

THE STATE AND REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN 1916-1926

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SUMMARY OF THESIS

The thesis is an examination and discussion of the responses of British governments to developments in labour and socialist organisations between 1916 and 1926. The first chapter is concerned with the growing recognition of the increased power of labour under the conditions of modern war. Yet governments, it is argued, failed to develop a coherent labour policy and often acted in a confused and contradictory manner. The second chapter begins with an analysis of the post war crisis when many politicians began to regard revolution as a real possibility. They developed two agencies, the Special Branch and the Supply and Transport Organisation in order to deal with the situation. It is argued that in its original form the latter was not only costly but politically dangerous and ineffective. Later developments were not only cheaper but based on a more sophisticated understanding of the political strengths of a modern state. The third chapter is concerned with the responses of British socialists to the state. It includes some discussion of theoretical influences, an examination of the attempts of the Communist Party to implement Lenin's teachings on state and revolution, and a discussion of the first Labour Government in respect of the implications for socialist strategies with regard to the state. The final chapter is concerned to argue that while superior organisation and resources played their part in the Government's victory in the General Strike, it was Baldwin's political manoeuvres which were the most important element of the campaign. In conclusion there is some discussion of attempts which have been made to characterise the development of the British state in this period. The reality, it is argued, was far more prosaic than many accounts would suggest. Politicians achieved the stability they sought but they did so not by dramatic innovation but by constant political endeavour based on marginal readjustment and the re-application of traditional themes and structures.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the ideas and actions of British Governments in the years 1916 to 1926 with respect to questions of political order and stability. It includes also some consideration of some of those organisations and individuals on the left of British politics who, in their various ways sought to bring about changes in the political and economic structures of British society.

These years were originally chosen because, on superficial examination they offered the prospect of the discovery of fundamental change and the demonstration of significant breaks in historical continuity. These were, after all, interesting times. The considerable domestic crises could be set in the context of the final and most terrible stages of the first modern war, the Bolshevik Revolution and the political disintegration of Central Europe. Gramsci argued that in post-war Europe the ruling groups were faced with nothing less than the complete reconstruction of the bases of their authority.

Yet for Britain what emerges on closer examination is far less clear cut. This may partly be attributed to the cultural and geographical separation from continental Europe and to the fact that Britain never lost or even came close to losing national territory during the War. But one must also take account of the fact that it is much easier to identify clear themes before one has tried to come to terms with the basic historical records. After contact with such inevitably confusing and often contradictory material, itself a record of mundane confusions, mistaken assumptions, ill informed arguments and the

necessary ambiguities of the day-to-day business of politics, general theories can only be advanced with qualification and a degree of circumspection.

Nonetheless it is possible to identify continuing themes and issues and it is possible to argue that the period is held together by something more substantial than chronological sequence. The question of political order in this period is dominated by the rise of the mass organisations of labour. These were as much at the heart of conservative anxieties as they were the focus of the hopes of radicals. It is the arguments and developments prompted by these organisations which form the core of this study.

It was during the Great War that British governments were first forced to recognise that labour questions had become permanently integrated into the political agenda. Politicians could no longer deal with labour matters on a one off basis at moments of crisis. Yet, to the dismay of many, the successful conclusion of hostilities did not mean that labour matters could be relegated to their former status. Disagreements about the nature of the problem and about how it might best be handled remained the central issue of domestic politics throughout the period.

The first section of the thesis is based on a study of the final two years of the Great War. It examines this growing recognition by the politicians of the vastly increased significance of labour and offers an assessment of various attempts to come to terms with this. The chapter seeks to demonstrate that there was in effect no labour policy; that actions in the area were frequently contradictory, often counter

productive, and that disorder became institutionalised owing to the proliferation of overlapping and competing agencies. In the end, it would appear that the Government tried almost everything from outright repression, through incorporation and deception to generous concession.

The second section is concerned with developments in the post-war period. It begins with an analysis of the panic of the post-war months in which a large section of the British political elite became convinced that revolutionary disorder was a real possibility. In this climate, it is argued, it was inevitable that politicians would favour repressive measures. In particular they developed two agencies, the Special Branch and an organisation to neutralise the effects of large strikes, which later came to be known as the Supply and Transport Organisation, in order to deal with the crisis which they felt to be imminent. This section contains a detailed analysis of the methods, structures and developments of these agencies. The theme of the section is that the original responses were not only costly and politically dangerous but always liable to be ineffective. Later schemes, as characterised by Sir John Anderson's report of 1923, were not only cheaper but were based on a far more sophisticated understanding of the real political strengths of a modern state.

The third section is concerned with the responses of British socialists to the question of the state. It begins with an outline and discussion of the major theoretical influences on socialists and then moves to a detailed discussion of two attempts to put theory into practice. Firstly there is an examination of the efforts of the Communist Party of Great Britain to implement Lenin's teachings on 'State and Revolution'

and then an examination of the 1924 Labour Government in respect of its implications for socialist strategies with regard to the state.

The final section is an examination of how the Government handled the General Strike. It is argued that the Government's victory was essentially political. While superior organisation and resources played their part it was Baldwin's political manoeuvres which underpinned the Government's campaign. However accounts which suggest that the operations of the state were always smooth and cohesive are misleading. If Baldwin was able to stick to a coherent strategy he did so only in the face of internal opposition which always threatened to destroy his preparations.

Within these events, it is argued, it is possible to identify aspects of a developing modern liberal state. While more radical solutions to the labour problem; authoritarian, paternalistic and corporatist, had their advocates within government, tactics in line with traditional liberal assumptions were nearly always more attractive to the majority if only because they required less readjustment. The pattern that emerged then, is not of a state seeking to dominate popular opinion but rather of one using limited resources to select and reinforce those existing themes which could most readily be turned to advantage. It was not a state which sought to take all power to itself but rather one which recognised that in society as it was then constructed the maintenance of order rested on the activities of a vast range of individuals and organisations below and outside the formal political framework. Most conservative politicians came to realise that it was better to develop an effective alignment with such groups than it was to attempt to supercede them.

However the state which emerged was in no sense a weak state. In almost every sense its acceptance of a limited, though central, role meant that it was politically stronger than it could otherwise have been. Nor should it be imagined that the role of this state was in any way marginal or negligible. While, in reality, there was no moment when the state was all that stood between the established order and social collapse, and no single decision which, had it gone the wrong way, would have precipitated mass disorder; while the work was never as desperate or difficult as the more histrionic participants felt it to be, it was still essential. The work rarely demanded great imagination and there was always a considerable margin of error but the survival of the social order still rested on the ability of the state to continually reinforce and support its allies and to discomfort and undermine its opponents.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STATE AND LABOUR IN THE WAR

During the Great War the activities of government directed towards the maintenance of order were conditioned by two special factors. In one sense the war offered the state's agents a new opportunity. The war produced in many a strengthening of national sentiment and a desire for unity and, in more, an aversion to any action which might increase the miseries and dangers being faced by British troops in action. Politicians could exploit such an atmosphere and use it to deter or deflect criticism and to undermine opposition. Yet while the champions of order had these new weapons at their disposal they had to operate in a situation where they were continuously aware that the consequences of failure were certain and terminal. Modern states, it was rapidly recognised, are at their most vulnerable when at war. Moreover what was at stake was not just the external territory or the personnel of the regime. Defeat in war would be likely to precipitate the internal collapse of the regime. Should defeat alone prove to be an insufficient stimulus to internal opposition, the armies of the victorious enemy would be on hand to offer assistance or to complete the operation. As Hannah Arendt has argued, "since the end of the First World War we almost automatically expect that no government, and no state or form of government, will be strong enough to survive defeat in war".¹ These two factors, a social atmosphere ripe for exploitation and an awareness among elite groups of the consequences of defeat inevitably came together to produce a frenetic level of political activity. Yet political activity was not only intensified but it was extended into new areas of social and economic activity. As illustrated by Arthur Marwick,² even the slowest politicians came to realise that the outcome of the Great War would

be as dependent upon industrial production as on military strategy. Areas of activity which had previously been beyond the scope of the state inevitably became politicised.

In view of the panics and alarms among the politicians in the latter part of the war it is interesting that two well known works³ on the prewar period should present the outbreak of war as the beginning of a period of social harmony. Both Dangerfield and Halevy have argued that the war brought for the state a welcome respite from a period of political tensions, and induced dissident groups to sink their differences in a mood of national reconciliation. While there are difficulties in drawing a precise causal relationship between the coming of the war and the onset of social peace; it is apparent for instance that the wave of labour unrest was substantially diminished before the commencement of hostilities,⁴ it may not be misleading to view the war as an essentially unifying influence providing the perspective is restricted to 1914. The outbreak of war did diminish existing troubles and it was only in the latter half of the conflict that war related difficulties became acute.

Dangerfield's argument is worth some examination here, not so much for its view of 1914 as for the analysis of the political conflicts of the prewar years. Dangerfield identified four areas of conflict; the women's suffrage question, the Conservative rebellion on Ulster, the revolt of the House of Lords against the Liberal Government's legislative programme and the high levels of Labour unrest. Such issues, had they been as serious as Dangerfield states, must have had some bearing on the activity of the British state to survive

the pressures of war. It is therefore worth asking whether they did represent aspects of an underlying weakness which could re-emerge after the first euphoric months.

In this respect the conduct of the Unionist Party is the most intriguing issue. To what extent might the encouragement which certain prominent members of the Party gave to armed Ulster men and to their followers in the Lords be held to represent a fundamental division within traditional ruling groups? Such divisions have often been identified as one of the critical preconditions of successful revolutionary activity and Dangerfield's evidence might thus suggest that the British state entered the war with a potent, though latent, source of weakness at its heart. However later actions by the Unionists and their opponents indicate that the prewar conflict, while serious, was never fundamental. Both Parties were prepared to make concessions where they had previously appeared intractable and neither considered that such differences as they had should be allowed to compromise their attachment to the overriding priority of national defence. Disagreements could be contained within the conventions of 'high politics' and, for much of the time, fought out in relative privacy. John Stubbs has even suggested that the Unionist Party actually welcomed the opportunity the war brought to shelve those issues which they felt had left them "tied to a position of blind and unrewarding negativism".⁵

Any fears that the women's suffrage movement presented a revolutionary threat to the state were rapidly dissipated by the conduct of the bulk of its adherents on the outbreak of hostilities. Most suffragettes apparently felt

that their demands should be subservient to the needs of the nation in crisis and dissident activity ceased immediately. The 'labour revolt' of the prewar period had also apparently gone the same way in the first months of war. The summer of 1914 was by no means the high point for strikes but George Askwith noted that the one hundred disputes recorded at the Board of Trade at the beginning of August had been reduced to twenty by its end. Askwith concluded that employers and employees had sunk "their domestic quarrels and united in a concerted effort for the welfare and the preservation of the nation".⁶ Instead of the labour crisis which had been widely anticipated in the autumn of the year there was comparative industrial peace. The mood of crisis, intensified by the Woolwich Arsenal strike in July,⁷ seemed to disappear almost overnight. Halevy was correct to underline the Prime Minister's confidence in declaring war "without troubling to consult the Cabinet and confident of the silent support of the whole country",⁸ but this must call into question his estimate of the seriousness of the prewar troubles. If the call to patriotic duty could deflect the groups from their attachment to sectional or class interest it must cast some light on the nature of that attachment.

It would be wrong therefore to suggest that the British state entered the war weakened by internal divisions. The war itself presented serious difficulties but the ability of governments to adapt and manoeuvre in order to cope with them was not compromised by previous events.

The peculiar problems of wartime politics did not become fully apparent until 1916. It was during this year that the full, unchanging,

horrific novelty of modern war was revealed to the participants and a number of more perceptive civilians. Casualty figures rose to such heights as to numb normal sensibilities and politicians were driven to throw around such notions as the defence of democracy and promise future social reforms in order to inject some meaning into the otherwise purposeless slaughter into which they had drifted. Attrition though was not some subsequent rationalisation of the weaknesses of the military imagination but a conscious strategy, expressing itself in a macabre comparative demography: "We should follow the principle of the gambler who has the highest purse and force our adversary's hand and make him go on spending until he is a pauper".⁹ Haig, before Arras sadly "recognised", "how many must pay the full penalty before we can have peace".¹⁰ Even if the common soldier or the ordinary civilian were denied an insight into the subtleties of high strategy they could hardly avoid recognising its consequences. Military participants developed a gambler's mathematical fatalism about the likelihood of their survival. The heroic mood of the early months of the war was quickly submerged under a recognition of the mechanical, almost involuntary progress of hostilities. The outcome was unlikely to be influenced by feat of strategy or some act of heroism. By 1917 the conflict seemed to have become less a contest of heroes than a struggle between the least fit of all nations. The appropriate virtues were patience and endurance rather than dash and imagination. One participant recalled that by 1917 the sources of the evident weaknesses of the British forces were no longer to be sought on the playing fields of Eton but in an industrial system which had allowed a few "the joys of making money fast" and had "made half our nation slum dwellers".¹¹ That war had become a routine of dangers and

miseries was widely recognised. Chapman recorded that it came to resemble "an organised industry".¹² This view permeated the home front. At the Labour Party Conference the President argued "that war was never so mechanised, brutalised . . . man lies crushed beneath the war machine".¹³ This war machine was not only composed of the fighting men but also of large sections of industry and domestic society which were conditioned by the demands of the war. Nations were being tested on their ability to maintain a continuous supply of men and munitions and the grim recognition of this permeated every section of society.

Yet while the mood of 1914 was dissipated, while war in itself no longer held any attractions, it would be wrong to conclude that there was any general spread of pacifism or desire for peace at any price. It becomes impossible to understand the politics of wartime if one fails to take account of the widespread assumption that victory was the overriding priority. All other political questions were subordinated under this one. All the battles for place and position in high politics were conducted, with appropriate gravity and decorum around the issue of who was, or was not, the man to win the war. The object was to demonstrate the sort of mental virility that would allow no consideration of principle to stand in the way of a successful prosecution of hostilities. Yet the fall of Asquith, it could be argued, was not caused by his unwillingness to abandon principle so much as his failure to demonstrate sufficient enthusiasm in so doing. Even at the moment when Asquith was casting off the final liberal shibboleth and introducing a measure to extend conscription to married men, opposition continued to grow. Hankey tried to explain it by arguing, "the

people who want compulsory service don't want Asquith while those that want Asquith don't want compulsory service".¹⁴ Bonar Law was having difficulty in holding his men in check and Crewe was warning of "a dangerous energy among the Parliamentary Party".¹⁵ The Liberal War Committee had joined Unionist backbenchers in expressing unease at Asquith's apparent lack of energy. The atmosphere was made for Lloyd George to introduce himself as the man who would go to any lengths to secure victory. Above all he presented a carefully nurtured image of being able to deal with labour. In reality there was much that could be set against this. Lloyd George had run into serious trouble in Glasgow in December 1915. His attempt to intimidate the local engineers had misfired so badly that it had left the "Asquith crowd gloating . . ." and the image tarnished.¹⁶ George Asquith too felt Lloyd George's cavalier methods of labour conciliation often created more problems than they solved. Yet reason and open discussion had an even more minor role in wartime politics than in times of peace. Most important were a capacity for intrigue and the ability to project an image of competence and determination in the face of confusion and muddle, and in these qualities Lloyd George had a distinct edge. If one of the main elements in his rise had been his supposed ability to deal with labour his first two years of office were to offer him ample opportunity to exercise his talents.

Labour Problems

The attitudes of the British Labour Movement towards the war were, from the outset, too complex to admit of any simple generalisation. Ralph Miliband was surely correct to argue that there could be little justification for surprise at the abandonment of the stance of proletarian internationalism of the Second International,¹⁷ yet it would be equally wrong to assume that the predominant attitude could be characterised in terms of patriotism and an unequivocal support for the Government's war effort.¹⁸ Royden Harrison has identified four distinct bodies of opinion within the War Emergency National Workers Committee and suggested that the predominant group might be characterised as 'sane patriots' in that they accepted the necessity for prosecuting the war but offered their support only on condition that labour interests were safeguarded. Those passively opposed to the war formed a smaller group while those prepared to offer active opposition were a very small minority. However within the context of the war the equivocations of the majority and the very existence of a minority were to have some significance.

The debates and votes on two resolutions at the Labour Party Conference of 1916 offer clear evidence of the divisions. Macdonald in opposing a motion asking for wholehearted support for the war effort was vague, even in terms of his own undemanding standards of clarity, and conciliatory to the majority view to the point of saying very little, yet it is important to note that he followed James Sexton in full patriotic flood, 'German atrocities' and all. In this context Macdonald's efforts were not without significance and demonstrated a degree of political, and personal courage. The merest lack of

enthusiasm could, in itself, secure a valuable point. In this instance the minority position attracted 602,000 votes, but the vote must be treated with some caution as it is clear that some delegates voted against the resolution because they felt it implied support for all Government actions. The 206,000 votes, around ten per cent of those cast, in support of a motion condemning the executive for taking part in recruiting, are a better indication of anti-war feeling although here too the matter is complicated for a number of delegates may have been opposed not so much to recruiting itself but the recruitment of men to an occupation that was so poorly paid. However the real significance of anti-war feeling among sections of the Independent Labour Party is not to be sought in specific votes on issues, much less in speculations as to whether it might have come to dominate policy, but simply in the fact that it existed and continued to exist. The existence of an anti-war group, as a group of public figures prepared to take an unpopular stance and as a section of a broader movement, meant that the Government faced some constraint on the way in which it dealt with other opponents. Arthur Marwick, for example, is right to stress that, "British Governments did at least have the conscience to make provision for conscientious objection"¹⁹ but it is important to recognise that the maintenance of at least the semblance of liberal decency on this and other issues was at least as dependent on the existence of an active and courageous minority as it was on the promptings of conscience. The minority was also to have a longer term significance than anyone could have thought possible in 1916 for they were responsible for creating the impression that Labour was the Party that was not entirely compromised by the war and could take an imaginative stand against the 'International Anarchy' in the post-

war world. This factor alone was responsible for attracting a number of influential recruits to the Labour ranks. The danger from the Government's point of view, though its policies were never sophisticated enough to cope with this, was that if it failed to maintain support for its war aims or if its manpower demands antagonised groups of workers there were anti-war groups who could serve as a focus for discontent. The actions of isolated groups of dissident workers might be given a measure of legitimacy or a broader significance by the existence of this active minority.

In making any assessment of the significance of the actions of those who opposed the war, of those who remained equivocal or of those workers who went on strike in defiance of the Munitions of War Act it is important to stress the political context. Ross McKibbin, as part of his 'revisionist' interpretation of the impact of the First World War has sought to diminish the significance of wartime opposition: "The industrial disputes of the war, for example, were no worse than those which occurred immediately before it, and arose out of very traditional grievances".²⁰ Yet this concentration on the purely factual aspects of the disputes surely avoids the question of their true significance. Any oppositional activity ran the gauntlet of a legal sanction, social criticism and the attentions of patriotic mobs encouraged and abetted by a government propaganda unconstrained by limitations of taste or truth. To strike in any context requires a degree of determination, yet to strike in that context must surely have required a consciousness which was something more than traditional. In this sense it is misleading to make too much of the 'craft privilege' basis of the engineers' grievances. The significance of

their actions is much better indicated by their context, the munitions industries in wartime.²¹ The government saw to it that no striking engineer could be unaware of the meaning of his action.

The Labour movement in general was far happier offering support to the Government in general terms than in agreeing to specific concessions. It was at the point where their own interests were directly threatened that patriotic workers could be transformed into 'dangerous minorities'. At the 1916 Labour Party Conference George Roberts, then a junior Minister in the Asquith coalition, could secure large majorities for general resolutions of support by arguing against 'quibbles' and defining the issue as "were they for or were they against their country in this great war".²² Yet the same Conference voted overwhelmingly against the Military Service (No 2) Bill and only narrowly defeated a subsequent motion to agitate for its repeal. Similarly the Conference voted, almost unanimously, for a drastic revision of the Munitions of War Act. Successive governments could rely on a high level of support on the broad issue of support for the war yet they were always liable to face difficulties in gaining support for the specific measures necessary to prosecute the war effectively. Therefore governments were forced to continuously exploit their considerable resources of authority and their meagre stocks of ingenuity in order to use the general mood of support to extract specific concessions.

On the surface at least, the attitudes of trade union leaders seemed to promise practical assistance to the Government. The original industrial truce, solidified by the Treasury Agreements and apparently

concretised in the Munitions of War Act may have appeared the very model of patriotic restraint, but there were two difficulties. In the first place, the agreements were not universal. Several important unions, including the Miners' Federation, which, while not involved in munitions directly were nonetheless vital to their production, were not included in the agreements. Secondly, and more significantly, it was soon made clear to the Government that the agreement of trade union leaders did not guarantee the acquiescence of the rank and file. As George Askwith, who participated in the discussions, later noted, it was one thing to strike a bargain in London but quite another to "ensure that those arrangements should be respected and have results in the shops and yards".²³ By the final year of the war labour leaders who co-operated with the Government ran the risk of losing their authority over their members. Thus in the first two years of war the Government gained a number of concessions but neither the system of negotiation that was developed nor the legal constraints which were enacted seemed capable of delivering the agreements which would be necessary in future.

Time was always running against the Government. As the war continued it became less popular and the demands which the Government were forced to make became more severe. Up to a point this was unavoidable for nobody could predict the nature and duration of the war and hence it was never possible to formulate a final policy on manpower. George Barnes complained that "labour agitators" made insufficient allowance "for the difficulties which have beset all in authority through the ever changing phases of industrial conditions during the war".²⁴ Yet while a certain level of difficulty could be expected the situation

was exacerbated by the inability of government to formulate any rational policy at all. From the first days of the war the manpower situation had drifted into chaos. The Army simply demanded as many men as possible and the Government had allowed indiscriminate recruiting. This had caused serious dislocations in some industries and had contributed to the rise in unemployment in the autumn of 1914.²⁵ Some of the skilled men had been prised out of the Army but Hankey recorded in 1916 that the country was still being strangled by the voracious demands of the military and no politician was willing, or able, to stand up to them.²⁶ The inevitable consequence was the drift towards recruiting measures, virtually designed to cause difficulty. The withdrawal of the trade card scheme and the introduction of the 'comb out' in protected industries had to be undertaken at a time when general support for the war was at its lowest point. During the last year of war the situation was so serious that the Government was forced to break its agreements with the TUC. As late as September 1918 the officials of the Ministry of Munitions were still emphasising the need for a scheme for "the supply and proper distribution of labour".²⁷

The Development of the State Machine

By 1916 it was clear that the effective prosecution of the war required a re-examination of the relationship between the state and society. While there was no general agreement on how changes should be brought about most politicians and officials had come to realise that previous restrictions on state activity would have to be relaxed. The transformation which eventually took place can be viewed from a number of perspectives; in terms of new functions and responsibilities, in terms of the organisational development and growth to cope with them, in terms of the involvement of hitherto excluded groups in the state's consultative and regulatory machinery, or in terms of the debate on the desirability and necessity of such changes in terms of political principles.

The predominant voices of the prewar political debate had been those which assumed that government activity should be restricted and limited. While prewar politics lacked the dogmatic laissez-faire spirit of post-war administrations it is quite clear that even the reformers defended new extensions of state activity as necessary exceptions rather than desirable developments in themselves. Even within the Labour Party collectivist views were in a minority.

It was the Liberal Party which exhibited the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with the level of state activity necessary for the conditions of modern warfare. The restrictions on individual liberty represented by the issue of conscription were so painful to Asquith that even after he had accepted its necessity he presented the measure

tortuously dressed up as an extension of the voluntary system. As late as September 1916 the Prime Minister was still uncomfortable over Government involvement in vital industries. When the railway unions had claimed a war bonus Asquith supported his Minister who had argued, with impeccable Liberal rectitude that the Government could not become involved in wage negotiations nor even offer its services as an arbitrator: "The General Managers must strike the best bargain they can."²⁸ By 1916 however the Liberal Party was no longer united and Lloyd George had supporters for his advocacy of a more active role for government. The backbench Liberal War Committee supported a scheme for both military and industrial conscription.

The Unionist Party experienced far fewer difficulties in adapting to the collectivist demands of war. Their backbench War Committee was usually ahead of its Liberal counterpart in the degree of state activity which it demanded in the cause of a more vigorous prosecution of the war. Universal conscription here was in the nature of a starting point. The spiritual leader of this agitation was Sir Edward Carson whose ideas had a corporatist ring about them and whose scheme of "Economic Warfare" promised to project the conflict into the far distant future.

A number of reasons might be suggested as to why the Unionists experienced so little difficulty in adjusting their principles to meet the new situation. One contemporary in attempting to explain the Party's attitude to social reform had claimed that they were not as fundamentally opposed to governmental activity as was sometimes supposed: "modern Conservatism inherits the traditions of Toryism which are

favourable to the activity and authority of the State".²⁹ The explanation was no doubt tempting but it seems unlikely that Burkean romanticism held much sway over the Party at this time. There was a later tradition also associated with an active role for the state which may have helped to prepare the way. Milner and his associates had advocated the development of the role of the state as necessary for national survival in both economic and military terms. In the end it appears most likely that while tradition may have played its part in facilitating the change, the Unionists' conversion is to be mainly explained in terms of their perceptions of the dangers facing the British state and the Empire. No principle, certainly no principle about the means of political activity, would be allowed to stand in the way of the defence of their country and their place within it. It is also necessary to point out that where the rights of individual property owners were infringed it was not done without an entirely proper regard for the financial interests of such individuals. The owners and shareholders of industries which became immersed in the system of war production did not emerge in 1918 noticeably poorer for the experience. Even so the Unionists had their limits. Where proper guarantees were not forthcoming or where traditional interests were directly threatened they could prove intransigent. For example they managed to effectively stifle attempts to nationalise the drink trade.

