of £1,000 from the Society's funds also be approved by the members.<sup>(18)</sup> Although, in the context of the times, this was by no means an inconsiderable sum, many members felt that the Society could, and should, provide assistance on a much larger scale. Within the Royal Arsenal Society considerable influence was exercised by a group of politically active members of the Labour Party<sup>(19)</sup>, and it was from

this quarter that the campaign for a more substantial donation was possibly orchestrated.

The climax of this campaign was reached during the quarterly meeting at Woolwich in June when the Society's chairman called upon the members present to approve the recommendation that £1,000 be donated to the Co-operative Union fund. After listening to the chairman's remarks in support of this recommendation, a spokesman for the dissident group, T.R. Goy, moved an amendment that £10,000 rather than £1,000 be granted for the relief of miners' wives and children. He explained that £10,000 represented no more than a penny-farthing in the pound on the basis of the previous half-year's trading figures, and regretted 'that he had not gone for the whole of the dividend, when they considered how little it meant to the whole of the members'.<sup>(20)</sup> Goy concluded by insisting, in the phraseology of Ellen Wilkinson, that 'we have got to give, and give until it hurts'.<sup>(21)</sup>

In an anxious rejoinder the Society's secretary, W.B. Neville, urged that before voting on the amendment the meeting give careful consideration to the implications of rejecting the General Committee's recommendation:

In his position he had a certain duty to perform to the members. His postbag showed him that there were a number of members who were somewhat concerned with the amendment. They knew it was impossible to get all members together in the meetings and he regretted that a larger number did not attend, but at the same time he was aware that there were people who were somewhat astonished, and desired to protest in the only way they could protest against the amendment. They might say shame, but the movement was built up of all sections of thought, and those who had money and those who had no money, by those who traded with the Society, and by those

N<sup>o</sup> 7/167370 PR 63. *June 21 1926.*

# THE CO-OPERATIVE GESTURE

CO-OPERATIVE WHOLESALE SOCIETY LIM  
BANKERS

Pay to *Order* **£11,500** or order  
*W.B. Neville.*  
*J. Reeves*

HEAD OFFICE: GALLON



*Amicus*

who perhaps could not trade but who talked about it. They could not afford to alarm members unduly, and it was said that if those people took their money out, the Society would still go on, and he believed so. No one would accuse him of not being sympathetic to the miners. The dividend was due in September, and those who desired could hand their dividend to the miners' fund. He very much regretted that there had not been more sense of balance about this matter. A thousand pounds, after all, was a respectable donation, and those who were dissatisfied with that could suggest two, three, or even five thousand, but to make it ten times the value the administrators put on it was hardly playing the game. The General Committee were the responsible administrators of the Society, and the first retrograde step members could take was to throw over their advice in matters of this description. No one knew more about miners than he. As a boy he lived through the miners' strikes of the 'eighties, his father was a member of the Council of the Notts. Miners' Association, and he (the speaker) left school at the age of 13 and went to work as ganger in the mines. He knew the miners, and what they suffered, but he said they were jeopardising the unity of the Society if they took any step that was not warranted in that case. (22)

When the votes at this and other meetings in the Society's trading area were counted, however, they revealed that the General Committee's advice had been overwhelmingly rejected. The amendment was carried by 721 votes to 269<sup>(23)</sup>, and the Society was obliged therefore to transfer the sum of £10,000 to the account of the Co-operative Union's relief fund in Manchester. (24)

Rank-and-file members of the London Co-operative Society (L.C.S.), however, were less successful in their attempts to achieve a similar objective. In their opposition to such manoeuvres the directors here

were more resourceful and apparently less concerned with democratic niceties than their counterparts south of the Thames. In July, a number of rank-and-file activists came to the conclusion that the Society was not doing all that it might and should do for the miners' wives and children. In all probability these activists were members of the Communist Party, for the Party is known to have exerted some influence within the L.C.S. during this period. It has been suggested that at that time the Society 'was dominated by communists and elements opposed to the Labour Party',<sup>(25)</sup> although in the light of subsequent events this undoubtedly exaggerates their influence. Whatever their political allegiances, a number of members were clearly dissatisfied with the Society's response to the Co-operative Union appeal. They complained that although the Society was a healthy one and operated in an area not directly affected by the coal-mining dispute, the directors had allocated no more than £3,000, and then only reluctantly, to the relief of miners' dependants. This represented, it was argued, only one hundredth part of the net profit earned by the Society during the previous half-year's trading, or about  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d per member.<sup>(26)</sup>

Perhaps inspired by developments at the Royal Arsenal Society, a rank-and-file resolution was submitted to the Secretary of the L.C.S. moving that a grant of £25,000 be made to the Co-operative Union fund. On 1 September, however, a reply was received from the Secretary, G.L. Banks, announcing that, under the terms of Rule 42(6) of the Society's standing orders, the membership could not be allowed to consider or discuss the motion. On consulting the standing orders, the rank-and-file group was amazed to discover that the rule quoted by the Secretary, in fact, imposed no barrier to the submission or discussion of such a motion by the Society's members. Rule 42(6) merely stated that:

The Committee of Management shall have power to recommend to the general meetings of members which shall determine grants for any

purposes whatsoever, whether within the objects for which the Society is formed or not. (27)

The Committee's apparent abuse of the rule book to prevent discussion of a rank-and-file motion, claimed Lansbury's Labour Weekly:

roused indignation not unnaturally among circles far wider than that of the original group. So many letters were received from members demanding that the grant be made that the office had to have the secretary's letter of refusal multigraphed! (28)

Undeterred by the Secretary's intransigence, the rank-and-file group decided to submit a letter of protest, together with a notice of motion 'regretting the action of the Committee in preventing members discussing a motion to give further funds to relieve the miners' dependants'. (29)

The Secretary's response to what amounted to a motion of censure upon the Society's committee was swift and uncompromising. Banks defended his earlier interpretation of Rule 42(6) and made it clear that the committee would not allow the motion of censure either, to be discussed by the membership.

Even at this stage the rank-and-file members refused to acknowledge defeat and on consulting again the Society's standing orders, discovered an apparently unchallengeable procedure whereby their objective could be achieved. Rule 18 stipulated that, in the agenda for general meetings, 'members shall be notified that they are entitled to give notice of amendments to any of the items or notices of motions included'. (30)

'Presuming that so direct and absolute an instruction could not be defied by head office', reported Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 'a considerable number of members sent in an amendment to the motion "that the General Committee's report be received", urging the propriety of a gift of £25,000 to the miners' dependants.' (31)

Once again, however, the dissident members were shocked to discover that they had been outmanoeuvred by the General Committee: 'It is almost impossible to credit it, but in flat and open defiance of the rules the committee refused to allow even this amendment to appear on the agenda.'<sup>(32)</sup> Having exhausted every orthodox constitutional means of influencing the policy of the Society's general committee, the protestors decided to appeal publicly to the whole of the Society's rank-and-file membership. In October one of the group's leaders, H.G. Toms, approached the office of Lansbury's Labour Weekly with details of the correspondence which he and other rank-and-file members had entered into with the Society's secretary and management committee. On Saturday, 16 October, under the headline 'London Co-op Scandal' an article by Raymond Postgate, himself a member of the L.C.S., attacked both the Society's response to the Co-operative Union appeal and the committee's 'unconstitutional behaviour'.<sup>(33)</sup>

This attempt to influence the Society's members met with no apparent success, for later in the month the report of the management committee was adopted by a heavy majority. The voting, however, was perhaps influenced by the committee's claim that rejection of the report 'would have automatically cancelled the dividend which several of the poorer members of the society urgently needed'.<sup>(34)</sup> Nevertheless, the rank-and-file activists did claim a minor moral victory when 'the action of the committee in systematically breaking the rules for the purpose of preventing discussion of relief to the miners ... was fittingly stigmatised by the 3 to 1 rejection of the proposal for an increase in committee-men's pay'.<sup>(35)</sup>

Within the L.C.S., rank-and-file agitation for additional relief to be granted to the miners' dependants persisted throughout the lock-out and was not finally extinguished until February 1927. Indeed, it would appear that the General Committee was eventually prevailed upon to allow the matter to be discussed by the Society's members. An item in

the Co-operative News of 5 February 1927, reported that 'a small but vociferous section of Communists in the London Society received another salutary check in their desire to dominate the affairs of the society. The proposal to grant an additional £22,000 for the relief of miners was defeated by an overwhelming majority (316 to 3203) at various divisional meetings.'<sup>(36)</sup>

#### Administration of the Fund

As far as the actual administration of the national fund is concerned, it was decided by the United Board of the Co-operative Union to distribute all the money collected through the societies in the form of vouchers for foodstuffs which could be exchanged only at co-operative stores. This procedure was adopted in an attempt to ensure that the fund should be used for the sole purpose of assisting co-operative societies and their members. Generally, this practice was rigidly adhered to, although the Barnsley British Society did persuade the Co-operative Union to forward a cheque rather than vouchers, but only after an assurance had been given that the grant would be administered through the Society and not through any of the local relief committees.<sup>(37)</sup> Similar arrangements were also made with the Bryn Gates, Hucknall Torkard, Hamilton Palace Colliery, and Milnsbridge societies, 'on the distinct understanding that only the members of the societies concerned should participate in the benefits to be derived'.<sup>(38)</sup> In all, 79,672 vouchers to the value of 5s. and 140,724 vouchers to the value of 2/6d were distributed to over 300 societies in mining districts and industrial areas adversely affected by the coal dispute. (The balance of £748 still undistributed when the stoppage ended was transferred to a fund opened in aid of the dependants of miners killed in the colliery disasters at Cwm and Bilsthorpe near Mansfield.)<sup>(39)</sup>

The task of ensuring that the vouchers were distributed on an

equitable basis, not only by the Co-operative Union to individual societies, but also by the societies to their members, was clearly a difficult one and it gave rise to occasional complaints of unfair treatment at both levels. The method of distribution adopted by the Sub-Office and Finance Committee of the Co-operative Union was to invite applications for assistance from those societies experiencing difficulties as a consequence of the coalmining dispute. Each application was then 'considered on its merits' and, if approved, received an initial grant of vouchers to a value ranging from £10 to £100.<sup>(40)</sup> This system operated reasonably smoothly, although a small number of societies, including the Broomhill Equitable, complained to the Co-operative Union of inequality of treatment between themselves and neighbouring societies.<sup>(41)</sup> Several societies in South Wales also took objection to the practice of making grants from the fund to retail societies which were not members of the C.W.S.<sup>(42)</sup>

Far more dissatisfaction appears to have been experienced at the local level, however, where the retail societies receiving relief vouchers from the Co-operative Union adopted no uniform method of distributing them to their members. In the North East, the Throckley District, Ashington Industrial, Willington, and Seaton Valley Societies authorised their grocery or general managers to use their own discretion in distributing the vouchers.<sup>(43)</sup> The Amble Society appointed district committees consisting of society directors to perform the task and several societies, including the Easington Lane and South Hetton Society handed over part of their allocation of vouchers to various local relief committees for distribution.<sup>(44)</sup> Whatever the method of distribution, however, most societies appear to have insisted that the vouchers should only be allocated to society members, although the Newcastle upon Tyne Society reserved half of its first allocation of vouchers from the Co-operative Union for the benefit of the most deserving cases amongst the miners

themselves.<sup>(45)</sup>

From his examination of the records of twelve North Eastern societies, all of which received vouchers from the national relief fund, Anthony Mason found that the vouchers were distributed to the 'most necessitous' of the societies' membership.<sup>(46)</sup> Although it is undoubtedly true that many societies went to some lengths in the attempt to ensure that the vouchers were allocated to those members suffering most from the dispute, this was not invariably the case, even in the North East. Several societies were clearly reluctant to undertake the difficult and time-consuming task of attempting to identify the worst-affected members. The Ryhope and Silksworth Society requested permission from the Co-operative Union to hand over the vouchers to local canteen committees 'in view of the prodigious difficulties in allotting the tickets to the really necessitous cases', whilst the Windy Nook Society made no attempt to discriminate, merely distributing the vouchers on the basis of a ballot of the whole membership.<sup>(47)</sup> A number of retail society boards limited vouchers to members who had spent a given amount with the society during the previous financial period, and both the Broomhill and Radcliffe Equitable Societies in Northumberland decided that vouchers should be distributed only to the highest purchasing members affected by the dispute.<sup>(48)</sup> As the highest purchasing members would also receive a larger dividend payment and were far more likely to be extended credit than 'less loyal' society members, they were not necessarily, nor even likely to be, the most necessitous cases.

It must be recognised, of course, that whatever method of distribution local societies decided to adopt, the number of vouchers available was totally inadequate to provide more than token relief to the miners and their families during the lock-out. The Mansfield and Sutton Society, for example, which had a membership in excess of 27,000 in June 1926<sup>(49)</sup>, received in all five allocations of vouchers from the national fund

totalling £195.<sup>(50)</sup> This would have been sufficient to provide no more than one in six of the society's estimated nine thousand coalminer members<sup>(51)</sup> with one half-crown voucher during the course of the dispute. When the Jarrow and Hebburn Society in Durham, posted notices informing distressed members of the Co-operative Union fund, the board received almost three thousand applications for the seven hundred vouchers available. The society took so long to decide on an appropriate method of allocation that distribution did not finally commence until the middle of November, when the dispute was all but over.<sup>(52)</sup>

#### Other Forms of Assistance

Had the Co-operative Union relief fund been the movement's only contribution to relief in 1926, then it would undoubtedly have been regarded as an extremely disappointing one from the miners' point of view. Many societies, however, decided to make their own provisions to assist the miners, either by subscribing to relief funds other than the one launched at the Belfast Congress, or by initiating relief funds of their own. The Leeds Industrial Society placed £1,000 at the disposal of the directors for the relief of distress, and also subscribed to a number of local relief committees.<sup>(53)</sup> Similarly, directors of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (S.C.W.S.) granted the sum of £1,500 for relief purposes and had decided to distribute the money themselves, in preference to sending it for inclusion in the Co-operative Union fund.<sup>(54)</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, only twenty societies sent donations directly to the distress fund organised by the M.F.G.B., although these contributions yielded in excess of £1,500.<sup>(55)</sup> In replies to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, 247 societies claimed to have made contributions totalling £48,893 to local or national relief funds other than the one established by the Co-operative Union. The regional pattern of these donations can be seen from Table 7.1.

TABLE 7.1

Amounts contributed by societies to local or national relief funds other than the fund raised by the Co-operative Union.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Midland	£9,140
Northern	2,341
North-Eastern	8,494
North-Western	5,009
Scottish	13,445
Southern	9,271
South-Western	880
Western	313
Total	<u>£48,893</u>

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.54.

Most of the contributions to the various national funds were made by those societies not directly affected by the dispute, as societies in mining districts generally preferred to support local distress funds.

As well as cash aid, many societies made regular grants of food and clothing in response to frequent requests for assistance from the numerous voluntary relief organisations operating throughout the coal-field areas. Although much of the assistance given in this way was on a relatively modest scale, a number of societies made remarkably generous grants. By the middle of September the Barnsley British Society had distributed more than 50,000 two-pound loaves of bread at a cost to the society of £1,679, and was also issuing 1,000 free jars of jam each week.<sup>(56)</sup> Of the societies replying to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, 132 claimed to have made similar grants of food or clothing at a total cost of £14,734. The estimated contributions of the eight sections are summarised in Table 7.2.

TABLE 7.2

Value of goods granted by societies to local soup kitchens or similar institutions during the stoppage.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Midland	£1,962
Northern	1,827
North-Eastern	1,891
North-Western	2,264
Scottish	3,821
Southern	50
South-Western	2
Western	<u>2,917</u>
Total	<u>£14,734</u>

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.54.

The totals shown in this table, however, underestimate, perhaps substantially, the assistance given in this way, for a number of societies did not attempt to place a monetary value on the grants they made.

In many distressed areas co-operative societies became involved in communal feeding schemes, sometimes by opening feeding centres or soup kitchens of their own, but more frequently by allowing voluntary relief organisations free use of the cooking facilities on their premises. Assistance of this kind seems to have been particularly prevalent in several districts in South Wales, where it was reported that communal feeding of miners and their families was being undertaken almost exclusively by local co-operative societies. The Ynysbwl Society alone was running fourteen feeding centres, financed from funds sent into the area by the Miners' Federation and other organisations.<sup>(57)</sup> At the end of July it was reported in The Mineworker, the official organ of the National Miners' Minority Movement, that at Cross Hands communal kitchens had served more than thirty thousand meals during the previous six weeks,

with all the food being provided 'at extremely low cost' by the Gorslas Co-operative Society.<sup>(58)</sup>

Such undertakings were also assisted by the scheme introduced in August by the C.W.S. in Manchester to provide cheap fish to communal kitchens and relief organisations. Within the first five weeks of its operation an estimated 14,000 pounds of fish at twopence per pound had been distributed in South Wales, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Staffordshire.<sup>(59)</sup> Also widespread was the practice of allowing voluntary relief organisations the free use of co-operative halls for fund-raising activities such as dances, concerts and jumble sales. When touring miners' jazz bands and choirs were afforded these facilities they were also normally provided with free refreshments.

In addition to the arrangements described above, which largely involved provisions for assisting voluntary relief organisations, many co-operative societies in mining districts adopted at the outbreak of the dispute, a variety of more direct methods of relieving their distressed members. A number of societies, including those at Hucknall, Torkard and Rotherham, decided to bring forward by several weeks the payment of dividend on members' purchases.<sup>(60)</sup> During the first week of the stoppage the Bonnybridge Society in Scotland reduced the price of all foodstuffs by fifteen per cent, reported The Scottish Worker, official organ of the Scottish T.U.C., 'in view of the fact that most members are on strike pay'.<sup>(61)</sup> This lead was followed by many English societies, although at some, like the Broomhill Equitable, price reductions were introduced on cash transactions only.<sup>(62)</sup>

- (1) Report of 58th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1926, p.405.
- (2) The Co-operative Party was formed in December 1917, to endeavour to secure co-operative representation in Parliament and on local government and administrative bodies. See T.F. Carberry, Consumers in Politics: A History and General Review of the Co-operative Party, 1969.
- (3) Report of 58th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1926, pp.405-6.
- (4) *ibid.*, p.407.
- (5) *ibid.*, p.409.
- (6) *ibid.*, p.431.
- (7) *ibid.*, p.432.
- (8) *ibid.*
- (9) *ibid.*, p.433.
- (10) *ibid.*, p.446.
- (11) Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.21.
- (12) *ibid.*, p.56.
- (13) *ibid.*
- (14) *ibid.*, p.488.
- (15) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd., Minutes 1926, N.R.O. 1795/3.
- (16) Co-operative News, 21 August 1926.
- (17) Derby Co-operative Provident Society Ltd. Minutes 1926.
- (18) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, July 1926.
- (19) B. Donoughue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician, 1973, p.66.

The Royal Arsenal Society's relationship with the Labour Party has been a particularly close and long-lasting one. From its inception, co-operative societies have been eligible to affiliate to the Labour Party, but relatively few societies have done so, even at the local level. To a considerable

extent this reluctance has been the result of opposition to such an arrangement not only from Conservative and Liberal elements within the societies themselves, but also from the Co-operative Party. In 1927, however, the Royal Arsenal Society decided to take such a step and today remains the only co-operative society affiliated to the Labour Party at both local and national levels.

See Barbara Smith and Geoffrey Ostergaard, Constitutional Relations between the Labour and Co-operative Parties: An Historical Review, 1960, pp.8-9, 29.

(20) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, August 1926.

(21) *ibid.*

Ellen Wilkinson was Labour M.P. for Middlesbrough and Chairman of the Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children. For a recent account of Ellen Wilkinson's activities during the General Strike and Lock-out, see B.D. Vernon, Ellen Wilkinson, 1982, pp.85-90.

(22) Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, August 1926.

(23) *ibid.*

(24) Given their opposition to the amendment it was somewhat disingenuous of the General Committee later to proclaim the Society's general response to the Co-operative Union appeal - see front cover of Comradeship and the Wheatsheaf, August 1926. Certainly, not everyone was convinced of the Committee's commitment to the cause of relieving distress in the mining districts. An article in the Sunday Worker of 27 June alleged that although the rank-and-file of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society decided to grant £10,000 to the funds of the miners, 'reactionary elements in the society' were proposing to hold up the money until September. This was later denied by the Society's secretary, W.B. Neville, who

stated that the whole sum had been paid over to the co-operative Union fund. (Sunday Worker, 11 July 1926.)

- (25) Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., p.66.
- (26) Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 16 October 1926.
- (27) ibid.
- (28) ibid.
- (29) ibid.
- (30) ibid.
- (31) ibid.
- (32) ibid.
- (33) ibid.
- (34) ibid.
- (35) ibid.
- (36) Unfortunately, this account of rank-and-file attempts to encourage the London Society to show greater generosity to the miners and their dependants in 1926, of necessity, is drawn almost exclusively from Postgate's article in Lansbury's Labour Weekly. In order to obtain a more balanced account of these events several attempts were made between June and October 1980 to gain access to the London Society's records in Maryland Street - but in this case it proved impossible to overcome the fairly typical anxiety of retail and wholesale societies to avoid the possibility of revealing skeletons in the co-operative cupboard. The Society's Administrative Assistant, L.G. Snow, eventually supplied extracts of Society minutes, reports and balance sheets for the period, indicating certain paragraphs 'which maybe of interest, and would seem to refute the Lansbury's Labour Weekly criticisms, by actual acts of charity as recorded'. Unfortunately none of the material supplied by Mr. Snow made any reference to the

- (36) controversy surrounding the Society's response to the Co-operative Union appeal.
- (37) Barnsley British Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.
- (38) Co-operative Union Sub-Office and Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (39) Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.21.
- (40) Co-operative Union Sub-Office and Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (41) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes,  
1926, N.R.O. 1795/3.
- (42) Co-operative Union Sub-Office and Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (43) Throckley District Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926, T.W.C.C.A.D.  
ACC 1062/15.
- (44) Ashington Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926, NRO 1794/23.  
Willington Co-operative and Industrial Society Minutes, 1926,  
D.R.O. D/Co/Da 113.
- (45) Seaton Valley Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926, NRO 920/3.
- (46) Easington Lane and South Hetton Co-operative Society Minutes,  
1926, DRO D/Co/Sh 34/35.
- (47) Amble Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926, NRO 361/12.
- (48) Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926,  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC 120/44.
- (49) A. Mason, op. cit., p.396.
- (50) Ryhope and Silksworth Industrial and Provident Society Minutes,  
1926, DRO D/Co/RS 15.
- (51) Windy Nook and District Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes,  
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- (52) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes,  
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- (53) Radcliffe Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes,  
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- (49) Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Industrial Society,  
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- (50) Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Industrial Society Minutes,  
1926.
- (51) Co-operative News, 5 June 1926.
- (52) Jarrow and Hebburn Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926,  
D.R.O. D/Co/JH 14.
- (53) Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes, 1926.
- (54) Co-operative Union Sub-Office and Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (55) The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Annual Volume of  
Proceedings, 1926, p.26.
- (56) Barnsley British Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.  
Co-operative News, 14 August 1926.
- (57) Co-operative News, 19 June 1926.
- (58) The Mineworker, 31 July 1926.
- (59) Co-operative News, 11 September 1926.
- (60) *ibid.*, 5 June 1926.  
Rotherham Board of Guardian Minutes 1926.
- (61) The Scottish Worker, 12 May 1926.
- (62) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes  
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## CHAPTER 8

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE CREDIT QUESTIONBackground

By far the most vital and controversial decision facing co-operative societies in 1926, however, concerned the extent to which they were prepared to advance credit facilities to their members and local miners' unions during the dispute. During the fifty years following its revival at the hands of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844, the co-operative movement fought a determined rearguard action in defence of its conviction that the evil of credit trading should be eliminated.<sup>(1)</sup> By the end of the First World War, however, most societies, although still paying lip service to the early co-operators' commitment to cash trading, had to a greater or lesser degree long since recognised the inevitability of departing from that principle. In 'normal times' most societies were prepared, if somewhat guardedly, to enter into short-term credit arrangements with members regarded as 'trustworthy', usually to an extent equivalent to their share capital holdings with the society.