However it is true to suggest that previous party divisions did begin to break down during the war and a new dividing line began to form around the immediate and overriding issues of the time. Leo Maxse, super patriot and publicist, captured the mood in a letter to Lloyd George: "Anxious as we are to be quit of the debris which encumbered

the late Prime Minister we are hardly less anxious to be rid of the useless rubbish by which Bonar Law is surrounded."³⁰ Politics was coming to be divided on the basis of those who would contemplate any measure in pursuit of victory and those who maintained some reservations.

There is no simple way of describing the changes in the administrative machinery of government which took place during the war.³¹ As responsibilities were extended vertically and horizontally, quantitatively and qualitatively, so new administrative branches had to be established. In some areas new mechanisms were created, in others older ones were extended. Some existing provisions were adapted and used to great effect, some of the ambitious new schemes failed significantly. Some areas of governmental activity, for example the labour exchanges, developed great strength from small beginnings while others, for instance the liquor scheme, were commenced with a great flourish but produced precious little. By the end of the war the state had assumed wide, if varying, powers over a large part of industry and commerce. In the field of munitions and related materials the state had established either a direct or strong indirect control over production. Over other industries supplying materials associated with the war effort the state had considerable influence as the predominant customer. The production and distribution of food and fuel, of shipping, the mines and the railways, were subject to government control. Even many of those industries outside the immediate realm of influence or control had to rely upon government for the supply of raw materials. The Government also accepted responsibility over wages and rents. While these developments were dependent upon prior changes in political attitudes, once established they themselves began to

influence the politicians' perceptions of reality and possibility. The accumulation of comprehensive and reliable information about many aspects of national life and the extension of powers of direction and regulation encouraged an escalation of expectations about state activity.

However the matter of war collectivism must not pass without some qualification. Even within the 'collectivist party' there were divisions and many schemes were more impressive in conception than in practice. George Askwith recorded that the war had seen a good deal of ambitious talk about the need for the Government to "take over" this or that industry: "as if the Government could have possibly run the works by themselves without the aid of skilled management by persons conversant with each business".³² Inevitably there was often less to 'taking over' than met the eye. The middle of a war is no time to go in for comprehensive reconstruction so within broad guidelines imposed from above industries tended to be left to their own devices. Thus the 'control' of the railways involved no change in the managers or directors of the companies and the Shipping Controller, Sir Joseph Maclay, felt that control should be restricted to "essentially a financial control" and that the impermanence of the scheme should be emphasised by the maintenance of "the incentive of trade profit".³³ His Parliamentary Secretary, Leo Chiozza Money, disagreed and submitted a paper which argued that the nationalisation of the industry should be continued after the war.³⁴ There was clearly a divide in the collectivist camp over the question of whether such measures were an unpleasant, if necessary, expedient or if they pointed the way to post war reform. However these were essentially preliminaries of future conflicts and in practice the advocates of a limited

collectivism had their way.

A central feature of government expansion was the Ministry of Munitions itself.³⁵ The Ministry was created in 1915 out of the supply departments of the War Office. Its growth was rapid and unsystematic owing to the pressures of war and the erratic dynamism of Lloyd George, its first minister. On creation the Ministry assumed responsibility for the Royal Factories and gained the same direct control over the National Factories as they were created. As such the Ministry was the employer of around 300,000 industrial workers.³⁶ The Ministry exercised varying degrees of influence over other controlled and uncontrolled establishments but in all sections of the munitions industries its impact was considerable. Its general powers, some exercised in conjunction with other Departments, included allocation of raw materials, the direction of labour, control over contracts and the fixing of prices and wages.

In the field of labour regulation the Ministry exercised control over the whole munitions area. It is possible to identify four aspects of this control. There were the quasi legal powers granted under the Munitions of War Act and exercised through the Munitions Tribunals, there were powers of compulsory arbitration exercised through the Local Labour Advisory Board, there was the Welfare Inspectorate and there was a large surveillance organisation based on the Chief Information Offices in each region. It was quite inevitable that even in the best of circumstances such functions would involve the Ministry in demarcation disputes with other Departments. The arbitration service would encroach on the preserves of the Labour Department of

the Board of Trade and its surveillance services would of necessity cut across the work of the Home Office and the Naval Intelligence Department. Yet the mood engendered by the war left little opportunity for the type of negotiation and rationalisation which might have reduced conflict, and the 'dynamism' of its first two ministers only added fuel to the flames. The officials of the Ministry were rarely inhibited by their own inexperience and frequently exhibited impatience with conventional procedures. The Labour Section appears to have felt it had a special mission to blighted industry. At one time, in order to counter the influence of the shop stewards' movement they began to encourage the formation of non-revolutionary workshop organisations³⁷ apparently not recognising that this would jeopardise the relationship between government and the official trade unions which was the foundation of the whole labour policy. This supreme confidence is well illustrated by the remarks of the Chief Information Officer for Manchester, who argued that the settlement of disputes was a relatively easy matter if representatives of employers and employees were prepared to meet, "providing that an officer of the ministry is present". "If he is not such meetings lead to further friction, owing to both sides abusing each other."³⁸ The Welfare Inspectorate frequently succeeded in antagonising both unions and management.³⁹ The initiatives of the officials could prove embarrassing to ministers as when the Labour Department instigated the suppression of 'Forward' and left Lloyd George to develop a justifying case after the event.⁴⁰ Only one of the ministers, Addison, appears to have made any attempt to rationalise the expansion, and the ambition of his officials. Under pressure from other ministers he attempted to limit the scope of the surveillance work being undertaken by the Labour Section but in this he failed.

However according to one interested observer it would be unfair to single out the Ministry of Munitions. According to George Asquith their mistakes were only an inevitable part of a broader pattern of confusion and inconsistency arising out of the opportunism of the leading politicians. Instead of offering wise and informed direction government became, "a force of disintegration resulting from a maze of authorities".⁴¹ The creation of the Ministry of Labour itself Asquith felt owed more to a desire to flatter Labour leaders than a desire to promote an efficient conduct of business.⁴² The new minister, Hodge, by encouraging labour leaders to articulate their grievances was merely increasing the government's burden. Even worse, Asquith argued, was the appointment of Industrial Commissioners in June 1917 to investigate the causes of growing labour unrest. The Commissions were no more than a hasty improvisation. They had to report within fourteen days, there were no restrictions on the areas they could investigate, they had no professional assistance and the different commissioners had no opportunity to discuss or co-ordinate their findings.⁴³ Such expedients and the fact that each new department was allowed to develop its own structures and ideas for dealing with labour led inevitably, argued Asquith, to confusion. Such notable blunders as the award of the twelve and a half per cent bonus to skilled engineers in 1917 could be traced directly to the intervention of a "political chairman who could not have known anything on the subject".⁴⁴

It must be initially conceded that there was much that was reasonable in Asquith's criticism of government policy. His descriptive account is accurate and it is unquestionable that the labour policy would

have been infinitely more effective had it been possible to maintain the central control and co-ordination which he advocated. The main problem with his assessment is that it relies too much on the benefit of hindsight and fails to make adequate allowance for the desperate mood in which much of the activity took place. Askwith also failed to pay adequate attention to the impact of broader political issues on labour matters and as such failed to appreciate that the work of officials, systematic and informed though it may have been, would have proved ineffective in such a situation. In the best of worlds it is undeniably the case that institutions should be developed to fulfil specific and limited functions and with proper attention to past experience, yet the middle of a war is no time for such luxuries. The Government was constantly being faced with new demands and difficulties. It was never able to project any long term plan of its labour requirements and so it was inevitable that its demands would be constantly changing. As such, innovation and improvisation were perhaps the only avenues open.

Askwith clearly failed to take adequate account of how difficult it was for the government to secure acceptance for its policies. He was aware, as noted above, that bargains struck in London did not guarantee action in the workshops but failed to see that this meant that normal negotiations between officials and union leaders were no longer an adequate basis for the settlement of disputes. Askwith failed to appreciate that some qualitative change in the relationship between government and labour was rendered necessary by the additional demands and restrictions which were required. Even if only for symbolic reasons labour matters had to be elevated to the political level and

ministers and officials were of necessity involved in a continuous round of political activity. Even had it been possible in 1914 for the government to outline all of its future manpower requirements it would not have been possible to secure their acceptance, for this could only be secured by a continuous process of exposition, argument and threat. The developing military situation was always an important element in the Government's arguments for increased demands. In the early months of 1918 labour unrest was felt to be developing to a point of crisis. A number of factors made it appear probable that resistance to the new manpower proposal would create severe difficulties.⁴⁵ Arthur Henderson warned that the situation was "pregnant with disastrous possibilities" and that the country was on "the verge of industrial revolution".⁴⁶ Unofficial organisations seemed to have developed to the point where they could offer effective leadership to discontented workers in the munitions industries. At the beginning of March the stage was set for battle, yet by the end of the month the labour information service of the Ministry of Munitions could report that "threats of serious resistance to the manpower programme have disappeared". The success of the German Spring offensive on the Western Front had so transformed the situation that the 'responsible officials' of the ASE had been able to convince their members that the proposed strike "would raise such a storm among the general public that the Society would never get over it".⁴⁷ The Government had to be flexible enough to exploit the political advantage offered by such a situation. In this event it not only managed to push through its manpower proposals without opposition but to secure a bonus in that; "the Minister's appeal to munitions workers to sacrifice their Easter holidays met with a magnificently loyal response".⁴⁸ Normal negotiating procedures could not secure such victories.

Askwith's criticisms of the appointment of the Commissioners on Industrial Unrest again initially appear reasonable. No doubt the requirement to report quickly was less than ideal, the terms of reference more than a little vague and the sources of evidence somewhat indiscriminate. Clearly a better balanced picture could have been drawn by officials if they were given time to collate, monitor and analyse the available information, yet such a report might have served the purposes of the Government less well than did the actual reports in spite of their weaknesses.

One of Askwith's complaints concerned the breadth of evidence that the Commissioners listened to: "Every conceivable ex parte complaint and opinion had been invited and heard without check or hindrance to misstatement, or explanation of facts or circumstances."⁴⁹ Yet, in a sense, this represented the very quality of the inquiry. The type of investigation which Askwith seemed to favour, involving sober and informed discussion between officials and union leaders, would have been unlikely to carry much authority at the shop floor level. The sources of unrest existed below the level of official leadership, such representatives being scarcely more in touch with their rank and file members than the civil servants they would have been talking to. George Barnes, in his summary of the Commissioner Reports, draws particular attention to the fact that workers' criticisms were levelled against "all in authority", trade union officials as much as Cabinet Ministers.⁵⁰

A further criticism was that the Commissioners only came up with information that was generally available anyway. This in itself is

only partially true for some information and opinion did surface in the reports which was not available elsewhere. For example the Commissioners for the North West were able to present a picture of the life of munitions workers in Barrow that would introduce a new element into debates on the causes of unrest. They specifically argued that such conditions could only have been allowed to continue because of official ignorance: "But for the fact that Barrow is in a very isolated position and that it is considered undesirable to inform the public through the medium of the press of many of the evil conditions of industrial life, we cannot believe that the facts we propose to set down could so long have remained actual conditions of domestic life in England in the twentieth century."⁵¹ The Commissioners drew a picture of wretchedly inadequate housing conditions and pointed out weaknesses in the existing policy on rent control, in particular its failure to protect lodgers. Similarly they illustrated the need for a stricter control over the supply and cost of foodstuffs and gave specific examples of exploitation. Such a report could scarcely be dismissed as 'stale complaints'.⁵² In any case it would be naive to assume that the main purpose of Commissions is to unearth new evidence. In the course of a hostile response to the appointment of the Commissioners: "The general feeling frankly expressed among the workers is that if more attention were given to the problem of reducing the high cost of foodstuffs and less to the formation of commissions, much discontent would be removed",⁵³ the labour experts of the Ministry of Munitions complained that all that the Commissioner 'discovered' had already appeared in their own reports. There was a measure of truth in this, but they had presented such evidence piecemeal. The quality of the Commissioners' reports was to concentrate grievances and suggestions

for reform. The Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Munitions perhaps recognised this, for after this time they began to include some general analysis of the continuing causes of industrial unrest in their weekly reports.

Yet the main weakness of Askwith's criticism of the appointment of the Commissioners is that he fails to take account of the political significance of the event. While the Commissioners produced little new information, though perhaps more than might have been reasonably anticipated, while they produced little deep analysis of the problem,⁵⁴ and while their findings on the causes of unrest: the high cost and poor distribution of food, inadequate supplies of beer, long delays in arbitration settlements, continuing difficulties over dilution schemes and the grievances of skilled men over the erosion of differentials, were no means novel, it would be inadequate to question their utility on these grounds alone. Commissions are usually appointed to make a political point and these were no exception. During 1917 there was a great deal of concern in Cabinet about industrial unrest. Some argued that it must be related to grievances but a number of Unionists related the unrest to the influence of 'revolutionaries'.⁵⁵ There was much debate, frequently instigated by Sir Edward Carson, as to the degree of influence which 'agitators' had on the labour situation.⁵⁶ Labour representatives, while second to none in their hostility to such 'agitators', argued that unrest developed because the workforce had a number of genuine grievances. Lloyd George clearly favoured this latter line if only for the fact that it offered scope for political action.

In this context the potential utility of the Commissions becomes clearer. It would tend to strengthen the Prime Minister's hand against the Unionist hard liners as the Commissioners were more likely to relate the unrest to legitimate grievances than to the influence of pacifist agitators or 'German gold'. Thus they would reinforce those who believed unrest to be remediable by state action. More importantly, the appointment of the Commissions would also serve as a demonstration of the Government's concern for the welfare of the workforce. This function was reinforced by the composition of the Commission, one representative each of labour and capital under an independent chairman, and by the fact that the commissioners were encouraged to consult a wide range of opinions. That one Commissioner could use the report as a vehicle for his view that in order "to satisfy the feeling prevalent among the wage earning classes" it would be necessary to make "more drastic demands on the rich"⁵⁷ could only reinforce the impression that the Government was prepared to consider all views in its solicitude for the workers' interests. The vital matter was to maintain some measure of political authority when conventional channels were breaking down and official consultation no longer appeared to work. Inevitably the danger lay in raising expectations which a government composed as this one was, could never conceivably satisfy, but there were ways of postponing such matters until the immediate crisis was passed.

One measure, the award of the twelve and a half per cent bonus to skilled men in the munitions industries, which arose out of the Commissions on Industrial Unrest, was cited by Askwith as a particularly unfortunate result of their activities. As was widely

recognised much labour unrest during the war arose out of the grievances of skilled men whose wages rose by far less than those of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. A number of factors contributed to this including the dilution policy, the increased use of national wage agreements, the predominance of flat rate agreements and a rapid increase in mechanisation. Government intervention had actually reinforced the relative improvements in the pay of unskilled workers who tended to be paid on a piece rate rather than the day rate of the skilled. On 13th September 1915 the Minister of Munitions had pledged "to prevent the reduction of piece rates as a consequence of the increase in output due to the suspension of restrictions".⁵⁸ As the war progressed the introduction of new processes and machinery rendered the old piece rates even more unrealistic but the Ministry stood by its original pledge, and the relative position of the semi-skilled and unskilled continued to improve. The Commissioners were unanimous in their view that the skilled men had a legitimate grievance and proposed that "A system should be inaugurated whereby skilled supervisors and others on day rates should receive a bonus".⁵⁹ The then Minister of Munitions, Churchill, reacted immediately and appointed "a small committee under a political chairman" with the brief, "not of considering whether the plan was wise or not",⁶⁰ but of reporting on how the bonus should be paid. They quickly reported the view that a twelve and a half per cent bonus should be paid to all skilled engineers and foundry workers on time rates in the munitions industries.

This scheme, in the event, proved to be a failure. Many observers later came to believe that it had caused far more unrest than it had cured. The main difficulty was that other groups of workers did not

understand why they too were not entitled to the bonus. The Information Officers of the Ministry of Munitions eventually recorded the various complaints. From Manchester it was reported that railwaymen had automatically assumed their right to the bonus and had tacked twelve and a half per cent on to a claim they were already making.⁶¹ From Leeds came reports of "general discontent amongst iron and steel workers who had been excluded"⁶² and steel workers in Sheffield had gone on strike.⁶³ Particular difficulties were experienced in plants where only a section of the skilled workforce was involved in munitions work. Both Manchester and Birmingham had seen meetings of excluded men who had threatened to strike. The Ministry's Manchester Officer warned of severe unrest if the bonus were not extended to all skilled men.⁶⁴ Eventually all industrial districts began to experience unrest related to the issue: even piece rate workers were insisting that they be included in the scheme. The Officials responsible for Wales understood the central problem: "The men do not understand the subtle distinctions which differentiate between one class of labour and another."⁶⁵ The Ministry was gradually forced to give way. In the face of the Sheffield strike they broadened the entitlement to war bonuses to include other skilled workers and they were eventually driven to introduce a twenty shilling bonus payment in order to restore equity between piece and time workers, which, of course, defeated the whole original purpose of the bonus scheme. The Leeds Officer of the Ministry felt the Government had lost on all counts: "The Government does not get any credit at all for their undue generosity, while the men are encouraged in the idea . . . that they have only to go on strike to expedite a decision."⁶⁶

While it is undeniable that the bonus scheme proved unsuccessful Askwith's attempt to blame it exclusively on the politicians must be questioned. It was only when the difficulties had actually arisen that the officials of the Ministry of Munitions began to criticise the scheme. Up to that point they had been willing to go along with it and, as late as December 1917 regional Officers were anticipating that the effect of the award would be "to calm much of the growing unrest".⁶⁷ In retrospect it seems highly unlikely that any agency, no matter how well informed or experienced, could have adequately dealt with the difficulty. The Government had to make some response to the skilled munitions workers but it was inevitable that any significant response would be seized upon by other workers as a vehicle to progress their own claims. Under the conditions imposed by the war the Government was in no position to ride out even a temporary disruption of munitions production. Again Askwith was too readily assuming that some well designed administrative scheme could overcome what was an essentially intractable political situation.

Most of Askwith's own time during the war was devoted to the work of the Committee on Production; "the ultimate custodian of the Government's duties as conciliator". While the officials of the Ministry of Munitions and the Commissioners on Industrial Unrest complained that delays in the settlements arrived at by the Committee were contributing to industrial unrest this must be attributed to the huge volume of business caused by the introduction of compulsory arbitration, rather than the inefficiency of Askwith and his officials. In fact the Committee was remarkably successful. Its officials were experienced and knowledgeable in labour matters and, as the final report under

the Conciliation Act noted, its decisions "were almost universally accepted". However this cannot be used to imply that such an approach would have been successful in all cases nor that there was no need for the Government to deal with labour matters at the general political level. The success of the Committee cannot be explained without some reference to the political climate in which its work took place, nor can it be assumed that because it could deal adequately with some matters it could deal with all.

In dealing with government activities during this period it is important not to neglect the question of the development of the machinery of government. From the perspective of the present day it is all too easy to concentrate on high policy and to assume that network of minor and local agencies which has since become an unremarkable feature of the modern state. At the beginning of the war the Cabinet had few such agencies at its disposal. As a result policies were often formulated on the basis of inadequate information and their implementation was a haphazard affair. In its desire to gain influence in areas which it had previously ignored government was drawn on the one hand, to act in conjunction with private associations; the machinery of the trade unions was used to regulate labour, and District Armament Committees, consisting in the main of local employers, played a large part in the production of war materials; and, on the other, to instigate the rapid development of official structures. Such developments were often rather erratic and not always of much assistance in effective policy making. If the activities of government frequently bore the aspect of casting straws on the wind it must be related to this gap between the responsibilities which ministers wanted to

assume and their limited competence.

Those administrative structures which had already been in existence proved to be of great assistance to the Government in its attempts to direct national life into the war effort. The Labour Department of the Board of Trade and, in particular its newly created network of labour exchanges, proved invaluable.⁶⁸ As Wolfe pointed out: "The fundamental difference between them and other agencies was their national character."⁶⁹ In the exchanges the government had a ready made network of officials with local contacts and some expertise in the field of labour regulation. During the war the government used this structure as the foundation for its attempts to control the use, mobility and conduct of labour. Early in the war the scope of the exchanges was broadened to include categories of workers who had not been covered by compulsory insurance, for example those in the wool and cotton trades, and in April 1915 an order in council under the Defence of the Realm Act made it illegal for an employer "to obtain labour from a distance of more than ten miles from his factory otherwise than through a Board of Trade Labour Exchange".⁷⁰ The information provided by the local exchanges made it possible for other government agencies to place contracts where they would encourage the best use of available labour and the most efficient type of industrial development.⁷¹ A Regulation of August 1915 empowered the exchanges to give priority in the supply of labour to firms involved in war work and the 'leaving certificate' scheme of the Ministry of Munitions was only made possible by the regulatory work of the exchanges. They were used to encourage employers to substitute female labour for their male workers and in the introduction of foreign and colonial labour. The exchanges were also

used to rectify the mistakes of others as when they were put to the task of organising 'release from the colours' for key workers who had been allowed to enlist.⁷² As the war progressed the exchanges acquired a whole new range of functions. They were involved in the provision of industrial training, they issued lists of lodgings, gave advice on housing and helped employers to provide hostel accommodation for workers. The exchanges thus provided the essential administrative structure for a number of uncontentious but vital policies.

The most chaotic administrative growth occurred in the field of labour surveillance. A large number of agencies were formed to monitor the activities and opinions of workers. In the course of its more general weekly reports the Labour Department of the Board of Trade, later the Ministry of Labour, offered information on unrest and the activities of 'agitators'. In May 1917 the new ministry set up its own Industrial Intelligence Department. The Ministry of Munitions also developed an Intelligence Branch and produced detailed weekly reports. Also watching and reporting on labour unrest were the shipyard Department of the Admiralty, the Naval Intelligence Department of the same organisation, the Military Intelligence Department of the War Office, as well as the Special Branch of Scotland Yard. It is also clear from Cabinet records and private papers that many leading politicians were also provided with information, some solicited, some not, from all manner of private organisations and individuals in industry.⁷³ There was a measure of functional division and the situation was rendered less chaotic than it might have been by the fact that a number of these organisations drew their agents from a common source: Scotland Yard provided officers to serve with Military Intelligence, with

Naval Intelligence and with the Ministry of Munitions.⁷⁴ Yet there remained a good deal of confusion as to who was responsible for what, who controlled who, and to what end the various enquiries should be directed. Surveillance work raises serious problems at the best of times but during the war the issues sometimes became spectacularly entangled. At the heart of the confusion was the evident fact that the politicians had no clear idea as to what their agents should be looking for.

Cabinet attitudes to labour would appear to have undergone a qualitative change during 1917. The increased incidence of labour disputes obviously had something to do with this, as did the deepening manpower crisis, yet it was the March Revolution in Russia which more than anything else predisposed certain ministers to see domestic matters in a new light. They were particularly concerned about the way in which this had served to focus and to sustain radical opinion in Britain. The Cabinet considered banning the Leeds meeting organised by the United Socialist Council but felt it to be impossible because of the wide interest and support it had attracted.⁷⁵ The Prime Minister's response to the new wave of agitation, as discussed above, was to appoint Commissioners to investigate unrest in the hope that they would suggest practical concessions which would curtail the influence of the agitators. "At bottom", he argued, "there appeared to be genuine and legitimate grievances". While there were violent anarchists about attempting to exploit the situation the best way to deal with the matter was "to remove the grievances without delay in order to forestall trouble".⁷⁶ However other members of Cabinet were not convinced that ameliorative action was adequate. Carson conceded that the Commissioners had gone "fully into the causes which have

created an atmosphere in which industrial agitation flourishes" but argued that it was unrealistic to suppose that "those causes alone would have produced the dangerous symptoms which exist in the country without some powerful driving force to make them effective".⁷⁷ Carson felt it was more profitable to detect and suppress this minority than to appease the majority. He was particularly concerned about the proliferation of organisations attempting to perform the tasks of surveillance. The Ministry of Labour officials were useful up to a point but were "necessarily more clearly associated with the properly accredited Trade Union officials, and less in touch with the more recent labour organisations". Carson identified, the Union of Democratic Control, the Independent Labour Party, the No Conscription Fellowship, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Rank and File Movement and the Shop Stewards' Movement as "the principle field of operations for pacifist propaganda", and it was in these organisations that surveillance was weakest. Carson argued that other departments should concentrate on more conventional activities and the Home Office should be given the responsibility for co-ordinating information on revolutionary and pacifist organisations.

The Cabinet substantially accepted Carson's suggestions. They agreed "the Home Office should undertake the co-ordination and control of the investigation of all pacifist propaganda and of other subjects connected therewith . . . and should submit a full report to the War Cabinet who would then decide whether periodical reports should be submitted on the subject".⁷⁸ In point of fact the matter was already under way in the Home Office. The Home Secretary had received one report from Scotland Yard which had not been entirely satisfactory,

but by November he was able to submit for Cabinet approval a report prepared by Basil Thomson.⁷⁹ The Cabinet was sufficiently impressed to sanction the production of further reports at fortnightly intervals but thought they should include more detail.