Any lingering hopes the movement may have nursed of arresting this 'undesirable' trend were finally extinguished during the post-war years of depression and industrial unrest, when the purchasing power of many society members was reduced considerably as a consequence of unemployment or their involvement in lengthy strikes and lock-outs. As far as industrial disputes were concerned, societies, in the main, responded during this period by granting considerable financial assistance through the medium of credit agreements with their members and the trade unions involved. Although genuinely concerned for the welfare of the men and

their families affected by these disputes, the decision to provide assistance was by no means an entirely altruistic one. It was felt that to deny assistance to a loyal society member who 'falls upon evil times' would merely drive him to the nearest corner shop where credit facilities were available. 'Not only would that not be a co-operative action but would mean that when good times came round again that member's trade would be lost to the society.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Not without misgivings, then, many societies gave considerable support to trade unions involved in many post-war industrial disputes, including the national rail and coal strikes of 1919 and 1920 respectively<sup>(3)</sup>, and during the three month's mining stoppage in 1921 provided financial assistance on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Information collected by the Co-operative Union from 362 societies in 1925 revealed that during the 1921 stoppage credit estimated at £526,322 had been extended to society members, and that £82,395 had been loaned to miners' unions. In addition, goods to the value of £639,962 were supplied to the miners and their families through credit arrangements entered into with local miners' unions.<sup>(4)</sup>

Similar assistance would no doubt have been expected from societies in 1925, had the announcement of the temporary government subsidy to the coal industry on 31 July not averted the threat of sympathetic action by railwaymen and transport workers in support of the miners' struggle to resist the imposition of wage reductions and longer working hours. Convinced that 'Red Friday' had achieved no more than a postponement of the conflict, left-wing elements within the labour movement urged that preparations, including an agreement between the trade union and co-operative movements, should be made in readiness for a general strike. At the 1925 Annual Trades Union Congress in Scarborough a delegate of the National Union of Vehicle Builders proposed that the General Council should be given authority to call for strike action, 'to assist any

union defending a vital trade union principle, and to arrange with the Co-operative Wholesale Society for the distribution of food in the event of a strike making this necessary'.<sup>(5)</sup> During the interregnum afforded by the government subsidy, the Communist Party issued a number of statements stressing the need for national and local co-operation between the two movements on such questions as food distribution and the extension of credit to strikers.<sup>(6)</sup> One of the most vociferous advocates of such an agreement was the Secretary of the M.F.G.B., A.J. Cook, who in a series of weekend coalfield speeches in 1925 and 1926, warned that conflict in the coalmining industry was inevitable, and emphasised the importance of ensuring that adequate arrangements were made to have 'grub distributed in the homes of our people'.<sup>(7)</sup>

The Co-operative Union, however, grew increasingly concerned at suggestions that the movement's resources should be committed to the large-scale assistance of strikers in the event of a national stoppage. At a meeting of the Central Board in Manchester on 24 October 1925, consideration was given to the effect that a general strike or lock-out might have upon societies in coalmining areas and upon the movement generally. The most important item on the agenda at this meeting was a resolution submitted by P.J. Agnew on behalf of the Scottish Sectional Board:

That a special or other committee be appointed to consider the policy to be adopted by the co-operative movement in the event of an industrial crisis next year, and that such committee shall take steps to consult with the General Council of the T.U.C. to suggest a policy between both movements.<sup>(8)</sup>

In seconding this resolution, a Mrs. Corrie reported that 'the members of Trades and Labour Councils were circularising co-operative societies asking them to form local councils. The co-operative move-

ment could not afford to risk the whole structure in going to the assistance of the industrial section. We want them to recognise there is a consumers' point of view.'<sup>(9)</sup> The resolution was adopted by the board and it was also decided that before discussions with the General Council took place, information should be obtained from local societies showing the amount of debt still outstanding from loans made to trade unions and from credit extended on the security of miners' and other trade unions during the coalmining dispute of 1921.<sup>(10)</sup>

### Negotiations with the T.U.C.

Armed with only part of this information, Co-operative Union representatives met the Special Industrial Committee of the T.U.C. for talks at Ecclestone Square on Friday 18 December 1925.\* When the opening pleasantries had been dispensed with, Alderman Hayward for the Co-operative Union suggested that 'rather than be caught napping in a crisis as they had been on the last occasion', the two movements should decide upon a mutually acceptable policy.<sup>(11)</sup> Such an understanding was essential, argued Alderman Hayward, in order to avoid a repetition of the difficulties experienced by local societies as a consequence of assistance rendered during the coalmining dispute of 1921. No preliminary arrangement had been made at that time with the Miners' Federation, and although only 151 societies had so far replied to a Co-operative Union survey, it was already apparent that a considerable amount of the money advanced to local and county miners' organisations in 1921 had not yet been repaid. Hayward went on to point out that by far the most seriously affected area was South Wales, although outstanding debts

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\* Special Industrial Committee members present: A. Pugh, A.G. Walkden, A.B. Swales, G. Hicks, W.M. Citrine.  
Co-operative Union Representatives: F. Hayward, G. Briggs, W. Halls, P. Loney, W. Swindlehurst, A. Whitehead.

were also reported by retail societies in Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, and parts of Durham and the Midlands. From some districts in Staffordshire and South Wales, moreover, the Co-operative Union had received complaints 'that people had not only not honoured their debts, but had also taken their trade away from the Society after leaving a large outstanding bad debt.'<sup>(12)</sup>

Hayward assured the members of the Special Industrial Committee that, despite such unfortunate experiences, the Co-operative Union was anxious to provide all possible assistance to the trade union movement in the event of an industrial crisis in 1926: 'They were, of course, entirely sympathetic, but if there were going to be any advances made, there must be a well thought out scheme, so that they could give their help without being left in the lurch.'<sup>(13)</sup> Prevailing circumstances made such an arrangement all the more essential, argued the deputation, since it appeared certain that any crisis would not be confined to the mining industry, but involve other sections of the trade union movement in sympathetic action.

During the discussion several members of the S.I.C. welcomed the prospect of an arrangement with the co-operative movement and appeared optimistic that a mutually acceptable scheme could be devised. George Hicks, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, put forward the novel and perhaps naive suggestion that it would help to prevent the possibility of a national stoppage if the employers knew that an arrangement had been reached between the two movements. Hicks expressed agreement with a suggestion put forward by W. Halls of the Co-operative Union, that the S.I.C. should draft a model form of proposition to be submitted to the whole of the trade union movement.<sup>(14)</sup>

Arthur Pugh of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation was also optimistic that a satisfactory arrangement could be concluded between

the two movements, but introduced a note of caution to the proceedings. Pugh warned that any scheme 'would have to be operated to a material extent through the Miners' organisations' and that before they could get far with practical arrangements with the co-operative movement it would be necessary to have close consultation with representatives of the Miners' Federation.<sup>(15)</sup> It was suggested that before these consultations took place, the Co-operative Union should provide the Committee with a comprehensive list of the miners' associations which had entered into definite undertakings with co-operative societies, showing the extent to which their obligations had been fulfilled. The deputation undertook to supply this information and the two parties agreed that a further meeting be arranged in the early part of 1926, at which 'they could get down to a practical scheme'.<sup>(16)</sup>

With the negotiations at such a delicate and inconclusive stage, therefore, the Co-operative Union was understandably incensed when, at a meeting of South Wales miners in Port Talbot on 10 January 1926, A.J. Cook gave the distinct impression that an agreement between the two movements had already been reached:

In the coming struggle it would be found there would be a new trinity - a linking up of the miners' cause with the political, industrial, and Co-operative movements. The Co-operative movement would be the victualling movement for the fighting forces of Labour.<sup>(17)</sup>

This prompted the Secretary of the Co-operative Union, Alfred Whitehead, to write to Citrine in the following terms:

It is a great pity that Mr. Cook cannot be "muzzled". See his statement again this week that an arrangement has been come to for the Co-operative Movement to deal with the question in case

of a crisis. This is causing a lot of discussion in the Co-operative Movement, because no such arrangement has been come to, and I think he ought to be a little more guarded in his statements, as it is making our position more difficult everytime statements like that appear in the Press. (18)

Although it is unlikely that Cook's indiscretion greatly influenced the outcome of the discussions between the S.I.C. and Co-operative Union, it did serve to mobilise opposition to the proposed agreement amongst certain sections of the co-operative movement. Typical of many letters of protest from co-operative members was one published in the Co-operative News, from a correspondent claiming to be a Socialist of thirty years' standing:

What has the Miners' Federation done either for the general public or for the co-operative movement? The co-operative spirit is anti-strike, the miners is for ever and ever 'down tools'. The co-operative organisation, wholesale and retail, should tell Mr. Cook and his warrior friends 'Hands off'. (19)

Alarm at the prospect of an agreement along the lines suggested by Cook was apparently not confined solely to sections of the co-operative movement. An article by Helen Crawford in the Sunday Worker later claimed that 'it was with full cognisance of the important role that the Co-operative Movement could play in the workers' struggles that the conservative and liberal parties sent out circulars recently to their members urging them to get inside these organisations with a view to sabotaging any practical schemes of agreement'. (20)

Nevertheless, the negotiations continued and on 19 January 1926 the S.I.C. met representatives of the M.F.G.B. to discuss the lines upon which a scheme with the Co-operative Union could be drawn up. (21)

Much of the discussion at this meeting was centred upon figures compiled

by the Co-operative Union, which revealed that co-operative societies were still owed more than £200,000 from loans made to trade unions and from credit extended on the security of miners' and other trade unions during the coalmining dispute of 1921. Whilst regretting that the money advanced by co-operative societies in 1921 had not yet been fully repaid, the first reaction of the M.F.G.B. representatives was to make clear to the S.I.C. that the Federation itself could accept no responsibility for any of the outstanding debt. It was explained that no approach had been made by the Federation nationally to any co-operative society in 1921 and that responsibility for repayment rested upon those district organisations and local branches which had incurred the debts. Furthermore, the Federation representatives clearly felt that although 'there ought not to be a penny deficit', the amount outstanding to the Co-operative Union was relatively small given the conditions prevailing in the coalfields since 1921. Growing unemployment and the consequent fall in union membership and subscriptions accounted for the outstanding debt it was argued, and not, as the Co-operative Union seemed to be implying, a lack of good faith on the part of the miners' organisations. (22)

It was, nevertheless, recognised at this meeting that the existence of outstanding debt represented the most immediate threat to the prospect of an agreement between the two movements, and the miners' representatives reluctantly agreed that some attempt should be made to placate the Co-operative Union. Tom Richards, Vice President of the M.F.G.B. and representative of the South Wales miners on the Federation executive, suggested that a communication be sent to the Co-operative Union indicating that although the Federation itself could accept no liability, it was prepared to do everything possible to ensure that the debt was wiped off. This suggestion was accepted by the meeting and it was agreed that the Co-operative Union be invited to attend a joint meeting with the S.I.C. and Miners' Federation on Thursday 25 February.

At the close of the meeting, in a comment perhaps made with A.J. Cook in mind, it was pointed out that it would perhaps 'be advisable not to bring the Co-operative Movement too much into public discussions on the possible industrial crisis'.<sup>(23)</sup>

In January 1926, then, there appeared, on the surface at least, still to be some optimism within the trade union movement that, despite the obvious difficulties, an arrangement with the co-operative movement in the event of a national stoppage remained a practical possibility. During the following month, however, such optimism, if genuinely held, received a serious blow, when in a circular letter to the shareholding societies dated 8 February 1926, directors of the C.W.S. outlined the policy they intended to adopt in the event of an industrial crisis:

Having in mind the past experiences, under which heavy debts were incurred - many of which have not yet been fully discharged - we do not propose to allow societies, or any outside organisation, any special facilities by way of extended credits for the supply of goods, or by increased overdrafts, without proper security.<sup>(24)</sup>

Apart from any influence this statement may have had upon the policy of the Co-operative Union, it clearly placed extremely severe restraints on the freedom of action of any local retail societies called upon by trade unions to provide financial assistance in future industrial disputes. However sympathetic they may have been, it was beyond the means of all but the largest local societies to provide large scale financial assistance to strikers, unless they in turn were granted similar facilities by the C.W.S.<sup>(25)</sup> The significance of the Wholesale Society's policy statement was appreciated by The Morning Post, which on 11 February pointed out that whatever arrangement the Co-operative Union might be willing to make with the General Council or with the miners, 'will be of no use whatever if the C.W.S. declines to grant either extended credit

or overdrafts at the bank'.

On Friday 26 February (one day later than originally planned) a further meeting of the S.I.C. and representatives of the Miners' Federation and Co-operative Union, this time at the House of Commons (26), ended with the prospects of an agreement between the two movements appearing even more remote. Although the declared purpose of the meeting was to formulate, if possible, a co-ordinated policy between the two movements, proceedings were again dominated to a large extent by memories of 1921. Despite the efforts of S.I.C. members such as Pugh and Thomas to focus the meeting's attention on the question of future arrangements, representatives of both the M.F.G.B and Co-operative Union were repeatedly drawn into acrimonious discussion of the outstanding debt. Dialogue ran along paths well worn at the previous meeting, with the Co-operative Union reaffirming its warning that the movement's future response to trade union appeals for financial assistance would inevitably be conditioned by its experiences in the past. In reply, several of the miners' representatives expressed resentment at Co-operative Union comments on the outstanding debt, clearly interpreting them as an attack on the integrity of the Federation itself. Arthur Cook complained angrily that 'it was only by seeing the press that he first heard of the trouble over the 1921 payments' and that it 'had been circulated extensively in the enemy press that the Miners' Federation were not honouring their obligations to the Co-operative Societies'. (27) It was again stressed by the miners' representatives that the Federation could accept no liability for agreements entered into with autonomous district and branch organisations in 1921, but as promised earlier 'they would use their moral persuasion' in an attempt to recover the outstanding debt in full. (28)

When the meeting eventually directed its attention to the current industrial crisis it quickly became apparent that the task of formulating

a mutually acceptable policy between both movements would prove an extremely difficult one. From the trade union point of view, two aspects of Co-operative Union policy emerged as the most serious obstacles to the conclusion of a satisfactory agreement. Firstly, it was made clear that although the co-operative movement was anxious in the event of a national stoppage to assist its affected members, any financial assistance provided could under no circumstances be extended to 'non-co-operators'. As by no means all trade unionists were society members<sup>(29)</sup>, such a policy clearly limited the potential value to the unions of an agreement with the co-operative movement. Trade union hopes of a satisfactory agreement received a further and more serious blow when the co-operative movement's conditions for providing even limited financial assistance were announced. The Co-operative Union representatives explained that any agreement between the two movements must contain adequate safeguards to prevent a recurrence of the heavy losses sustained by many societies following the mining dispute of 1921.

From the co-operative viewpoint, the major weakness of arrangements made in 1921 was the lack of a co-ordinated policy at the national level, and the consequent need for local agreements between retail societies and the relatively small and sometimes financially insecure trade union organisations. It was stressed, therefore, that the Co-operative Union would not be prepared to recommend retail societies to provide financial assistance in the event of a national stoppage, unless an undertaking to reimburse any future losses was given by all the national trade union organisations involved.<sup>(30)</sup>

Once it became clear that an offer of financial assistance from the co-operative movement was conditional upon the resources of the national trade union movement being made available as security, immediate progress towards an agreement became impossible. As the S.I.C. members explained, not only did the General Council not have the necessary

authority to pledge the resources of its affiliates in this way, but its own financial resources were such that the Council could provide no more than 'moral security' for any assistance granted by the co-operative movement. The extent of the General Council's financial weakness was outlined with some irony by Jimmy Thomas, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and himself the president of two co-operative societies: 'The credit of the General Council of the T.U.C. was not worth a £15,000 overdraft at the Wholesale Society.'<sup>(31)</sup>

Nevertheless, Thomas in particular appeared reluctant to accept that negotiations between the two movements had finally broken down. He suggested to the Co-operative Union representatives that the meeting be adjourned 'without issuing a press statement, and in the interim we on our side could see how far we could give you a guarantee of a moral kind, and you could submit to us prior to our next meeting some concrete proposals that in your view would meet the situation'.<sup>(32)</sup> In what now seems to have been little more than a token attempt to keep the dialogue alive, this suggestion was accepted and it was agreed that a further meeting be called when the Co-operative Union representatives had prepared for submission to the General Council a formal statement of their requirements.

Within a matter of days the Co-operative Union representatives had agreed upon the wording of such a statement and on 12 March submitted their recommendations to a meeting of the United Board. After a brief discussion these recommendations were approved and the Board passed the following resolution, a copy of which was immediately forwarded to the General Council for consideration:

(1) That while it is both desirable and imperative that the most cordial relationships should be maintained between the Co-operative and Trade Union movements, it is obvious that the question

as to how far the two can work together in the event of a general stoppage of industry presents considerable difficulty.

(2) That in view of the fact that the stoppage now threatened in the mining industry will in the event of its occurrence probably become a general dispute in which the whole trade union movement may be involved, it is desirable that the whole resources of the trade union movement should be available as a guaranty for the repayment of any financial assistance that may be rendered to trade union organisations by the Co-operative Movement. (33)

At first there appeared to be general agreement within the S.I.C. that these demands rendered futile any further discussion between the two movements. When the Co-operative Union resolution was considered at a meeting of the S.I.C. on 25 March it was discussed only briefly before being dismissed as 'an impractical suggestion from the point of view of the T.U.C.'. (34) For its part, the Co-operative Union was probably well aware that there was never any serious possibility that the terms demanded for recommending financial assistance to trade unions would be accepted, and it can have come as no real surprise or disappointment when they were rejected by the Industrial Committee. Nevertheless, in what seems to have been little more than an exercise in window-dressing, the United Board wrote to Walter Citrine on 7 April asking if the S.I.C. wished to put forward any alternative proposals for an arrangement between the two movements. (35)

Opinion within the S.I.C. was divided when this offer from the United Board came up for discussion at meetings on 8 and 23 April. Jimmy Thomas, who at earlier meetings of the S.I.C. appeared optimistic that an arrangement could be reached with the co-operative movement, now ruled out such a possibility. He argued 'that it would be merely a waste of time to meet the Co-operative Union on the matter. There was

nothing the Committee could offer as an alternative to giving a guarantee for which the Co-operative Union asked, and they knew that that was impossible.'<sup>(36)</sup> Thomas was supported by Arthur Pugh who felt that any new proposals for an arrangement should come from the Co-operative Union rather than the S.I.C. Pugh, like Thomas, stressed that it 'was impossible for the Council to give any financial guarantee for the whole Trade Union Movement'.<sup>(37)</sup>

Opposition to such views was expressed by Alonzo Swales, Leader of the Engineering Union, who perhaps recognised that on an arrangement with the Co-operative Union rested the militant left's only remaining hope of persuading the labour movement to make preparations for the impending national stoppage. Swales did not accept the argument that the financial guarantees sought by the Co-operative Union necessarily presented an unsurmountable obstacle to agreement between the two movements: 'he could foresee that later on they might ask a conference of all the Unions what they were prepared to do in that direction. If the Movement as a whole turned it down, well and good, but he did not think the Committee should rule it out.'<sup>(38)</sup>

Swales, however, was unable to convince his colleagues that an approach to the wider trade union movement was either a necessary or useful exercise. With the exception of Swales and perhaps Hicks, optimism within the S.I.C. that an agreement could be reached had been eroded by the belief that the Co-operative Union's requirements for recommending financial assistance could not be met by the trade union movement. Furthermore, a number of S.I.C. members had for some time been expressing doubts that the need for an arrangement with the co-operative movement was a particularly vital one. In a memorandum submitted to the S.I.C. on 28 January 1926, Walter Citrine voiced doubts that the resources of the co-operative movement alone were great enough to provide assistance on the scale that would be required if a

general stoppage of industry occurred.<sup>(39)</sup> Citrine returned to this theme on 3 March in a memorandum entitled 'Essential Services during Trades Disputes':

The matter which is uppermost in the minds of trade unionists when considering the possibilities of a large scale dispute is that the essential services would be those of a commissariat character and could be carried on by the Co-operative Societies. But is it practical to assume that the Co-operative Societies would have the means and machinery necessary to erect even a skeleton service? The membership of the Co-operative Movement is approximately that of the Trade Union Movement. It would require an immense expansion before it could become adequate to conduct even a skeleton set of services. Some services such as those undertaken by the Municipalities, i.e. water, lighting, and possibly heating, would be entirely outside the ambit of the Co-operative resources. It is even doubtful as to what extent it would be possible for the Co-operative Movement to devote its attention to the feeding of the working class.

But it is hardly to be contemplated that any Government would permit the Co-operative Services exclusively to use the commodities at its command for the working-class population. It is more than likely that all food supplies, and possibly coal, would be commandeered by the Government and distribution made as local as possible. The very suggestion of the Co-operative Movement being contemplated as a possible source of commissariat supply presupposes that it would be allowed by the Unions to produce those commodities and services. In that sense the Trade Union Movement would be giving assent to the erection of essential services, but these services would be devoted to its own membership and other

sections of the Co-operative and working-class Movement.

As already indicated, the intricacy of production and distribution would probably prevent this being done. The alternative would be to make advance arrangements with private traders to supplement the services of the Co-operative Movement. It is doubtful, however, as to how far it would be possible to do this and whether adequate (sic) control and supervision could be maintained of such services. The inevitable result of this reasoning is that if the Trade Union Movement assents to the necessity for the carrying out of essential services, it is to the Government, rather than any other agency, that attention must be turned.<sup>(40)</sup>

And as the minutes of the S.I.C. reveal, even Arthur Cook had begun to doubt the co-operative movement's organisational capacity to provide assistance on the necessary scale: 'If the Miners' Federation had all the money in the world, the Co-operative Movement could not suddenly reorganise itself to have depots everywhere to meet an emergency.... It had to be realised that the Co-op could not feed one tenth of our population.'<sup>(41)</sup> Cook had also apparently come to believe that large-scale arrangements to feed strikers during a national stoppage would not, after all, be required. In what, from the miners' point of view, must rank as a classical piece of miscalculation, Cook argued this point at a meeting of the S.I.C. on 26 February 1926: 'if a struggle took place... any upheaval of any size could not last long. They were talking as though they were going to go on for months.'<sup>(42)</sup>

Although the matter was submitted to the General Council for consideration, no alternative proposals for an arrangement between the two movements had emerged when the General Strike began. In the words of Christopher Farman, 'the one positive attempt to prepare for the May crisis ended in complete failure'.<sup>(43)</sup>

### Credit During the General Strike

At the commencement of the General Strike, then, no arrangement existed at the national level between the two movements and the question of financial assistance now rested to a large extent on negotiations between local trade union branches or councils of action and the co-operative retail societies. In some districts labour organisations had actually attempted to reach an understanding with local societies before the national stoppage began. During the period of the government subsidy to the coal industry, for example, the Rhondda District of the South Wales Miners' Federation (S.W.M.F.) entered into discussions with local co-operative societies for the extension of credit in the event of a prolonged dispute.<sup>(44)</sup> And on 8 April 1926 the London Trades Council, clearly exasperated at the lack of progress made in the discussions between the Special Industrial Committee and Co-operative Union, resolved:

To press the T.U. Congress and Co-operative Union for an immediate decision as to a joint working arrangement in the event of an industrial dispute arising out of the present mining crisis. In the meantime we instruct the Trades Council Executive to approach the Management Committees of the principal Co-operative Societies with a view to at once instituting a joint publicity campaign and raising special local funds for this and dispute purposes.

The Publicity Campaign to be ranged around the following points:-

1. The Coming Industrial Struggle.
2. Every Trade Unionist a Co-operator.
3. Every Co-operator eligible a Trade Unionist.<sup>(45)</sup>

Local initiative of this kind was rare, however, and in the case of London at least produced no satisfactory results. In many districts

negotiations between local trade union branches and retail societies had not taken place or were still proceeding when the national stoppage was called off on 12 May, and only a relatively small number of societies appear to have advanced credit to trade unions during the nine days of the strike itself.<sup>(46)</sup> Included in this minority was the Derby Co-operative Provident Society, which decided on 6 May to allow credit coupons to the extent of £5,000 to local trade unions 'on condition that guarantees satisfactory to this Board' were produced.<sup>(47)</sup> In most other areas during the General Strike credit was given to trade unions on a much smaller scale or not at all.

Nevertheless, many societies provided a valuable service during the national stoppage by acting as the agents of the C.W.S. Bank, with which in May 1926 more than four thousand trade union branches throughout the country had accounts.<sup>(48)</sup> At the outset of the strike the Bank's manager reported that he had received numerous enquiries and deputations from trade union officials in regard to cash for strike pay and the means of obtaining it when required:

Although there are physical difficulties arising in transferring funds to societies who have not sufficient of their own to cash Trade Union cheques, it is thought these difficulties will be overcome, and the situation is well in hand. Our cash in hand and at short notice amounts to over £7,000,000, which should be ample to cover all possibilities, but if necessary we can easily realise some portion of our investments in Government and other gilt edged securities amounting to nearly £20,000,000.<sup>(49)</sup>

Co-operative societies were requested by the C.W.S. to reserve sufficient cash balances to meet the expected demand from trade unions for the payment of strike pay, and between 3 May and 25 May 1926 societies cashed cheques amounting to approximately £1,500,000.<sup>(50)</sup> During

this three-week period the total sum withdrawn by trade union branches from the C.W.S. Bank amounted to more than £2,500,000, with retail societies withdrawing a further £350,000 for their own purposes.<sup>(51)</sup> In some districts, where the arrival of cheques from trade unions was delayed because of transport difficulties during the stoppage, retail societies bridged the gap by advancing strike pay to local branches. During the stoppage, for example, the Birmingham Co-operative Society undertook to cash cheques for the unions 'backed solely by the reputations of the unions and their local officials'.<sup>(52)</sup> In all, the Birmingham Society cashed cheques or I.O.U.'s worth approximately £28,000 for some thirty-six local trade union branches.<sup>(53)</sup>

In his account of the sterling work performed by the C.W.S. Bank and local societies during the General Strike, Percy Redfern could not resist the temptation to reveal that even in this area of its operations the movement was obliged to overcome a distinct lack of co-operation from the trade unions:

As did the directors, so did the staffs believe, and feel, that the business of the C.W.S. was to supply essential human needs. The more obvious the need the greater the effort.

A similar spirit animated the C.W.S. Bank, although the tasks of the manager and staff were more troublesome than exhilarating. Over 4,000 trade union branch accounts were involved from the start. Money was suddenly wanted in every part of Britain. It was not a case of writing cheques, but of meeting precise requests, such as a demand for £800 in ten shilling notes and £900 in silver. Retail societies became agents absolutely invaluable. But to whom and how much were they to pay out? Head offices of the trade unions concerned instructed the C.W.S. to pay so much to each member. But with head office lists of members not up-to-date, and with lapses and arrears, who was to certify the number

of definite members? Retail societies had to be given limits within which to pay according to their local knowledge and their trust in local trade union officials; and the quality of this knowledge sufficed. In three weeks, mainly as extra to normal business, £2,500,000 of trade union money was paid out. Meanwhile, at the bank headquarters, and at Leaman Street, work was done amidst a whirl of telegrams, a chorus of telephone bells. It was said in London that permits to convey money were unnecessary since (non-union) taxis were abundant; but each day several members of both the Manchester and the London staffs, detained far beyond bank closing hours, would have had to stay on the premises until next morning but for the C.W.S. cars and C.W.S. drivers willing to assist the officials in their labours for the unions and the societies, even at the cost of friction with men whom those labours supplied. (54)

- (1) For an outline of co-operative attitudes towards credit extension see G.D.H. Cole, *op. cit.*, pp.9, 182-3, 221.
- (2) Co-operative News, 21 August 1926.
- (3) A. Bonner, British Co-operation, 1961, p.196.
- (4) Report of 58th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1926, p.52.
- (5) Lord Citrine, Men and Work, 1964, p.145.
- (6) James Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol.2, 1925-1927: The General Strike, 1969, p.150.  
J.T. Murphy, The Political Meaning of the Great Strike, 1926, pp.52-3.
- (7) For a typical example, see The Times, 24 August 1925.
- (8) Co-operative Union Central Board Minutes 1926.

- (9) *ibid.*
- (10) Report of 58th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1926, p.51.
- (11) Special Industrial Committee Minutes, 18 December 1925,  
T.U.C. Library, Box 123.
- (12) *ibid.*
- (13) *ibid.*
- (14) *ibid.*
- (15) *ibid.*
- (16) *ibid.*
- (17) The Morning Post, 11 January 1926.

An editorial in this newspaper on 12 January 1926 saw attempts to involve the co-operative movement in a possible national stoppage as part of a Communist conspiracy. See Appendix R for full text.

- (18) National Strike Special Conference, Report of Proceedings,  
1927, p.42.
- (19) Quoted in The Morning Post, 25 January 1926.
- (20) Sunday Worker, 23 May 1926. In his study of the General Strike in York, R.I. Hills has noted attempts by local conservatives to 'infiltrate' the co-operative society:

The local struggle against 'revolutionary socialism', which was normally focussed on elections, became concentrated in the months before the strike on the Co-operative Society, which was widely thought to be dominated by the 'Red Menace' and certainly most of its directors were active in the labour movement. The leader of the Conservatives on the City Council had suggested in 1925 that action ought to be taken against the influence of socialism on the society, but little was done until Central Office intervened. The Conservative Association eventually fielded five candidates for the Society's board and two for the educational comm-

ittee and arranged for the distribution of a circular and 4,000 Central Office leaflets. It also organised a correspondence in the local papers. The Yorkshire Evening Press lent its support to the campaign, which started early in 1926, but the board, acting on legal advice, disqualified the candidates for canvassing. (R.I. Hills, The General Strike in York, 1926, 1980, p.2.)

- (21) Special Industrial Committee Minutes, 19 January 1926, T.U.C. Library, Box 123.

S.I.C. members present: A. Pugh, J. Bromley, A. Hayday, J.H. Thomas, W.M. Citrine, A.S. Firth.

M.F.G.B. representatives: T.F. Richards, W.P. Richardson, A.J. Cook.

- (22) *ibid.*

- (23) *ibid.*

- (24) Co-operative News, 13 February 1926.

- (25) Some indication of the extent to which retail societies were dependent upon the C.W.S. for financial assistance may be seen from the example of the Blaina Society in South Wales, which in February 1926 was indebted to the C.W.S. to the extent of almost £100,000. (S.I.C. Minutes, 26 February 1926.)

- (26) Representatives present:

S.I.C. - A. Pugh, J. Bromley, G. Hicks, J.H. Thomas, B. Tillet, W.M. Citrine, H. Tracey, W. Milne Bailey.

M.F.G.B. - H. Smith, W.P. Richardson, A.J. Cook.

Co-operative Union - E. Lovey, W. Halls, Mr. Briggs, W.T. Charter, T.W. Allen, A. Whitehead, F. Hayward, W. Swindlehurst.

In his account of the General Strike, G.A. Phillips states that between December 1925 and the end of February 1926, three meetings took place between representatives of the Co-operative Union, the S.I.C. and the miners. (Phillips,

op. cit., p.92). In fact, the S.I.C. minutes indicate that Co-operative Union representatives met the Committee only twice - on 18 December 1925 and 26 February 1926. Phillips appears to have included the 19 January meeting, but this was attended only by the S.I.C. and representatives of the M.F.G.B.

(27) S.I.C. Minutes, 26 February 1926, T.U.C. Box 123.

(28) *ibid.*

(29) In 1926 the total membership of trade unions was remarkably similar to that of the retail distributive societies. There were 5,219,000 trade union members (Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, 1972, p.289.) and 5,186,728 members of retail societies (Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.488). Although no statistical evidence is available the close similarity of these totals is not indicative of joint membership of the two movements. Contemporary trade union and co-operative documents reveal dissatisfaction within both movements at the number of 'non-co-operators' within trade union ranks.

(30) S.I.C. Minutes, 26 February 1926, T.U.C. Box 123.

(31) *ibid.*

(32) *ibid.*

(33) Report of 58th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1926, p.52.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that in at least one account of the negotiations between representatives of the co-operative and trade union movements, the role of the Co-operative Union appears to have been misinterpreted. Christopher Farman writes that '(r)ecalling the heavy financial losses which some of the local retail societies suffered during the miners' strike of 1921, the Co-operative Union

refused to guarantee any further assistance unless the  
 assets of the whole trade union movement were pledged in  
 advance'. (C. Farman, op. cit., p.50.) In fact, the Co-  
 operative Union was never in a position to guarantee further  
 financial assistance to the trade union movement. The Co-  
 operative Union's role was very similar to the one fulfilled  
 by the T.U.C. within the trade union movement and its strictly  
 limited powers were clearly outlined to the S.I.C. in a state-  
 ment by Sir Thomas Allen, an influential director of the  
 C.W.S.: 'They could not issue any particular instruction to  
 any one society. They had no funds. They could guide,  
 direct and recommend, but they could not accept any financial  
 obligation. The obligation must be between the individual  
 society and any authority, national or otherwise, which wanted  
 to use the society for the purpose of extending credit, and  
 then the society in its turn must approach its wholesaler to  
 give them credit.' (S.I.C. Minutes, 26 February 1926, T.U.C.  
 Box 123.)

Regardless of the General Council's response to the Co-  
 operative Union resolution of 12 March, therefore, the question  
 of financial assistance to trade unions in the event of a  
 national stoppage ultimately rested with the autonomous local  
 societies. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the 'advice'  
 or 'guidance' of the Co-operative Union carried considerable  
 weight with retail societies, though as we shall see, it was  
 not always unquestioningly accepted.

(34) S.I.C. Minutes, 25 March 1926, T.U.C. Box 123.

(35) *ibid.*, 8 April 1926.

(36) *ibid.*, 23 April 1926.

(37) *ibid.*, 8 April 1926.

- (38) *ibid.*, 23 April 1926.
- (39) Copy in Bevin Papers, M.R.C., MSS 126/EB/GS/2/2.
- (40) *ibid.*, MSS 126/EB/GS/2/3.
- (41) S.I.C. Minutes, 19 January, 26 February 1926, T.U.C. Box 123.
- (42) *ibid.*, 26 February 1926.
- (43) C. Farman, *op. cit.*, p.50.
- (44) H Francis, 'South Wales', in J. Skelly (ed.), The General Strike 1926, 1976, p.242.
- (45) E. Burns, *op. cit.*, p.139.
- (46) According to the survey conducted by the Labour Research Department immediately after the General Strike, almost half of the reporting trades councils stated that no arrangements of any kind had been made with local retail societies during the national stoppage. (Emile Burns, *op. cit.*, p.55.)
- (47) Derby Co-operative Provident Society Minutes, 1926.
- (48) P. Redfern, *op. cit.*, p.268.
- (49) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 7 May 1926.
- (50) Undated Co-operative Union Information Sheet in Co-operative Union Library.
- (51) Banking Supplement, 28 April 1934.
- (52) Birmingham Public Libraries, *op. cit.*, p.14.
- (53) R.P. Hastings, 'Birmingham', in J. Skelley, *op. cit.*, p.225.
- (54) P. Redfern, *op. cit.*, pp.268-9.

## CHAPTER 9

CO-OPERATIVE CREDIT DURING THE LOCK-OUTCredit to Local Miners' Unions

Throughout the period of the continuing coal dispute, no uniform policy on the question of credit to miners' unions emerged, although both the Co-operative Union and the C.W.S. attempted to influence the policies of local retail societies. During the General Strike the directors of the C.W.S. repeated the warning contained in their circular dated 8 February, and the Co-operative Union advised societies 'to be sure, before granting credit, that they have security, and, should agreements be entered into with local unions, such agreements should have the backing of the national organisation'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Perhaps a more crucial influence on local societies, however, was provided by their experiences following the previous major coalmining dispute in 1921, during which financial assistance on a considerable scale had been given to many of the miners' unions. A large number of societies had agreed to accept vouchers for goods issued by local miners' lodges or branches, often on the strict understanding that the unions would be responsible for repayment after work had been resumed. At the beginning of the lock-out in 1926, however, over £183,000 of this debt was still unpaid<sup>(2)</sup> and a further sum of £17,344 remained outstanding from loans made by societies to various miners' unions.<sup>(3)</sup> A Co-operative Union survey revealed that amounts were still outstanding to local societies in Lancashire, Durham, Cheshire, Staffordshire,<sup>(4)</sup> and parts of the Midlands. By far the worst affected area, however, was South Wales, where there were frequent complaints from retail societies that many people had not only failed to repay their debts, but had taken their custom to other shops when the dispute was settled.

Most of the miners' organisations involved had made determined efforts to fulfil their obligations to the co-operative societies but in many cases had been frustrated by circumstances beyond their control. Widespread unemployment amongst the miners in many areas had inevitably led to a decline in the membership and consequently the income of the unions. Furthermore, it was alleged that large numbers of men had deliberately left the union in order to avoid the weekly repayment of money owed to the local co-operative society.

Despite the recognition of extenuating circumstances, the existence of outstanding debts often gave rise to considerable resentment within the societies affected. The West Stanley Co-operative Society, in Durham, which in 1921 had advanced approximately £24,000 to local trade union lodges and individual members, eventually resorted to the extreme course of taking legal action against a number of members 'to extract from them what moral decency ought to have prompted them to have readily offered'.<sup>(5)</sup> The Blaydon Society, also in Durham, was in fact in the process of taking legal action against the Rowlands Gill, Stargate, and Blaydon Burn "Bessie Pit" lodges when the 1926 lock-out began, and agreed to postpone proceedings until after the dispute was settled.<sup>(6)</sup> Just how many societies eventually sought satisfaction in the courts is unknown, although the practice was certainly not confined to the county of Durham. In 1925, for example, the Kirkintilloch Co-operative Society in Scotland sued the Kirkintilloch and Twetchar Miners' Association for the sum of £172.10s, the outstanding balance of a £471 loan made to the union in 1921. To add insult to injury in this particular case, the court's decision went against the co-operative society because the agreement was held to have been badly drafted.<sup>(7)</sup>

Societies which had been placed in such a position were understandably reluctant to enter into similar arrangements in 1926, and this reluctance was shared by most 'coalmining societies', for by now they

had been made aware of the extent if not the full details of the outstanding debt.<sup>(8)</sup> This reluctance was reinforced by the Co-operative Union's initial warning to societies not to advance money without proper security being given and subsequent advice that any agreements with local miners' unions should have the backing of the relevant county organisation.

Had all societies followed this advice to the letter, very little if any credit would have been extended to local miners' unions, for most of the M.F.G.B.'s county organisations were either reluctant or clearly unable to give such backing. The Warwickshire Miners' Association, for example, which in June 1926 still owed both the Tamworth and Nuneaton co-operative societies more than £3,000 as a consequence of credit received during the dispute in 1921, decided against issuing vouchers to its members as there were no funds to back them.<sup>(9)</sup>

In Yorkshire, on the other hand, the funds of the county organisation were in a relatively healthy state at the commencement of the dispute in 1926. Following the lock-out in 1921 Yorkshire miners were in debt to the total of £367,000 from credit extended by co-operative societies and other traders, but under the supervision of the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association this sum had been repaid in full by October of the following year.<sup>(10)</sup> At some pits this had been achieved by the deduction of agreed amounts from the miners' wages on a weekly basis. The Association entered the dispute with assets totalling more than £649,000, of which £353,788 was deposited with the C.W.S. Bank.<sup>(11)</sup> During the first week of June 1926 the Association's General Secretary, Joseph Jones, sent a circular to societies located in the county's mining districts asking if they 'would be willing to accept vouchers issued by the Association to their members, such vouchers to be honoured after the settlement as speedily as the resources of the Association will allow'.<sup>(12)</sup> The Leeds Industrial society responded to this request

by suggesting to the North Eastern Sectional Board of the Co-operative Union that a meeting of all societies in the area be called to discuss the question of credit.<sup>(13)</sup>

This suggestion was quickly approved and on Saturday 12 July approximately one hundred delegates from societies in Yorkshire mining areas attended a special meeting at the People's Hall in Leeds.<sup>(14)</sup> The representatives at this meeting agreed that 'we recommend the societies concerned to accept credit vouchers issued by the YMA Central Office to the extent their financial position will allow, such transactions to be based on an agreement similar to that obtaining in 1921 ... a copy of which agreement, when completed, to be sent to each society notifying their willingness to accept the said vouchers'.<sup>(15)</sup> It was also decided to appoint a Credit Vouchers Committee to deal with any questions arising out of credit voucher transactions.

Following their delegate's report of the conference proceedings, the board of the Leeds Industrial Society agreed on 15 June to accept vouchers from the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association up to a maximum value of £10,000.<sup>(16)</sup> However, it would appear that while these deliberations were taking place the Association had experienced a change of heart and was no longer quite so keen to guarantee its resources in order to obtain credit from co-operative societies. At a meeting of the Credit Vouchers Committee in Barnsley on Tuesday 22 June, a small deputation was appointed to meet representatives of the Association 'when requested'.<sup>(17)</sup> But such a request was never forthcoming and no further reference to an agreement with local societies appears in the Association's minutes until 4 September, when it was tersely recorded that 'this Council cannot recommend issuing vouchers'.<sup>(18)</sup> Although no explanation for this 'u-turn' appears in the Association's minutes, it is perhaps not too difficult to understand. Ironically, the date of the Leeds conference of Yorkshire societies coincided with that on which

the Association's funds were finally exhausted by the distribution of strike pay. It may well be that the remarkably rapid depletion of its assets convinced the Association's executive committee that the large-scale commitment of future resources on co-operative society vouchers was inappropriate. The rapidity with which the Association's assets were depleted during the lock-out can be seen from Table 9.1 which is reproduced from the minutes of the YMA for 1926:

TABLE 9.1

YMA ASSETS AT COMMENCEMENT OF LOCK-OUT:-

	£	s	d
Amount deposited with C.W.S. Bank	353,788	18	5
Amount deposited with Barclays (Deposit A/C)	159,355	6	3
Amount deposited with Barclays (Current A/C)	25,054	6	4
Amount in Political Fund	12,000	0	0
Amount in subsidiary funds	34,000	0	0
Total	584,198	11	0
Received since from MFGB - per Russia etc.	75,000	0	0
Overdraft arranged on properties etc.	65,000	0	0
Total Assets	£724,198	11	0

PAYMENTS

Lock-out pay (First Week)	148,078	15	5
Lock-out pay (Second Week)	149,597	1	3
Lock-out pay (Third Week)	150,898	10	0
Lock-out pay (Fourth Week)	150,800	0	0
Lock-out pay (Fifth Week)	75,000	0	0
Total	674,374	6	8
Present Balance	49,824	4	4
	£724,198	11	0

The Association was able to make one further benefit payment before announcing on 11 June that its funds 'and also monies forwarded by the

MFGB have been exhausted. Therefore, any further payment must be made on borrowed money either in cash or in kind.<sup>(19)</sup> It was clearly hoped that some at least of the money required for this purpose could be borrowed from the C.W.S., for during the following week the Association wrote to the Society's General Committee asking if they were 'prepared to make advances without security'.<sup>(20)</sup> (Emphasis added) The C.W.S. replied to the effect that this was contrary to their policy but offered Herbert Smith, the Association's President, an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Society's Finance Committee. In his best 'nowt-doing' style, Smith replied that as the Committee were not prepared to depart from their policy on the matter there was not much point in meeting. Smith went on to express surprise at the C.W.S. decision which he warned, in slightly less than veiled terms, 'must be considered and dealt with by their members when they return to work'.<sup>(21)</sup> At a Yorkshire divisional meeting of co-operative societies at Ripponden in July, C.W.S. officials were clearly embarrassed when the Morley delegate, Mr. Dixon, asked if it could really be true that the banking department of the C.W.S. had refused an overdraft to the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association. For the Society, Mr. Hayhurst replied: 'you have put a question to me I would rather not answer. We have refused an overdraft to the Miners' Association in Yorkshire because they did not bank with us, nor had they any security.'<sup>(22)</sup> Certainly, the Y.M.A. could now offer no security, but to claim that the Association 'did not bank with us' was to say the least a little harsh, given that prior to the dispute the union had in excess of £350,000 on deposit with the C.W.S.