This side of the rationalisation proved a relatively easy matter. Thomson continued to report for the duration of the war though he did fail to uncover the conspiracies which Carson suspected were at work. However it was a far more difficult matter to persuade other agencies to give up their activities in what they clearly felt was a most interesting area. Addison, during a brief spell as Minister of Munitions attempted to introduce some rationalisation. He argued that as he had found his Ministry was "not competent to perform its duties" in respect of "aliens, sabotage and industrial unrest" such functions should be transferred to the Home Office and Scotland Yard.⁸⁰ The intention was clearly to limit the surveillance activities of the Ministry of Munitions to more mundane labour issues. Yet this initiative proved to be singularly ineffectual in that the Information Officers of the Ministry actually broadened the scope, and increased the political content of their reports during 1917. It would appear that the officials involved interpreted the criticisms as a challenge, and instead of accepting a more limited role, attempted to prove that they could quite adequately perform any of those duties which had been assigned to Scotland Yard. For example, in September 1918, the labour section presented a report of a detailed investigation into the Shop Stewards' Movement in Coventry. Similarly the Ministry of Labour was resistant to the idea that their field of operations should be circumscribed. In 1918 they too submitted to Cabinet a report on the Shop Stewards' Movement.⁸¹

As labour matters were at the heart of wartime politics it was clear to most politicians that their activities in the area could not be restricted to surveillance and welfare. It was soon realised that the critical role of labour would have to be symbolically recognised by the inclusion of labour representatives in the Government. Asquith began the process tentatively by appointing three Labour Party men to junior posts in his coalition. Lloyd George was more thorough and included a Labour man in his War Cabinet. Yet while the significance of such appointments must be acknowledged it is all too easy to exaggerate it. Some historians have argued that they were critical in the rise of the Labour Party and Arthur Marwick argued that they "made nonsense of the claim that, good as Labour chaps might be on the hours of work they were not fit to govern".⁸² This suggests that the Labour representatives played a full part in the work of these governments. The record suggests however that their role was somewhat restricted. Positions occupied by Labour men in the Lloyd George coalition were Junior Lord of the Treasury, Food Controller, Junior Minister at Food Control, Minister of Labour, and Junior Secretaryships at the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Service. In addition there was Henderson's seat in the Cabinet, but apart from this last appointment there is little to suggest that the Labour role went significantly further than "hours of work" and similar subjects. Even Henderson's position should not pass without question for while he was nominally at the centre of affairs with a voice on every issue, he appears to have spent most of his time on labour matters; advising the Cabinet, acting for the Cabinet in negotiations with labour representatives and acting as chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Manpower. Lord Crewe, in

informing the King on a specific instance of labour unrest, provided an indication of Henderson's function, when nominally Minister of Education, in Asquith's Government: "Mr Henderson offered to use his best efforts to enlighten his friends as to the true state of affairs, both at an important meeting which is being held in London this afternoon, and by going to Glasgow to confer with the leaders there; and the Cabinet felt that the business could not be left in better hands".⁸³ Henderson's contribution to the Lloyd George Cabinet was similarly circumscribed. He was indeed used as envoy to the Provisional Government in Russia and there was a suggestion that he be kept there as Ambassador, yet this was not intended to be his introduction to higher affairs but was rather a piece of astute opportunism on the part of Lloyd George who, like his French counterpart who sent Albert Thomas, felt that a Labour man would put a more effective gloss on the Allied cause. When Henderson did attempt to become involved in wider issues he was abruptly dismissed. Thomas Jones had it from Sidney Webb that Henderson was so embittered by his ineffectiveness in the Government that he had vowed never again to serve in a government which did not have a Commons' majority.⁸⁴

In spite of many claims to the contrary it is also important to recognise that Labour's representation in the Lloyd George Coalition was not greatly disproportionate to the number of seats it held in the House of Commons. In December 1916 Labour held thirty-nine seats. This was 6.7 per cent of the total seats held by the parties in the Coalition. Labour's share of Government appointments was around 10 per cent. If allowance is made for the fact that smaller parties in coalitions are usually over represented and that a number of

Asquithian Liberals deliberately excluded themselves, the Labour appointments can be accounted for in purely parliamentary terms.⁸⁵ Only Henderson's appointment to a small War Cabinet could be thought of as generous, but it is difficult to see how it could have been avoided. In any case Henderson's position, in practice, bore clear limitations. Any particular impact which these Labour appointments had may be best explained in terms of public attitudes towards the fitness of men from certain social backgrounds to hold high office, even though such appointments were not without precedent.⁸⁶

Labour permeation was more extensive at the administrative level. As the Government attempted to extend its field of operations into the labour field it inevitably became dependent upon labour leaders. The centralisation of wage bargaining procedures which was undertaken in many industries, the administration of the machinery of compulsory arbitration alone, served to keep hundreds of trade union officials in London for the duration of the war. Labour leaders did not penetrate all departments but in addition to the immediate issues of wages, hours, welfare and work discipline, a good deal of their energy was devoted to the Ministry of Reconstruction. Yet here too labour representation tended to be strongest in traditional areas of interest; welfare, education, state benefits and the like, rather than more central, and critical, areas such as economic planning. It is probable that labour men excluded themselves from areas in which they lacked confidence. The Webbs, who served on the committee dealing with the reconstruction of government, were convinced that few labour men possessed the necessary talents to play a role in such matters.⁸⁷ There is little evidence in this of any breaking of the labour stereotype. Moreover

labour representatives actually felt their participation to be marginal and conditional. Most were sceptical of the motives of those who had engineered their elevation. Wardle, soon after to be made Parliamentary Secretary at the Board of Trade, warned the Labour Party Conference in January 1917 that "the active share on committees and in the actual operations of Government which has been accorded to Labour is not so much the spontaneous recognition of its sacrifices, as of the necessities of the hour".⁸⁸

The Politics of Co-operation

Central to any explanation of the co-operation between the Government and labour leaders during the war must be some appreciation of the divisions within the Labour Movement. Had the Movement been united on the desirability of pursuing victory at any price there could have been little difficulty. Had rank and file dissent been isolated and without articulate spokesmen, labour leaders and Government could have combined to stifle it. However because divisions and disagreements existed at all levels even those leaders who would have dearly loved to fall in behind the Government had to act with circumspection. Furthermore their path was also complicated by the fluctuations of politics in the war years. The maintenance of popular support for the labour leaders, as much as for the Government, demanded constant attention and activity.

Labour spokesmen, therefore, offered support, but support with reservations. As the war progressed there was a tendency for the support to diminish and the reservations to increase. The reservations were expressed in a number of ways. The most common and persistent theme was to link continued support for the war to the provision of adequate conditions and benefits for those members of the working population, either at the front or in the factories, who were making the greatest efforts. Later in the war labour spokesmen introduced other themes; the need for equality of sacrifice, the definition of 'War Aims' and the question of post-war social reform as part of reconstruction, yet it was the original welfare issues with which labour spokesmen were most comfortable and united. The Party in Parliament, for example,

supported the general proposals of the Lloyd George Coalition as outlined in its first King's Speech but tabled an amendment to record regret that there was no provision for pensions for soldiers who had been discharged because of disease contracted in the service. The Labour Party President caught the style well in arguing that the Party's participation in the new Coalition should not be taken to mean "that we are not to have special regard to the interests of Labour during this war (nor) that we are to be uncritical as to the means to be employed in waging it".⁸⁹ Throughout the war labour spokesmen continued to remind the Government and the public of the sacrifices being made by 'their people'. They rarely threatened any direct sanction, but they often presented their suggestions as preconditions for the maintenance of industrial peace. They sought to demonstrate that 'inequalities of sacrifice' would weaken their members' support for the war effort: "Labour is expected, even legally obliged to maintain an industrial truce, but shipowners can increase freightage many times over, and Government contractors and food monopolists have reaped huge harvests out of the necessity and dangers of the realm".⁹⁰ Most spokesmen sought to disassociate themselves from strikes and unrest but still use such events to reinforce their arguments. The Government was persistently warned that if it failed to come to terms with the leaders, "the men in the workshops would deal with it more drastically".⁹¹ Granted that consistent and unconditional support for the war effort was out of the question this support with qualifications was by no means unacceptable to the Government. It offered no focus for those who sought to propagate their fundamental opposition to the war and it tended to reinforce the belief that grievances and miseries associated with the war could be dealt with by minor adjustments and

without calling into question the desirability of war itself. It also gave the Government the opportunity to strengthen the position of 'responsible' leaders by offering appropriate concessions.

While such a policy was perhaps the best available to the Government it created a number of casualties. The Government's effort to retain its own credibility in this field became, in practice, a continuous, and losing battle to maintain that of the labour leaders who had been persuaded to co-operate. The increasing unpopularity of the war and the accumulating demands on the working population rendered this all the more difficult. Only two of those Labour politicians who joined Lloyd George's government survived in Labour politics. Even Henderson, one of the survivors, was on one occasion denied a hearing at a Labour Party Conference when he attempted to explain the Government's line on deportations. Perhaps his survival had more to do with his dismissal than anything else for none of the other Labour Ministers seemed to be able to maintain any authority within the Labour Movement. It was widely felt that on entering the Coalition the Labour men had abandoned their former friends. At the 1918 Conference after a year of the Coalition Bromley complained that when he had been in government departments, "putting the case of serious-minded Trade Unionists . . . the Labour representative had sat dumb, without giving even a sympathetic glance".⁹² At the same Conference Mr R J Davies gave voice to the disillusionment: "Instead of permeating the Departments of the capitalist government the capitalist government had permeated the Labour men. The speeches of some of the Labour Ministers were filled with militarism and jingoism. Another argument, he noted, was that if a Labour Government were to come it was necessary for Labour Ministers to

gain administrative experience, yet "How many of the Labour members of this government would be in the Labour Government?"⁹³ Askwith too recognised that many of the union leaders who had worked with the Government had done so at the cost of losing their influence with their members.⁹⁴

The reinforcement of the position of the official leaders clearly required that the Government should make, and be seen to be making concessions in response to their representations. In a few areas attempts were made. The Asquith Government introduced the 'trade card' scheme with such considerations in mind. It offered union officials the opportunity to administer exceptions and as such reinforced their position. Similarly trade union complaints that the talents of many skilled men were being wasted in military service were met with a scheme whereby union officials were encouraged to report all known cases to the Minister of Munitions who would investigate and obtain the release of the men. The scheme was put into operation and between September 1917 and May 1918 3,736 cases were dealt with. Yet while this provided union officials with something to do it represented little in the way of concession for the release of these men coincided with the Government's own manpower policy. On matters of greater substance the Government tended to yield to the temptations offered by supplicants without sanctions.

The trouble with this was that if the Government did ignore the promptings of the official leaders it would encourage workers with grievances to turn to those who were prepared to act. The Cabinet had been aware of this possibility since 1915 and by April 1917

Lloyd George was warning his colleagues of "a very considerable and highly organised labour movement with seditious tendencies".⁹⁵ The officials of the Ministry of Labour recognised that the first casualties of such a movement were likely to be the official leaders: "The proposals are directly aimed at undermining the present Trade Union organisation".⁹⁶ Faced with this threat to its "shield of Labour representatives"⁹⁷ it was quite clear what the Government ought to do: "The Government should adhere to its policy of recognising only the constituted authority of the Trade Unions and that no deputation from the Shop Stewards' Movement should be received except at the request of the executive of the union".⁹⁸ Officials continued to remind ministers of the consequences of weakening: "The responsible Trade Union officials . . . are extremely anxious that the Government should not in any way prejudice their position by offering any encouragement to any of the Shop Stewards . . . (and) that if this were done they would be absolutely powerless".⁹⁹ In the majority of cases this policy was maintained yet there were exceptions. The Commissioners on Industrial Unrest for the London area complained that although "the Trade Union representatives have by constitutional means endeavored, but in vain, to procure settlement of disputes" the Government had acceded to unofficial and illegal action and hence "the workpeople gained the impression that if they wish for any improvement in conditions they must take the matter into their own hands . . .".¹⁰⁰ It was easy enough to appreciate the importance of a policy of only dealing with official leaders but a more difficult matter to maintain it in practice. Even though the official leaders had agreed not to exploit the situation created by labour shortages and the Government's need for continuous production labour's potential market advantage

still existed. Even the high degree of regulation could not entirely remove or submerge this fact. The official censorship might help to conceal some of the victories secured by unofficial action but some were so obvious, as when the Government, in June 1917, gave way to the miners' wage demands, or so spectacular, as for example the Hargreaves case, that they offered a public demonstration of the contrast between official ineffectuality and the potency of well organised rebellion.

In practice, then, there were occasions when it was not possible for the Government to ignore workshop power. Similarly, it was rarely able to reinforce the position of official trade union leaders largely because its manpower policy was too erratic, too frequently at the point of breakdown for it to be able to offer the sort of substantial concessions that would have been necessary. Many government officials came to feel that the only way to cope with shop floor power was to frankly recognise it and to try to direct it into less militant organisations. The Commissioners on Industrial Unrest advocated a system of industrial councils and the Ministry of Labour actually set up a Joint Council for engineers in the Manchester area. Such schemes were subject to the inevitable departmental rivalries. The Ministry of Munitions commented dismissively on the council that its "function would appear to be limited to the exchanging of views"¹⁰². They themselves were "actively engaged in considering the formation of joint district committees and works committees"¹⁰³. The Ministry's officials did manage to encourage a meeting of five hundred Shop Stewards in Liverpool who "resolved if possible to form Workshop Committees with limited powers in every firm in the port"¹⁰⁴. Yet it was soon clear that such devices were more likely to exacerbate the problem than to

solve it. An ASE official from Glasgow warned the Ministry's officials that if they managed to institute their system of shop committees they "would amalgamate and virtually overthrow the unions" and form a "nucleus of industrial unionism".¹⁰⁵ What the officials had failed to appreciate was that the threat of workshop organisations to the official unions lay not so much in the political opinions of their creators as in their structure and functions.

The uncomfortable truth was that there was no policy or structure which could provide a once and for all solution to the dilemma. It was important in a general sense that the Government should refuse to recognise unofficial leaders yet on occasion they would be forced to act by the pressure that they could bring to bear. It was important to conciliate the official leaders yet it was usually only in the circumstances created by unofficial and illegal action that the Government would be forced to admit that it had anything left to concede. One way to draw attention from the dilemma was to attempt to introduce issues which had no immediate resource implications. As the war progressed the Government increasingly sought to promote discussion of post-war reforms and the question of War Aims.

Frances Stevenson recorded that when Labour representatives raised "awkward questions" when Lloyd George was soliciting their support for the Coalition,¹⁰⁶ "he put them off with chaff". 'Chaff' would appear to have been the Prime Minister's favourite currency, for in meeting a Labour Party delegation in March 1917 he ignored their immediate concerns and instead criticised their lack of 'audacity' and urged them to formulate ambitious schemes for the post-war world. With

hindsight much of the work of the Ministry of Reconstruction must be seen in the light of concentrating attention on the future and away from existing grievances.

It would be wrong however to suggest that this was an instance of an innocent group of labour leaders being led into a consciously created trap by manipulative politicians. It was beyond the competence of government to create this mood of expectation for the post-war period. The enhanced feelings of national community and the belief that things could never be the same after the war were spontaneous reactions to widespread suffering and were not, moreover, confined to any particular class or political group. In directing attention away from present grievance to future opportunity the Prime Minister was doing no more than identifying and harnessing a mood that was ripe for exploitation. Similarly it is wrong to imply, as did Frances Stevenson, that labour leaders were in some way tricked into going along with the idea. Many of them were more than willing accomplices for they too had much to gain from any policy which avoided awkward questions about the present. It would appear that those labour leaders who were most favourable to the active prosecution of the war were also the most vociferous and optimistic about the post-war world. James Sexton had taken to the idea as early as January 1916. He admitted that "when the boys came home" they would still have the same employer to fight but argued that "their claim would be so irresistible that no-one could refuse them their fair share in the products of the country".¹⁰⁷ One sceptical voice drew attention to the uncomfortable fact that among employers there had "been little change of policy even during the war and it (was) surely expecting too much to

look for some miraculous change when war is over". Yet scepticism was rare and became rarer as the war progressed. J H Thomas argued that there could be no argument against rail nationalisation in peacetime if government control had been found to be necessary for the system's efficient operation during the war.¹⁰⁹ Smillie moved the nationalisation of the mines arguing that "the nation was prepared for a big step forward in this direction".¹¹⁰ One delegate felt the time had come to go even further: "No schemes for the nationalisation of industry can be accepted as satisfactory which do not provide for their effective control by the workers in these industries."¹¹¹ The Executive of the Labour Party predicted confidently that the experiences of wartime had opened the doors to peacetime collectivism: the "more thoughtful of the population" were now inclined to favourably "consider proposals for national reorganisation on lines that were popular only in Labour circles before the war". J H Thomas, at the Party Conference of June 1918, dismissed the notion that social reform could be postponed by financial considerations: "While they used to be content when told that any reform costing a few millions a year would mean bankruptcy for the state, the most ignorant people now understood that if a state could spend eight millions a day in the destruction of humanity, they could at least find some millions for the reconstruction of humanity."¹¹² Most labour leaders were more than willing to take the path which the Prime Minister had pointed out to them.

An interesting example of the way in which those in government circles drew distinction between immediate and future demands is offered by Basil Thomson's report on Pacifism. Thomson had investigated reports

that access to the 'Labour Leader' and the 'Daily Herald' had led some of the troops in France to become infected with bolshevist ideas. Thomson blandly reassured the Cabinet that there was little to worry about because "most of the revolutionary talk had been confined to plans for after the war".¹¹³

'War Aims' was another aspect of policy which the Government could manipulate without cost to its manpower policy, yet this could involve other difficulties. Although labour politics during the war normally revolved around immediate issues and proceeded from crisis to crisis all smaller questions were affected by the larger question of the legitimacy of the war itself. All the arguments which the Government would bring to bear against recalcitrant workers ultimately rested on the assumption that the winning of the war was a desirable and necessary object. Therefore, for example, arguments about the desirability of a negotiated peace could not be confined to the realms of grand strategy for the handling of such an issue could determine the degree of co-operation which the Government could secure in labour matters.

Popular views about the desirability of securing a military victory were subject to fluctuation during the conflict. While there always appears to have been a comfortable majority in agreement with the Government on the necessity for securing a military victory there had been a considerable decline in enthusiasm by 1917. As the war entered its final year the Government were warned that even military victories had failed to inspire any general enthusiasm: "All they seem to care about is the return of their own relations."¹¹⁴ Even that old favourite of the propagandists, 'German outrages', had ceased to have the desired

effect for, it was reported, it only produced a more urgent desire for peace so that the prisoners could be brought home without delay. While it was only in the imaginations of the super patriots that conscious pacifism made substantial inroad into British opinion, the Government was forced to take up the issue of the desirability of the war because even a slight weakening of support might cause a fatal fall in industrial production or make the workforce unwilling to tolerate additional demands. A large element in public debate therefore came to centre on the question of 'War Aims'. Even the 'Daily Herald' was prepared to offer support for the war on condition that the Government "restate war aims in accordance with what is worth fighting for by the people who have to do the fighting".¹¹⁵ The issue was taken up on the right as well, Carson arguing in Cabinet that the success of the pacifists could be directly related to the Government's failure to state definite war aims.¹¹⁶ The revolutions in Russia rendered the issue even more topical for the first provoked discussion as to the conditions under which Russia would continue in the war while the second produced the immediate withdrawal and renewed interest in a negotiated peace.

The Labour Party issued its own war aims during 1917. These included a repudiation of secret diplomacy and a strong emphasis on the importance of a conciliatory settlement once the war was over. The Party supported the idea of a League of Nations and suggested that African colonies should be handed over to that body. On the issue which was critical for the Government, the Party remained sound. The "fundamental purpose" of the war was identified as "making the world safe for democracy".¹¹⁷ This was later reinforced in the

memorandum which the Party submitted to the Inter Allied Labour and Socialist Conference which warned that "a victory for German imperialism would be the defeat and destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe".¹¹⁸

Lloyd George later recalled how important it had been for the Government to respond favourably: "The Macdonald Section of the Labour Movement was becoming greater and their agitation was intensifying and gaining fresh adherents . . . It was essential to convince the nation that we were not continuing the war merely to gain a vindictive or looting triumph."¹¹⁹ It was highly significant that Lloyd George, when he came to announce his own war aims, should do so to an audience of trade union officials. He himself later related the matter to the manpower question: "The difficulties of our manpower had almost produced a deadlock with the Trade Unions. Without their goodwill and co-operation, we could not have secured further recruits among the exempted."¹²⁰ The Prime Minister endorsed many of the Labour Party's statements. He emphasised that the war was not a war of aggression and emphasised the need for a conciliatory settlement. He spoke of the restoration of the sanctity of treaties, territorial settlements based on the right of self determination and the need for some international organisation. The Cabinet had no difficulty in agreeing to such ideas providing they presupposed the securing of a military victory. The important matter was to retain the support of the leaders of labour and, above all, prevent them or their followers becoming converted to the view that there was a possibility of peace by negotiation.

While the maintenance of a working alliance with the official leaders

of labour was an important part of the Government's policy it did not in itself guarantee the results which were required. The alliance was the framework within which the Government and its agents could work to extract the specific agreements they thought were necessary. The maintenance of the alliance required attention and adaptation but it was a relatively simple business in comparison with the range of measures which were used to secure the detailed compliance of all groups of workers.

Government measures in the labour field rarely followed any consistent pattern. The politicians lurched from crisis to crisis using what assistance was immediately available and improvising when necessary. As illustrated above, they knew what they should do in respect of unofficial union organisations, yet they were frequently forced to break their own rules. All attempts to develop some general analysis of the problems reflect this same flux and inconsistency. The most generally expressed view in Cabinet was a fairly straightforward one: "The danger of the situation depends not so much on the proceedings of the small (by comparison) numbers of workmen holding syndicalist views and revolutionary aims, as on the fear that the vastly larger body of patriots and loyal trade unionists may be deluded by misrepresentation of the facts into expressing sympathy with the violent minority."¹²¹ Lloyd George was sometimes predisposed to analyse unrest in a similar way: "At bottom there appeared to be general and legitimate grievances, but there was a danger of these being exploited by violent anarchists."¹²² Up to this point the Commissioners on Industrial Unrest were in agreement identifying "a strong feeling of patriotism on the part of employers and employed" and arguing that "feelings of a

revolutionary character are not entertained by the bulk of the men".¹²³ At this level there was little dissent. Sir Edward Carson felt that the view was complacent and attention should be drawn to the "powerful driving force" which he felt was behind the labour agitation, but there was usually sufficient agreement on the policy of removing the majority from the influence of the minority by concessions for the following type of statement to become accepted policy: "As soon as further evidence was forthcoming the Government should endeavour to remove the grievances without delay in order . . . to forestall trouble."¹²⁴ The analysis was slight and the level of generality high but such an approach did offer a starting point. However the idea was not often properly applied and Government actions continued to exhibit a lack of consistency. There is little evidence of imaginative concessions to remove the "legitimate grievances" of the loyal majority and nothing which suggests coercive measures were confined to the minority. Actual policy seemed to be to ignore grievances which were advanced through legitimate channels and to attack all active protest with every means at the state's disposal. The policy might have stood a greater chance of success had it been possible to stub out all dissent but in practice it was sometimes necessary to admit defeat and concede victory to the dissidents.

Those who were supposed to assist the Cabinet to formulate an analysis of industrial unrest were frequently unhelpful. Hodge, supposedly an expert in labour matters, advised the Cabinet that the 'trade card' scheme could be withdrawn without serious consequences. Basil Thomson when set to investigate Carson's fear that German money was behind the unofficial strikes and the pacifist movement offered only the thread-bare techniques of the yellow press. E D Morel, for example, was under suspicion as "he had published books and articles on abuses in the Congo,

which were undoubtedly in the German interest, as bringing the Belgian Government into public odium". In addition although Morel had been publicly accused of working for the Germans on a number of occasions, "the public cannot be blamed for believing" it to be true as Morel had "never thought fit to vindicate himself".¹²⁵

Most officials were reticent about generalisation. They all tended to identify a series of complaints, about food, beer, housing and the like, but made no attempt to show how they connected with different levels of active unrest. The labour officers of the Ministry of Munitions thought there was a connection between the military situation and the labour situation. Military defeats were said to produce peace in the factories,¹²⁶ but victory was full of dangers. One "recurrence of labour unrest"¹²⁷ was directly related to victory on the Italian front while the defeat of Austria was said to have increased absenteeism.¹²⁸ The Government was unlikely to be able to draw any constructive lesson from this hypothesis.

Another frequently made, though equally unconstructive, suggestion was that unrest was related to the high earnings of munitions workers. From the South West came the complaint: "There is too much money about and the men want a holiday to spend it."¹²⁹ Basil Thomson took up this theme. He 'discovered' working men with "their pockets full of money" and deprived of "the relaxations to which they were accustomed . . . owing to the curtailment of horse racing and football" who were amusing themselves by attending pacifist meetings. His suggested remedy was, "an issue of premium bonds which would satisfy their craving for excitement".¹³⁰ Thomson also suggested that

the situation could be improved by more effective propaganda and he suggested the "Bolshevik Horror" as a suitable subject.¹³¹ Later, remembering the restricted sensibilities of some of the audience, he warned that anti Bolshevik propaganda should not "lay too much stress on the outrages committed on the bourgeoisie".¹³²

At one level it is possible to develop a picture of Government making an increased accommodation to the needs of working people in order to mobilise their support for the war effort. The state expanded its organisational capacities in order to cope with new concerns. The Government developed a policy for food distribution, the Ministry of Munitions introduced works canteens; rents were officially fixed, the Government became involved in the paying of wages, and pledges were made to restrict excess profits made as a result of the suspension of normal trade union practices. Similarly one might cite the inclusion of labour representatives in government as evidence of an imaginative development. Some historians have used these, and the many similar innovations to suggest that the politics of the war years represent some novel departure; that the state under pressure radically altered its relationship with the working population.