The Y.M.A.'s decision not to issue vouchers as they had done in 1921 clearly presented co-operative societies and local miners' unions in Yorkshire with something of a dilemma, for the Co-operative Union had recommended that all credit transactions should be made with the Association's central office and not with its local branches. Yorkshire

societies were reminded of this recommendation in a circular letter dated 30 June from Mr. Goodenough, secretary of the North Eastern Section of the Co-operative Union.<sup>(23)</sup> But in the following weeks co-operative societies in Yorkshire mining districts were subjected to increasing pressure from local miners' branches requesting credit facilities for their members. At a committee meeting on 3 August, for example, the board of the Barnsley British Society resolved to write to Mr. Goodenough 'stating that as the Y.M.A. had not yet agreed to the issue of vouchers and as we are being pressed to accept vouchers to be issued by local branches, would he consider it any infringement ... of his circular of June 30 if we do accept these vouchers'.<sup>(24)</sup> Goodenough's reply cannot have been very encouraging for on 7 September the Barnsley Society responded to a request for credit from the Wharnccliffe Woodmoor Branch by stating that 'if they can arrange the matter through the Y.M.A. we shall be prepared to favourably consider it'.<sup>(25)</sup> Not all Yorkshire societies appear to have followed the Co-operative Union's advice, however, for by 11 September 1926 the Doncaster Mutual Co-operative and Industrial Society had already extended credit totalling more than a thousand pounds to the Bullcroft and Edlington branches of the Y.M.A.<sup>(26)</sup>

The major obstacle in Yorkshire to local agreements between miners' unions and retail societies was also present in the North East where the Durham Miners' Association was known to disapprove of such arrangements. This was made clear by William Richardson, the Association's general secretary, at a meeting of the Special Industrial Committee and representatives of the M.F.G.B. on 19 January 1926. Speaking of local credit arrangements made during the mining dispute of 1921, Richardson stated that in Durham 'where there were about 150,000 men walking about the mines they (the Association) did not take responsibility but some of the lodges did. They received a communication in

1921 deom (sic) some Co-operative Societies and had had to reply that they were not responsible and did not believe in the system.' (27)

At the commencement of the lock-out in 1926 the Association again stressed that its headquarters 'could not accept responsibility as guarantors for any agreement entered into by local lodges'. (28)

When asked for advice from the Windy Nook Society on the question of credit towards the end of May, Mr. Stodard of the Co-operative Union's Northern Section appeared anxious that the Kirkintilloch Society's unfortunate experience following the 1921 dispute should not be repeated in Durham. Pointing out that the county miners' association had refused to become involved, Stodard explained that 'any question of the issue of vouchers must therefore be one between the local lodge, and the society, and the situation so far as the local lodges being of themselves, a separate legal entity, was the deciding factor with regard to the legality of any such agreements being enforceable at law'. (29) Apparently, the precise legal status of local miners' lodges was far from clear and the Co-operative Union urged those societies which decided to enter credit agreements to ensure that extreme care was taken in their wording.

Given this concern with the enforceability of agreements, it is perhaps remarkable that of the fifteen or so Durham co-operative societies whose records have so far been consulted, only two expressed reluctance to issue vouchers because of legal considerations. The first of these was the Bishop Auckland Society which on 1 July reported that it had 'not yet considered the question of issuing vouchers to Trade Union Lodges as there are legal difficulties in the way'. (30) When faced with a deputation from the Victoria Garesfield Miners' Lodge requesting a credit voucher scheme, the Blaydon Society's committee also pointed to the legal difficulty involved, but in this case it would appear that this factor was not the most important one in the committee's decision to refuse the lodge's request. The Society's minutes reveal

that:

The meeting, after lengthy consideration of this request decided ... in view of our past unpleasant experience of the 1921 Lock-Out, and the advice of the Co-operative Union Legal Department, which pointed out the illegality of us allowing credit on such terms and in contradiction to the Society's rules, that we were unable to allow credit to the Miners' Lodges.<sup>(31)</sup>

One suspects that this decision, which was arrived at by fourteen votes to two, owed more to the bitter memory of bad debt and legal action against a number of local miners' lodges following the 1921 lock-out, than to the sacrosanctity of Co-operative Union advice.

As far as other Durham co-operative societies are concerned it is not always easy from their records, even where they have survived intact, to discover whether they gave credit or not to local miners' lodges in 1926. The minutes of the Jarrow and Hebburn, Willington, Swalwell, Hetton Downs, and Darlington co-operative societies, for example, make no specific reference to credit being either granted or refused to local miners' lodges. The Sherburn Hill, Easington Lane and South Hetton, Ryhope and Silksworth, Pittington, and Windy Nook societies, on the other hand, are all known to have agreed to credit voucher schemes with local miners' unions.<sup>(32)</sup> The West Pelton<sup>(33)</sup>, Station Town, Coxhoe<sup>(34)</sup>, and Consett<sup>(35)</sup> societies are also reported to have made some form of credit agreement with Durham miners' lodges.

All Durham societies entering such agreements appear to have proceeded with similar caution to that shown at Windy Nook, where it was agreed to supply credit vouchers to local miners' lodges 'providing that sufficient safeguards, and security to satisfy the requirements of the Society be given'.<sup>(36)</sup> The Pittington Society agreed to credit schemes with the Sherburn Hill, Hetton Lyons and North Hetton lodges

but refused similar facilities to the Belmont lodge of the Durham Miners' Association because it could give the society no guarantee of repayment.<sup>(37)</sup> Agreements were very carefully drawn up, usually by the societies' solicitors, and often contained quite rigid conditions. In some cases the debts incurred by the lodges were to carry interest charges ranging from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 6 per cent.

Strangely, perhaps, the relatively widespread practice in Durham of societies entering into credit voucher schemes with local miners' lodges does not appear to have extended across the border into the Northumberland coalfield, although here the evidence is of a negative rather than positive nature. Nowhere in the records of the sixteen Northumberland co-operative societies so far examined is there any specific reference to such arrangements, although as we shall see, many of them granted credit facilities to individual society members.<sup>(38)</sup> The Tweedside Industrial Co-operative Society did agree to accept vouchers issued by 'Scremerston M.R.F.C.', but this organisation was probably a 'miners' relief fund committee' rather than a union lodge as such.<sup>(39)</sup> An examination of the minutes of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association throws no additional light on the position in Northumberland, for they too contain no reference to policy on the question of credit arrangements with co-operative societies.<sup>(40)</sup>

It must be stressed, of course, that even where miners' county organisations were prepared to give their backing to voucher or other credit schemes with co-operative societies, it was by no means certain that agreement would be reached. In September 1926 the Leicester Miners' Association 'made an unsuccessful attempt to borrow £15,000 in the form of credit vouchers for its members from the Coalville Co-operative Society'.<sup>(41)</sup> This failure must have surprised and disappointed the Association's executive committee, for in 1921 they had received an interest-free loan of £23,000 from the same society and 'had repaid

every penny'.<sup>(42)</sup> Early in October the Association again approached the Coalville Workingmen's Society for a loan, but on this occasion only £7,500 was requested 'as many miners have now resumed work'.<sup>(43)</sup> This approach was also unsuccessful, and the decisive factor here was possibly the Association's financial position, which even before the dispute began was hardly a healthy one. In South Wales an attempt by the executive committee of the S.W.M.F. to raise a loan with the co-operative movement to aid the running of communal kitchens also ended in failure<sup>(44)</sup>, and again the reason would appear to be that the Federation could not provide adequate security.

In fact, and contrary to Farman's views, it was not too difficult for miners' unions, regional or local, to secure loans or overdrafts from the C.W.S., provided they were able and willing to offer satisfactory security. The minutes of the C.W.S. General Committee between July and December 1926 contain several instances of successful applications by local miners' organisations for loans or overdrafts. A few examples may serve to indicate both the scale of assistance provided by the C.W.S., and the Society's interpretation of the term 'satisfactory security': In some cases the arrangements were on a very modest scale, like the overdraft of £100 granted in August to the Victoria Garesfield lodge of the Durham Miners' Association on the security of deeds to a freehold house in Low Spennings. In others, the amounts involved were rather more substantial. The committee of the Bolden Colliery Lodge applied in August for an overdraft of £1,000 to allow them to give some financial assistance to single miners who, under the terms of the Merthyr Tydfil Judgement, were unable to obtain relief from the Poor Law Guardians. The lodge was granted an overdraft of £1,000, extended by a further £500 in September on the security of the deeds to the miners' hall which was valued at £2,000. On 28 June a deputation from the Marsden Lodge of the Durham Miners' Association applied to the Newcastle branch of the

C.W.S. for an overdraft of £6,000 on the security of deeds to property consisting of the miners' hall and a number of houses, valued together at £6,400. The deputation explained that the lodge had some four thousand members and that the loan would be repaid by a levy of the members within a short time of work being resumed at the colliery. In line with the Society's normal policy of allowing only fifty per cent of the nominal value of security offered, the lodge was eventually granted an overdraft of £3,200. The largest overdraft agreed to by the C.W.S., certainly to a local union, was one of £4,750 to the Dawdon Miners' Lodge in July, on the security of deeds to property including the miners' hall, institute and library, and two houses valued in total at £6,345. The money was required to make relief payments to the lodge's locked-out members. It was agreed that the overdraft would be repaid by a levy of one shilling per week on the colliery's 4,650 employees.

It is very noticeable from the C.W.S. Minutes that with very few exceptions the local unions prepared to put forward their property as security for overdrafts to assist their members were lodges of the Durham Miners' Association. It may be, of course, that the practice was more widespread, and that not all such transactions were recorded in the minutes of the C.W.S. The Northumberland Colliery Mechanics Association, for example, is known to have deposited the deeds of a property in Falcon Street, Newcastle, as security for an overdraft of £400 with the C.W.S. Bank. (45)

### Regional Pattern

Generally, where arrangements were made between co-operative societies and miners' unions, credit was extended on only a relatively limited scale. The Doncaster Mutual Society, for example, which in October 1926 had a membership in excess of 23,000, decided that total credit

to local branches of the Yorkshire Minerworkers' Association should be limited to £3,000.<sup>(46)</sup> There were, of course, notable exceptions to this general rule, such as the Ryhope and Silksworth Society in Durham which on 22 October 1926 reported that the aggregate issue of credit vouchers by miners' lodges under agreements with the Society numbered 2794 per week, 'representing a money value of £1027'.<sup>(47)</sup> Even when allowance is made for the fact that retail prices were relatively low in 1926, however, the total value of credit extended by co-operative societies to trade union branches did not compare favourably with the total advanced in 1921. In replies to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, sixty-five societies claimed to have supplied goods to the value of £131,215 on trade union security<sup>(48)</sup>, less than 21 per cent of the total estimated to have been advanced during the much shorter mining dispute in 1921. It is clear from Table 9.2 that credit agreements of

TABLE 9.2: VALUE OF GOODS SUPPLIED ON CREDIT TO MEMBERS ON THE SECURITY OF THE MINERS OR OTHER TRADE UNIONS.

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Midland	£ 3,558
Northern	73,848
North-Eastern	15,232
North-Western	1,035
Scottish	11,524
Southern	135
South-Western	10,422
Western	15,461
Total	<u>£131,215</u>

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, pp.54-5.

this kind were far more common in the North East than in any other coalfield area. More than fifty-seven per cent of the total credit

known to have been extended to trade unions during the coalmining dispute of 1926 was advanced by societies in the Northern Section of the Co-operative Union, which was made up of the counties of Cumberland, Durham, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Northumberland, and Westmorland.

Furthermore, it would appear from the available evidence that retail societies in the county of Durham provided a fairly large proportion of the credit extended to miners' unions in the Northern Section. A further interesting feature of the table is its indication that the practice of extending credit to local miners' unions was not at all common in the Midland Section of the Co-operative Union, which included important coalmining districts in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Staffordshire. According to the Co-operative Union survey only £3,558 was extended in this way in 1926, a very small sum indeed when compared with the assistance given by only one Midland Section society during the coalmining dispute of 1921. In the course of that dispute the Ripley Co-operative Society in the Derbyshire Coalfield 'gave direct assistance to the value of £1,370, lent £10,000 to the Derbyshire Miners' Association, and accepted thousands of pounds worth of Notts Miners' Association vouchers'.<sup>(49)</sup> Some of the reasons for the observed interregional differences in 1926 have already been discussed and will be considered again, along with their possible impact on the course of the mining dispute, after the co-operative movement's aggregate contribution to the relief of the miners and their families has been assessed.

#### Credit to Individual Members

Co-operative societies also approached the question of granting credit to individual members with considerable circumspection during the lock-out, and in many cases it was decided that little if any

extension of existing credit arrangements could be made. Again, an important factor in the response of local societies was provided by their experiences following the dispute in 1921. Paul Jeremy has suggested that in South Wales such experiences had a decisive influence upon the policies of both co-operative retail societies and private traders during the stoppage:

Any chance of retailers awarding generous credit terms in 1926 was destroyed by their memories of how the 1921 lockout in South Wales created a wave of bankruptcies and left a huge accumulation of debts, many still uncleared. Saddled once again with another lockout the grocers had to balance against their reliance on the custom of miners' wives the risk of repeating the difficulties of 1921. Most decided upon strictly limited credit for families they trusted would clear their debt as rapidly as possible. These reservations also affected the policy of the Co-operative Societies in South Wales whose efforts had done much to sustain the coalfield in 1921. This time they decided upon very small credit arrangements to be provided to members who had to agree on quick repayment after the lockout ended or by cash or by earmarking their quarterly dividend once the coalfield returned to work. (50)

There were other factors, too, which tended to make retail societies less willing or able to provide large scale credit facilities to their members than had been the case in 1921. During the five years leading up to the General Strike, periods of unemployment or short-time working and outbreaks of industrial unrest had adversely affected the trade of many societies in coalmining areas. Such obstacles to the granting of generous credit facilities in 1926 were emphasised by the co-operative press during the early stages of the

lock-out:

Societies in mining areas are thus placed in a difficult position; owing to the depression in trade and other causes operating prior to the stoppage, these organisations are not so well equipped to meet the situation as they were in 1921, when they responded generously to the appeal of the mining community. (51)

Since the stoppage in 1921 a number of co-operators had been unsuccessfully advocating that retail societies should set aside emergency funds in order to provide their members with credit when it was most urgently needed. The folly of disregarding this advice was later outlined in the editorial columns of the Co-operative News:

Many societies have not yet cleared debts from members outstanding from 1921. Co-operative Committees, if we are to judge from present circumstances, are not prepared to learn from experience. Otherwise societies would have been prepared with funds to meet the present emergency, and instead of taking risks in the way of credit, would be advancing sums to members out of funds set aside from past surpluses. (52)

However sympathetic they may have been, therefore, none but the very largest retail societies had the financial resources necessary to provide their members with credit for more than a relatively brief period. In most mining districts the ability to grant extended credit on a large scale depended to a very great extent upon whether the retail societies could make similar arrangements with their own suppliers. But as we have seen, the C.W.S. had already made it perfectly clear that extended credit for the supply of goods was out of the question, unless the societies were able to provide adequate security. This ruling by the C.W.S. created considerable consternation in South Wales, where the

financial position of many retail societies was reported to be particularly unhealthy. Early in May representatives of nine retail societies from the Merthyr, Aberdare, and Rhondda areas met to consider the advisability of adopting a uniform policy on the question of supplying goods on credit to their members. During this meeting the representatives reported on the financial position of their respective societies, and it quickly became apparent that 'the majority of them would be able to render little or no assistance to their members by way of credit'.<sup>(53)</sup> It was agreed that the Mid-Rhondda Society should write to the board of the C.W.S. to discover just what was required from local societies in terms of security for goods supplied on credit, and at the same time 'to appeal for generous consideration of societies in their desire to render assistance to those of their members who remained loyal to them since 1921'.<sup>(54)</sup>

When this appeal was considered by the general committee of the C.W.S. on 11 June it was decided that the Society was unable to accede to 'requests for credits outside the limits prescribed in our circular letter of 8th February last'.<sup>(55)</sup> The general committee did suggest, however, that if arrangements could be made for Guardian vouchers to be made out in the name of the C.W.S., the Society would agree to treat the vouchers as cash. The committee further suggested that 'failing such an arrangement, we obtain from each society an authority addressed to the Guardians to pay us all monies due to the local Societies in respect of the Vouchers, and that, during our pleasure, we treat such vouchers as the equivalent of cash payments by the respective Societies to whom they are issued'.<sup>(56)</sup>

These suggestions were not favourably received, however, when they were subsequently considered by a joint-committee of the nine retail societies. To begin with, it was considered inadvisable for societies to approach the clerks to local boards of guardians to ask

if relief vouchers could be made out in the name of the C.W.S. (Perhaps the societies were aware that such an approach would almost certainly have proved abortive, for a Ministry of Health ruling later laid down that board of guardian relief vouchers should be made out in the name of a shop of the recipient's choice.) The Society's alternative suggestion was ruled out on the grounds that 'it would create the impression that the Local Societies were in a bad way'.<sup>(57)</sup>

Eventually, however, a compromise formula seems to have emerged whereby local societies in South Wales were granted a certain amount of extra credit by the C.W.S. However, by September the financial position of retail societies in South Wales and consequently their ability to provide credit to their members, had deteriorated further. At a meeting of the C.W.S. Finance Committee on 22 and 23 September it was reported 'that it is now becoming difficult to execute the Societies' weekly orders without allowing their accounts to rise somewhat, and that it is now becoming necessary, if we are to keep the Societies together, to allow extended credit'.<sup>(58)</sup> The C.W.S. general committee agreed to the South Wales societies' credits being extended subject to a representative from the Society's Cardiff depot 'enquiring and being satisfied that in each district the pits will re-open within a reasonable time'.<sup>(59)</sup>

In other mining districts, too, during the lock-out, retail societies sought extra help from the C.W.S., although it is not always clear whether this was required solely to enable the societies to provide their members with credit. The Churwell, Flockton, and Tyne Docks Societies, for example, approached the C.W.S. for overdrafts on the grounds of the heavy withdrawals of share capital by members during the dispute.<sup>(60)</sup> Other societies explained their need for overdraft facilities by reference to such factors as 'the depression caused by the coal dispute' and 'the drain on resources in consequence of the mining stoppage'. In such cases it is not known if any part of the required over-

draft was ear-marked for the purpose of extending credit to their locked-out members.

A number of societies, however, quite clearly sought financial assistance from the C.W.S. in order to continue providing their members with credit. On 14 July a deputation from the Cannock Co-operative Society in the Staffordshire coalfield applied to the manager of the C.W.S. Bank for an overdraft of £27,000 'for the purpose of supplying goods to members in distress by means of vouchers issued against the members' Share Capital up to £1 per week per member'.<sup>(61)</sup> The C.W.S. agreed to allow an overdraft of £15,000 on the security of the deeds to the Society's property, which stood in the balance sheet at over £35,000.<sup>(62)</sup> At the Cannock Society's request the overdraft was extended by £3,000 in August and a further £3,000 in October 'to enable them to continue supplying their members on food vouchers to the extent of 10s0d per week, which is deducted from each members Share Capital'.<sup>(63)</sup>

### Regional Pattern

There were, then, in 1926 a number of economic factors which tended to reduce the retail societies' ability or willingness (and sometimes both) to provide their members with credit. Where assistance was provided societies were generally anxious to avoid 'excessive', 'indiscriminate' or 'promiscuous' credit being given. The Ashington Industrial Society in Northumberland which decided at a special meeting in June that no more than eight weeks' credit should be allowed to any one member<sup>(64)</sup>, was one of many societies which introduced temporal limits to credit advanced. Special consideration was often given to 'loyal' and 'trustworthy' members, with but few societies being prepared to grant extensive credit to any member already in debt when the dispute began. On 5 May 1926 the committee of the Broomhill Equitable Society issued to its departmental managers a confidential 'black list' con-

taining the names of more than one hundred society members, with instructions that they were not to be supplied with goods on credit. Following an examination of outstanding accounts a further twenty-three members were subsequently added to the list.<sup>(65)</sup>

In an attempt to avoid the possibility of members not repaying any credit advanced, a number of societies demanded written guarantees that outstanding accounts would be settled when work was resumed in the pits. With the same objective in mind, the Ashington Industrial Society attempted to persuade the local colliery company to collect any outstanding debts by weekly deductions from the men's wage packets.<sup>(66)</sup>

As the dispute dragged on an increasing number of societies imposed tighter restrictions on credit and in some cases it was stopped completely. The most reliable estimate available of total credit advanced to individual members during the lock-out is once again derived from information collected by the Co-operative Union, although it must be remembered that replies to the Union's questionnaire were received from only just over half of the affiliated societies. Nevertheless, working on the not unreasonable assumption that societies which advanced credit were more likely to reply than those which advanced none, the Co-operative Union figures, whilst underestimating the actual total, may not be too far wide of the mark. In all, 226 societies claimed to have advanced credit to their members amounting to £465,697, only about £60,000 less than had been granted in this way during the stoppage in 1921. As can be seen from Table 9.3, by far the largest regional total was advanced by co-operative societies in the Western Section of the Co-operative Union, which embraced the counties of Brecknock, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Gloucester, Hereford, Monmouth, and Pembroke. This was a remarkable achievement given the financial difficulties reported by the retail societies in South Wales.

TABLE 9.3: CREDIT EXTENDED BY CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES TO THEIR MEMBERS DURING THE COALMINING DISPUTE OF 1926 -- DERIVED FROM REPLIES TO THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION QUESTIONNAIRE.

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>AMOUNT (£s)</u>
Midland	34,991
Northern	101,307
North-Eastern	47,493
North-Western	29,940
Scottish	38,484
Southern	11,520
South-Western	40
Western	<u>201,922</u>
Total	<u>£465,697</u>

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.55.

When assessing the total contribution of local societies to the relief of distress in mining areas, it is evident not only that the response could vary considerably from one society to another, but also that significant inter-regional variations were present. To some extent both the intra- and inter-regional differences can be explained in terms of those factors already considered, which affected an individual society's willingness or ability to provide relief. Such factors do not fully account, however, for the fact that credit advanced to individual members and local miners' unions was not evenly distributed throughout the coalfield areas, but concentrated disproportionately in South Wales, the North East, and parts of Yorkshire. In these areas additional factors stimulating societies to provide assistance were present as a consequence of the existence, on a scale not found in other coal producing regions, of large communities dependent almost entirely upon the mining industry for their livelihoods. Within such communities co-operative societies were subjected to far greater social and political

pressures to provide relief than societies in more mixed communities.

In his study of the Northumberland and Durham coalfields Anthony Mason comments that in mining areas 'the Co-operative Societies did not have much choice. They had to stand by their members, many of whom were miners, and their connections with Labour were such that they could not remain inactive whilst families in their districts experienced hard times'.<sup>(67)</sup> The undoubted influence of such social and political pressures, however, should not be overestimated. As we shall see, they were not supplemented to any great extent by economic pressures, for even in those areas dependent almost totally on the mining industry, co-operative society sales generally stood up remarkably well during the dispute. Because of this, co-operative societies did in fact 'have a choice', and despite considerable sympathy for the miners and their families and a genuine concern to provide assistance, remained determined that their financial stability should in no way be jeopardised as a result.

- (1) Co-operative Union Ltd., Scottish Section Minutes 1926.

In his account of the national stoppage, Christopher Farman states that on the eve of the strike 'the Co-operative Wholesale Society had urged the retail societies to withhold credit from strikers.' (Farman, *op. cit.*, p.164.) In fact, this is not strictly correct for the Society's memorandum merely warned that the C.W.S. was not prepared to grant credit facilities to trade unions or retail societies without proper security.

- (2) Co-operative Union Ltd., Central Board Minutes, 1926.  
 (3) Special Industrial Committee Minutes, 19 January 1926,

- (4) On 31 December 1925, the North Stafford Miners' Federation still owed £46,400 to co-operative societies on 'Food Voucher Account'. National Unionist Association, The Test of Trade Unionism, 1926, p.19, copy in T.U.C. Library, HD 5366.
- (5) J.W. White and R. Simpson, Jubilee History of West Stanley Co-operative Society Ltd. 1876-1926, 1926, p.188.
- (6) Blaydon Co-operative Society Committee and Quarterly Meetings' Minutes, 1926. D.R.O. D/Co/BL 21.
- (7) Special Industrial Committee Minutes, 18 December 1926.  
T.U.C. Box 123.
- (8) When the extent of outstanding debt was first discovered, the Co-operative Union gave serious consideration to the advisability of circulating the details to its affiliated societies. At meetings of the Central Board on 9 and 10 April 1926, the Chairman 'deprecated any attempt to pillory the trade union movement in their report, and that would be the effect of publishing outstanding accounts'. The Scottish Section representative even questioned 'the advisability of circulating amongst the members of their societies the report concerning the attitude the co-operative movement and trade union movement should take up in the event of the threatened stoppage in the mining industry becoming an actual fact'. He thought an atmosphere of suspicion would be created amongst their members and 'if matters came to a head there might be a run on societies' share capital'. Co-operative Union Minutes 1926.
- (9) Co-operative News, 5 June 1926.  
The Warwickshire Miners' Association returns to the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for the year ended 31 December 1925 show as liabilities 'due to tradesmen in respect of Food

Vouchers £13,489' and 'due to Midland Bank, Food Voucher Account, £454'. The Association's cash in hand at this date amounted to only £4,196 - from table produced in National Unionist Association pamphlet, op. cit., p.19.

See Appendix Y for full details.

- (10) Doncaster Gazette, 7 May 1926.
- (11) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.
- (12) Details in the minutes of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society, 1926.
- (13) *ibid.*
- (14) Co-operative Union Ltd., North Eastern Section Minutes 1926.
- (15) *ibid.*
- (16) Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.
- (17) Co-operative Union Ltd., North Eastern Section Minutes 1926.
- (18) Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.
- (19) *ibid.*
- (20) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 18 June 1926.
- (21) *ibid.*
- (22) Co-operative News, 17 July 1926.
- (23) Details in Barnsley British Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.
- (24) *ibid.*
- (25) *ibid.*
- (26) Doncaster Mutual Co-operative and Industrial Society Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (27) Special Industrial Committee Minutes, 19 January 1926,  
T.U.C. Box 123.
- (28) See Windy Nook and District Industrial Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/WN 14.
- (29) *ibid.*
- (30) Bishop Auckland Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926,  
D.R.O. D/Co/Da 73.

- (31) Blaydon Co-operative Society Committee and Quarterly Meetings'  
Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/BL 21.
- (32) Jarrow and Hebburn Co-operative Society Committee and Quarterly  
Meeting Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/JH 14.
- Willington Co-operative and Industrial Society Ltd. Committee  
Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/Da 113.
- Swalwell Co-operative Society Minutes of Board Meetings 1926,  
DRO D/Co/SW 5.
- Hetton Downs Amicable Industrial Society Quarterly Reports and  
Balance Sheets, T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC 1066/3.
- Darlington Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926,  
DRO D/Co/Da 24.
- Sherburn Hill Co-operative Provision Society Quarterly and  
Committee Meeting Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/SH 13-14.
- Easington Lane and South Hetton Co-operative Society Committee  
Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/SH 34-35.
- Ryhope and Silksworth Industrial and Provident Society Minutes  
1926, DRO D/Co/RS 15.
- Pittington Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926,  
DRO D/Co/SH 47.
- Windy Nook and District Industrial Co-operative Society Committee  
Minutes 1926, DRO D/Co/WN 14.
- (33) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 30 September 1926.
- (34) Co-operative News, 12 June 1926.
- (35) A. Mason, op. cit., p.397.
- (36) Windy Nook and District Industrial Co-operative Society Committee  
Minutes 1926, D.R.O. D/Co/WN 14.
- (37) Pittington Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926,  
DRO D/Co/SH47.

## (38) Northumberland Co-operative Society Records consulted:

Amble Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, N.R.O. 361/12.

Ashington Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926,  
NRO. 1794/23.

Bedlington Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Annual  
Return for Year Ending 6 November 1926, NRO. 360/9.

Blyth Co-operative Society Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1926,  
NRO. 1807/1.

Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes  
1926, NRO. 1795/3.

Felton District Co-operative Society Quarterly, Half-Yearly  
and Committee Meeting Minutes 1926, NRO. 362/2.

Guide Post Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, NRO.

Newbiggin District Industrial and Provident Society Minutes  
and Quarterly Reports 1926, NRO. 1798/19, 1798/3.

Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Society Minutes 1926,  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC 120/44.

North Shields Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, T.W.C.C.A.D.  
ACC 1067/1.

Seaton Valley Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, NRO. 920/3.

Throckley District Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, T.W.C.C.A.D.  
ACC 1062/15.

Radcliffe Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Balance  
Sheets and Reports 1926, NRO. 363/5.

West Wylam and Prudhoe Co-operative Society Quarterly Reports  
1926, NRO. 368/13, and Local Branch Minutes 1926, NRO. 368/14.

Fourstones and Newbrough Industrial and Provident Society  
Committee Minutes 1926, NRO. 402/9.

## (39) Tweedside Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, NRO. 1799/16.

- (40) Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association Minutes  
1926, NRO. 759/68.

In an attempt to discover the reasons for the apparent difference in policy between Northumberland and Durham, I consulted Anthony Mason at the University of Warwick's Centre for the Study of Social History, who also had looked at North-East co-operative society records whilst researching his doctoral thesis. Dr. Mason replied: 'I can only suggest that you look in papers of the Northumberland Miners' Association to see whether there was any discussion about approaching the local co-operative societies, either in a body or individually. I agree with you that it does seem a bit strange.'

Letter dated 13 March, 1981.

- (41) C.P. Griffin, 'The Leicestershire Miners and the Mining Dispute of 1926', International Review of Social History, 22, 1977, p.300.
- (42) Co-operative News, 4 September 1926.
- (43) *ibid.*, 2 October 1926.
- (44) P. Jeremy, *op. cit.*, p.70.
- (45) Northumberland Colliery Mechanics Association Minutes 1926,  
N.R.O. 574/6.
- (46) Doncaster Mutual Co-operative and Industrial Society Finance Committee Minutes 1926.
- (47) Ryhope and Silksworth Industrial and Provident Society Minutes 1926, D.R.O. D/Co/RS 15.
- (48) Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.54.
- (49) Comradeship and the W heatsheaf, No.55, July 1926.
- (50) P. Jeremy, *op.cit.*, p.67.
- (51) Co-operative News, 5 June 1926.
- (52) *ibid.*, 21 August 1926.

- (53) C.W.S. General Committee Minutes, 20 May 1926.
- (54) *ibid.*
- (55) *ibid.*, 11 June 1926.
- (56) *ibid.*
- (57) *ibid.*
- (58) *ibid.*, 24 September 1926.
- (59) *ibid.*
- (60) *ibid.*, 19 August, 2 September, 3 December 1926.
- (61) *ibid.*, 16 July 1926.
- (62) *ibid.*
- (63) *ibid.*, 5 August, 14 October 1926.
- (64) Ashington Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926,  
N.R.O. 1794/23.
- (65) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes  
1926, N.R.O. 1795/3.
- (66) Ashington Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926,  
N.R.O. 1794/23.
- (67) A. Mason, *op. cit.*, p.398.

## CHAPTER 10

IMPACT OF THE DISPUTE ON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIESShare Capital Withdrawal

Clearly, the impact of the mining dispute in 1926 was felt most severely by societies in the mining areas themselves and in the heavy industrial areas adversely affected by the relative scarcity of coal supplies. During the early stages of the stoppage any savings the miners may have had were quickly eroded, and many societies became alarmed at the extent of share capital withdrawals by their members. In replies to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, 252 societies reported that share capital had been withdrawn as a consequence of the stoppage and the details in sectional order are presented in Table 10.1:

TABLE 10.1: CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY SHARE CAPITAL WITHDRAWN AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE MINING DISPUTE.

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>SHARE CAPITAL WITHDRAWN (£s)</u>
Midland	355,716
Northern	707,340
North-Eastern	551,285
North-Western	210,565
Scottish	332,605
Southern	4,288
South-Western	60,175
Western	187,683
	<u>Total £2,409,657</u>

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.55.

Particular concern was expressed in those mining areas in which

the locally elected boards of guardians required applicants to realise part of their co-operative share capital holdings before becoming eligible for poor law relief. Although this practice was not confined to any particular region, nowhere did it arouse more indignation than in parts of Nottinghamshire, where its adoption seems to have been particularly widespread. Representatives of approximately twenty local societies with a total membership of 90,000, attended a meeting of the Nottingham District Conference Association on 21 June 1926<sup>(1)</sup>, to consider the action of relieving officers in the area who were refusing to issue relief tickets to society members unless they produced their membership pass books. Furthermore, relieving officers were demanding that local societies provide certificates to verify that the books were entered up to date.<sup>(2)</sup>

Several representatives at the conference clearly felt that local poor law guardians were adopting such a policy, not merely to fulfil their legal obligation to establish an applicant's means, but in a deliberate attempt to discriminate against co-operative trading. A representative of the Hucknall Society claimed that it was an 'attempt to cripple the co-operative movement', and in support of such allegations it was stated that unlike co-operative society members, traders at private shops were not requested to produce bank books or other evidence of their means.<sup>(3)</sup> Instructions circulated to all relief staff by the clerk to the Easford Union on 17 June 1926, appeared to add weight to such claims, for they related exclusively to co-operative society members:

BASFORD UNION

COAL STRIKE EMERGENCY RELIEF

CLERKS NOTE TO RELIEF STAFF<sup>(4)</sup>

Co-operative Societies.

1. Each person in receipt of relief and trading at the Co-op

stores must be asked to produce his or his wife's Share Pass Book on the visit next following the date the request is made.

2. A note should be made on the case paper stating the name of the society and branch on which the voucher is issued.
3. When share book is produced a short note should be made of the amount standing to the owner's credit.

Particular note of the date and amount of any recent withdrawal should be made.

4. Relief should not ordinarily be given to anyone who has £2 or more standing to his or his wife's credit in the stores.
5. Failure to produce share book in accordance with instruction (1) will entail discontinuance of relief unless some bona-fide reason is given.
6. Special note showing name, address and amount of relief granted should be made in all cases where no further application for relief is made after a request for the production of the share book has been made, and enquiries at once instituted to ascertain whether such person has obtained relief when he was not destitute.

The harmful effects of such discrimination, it was argued, would extend far beyond the large-scale withdrawal of members' share capital. It was feared that members applying for relief to the local board of guardians would request vouchers exchangeable at private shops rather than submit their pass books for examination, and that this would lead to a damaging decline in society sales.<sup>(5)</sup>

As a means of averting both these possibilities it would appear that the co-operative movement seriously considered amending standing orders which legally obliged societies to repay shareholders' capital

on demand. The implications of such a step were discussed on 21 June at a meeting between A.V. Alexander, Secretary to the Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Congress, and H.W.S. Francis, Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Health.<sup>(6)</sup> Two days later, more formal discussions took place between representatives of the co-operative movement, including Alexander, and Sir Kingsley Wood, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, during which consideration was given to the effect that such an amendment would have upon the administration of poor law relief. Wood conceded that if co-operative societies did decide to renounce their obligation to repay on demand, boards of guardians would not be able to take the value of claimants' share capital into account when assessing relief. But he warned that 'any attempt to discriminate between the share capital of applicants for relief and of other persons would raise very difficult questions', and that there was little possibility that the existing legal position could be altered.<sup>(7)</sup>

Nevertheless, Wood did give an undertaking that if any board of guardians was in fact discriminating against societies, he would take steps to ensure that they extended their enquiries to include all forms of savings. Subsequently instructions to this effect were issued by the Ministry of Health to the Basford Guardians, who in July reported that they had made arrangements to investigate all cases impartially, whether the applicants were co-operative society members or not.<sup>(8)</sup> Whether the Basford, or any other board of guardians, was in fact deliberately discriminating against co-operative societies in this way is difficult to judge, although when challenged the boards naturally denied that such a policy was practised. In July, for example, the Clerk to the Mansfield Union informed a deputation from local co-operative societies that 'there is no ground for suspecting that inquiries as to means are only made in cases where applicants ask for an order on

a co-operative society, and that the Guardians take into account means from all sources, including Post Office Savings, War Loan, Pensions, Compensation etc.'. (9)

In at least one instance, however, evidence does exist which tends to show that discrimination in favour of co-operative society members was being practised. At a meeting of Chester-le-Street Guardians on 12 May 1926, the union's relieving officers were instructed not to require production of co-operative store pass books by applicants for relief. (10) An official investigation into the administration of poor law relief in Chester-le-Street noted this decision and made the following observations: 'These Store Pass Books in a mining district are the best source of information from which the Relieving Officers can ascertain the private means of applicants for relief. The Chairman of the Board was Chairman of one of the largest Co-operative Societies in the district and the Chairman of the Emergency Committee was Vice-Chairman of the same Society.' (11)

From the co-operative society records so far examined, fears that share capital withdrawals would lead to bankruptcies in mining areas appear largely to have been groundless. Although the share capital of many societies declined temporarily as a consequence of the dispute there is no evidence to indicate that their long-term financial viability was impaired. The share capital of the Mansfield and Sutton Society, for example, increased by £4,058 between December 1925 and December 1926 (12), despite the fact that during the dispute £170,000 had been withdrawn by members. (13)

### Society Sales

As far as co-operative society sales were concerned, the impact of the dispute was largely confined to the mining areas, although all societies were initially affected to some extent by the shortage of

coal supplies. Societies' existing stocks were rapidly depleted despite strict limitations on the sale of coal to domestic consumers imposed by the Board of Trade's 'Coal (Emergency) Directions, 1926'. The trade of the London Co-operative Society's coal department, which normally averaged about ten-thousand tons a month, 'shrank almost to nothingness' according to one account<sup>(14)</sup>, and the Liverpool Society's coal sales fell from one thousand to ninety tons a week.<sup>(15)</sup> In an attempt to obtain their share of any additional supplies which became available, most societies appear to have followed the Co-operative Union's advice to seek representation on the various 'coal emergency committees', set up by local authorities to regulate coal supplies. The need for such representation was perhaps demonstrated in Derby where in May, the local emergency committee attempted to appropriate part of the Provident Society's coal stocks to replace supplies which the committee claimed had been sold to society members since the introduction of the restrictions.<sup>(16)</sup> Despite pressure from both the local and area controllers, the society's committee refused to allow the emergency coal committee to take any part of their supplies.<sup>(17)</sup> Other societies were less fortunate, however. In replies to the Co-operative Union questionnaire, thirty-seven societies reported that part of their coal stocks had been commandeered by the local authorities.<sup>(18)</sup>

In addition to the requirements of their regular customers, considerable quantities of coal were also needed by co-operative societies for use as fuel in the production of various foodstuffs, and their anxiety to obtain the necessary supplies presented societies with a dilemma quite early in the mining dispute. Enterprising colliery owners, coal contractors and shippers were quick to exploit the coal shortage by importing large supplies from the Polish, French, Dutch, Westphalian, Belgian and American coalfields, which were then offered

to local authorities at suitably inflated prices.<sup>(19)</sup> By availing themselves of imported coal supplies societies could considerably alleviate their own difficulties, but only at the cost of possible damage to the miners' cause.<sup>(20)</sup> A number of co-operative societies were clearly reluctant to take this course of action. On 29 June, the committee of the Barnsley British Society issued explicit instructions to their buyer that foreign coal was not to be purchased.<sup>(21)</sup> Similarly, the Bristol Society's management committee decided not to handle any part of the first consignment of foreign coal to the port in June<sup>(22)</sup>, and in August the Royal Arsenal Society also decided against retailing imported coal.<sup>(23)</sup>

Not all co-operative societies were quite so fastidious, however. At a Western Divisional meeting of the Co-operative Union in July, it was revealed that the directors of the C.W.S. had felt compelled to obtain supplies of imported coal in order to keep running its various works.<sup>(24)</sup> During the following months the emergency coal regulations were eased considerably as a consequence of the imported coal supplies and the gradual resumption of work at collieries in parts of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire, and the societies' coal sales gradually began to recover.

Within the mining districts themselves, co-operative society sales during the lock-out inevitably reflected the diminished purchasing power of many of their members. The wives of miners and other workers unemployed or on short-time as a consequence of the dispute reserved their meagre resources for the purchase of essential foodstuffs. Worn-out furniture, clothing, and boots and shoes were endlessly repaired or patched up, with the result that society sales of such goods fell significantly in many areas. The average weekly expenditure of the Kilsyth Co-operative Society's 3,500 members, three-quarters of whom were miners, fell from 30s to only 22s.6d during the dispute<sup>(25)</sup>, and as in all mining

districts most of this reduction occurred at the expense of 'non-essential' goods and services. (Orders to the C.W.S. soap works from mining centres declined markedly, because, it was suggested, 'miners through not working do not find it necessary to wash themselves so often or so thoroughly'.)(26)

As an alternative to dismissing staff now underemployed as a consequence of this reduced demand for many goods and services, a number of societies introduced short-time working or negotiated wage reductions with their employees in an attempt to reduce labour costs. Some societies introduced such measures only in the worst affected departments, but others insisted that any sacrifice should be shared equally by all employees. Managerial staff of the Throckley District Society, for example, were asked to submit to a temporary reduction in salary<sup>(27)</sup>, and the wages of the Broomhill Equitable Society's manager were reduced from 85s to 75s for the period of the stoppage.<sup>(28)</sup> Generally, the introduction of short-time working or wage reductions seem to have met with remarkably little opposition, although the decision of the Conisborough Working Man's Society to place its assistants on short-time was reversed by the members at the half-yearly general meeting in September 1926.<sup>(29)</sup>

Grocery sales, which accounted for by far the largest proportion of co-operative societies' trade in 1926, were maintained at an unexpectedly high level in many mining areas, although results did tend to vary from one society to the next. Relatively few co-operative societies seem to have experienced any really dramatic decrease in grocery sales during the dispute and many actually recorded an increase over the corresponding period in 1925. Although this increase was usually smaller than would have been expected during 'normal times', it was sufficient in a number of cases to more than offset losses sustained in other departments. The Mansfield and Sutton Society, for

example, recorded a total increase in sales of over £42,000 for the half-year ended September 1926, despite reduced takings in all its departments other than grocery.<sup>(30)</sup>

That grocery sales were generally maintained at a remarkably high level in mining areas during the lock-out was largely due to the policy adopted by local boards of guardians of dispensing relief partly or wholly in the form of vouchers exchangeable at local shops. The reluctance of most boards of guardians to grant more than a small proportion of any relief in cash stemmed from their anxiety to prevent it being 'squandered' on non-essential goods such as tobacco and alcohol, and in many cases local stores were required to supply only recommended items to the recipients of poor relief vouchers. As the recommended items were usually confined to a restricted range of foodstuffs, a very large proportion of the poor relief granted in mining areas during the dispute was inevitably channelled to local grocery stores.