However when the innovations are examined in more detail they appear less like concessions to labour than simply the basic requirements of running a state in wartime. Food rationing was no more than a response to a situation in which market forces had failed to guarantee minimum requirements. Works canteens simply enabled men to work more efficiently over longer periods of time. The welfare inspectorate of the Ministry of Munitions was unashamedly in pursuit of a docile

and productive workforce.¹³³ Rent control was no more than an inadequate response to a chaotic situation which had resulted from Government policy in the first place. Attempts to control excess profits were remarkable only for their ineffectuality while Government intervention in the field of wages was mainly motivated by the desire to prevent workers benefiting from the situation of labour shortages. The official account makes it quite clear that officials were far more concerned to limit the high earning of piece workers than to alleviate the difficulties of the rest.¹³⁴ The one notable intervention on behalf of a group of workers, the award of the twelve and a half per cent bonus, was a capitulation to pressure rather than a natural development out of existing policy. The alteration of the relationship between the state and labour was in reality insubstantial. The creation of the Ministry of Labour, it has been convincingly argued, was little more than a symbolic gesture¹³⁵ and if Labour men were in government they were seen as hostages to the good behaviour of their followers rather than as representatives of an alternative and legitimate point of view.

Any munitions worker's impression of the state in wartime was far more likely to be dominated by the increased powers of regulation and punishment than by welfare provision. Innovations in the coercive side of government activity were both extensive and substantial. The Munitions of War Act effectively removed the means by which workers could defend their interests and seek to regulate their work environment. It is important to recognise that the powers which the Government reserved to itself and its agents were not merely a matter of sanctions in reserve to deal with such abnormal and serious occurrences as strikes, but represented an attempt to regulate the day to day

business of industry. The routine misdemeanours of industry, bad timekeeping, absences without medical certificates, even refusals to work overtime were brought into the area of legal regulation . For a period it was illegal for an employee to exercise that traditional freedom of leaving his job without his employer's consent, and for most of the war 'voluntary leaving', as it was called, was penalised by six weeks enforced unemployment. Working people were thus faced with a situation in which those who normally exercised disciplinary functions over them, works managers, foremen and the like, had had their powers enhanced by legal enactment and supported by formal sanctions. Most of their traditional means of defence through collective action had been removed. Any strike was unofficial, hence illegal, and would encounter not only the coercive powers of the state but the opposition of the union. It was not even possible to leave or to even threaten to do so. The Military Service Acts also cast a shadow over industrial life. Cole argued that conscription more than any other factor was responsible for the change in the attitude of working people towards the war. These Acts underlined the formal powerlessness of the worker. They could be used selectively; men previously exempted were sometimes conscripted as a punishment for industrial misconduct. On at least two occasions the threat of conscription was used as a sanction against groups of striking workmen. In addition powers available to the state under the Defence of the Realm Regulations rendered almost any political protest illegal. The circulation of a Bolshevik pamphlet ensured, for one alien, six months hard labour and deportation. Proceedings were even instituted against a member of the South Dorset Labour Party whose sole offence had been to publicly suggest that War Loans and War Bonds were a swindle.¹³⁶ No account could legitimately ignore the

manner in which the coercive powers of the state became embedded into the routine procedures of industrial and political life.

However this was not the full extent of the coercive powers available. Those who did undertake strike action rapidly discovered that the state had many additional powers and even a capacity for improvisation. The most persistent opponents of Government policy were the skilled men of the ASE. It has been calculated that they were responsible for more than forty per cent of the days lost through strikes in 1916 and 1917.¹³⁷ It was always probable that these men would be at the centre of conflict for, as skilled men, the industrial practices of the war years undermined their status and earning capacity. Moreover many of these men worked in the munitions industries. The introduction of dilution was one of the earliest, and most bitter issues in contention between the Government and the engineers, yet, as James Hinton demonstrates the Cabinet was never predisposed to soft pedal the issue. From the first they linked the issue with that of the destruction of unofficial organisations, in particular the Clyde Workers' Committee, which were attempting to resist its introduction. The contest was a deeply unequal one. The Government at all times possessed the initiative and the support of powerful allies in the engineering employers and the officials of the ASE. The latter alliance was particularly important for it tended to isolate the engineers from other groups of workers and to hamper their efforts to secure general support within the Labour Movement. When its victory in this matter was secured the Government chose to deport David Kirkwood and other leaders. The Labour Party was sufficiently concerned with this new departure to set up an investigating committee.

They recorded their opposition to the deportations but were obviously far more concerned with the extent to which Kirkwood and other leaders had challenged the official union representatives. The committee conceded that the grievances of the men may have been real but they felt that they "had not been properly formulated and placed in the hands of their recognised Trade Union officials". The unofficial committee had "sought to usurp the functions of the regular Trade Unions" and the committee was forced to the "very regrettable" conclusion that Kirkwood had repudiated Messrs Henderson and Brownlie as representatives of Labour. ¹³⁸ Clearly the committee felt the introduction of internal deportation to be a relatively minor matter in the face of a challenge to official labour leaders.

The hostility of labour leaders to unofficial action continued to play an important role in the Government's ability to prevent or break strikes, yet while it had this and other potent means at its disposal it never managed to eliminate the threat from the engineers. There was a further wave of unofficial strikes in the engineering trades in the Spring of 1917. What was particularly worrying for the Government was that by this time the engineers seemed to have established some sort of national organisation. Delegates from many parts of the country attended the Walworth Conference in May of that year. The Government and the ASE officials were now able to act in unison and they both initially refused to meet anyone involved with the Conference. Later the union executive did consent to meet a group of unofficial delegates but during that meeting received a private message from the Government that it was about to make arrests. Accordingly the ASE Executive suspended discussions, and the Walworth Conference was

raided and arrests made. When they resumed their meeting with the executive the unofficial delegates were sufficiently chastened to agree to recommend a return to work and to transfer their mandate to that executive.¹³⁹

The next issue which provoked widespread unofficial action was the introduction of the 'comb out'. Opposition to this was strong in itself but made all the more strong by the fact that it became an issue around which accumulated all the other grievances of the war years. A meeting of ten thousand unofficial delegates at the Albert Hall in January 1918 expressed general discontent with the Government's conduct of the war as well as specifically opposing the withdrawal of the trade card scheme. A national ballot revealed that a large majority of ASE members supported the decisions that had been taken at this meeting.¹⁴⁰ Even Arthur Henderson seemed to be offering at least a passive support in arguing that he felt the Government was acting unfairly in withdrawing exemptions from skilled men in protected trades.¹⁴¹ Yet, after a halfhearted attempt through the ASE executive to ameliorate certain features of the policy, the Government decided to bludgeon through its original demands. The engineers were publicly denounced and the public informed of the selfish and sectional nature of the 'privileges' they were demanding. Naturally the bulk of the press took up the cry. The 'Times' asked the unofficial leaders to "ponder seriously the wisdom of alienating themselves at this critical period not only from their co-workers in the war workshops but from the nation at home and the nation in arms abroad".¹⁴² In this case such efforts were not necessary for, as the Ministry of Munitions reported, the success of the German Spring offensive on the Western

Front, "paralysed the efforts of the agitators".¹⁴³ Many of those men who had been denounced as traitors had offered to forego their holidays.

However once the immediate crisis was over the agitation over the 'comb out' continued. A group of engineers who struck in July had to face the oratorical powers of the Prime Minister as well as the coercive powers of the state. First of all Lloyd George sought to harness the traditions and beliefs of the Labour Movement to his cause by pointing out that not only was the strike unofficial but it was "not in pursuance of a trade dispute". This, of course, had no bearing whatsoever on the legality of the dispute, but the Prime Minister was striving for something more than dispassionate analysis. The strike, he claimed, was "an endeavour to change the national policy essential to the prosecution of the war. Whilst millions of their fellow countrymen are hourly facing danger and death for their country, the men now on strike have been granted exemption from these perils only because their services were considered of more service to the state in the workshops than in the army." Having tried to politically isolate the strikes, the Prime Minister proceeded to threats: "It is now necessary for the Government to declare that all men wilfully absent from their work on or after Monday 29th July will be deemed to have voluntarily placed themselves outside the area of the munitions industries. Their protection certificates will cease to have effect from that date and they will become liable to the provisions of the Military Service Act."¹⁴⁴

That the Government usually managed to get the engineers back to

work relatively quickly must not be used to attribute to its agents great acumen or political skill. In truth the Government held most of the cards. Its opponents were denied even the simple resources of organisation, finance and publicity which official union bodies can provide. They were so isolated that Government propaganda sometimes had a considerable impact on men working alongside of them. The skilled engineers at Parkhead Forge had "not only decided to forego their holiday but had resolved to contribute one day's pay to a charitable fund in order to repudiate the feeling that they were indifferent to the sufferings of the soldiers in France".¹⁴⁵ It was reported from Manchester that the "general ill will shown by other unions towards the ASE . . . has caused trouble in the workshops".¹⁴⁶ The Government line could never be effectively challenged so it was able to turn every event to its own advantage. Even George Askwith, who somewhat eccentrically maintained elsewhere that the war had little impact on labour matters was forced to conclude that the defeats in the Spring and Summer of 1918 were responsible for the ensuing industrial peace.¹⁴⁷

What is perhaps most remarkable about the continuing conflict between the engineering shop stewards and the state is not so much the fact that the state was usually victorious in open confrontations but that unofficial action was never finally stamped out. This was partly due to some quite outstanding organisational work by unofficial leaders and the nature of the difficulties which their followers faced, but it must also be related to the aggressive stance adopted by the Government from the first and its total inability to present and maintain a consistent and coherent line of policy on anything but the suppression of active opposition.

It must not be imagined however that the Government reserved its coercive powers for the engineers alone. Any group of workers attracting displeasure could find themselves in a similar situation. When Liverpool boilermakers went on strike in December 1916 they were immediately attacked by the Ministers of Labour and Munitions. The leaders of the strike were threatened with arrest and the local police forces reinforced so that they could adequately support the introduction of blackleg labour. When the enginemen of ASLEF threatened to strike in August 1917 government officials were initially uncertain about the legal position. The railways, though controlled, did not come under the Munitions of War Act and it might not therefore be possible to deal with the enginemen as they had dealt with the engineers. However the Home Office discovered that Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Act, already used to good effect in an engineering strike in Barrow in March,¹⁴⁸ could be used against the railwaymen. The Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Edward Troup, wrote to all Chief Constables to draw their attention to Regulation 42, "if any person attempts . . . to impede, delay or restrict the production, repair or transport of war material or any other work necessary for the prosecution of war, he shall be guilty of an offence under these regulations".¹⁴⁹ He also pointed out that all laws which applied to the conduct of labour disputes in peacetime were null and void. They must treat any attempt to bring about a dispute as an illegal act: "The Law Officers of the Crown have advised that such an attempt is an offence even when the means used . . . is peaceful persuasion . . . and the provisions of the Trade Disputes Act would provide no answer to this charge." Picketing was also thereby rendered illegal. The Home Office advised the Chief Constables that pickets should be

given one warning and then if they persisted be arrested under Regulation 55 of DORA.¹⁵⁰ The Chief Constable of Staffordshire was not satisfied with this and pointed out that there were conditions, albeit very stringent ones, under which legal strikes could take place in wartime, and that his legal powers to arrest pickets might be compromised by this. The Home Office reply clearly indicated that the Government believed that in effect no legal strike could occur and that in any case picketing must always be considered illegal. Chief Constables should, however, exercise great care in this matter: "Except when an immediate arrest is necessary to stop picketing reference should be made to the Director of Public Prosecutions before any arrest is made."

The newspaper cuttings file¹⁵¹ indicated a press united in hostility against the enginemen. The 'Globe' expressed its "grave concern" over the strike but was "greatly encouraged by the prompt action of the Government". The 'Daily Mail' felt it was "too incredibly monstrous" of the enginemen "to threaten to paralyse the fighting arm of the country", while the 'Daily Chronicle' attempted to arouse two prejudices in one sentence in arguing, "Their own women and children would turn on them if any action of theirs prolonged the agonies of our brave wounded coming back from the front and increased the already too high prices of food". The 'Manchester Guardian', more soberly, hoped that the enginemen would "recoil from any such quasi rebellion" and argued that in any dispute the people would be on the Government's side. The press served the ends of the Government admirably in concentrating on the possible consequences of the strike and ignoring its causes.¹⁵² There was also assistance from the official labour

leaders. J H Thomas, General Secretary of the NUR, attacked to strike in a much quoted speech as "neither fair fighting nor common honesty".¹⁵³ The efforts of the Government and its allies may have had some effect on groups of workers who might otherwise have offered support. The Chief Constable of Glamorgan reported that while there was "the usual strong disinclination to become a Special Constable during times of labour unrest", he felt certain that the majority of the population would "preserve a benevolent neutrality towards the forces of law and order".¹⁵⁴ The police however were to be at the disposal of the railway companies. Chief Constables were instructed to "get in touch with the General Managers or District Officers of the companies whose lines run through your area and ascertain from them the places where protection would be most wanted".¹⁵⁵

The measures adopted by the Government in the face of a strike involving NUR members in the Autumn of 1918 were even more stringent. The Chief Constables were under the same instructions as they had been in the ASLEF strike but were in addition to be given military assistance: "The War Cabinet (had) decided to utilise the Naval and Military forces to assist in the maintenance of railway services, in the protection of railway property and personnel, and in the preservation of law and order."¹⁵⁶ Instructions to military officers on the conduct of the operation contained the chilling note: "Any acts of attempted sabotage should be dealt with under the same conditions as if attempted by the enemy."¹⁵⁷ In addition the Cabinet decided that railwaymen who went on strike would be immediately rendered liable to conscription.¹⁵⁸ There was a similar campaign to arouse the hostility of the population against the strikers which met with some success: "Tonight wounded

soldiers entered the ILP rooms, where a large number of strikers had met, and with their crutches smashed chairs and other furniture. There was a general mêlée and strikers fled the room."¹⁵⁹ Press comment was favourable to such acts of patriotic vandalism and to the Government's case in general. The 'Manchester Guardian' felt the Government had "no option but to fight the matter out"¹⁶⁰ and the 'Times' cast its sober authority behind the view that the strike was "the work of pacifists and conscientious objectors".¹⁶¹ The 'Daily News' took the opportunity to criticise the Government for the general lack of candour it displayed in its dealings with labour but offered no comfort to the railwaymen; "in this matter the Government is emphatically right".¹⁶²

The Government's alliance with official labour leaders was again in evidence. Clynes struck a useful note in urging: "While sailors and soldiers, who are workmen, are winning the war don't let workmen at home lose the fight or delay our victory by thoughtlessly interfering with military operations."¹⁶³ J H Thomas rushed down to South Wales and attempted to exert his authority over the unofficial strike committee. Thomas was neither impervious to the appeals of melodrama nor disposed to play down his own role: "I think the nation has been saved from a grave crisis. I have never seen anything so near bloodshed before. The soldiers coming in and the fear of the colliers, who were unable to get food coming up, and the large numbers of wounded soldiers made it a trying time."¹⁶⁴ The Special Branch was also at work. A list of "principal strike agitators" was prepared¹⁶⁵ and even after the immediate crisis was over the NUR was kept under close surveillance.¹⁶⁶ In this instance repression alone was not enough. The Government was so concerned with the situation on the railways that

they conceded an agreement with the NUR which linked their wages with the cost of living.

Although successive Governments fully realised the importance of labour in the prosecution of the war their policies and actions in this field bore few traces of novelty or imagination. Most of the wartime developments of the state machine were motivated by a desire to institute more effective controls over labour than by a wish to propitiate the workforce. This principle applied as much to the development of the welfare inspectorate for munitions workers as it did to the extension of the labour surveillance services of the state. A central feature of labour policy was the maintenance of an alliance with the official leaders of labour. However this was essentially a one way alliance in that labour leaders were expected to represent the Government's case to their members rather than vice versa. Labour as a whole was expected to be content with this essentially symbolic recognition of its new importance.

The Government was never sufficiently in control of the labour problem to be able to contemplate a policy of concessions. Most of the material concessions that were granted were capitulations to unofficial pressure. For the most part the politicians encouraged labour leaders to develop issues which had no immediate resource implications. For their part labour leaders were quite willing to go along with a policy which directed their followers' attention to the postwar world and away from existing difficulties.

In practice the Government relied heavily on repression. On the one hand there were the tight legal and administrative frameworks which

regulated the day to day existence of munitions workers and the removal of the means of effective protest from the rest of the working population. On the other hand there was the battery of measures which the government would turn on any group of workers who were moved to industrial action. One of the reasons that state activity in this area was so unsophisticated and alternative courses of action were rarely considered was that most ministers appear to have believed wholeheartedly that the sacrifices they demanded of labour were absolutely necessary and that those who questioned them must be motivated by pacifist or other treasonable considerations. For example the Home Secretary was moved to defend the censorship of pacifist literature thus: "To censor such leaflets would not be an interference with freedom of opinion and speech; for they are not expressions of opinion, but propaganda intended to influence others."¹⁶⁷ Labour representatives became caught up in this mood; Hodge, on one occasion, arguing that there was no harm in suppressing the labour press. Clearly this was not an atmosphere conducive to a clear consideration of alternative courses of action. That the state did not introduce even more stringent controls in this and other areas must be explained on grounds of practicality rather than an appreciation of the possibility of harmful consequences, much less some residual attachment to liberal principle. It is reasonable to suggest that there were divisions within the War Cabinet and it is possible to identify Lloyd George and Roberts as 'moderates' in labour matters.¹⁶⁸ However it is also important to recognise that such divisions may not have meant a great deal in practice. While the Prime Minister, for instance, was prepared to speculate that the best way of dealing with unrest was to ameliorate the grievances of the majority there is no evidence that he was prepared to overcome the difficulties

involved in giving substance to such a policy. In effect the divisions were usually about when, how, and in what degree coercive measures should be used. For example in the engineering strikes of May 1917 the issue was whether wholesale arrests should be made immediately or ¹⁶⁹ selective arrests made when the strike was on the wane. Moderation was in practice a belief that coercive policies were most effective when applied selectively.

However, in spite of such efforts it seems probable that many of the measures taken by the Government were counter productive. Although their friends were strong and their opponents weak they did contrive on a number of occasions to create or reinforce suspicion and hostility. The fact that they ran into as little difficulty as they did cannot be related to the wisdom of their policies, the astuteness of their application nor even the resources at their disposal, but rather to the impact of the war on public opinion. Opponents of government policy were always aware of the mass hostility which might be directed against them and, for their own part, very few were prepared to push their dissent to a point at which the British troops in the field were further endangered. Hence if the Government was able to manipulate smaller issues into some relationship with this broader one its success was certain. Thus while the war produced difficulties for the state in its dealings with labour, and while the consequences of failure were considerable, there were also new possibilities. In the political climate created by the war the state was able to develop its own definition of the national interest and the machinery to ensure its acceptance.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- 1 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963) p1
- 2 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge* (1967)
- 3 E Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (1961), Volume 6, *The Rule of Democracy*
and G Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1972)
- 4 See for instance material presented in James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (1973), B Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1921* (1959), and Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* (1976)
- 5 J Stubbs, 'The Impact of the Great War on the Conservative Party' in G Peele and C Cook (Eds), *The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939* (1975) p15
- 6 G Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (1920) p357
- 7 E Phelps-Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (1965) p331. Phelps-Brown argues that the fall in the number of strikes did not mean industrial peace would continue. "There had been few strikes that summer, but men felt the unrest mounting all about them."
- 8 Halévy, p676
- 9 Robertson as quoted by Lloyd George. *The War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (1932) p1568
- 10 Haig's Diaries quoted by Cyris Falls, *The First World War* (1966) p254
- 11 C E Montague, *Disenchantment* (1922) p116
- 12 Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933) p224
- 13 Report of the Conference of the Labour Party (January 1916) p95
- 14 S Roskill, *Hankey, Volume 1, 1877-1918* (1970). But see also E S Pankhurst, *The Home Front* (1932) p369. Sylvia Pankhurst claimed to have detected the growth of an inarticulate pacifism in the English countryside, although some modern research has suggested a need to question this judgment.
- 15 Peele and Cook, p26
- 16 Lloyd George - *A Diary*, by Frances Stevenson, Ed A J P Taylor (1971) p93
- 17 Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (1972) p39. But see also Marc Ferro, *The Great War 1914-1918* (1973). "The international spirit is said to have gone bankrupt, socialists to

- have failed to stop the war, to have betrayed their oath. Contemporaries were struck by this. But men were sure that this was false: in answering their country's call they carried out a patriotic and a revolutionary duty." p8
- 18 See Royden Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee 1914-1920' in A Briggs and J Saville (Eds), Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971)
 - 19 Marwick, p338
 - 20 Contribution to 'Labour and Politics in the Great War'. Society for the Study of Labour History, Bulletin No 34 (Spring 1977) pp3-7
 - 21 See also James Hinton on how the defence of craft privilege can become an almost revolutionary demand in the appropriate context, Hinton (1972) pp333-334. See also J T Murphy, The Workers' Committee: an outline of its principles and structure (1917) and J T Murphy, New Horizons (1941). Of particular interest in this context is the recent article by Richard Price in which he challenges conventional assumptions about sectional action: "In fact sectionalism possesses elements of both quiescence and dissent, of fragmentation and unity, and whilst it may explain particular episodes or incidents, it may not be elevated into an absolute category precisely because of the contradictions inherent in its nature." Richard Price, 'The Labour Process and Labour History', Social History Volume 8 Number 1 (January 1983) p61
 - 22 Labour Party Conference Report 1916
 - 23 Askwith, p367
 - 24 Summary of Commissions on Industrial Unrest Cd 8696 1917-18
 - 25 See LAB 12
 - 26 "Thus and thus is the British Empire governed at a critical stage of the war", lamented Hankey. (Roskill p317). See also Peter Fraser's article, 'British War Policy and the crisis of Liberalism in May 1915'; "Asquith cared for Liberalism more than he cared for war policy but failed to see that neither could compromise with the other." p26. Journal of Modern History Volume 54 Number 1 (March 1982) pp1-26
 - 27 MUN 2 21-9-18. See also Report of the General Iron Fitters' Association, 1918, p2 which supports this view.
 - 28 CAB 41/37/32 Sept 5 1916
 - 29 Lord Hugh Cecil, Conservatism 1912
 - 30 Letter from Leo Marxse. See Lloyd George Papers.

- 31 See War and the State, Ed Kathleen Burke 1982, for a recent attempt to come to terms with the problems of administrative change during the war. The authors represented in this collection are careful to avoid generalisations. Also S Hurwitz, State Intervention in Great Britain 1914-1919 (New York 1949)
- 32 Askwith, p376
- 33 CAB 24/7 G122 Jan 25 1917
- 34 CAB 24/7 G123 Jan 25 1917
- 35 On this topic see Chris Wrigley, 'The Ministry of Munitions: An Innovatory Department' in K Burke (Ed), War and the State (1982) pp32-56
- 36 The total, for example, on 27-10-17, an unexceptional week, was 287,514 who were employed in Royal Factories, National Projectile Factories, National Shell Factories, National Filling Factories, High Explosives and Propellants Factories (MUN 2 27-10-17)
- 37 Though not all officials of the ministry were inexperienced in Labour matters. During 1915 Llewelyn Smith had moved from the Board of Trade Labour Section to deal with labour matters at Munitions.
- 38 MUN 2 29-6-18
- 39 See Noelle Whiteside, 'Industrial Welfare and Labour Regulation', International Review of Social History, Volume 25 (1980) pp307-31
- 40 See Frances Stevenson's Diary, Ed A J P Taylor, p88. Also J Hinton 'The Suppression of Forward - A Note', Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society 7 (July 1973) pp26-29
- 41 Askwith, p415
- 42 Askwith, p413
- 43 Askwith, p426
- 44 Askwith, p428
- 45 See Mun 2 30-3-18
- 46 Times 1-2-18 and quoted in Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement p261
- 47 Report of 30-3-18 in MUN 2
- 48 As above
- 49 Askwith, p426
- 50 Cd 8696 1917/18

- 51 Cd 8663 1917/18
- 52 See Askwith, p426
- 53 MUN 2 9-6-17
- 54 Though the Report from Wales is a remarkable exception
Cd 8668 1917/18
- 55 See for example CC 226(14) 1917
- 56 CAB 23 CC 115(9) Apr 6 1917
- 57 Cd 8664 1917/18
- 58 H Wolfe, Labour Supply and Regulation (1923) Economic and
Social History of the War, British Series
- 59 Cd 8696 1917/18
- 60 Askwith, p428
- 61 MUN 2 1-12-17
- 62 MUN 2 5-1-18
- 63 MUN 2 19-1-18
- 64 MUN 2 1-12-17
- 65 MUN 2 5-1-18
- 66 MUN 2 19-1-18
- 67 MUN 2 1-12-17
- 68 See LAB 12/2 for a somewhat eulogistic internal assessment of
the work of the Labour Exchanges.
- 69 Wolfe, p67
- 70 Order in Council under Defence of the Realm Act. Quoted in
LAB 12/2.
- 71 LAB 12/2
- 72 Wolfe, p68
- 73 Lloyd George's correspondence reveals a good deal of concern
with such matters.
- 74 HO 45/11000 At the minimum, one Detective Inspector with
Naval Intelligence, 12 sergeants with Munitions, and 17 other
officers with Military Intelligence.