In mining districts, therefore, it became a major concern of societies to ensure that poor relief vouchers issued to their members were actually exchanged at co-operative stores. Many co-operative societies appear to have experienced no difficulty in this respect. In some colliery districts of South Wales, for example, it was reported that board of guardian relief vouchers represented more than sixty per cent of societies' weekly trade.<sup>(31)</sup> The Mansfield and Sutton Society estimated that guardian relief vouchers to the value of £4,000 a week were being cashed at local branches.<sup>(32)</sup>

Occasionally, however, the policies adopted in some Poor Law unions led to strained relations with local co-operative societies. It was within the competence of any locally-elected board of guardians to determine whether their tickets could be exchanged throughout the poor law union or only at certain shops.<sup>(33)</sup> At a meeting of the Dewsbury Board in July, a co-operative representative protested that during the

previous fortnight six societies in the district had received only £26 of the £962 distributed in the form of poor relief vouchers.<sup>(34)</sup>

A number of other societies also complained to local boards that they were not receiving a fair share of any relief vouchers issued, and it was alleged that some relieving officers with friends in private trade were deliberately discriminating against co-operative stores.<sup>(35)</sup>

Usually such charges were strongly denied by local guardians, who claimed that the choice of store at which the vouchers were to be exchanged was left entirely to the individual applicant. It was admitted at a meeting of the Leigh Board of Guardians in June, however, that the relief committee had refused to issue vouchers made out to the local co-operative society, because it was felt that the applicants could get better value for their money at other stores in the area.<sup>(36)</sup>

In fact, complaints of unfair treatment by boards of guardians in the distribution of relief vouchers were more frequently voiced by private traders than by co-operative societies. This was particularly the case in certain parts of the north east, where it was alleged that boards were boycotting private traders in favour of co-operative societies. On 13 May, the Birtley Relief Committee decided that all relief vouchers given during that week should 'be issued on the various branches of the Co-operative Societies'.<sup>(37)</sup> This prompted private tradesmen in the district to ask that a deputation be received by the committee to discuss the distribution of relief vouchers, but the request was refused.<sup>(38)</sup>

During the first month of the dispute the Ministry of Health received a number of letters from individual private traders in the north east, and from a firm of Newcastle solicitors, complaining of similar discrimination by local boards of guardians.<sup>(39)</sup> The Auckland, Lanchester, and Chester-le-Street boards, in particular, were felt to be acting against the interests of private traders by restricting their food vouchers to co-operative stores. Chester-le-

Street guardians defended their decision to refuse to issue vouchers exchangeable at private shops by claiming that clerical difficulties were minimized by using only the local co-operative stores.<sup>(40)</sup> Although this excuse was described as 'sheer nonsense' by H.W.S. Francis at the Ministry of Health, he was obliged to concede that nothing could be done officially to compel the guardians to change the practice.<sup>(41)</sup>

Generally, the adverse effects of the dispute on co-operative societies resulting from credit extension, share capital withdrawal and reduced sales appear to have been only transient, though clearly recovery was most delayed in those districts in which coalmining provided the major source of employment. Here, the enforced wage reductions and periods of unemployment or short-time working continued to affect co-operative trading and made it more difficult to recover debts incurred by miners during the lock-out. But fears that many societies in mining areas would be forced to close their doors were clearly exaggerated. Although the number of retail societies fell markedly during the inter-war period, from 1,357 in 1919 to 1,065 in 1940<sup>(42)</sup>, little if any of this fall can be attributed to the impact of the mining dispute and its aftermath. Amalgamation rather than bankruptcy accounts for the reduction during this period with society membership more than doubling, from 4,131,000 to 8,716,000.<sup>(43)</sup> The fortunes of the co-operative movement continued to improve and did not begin their rapid and apparently irreversible decline until after the Second World War.

- (1) The Nottingham District Conference Association was a sub-unit of the Co-operative Union and represented the following retail societies: Annesley, Calverton, Cinder Hill, Hucknall, Kirkby, Langwith, Mansfield and Sutton, Netherfield, Nottingham,

Pleasley, Radcliffe on Trent, Ruddington, Selston, Southwell, Stanton Hill, Stapleford and Sandiacre, Warsop Vale and Woodborough.

Also represented at the meeting on 21 June were the Ilkeston, Langley Mill and Codnor Park societies. P.R.O. MH 57/116.

- (2) Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Industrial Society Minutes, 1926.
- (3) Co-operative News, 26 June 1926.
- (4) Quoted in P.R.O. MH 57/116.
- (5) Co-operative News, 26 June 1926.
- (6) P.R.O. MH57/116.
- (7) *ibid.*
- (8) *ibid.*
- (9) Mansfield Union Minutes, Nottinghamshire Record Office, PUM1/36.
- (10) Chester-le-Street Union Guardian Minutes 1926, D.R.O. U/CS 14/1-14/2.
- (11) Quoted in M.E. Rose, The English Poor Law 1780-1930, 1971, pp.312-3.
- (12) Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Society Ltd., Committee Report for the Quarter ended 1 December 1926.
- (13) W. Henry Brown, Mansfield's Co-operative Advance 1864-1950, 1950, p.34.
- (14) W. Henry Brown, A Century of London Co-operation, 1928, p.144.
- (15) Co-operative News, 14 August 1926.
- (16) Derby Co-operative Provident Society Minutes 1926.
- (17) Co-operative News, 22 May 1926.
- (18) Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.51.
- (19) Doncaster Coal Emergency Committee Correspondence File, Doncaster Archives.
- (20) See A.J. Cook's article, 'Don't Handle Black Coal', in The Miner-worker, 19 June 1926.
- (21) Barnsley British Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.
- (22) Co-operative News, 19 June 1926.

- (23) Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Committee Minutes 1926.
- (24) Co-operative News, 17 July 1926.
- (25) P. and C. Carter, 'The Miners of Kilsyth in the 1926 General Strike and Lockout', in Our History pamphlet 58, Spring 1974, pp.10-11.
- (26) Co-operative News, 19 June 1926.
- (27) Throckley District Co-operative Society Minutes 1926,  
T.W.C.C.A.D. ACC 1062/15.
- (28) Broomhill Equitable Industrial Co-operative Society Minutes 1926, N.R.O. 1795/3.
- (29) Conisborough Working Man's Co-operative Society Minutes 1926.
- (30) Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Industrial Society Report and Balance Sheet for Half Year ended 1 September 1926. Nationally, the total trade of the 1,407 societies within the Co-operative Union showed a decrease of £1,525,196 in 1926 which concealed 'a slight increase in retail sales compensated by decreases in other branches of co-operative trade': The People's Year Book 1928, p.18.
- (31) Co-operative News, 19 June 1926.
- (32) *ibid.*, 5 June 1926.
- (33) P.R.O. MH57/94.
- (34) Co-operative News, 17 July 1926.
- (35) *ibid.*
- (36) *ibid.*, 26 June 1926. In many cases co-operative society prices were not in fact appreciably lower than those of private traders, although society members did of course receive a dividend, sometimes as high as 2s.6d in the pound on all their purchases. The payment of dividend on co-operative purchases was itself the subject of considerable controversy during the lock-out. Many boards allowed recipients of relief

to retain the dividend accruing from purchases made with relief vouchers, whilst others like the Doncaster board, insisted that all or part of the dividend should be paid to the guardians. Some boards even considered becoming, as a body, members of the local co-operative society, presumably in order to qualify automatically for dividend payments.

(37) M.E. Rose, *op. cit.*, p.313.

(38) P.R.O. MH57/116.

(39) *ibid.*

(40) *ibid.*

(41) *ibid.*

(42) A. Bonner, *op. cit.*, p.160.

(43) *ibid.*

CONCLUSIONS

The national coalmining dispute of 1926 was one of the longest and most bitter conflicts in the history of British industrial relations. Against almost insurmountable odds, a majority of miners and their families fought for seven months a determined rearguard action to protect standards which were already desperately low. Initially lacking adequate resources to survive a dispute of any duration and facing employers many of whom would accept nothing short of total surrender, the miners were further weakened by internal divisions arising to a large extent from the industry's differing market structure. In the inland coalfields which largely supplied the domestic market and where the employers could afford to offer more favourable terms enthusiasm for the struggle was from the start both patchy and at best lukewarm. Generally, this was not the case in those districts supplying the export market, for here the miners' resolve to resist was considerably bolstered, not only by more determined leadership and a long tradition of militancy, but also by the prospect of settlement terms involving longer working hours and drastically reduced rates of pay.

From very early in the dispute, however, continued resistance in all districts, but most vitally in the wavering Midland coalfields, depended to a considerable extent upon the ability of the miners to feed themselves and their families. The panoply of devices adopted in the attempt to achieve this objective is now legend. To communal undertakings such as soup kitchens provisioned by innumerable and exhausting fund-raising activities, were added various forms of individual self-help, the most notable of which was the picking or 'scratting' of coal from colliery waste heaps. In many mining districts co-operative societies, despite the memory, imagined or real, of unfair treatment at

what were widely regarded as totally unacceptable levels cannot seriously be doubted. Less clear though is the Ministry's role in the dispute. Throughout the lock-out the Ministry continued to stress its impartiality and to claim that its sole concern was the extremely difficult task of ensuring observance of the law as laid down by the Merthyr Tydfil judgement. But whilst not suggesting that the miners' cause was sabotaged by a conspiracy of reactionary guardians and the Ministry of Health, it is not too difficult to identify instances where ministerial claims to impartiality appear less than convincing. Certainly board of guardian decisions in some unions drastically to reduce poor law scales or even to stop out-relief entirely were never denounced by the Ministry with the same degree of vehemence as were attempts to afford relief on a more generous scale than the one recommended by Circular 703.

Lacking both the spirit and resources engendered in more closely-knit mining communities, dependent upon unsympathetic or even openly hostile poor law regimes, and not sharing the same threat to their standards as miners in other areas, many colliers in the Midland coal-fields simply did not have the stomach to continue the fight. From quite early in the dispute they returned to work in a steadily increasing stream. The resumption of near normal working at many collieries in the Midlands mortally damaged the already slim prospects of a national settlement on terms acceptable to the majority of miners. Nevertheless, in South Wales, the North East and Yorkshire most miners continued to resist until, their resources at last exhausted, they finally recognised the inevitability of defeat and agreed to the negotiation of local settlements. Many of the miners who were fortunate enough to find their jobs still waiting for them returned to work in the pits after months of struggle and privation on terms less 'generous' than had been available at the start of the dispute.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A and B: Circular letter to employees of the New Hucknall Colliery Company.
- Appendix C: Lock-out payments to Y.M.A. members in the South Yorkshire area, 1926.
- Appendix D: Provision of school-meals in mining areas; particulars of provision and cost during the period 1 May to 31 December 1926.
- Appendix E: Boards of Guardians (Default) Act, 1926.
- Appendix F: Table showing number of males engaged in mining and quarrying in 1926 and the proportion of single men.
- Appendix G: List of poor law unions classified by the Ministry of Health in 1926 as being 'Coal Mining Unions'.
- Appendix H: The amount of loans and overdrafts sanctioned in mining poor law unions in respect of current expenditure.
- Appendix J: Statement showing the poor law unions in mining districts in which the monthly average number of unemployed outdoor poor and their dependants exceeded the proportion of 1 in 10 of the population.
- Appendix K: Statement showing the poor law unions in which the number of persons in receipt of poor law relief reached or exceeded 1 in 10 of the population.
- Appendix L: Number of persons in receipt of domiciliary poor law relief (excluding casuals and persons in receipt of medical relief only) in 78 poor law unions in England and Wales.
- Appendix M: Table showing in which of the six months June-November 1926, the highest out-relief figures were registered in mining districts.

- Appendix N: Table showing at what date occurred the largest decrease in the amount of out-relief in mining districts.
- Appendix P: Table showing the amounts of relief given on loan by certain poor law unions during the mining disputes of 1921 and 1926 and the amounts recovered by 31 March 1928.
- Appendix Q: Cost of out-relief during the coalmining dispute.
- Appendix R: Editorial comment in the Morning Post, 12 January 1926, following A.J. Cook's week-end speech in Port Talbot when he declared that the co-operative movement would, in the event of a national stoppage, 'be the victualling movement for the fighting forces of labour'.
- Appendix S: Table showing the number of co-operative retail societies, the membership, the population, and the percentage of membership to the population in the counties of England in 1921.
- Appendix T: Membership of Retail Distributive Societies, 1924-26.
- Appendix U: List of geographical sections into which the Co-operative Union groups co-operative societies, with a note of the areas covered by each section.
- Appendix V: Questionnaire circulated by the Co-operative Union to 1,303 societies following the General Strike and Lock-out of 1926.
- Appendix W: The National Strike, May 1926, as it affected co-operative societies.
- Appendix X: The Miners' Unions: extracts from returns made to Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for year ended 31 December 1925.
- Appendix Y: The Coal Stoppage, 1926, as it affected co-operative societies.

## APPENDIX A

Circular letter to employees of the New Hucknall Colliery Company.

NEW HUCKNALL COLLIERY COMPANY LIMITED.

(New Hucknall, Bentinck, Welbeck, & Annesley Collieries)

HUTHWAITE, Mansfield, Notts. Sept: 10th 1926.

Please read the enclosed circular carefully, & act on it.

Briefly, the best terms that we can offer are,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hours a day, the same wages as were prevailing at the time of the stoppage, including the subsistence wage, the full terms of which have been published. You will suffer no reduction of wages, nor will you have anything stopped for police protection.

Adequate protection will be provided both coming to and going from work, & for your dependants while you are at work. Please report any case of intimidation to the Manager, which will be promptly dealt with.

If you want any arrangements making for transport to and from your employment, kindly let the Manager know and he will endeavour to arrange it.

If you really want to work, you must make an effort, and we will assist you all we can. Thousands of men have returned to work in the County of Notts - Why should you not join them?

For the NEW HUCKNALL COLLIERY COMPANY LTD.,

(Sgd.) P. MUSCHAMP.

Chief Agent.

Circular letter to employees of the New Hucknall Colliery Company.

NEW HUCKNALL COLLIERY COMPANY LIMITED.

(New Hucknall, Bentinck, Welbeck & Annesley Collieries)

HUTHWAITE, Mansfield, Notts. Sept. 17th 1926.

Some of the so-called Miners' Leaders keep coming round and telling you to hold out a little longer because negotiations are in hand, which will be completed very soon.

They are deceiving you - no negotiations are in hand, and no better offer than that already made - which thousands of men in the County are satisfied to work under - can possibly be made.

It is easy enough to ask the rank and file to be loyal to the Federation, but ask yourself how much YOU have had out of the Federation to keep you and your family during the Strike. Ask your Leaders how much they have had and how much they have sacrificed while you have been sacrificing everything. If they want you to stay out ask them to keep you and your family.

Ask them to account for all the "Red" money received - how much have you had out of it? Ask them how much money is still left in the Federation, and what is being done with it.

Ask them if they are really going without wages, and how much they draw in expenses. They are very fond of telling you to "tighten your belt" - have you ever seen them tightening theirs? You personally had no say about striking, you were never balloted on it, and therefore are free to choose for yourself.

Don't be duped any longer, recover your freedom, come back to work and keep your own family in comfort. Every protection will be given to you, and if you have any difficulty in getting to and from the pit, we will do our best to help you. Report any case of intimidation.

You have been told that you are cowards if you do not stand by your fellow-miners in other coalfields. Surely you are far greater cowards if you do not stand by your own wife and children and come back to work.

For the NEW HUCKNALL COLLIERY COMPANY LIMITED.

(Sgd.) P. MUSCHAMP.

Chief Agent.

## APPENDIX C

Lock-out payments to Y.M.A. members in the South Yorkshire area, 1926.

	LOCK-OUT PAY			AMINISTRATIVE COST		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
SHEFFIELD	50,124	. 12	. 6	368	. 2	. 3
DONCASTER	138,701	. 11	. 7	1,147	. 8	. 9
HEMSWORTH	48,178	. 14	. 8	360	. 11	. 8
ROTHERHAM	96,885	. 11	. 7	735	. 3	. 6
WORKSOP	59,480	. 2	. 3	415	. 2	. 6
MEXBOROUGH	83,511	. 17	. 3	433	. 6	. 11

Source: Yorkshire Mineworkers' Association Minutes 1926.

## APPENDIX D

Provision of school-meals in mining areas.

Particulars of provision and cost during the period 1 May to  
31 December 1926.

Local Education Authority	Highest number of children fed in any one week	Total number of meals provided	Estimated total cost £	Average cost per meal d
Cumberland	1,352	403,321	4,244	2.5
Whitehaven	-	-	-	-
Workington	383	148,112	1,499	2.4
Derbyshire	466	20,487	184	2.2
Chesterfield	20	865	17	4.7
Ilkeston	1,327	114,884	1,621	3.4
Durham	64,746	19,387,504	283,781	3.5
Hartlepool	189	23,240	484*	5.0*
Felling	2,457	731,657	9,954	3.3
Hebburn	1,476	212,872	3,104	3.5
Gateshead	1,330	270,072	4,745	4.2
South Shields	2,396	292,761	6,102	5.0
Sunderland	4,430	1,103,618	15,649	3.4
West Hartlepool	434	63,933	666	2.5
Gloucestershire	3,964	484,163	4,594/	2.3/
Kent	2,349+	217,642*	3,611*	3.5*
Lancashire	20,540	2,180,646	24,436	2.7
Ashton-under-Lyne	98	33,265	499*	3.6*
Colne	63	8,205	205*	6.0*
Darwen	24	593	4*	1.5*
Leigh	1,538	218,581	3,196	3.5
Middleton	276	30,412	304*	2.4*
Widnes	7	655	10	3.5
Farnworth	785	120,462	1,741	3.5
Hindley	192	13,285	171	3.1
Ince	199	25,456	206	1.9
Radcliffe	90	17,960	449*	6.0*
Swinton and Pendlebury	815	139,508	1,899	3.3
Burnley	1,304	456,885	8,636	4.5
Oldham	158	28,632	489*	4.1*
St. Helens	6,742	1,965,890	26,467	3.2
Wigan	8,667	662,838	8,286	3.0

Local Education Authority	Highest number of children fed in any one week	Total number of meals provided	Estimated total cost £	Average cost per meal d
Leicestershire	1,556	98,612	712//	1.7//
Northumberland	1,516	243,499	2,029	2.0
Blyth	2,109	217,430	4,953	5.5
Wallsend	-	-	-	-
Newcastle-on-Tyne	2,776	418,300	3,528	2.0
Nottinghamshire	3,609	437,509	5,469	3.0
Shropshire	893	44,109	665	3.6
Somerset	17	1,180	18	3.5
Staffordshire	1,664	232,563	2,298	2.3
Cannock	4,301 §	459,344 §	600	- §
Rowley Regis	294	9,989	146	3.5
Tipton	31	3,915	35	2.2
Stoke-on-Trent	5,724	139,166	2,144	3.7
Walsall	-	-	-	-
West Bromwich	13	129	2	4.0
Warwickshire	3,212	125,452	1,387	2.7
Worcestershire	81	1,921	13	1.5
Dudley	107	1,643	14/	2.1/
Yorkshire (North Riding)	-	-	-	-
Yorkshire (West Riding)	5,720	641,814	6,259	2.3
Batley	128	9,827	175	4.3
Morley	-	-	-	-
Pontefract	548	52,981	610	2.8
Barnsley	5,145	1,108,011	10,977	2.4
Dewsbury	80	9,674	189	4.8
Rotherham	-	-	-	-
Sheffield	6,228	1,612,229	20,468	3.0
<u>Wales</u>				
Brecon	1,463	401,463	4,302	2.6
Carmarthen	4,279	1,201,177	10,194	2.0
Denbigh	6,541	768,243	7,501	2.3
Wrexham	199	15,642	271	4.2
Flintshire	49	1,636	24	3.5

Cont'd...

Local Education Authority	Highest number of children fed in any one week	Total number of meals provided	Estimated total cost £	Average cost per meal d
Glamorgan	19,452	6,468,043	72,526	2.7
Aberdare	6,337	1,890,207	17,247	2.2
Mountain Ash	3,707	1,531,558	13,045 <del>£</del>	2.0 <del>£</del>
Pontypridd	3,380	1,316,405	9,988 <del>£</del>	1.8 <del>£</del>
Port Talbot	915	175,765	2,563	3.5
Rhondda	18,050	5,986,006	57,715 <del>£</del>	2.3 <del>£</del>
Merthyr Tydfil	6,724	1,824,838	22,807	3.0
Monmouthshire	7,770	647,097	7,750	2.9
Abertillery	1,722	548,870	9,231	4.0
Ebbw Vale	440	7,817	96	2.9
Total	251,305	57,603,124	714,604	3.0

\* Expenditure based on average total cost per meal for previous year.

+ Majority of meals provided for payment.

~~£~~ Cost for food only.

§ In Cannock the feeding arrangements were in the hands of Voluntary Committees to which the Local Authority contributed a sum of £600. None of these figures have been included in the totals.

// In Leicestershire the figures quoted represent the cost to the Local Education Authority.

Source: Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1927, vol.204, cols. 583-6.

## APPENDIX E

Boards of Guardians (Default) Act, 1926.

1 — (1) Where it appears to the Minister of Health (in this Act referred to as "the Minister") that the board of guardians for any poor law union have ceased, or are acting in such a manner as will render them unable, to discharge all or any of the functions exercisable by the board, the Minister may by order under this Act appoint such person or persons, as he may think fit (whether qualified or not to be guardians for the union), to constitute the board in substitution for the then existing members of the board (who shall on the making of the order vacate their office) for such period, not exceeding twelve months, as may be specified in the order, and the persons so appointed shall be deemed for all purposes to constitute the board.

Until the expiration of the term of office of the persons appointed by the order (in this Act referred to as "the appointed guardians"), no person shall become a member of the board otherwise than by the appointment of the Minister.

Where any such order is made provision shall be made thereby, or by a subsequent order under this Act, for the holding of an election of members of the board to come into office on the expiration of the term of office of the appointed guardians, and with respect to the term of office of the guardians elected at that election.

(2) The Minister may at any time, and from time to time, by order extend, for a period not exceeding six months, the term of office of the appointed guardians.

An order made under this subsection shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament as soon as may be after it is made, and if either House within twenty-one days after the order has been laid before it presents an address to His Majesty praying that the order may be annulled, His Majesty may by Order in Council annul the order and it shall thenceforth be void, but without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done thereunder, or the making of a fresh order.

(3) An order made under this Act may —

- (a) contain such supplemental and consequential provisions as appear to the Minister to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of giving full effect to the order; and
- (b) be amended, varied or revoked by a subsequent order made under this Act.

(4) There may, out of any moneys in the hands of the appointed

guardians for the purpose of the exercise of the powers or the discharge of the duties of the board, be paid to the appointed guardians such remuneration, and to any persons appointed to advise the appointed guardians such reasonable allowance on account of travelling expenses and by way of subsistence, as the Minister may approve.

(5) If before the date on which an order is made under this Act in respect of any board of guardians the clerk or any other officer of the board has, on the directions of the Minister, incurred any liabilities in connection with the relief of the poor in the poor law union, the appointed guardians may discharge those liabilities out of any moneys in their hands as aforesaid.

2 — (1) This Act may be cited as the Board of Guardians (Default) Act, 1926.

(2) This Act shall not apply to Northern Ireland.

## APPENDIX F

Table showing number of males engaged in mining and quarrying and proportion of single men (1926).

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTY AND ASSOCIATED COUNTY BOROUGHES	NUMBER OF MALES OVER 12 YEARS ENGAGED IN MINING AND QUARRYING		
	SINGLE MEN	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE MEN TO TOTAL
<u>NORTHUMBERLAND</u>			
Newcastle upon Tyne C.B.	1,772	4,476	39.6
Tynemouth C.B.	685	1,712	40.0
Administrative County	19,510	49,629	39.3
<u>NOTTINGHAM</u>			
Nottingham C.B.	2,927	8,801	33.3
Administrative County	15,734	41,658	37.8
<u>SOMERSET</u>			
Administrative County	3,564	8,713	40.9
<u>STAFFORD</u>			
Burton-on-Trent C.B.	187	456	41.0
Stoke-upon-Trent C.B.	6,981	17,256	40.5
Walsall C.B.	976	2,964	32.9
Administrative County	17,318	45,882	37.7
<u>WARWICK</u>			
Administrative County	6,569	18,323	35.9
<u>WEST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE</u>			
Barnsley C.B.	2,565	6,549	39.1
Rotherham C.B.	1,472	4,085	36.0
Sheffield C.B.	2,269	6,152	36.9
Wakefield C.B.	1,078	3,011	35.8
Administrative County	48,757	128,848	37.8
Doncaster M.B. (included in Administrative County)	815	2,197	37.1
<u>CUMBERLAND</u>			
Administrative County	5,905	16,298	36.2

Cont'd...