- 75 Cabinet of May 25 1917 (CAB 23/2, CC 147(11)). For the Conference and its repercussions see S Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution* (1959), Hinton (1973) pp238-241 and Stephen R White, 'Soviets in Britain, The Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History* XIX Pt 3 (1974) pp165-193.
- 76 CAB 23 CC 115(9) Apr 6 1917
- 77 CAB 24/7 G157 October 1917. The problems which the politicians experienced in identifying sources of unrest seem entirely understandable as later historians, with all their advantages, have also had great difficulty. The matter is clearly complicated. There is considerable evidence to show that the war saw an improvement in the living conditions of many of the working population, particularly the poorest. Yet as J M Winter notes, "Nonetheless there was in the war period a heightened sense of grievance about living standards. This was because some workers did suffer a decline in real wages, especially skilled men: and those with improved standards acquired the confidence to expect and demand that their gains be protected and, if possible, enhanced." *Society for the Study of Labour History, Bulletin No 34 (Spring 1977) p5*
- 78 CAB 23 CC 253(1) 19 Oct 1917
- 79 CAB 24/4 G173 October 1917
- 80 CAB 23 CC 157(11) 1917. See also C Addison, *Four and a Half Years* (1934)
- 81 CAB 24/ G222 26 Sep 1918
- 82 A Marwick, *The Deluge* p226
- 83 CAB 41/37/14 30 Mar 1916
- 84 T Jones, *Whitehall Diaries*, Ed K Middlemas, Volume 1 (1969) p45
- 85 Excluding Irish Nationalists and Independents the composition of the House of Commons during December 1916 was 283 Conservatives, 260 Liberals and 39 Labour members (48.6%, 44.7% and 6.7% respectively). In Lloyd George's government Labour had seven places, Liberals twenty-seven and Conservatives thirty-three. Of the higher ministerial offices (ie Ministers of Cabinet rank and Ministers in the War Cabinet) Labour had two places, Liberals eight and Conservatives fourteen. Minorities in such matters tend, inevitably, to be overrepresented, and it would appear that Labour had little more than was necessary. It was surely the Liberals who suffered most in that their representatives in the Government were disproportionately in minor offices.
- 86 John Burns, for example, had been president of the Board of Trade and had served at the Local Government Board in the previous Liberal Governments.

- 87 T Jones, Whitehall Diaries, Volume 1 pp45-46. See also
M Cole, Beatrice Webb (1945) pp126-135
- 88 Labour Party Conference Report January 1917
- 89 LPCR January 1917 p84
- 90 LPCR January 1916 p2
- 91 LPCR January 1917 p117
- 92 LPCR January 1918 p17
- 93 LPCR January 1918 p18
- 94 Askwith, p470
- 95 CAB 23 CC 115(9) 6 Apr 1917
- 96 CAB 24/8 G222 26 Sep 1918
- 97 Bromley's phrase LPCR January 1918 p118
- 98 CAB 23/2 CC 145 16 May 1917
- 99 MUN 2 20 Jul 1917
- 100 Cd 8666 1917/18
- 101 Cd 8696 1917/18
- 102 MUN 2 2 Mar 1918
- 103 MUN 2 30 Jun 1917
- 104 MUN 2 20 Oct 1917
- 105 MUN 2 20 Oct 1917
- 106 Lloyd George, A Diary by Frances Stevenson, Ed A J P Taylor
(1971) p134
- 107 LPCR January 1916 p100
- 108 LPCR January 1916 p98
- 109 LPCR January 1917 p111
- 110 LPCR January 1917 p112
- 111 LPCR January 1917 p114
- 112 LPCR June 1918 p43 On his dismissal from the Cabinet
Arthur Henderson lost little time in joining in the millennialist
chorus: "The whole organised movement, both leaders and follow-
ers, can only interpret the present universal catastrophe as the

final stage in the disintegration and collapse of the civilisation which was founded upon the individualist system of capitalist production and the social and political subordination of the toiling masses." Contemporary Review CXIII Feb 1918 p121

- 113 CAB 24/4 G173. Official reaction to a petition presented by the Home Counties and Training Reserve Branch of the Soldiers and Workers Council strongly reinforces this point: "The Resolutions themselves are much less objectionable than those which are usually passed at such gatherings, and no suggestion is made that an immediate peace should be negotiated." WO 32/5455 quoted in David Englander and James Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class', Historical Journal 21(3) (1978) pp593-621, p605
- 114 CAB 24/66 GT 5923
- 115 Quoted in CAB 24/39 GT3424 22 Jan 1918
- 116 CAB 23 CC 279(4) December 1917
- 117 Memorandum on War Aims 1917 (Labour Party and TUC) Harvester microfiche (1971)
- 118 Memorandum on War Aims, Inter Allied Labour and Socialist Conference held 20 Feb 1918, Harvester microfiche
- 119 Lloyd George's War Memoirs, p1491
- 120 The War Memoirs of David Lloyd George (1932) p1491
- 121 CAB 41/37/14 30 Mar 1916. Lord Crewe to the King.
- 122 CAB 23/2 CC 115(9) 6 Apr 1917
- 123 CAB 24/7 GT 173
- 124 CAB 23/2 CC 115 6 Apr 1917
- 125 CAB 24/7 GT 173 What, one wonders, would Thomson have made of Joseph Conrad. To Thomson's credit he did eventually come to the conclusion that there was no "German gold". See B H Thomson, The Scene Arranger (New York 1937)
- 126 MUN 2 30 Mar 1918
- 127 MUN 2 29 Jun 1918
- 128 MUN 2 9 Nov 1918
- 129 MUN 2 27 Oct 1917
- 130 CAB 24/7 GT 173
- 131 CAB 24/66 GT 5986 12 Oct 1918

- 132 CAB 24/67 GT 6079 21 Oct 1918
- 133 Whiteside, p312
- 134 See Wolfe (1949)
- 135 See Rodney Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour: A Still Small Voice?' in Kathleen Burke (Ed) War and the State (1982). Also Rodney Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour, 1916-24: A graveyard of Social Reform?' Public Administration 52 (1974) pp415-438
- 136 CAB 24/67 GT 6079
- 137 On the general point about coercion and regulation see again Wolfe on Munitions of War Act. He argued it gave foremen "an extraordinary hand over the individual". On the more general question of the role of foremen within the British industrial structure see Joseph Melling, "'Non-commissioned officers': British employers and their supervisory workers 1880-1920" Social History, Volume 5 No 2 (May 1980) pp183-221
- 138 Report of the Special Committee appointed by the Annual Conference of the Labour Party. Harvester microfiche (1971). See also accounts by Kirkwood and Gallacher. David Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt (1935), William Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde (1936)
- 139 MUN 2 19 May 1917 Also Hinton (1972) pp203/4/5
- 140 Times 20 Feb 1918
- 141 Times 1 Feb 1918
- 142 Times 20 Feb 1919
- 143 MUN 2 30 Mar 1918
- 144 Quoted in MUN 2 27 Jul 1918
- 145 MUN 2 6 Apr 1918
- 146 As above
- 147 Askwith, p449
- 148 See War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, p1149 and CAB 23 CC(10) 2 Apr 1917
- 149 HO 45 10884
- 150 See memorandum 'Threatened Rail Strike - Picketing' HO 45 10884
- 151 Also contained in HO 45 10884
- 152 The call for strike action was actually prompted by the failure of the Board of Trade to implement promises already made to the engine men.

- 153 J H Thomas. Speech delivered in Aberystwyth widely reported in newspapers of 21 Aug 1917.
- 154 Chief Constable of Glamorgan to Under Secretary of State Home Office HO 45 10884
- 155 Telegram from USS Home Office to Chief Constables HO 45 10884
- 156 Letter from R H Brade. GOC Home Forces 24 Sep 1918 HO 45 10884
- 157 As above
- 158 CAB 23 CC 455(16) Jul 1918
- 159 Manchester Guardian 24 Sep 1918
- 160 Manchester Guardian 25 Sep 1918
- 161 Times 27 Sep 1918
- 162 Daily News 25 Sep 1918
- 163 Times 26 Sep 1918
- 164 Times 27 Sep 1918
- 165 CAB 24/66 GT 5923 7 Oct 1918
- 166 See for example CAB 24/67 GT 6079 and CAB 24/70 GT 6328
- 167 CAB 24/4 GT 173 November 1917
- 168 See for example K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society (1979) p102
- 169 This former course of action was favoured by the Army Council and the Sheffield engineering employers.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POST-WAR CRISIS AND AFTER

Introduction

The successful conclusion of the Great War represented a considerable victory for the British political elite. The political and economic hierarchies of British society emerged from the war virtually unaltered. The industrial system which had frequently been characterised as archaic and haphazard had withstood the organised might of Germany, the working population had been kept at their uncongenial tasks in the poorest of conditions, and a constant supply of men and machines had maintained the nightmare of the Western Front. Moreover these feats of mobilisation had been achieved with only the most minor and temporary concessions. Yet in the first months of the peace the mood of the British elite was one of hysterical pessimism. A number of senior politicians, among them Churchill, Carson and Auckland Geddes, became convinced that only military preparation could save them from internal insurrection; Bonar Law believed the hour was come and "All weapons ought to be available for distribution to the friends of the Government",¹ and even the Prime Minister felt it necessary to issue grave warning of instability.² The 'responsible' newspapers were filled with sombre warnings and establishment sages filled their columns with lamentations on the dawn of the age of barbarism. Any political difficulty, any sign of proletarian intransigence, was removed from its context, separated from the analytical discipline of cause and effect, and heralded as an augury of disaster.

There is an almost disturbing disunity among historians as to whether such fears were justified. Halévy argues; "In the spring of 1919 it was difficult to resist the impression that England was on the edge of

a social revolution."³ Yet to A J P Taylor the outbreaks of unrest which did occur were isolated and ephemeral and subject to removal by relatively minor adjustments of policy.⁴ These disagreements may be related to an even deeper division over the basic question of the impact of the war on British society in general. For Bentley Gilbert the effect of the war, "can scarcely be reported let alone assessed and explained. A world died and a new one was born in slightly more than four years".⁵ Yet Havinghurst argues; "viewed in the larger context it may be argued that the general course of British history was little affected by the war which was rather a manifestation than a cause".⁶ Historians concerned with the impact of the war on labour have demonstrated similar divisions. Ross McKibbin argues that changes which took place within the labour movement and the Labour Party in the immediate post-war period were entirely consistent with what had taken place before 1914. To those such as GDH Cole and Arthur Marwick who have related such changes to a break in tradition and argued for the stimulating effect of war conditions on the ambitions and imaginations of labour leaders, McKibbin offers the view that the post-war Party was not really very different from its pre-war predecessor and that even the large growth in trade union membership represented no novel departure: "Everything points to Labour's enduring ante-bellum character: continuity of leadership and personnel at all levels, effective continuity of policy and, above all, continuity of organisation."⁷ Yet to Walter Kendal the war had precipitated the British state into a crisis which "was probably the most serious since the time of the Chartists".⁸ In his view the guardians of the British state were troubled by well founded doubts about the loyalty of its police and armed forces and facing a labour movement "stronger than

ever in its history". While the revolutionary socialists of the day failed to exploit, or even to fully recognise it, they were in effect being offered "the greatest revolutionary opportunity in generations".⁹

Contemporary observers on both the left and right were, in the main, of the opinion that great changes had taken place and that the future was far from certain. William Brace warned that "A wrong turn or act of folly by people in authority could easily send this country in a direction which for a time would make orderly constitutional government impossible".¹⁰ Arthur Henderson argued that the war had represented "the final stage in the disintegration and collapse of the civilisation which was founded upon the individualist system of capitalist production . . . "¹¹ and on another occasion warned that its conclusion had left "unrest more widespread and deep seated than ever before in the history of industrial England" and the country "on the verge of industrial revolt".¹² Social disorder and insurrection were thus central issues of political discourse though it was, in the end, only a very small minority on the left who believed that any good could come from such outbursts. Henderson, for all his talk of disintegration and collapse was as worried about "sporadic local efforts" and "industrial anarchy" as any other conventional politician.¹³ Henderson, like many other labour leaders was using the language of political rebellion to further the cause of gradualism. Revolutionary outbursts were held up as the inevitable consequences of the failure to make adequate concessions to labour and its official leaders.¹⁴ Thus the 'New Statesman' warned that had the miners' leaders not accepted the offer of a Committee of Inquiry in March 1919, "Great Britain would have been nearer a social revolution than anyone had previously thought possible",¹⁵ and Gerald

Gould was all for revolution, understood as a gradual transfer of power to labour, but warned that Britain had come close to a revolution of a different, undesirable and violent type during the Rail Strike of 1919.¹⁶ Arthur Gleason, having already predicted that workers' control would be the dominant theme of post-war reconstruction¹⁷ returned in 1920 to find that his prophecy was being fulfilled: "step by step the new order is being established". The workers were bringing in the new era by using their irresistible industrial power for such purposes as ending intervention in Russia and demanding the nationalisation of the mines: "As fast as full pressure is brought the opposition gives ground. That is why there are not any jutting flames and bloody futile riots, and the theatricalities of orthodox revolutions." The changes brought in were nonetheless decisive: "The famous moment of history has come when a nation ushers in another class to power."¹⁸ Not all accounts suggested that things had gone as far as this but many writers shared at least some of Gleason's assumptions. The Webbs argued that the post-war period saw capitalism in a terminal stage of decay. They argued that the "most potent" factor was the growing inability of the capitalist state to apply the "whip of starvation". Capitalism required for its survival the ability to inflict misery on those who refused work at the wages offered. This requirement they argued, had been fulfilled through the principle of "less eligibility" at the heart of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, but that this measure was incompatible with the universal franchise. No longer would it be possible for governments to resist demands for adequate maintenance for the unemployed, and thus capitalism had lost an essential part of its social machinery. The Webbs too gave expression to the familiar argument about unrest and change. They had little sympathy with the

idea of violent rebellion, yet as a threat it could serve a purpose: "We must face the practical certainty that if the transition from capitalism to socialism is not intelligently anticipated, planned and guided by the rulers of the people, the people, when the breaking strain is reached, will resort to sabotage to force whatever government may be left to tackle the job of reconstruction."¹⁹ If anarchic rebellion was not yet stalking Britain as it was Continental Europe there was still little cause for complacency. If existing rulers failed to come to terms with the new situation others would eventually have to reconstruct some new order on the debris of Western civilisation.²⁵

While the Webbs were concerned with the impact of the extension of the suffrage most of those, on both the left and the right, who feared or welcomed the prospect of sudden change saw the enlarged trade union movement as its principal agent. Superficially, at least, this must have appeared to be quite reasonable. The unions had doubled their size between 1914 and 1920. While McKibbin is correct to point out that this did not represent a faster rate of growth than the period 1910-1913 he is surely wrong to underestimate the impact of sheer numbers themselves. Not only were the unions larger but they had developed and exploited systems of centralised collective bargaining and developed potentially powerful alliances for mutual assistance.²¹ The years of the war had seen the fulfilment of the promise of the 'New Unionism'.²² In two critical senses the unions had become central to the operations of domestic politics. On the one hand the TUC was dominated by lower paid, semi or unskilled workers who, their representatives recognised, had more to gain from the activities of the state than any bargains they might make in the market place; and on the other, unions had

become so large and their members so central to the essential operations of society that any strike would almost inevitably involve the government. There had also been considerable changes in the leadership of the unions during and immediately after the war. The new men appeared to ride the general wave of labour confidence and were no longer willing to confine their political interventions to matters of immediate interest. They spoke of using direct action for a range of political ends and there was some evidence to support the view that they might carry their rank and file members with them.²³ Unofficial union activity had to a large extent been eclipsed by the new official militancy but some conservatives feared it had left a dangerous residue.²⁴ Charles McCurdy argued that the unrest went well beyond normal industrial matters: "Beyond the material causes of discontent there is a wind of revolution blowing across Europe, shaking political institutions in all countries". The waves of strikes in Britain, he suggested, might usefully be compared to the rise of Bolshevism in Russia and the spread of syndicalist doctrines in France. The movement was beyond the control of its more moderate leaders: "We may have to wait until the British people have had a fuller experience of the suffering which a great strike can inflict before we shall realise that methods of violence and anarchy in industrial disputes are just as barbarous and immoral as war itself."²⁵

While it is undeniable that 1919 saw a quite unusual rise in industrial militancy; thirty-five million days were lost in strikes as opposed to six million in 1918 and eleven and a half million in 1913; it is doubtful whether it was necessary to have recourse to arguments about 'winds of revolution' in order to explain the phenomenon. If the high levels of industrial unrest were considered in their proper context a more

reassuring pattern of causation might be discerned. As one contemporary observer expressed it: "the dismantling of the machine of war and the restoration of industry to a peace footing was bound to be accompanied by enormous unrest, dislocation, dissatisfaction and hardship."²⁶ Moreover trade unions had to set about the task of the practical restoration of traditional rights and working practices which had been suspended for the duration of the war. It was also inevitable that some conflict would arise from attempts to deal with the accumulated grievances of the war years. During the war basic wage rates had tended to trail behind prices, especially food prices and it was only during 1919 that the 1914 position was again achieved. Additionally it is significant that thirty per cent of the days lost were in the shipbuilding and engineering industries where the impact of the wartime state had been greatest. Yet not only were there a host of hitherto unexpressed grievances within the labour movement but the state of the labour market in 1919 afforded labour an excellent opportunity not only for dealing with these but for seeking general improvements in pay and conditions. The enlarged size of unions has also to be taken into account for it is clear that strikes of no greater length than those of 1913 would inevitably involve a far greater number of days lost. If all of these factors are set in the context of high expectations, as stimulated and exploited by the government it is clear, at the least that it is not inevitably necessary to assume some dramatic shift in working class consciousness in order to explain the visible expressions of industrial unrest.

This, of course, is not to argue that the government was not faced with an unusually difficult situation. While it might have been possible to explain such events in terms of a quite natural evolution of the labour

movement or an unexceptional response to unusually favourable circumstances they still had to be dealt with. While labour's new ideals and ambitions could, in part at least, be explained by the advent of new leaders anxious to separate themselves from an old elite compromised by too much contact with the state, the new ideals were not without content and did contain implications for post-war politics.

Walter Kendal, in arguing that the immediate post-war months constituted "the greatest revolutionary opportunity in generations"²⁷ takes account of the new situation of labour but also argues that the government was singularly ill prepared to deal with any unrest which might arise. Kendal points out that there were a number of occasions on which the government felt they were facing a potential uprising but lacked confidence in their police and armed forces. The police strikes and the numerous recorded incidents of unrest in the Army and Navy are cited by Kendal to show that this sense of insecurity was not groundless. Kendal is clearly not arguing that Britain was on the brink of a revolution but rather that there was a potential for revolutionary developments. He suggests a number of hypothetical events which, he believes, could have transformed such potential into actuality. Had the revolutionary left "won control of major sections of the labour movement" or the armed forces; had connections been established between the labour movement and the forces; or had either managed to unite with the militants within the police forces, the situation could have been very different. The validity of Kendal's hypothesis must rest on some assessment of how far any or all of these parties were prepared to go and whether there was any possibility of working connections between them. Judgments of this type are very difficult to make. Changes in consciousness can be very rapid

particularly where state structures and political expectations are successfully undermined so conclusions must be tentative, yet it must be recognised that there is evidence to suggest that Kendal's projection of events is somewhat unrealistic. While there is no reason to suppose that the various parties would not have gone the way Kendal suggests had a revolutionary situation developed there seems little reason to suppose that any of them could have precipitated that situation or acted as if that situation already existed. For example even if the revolutionary left had achieved a position of authority within a section of the labour movement their ability to direct their members would not have been freed from the normal constraints of internal disagreements and resistances unless some dramatic breakdown had occurred elsewhere. Similarly, while the militant protests from within the police and armed forces were a source of justifiable anxiety for most in authority they were clearly not, in themselves, subversive acts in that they took place within the confines of rules and were directed to limited and achievable objectives. That the police strikers harboured no deeper antagonisms towards the state was demonstrated by the manner in which the majority were bought off with relatively minor concessions.²⁸ Had it been felt to be necessary the government could have conceded the demands of the remaining minority at a price of no more than future inconvenience. The incidences of dissent in the armed forces would also appear to have been provoked by failures to deal with genuine and limited grievances. Many of those involved were satisfied with Churchill's reforms of demobilisation schemes and there is no evidence of the articulation of demands which the existing state could not have satisfied had it so wished. Troops did, on occasion, display and sing the 'Red Flag', but the explanation of this offered by David Englander and James Osborne is convincing;

that is that it represented the use of a convenient and widely understood symbol to demonstrate a grievance rather than a conversion to a style of politics with which the flag was associated.²⁹ As to the broadest significance of dissent in the armed forces it does seem probable that the nature of the grievances on which it was based would have tended to keep soldiers and sailors apart from civilians. Whatever may have been the later situation with the return to a professional army and navy it would appear that the bulk of the trouble in 1919 centred on the demands of 'citizen' soldiers and sailors for their return to what they saw as the privileged status of civilians.³⁰

Kendal concludes his argument by stating: "A government which in a crisis, cannot rely on armed force to back its decisions is a government which has already lost half its power."³¹ Yet while it is clear that there were sections of the armed forces which might have proved unreliable had they been deployed to deal with an internal crisis it has certainly not been demonstrated that all sections were beyond such uses.³² Moreover Kendal's statement tends to imply that armed force was the only resource at the government's disposal. A more illuminating epithet might be that a government which relies for its existence on its ability to immediately coerce dissent is a government which is already in deep trouble. Kendal tends to underestimate the political resources at the disposal of the government and consequently its ability to contain, deflect or simply live with the sort of dissent which might destabilise a different type of state. His case however is given greater credence by the fact that the government of the day was also disposed to take a similarly narrow view of its resources. While the post-war period offers evidence of dissent and unrest there are also signs of continuity

and stability. However it is analysed the 1918 general election represented a formidable victory for conventional politics. The fact that the Labour Party gained twenty-two per cent of the popular vote as compared to seven per cent at the previous general election might have upset a few conservatives but evidence freely available at the time indicated that there was no cause for panic. Labour was comfortably set on the road to becoming the second party and while this might complicate the processes of accumulating and defending wealth and privilege it offered no immediate prospect of their termination. Labour's progress would take place within the rules of the game. In any case Labour's electoral and parliamentary rise could be reassuringly set within a pattern of gradual change.

It is also important to take account of the military victory itself. John Stevenson, for example, has argued that the boost to the self confidence of the ruling elite that this represented was still a recognisable factor in the politics of the 1930s.³³ Moreover it was not just the victory but the way in which it was achieved that seemed to confirm and consolidate an impression of stability. In the domestic sphere the government had made few concessions to balance their considerable demands and on the military side, while it would be wrong to ignore, the level of punishments thought necessary to keep the armies in the field it was undoubtedly the case that the British armies had exhibited far lower levels of unrest than comparable forces.³⁴

In the end much of the disagreement over 1919 might be seen as a reflection of different theoretical approaches to stability as it is disagreements about fact. Conflicts in this area are inevitable as the question

of how order is maintained in a political society is a fundamental one. Political scientists have suggested a number of ways to explain stability.³⁵ Political culture, the nature and speed of economic development, political institutions have all been tried and, in their various ways found wanting. A central difficulty with most of such studies is that they are better at illustrating the circumstances of stability or instability rather than at identifying causes. By means of a comprehensive study of the comparative development of political societies Barrington Moore has gone beyond this and offered a thorough and convincing explanation of the historical background of contrasting degrees of stability yet for the present purpose this is only of limited use in that it offers little assistance in relating long term social and economic development to questions of immediate political activity.³⁶ Francis Castles has suggested a means whereby both the factors identified by the political scientists and longer term developments might all be made to serve some purpose.³⁷ Castles argues that a model of stability must include two sets of variables. It should include not only relevant aspects of social, economic and political organisation but also some analysis of the beliefs and expectations of the various political actors. Thus Castles suggests a political society may be defined as stable, "if changes in the nature of social organisation are in accord with the dominant image of society".³⁸ The attraction is that this allows for the influence of longer term factors as well as defining a field for short term action. Political leaders are not merely at the mercy of circumstance. Even when faced with rapid social or economic change they may maintain their position by restructuring the expectations of other political actors. The analytical emphasis is thus broadened to include a consideration of the state's ability to accommodate to change; to manoeuvre, to offer concessions, to persuade and to mobilise.

This perspective suggests a way in which the strongly conflicting views of the political situation in Britain in 1919 might at least be related to some common framework. Those who have seen the period only in terms of continuity and stability might be seen to have underestimated the degree of political adaptation that was necessary to contain pressures for change while those who see only dangers might have neglected the flexibility of the political system. Thus the Webbs, for example, may have been justified in emphasising the importance of the "whip of starvation" in the development of industrial capitalism and correct in arguing that its application by the structures of the Poor Law Amendment Act was incompatible with formal political democracy, yet they were clearly, if understandably, mistaken in failing to see that a system of relative destitution could be developed to serve the same purpose. The growth of the trade unions and the development of the Labour Party undoubtedly presented difficulties but it was surely not beyond the capability of the state to adapt to contain them. In one important sense such developments could be seen as contributing to stability in that by providing channels for protest and dissent they minimised the possibility of violent outbursts.

Thus there is a marked tendency in those who see 1919 as the year of revolutionary opportunity to underestimate ability of the state to adapt to meet the new circumstances of the post-war world. That this capacity existed is strongly supported in Charles Maier's study of post-war Europe when he demonstrates that other states achieved a successful restructuring in far less favourable circumstances than those which existed in Britain.³⁹ Nonetheless there is still some justification for those who viewed the British state as petrified and vulnerable in that a majority of the Cabinet of the day were strongly predisposed to the same view.

They too failed to appreciate the traditional strengths and the broad base of the system they nominally controlled. They too demonstrated an inability to distinguish between a point of departure and a last ditch. At a time when flexibility and imagination were required leading politicians fell victim to what one observer described as "a kind of fatal spirit".⁴⁰ It was, in the end, the British Cabinet which, by this atrophy, by the failure to meet essentially political demands with political measures, sustained the spectre of revolution. The Duke of Northumberland caught the spirit of the establishment in arguing: "We are now faced with precisely the same position in regard to Labour as that with which we were faced before this war with regard to Germany."⁴¹ As late as November 13, 1918, Lloyd George had anticipated and actually welcomed the new spirit and rising expectations, providing they were amenable to 'wise direction',⁴² but he soon changed his mind. The Times was soon deriding those "many amiable and kindly souls", who had "pictured the after war condition of the country as a sort of Utopia".⁴³ Under pressure from circumstances, no doubt exacerbated by his Cabinet, Lloyd George quickly forgot his earlier notion that social reform could provide a cheap insurance against revolution. The plans of the Ministry of Reconstruction were largely forgotten, new ideas for industrial relations such as the National Industrial Conference never received the necessary support and such measures of reform as did seep through, such as the Unemployment Insurance Act bore the marks of expediency rather than 'wise direction'. The Cabinet viewed the post-war unrest in such a way that ameliorative measures were seen as irrelevant. The forty hours' strike in Glasgow was regarded by the Scottish Secretary as a 'Bolshevik uprising' and the Cabinet assumed that the unrest in the engineering trades was the work of Russian agents. The 'Times', followed the lead

of the Government and described the engineers on strike in Belfast and Glasgow as "the unconscious instruments of a planned campaign drawn up by 'intellectuals' in the background who desire to emulate Lenin and Trotsky . . ." ⁴⁴ The claim for a forty hour week was dismissed as a mere pretext; the only consequence of granting such a claim would, argued the 'Times' be a demand for a thirty hour week. Evidence of the real nature of the dispute was ignored as was Thomas Jones' view that the strike movement itself had much to do with a "mutiny of the rank and file against the old established leaders". ⁴⁵

A similar outlook informed the Cabinet's analysis of all labour matters. The campaign for the nationalisation of the mines was regarded as subversive as were attempts to use the power of the Labour movement to influence certain political decisions. Labour unrest was assumed to be the product of Bolshevik inspired manipulators rather than legitimate grievances, so it was inevitable that the Cabinet should turn to repression rather than reform. Russia, as the source of propoganda, was to be isolated and the considerable resources of the state were devoted to identifying, and where possible imprisoning, or deporting, those who were assumed to be causing the trouble. However while few people seem to have had any difficulty in expounding on the dangers and follies of Bolshevism, nobody had any clear idea of what it actually was. At one point the Duke of Northumberland announced to an anxious world that it was "a German plot to re-establish German military supremacy by undermining the strength of the allies". ⁴⁶ He was clear that the Labour Party was "carrying out Lenin's programme of world revolution" and that the demand for nationalisation was merely "a certain phase of a great game played by the enemies of

this country"⁴⁷ but his analysis lost some of its coherence, though none of its vehemence, in the matter of whether the Labour leaders were victims of Russian or of German gold and their precise connection with the 'International Jew'. A 'Times' correspondent attempted to clarify matters by suggesting that the Bolshevik leaders were bent on using their "clear logical Jewish brains" to undermine christianity.⁴⁸ The 'Times' followed the activities of agents with interest and in February 1919 reported Soermus the Bolshevik propagandist who attracted a crowd by playing a violin, badly according to the correspondent, had been arrested as had a Russian Jew from Manchester. Other propagandists were reported to be dressing up as soldiers. Most were thought to be of foreign origin and were, on occasion, referred to as 'nocturnal agents'.⁴⁹

Official reports from Russia increased the mood of panic without adding much in the way of analysis. The quotation from 'Krasnaya Gazeta' sent by one agent; "Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies in scores of hundreds. Let them be thousands; let them drown themselves in their own blood . . . let there be floods of blood of the bourgeois - more blood as much as possible",⁵⁰ was scarcely calculated to reassure, nor was the communication from General Poole that "commisariats of free love have been established in several towns, and respectable women flogged for refusing to yield".⁵¹ These reports kept returning to the antibourgeois theme, for instance the quotation from the journal of the Extraordinary Commission for combating counter revolution, "We are no longer waging war against separate individuals, we are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class".⁵² Bolshevism was evidently connected with starvation,

typhus, influenza, syphilis, the nationalisation of women and the eating of horse flesh. Some suspected it had all been got up by the Germans, others blamed the Jews. There was also the belief that Bolshevism was merely nihilistic; concerned only with the destruction of all organised forms of social and economic life. In all this there was little to explain how such a doctrine could catch on in Russia let alone exercise any appeal anywhere else.

To those who rushed to define and defeat Bolshevism in Britain such matters scarcely merited consideration. No consideration was given to the idea that the unpleasant situation in Russia had something to do with past and existing circumstances of that country. Revolutions were effected by "well organised conspiracies"⁵³ and moved independently of the mass of the population. Bolshevism to some was almost an abstraction so independent was it of other social and political factors. Dr Hagberg Wright, self-appointed expert on Bolshevism, saw it as a disease and offered a 'temperature chart' to indicate its progress in Britain.⁵⁴ Sir Basil Thomson took up the medical image. Bolshevism was "a sort of infectious disease, spreading rapidly, but insidiously, until like a cancer it eats away the fabric of society, and the patient ceases to even wish for his own recovery . . . a nation attacked by it, if we may judge from the state of Russia, will be reduced to a political and social morass . . . civilisation crumbles away and the country returns to its original barbarism".⁵⁵ All the experts agreed that all Europe was in danger of contracting this disease, "unless proper measures (were) taken to isolate the source of infection".⁵⁶ Yet Hagberg Wright warned that Bolshevism was also

"a home grown product" and added cryptically that it had been "known for many years in this country under another label".⁵⁷

The difficulties of identifying Bolshevism proved no deterrent to those who wished to oppose it. The correspondence columns of the middle class newspapers contained many helpful suggestions and theories and many organisations were set up to counteract the menace. On February 10 1919 Brigadier General Page Croft, MP announced the formation of the 'League against Bolshevism', "To protect all law abiding subjects and oppose Bolshevist methods, objects and effects".⁵⁸ Founder members included Prebendary Gough, Leo Maxse and Havelock Wilson. Sir Edgar Jones, MP formed the Welsh Democratic League so that Bolshevism should be opposed in the principality,⁵⁹ and such luminaries as Ryder Haggard and Rudyard Kipling were attracted to the service of the 'Liberty League' in its opposition to "the Bolshevist peril".⁶⁰ Among the plethora of organisations arming themselves against the mysterious menace of Bolshevism were the Reconstruction Society, the British Empire Association, the National Political League, the Middle Class Union, Comrades of the Great War and the Women's League of Empire. Canon Burroughs of Hertford College, Oxford, felt secular measures and repression while desirable were inadequate on their own; "military measures by themselves would be only lancing one abscess . . . whereas the Bolshevik bacillus is already in the blood of the whole world". Burroughs recommended a 'National Christian Crusade': "We must find a stronger, kinder bacillus to fight it in the very veins of the world's spiritual life".⁶¹

There are a number of factors which might begin to explain this descent into pessimism. At one level it soon became clear that the coming of peace would make the practical business of domestic government a good deal more difficult. The war itself had provided the Government with its most potent sanctions against labour dissidence, and while much of the machinery of regulation survived the Armistice the popular mood which had allowed it to function at all effectively did not. The Cabinet must also have been aware that its difficulties would be exacerbated by those high expectations of the peace which they themselves had fostered as an element of policy during the war. Such hopes were widely acknowledged. The 'Times' argued, "Our people would be made of strange stuff, if after four years of war . . . they were content to come back and settle down as if nothing had happened".⁶² It soon became apparent that there was neither the competence nor the political will to implement the ambitious schemes of the Ministry of Reconstruction. The material factors which had underpinned the growth of state power; the Government's roles as a dominant major customer of industry, as a user of facilities and as guarantor of basic supplies, would inevitably decline. Yet the process was accelerated by politicians, comfortable again in their old prejudices. Within Whitehall, Treasury control began to stifle administrative innovation.

In accounting for the panic it is also important to attempt to recreate the intellectual outlook of those who suffered from it. Whilst, with hindsight, it seems obvious that the political and economic system which the Cabinet were committed to defending could survive with ease the reforms which the Labour Movement were demanding; even the

coming of a Labour Government; this was not accepted then. There is much evidence to suggest that many Conservative politicians saw nationalisation as striking at the very root of everything they were in politics to defend. They acted like men in the 'last ditch' because that is where they felt they were.

However the question remains as to why the Cabinet were predisposed to inflexibility and how they came to believe that they had no competence to deal politically with the difficulties that faced them. Underneath many statements there may have been an element of guilt; a recognition of the huge human cost of the war and of the promises of the war years which would inevitably remain unfulfilled. Yet this still fails to account for the anticipation of social disintegration. Any explanation must take into account the broader psychological impact of the Great War. While it is impossible to offer any precise interpretation of the impact of casualty figures no account could fail to take account of the individual grief of the millions of relatives of the dead nor the broken minds and bodies of so many of the survivors. In addition there is the broader impact of mass killing, the effect of living through a period when all previous expectations of life, views of human society, and even human nature itself, were turned upside down. It is in this mental context that we must set reactions to the considerable changes in industrial, political and social life. It has been argued with some plausibility that the impact of the war was merely to accelerate changes which were already underway.⁶³ Yet such explanations fail to take account of how the psychological impact of such changes was intensified by the way that war accelerated

the speed of change, by the way that it concentrated the processes, and, above all, by the way in which new processes and institutions became associated with the terrible novelty of modern war. Inevitably there can be no instant assimilation of such changes, no rational working out of what is altered and what remains. If the tone of much social and political thinking of the period is apocalyptic it must be viewed in the context of a mental world when plain material arguments about inherent stability and the inevitability of continuity might have appeared so out of place as to be sacrilegious. The fashion for idealising the past, and the recourse to myth to interpret the unpalatable present can be seen as part of a process of accommodation. It was not confined to Conservatives, often inclined to find decay in all change, for Beatrice Webb too, recorded the "depressed and distracted air of the strange medley of soldiers and civilians who throng the thoroughfares of the capital of a victorious empire", and speculated as to whether Western civilisation would "flare up in the flames of anarchic rebellion". Her instinctive reaction to the new age was similar to that of many Conservatives: "The Bolsheviks grin at us from a ruined Russia and their creed, like the plague of influenza seems to be spreading westward from one country to another."⁶⁴ In a civilisation accommodating itself to the collapse of Russia and of Central Europe and the domestic problems of the post-war world, prophets of doom and decay were at a premium. One popular myth which simplified the complexities of the new world was that of the passing of an old order. Masterman spun the web more expertly than most. He wrote of a feudal system defeated by stringent taxation, death in battle and estate duties: "The old generation passes with its children: the best of these children dead, the very type of its method of life,

maintained for so long, vanished forever." ⁶⁵ A 'Times' correspondent introduced the same note into a lament on the high volume of land sales which, he argued, had already destroyed the traditional pattern of rural life. He cautioned the new owners to accept their social responsibilities but with more than a hint to the inevitability of their failure: "Only let them beware of committing the unpardonable crime of not appreciating the wonderful treasure they have acquired. Let them really live in the old house for the greater part of the year, fit up the old nurseries (with all modern improvements if they will) but see to it that they are duly occupied by a troop of healthy happy children." ⁶⁶ While it is difficult to precisely define the social organisation of the country existing before 1914 it was clearly many decades, if not centuries, removed from these feudal idylls. Moreover it was quite misleading to attribute the decline in fortune of rural Britain to the war alone. Ryder Haggard provided a detailed analysis of that decline which began well before 1914. ⁶⁷ Land sales on this scale were similarly no novelty. There had been heavy selling between 1910 and 1913 and the war brought merely an interruption. The motivations for such sales may also have been a good deal less romantic than these contemporary accounts suggest. Instead of this picture of an impoverished gentry wrenched from the land by death duties and the deaths of heirs there is evidence to suggest that many sales may have been occasioned by a most 'unfeudal' desire to maximise return on capital by getting out of land and into more profitable and less troublesome investments. ⁶⁸

As with all good myths, "the passing of the old order" was not entirely unrelated to the situation it purported to describe. It offered a romanticised picture of a part of society and implied its applicability

to the whole. What was in reality a period of accelerated change in a long pattern of transition became, to the 'Times', "a social turnover which has changed the status of classes and their relation".⁶⁹ Few seem to have bothered to make any attempt to relate rural images to the predominantly urban and industrial reality. The Prime Minister himself suffered several bouts of agrarian romanticism and the most potent accounts of the war, which enjoyed their widest circulation in the post war years, represented Britain as a series of rural images. Flanders mud is contrasted to the peace and greenness of the English countryside, officers are "fox-hunting men" and bereavement itself is seen as "bugles calling from sad shires". The world of the cities, of factory based production and the lives of the urban workshop found no place in this myth making. One account did at least acknowledge its existence but it specifically set the new world in permanent conflict with the 'old order'. The 'Times' anonymous expert on revolution resurrected that most useful vehicle for myths of various sorts, the two nations theory, and adjusted it to the circumstances of the times.⁷⁰ On the one side was the 'Labour nation', within the national community but owing only marginal allegiance to it. It consisted of the organised workers, apparently largely employed by the state in the manufacture of war supplies. They were supposedly well fed, well educated and conscious of the power they could wield. Against them were set 'Old England': the propertied classes, the learned professions, trading and agricultural interests and those wage earners in industries not taken over by the state. All social ideologies of the time tended to be structured on the basis of who had, or who had not, done well out of the war, so here it was, inevitably the 'Labour nation' whose "burdens had been

comparatively light" and 'Old England' which had borne the brunt of the sacrifice. The factual inaccuracies of this account are, to a large extent, obvious. The point about high wages is quite simply wrong and the notion that industrial Britain failed to supply human material for the war a cruel travesty. However as a record of a collective state of mind the account may have something to recommend it. A significant section of the governing elite did enter the post-war world with the belief that a considerable section of the population was beyond their authority. Events in Russia were separated from their context and whipped up into a myth of Bolshevism as an epidemic. The appeals of revolution and revolt were not seen as being in any way related to factors which might be affected by rational political action. Revolution was "A ferment of formless aspirations, a hydra of a hundred discontents, its method is destruction, its god is anarchy". Events in domestic politics were also seen through the distorting lens of fear. Labour attempts to exert influence were seen as attempted insurrections, alternative explanations were dismissed out of hand and notions of responding to unrest with ameliorative measures rejected as, almost, treasonable. If the developed state machine of the war years was not to be turned to the tasks of social reform it was still to play a prominent, if more traditional, role in the maintenance of order. The Government looked to this enhanced state machine to ensure that the power of organised labour should not be used to exert any significant influence over domestic policy. Similarly they looked to an enhanced Special Branch to investigate and frustrate the plots of the subversives. Thus the Cabinet entered the post-war world in a mood of deep pessimism convinced that their only available course was to

confront organised labour. The measures which they undertook would inevitably produce reactions which would only tend to confirm their initial gloomy diagnosis.

Scotland House:

Organisation and Methods

Given the prevailing attitudes of the Cabinet to the political and industrial unrest of the post war months, it was perhaps inevitable that Basil Thomson should be retained as head of surveillance and that his department should be continued and strengthened. This provides an illustration of the predominating view of the social unrest, and the decision guaranteed that the police view, inevitably biased towards certain analyses and prescriptions, would be institutionally maintained at the centre of future deliberations.

In order to appreciate the implications of the decision it is useful at this stage to examine some central aspects of the history and ethos of the Special Branch. It had been formed in the 1880's as a section of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department specifically to counteract the activities of Irish terrorists. In addition to investigative functions the Branch was also charged with the protection of those who were judged prominent enough to attract the attention of assassins. While it retained its interests in Irish activities the Branch's brief was broadened to include other fringe political activists, commonly labelled within the Branch as "anarchists".

Celebrities as diverse as Maletasta and Lenin were investigated and included within this category. This unsophisticated terminology provides an insight into the nature of the Special Branch. They were in many respects a 'political police' yet they had none of those analytical abilities which later came to attach themselves to this concept. They made few political distinctions but merely watched

and harassed unconventional political figures.⁷¹ Most of their 'clients' in the period before the First World War appear to have been of foreign origin and to have enjoyed little support in domestic politics. This inevitably simplified the work of the Branch. In addition to being politically isolated the 'politicals' appear to have been geographically concentrated in the East End of London, the solid core of them being composed of Russians, mainly Jews, who had fled from Russia after the attempted revolution of 1905. Later popular stereotypes of Bolsheviks had much to do with this, and the Special Branch analysis was heavily conditioned by these early experiences. The style is well captured by H T Fitch who in commenting on one object of his attention argued, "his life showed that curious natural ferocity against all authority and system which has been the hallmark of other notable Jews such as Lenin and Trotsky".⁷²

Memoirs of Special Branch Officers bear an unmistakable air of cloak and dagger. The officers clearly entered what they regarded as an underworld of conspiracy with some enjoyment. One officer recalled how in the course of his attempt to obtain documentary evidence as to the intentions of a group of Russian Social Democrats he had hidden in a cupboard and then masqueraded as a waiter.⁷³ Another officer, no stranger to the world of Bulldog Drummond, recalled his sorties into the "Anarchist Club", in Jubilee Street, where it was apparently possible to "mix with the veritable scum of the earth" or to meet "regicides of the deepest dye".⁷⁴ This contains, perhaps, a hint of mutual dependence. Certainly the officers seemed disinclined to view their clients' 'villany' in the more prosaic light of political analysis. They preferred biological explanations, and not very

precise ones at that; thus Brust on Stephen Titus: "The virus of anarchy which had long poisoned his brain, was working to a head, and all the murderous instincts in the man surged into full flood." Subversive politics and conventional criminality were, in the end, part and parcel of the same thing: "Time and again, during my detective investigations, I found anarchy and ordinary crime mingled . . . ".⁷⁵

Militant suffragettes proved an, understandably, unwelcome intrusion into the world of the Special Branch when they were added to the case load, but the outbreak of war quickly restored the old drama and sense of importance. Even normal protection duties could be seen in a new light: "Night and day, secret guns, aircraft and submarines are watched and guarded: an impenetrable, unavoidable circle is invisibly drawn around vital political discussions, facts of which might set the world on fire."⁷⁶ The War considerably broadened the functions of the Branch. Thomson noted that after 1914, "it was maid of all work to every public office . . . from the regulation of carrier pigeons to investigating the strange behaviour of a Swiss waiter".⁷⁷ The Swiss waiter, inevitably turned out to be a spy of the Central Powers. Spies formed a large part of the concerns of the Branch during the War. Brust recalled, in his second attempt at autobiography, "it was Sir Basil (Thomson) who, at the outbreak of war, turned crack detectives into spy catchers".⁷⁸ The work was admirably suited to the Branch. The world of Mata Hari enabled them to indulge their histrionic impulses to the full and, in this, they were ably led by their Director. The work might be seen as being of the highest importance, it guaranteed excitement but above all, one suspects, it

was apolitical and straightforward. Where their work with suffragettes was sensitive their new tasks returned them to the old order of a closed activity with the minimum of external complications. It was to this organisation, in the midst of its war intensified heroics, that Carson had persuaded the cabinet to entrust the matter of the surveillance of domestic political unrest.

Inevitably the Special Branch treated its new clients in the way it had been treating existing ones. The utility of its perceptions and recommendations would be restricted because of the limited analyses which its officers had become accustomed to applying. In respect of the analyses of domestic unrest two critical omissions would be estimations of general political support 'agitators' might attract and the extent to which unrest was rooted in identifiable circumstances. The Special Branch viewed all unrest as criminal and regarded agitators as being driven by criminal, or otherwise venal, motivations. On pacifist societies, Fitch commented: "Some few of them were honest, but the majority of them were in receipt of anarchist gold and were working for anarchist ends."⁷⁹ Of the men he arrested at the unofficial ASE conference at Walworth: "It was a striking comment on these men that all but one of them were of military age, though in that hour of national need they were still to be found at home."⁸⁰ Fitch's moral outrage was not tempered by any knowledge of the Government's manpower policy. Thomson himself, when first given his new task set out on a search for 'German gold' and anarchist conspiracies and it is to his credit that he came to put together a more credible account of unrest than that which Carson might have anticipated.

Even if it were to be argued that the use of the Special Branch in wartime was a reasonable expedient, the coming of peace must surely be viewed as an opportunity to instigate something more sophisticated. While, in wartime, it might prove possible to deal with even quite widespread dissent as if it were criminal, the political consequences of doing so in peacetime could clearly be far more extensive. Nevertheless the post-war coalition Cabinet took the earliest opportunity of strengthening the position of the Special Branch, confirming the role of Thomson, and extending his brief to include rationalisation of surveillance. Carson again led the way by complaining in Cabinet on January 22 1919 that, "no concerted action was being taken by the various departments with regard to combating Bolshevism in this country". Thomson recalled that the wartime muddle continued and that he was specifically entrusted with the task of rationalising the various facilities which existed.⁸¹ But why should the Cabinet have felt that these functions, which they clearly regarded as crucial should remain with Thomson and the Special Branch?

If social proximity to the ruling elite is considered an advantage in a defender of existing order then Thomson was supremely qualified for his appointment. He was the second son of an Archbishop of York, and his mother claimed social connections with both Gladstone and Disraeli and had attracted a biographer for a somewhat unremarkable life.⁸² Thomson was educated at Eton and Balliol, leaving the latter institution after two terms, in horror, he later recalled at the prospect of a clerkship in the Civil Service. On leaving Balliol Thomson had joined the Colonial Service and in an eventful six years had encountered Baden Powell and governed Tonga as its Prime Minister.⁸³ Illness

forced him to retire from the Colonial Service in 1893, and between then and 1896 he pursued his studies for the Bar, to which he was admitted in the latter year. During these three years he also found time for a friendship with Lord Northcliffe, a period as guardian to two Siamese princes, and the commencement of a prolific literary career. In the context of an active life his literary output must appear remarkable. Between 1894 and 1939 Thomson published twenty-nine full length books as well as contributing a large number of articles to newspapers and periodicals. His output included autobiography, travellers tales and detective fiction, to which genre he is still judged to have made a considerable contribution.

In 1896 Thomson joined the Prison Service and was gazetted deputy-governor of Walton prison. He later served in Northampton and Dartmoor prisons. These experiences led Thomson to literary speculation on the subject of criminals. What emerged is the then conventional view of criminals as a class apart, to be relentlessly pursued and punished yet regarded with detachment and even, to a limited extent, afforded a measure of respect. Certainly Thomson had a good deal more sympathy for criminals than for his later political quarries. The flavour of the distinction is captured in the plea of a Dartmoor Prison Officer which Thomson quoted with approval. The officer called on Thomson during the war to ask him to use his influence "to get the good old convicts back. I tell you these conchies are a disgrace to the place . . . long-haired, idle young men wandering about a respectable village with their arms around each other's necks. It makes us sick to look at them".⁸⁴ Evidently as late as 1937 Thomson felt little need to rescue conscientious

objectors from crude slander or to raise them to the moral level of 'good old convicts'.

During his prison service Thomson had his first contact with political dissenters, for when he was promoted to Secretary of the Prison Commission it fell to him to investigate complaints of suffragette prisoners. In June 1913, Thomson transferred from the prison service to Scotland Yard and the Criminal Investigation Department. Here his duties included the surveillance and arrest of spies, in which function he gained a considerable reputation.⁸⁵ The spies attracted great admiration from Thomson; Lody, a German spy executed in 1914, draws the greatest accolade that Thomson could bestow: "He died as one would wish all Englishmen to die - quickly and undramatically, supported by the proud consciousness of having done his duty."⁸⁶ It was, however, another aspect of his work at Scotland Yard that was to have most bearing on his future appointment for at this time he also ran an Irish Service, concerned with the surveillance of Irish political agitators in Britain.

Thomson's first contact with labour came in 1916 when he was invited by the Ministry of Munitions to undertake its intelligence work. His brief was to rationalise an existing service which had become chaotic with the rapid expansion of the Ministry.

In a number of senses, then, Thomson must have appeared as a natural choice for the work demanded by Carson in 1917 and for the continuation of that work in 1919. Thomson's weakness, it might be plausibly argued, was a predisposition to simplify both problems and solutions

and to reduce political dissent to simple, albeit morally abhorrent, criminality. Yet such matters were unlikely to appear as deficiencies to the men who appointed Thomson. If his advice now seems heavily compromised by his stern and simplistic attitudes to working class political activity this is unlikely to have been seen as a drawback by that Cabinet. If he was inclined to view Bolshevism as an infection at one moment and an 'international Jewish movement'⁸⁷ at another he was doing no more than retailing establishment conventional wisdoms. If he saw the 40 hours' strike in Glasgow as 'a Bolshevik uprising'⁸⁸ he was only conferring an opinion which the Scottish Secretary had previously expressed in Cabinet. If Thomson was to produce an analysis of the left wing movement which veered towards the conspiratorial and to constantly advocate additional repressive measures he was reflecting Cabinet opinion quite as much as he was shaping it. In selecting Thomson and the Special Branch for this task the Cabinet were ensuring that they got only the advice they wanted, even if it is possible to argue that this was not the advice that might have been necessary for the wisest decisions.