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTY AND ASSOCIATED COUNTY BOROUGHES	NUMBER OF MALES OVER 12 YEARS ENGAGED IN MINING AND QUARRYING		
	SINGLE MEN	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE MEN TO TOTAL
<u>DERBY</u>			
Administrative County	27,131	66,648	40.7
Chesterfield M.B. (included in Admini- strative County)	2,198	5,319	41.3
<u>DURHAM</u>			
Gateshead C.B.	1,927	4,798	40.2
South Shields C.B.	3,981	8,826	45.1
Sunderland C.B.	1,079	3,253	33.1
Administrative County	56,463	143,494	39.3
<u>GLOUCESTER</u>			
Bristol C.B.	568	1,726	32.9
Administrative County	3,886	9,643	40.3
<u>LANCASHIRE</u>			
Bolton C.B.	1,509	3,863	39.1
Burnley C.B.	878	3,097	28.4
St. Helens C.B.	4,385	10,594	41.4
Wigan C.B.	5,133	12,624	40.7
Administrative County	28,253	75,053	37.7
<u>LEICESTER</u>			
Administrative County	5,126	14,144	36.2
<u>BRECON</u>			
Administrative County	2,686	6,441	41.7
<u>CARMARTHEN</u>			
Administrative County	5,985	14,573	41.1
<u>DENBIGH</u>			
Administrative County	5,198	13,334	39.0
<u>FLINT</u>			
Administrative County	1,780	4,481	39.7

Cont'd...

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTY AND ASSOCIATED COUNTY BOROUGHES	NUMBER OF MALES OVER 12 YEARS ENGAGED IN MINING AND QUARRYING		
	SINGLE MEN	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE MEN TO TOTAL
<u>GLAMORGAN</u>			
Merthyr Tydfil C.B.	5,794	14,502	40.0
Swansea C.B.	1,566	4,054	38.6
Administrative County	57,331	141,534	40.5
Aberdare U.D. (included in Administrative County)	4,883	12,168	40.1
Rhondda U.D. (included in Administrative County)	17,107	41,585	41.1
<u>MONMOUTH</u>			
Newport C.B.	114	328	34.8
Administrative County	24,358	61,158	39.8

Source: P.R.O. MH 57/119.

## APPENDIX G

Poor law unions classified by the Ministry of Health in 1926 as being 'Coal Mining Unions'.

England

<u>Cumberland</u>	Cockermouth, Whitehaven.
<u>Derbyshire</u>	Belper, Chesterfield.
<u>Durham</u>	Aukland, Chester-le-Street, Durham, Easington, Gateshead, Houghton-le-Spring, Lanchester, Sedgfield, South Shields, Sunderland, Teesdale.
<u>Gloucestershire</u>	Westbury-on-Severn.
<u>Lancashire</u>	Ashton-under-Lyne, Barton-upon-Irwell, Belton, Burnley, Leigh, Prescott, Warrington, Wigan.
<u>Leicestershire</u>	Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Market Bosworth.
<u>Northumberland</u>	Alnwick, Castle Ward, Hexham, Morpeth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tynemouth.
<u>Nottinghamshire</u>	Basford, Mansfield, Nottingham, Worksop.
<u>Somerset</u>	Clutton.
<u>Staffordshire</u>	Cannock, Cheadle, Leek, Lichfield, Stoke and Wolstanton, Walsall.
<u>Warwickshire</u>	Atherstone, Foleshill, Nuneaton, Tamworth.
<u>Worcestershire</u>	Dudley.
<u>Yorkshire</u>	Barnsley, Dewsbury, Doncaster, Hemsworth, Penistone, Pontefract, Rotherham, Tadcaster, Wakefield, Wortley.

Wales

<u>Brecon</u>	Crickhowell.
<u>Carmarthen</u>	Carmarthen, Llandilo Fawr, Llanelly.
<u>Denbigh</u>	Wrexham.
<u>Flint</u>	Hawarden, Holywell.
<u>Glamorgan</u>	Cardiff, Bridgend and Cowbridge, Gower, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath, Pontardawe, Pontypridd, Swansea.
<u>Monmouth</u>	Abergavenny, Bedwellty, Monmouth, Newport, Pontypool.

Source: P.R.O. MH 57/117.

## APPENDIX H

The amount of loans and overdrafts sanctioned in mining poor law unions in respect of current expenditure.

POOR LAW UNION	TOTAL AMOUNT OF OVERDRAFT AND/OR LOAN AUTHORISED		
	At 31 March '25	At 31 March '26	At 6 Dec. '26
	£	£	£
ABERGAVENNY	NIL	NIL	13,650
ALNWICK	NIL	NIL	6,000
ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH	NIL	NIL	28,000
ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE	50,000	NIL	15,000
AUCKLAND	NIL	40,000	159,000
BARNSLBY	NIL	NIL	290,000
BARTON-UPON-IRWELL	NIL	NIL	7,000
BASFORD	NIL	NIL	130,000
BEDWELLTY	364,000	549,000	994,000
BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE	45,000	30,000	207,000
BURNLEY	NIL	NIL	20,000
CANNOCK	3,000	NIL	30,000
CASTLE WARD	NIL	NIL	30,000
CHEADLE	NIL	NIL	2,000
CHESTERFIELD	NIL	NIL	115,000
CHESTER-LE-STREET	NIL	120,000	230,000
CLUTTON	NIL	NIL	12,000
COCKERMOUTH	50,000	50,000	87,000
CRICKHOWELL	25,000	25,000	71,000
DEWSBURY	NIL	NIL	250,000
DONCASTER	NIL	NIL	150,000
DURHAM	NIL	25,000	135,000
EASINGTON	NIL	NIL	245,000
FOLESHILL	5,000	NIL	2,000
GATESHEAD	50,000	120,000	270,000
GOWER	NIL	3,000	4,000
HAWARDEN	NIL	NIL	5,000
HEMSWORTH	NIL	NIL	180,000
HOLYWELL	NIL	NIL	5,000
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING	7,000	10,000	153,000
LANCHESTER	NIL	199,000	270,000
LEIGH	NIL	NIL	21,000

Cont'd...

POOR LAW UNION	TOTAL AMOUNT OF OVERDRAFT AND/OR LOAN AUTHORISED		
	At 31 March '25	At 31 March '26	At 6 Dec. '26
	£	£	£
LICHFIELD	NIL	NIL	8,000
LLANDILO FAWR	NIL	NIL	5,000
LLANELLY	NIL	25,000	75,000
MANSFIELD	NIL	NIL	120,000
MERTHYR TYDFIL	40,000	98,000	445,000
MONMOUTH	NIL	NIL	11,000
MORPETH	NIL	NIL	135,000
NEATH	75,000	75,000	225,000
NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE	100,000	60,000	225,000
NEWPORT (MON)	NIL	NIL	160,000
NOTTINGHAM	75,000	NIL	100,000
NUNEATON	NIL	NIL	13,000
PENISTONE	NIL	NIL	9,500
PONTARDAWE	10,000	6,000	71,000
PONTEFRACT	NIL	NIL	160,000
PONTYPOOL	NIL	NIL	67,000
PONTYPRIDD	NIL	75,000	470,000
PRESCOT	80,000	80,000	100,000
ROTHERHAM	NIL	NIL	170,000
SEDFIELD	NIL	NIL	75,000
SOUTH SHIELDS	140,000	120,000	250,000
STOKE AND WOLSTANTON	NIL	NIL	135,000
SUNDERLAND	NIL	15,000	100,000
SWANSEA	25,000	25,000	85,000
TADCASTER	NIL	NIL	85,000
TYNEMOUTH	NIL	NIL	284,000
WAKEFIELD	NIL	NIL	95,000
WARRINGTON	NIL	NIL	35,000
WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	NIL	NIL	15,149
WHITEHAVEN	NIL	NIL	62,000
WIGAN	NIL	10,000	235,000
WORKSOP	NIL	NIL	90,000
WORTLEY	NIL	NIL	22,500
WREXHAM	NIL	7,750	65,000

Source: The Labour Year Book, 1927, pp.269-70.

## APPENDIX J

Statement showing the Unions in Mining Districts in which the monthly average number of unemployed outdoor poor and their dependants exceeded the proportion of 1 in 10 of the population. (The unions given by name are placed in order of the magnitude of their figure.)

Proportion to Population	MAY 1926	JUNE 1926	JULY 1926	AUGUST 1926	SEPTEMBER 1926	OCTOBER 1926	NOVEMBER 1926	DECEMBER 1926
Over 4 in 10	-	HEMSWORTH HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING	HEMSWORTH HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING CHESTER-LE- STREET	HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING HEMSWORTH EASINGTON CHESTER-LE- STREET	HEMSWORTH HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING EASINGTON	HEMSWORTH EASINGTON HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING	EASINGTON HEMSWORTH HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING	-
From 3 in 10 to 4 in 10	-	CHESTER-LE- STREET BEDWELLY EASINGTON SEDFIELD LANCHESTER	EASINGTON SEDFIELD BEDWELLY LANCHESTER DURHAM	SEDFIELD BEDWELLY LANCHESTER DURHAM DONCASTER	SEDFIELD CHESTER-LE- STREET BEDWELLY LANCHESTER DURHAM MORPETH DONCASTER	SEDFIELD CHESTER-LE- STREET BEDWELLY LANCHESTER DURHAM MORPETH	SEDFIELD CHESTER-LE- STREET BEDWELLY LANCHESTER DURHAM MORPETH	EASINGTON HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING SEDFIELD
From 2 in 10 to 3 in 10	CHESTER-LE- STREET HOUGHTON-LE- SPRING BEDWELLY	9 UNIONS	12 UNIONS	12 UNIONS	12 UNIONS	12 UNIONS	10 UNIONS	LANCHESTER DURHAM BEDWELLY HEMSWORTH
From 1 in 10 to 2 in 10	15 UNIONS	22 UNIONS	21 UNIONS	22 UNIONS	20 UNIONS	16 UNIONS	17 UNIONS	13 UNIONS
TOTAL ABOVE 1 in 10	18	38	41	43	42	37	36	20

Source: Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, p.118.

## APPENDIX K

Statement showing the poor law unions in which, at the dates mentioned, the number of persons in receipt of poor law relief reached or exceeded 1 in 10 of the population.

Proportion of Population	24 April 1926	19 June 1926	14 August 1926	4 December 1926	26 March 1927
1 in 2	-	HEMSWORTH	-	-	-
1 in 3	-	HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING BEDWELLTY EASINGTON CHESTER-LE-STREET SEDFIELD LANCHESTER	HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING HEMSWORTH EASINGTON CHESTER-LE-STREET SEDFIELD BEDWELLTY LANCHESTER MERTHYR TYDFIL	EASINGTON HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING HEMSWORTH SEDFIELD BEDWELLTY LANCHESTER	-
1 in 4	-	MERTHYR TYDFIL DURHAM BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE PONTYPRIDD CRICKHOWELL BARNSELY MANSFIELD DONCASTER ROTHERHAM AUCKLAND	DURHAM DONCASTER PONTEFRACT BARNSELY MORPETH BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE PONTYPRIDD WORKSOP MANSFIELD CRICKHOWELL ROTHERHAM THORNE AUCKLAND NEATH	MORPETH DURHAM CHESTER-LE-STREET PONTEFRACT MERTHYR TYDFIL BARNSELY BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE DONCASTER CRICKHOWELL	-
1 in 5	-	MORPETH NEATH WORKSOP PONTEFRACT WREXHAM WIGAN	TADCASTER WIGAN TYNEMOUTH	PONTYPRIDD AUCKLAND NEATH ROTHERHAM	-
1 in 6	POPLAR	WHITTEHAVEN POPLAR GATESHEAD TYNEMOUTH CANNOCK SOUTH SHIELDS BASFORD NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME PONTYPOOL CHESTERFIELD	WHITTEHAVEN ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH POPLAR GATESHEAD PONTYPOOL SOUTH SHIELDS NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BASFORD CANNOCK WREXHAM WAKEFIELD	WHITTEHAVEN POPLAR SOUTH SHIELDS GATESHEAD TADCASTER	POPLAR

Cont'd...

Proportion of Population	24 April 1926	19 June 1926	14 August 1926	4 December 1926	26 March 1927
1 in 7	BERMONDSEY	WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH NEWPORT (MON) CASTLE WARD PRESCOT BERMONDSEY	CASTLE WARD CHESTERFIELD NEWPORT (MON) BERMONDSEY	TYNEMOUTH PONTARDAWE WIGAN BERMONDSEY	BERMONDSEY
1 in 8	LANCHESTER	MONMOUTH FOLESHILL WALSALL LICHFIELD	PONTARDAWE PRESCOT COCKERMOUTH MONMOUTH LLANELLY CLUTTON	NEWPORT (MON) COCKERMOUTH SUNDERLAND LLANELLY CASTLE WARD	--
1 in 9	GATESHEAD	STOKE AND WOLSTANTON COCKERMOUTH NUNEATON LLANELLY PONTARDAWE WAKEFIELD SUNDERLAND	FOLESHILL NUNEATON SUNDERLAND	CLUTTON WAKEFIELD PONTYPOOL	BETHNAL GREEN
1 in 10	CHESTER-LE-STREET AUCKLAND NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE MERTHYR TYDFIL BEDWELLTY	SOUTHWELL HEXHAM BETHNAL GREEN	WALSALL LICHFIELD BETHNAL GREEN HEXHAM STOKE AND WOLSTANTON ABERGAVENNY	BETHNAL GREEN ABERGAVENNY WORKSOP	-

Source: Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927, pp.127-28.

## APPENDIX L

Number of persons in receipt of domiciliary poor law relief (excluding casuals and persons in receipt of medical relief only), on the Saturday nearest to the sixteenth day of each of the under-mentioned months in 78 poor law unions in England and Wales. These unions account for about 85 per cent of the mining population.

POOR LAW UNION	1921			1926						
	16 APRIL	14 MAY	18 JUNE	15 MAY	19 JUNE	17 JULY	14 AUGUST	18 SEPTEMBER	16 OCTOBER	6 NOVEMBER*
<b>CUMBERLAND:</b>										
COCKERMOUTH	1,236	2,112	4,121	4,731	8,462	9,017	9,359	9,607	9,697	9,036
WHITEHAVEN	1,751	1,820	1,112	3,870	12,029	12,029	12,162	12,205	12,187	12,103
<b>DERBY:</b>										
BELPER	404	428	665	1,091	2,592	3,941	5,878	5,538	3,632	799
CHESTERFIELD	1,760	2,689	13,736	16,566	28,756	26,625	27,270	24,034	17,105	12,382
<b>DURHAM:</b>										
AUCKLAND	4,629	7,298	15,517	25,994	28,329	29,343	29,537	30,534	30,139	29,017
CHESTER-LE-STREET	856	858	847	28,854	35,937	40,418	40,951	36,921	35,934	35,794
DURHAM	897	938	942	6,881	27,088	30,580	29,008	30,008	29,839	30,306
EASINGTON	1,002	1,311	2,478	20,632	39,562	43,786	46,681	47,809	48,864	49,577
GATESHEAD	1,672	16,150	19,054	38,111	41,291	40,834	41,343	42,147	42,481	42,494
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING	918	4,917	2,343	14,549	26,781	27,707	28,980	27,840	28,049	28,410
LANCHESTER	1,665	15,603	24,801	10,239	41,961	42,222	42,541	42,342	43,110	41,937
SEDFIELD	493	1,588	1,643	2,130	15,105	16,532	17,173	16,949	16,788	16,658
SOUTH SHIELDS	3,919	9,330	22,096	16,840	35,661	35,788	36,411	36,965	37,605	37,217
SUNDERLAND	2,007	2,184	2,290	14,967	23,678	24,239	25,287	25,727	26,067	26,467
TEESDALE	251	272	425	252	950	1,013	1,015	1,028	1,004	974
<b>GLOUCESTER:</b>										
WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	386	396	399	339	3,794	3,677	388	802	387	370
<b>LANCASTER:</b>										
ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE	1,853	2,253	3,521	3,028	2,971	2,806	3,023	3,193	2,653	2,751
BARTON-UPON-IRWELL	447	554	574	3,029	3,984	4,369	4,557	4,550	4,067	4,116
BOLTON	1,194	1,271	1,381	5,190	10,421	9,910	5,268	5,930	5,601	5,810
BURNLEY	1,432	2,395	9,156	4,593	7,581	7,984	6,291	6,372	5,248	4,909
LEIGH	536	3,116	3,657	924	5,272	8,045	9,225	10,137	7,617	7,599

Cont'd...

POOR LAW UNION	1921			1926						
	16 APRIL	14 MAY	18 JUNE	15 MAY	19 JUNE	17 JULY	14 AUGUST	18 SEPTEMBER	16 OCTOBER	6 NOVEMBER *
LANCASTER - cont.										
PRESCOT	2,066	2,239	2,363	25,644	26,631	25,323	25,017	24,949	24,391	23,958
WARRINGTON	5,239	6,884	9,016	6,647	10,499	10,360	9,420	9,505	9,070	8,832
WIGAN	2,664	30,897	38,769	6,454	45,377	46,132	46,425	44,407	41,278	40,923
LEICESTER:										
ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH	454	475	563	707	9,086	11,481	10,946	8,818	5,403	1,822
MARKET BOSWORTH	258	250	239	256	1,534	1,783	1,349	582	391	248
NORTHUMBERLAND:										
ALNWICK	155	525	675	216	1,561	1,581	1,632	1,608	1,556	1,604
CASTLE WARD	418	897	1,301	3,384	7,384	7,687	7,865	7,445	7,693	7,332
HEXHAM	344	941	1,226	1,687	3,944	4,084	4,050	4,113	4,026	3,912
MORPETH	705	4,051	6,627	1,831	23,368	25,543	29,855	31,254	32,310	31,006
NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE	4,461	7,032	10,785	28,021	24,938	23,878	23,835	24,061	24,116	24,008
TYNEMOUTH	1,315	3,002	3,819	12,545	42,078	43,930	46,552	47,259	47,777	40,454
NOTTINGHAM:										
BASFORD	1,281	1,372	1,577	26,298	35,464	34,549	34,462	29,090	9,365	2,857
MANSFIELD	1,806	3,086	9,570	36,436	42,234	42,471	43,747	33,720	10,012	3,449
NOTTINGHAM	2,860	3,591	5,062	29,674	24,932	22,948	23,472	20,447	14,113	13,124
WORKSOP	4,563	7,802	10,885	4,546	15,742	18,243	18,360	17,473	15,176	12,714
SOMERSET:										
CLUTTON	566	820	619	1,140	2,405	2,848	3,836	4,395	4,574	4,574
STAFFORD:										
CANNOCK	2,877	4,819	9,916	4,264	11,575	11,843	10,891	8,200	1,153	920
CHEADLE	185	192	205	1,907	1,635	385	308	276	230	232
LEEK	1,011	2,116	1,783	3,308	3,579	3,046	2,597	2,392	2,097	1,828
LICHFIELD	410	627	1,118	560	6,257	5,817	5,341	931	683	608
STOKE AND WOLSTANTON	2,344	6,304	7,711	29,094	37,743	33,833	31,028	24,287	16,150	11,622
WALSALL	2,454	3,444	3,509	13,358	17,768	15,537	15,053	11,301	8,544	7,509
WARWICK:										
ATHERSTONE	140	149	169	179	905	837	1,034	609	165	180
FOLESHILL	352	624	475	225	4,907	4,301	4,595	3,813	355	273

Cont'd...

POOR LAW UNION	1921			1926						
	16 APRIL	14 MAY	18 JUNE	15 MAY	19 JUNE	17 JULY	14 AUGUST	18 SEPTEMBER	16 OCTOBER	6 NOVEMBER *
WARWICK - cont.										
NUNEATON	275	827	591	2,881	6,140	5,551	6,281	4,754	1,178	706
TAMWORTH	306	354	395	655	2,145	2,568	2,377	1,385	356	326
WORCESTER:										
DUDLEY	915	1,000	1,739	5,314	5,326	3,704	3,263	2,336	1,964	1,389
YORK, WEST RIDING:										
BARNSELY	1,785	1,937	2,094	9,652	43,607	50,032	50,827	50,570	50,309	49,284
DEWSBURY	1,256	2,046	4,886	2,668	5,212	6,223	6,379	6,276	5,506	3,862
DONCASTER	2,069	23,712	31,928	3,732	46,982	56,936	58,194	58,956	56,549	53,566
HEMSWORTH	1,838	15,280	18,186	6,474	28,293	30,070	26,854	26,753	26,549	26,074
PENISTONE	88	100	134	150	142	134	1,129	1,110	1,042	995
PONTEFRACT	1,128	9,697	16,461	8,385	22,891	31,339	31,089	31,432	31,548	31,238
ROTHERHAM	2,378	2,559	2,795	10,690	44,425	46,539	47,619	45,796	44,101	43,400
TADCASTER	143	233	856	321	2,613	7,245	7,432	7,381	7,156	6,747
WAKEFIELD	4,259	6,106	10,263	5,227	17,287	23,240	24,398	25,056	24,599	21,327
WORTLEY	326	524	2,262	706	2,773	4,099	3,984	4,165	3,876	2,740
BRECON:										
CRICKHOWELL	998	2,339	1,551	6,966	6,753	6,887	6,884	6,880	7,057	6,894
CARMARTHEN:										
CARMARTHEN	550	603	641	631	1,407	1,524	1,776	1,927	1,965	1,968
LLANDILO FAWR	559	981	1,112	770	1,253	1,545	1,851	2,214	2,399	2,484
LLANELLY	3,078	4,049	4,835	11,251	11,253	11,954	12,254	12,210	12,328	12,456
DENBIGH:										
WREXHAM	1,199	10,648	10,744	5,543	18,274	16,704	14,256	12,517	9,471	9,748
FLINT:										
HAWARDEN	409	702	1,305	1,342	2,046	1,779	1,581	1,259	999	1,011
HOLYWELL	1,084	3,148	3,552	3,929	4,141	3,780	3,498	3,145	2,738	2,301
GLAMORGAN:										
CARDIFF	4,677	6,314	6,891	15,090	15,850	15,222	15,608	16,840	15,995	16,540
BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE	4,295	16,781	19,096	8,891	36,149	34,946	35,520	35,512	34,810	34,081
GOWER	237	250	276	389	762	807	876	897	835	823

Cont'd...