Attempts to rationalise surveillance services during the war evidently failed. Carson was pressing for co-ordinated action in January 1919⁸⁹ and Thomson later recalled that, "until six months after the Armistice there were several independent organisations for furnishing information".⁹⁰ Some measures of reorganisation were later achieved. From May 1st 1919 Thomson acted as Director of Intelligence and the operations of his staff were centralised in Scotland House. His reports to Cabinet were made weekly rather than fortnightly. It also emerged from a number of sources that at this time he developed a

recognised role as adviser on labour and subversive politics, often attending the relevant Departmental and Cabinet Committees. Thomson was able to develop a close, and amiable, working relationship with the Home Secretary, Edward Shortt.⁹¹

Thomson recorded the rumours which inevitably came to surround his Department. It comprised, he wrote, "A most admirable and efficient little staff . . . organised at very low cost to the country. The revolutionary press tried to spread the belief among its readers that enormous sums were being lavished, that I went about with bulging pockets corrupting honest working men; whereas, in fact, all the most useful and trustworthy information was furnished gratuitously and the corruption was all on the other side".⁹² If we take first this question of size it should prove possible to test his claims. It is as well to note at the beginning that the Home Office went to some pains to conceal the activities of the Special Branch, and one example will illustrate this. In August 1921, Mr Gilbert, a Member of Parliament who took a close and informed interest in Home Office business asked the Home Secretary whether any Chief Officers had recently been appointed to the Detective Branch and what the size of that Branch was. Shortt replied that no additional Chief Officers had been appointed to "the Detective Branch of the Metropolitan Police" and that the current strength of the Branch as a whole was 758 men.⁹³ This seems straightforward enough, yet from the Departmental Minute it becomes clear that the Home Secretary was briefed to answer in such a way as to avoid revealing information about the size of the Special Branch. He was advised to use "the term Detective Branch as meaning the CID and excluding the Special Branch".⁹⁴ This might imply some change had

taken place at this time; yet it indicates, beyond doubt, a high degree of sensitivity on the subject. On another occasion a parliamentary request for information was met by a suggestion, from the Home Secretary, that the enquirer should consult the Civil Service Estimates. However, as the Home Secretary obviously knew, the Secret Service vote was not presented in a revealing way. The description of the vote: "to defray the charge of His Majesty's foreign and other secret services" clearly precludes the revelation of any useful detail. The vote under this head for 1918-19 was one million pounds, and for 1919-20, £200,000. The latter figure was, during the course of 1919 doubled by a supplementary estimate.⁹⁵ The fluctuation, because of its sheer size and its coming at the end of the war, was almost certainly substantially connected with foreign intelligence.

A Home Office Minute of June 1920 gives the best, and clearest information about the size of the Special Branch during these years, and on this basis a picture of Thomson's organisation can be constructed. His authorised establishment in 1920 was one detective superintendent, one detective chief inspector, twenty-two detective inspectors, sixty-four detective sergeants and forty-eight detective constables. That the functions of this staff comprised both the gathering of information and its systematic storage might be deduced from the fact that at least two of the inspectors were known as Registrars of Special Records.⁹⁶ The maximum authorised wage bill was in the region of £40,000 per annum.

This establishment seems more than the 'admirable and efficient little staff' of Thomson's account, while less than that suggested by several radicals. However several qualifications need to be made concerning

this information. In the first place it must be asked whether all these men were involved in the business of political surveillance? It would appear likely that a good proportion were involved in duties unrelated or only indirectly related to this work. Available information also gives us no indication of the fluctuations in the size of the Special Branch. Without this it is impossible to indicate how the new political function, acquired in 1916, routinised in 1919, affected these numbers.⁹⁷ Thomson's 'staff', directly engaged in political surveillance may well have comprised but a section of this overall number. There are other problems connected with the assessment of the size of this staff. During the war, for instance, several members of the Special Branch had been seconded for work with other government departments. At least one detective inspector served with Naval Intelligence, twelve sergeants with the Ministry of Munitions and seventeen other officers with Army Intelligence in France. No doubt these were returned to more conventional duties during 1919. Also at this time there was an attempt in Scotland Yard to employ civilian clerks for duties hitherto performed by police officers. If this change had been applied within the Special Branch it would have effectively increased the strength of the Branch without affecting the establishment figures. A further problem in assessing the size of the force engaged in the political police function relates to the question of how far ordinary regional forces were engaged in such work. It is clear from the reports prepared by Thomson and his successor that the work of the Special Branch was supplemented by other police forces. Chief Constables submitted to the Director of Intelligence periodical reports of left wing activity in their regions. Much of this information was of a type that indicates that it was

readily, and publicly available: numbers attending meetings, marches and the like. Other information was gathered by CID shorthand writers who attended meetings, sometimes with the purpose of gathering information with a view to the prosecution of the speakers. Clandestine information from the regions was usually supplied, by 'correspondents', directly to Thomson, presumably by men who were under his direct command. However it was misleading for Thomson to imply that it was only his 'efficient little staff' which was involved in political work.

Just as Thomson claimed that his opponents' estimates of the size of his establishment were exaggerated, so he felt were their suspicions as to his methods. As noted above he claimed that his best information was freely offered. "The great art of acquiring information" he wrote, "is to have friends in every grade of society and in as many countries as possible". He claimed too, with only limited plausibility, that he had friends who were communists who gave him information because they "disapproved very strongly of the way in which the movement was being exploited".⁹⁸ While it is perhaps better to be sceptical of such accounts, which were possibly attempts to create a mystique of the omnipresent insider, it must still be clear that a great deal of useful information, could be, and was, gathered by straightforward routine methods. The personalities of the labour movement transacted much of their business, and many of their disputes, in public and much of Thomson's 'inside information' could be gained by the mundane expedience of reading the socialist press. In addition the nationwide police forces sent in a constant stream of detail about strikes, pickets, marches and all other forms of activity. As he claimed, there is evidence that Thomson did interview left wingers. Kenworthy,

Malone and Lansbury are all recorded as having been interviewed, yet it may be doubted whether such occasions were the friendly events of Thomson's account.

Police shorthand writers became such an established feature of socialist meetings that speakers frequently made reference to them. Thomson recorded many such comments. Lansbury, in warning the Government that it was dangerous to arm reservists used in strikes "as they might use them in a way not intended by the Government", added with some bravado, that "if the CID man was present he hoped he would make a note of that".⁹⁹ Usually the recognition of shorthand writers led to hostile comment, as when a Labour Alderman in Birmingham "challenged a local detective to take down a speech in shorthand and alleged that convictions based upon notes . . . were 'caricatures of British justice'".¹⁰⁰ This comment illustrates the point that the purpose of shorthand notes was not restricted to the intelligence function. A large percentage of the numerous convictions in the post war years were for incitement to unlawful assembly, or for incitement to mutiny, and such cases necessitated accurate notes. One organisation, in particular, presented the police with severe difficulties in respect of note taking. Members of the outlawed National Union of Police and Prison Officers quickly recognised former colleagues and reacted emphatically.¹⁰¹

The more serious claims against the Special Branch concerned the use of secret agents and agents provocateur. John Maclean was the most prolific in such accusations. Thomson felt that Maclean used such ideas to his own advantage in that, "when asked a question he cannot

answer he accuses the questioner of being a police spy".¹⁰² Thomson claimed a certain type of political agitator had agents provocateur 'on the brain'. Certainly Maclean was liberal in his accusations and, as Thomson recorded, at the BSP's annual conference in 1920 "made charges against the leaders of being police spies and cited the money spent on young Rothstein's education at Balliol and hinted that he was an agent provocateur of the Government".¹⁰³ It appears to have become a fairly common tactic in revolutionary circles to denounce opponents as agents of the Government. Thomson recorded these rumours. Sylvia Pankhurst came under suspicion: "There are whispers that she may be in league with the authorities";¹⁰⁴ J T Murphy was "denounced as a paid agent of this office";¹⁰⁵ and Colonel Malone became both user and victim of the practice.¹⁰⁶ At one point the CPGB was moved to suspend recruitment for 3 months.¹⁰⁷

In the midst of this it is difficult to separate truth from fiction. A number of the accusations may have contained a small element of truth. On one occasion, when charges were pending against Colonel Malone, Thomson recorded, "Yesterday his solicitor called to say that Malone was very much averse to going to prison and would be prepared to give a verbal undertaking to exercise a restraining influence on the Communists".¹⁰⁸ Thomson claimed that the offer was rejected. In the case of J T Murphy, Thomson stated, "Murphy has never been paid by this office, though he was reporting for, and being paid by an unofficial employers agency during the war".¹⁰⁹ Here Thomson would appear to have got hold of one of the most persistent rumours. His source was probably articles written by Murphy which appeared in the 'Daily Herald' of August 13 and August 14, 1919. In these, and later in his autobiography Murphy

explained that he had been approached by a "Mr Brown" in Sheffield who had offered him five pounds a week for information on left wing industrial activities. He had not repudiated the offer as he wished to expose "Mr Brown" and those behind him.¹¹⁰ In view of Murphy's dedicated political career, the hardships he endured and even the manner of his eventual estrangement from official communism¹¹¹ it seems more than improbable that Thomson's statement could be true. There is one case however where it does appear that an activist was paid for information. A London activist, W F Watson, prominent in the Londer Workers' Committee, "Hands off Russia", the People's Russian Information Bureau, and editor of "The Masses", became so compromised in the eyes of his colleagues by his contacts with the police that he was moved to publish his own account of the events. Watson recorded that he had been approached with a view to selling information on a number of occasions but that his first clear contact with Scotland Yard was during June 1918. His contact asked "Do you know of any German gold knocking around Mr Watson?"¹¹² Watson records that he believed that this was a subterfuge. That Watson mentions a search for "German gold" and the fact that he believed it to be a cover for other interests argues powerfully for the veracity of at least this part of his story, for it is known from other sources that it was precisely this task which Carson had set Thomson at this time. Thus Watson, seeing little harm in the adventure agreed to meet his contact again. At this and subsequent meetings the Special Branch Officer invited Watson to work for him, offering him three pounds a week and asking for information about the "undercurrents of the movement". In particular he wanted details of the People's Russian Information Bureau and was especially interested in finding out where Bolshevist propaganda was coming from and

in particular the "Appeal to the Toiling Masses". This part of Watson's story also tallies exactly with what is known of the interests of Scotland House at this time. Watson claimed that he took the money but sent in only "fictitious reports", but led his contact to believe that he was endeavouring to get the information he most wanted. However while all this was going on Watson was approached quite independently by the secretary of "Mr Z" also of Scotland Yard. He was taken to see "Mr Z", "a very urbane, soft spoken gentleman", (possibly Basil Thomson himself?) and offered three pounds a week and two pounds expenses to send information. Watson claimed that he obliged by sending a carbon copy of the report he was already submitting to his first contact. However after a few weeks the two apparently compared notes. His first contact declared that Watson had "made him the laughing stock of Scotland Yard" and threatened that Watson "would never get on a public platform again".¹¹³ Watson was arrested on 14 February 1919 under the Defence of the Realm Act for a speech which he had made at a 'Hands Off Russia' meeting at the Albert Hall on 7 February. On 22 March he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Robert Young raised the Watson case in the House of Commons on 12 July 1919 asking the Home Secretary, Edward Shortt, how many others had been offered positions such as that accepted by Watson. Shortt replied that the police never offered such appointments but conceded that payments had been made to Watson which he regarded as a normal "criminal" procedure, especially in the circumstances of war.¹¹⁴ Young raised the matter again on 24 July asking the Home Secretary what kind of assistance W F Watson had rendered to the police. Shortt replied that "Watson gave information from time to time about breaches of the law actually committed or planned, such as fomenting strikes in munitions works, incitements to disorder etc, and was paid

small sums in respect of each piece of information found to be of value to the police".¹¹⁵ Watson, by now in the middle of a storm of accusation from his former associates, believed that Young had placed this second question with the object of discrediting him, though Young denied this. On 12 August 1919 J H Thomas blundered into the case. Thomas' ever present sense of his own heroism had been stimulated by the case. Watson he recalled had "persistently followed me about all over the country during the last three years of the war denouncing me in my meetings . . ." ¹¹⁶ As Watson was now revealed as a government agent Thomas felt he had suffered persecution at the hands of the state. Shortt gave what was by now his familiar reply that Watson had "volunteered certain pieces of definite information and when that information was found to be accurate and acted upon he was paid for it".¹¹⁷ Thomson made no reference to the incident in his reports although he must have known about it, but a few months later he did record, without comment, that on his release from Pentonville, Watson had "been accused by the London Workers' Committee of being a government spy".¹¹⁸

While it is impossible to say with any certainty which account, if either, is true, it would appear to be the case that Watson's story has more to commend it. Some of those who knew Watson came down in his favour; the 'Workers Dreadnaught' supported him as did ex Inspector Syme, who as an ex CID man probably knew more than most. Evidence from the available reports suggests that Scotland House did operate a system of correspondents which would not have been possible if Shortt's statement about police methods had been true. Thomson's reticence about the case also tends to support Watson's version rather than Shortt's. In addition it is clear that it is only Watson's account which offers a

convincing explanation of his eventual prosecution. If Watson had been offering useful information why should the Government have him arrested and then destroy any future use he might have. Finally it must be conceded that the Home Office version of the case seems far-fetched on psychological grounds. W F Watson was, after all a well respected and prominent figure in the unofficial movement. To rise to such a position in the circumstances of wartime Britain inevitably required some firm sense of purpose and a willingness to sacrifice immediate personal comforts. While it is just possible that such a man could be trained to act as an agent for the other side it seems highly improbable that he would betray his cause and his comrades for the occasional ad hoc payment. Watson undoubtedly acted unwisely, though the temptations to play along the Special Branch must have been great, and while he apparently did tell some of his friends a little of what was going on he would have done better to keep them thoroughly informed.

These cases clearly add something to the picture of the Special Branch. Unsurprisingly perhaps, they reveal an organisation considerably less smooth and efficient than its Director pretended. Watson felt the left overestimated the intelligence of the CID men. He argued that they were often clumsy, largely ignorant of the nature and strength of the socialist movement and frequently inept, as when they failed to intercept a Soviet envoy, even though he had it stamped in his passport. Other known incidents such as when CID men were discovered hiding in a cupboard at a radical meeting would tend to support Watson's view.

Watson claimed that Thomson's organisation made no approach to other London Workers' Committee members until his contact with them ceased and

on this and other grounds it seems to have been the case that Scotland House sought to gain one "correspondent" in each organisation in which they were interested. These cases would indicate that Thomson's weekly reports should be treated with some caution. He clearly seized on the flimsiest allegation about Murphy and retained it as hard fact. In this matter Thomson was victim of his ideology, in that he held the view that revolutionaries as a class tended to be driven by venal motives. This view, apparent at other points in his reports and writings, led him to seize on such insubstantial allegations. The Watson case also indicates that while it seems unlikely that Thomson would put material into the reports which he knew to be untrue, he did not reveal there everything he knew. In such matters as the use of agents it is therefore as well to bear in mind that the fact that a practice is not mentioned does not mean, necessarily, that it was not employed.

The term police agent in this connection contains a multitude of sins, and in order to make sense of the reality of police activity it is essential to subdivide the term. The Nosivitsky case provides an interesting starting point. Nosivitsky was a courier for the Comintern who, when arrested by Scotland Yard, was persuaded to undertake clandestine work against his former employers. Through Nosivitsky Thomson was able to glean much useful information about the Scandanavian link between Russia and Western Europe. He was able to discover, among other things, that Rothstein was the chief Comintern representative in Britain, and obtain details about financial transactions. Furthermore Nosivitsky seems to have been largely responsible for the successful arrest of Veldtheim (alias

Zacharissen). Thus Scotland Yard might count themselves fortunate to have recruited so useful an 'agent'. The general points to emerge are that Nosivitsky was initially a genuine member of the organisation he served and that he was persuaded to change sides, primarily, under threat of some sanctions which Scotland Yard could, quite legitimately have brought to bear. Malone, we have seen, apparently offered a degree of co-operation under such circumstances. Clearly such 'agents' must be separated from those who enter an organisation with the specific and sole intention of providing information for the police. Agents like this are far more common than the Nosivitsky type. Agents again must be separated on the grounds of what they do when within an organisation. There are those who seek only information and others who, while providing information, also seek to move that organisation in a certain direction. This type of agent may again be subdivided. Those who seek to persuade others along lines directly favourable to their employers and others, the most sinister of all, the ideal type, agents provocateurs, who specifically set out to persuade their fellow members to commit offences for which they can be arrested.

For the latter category, the agent provocateur proper, there exists no evidence for this period. It seems in a sense unlikely that such agents would have been used, for such activities would appear to have been unnecessary, let alone impolitic, but the absence of evidence cannot be taken as proving anything. For the agent who attempts to move an organisation along lines directly favourable to the Government there is some tentative support. Malone's offer to do something like this was rejected but Thomson did report that on one occasion when a resolution favourable to

industrial unionism" was brought forward at the Vale of Leven and Renton branch of the AEU my correspondent arranged that rejection was moved on the grounds that that policy was 'another move to smash Trade Unionsim'.¹¹⁹"

The circumstances of the incident suggest that the 'agent' here was not a professional and that he was working on his own initiative yet it remains that he felt he was serving the state in his secret manner and was so encouraged by the Director of Intelligence. The line between obtaining information and influencing an organisation is necessarily a fine one. In order to gain admission an 'agent' must take part in the affairs of that organisation and as such must take part in its decision making. Thomson's reports tend to suggest that the bulk of such work was concerned with information alone, and while on grounds of general reason this seems likely to have been the case, his vagueness about the relationships existing between his agents and their organisations leaves room for doubts.

Much of the evidence in the Reports is inevitably scanty. Thomson revealed an 'inside source' in the National Union of Ex-Servicemen. The source was sufficiently inconspicuous to receive five shillings 'unexpectedly' when money was distributed to the members.¹²⁰ This man was on terms of trust with a Sergeant Major Leatherhead who had been nominated as President of the Union. The Sergeant Major had apparently confided to Thomson's 'correspondent' that "the Union was determined to obtain its demands by fair means or foul".¹²¹ The available information gave no indication whether the 'correspondent' was a genuine member of the organisation, prepared for some reason or other to assist the Special Branch, or whether he was a policeman, or police

agent, who had joined for the express purpose of securing confidential information. In a new organisation such as this Union with its loose structure either expedient would have been possible. Some 'correspondents' are clearly amateur. For instance Thomson's man on the Herald: "According to a usually trustworthy source, Mr Lansbury has accepted £10,000 from the Khaufat Delegation, in return for a promise to support their cause"¹²² No professional agent could be 'usually trustworthy'. Thomson's references to his sources give some indication of their type but are rarely conclusive; for example, 'a woman who is in close touch with the Women's Peace Crusade', 'a working man correspondent', 'an unconfirmed report from Birmingham'¹²³ It is clear, however, that more 'correspondents' were able to conceal their true affiliations. That "the leaders of the No Conscription Fellowship" should tell a correspondent "that there would shortly be a revolution in England" and warn him "to get in plenty of food as it would be difficult to obtain"¹²⁴ is indicative of a degree of misplaced trust. The excellent cover of one agent is indicated by the following extract: "Communist speeches throughout the country show great similarity and this fact is due to the issue of leaflets from King Street; a batch of the latest leaflet entitled 'Capitalism or Communism - which will you fight for?' was sent to Leicester and handed to my correspondent for distribution".¹²⁵ The numerous references to Leicester and the volume of detailed information is striking: "In Leicester several communists are now making a living by selling chocolate at 10p per lb. The chocolate is manufactured by the Waretta Chocolate Co, Barton, USA, and is forwarded to Leicester from London. The secretary of one of the local extremist organisations recently had four tons at his home."¹²⁶ The detail and the frequency

of reports from Leicester must indicate an assiduous agent at the heart of left wing politics in the area. Information from Coventry also indicates a similar situation there.

Thomson implied that his 'correspondents' secured the confidence of prominent radicals: "One of my correspondents who has been in close touch with W Paul sends the following report of an interview between Lenin and Paul"¹²⁷ Harry Quelch too seems to have been mistaken in his choice of confidant; "Quelch admitted in conversation that his party would have been practically non-existent during the past few months if it had not been for the Russian Bolshevik money disbursed by Rothstein"¹²⁸ One 'correspondent' was claimed to be sufficiently in the confidence of Tom Mann to obtain information "known only to three persons in the country"¹²⁹ Sylvia Pankhurst's activities and ideas were reported in minute detail,¹³⁰ and the 'correspondent' in touch with the 'Herald' could produce a constant stream of information, much of it intimate and trivial.¹³¹ General Childs, Thomson's successor as Director of Intelligence, in his autobiography, claimed that he had never managed to place an agent at the heart of the Communist Party. Whether this was true or not neither Director appears to have had any great difficulty in keeping in touch with Communist Party affairs. Accuracy and detail and such extracts as, "one of my correspondents has obtained temporary possession of some notes belonging to an important member of the Communist Party executive"¹³² indicate that the suspension of membership recruitment during 1921 was no unwise decision.

'Correspondents' did not apparently restrict their activities to fringe political groups. In February 1919 Thomson reported Arthur Henderson as "being much disappointed at the failure of the Conference in Berne but he says that he cannot confess it publicly",¹³³ and similarly in September, "An interesting statement was made by Mr Henderson at a private conference of the Parliamentary Committee to which my correspondent gained admission".¹³⁴ 'Correspondents' were on good terms with some Trade Union leaders: "The measure of communist effort in this connection may be gauged from the fact that though Herbert Smith has privately expressed great pleasure at the removal of revolutionary obstructionists from his own area, he was forced to protest against the prosecutions . . ."¹³⁵ It was probably no more than routine that a 'correspondent' should attend a Triple Alliance Conference in July 1919, even though it did take place "behind closed doors".¹³⁶ While there seems to be no reason, for reasons amplified later, to question the general reliability of Thomson's reports, his method of obtaining information could be questioned. Though it must be the case that some of his 'correspondents' actually did make the contacts they claimed it is possible that Thomson dressed up some information obtained from mundane sources to increase the appearance of competence of his organisation.

The older traditions of the Special Branch were not entirely forgotten and some unconventional espionage took place. Officers acted as waiters at a private lunch in Gatti's Restaurant, attended by Ramsay Macdonald and George Lansbury.¹³⁷ On another occasion officers were discovered in a cupboard at a meeting of the Communist Party.

The opening of private mail proved a less dramatic, though far more useful source of intelligence. The extent of the practice is difficult to estimate with accuracy, though the fact that it was extensively practised is beyond doubt. Even if the number of warrants issued to sanction the practice of letter opening were known for this period the true extent of the business would still remain a mystery for then, as now, it was permissible for several persons to be named a single warrant. Thomson was careful not to reveal too much in his reports though there is sufficient evidence on which to draw some tentative conclusions. Under the conventions of British government there are a variety of rules which apply to different categories of mail. Foreign mail is, in crude terms, treated as fair game, while the opening of internal mail is done with a degree of circumspection. Under the provisions of DORA all foreign cables were recorded and their contents made available to Scotland Yard. This practice was deemed sufficiently necessary for national security that the Cabinet devoted some time to the discussion of a proposal in July 1919 that the practice be curtailed. In spite of "pressure from business interests" complaining about the delays entailed by such censorship there were many in the Cabinet who were reluctant to give up the device. Eventually the censors gave way, but only when it had been explained to them that the Home Secretary had sufficient powers of intervention in any case. The detail of the case is interesting as it gives a good illustration of the sort of powers British governments have sought to obtain for themselves. The Law Officers' opinion was, "when, in the opinion of the Secretary of State an emergency has arisen in which it is expedient for the public service that the Government should have control over the transmission of messages by

the company's Telegraphs he may under Section 52 of the Telegraph Act 1863 (26 & 27 Vic c112) by warrant (inter alia) direct and authorise such persons as he thinks fit to assume control of the transmission of messages". In response to a question as to whether the power would be exercised in 'normal times' the Law Officers replied that the Secretary of State was at perfect liberty to designate an emergency at any time he chose. Moreover, "In our opinion the discretion of the Secretary of State is absolute. That is to say that it could not be questioned in a court of law".¹³⁸ The use of such powers after the official censorship was ended is indicated by Thomson's use of cable which Robert Williams sent to New York.¹³⁹

Thomson certainly used the official censorship while it was in being, for example; "From a number of censored letters from Glasgow to the USA it appears that there is active revolutionary feeling in the different shops".¹⁴⁰ Yet the cessation of official censorship brought no apparent change in the volume of information Thomson was able to obtain from the mail. Evidence in the reports clearly suggests that all prominent communists and those associating with them had their letters opened regularly. The reports make specific reference for instance to letters from Kime to Dingley,¹⁴¹ from Watkins to Campbell,¹⁴² from Meynell to Macmenus,¹⁴³ from Malone to Inkpin.¹⁴⁴ Letters from Page Arnott¹⁴⁵ and Sam Mainwaring¹⁴⁶ are used as sources without mention of recipient. Much of Sylvia Pankhurst's correspondence found its way into police files. On one occasion Thomson quoted the fears she had expressed to Phillip Price that the Soviet Union was moving towards capitalism.¹⁴⁷ Her statement to 'a friend in Glasgow'; "I expect revolution soon, don't you?"¹⁴⁸ might just conceivably be considered

useful intelligence though a great deal of the material from her letters seems of little general interest. Maybe Thomson overestimated her importance because of his earlier contacts with the militant suffragettes or it could be that inertia within the organisation meant that letters continued to be recorded even when the individual concerned was no longer prominent. Thomson clearly did make some mistakes. Both Commander Kenworthy and Lt Col Malone surely attracted more interest than they strictly deserved. Thomson's interest in Kenworthy extended to speculation as to his influence over the Hull Junior Liberals. Maybe he was drawn to these men because as MP's and officers they might, in Thomson's view at least, be expected to offer 'leadership' to the left wing movement. In practice though Thomson's resources were great enough to accommodate such aberrations for if he occasionally followed the insignificant, the letters of those at the heart of the movement received his full attention. From the confidential nature of the material which they sent through the public posts it seems likely that many communists were, initially, unaware of the incidence of this technique of surveillance. Pollitt, for instance, in 1921, wrote of his doubts about Russia and his feeling that "there (was) something terrible going on behind the scenes".¹⁴⁹ The correspondence of the Manchester business manager of the Daily Herald was opened as was the private mail of the editor.¹⁵⁰ That E D Morel should have had his mail opened is perhaps explained by his activities during the war. Charles Trevelyan and Ramsay Macdonald had their letters opened, the latter again perhaps because of wartime activities, yet the last recorded incidence was as late as November 1919. Much trade union business was watched through the mails and Thomson's analyses of union politics were assisted by such material as letters from the

Secretary of the NUR, and one from Cramp. The latter is interesting because Thomson makes it quite clear that he regarded Cramp as a 'moderate'. Within the organisation there was no pretence that the practice of letter opening was restricted to subversives or revolutionaries.