POOR LAW UNION	1921			1926						
	16 APRIL	14 MAY	18 JUNE	15 MAY	19 JUNE	17 JULY	14 AUGUST	18 SEPTEMBER	16 OCTOBER	6 NOVEMBER *
GLAMORGAN - cont.										
MERTHYR TYDFIL	18,914	45,357	42,087	22,251	63,701	64,749	65,450	65,956	65,953	65,583
NEITH	7,078	9,688	20,780	21,469	31,647	31,781	33,077	32,268	31,171	30,892
PONTARDAWE	1,526	2,571	3,421	1,463	5,776	6,170	6,823	7,001	7,431	7,481
PONTYPRIDD	55,835	14,280	13,410	34,745	94,206	90,032	93,718	93,775	83,083	83,556
SWANSEA	8,229	16,382	14,518	11,920	11,617	11,771	12,816	12,796	13,063	13,835
MONMOUTH:										
ABERGAVENNY	451	501	909	2,462	2,858	2,969	3,030	3,268	3,478	3,368
BEDWELLTY	15,602	42,094	32,296	31,119	58,000	59,565	58,779	57,555	57,104	56,528
NEWPORT	1,839	3,513	18,759	6,765	28,586	28,983	28,733	27,205	27,074	26,716 +
PONTYPOOL	1,085	3,809	4,364	8,850	12,267	13,271	13,002	12,615	12,398	11,283
MONMOUTH	509	616	547	2,660	4,228	4,068	3,986	3,058	1,656	868

\* Latest date for which figures are available

+ Number on 30th October

Source: Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1926, vol.200, cols.23-6.

## APPENDIX M

Table showing in which of the six months June - November 1926, the highest out-relief figures were registered in mining districts.

JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
CHESTERFIELD	WHITEHAVEN	HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING
GATESHEAD	CHESTER-LE-STREET	SEDFIELD
WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	BURNELY	TEESDALE
BOLTON	WIGAN	BARTON-UPON-IRWELL
PRESCOT	ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH	ALNWICK
WARRINGTON	MARKET BOSWORTH	CASTLE WARD
HEXHAM	CANNOCK	MANSFIELD
BASFORD	TAMWORTH	WORKSOP
NOTTINGHAM	PENISTONE	ATHERSTONE
CHEADLE	ROTHERHAM	NUNEATON
LEEK	WORTLEY	BARNSLEY
LICHFIELD	BEDWELLTY	DEWSBURY
STOKE & WOLSTANTON	NEWPORT (MON)	HEMSWORTH
WALSALL	PONTYPOOL	TADCASTER
FOLESHILL		CRICKHOWELL *
DUDLEY		NEATH
WREXHAM		
HAWARDEN		
HOLYWELL		
BRIDGEND *		
PONTYPRIDD		
MONMOUTH		
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
BELPER	COCKERMOUTH	DURHAM
AUKLAND	LANCHESTER	EASINGTON
ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE	SOUTH SHIELDS	SUNDERLAND
LEIGH	MORPETH	NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE
CLUTTON	TYNEMOUTH	CARMARTHEN
DONCASTER	PONTARDAWE	LLANDILOFAWR
PONTEFRAC T	ABERGAVENNY	LLANELLY
WAKEFIELD		CARDIFF
GOWER		SWANSEA
MERTHYR TYDFIL		

\* Bridgend showed a peak in September as well.  
Crickhowell showed a peak in October as well.

Source: P.R.O. MH 57/119.

## APPENDIX N

Table showing at what date occurred the largest decrease in the amount of out-relief in mining districts.

BEFORE DECEMBER	11/12/26	18/12/26	25/12/26
WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE *	COCKERMOUTH	DURHAM
MARKET BOSWORTH	BARTON-UPON-IRWELL	WHITEHAVEN	EASINGTON
BELPER	BOLTON	AUCKLAND	GATESHEAD
CHESTERFIELD	PRESCOT	CHESTER-LE-STREET	HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING
LEIGH	WIGAN	SUNDERLAND	LANCHESTER
ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH	HEXHAM	WARRINGTON	SEDFIELD
BASFORD	MORPETH	CASTLE WARD	SOUTH SHIELDS
MANSFIELD	CLUTTON	NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE	TEESDALE
NOTTINGHAM	LEEK	TYNEMOUTH	BURNLEY <sup>+</sup>
WORKSOP	BARNSLEY	DONCASTER	ALNWICK
CANNOCK	HEMSWORTH	PONTEFRACT	PENISTONE
CHEADLE	ROTHERHAM	WORTLEY	CARDIFF
LICHFIELD	TADCASTER	CRICKHOWELL	BRIDGEND AND COWBRIDGE
STOKE AND WOLSTANTON	WAKEFIELD	CARMARTHEN	PONTARDAWE
WALSALL	LLANELLY	LLANDILOFAWR	
ATHERSTONE	WREXHAM	GOWER	
FOLESHILL	HAWARDEN	MERTHYR TYDFIL	
NUNEATON	HOLYWELL	NEATH	
TAMWORTH	PONTYPOOL	PONTYPRIDD	
DUDLEY		SWANSEA	
DEWSBURY		ABERGAVENNY	
MONMOUTH		BEDWELLY	
		NEWPORT (MON)	

\* There was a rise on 25/12/26 in the ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.

+ There was a rise on 18/12/26 in the BURNLEY UNION.

Source: P.R.O. MH 57/119.

## APPENDIX P

Statement showing the amounts of relief given on loan by certain poor law unions during the mining disputes of 1921 and 1926 and the amounts recovered by 31 March 1928.

POOR LAW UNION	DISPUTE OF 1921		DISPUTE OF 1926	
	AMOUNT GIVEN ON LOAN £	AMOUNT RECOVERED £	AMOUNT GIVEN ON LOAN £	AMOUNT RECOVERED £
BARNESLEY	46,892	38,284	274,628	45,208
EASINGTON	3,924	294	296,951	30,414
HEMSWORTH	58,000	47,409	175,400	33,360
LANCHESTER	63,724	NOT EXCEEDING 450	7,295	102
MERTHYR TYDFIL	142,842	33,278	356,367	19,836
MORPETH	7,168	6,314	140,252	25,000
SHEFFIELD	24,643	12,523	70,033	7,698
TYNEMOUTH	3,395	1,316	203,657	27,292
WAKEFIELD	17,000	9,000	128,681	13,337
WREXHAM	13,316	292	30,268	2,776
AUCKLAND	-	-	169,788	21,441
CHESTER-LE-STREET	-	-	17,071	11,599
HARTLEPOOL	-	-	858	320
PONTEFRACT	-	-	178,833	22,644
PONTYPRIDD	-	-	458,232	16,754
STOCKTON	-	-	2,005	1,581
SUNDERLAND	-	-	119,045	15,030
DONCASTER	58,613	42,501	299,997	9,726

Source: P.R.O. MH 57/119.

## APPENDIX Q

Cost of Out-Relief during the coalming dispute.Average weekly cost of out-relief month by month.

<u>1926</u>	<u>£</u>
April	303,842
May	479,067
June	551,504
July	570,958
August	572,509
September	553,995
October	526,882
November	499,979
December	433,579
<u>1927</u>	
January	336,974
February	319,444
March	311,162

The total cost of out-relief in England and Wales in 1926, according to returns furnished by the Clerks to local boards of guardians was £23,578,230 as compared with £15,326,742 for the year 1925-26, £12,978,268 in 1924-25, and £14,664,802 in 1923-24.

Source: Eighth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1926-1927,  
p.136.

## APPENDIX R

Editorial comment in the Morning Post, 12 January 1926, following A.J. Cook's week-end speech in Port Talbot when he declared that the co-operative movement would, in the event of a national stoppage, 'be the victualling movement for the fighting forces of labour':

Mr. Cook's boast that in the coming struggle it will be found that there will be a new trinity ... is not exactly a new threat. He says the co-operative movement will be the victualling movement for the fighting forces of Labour, and in an article in a Socialist Sunday newspaper he urged "men and women to see that the co-operative movement is prepared for the capitalist attack".

Perhaps it would be well if the thrifty working men, who constitute the bulk of the members of co-operative societies, realised where this idea came from, and what is the real purpose behind it. It came from Moscow, and the whole plan was revealed in a Communist pamphlet published about a year ago. This pamphlet is one of a series called "Communist Industrial Policy", and this particular one is entitled "New Tasks for New Times". In it occurs the following:

"Experience teaches that it is not enough to declare a strike. It is just as essential to be able to maintain the strike when it is declared. Contact with local co-operative societies, therefore, provides a useful method of maintenance, and direct representation from the co-operative societies in conjunction with the representatives of workshop committees and trade union branches with powers to take direct action would transform the Trades Councils from being mere hunting grounds for political careerists into industrial fighting organs of the class struggle, capable of taking direct action and at the same time ensuring maintenance during such struggles."

There followed in September last the Trades Union Congress, at which the Communists managed to get through a resolution giving the General Council power "to call for a stoppage of work, by an affiliated organisation or part thereof, in order to assist a Union defending a vital trade union principle, and also to have power to arrange with the Co-operative Wholesale Society to make provision for the distribution of food &c., in the event of a strike or other action calling for same.

Cont'd...

This resolution was part of a plan approved at the Communist Party's annual Congress, Glasgow, 30 May and June 1, 1925. The object of the plan was then declared to be "to free the Co-operative movement of Britain from the influence of the reformist anti-working class elements and secure the closest working alliance with the workers' organisations struggling against capitalism." Another object was "to establish a conscious identity of interest of the co-operatives with the struggles of the workers in strikes and lock-outs, in political demonstrations and campaigns conducted against the capitalists, so that the co-operatives will render material assistance in the struggle."

And then "to encourage the establishment and development of the closest relation with the co-operatives of the Soviet Republics and unite the co-operatives in the political campaign of the working-class movement of this country for the defence of the Workers' Republic of the U.S.S.R."

There is the plot. It is to persuade the co-operatives that they are helping their fellow working men in trouble, while all the time the real object is to enlist them as defenders of the Soviet Republics. If the co-operative societies succumb to the plot they will find their finances going the same way as the Trade Union finances. It is precisely because the Trade Unions' money has been frittered away in political propaganda that leaders like Mr. Cook are looking to the co-operatives for help. The co-operatives have great possessions, and the Communists are plotting to lay their hands on them.

## APPENDIX S

Table showing the number of co-operative retail societies, the membership, the population, and the percentage of membership to the population in the counties of England in 1921.

COUNTY	No. of Retail Societies	No. of Members	Population	Per cent of Membership to Population
BEDFORDSHIRE	6	13,829	206,478	6.70
BERKSHIRE	6	19,244	294,807	6.53
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	11	15,849	236,209	6.71
CAMBRIDGESHIRE	6	15,156	203,372	7.45
CHESHIRE	25	129,367	1,025,423	12.62
CORNWALL	19	17,506	320,559	5.46
CUMBERLAND	21	44,144	273,037	16.17
DERBYSHIRE	37	126,521	714,539	17.71
DEVONSHIRE	32	106,286	709,488	14.98
DORSETSHIRE	6	18,092	228,258	7.93
DURHAM	54	285,781	1,478,506	19.33
ESSEX	17	41,488	1,468,341	2.83
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	14	64,288	757,668	8.48
HEREFORDSHIRE	1	4,302	113,118	3.80
HERTFORDSHIRE	9	17,518	333,236	5.26
HUNTINGDONSHIRE	2	1,386	54,748	2.53
KENT	19	64,080	1,141,867	5.61
LANCASHIRE	150	771,888	4,928,359	15.66
LEICESTERSHIRE	30	71,342	494,522	14.43
LINCOLNSHIRE	9	57,205	602,105	9.50
LONDON	12	234,458	4,483,249	5.23
MIDDLESEX	6	23,827	1,253,164	1.90
MONMOUTHSHIRE	13	44,328	450,700	9.84
NORFOLK	11	29,216	504,277	5.79
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE	34	71,363	349,384	20.43
NORTHUMBERLAND	43	126,401	746,138	16.94
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	23	81,648	641,134	12.73
OXFORDSHIRE	5	21,668	189,558	11.43
RUTLANDSHIRE	..	..	18,368	..
SHROPSHIRE	12	14,264	242,959	5.87
SOMERSETSHIRE	24	44,746	465,682	9.61

Cont'd...

COUNTY	No. of Retail Societies	No. of Members	Population	Per cent of Membership to Population
SOUTHAMPTON	10	50,616	1,005,030	5.04
STAFFORDSHIRE	18	128,190	1,349,225	9.50
SUFFOLK	12	34,636	399,988	8.66
SURREY	8	20,034	930,377	2.15
SUSSEX	7	21,069	728,001	2.89
WARWICKSHIRE	18	110,393	1,390,092	7.94
WESTMORELAND	6	5,432	65,740	8.26
WILTSHIRE	12	27,952	292,213	9.57
WORCESTERSHIRE	7	35,692	405,876	8.79
YORKSHIRE	180	688,833	4,182,735	16.47
TOTALS - ENGLAND	935	3,700,038	35,678,530	10.37

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.489.

## APPENDIX T

Membership of Retail Distributive Societies.  
1924-26.

SECTION	1924	1925	1926	Increase for year 1926
	Number	Number	Number	
Irish	45,582	45,889	47,549	1,660
Midland	625,570	669,412	728,068	58,656
Northern	506,378	530,336	540,956	10,620
North-Eastern	719,391	738,236	766,928	28,692
North-Western	1,031,557	1,079,324	1,138,553	59,229
Scottish	661,752	669,449	677,258	7,809
Southern	712,527	773,554	867,051	93,497
South-Western	226,315	231,143	240,497	9,354
Western	173,796	173,640	179,868	6,228
Gt. Britain and Ireland	4,702,868	4,910,983	5,186,728	275,745

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress,  
1927, p.488.

## APPENDIX U

List of geographical sections into which the Co-operative Union groups co-operative societies, with a note of the areas covered by each section.

- Scottish Section : The counties of Aberdeen, Argyle, Ayr, Banff, Bute, Caithness, Clackmannan, Dumbarton, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Elgin, Fife, Forfar, Haddington, Inverness, Kincardine, Kinross, Lanark, Linlithgow, Peebles, Perth, Renfrew, Roxburgh, Selkirk, and Stirling.
- Northern Section : The counties of Cumberland, Durham, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Northumberland, and Westmormorland.
- North-Eastern Section: The county of York, and part of Derby, Lincoln, and Nottingham.
- North-Western Section: The counties of Caernarvon, Chester, Denbigh, Derby (Peak District), Flint, Lancaster, Merioneth, Stafford, part of Westmorland, and Isle of Man.
- Midland Section : The counties of Cardigan, Derby, Huntingdon, Leicester, Lincoln, Montgomery, Northampton, Nottingham, Radnor, Rutland, Salop, Stafford, Warwick, and Worcester.
- Southern Section : The counties of Bedford, Berks, Bucks, Cambridge, Essex, Hampshire, Herts, Isle of Wight, London, Kent, Middlesex, Norfolk, Oxford, Suffolk, Surrey and Sussex.
- Western Section : The counties of Brecknock, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Gloucester, Hereford, Monmouth, and Pembroke.
- South-Western Section: The counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, and Wiltshire.
- Irish Section : Ireland.

Source: J.A. Hough, Co-operative Retailing 1914-1945, 1949, p.165.

## APPENDIX V

Questionnaire circulated by the Co-operative Union to 1303 societies following the General Strike and Lock-out of 1926.

## I - The National Strike

1. Did any section of your society's employees cease work during the national strike? If so, please state number and classes of workers involved.
2. Did any section of transport workers employed by your society refuse to handle goods during the national strike? If so, please give particulars.
3. Were the normal operations of your society interfered with in any way by the local strike committee or other body? If so, please give particulars.
4. Did you have any difficulty in obtaining permits to move supplies of foodstuffs, coal, or other essential commodities? If so, please give particulars.
5. Was it necessary for you to make application for (or to employ) volunteers as workers in any departments of your society? If so, please name the departments affected.
6. Did your distributive employees, or any section of them, refuse, or threaten to refuse, to handle goods brought into your warehouse or shops by volunteer labour?
7. Were any of your stocks of coal, foodstuffs, etc., commandeered by the local authorities? If so, please give particulars.
8. Did you grant trade union organisations the use of your hall (or halls) for any purpose during the national strike?
9. Is there any other information that you wish to supply? If so, please give particulars.

## II - The Coal Stoppage

10. Did your society make any grant (or grants) to local or national relief funds (other than the fund raised by the Co-operative Union) during the stoppage? If so, please give particulars of funds and amounts.

Cont'd...

11. Did you make any grant (or grants) of goods to local soup kitchens or similar institutions for the relief of miners and their children during the stoppage? If so, please state approximate value of the grants.
12. Did your society supply goods on credit to members on the security of the miners', or other trade unions? If goods were so supplied, please state their total value.
13. Was any share capital withdrawn from your society in consequence of the stoppage? If so, please state the amount thus withdrawn.
14. Did the stoppage lead to any increase in the amount of credit given to members by your society? If so, please state the amount of the increase.
15. Are there any other observations which you desire to make under this head? If so, please state your views in the space opposite.

Source: Report of the 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, pp.49-50.

APPENDIX W

The National Strike, May 1926, as it affected co-operative societies.

SECTION	No. of Questionnaires issued	No. of Questionnaires completed	No. of Societies replying "No" to ALL questions	QUESTION 1		QUESTIONS 2 to 9							
				No. of Societies replying	No. of workers involved	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
						No. of Societies with employees refusing to handle goods	No. of Societies interfered with	No. of Societies having difficulty re permits	No. of Societies employing volunteer labour	No. of Societies with employees refusing to handle goods	No. of Societies having stocks commandeered	No. of Societies granting use of halls	No. of Societies supplying information
IRISH	26	2	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
MIDLAND	175	102	49	12	922	9	13	8	2	7	6	19	17
NORTHERN	138	86	27	16	54	21	17	17	9	11	6	22	13
NORTH-EASTERN	175	117	63	22	560	13	13	10	1	3	4	23	17
NORTH-WESTERN	238	156	61	45	680	16	16	13	12	9	16	33	31
SCOTTISH	225	133	49	8	488	7	23	18	..	5	3	34	14
SOUTHERN	151	88	17	13	624	9	13	30	5	3	1	37	19
SOUTH-WESTERN	88	40	17	2	19	1	3	2	2	2	..	8	13
WESTERN	87	47	20	8	46	4	2	3	1	2	1	7	8
TOTAL	1303	771	305	126	3393	80	100	101	32	42	37	183	132

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.51.

APPENDIX X

The Miners' Unions

Extracts from returns made to Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for year ended 31 December 1925.

NAME OF UNION	Members	Income from Members	Paid in Benefits including State Un-employment	Working Expenses	Total Funds at End of Year	Cash in Hand	THE MINERS' FUNDS
		£	£	£	£	£	
CUMERLAND MINERS' ASSOCIATION	10,036	21,464	20,381	5,118	5,889	2,671	
DURHAM MINERS' ASSOCIATION	155,773	341,592	487,250	46,164	109,586	63,753	
LANCS. & CHESHIRE MINERS' FED.	72,902	60,680	21,979	14,595	115,795	108,539	
LEICESTERSHIRE MINERS' ASSOCIATION	7,428	16,336	18,136	1,875	24,029	2,699	
* N. STAFFORD MINERS' FED.	10,679	20,153	3,496	7,405	Deficiency 39,681	4,144	
N. WALES MINERS' ASSOCIATION	14,224	12,792	10,323	7,028	10,817	5,292	
NORTHUMBERLAND MINERS' MUTUAL CONF. ASSOCIATION	43,482	36,114	30,960	17,550	53,394	41,036	
NOTTS. MINERS' ASSOCIATION	34,767	60,100	16,208	15,473	9,979	596	
SOUTH WALES MINERS' FED.	129,155	167,474	98,759	97,335	103,278	73,395	
+WARWICKSHIRE MINERS' ASSOCIATION	11,500	12,074	4,254	6,381	10,688	4,196	
YORKSHIRE MINEWORKERS' ASSOCIATION	<u>164,196</u>	335,961	131,693	73,605	<u>492,711</u>	461,757/	
	654,142				936,166		

\* This union shows £48,138 as "amount of general funds at end of year" but shows as "owing to co-operative societies on food voucher accounts £46,400", and a deficiency as above.

+ This union shows as liabilities "due to tradesmen in respect of food vouchers £13,489" and "due to Midland Bank, Food Voucher Account, £454". It shows as an asset "due from members in respect of food vouchers (subject to realisation) £13,891.

/ This item includes £353,788 invested with the C.W.S.Bank.

Source: National Unionist Association pamphlet, The Test of Trade Unionism, the General Strike and after, 1926, p.19.

APPENDIX Y

The Coal Stoppage, 1926, as it affected co-operative societies.

SECTION	No. of Societies subscribing to Co-op Union Relief Fund	Amount of Co-op Union Relief Fund	No. of Societies making grants to Relief Funds	Amounts of grant to Relief Fund	No. of Societies stating value of goods given locally	Value of Goods etc. given by the Societies	No. of Societies granting credit	Value of Goods supplied on Trade Union Security	No. of Societies stating amount with-drawn	Amount of Share Capital with-drawn	No. of Societies stating amount of increase of credit	Amount of increase of credit given to members
		£		£		£		£		£		£
IRISH	2	27	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
MIDLAND	83	3357	32	9140	19	1962	7	3558	22	355716	24	34991
NORTHERN	14	343	30	2341	23	1827	19	73848	55	707340	45	101307
NORTH-EASTERN	48	1498	38	8494	22	1891	6	15232	42	551285	28	47493
NORTH-WESTERN	78	13843	57	5009	11	2264	9	1035	41	210565	43	29940
SCOTTISH	65	1702	53	13445	36	3821	12	11524	55	332605	42	38484
SOUTHERN	86	16142	21	9271	1	50	4	135	7	4288	11	11520
SOUTH-WESTERN	33	639	6	880	1	2	3	10422	3	60175	1	40
WESTERN	10	158	10	313	19	2917	5	15461	27	187683	32	201922
SUNDRIES	28	399	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
TOTAL	447	*38108	247	*48893	132	*14734	65	†131215	252	2409657	226	†465697

\* Total value of Grants, £101,735

† Total amount of Credit given £596,912

Source: Report of 59th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1927, p.56.

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