The methods of surveillance, outlined above, were occasionally supplemented by raids on the offices of left wing organisations, yet such raids were not primarily conceived of as means of gaining information. The main purpose of raids and arrests was to disrupt organisations and the seizure of records was meant to assist in this. Thomson clearly saw raids in this light: "Much of the present unrest is due to the activity of the Communist Party. The arrest of Albert Inkpin and Robert Stewart and the search of Headquarters have, however, somewhat checked its activity for the moment."¹⁵⁴ A raid on the Manchester Headquarters of the Red International of Labour Unions came at the end of two months' comment on the gathering strength of that organisation. Information gained from such raids was regarded as a bonus and it tended only to confirm what was known already: "A number of interesting documents were seized and these bear out in every respect the information already given in my reports." Thomson would inevitably claim this yet the evidence of his reports and the quoted documents show that this was substantially the case. If there was one particular advantage in information gained from raids it was that material so obtained could be used for propoganda purposes without provoking awkward questions as to its origins, yet the two raids of May 1921 were obviously primarily motivated by the desire to mini-

mise the effectiveness of the communists during a period of acute industrial unrest, just as later raids and arrests in 1925 sought to remove communists from circulation during the General Strike.

From the above it is clear that the business of intelligence was carried on in a relatively efficient, if unimaginative way. Thomson's organisation was neither as innocent, nor as competent as he himself claimed, yet it didn't seem to rely on venality to the extent claimed by his opponents. While, from the Government's point of view, it was convenient that some of the methods used should remain secret, it seems unlikely that they would have provoked general public opposition had they become public knowledge; certainly in so far as they were applied to self proclaimed revolutionaries. The area of contention would inevitably have been the secret surveillance of non-revolutionary labour organisations. Yet the fact that such work was done can in no sense be seen as intelligence personnel stepping beyond lines laid down by their political chiefs. If such activity is judged to be morally illegitimate or politically foolish the blame must attach itself to the Cabinet rather than to Thomson. Also if it is claimed that the objects of surveillance were ill chosen and excessive amounts of time devoted to unimportant detail this cannot be laid exclusively at Thomson's door. Such errors stem from a failure to develop a coherent theory of subversive activity and in this respect Thomson was no worse than his political mentors.

Scotland House:

Revolution: Its Diagnosis and its Remedy

Thomson's attempts to define the 'Bolshevik menace' were never particularly impressive. At one point he confided to the Cabinet, "An exact translation of the word 'Bolshevik' is, I am told, an 'out and outer'".¹⁵⁶ He later claimed, "there is . . . evidence to show that Bolshevism is fast becoming an international Jewish movement . . ." ¹⁵⁷ and he frequently had recourse to the imagery of disease and contagion in which Bolshevism could be seen as "a cancer which eats away the heart of society".¹⁵⁸ He advised the Cabinet that the reason Britain had not been affected was "owing not only to the good sense of the people and the stability of their institutions but rather to the difficulty of sending propagandists while the blockade continued".¹⁵⁹ Bolsheviks were "a tiny destructive minority" who could "wreak havoc . . . in a civilised community that takes no thought for self-protection". There is no discussion of the circumstances which might facilitate their activities and Thomson gave no credence to Bolshevism as an alternative political system. On one occasion he argued that it was not to be found in Ireland "except in so far as lawlessness" could be regarded as such. Bolshevism was merely the product of fertile enthusiasms of a group of deranged and impractical intellectuals. Its appeal was not based on any credibility it might have as an explanation of existing societies or as a model for a future one, but rather on its ability to prey on the lemming-like, anarchic passions which might seize populations from time to time. The only available solution was to isolate Soviet Russia; to ensure that anyone who broke through the blockade was sent back, and to prosecute and punish any British national who attempted to spread the doctrine.

Thomson's view was no more extreme or exaggerated than that of the Cabinet he was advising. Indeed there is some evidence to the effect that by the beginning of 1920 Thomson had achieved a more balanced view of the situation than most of the politicians. Hankey cited Thomson as one of the saner voices on the subject of industrial unrest.¹⁶⁰ Yet the more moderate counsels which Thomson advanced represented no softening of his attitudes towards the Soviet Union or the prophets of revolution. To Thomson they never became anything more than freaks or 'queer people'.¹⁶¹ What did alter was his ability to separate out the reformers from the 'Bolsheviks', and his perceptions of the ability of the British people to resist the temptations of 'anarchy'.

In the earlier reports Thomson showed that he found it difficult to understand the world of labour politics and, in particular, to view in any realistic perspective the turbulence of the immediate postwar period. The Labour Party itself, he viewed in a highly equivocal light: if it was not the cancer outright it did at least represent an avenue through which Bolshevism might triumph. The fact that the Labour Party was the official opposition did not exempt its leaders from Thomson's attentions. He later claimed that his Department destroyed such records when a Labour Government came to power, lest the curiosity of ministers should lead them to ask to see their personal files.

Thomson carefully surveyed the whole field of Labour activity. He watched the preparations for the municipal elections and warned the Cabinet that there "was talk of making borough councils Soviets".¹⁶² They should not regard Labour efforts to elect councillors as evidence

of a conversion to constitutional action as such activity was merely seen, "as a means to an end . . . Labour leaders have realised that revolution is doomed unless it is accompanied by a quick re-organisation of the means of transport and supply. They are now fully alive to the full scope of municipal power".¹⁶³ He was even driven to psephological speculations: discharged soldiers, he argued, were supporting Labour "not so much out of sympathy with the Labour Party but as a protest against the housing situation and high prices".¹⁶⁴ Labour's success in the elections found Thomson a little more sanguine, but still suspicious: "As a means of educating Labour candidates in responsibility the election of Labour majorities may prove a good thing: the danger lies in the fact that so many of the elected men and women are secretly pledged to smash the whole machine of capitalism".¹⁶⁵ Thomson appears to have watched even the day to day activities of the new Labour councils. Bermondsey councillors, he informed the Cabinet, were liable to incur a supplementary rate of five shillings and sixpence while the new council in Glasgow had voted to approach the Government with a view to fixing work for the unemployed.¹⁶⁶ He noted that even after their victories Party activists continued to put in work in the constituencies and warned that they were often the only party getting across any propaganda. However, of the new councillors, Thomson recorded with a degree of surprise: "many of them appear to be quite sensible and moderate".¹⁶⁷ Yet there was little cause for complacency for in his summary of the year 1919 he commented: "The number of British born persons who desire a revolution is apparently stationary . . . but the number who want a revolution by constitutional means is certainly increasing, and among them are those who are licking their lips at the idea of obtaining control of the Navy, Army and Police Forces

through Parliament as instruments for overturning the present social organisation".¹⁶⁸

If the Labour Party was, at best, suspect, the ILP was clearly beyond the pale. The ILP's record during the War had much to do with Thomson's attitude here: he had reported that "the ILP are pacifist to a man". If the ILP was not actually bolshevist, that doctrine was "affecting the Party to a considerable extent". Apparently the Party indulged in the same type of clandestine subversion; "I am informed that several young artificers, mechanics and shipwrights, who have recently joined the Navy are in the pay of the ILP and have joined with a view to spreading unrest in the service".¹⁶⁹ The laconic note, "The ILP has found time in other activities for the dismemberment of Empire"¹⁷⁰ similarly illustrates Thomson's attitude to the Party. He made more of the fact that the ILP debated affiliation to the Third International than of the outcome of the debate. Thomson's problem here was perhaps that he failed to distinguish between political possibility and party rhetoric. Inevitably he assumed too much about the Party because of their hostility to institutions, which were dear to him, for instance the Empire and the Services.

Thomson's early approach to the trade union movement followed a similar pattern. Certainly he felt entitled to survey and report on the day to day activities of trade union officials irrespective of their political commitment. In the postwar world, he noted, many of those leaders in whom he felt most confidence were losing their standing: Tillet and Thorne were under attack, and Havelock Wilson had become "a joke".¹⁷¹ He cited an editorial in the journal of the

United Society of Boilermakers as "a sign of the times"; "The whole editorial is purely political and has nothing to do with the affairs of the union".¹⁷² He later complained that the ASLEF journal "devotes several pages to matter quite unconnected with the union".¹⁷³ Thomson attempted to use men he regarded as key figures and use their activities, and popular reaction to them as indications of popular feeling. Thus it was, "a good sign that Mr J H Thomas was able to hold his own at a meeting of the Nine Elms Branch",¹⁷⁴ though such an approach had its own difficulties; Thomson had earlier noted that even Mr Thomas had been, on occasion forced to don the apparel of subversiveness in order to retain his place. He was aware, at least in some of the more obvious cases that appearance was not everything. Reporting Henderson's rather uncharacteristic remarks to the effect that it was doubtful whether full political liberty could be achieved without a violent convulsion of society, he commented, "Mr Henderson is rather easily affected by opposition and his mind may have been unconsciously affected by popular demonstration against him at the Women's Trade Unionists meeting at Glasgow . . ." ¹⁷⁵

While some of the weaknesses of Thomson's analysis may be explained by his lack of sympathy with the structures and attitudes of the post-war labour movement they must also be seen in the light of his understanding of the system he felt himself to be defending. Thomson discounted the possibility of any change in capitalism. Capital was too sensitive to accommodate even the changes which the labour moderates were now demanding. The rigidity of Thomson's view is well illustrated by his attitude to propaganda: "The great need at the moment is for instruction and unfortunately the only agency is the Labour colleges, which

are imparting instruction in false economics".¹⁷⁶ Thomson's plea is always for instruction rather than propaganda; his opponents are not seen as dealing in alternatives but in falsehoods. His attitude to unemployment was considerably influenced by this extreme orthodoxy. On unemployment: "The problem is unfortunately insoluble for it is brought about by worldwide conditions over which we have no control."¹⁷⁷ The alleviation of the effects of unemployment was equally beyond the scope of government; charity was admissible but attempts by Labour Party guardians to increase rates of relief were castigated as 'ruinous extravagance'. Relief he noted "amounts to more in many cases than would be earned by unskilled labour and its demoralising effect needs no emphasis".¹⁷⁸ Thomson was so moved by the issue that he suggested, in a report to Cabinet, that ratepayers should be encouraged to take action.

Thomson was never clear what impact unemployment was liable to have on political stability. Initially he welcomed it; "Unskilled workers are beginning to realise that their places can be taken by unemployed men".¹⁷⁹ Yet a vocal section of the unemployed refused to accept that the problem was beyond the competence of the government and by the end of 1920 Thomson was alarmed; "The real danger of the position is that the unemployed may be induced to act, as they did in Germany, on the maxim, 'Nothing will be done for you until you unite and seize all the food shops, clothing shops, factories and workhouses and convert them to your own uses'".¹⁸⁰ Unemployment quickly became a central feature of the weekly reports with inevitably the main interest in attempts to organise unemployed men. Thomson was particularly concerned at its effect on exservicemen and there are

many anticipations of "trouble among the unemployed when the weather becomes cold".¹⁸¹ In the circumstances the decline of the official ex-servicemen's organisations was not to be lamented: "much as this is to be regretted from some points of view, it is better than the present tendency to absorb revolutionary doctrines".¹⁸²

By the Autumn of 1921 unemployment was judged sufficiently important to merit a special report. In it Thomson presented estimates of unemployment broken down by region and the rates of relief being paid by guardians. He also offered an estimate of the state of feeling in the larger cities: "It is estimated that after deducting the number of men who have participated in more than one meeting about 85,000 unemployed have demonstrated during the last week. Serious as this total is it yet amounts to less than 6% of the wholly unemployed."¹⁸³

Yet communist agitators were "moving rapidly from city to city and such 'undesirables' as Mrs Thring, "a woman of loose habits", were turning their attention to the issue."¹⁸⁴ The reports leave the impression that while Thomson felt that unemployment represented a danger, he was never certain what this danger was; whether it was a fear of limited rioting and disorder or whether unemployment would provide an opportunity for the revolutionaries. Such confusions led Thomson on a number of occasions to spend a great deal of time on apparently unimportant individuals: ex-Lieutenant Nicholson was a case in point. In January 1920 Nicholson was reported as being "dangerously active in Reading",¹⁸⁵ when he was preaching revolution to ex-servicemen.

Later Thomson reported that he had started a Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's commune: "It is not known yet whether he has much following but he seems likely to prove a very bad influence".¹⁸⁶ About this time Nicholson made his major contribution to revolutionary theory which

was a scheme to finance a 'Red Army' on the proceeds of a sweepstake on the 'Lincoln'. He also attempted to set up a shooting club, "under a patriotic cover".¹⁸⁷ In March he visited Wales but was "less revolutionary than usual",¹⁸⁸ but later in the year there were rumours that he was dealing in small arms.¹⁸⁹ He later still announced his conversion to a policy of assassination¹⁹⁰ but this proved to be the end of his revolutionary career for in the Autumn he publicly renounced his part and declared his faith in capitalism. Nicholson undoubtedly needed watching yet it seems doubtful whether his wilder ambitions and the violence of his language justified his inclusion in a Cabinet report on revolutionary activity.¹⁹¹

Thomson was also inclined to let himself be led by revolutionary symbolism. He often appeared to have judged the mood of meetings on the basis of whether the 'Red Flag' was sung or not. The Cabinet was informed that an audience of around a thousand had sung the anthem at the conclusion of a meeting in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in November 1919,¹⁹² that a meeting of ILP supporters in Scotland had greeted the news of a Labour victory in the Spen Valley by election by singing the 'Red Flag'.¹⁹³ Commenting on a meeting to be held in the Albert Hall, Thomson predicted that both the 'Red Flag' and the 'International' would be sung.¹⁹⁴ He also felt it worth reporting that a group of Labour councillors had joined in the singing of the 'Red Flag' while on a visit to France.¹⁹⁵ He could also draw specific conclusions for such incidents; commenting on a delegate meeting of the Triple Alliance he argued, "That the 'Red Flag' was sung shows that an undue proportion of the delegates were extremists and not representatives of the bulk of labour".¹⁹⁶ He also used such evidence in his attempts to understand the allegiances of

individuals: Mr Charles Trevelyan has written to Mr Phillips Price an alarming letter in which he mentions that he is bringing up his children to sing the 'Red Flag'. It is a very foolish and conceited document".¹⁹⁷ It could also provide negative evidence; the fact that co-operators did not sing the 'Red Flag' was cited as reinforcement of Thomson's view of the co-operator as "a cautious person and an advocate of practical socialism without disorderly revolution".

Islington Town Council though was clearly a black spot, for its members were reported as singing the anthem at meetings¹⁹⁸ and Thomson expressed much concern at the news of a Reserve Naval Battalion at Newport "singing the 'Red Flag' and cheering".¹⁹⁹ Some encouragement was, no doubt, to be drawn from a report of a red flag being torn up,²⁰⁰ and the fact that a group of men in Edmonton, attempting to fly a red flag, had come under physical challenge from a group advocating the merits of the Union Jack.²⁰¹ Concern that a 'Red Orchestra' had been formed in Coventry to play the 'Red Flag' to the dole queues may seem understandable enough, though the extract, "a report, not yet confirmed, has reached me that 100,000 red flags have been made for distribution in Barrow and Coventry", bears a tinge of panarolia.²⁰²

Thomson rarely attempted to generalise, and indeed many of the weaknesses of his analysis may be seen to stem from the necessity to produce a report every week. Yet he did in his report for the year 1919 attempt lists of factors favourable and detrimental to the cause of revolution. Those factors which he felt contributed to revolutionary feeling he listed in the following order: first came the general concern about high prices exacerbated by the belief that they were caused by profiteering. Second was the housing shortage

and third "class hatred" which Thomson complained was compounded by "foolish ostentation on the part of the well to do".²⁰³ Fourth were the Labour colleges, fifth the influence of "extreme" Trade Union leaders, such as Mann, Smillie, Hodges, Bromley, Hill, Williams and Turner. Unemployment was sixth and finally came the Labour press; the 'Daily Herald', the 'Worker' and Sylvia Pankhurst's 'Workers' Dreadnought' qualifying for special mention. Set against this list was one of "steadying influences". First came the continuing popularity of the Royal Family, next the popularity of sport with the working classes, third the poverty of the would-be revolutionaries and fourth the jealousy which existed between trade unionists and their leaders. Fifth was the ill-feeling which existed between demobilised soldiers and "the shirkers" and the final influence for good was the increase in the amount of money being handled by the working classes. Thomson's grasp of the issues at this level is made to appear somewhat shaky by his inclusion of a graph purporting to demonstrate fluctuations in revolutionary feeling for the year, where no attempt is made to explain on what basis such "feeling" had been quantified. It is probable that Thomson lifted the graph from the "researches" of Dr Hagberg Wright, one of that considerable body of experts with special insight into problems of revolution.²⁰⁴ The graph and the lists reveal Thomson's lack of any realistic model of revolutionary activity but they do contain some insights. The attachment to the Monarchy and its surrounding paraphernalia was obviously the other side of the coin to his concern with the symbolism of revolution. The beneficial influence of monarchy was not merely a matter for contemplation for the activities of the Royal Family were seen as a part of a continuous battle for the minds of the working classes. Royal visits were

watched in minute detail and policemen stationed in the crowds to make estimations of reactions. These were collected by Thomson and formed the basis of his estimation of the "loyalty" of particular cities. The fact that crowds for a visit to Sheffield in May 1919 were "generally rather apathetic and uninterested" while those in Birmingham had been more appreciative was cited as evidence that "Sheffield was less loyal than Birmingham".²⁰⁵ A visit to Leicester later that summer proved to be "an unqualified success". That the Town Clerk's speech had been nearly inaudible while the King's had been distinctly heard had "provoked many approving comments on this contrast".²⁰⁶ During the visit city status had been conferred on Leicester and this had, it was reported, "enhanced feelings of loyalty". Thomson's impression that extremism was making no headway in Newcastle he found "confirmed by the enthusiastic welcome" which Prince Albert received there.²⁰⁷ In spite of the triumphs of other Royal persons Thomson evidently saw the Prince of Wales as the star turn. A visit to Wales was "a great personal triumph" in spite of attempts by extremists, who evidently shared Thomson's view of the significance of such visits, to disrupt proceedings.²⁰⁸ A Leeds 'correspondent' was quoted to confirm the popularity of the Prince "with the better class of workers": "In private conversation they speak of him as a 'sport' and a 'proper gent'".²⁰⁹ A visit to a boxing match brought the comment, "Yorkshiremen are sportsmen and the Prince's visit to the National Sporting Club the other night made a big impression in Yorkshire. When the Prince went to Australia Thomson made his feelings clear: "His Royal Highness's popularity will be as great an influence for stability in Australia as it is in England".²¹⁰ That Thomson's feelings may have got the better of his analysis might be indicated by the

fact that a single report contained both the comment that a Royal visit to Belfast had been a singular success and indicated good feeling, and also that there had been fierce rioting in that city. Thomson clearly felt Royal visits were an active ingredient in the maintenance of stability and even, on occasion suggested a visit to a difficult area.

The reports also include many references to the beneficial influence of professional sport, and in particular football. The King's visit to a game between Manchester City and Liverpool was warmly welcomed; "The interest taken by the King in a game which is nearer the heart of the people of the North than any political question has done immense good".²¹¹ At one point Thomson used the fact that the Communist Party had begun to take an interest in sport as evidence of their growing understanding of the psychology of "the working man".²¹² Football was seen as an alternative interest to politics; as a comment on the relative failure of socialist propaganda he cited the fact that the only International working men knew of was that which took place at Wembley between Scotland and England.²¹³ In the difficult year of 1919 he viewed the new season with considerable relief, "The approaching football season is already influencing the minds of workers and should greatly reduce the attendance at meetings".²¹⁴ He suggested on another occasion that a Labour candidate's failure in an election might have been due to the alternative attractions of a football match. It was similarly consoling that May Day 1920 in Leeds found ten thousand workers at a football match and only two thousand on a demonstration.²¹⁵ Football had been prominent in Thomson's discussions of the preparations for May Day. Socialist organisers, he suggested

were worried by the rival attractions of football matches: "Unfortunately no match is advertised for the Chelsea ground on May 1st. If an attractive match could be arranged it would blow away a great many people from Hyde Park".²¹⁶ Sport should be harnessed to longer term objectives; he feared that the shorter working day might facilitate the work of propagandists unless "the British workingman's love of sport", "the healthiest antidote to extremist teaching", could be further developed by the provision of additional facilities for playing games.²¹⁷

That Britain did not fall victim to the Bolshevik plague in the post-war period was, according to Thomson, mainly to be explained by the hard won immunity from Russian propaganda. Propaganda was central in Thomson's analysis of politics and this is illustrated in the reports by his attention to all forms of socialist propaganda, his continuous campaign for strict legal penalties to be attached to it, and his recording of schemes of counter propaganda with pleas for official support for such efforts.

Thomson made constant reference to socialist newspapers and pamphlets, and even found space to complain that William Paul had been allowed to bring lantern slides back from Russia. All radical newspapers, no matter how miniscule their circulation were worthy of attention yet it was inevitably the 'Daily Herald', in these years an independent socialist paper, which provoked the greatest interest and comment.²¹⁸ The considerable resources of Scotland House were devoted to investigating the affairs of the 'Herald' and Thomson spent a lot of time

speculating on the effect it had on those who read it. One "correspondent" offered the information that those who read the paper when on buses took great care that their fellow passengers should not identify their reading matter. Another provoked alarm by suggesting that the 'Herald' had made working men suspicious of what they read in the "capitalist press". Thomson felt the paper had an immediate and direct effect. During the industrial actions of April 1921 he argued that it "must bear much of the responsibility for the action of the Triple Alliance. Deliberate incitement has been evident in several articles during the crisis and the paper is a distinct danger to social peace".²¹⁹ On a couple of occasions Thomson was able to hamper the progress of the 'Herald'. When he discovered that it was being sent, along with other newspapers, to the Army in France he successfully campaigned for the practice to cease. On another occasion he noticed that Victory Loan advertisements had been placed in the paper: "It is to be hoped", lectured Thomson, "that Government Departments will not prolong the life of this paper".²²⁰ It was his constant hope and expectation that the 'Herald' would suffer financial collapse but to his annoyance, it sometimes seemed to enjoy a charmed life: "Unfortunately the sporting correspondent had the good fortune to spot several winners lately". Once he was moved to suggest a scheme whereby it might be taken over and directed to responsible purposes.

An area of propaganda which made Thomson even more uneasy than the newspapers was socialist education. The post-war years abounded with attempts to set up socialist education groups, ranging from the significant to the trivial and bizarre, but Thomson seems to have covered

them all. The Socialist Sunday Schools Movement was watched with a closer attention than it merited, the Cabinet being informed of such events as when at a 'service' in the Trade Hall in Leicester, four infants were dedicated to the International Socialist Movement.²²¹ A scheme to set up a troupe of 'Red Scouts' in Thornton Heath was also faithfully recorded.²²² Thomson appears to have felt that there was something especially wicked in attempting to convert children. On one occasion he warned that school teachers in Southern Wales had been giving "impromptu lessons in revolution" and his favourite legislative suggestion was for such socialist pedagogues to be singled out for especially severe punishment.²²³

However most of Thomson's entries concerning "Education in Revolution" referred to adult education. He followed the activities of the Plebs League and reported the formation of the Central Labour College. The latter, he warned, had attracted applications well in excess of the sixty places it was initially able to offer. Its activities, he noted, were "to be based on the recognition of the antagonism of capital and labour".²²⁴ Six months later Thomson returned to the theme and reminded his readers that the aims of the College were "frankly revolutionary" and that it had been created in the belief that previous schemes of working class education had been too moderate.²²⁵ He pointed out the link between the South Wales Miners Federation and the College and was later to relate the militancy of that coalfield to the College's influence. Thomson noted with concern the spread of colleges with a similar philosophy. During 1919 he reported foundations in Nottingham, Scotland, Bradford and in Wallsend, though the latter, while it was deemed worthy of the Cabinet's attention was "situated in a disused

shop" and only "attended by a few youths between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one".²²⁶ When a college was set up in Sheffield he noticed the name of F W Chandler, "the well known extremist", on the list of lecturers; "One can imagine", lamented Thomson, "the kind of economics and history taught by such a person and how it is likely to work in the minds of uneducated youths".²²⁷ Later the same year he reported, "the spread of classes teaching revolution continues". Walton Newbold was tutoring eighty-two students in Bury under the auspices of the Plebs League, and similar classes had sprung up in Tottenham and Coventry.²²⁸ To vindicate his deep concern Thomson quoted the 'Socialist', "Classes should not be held for the sake of holding them, but for the permeation of our unions with revolutionary conceptions". He commented, "It is not suggested that these classes are a serious menace to the stability of society at present but they are certainly sufficient reason for the undertaking of sound economic education".²²⁹ In again drawing the Cabinet's attention, two months later, to the prevalence of "pernicious teaching" Thomson suggested that the colleges were potentially the "most dangerous revolutionary instruments of the moment".²³⁰ The Central Labour College was starting a series of outdoor classes and Thomson identified this institution and the Labour Research Department as "the fountainhead of the teaching of class hatred".

Thomson frequently used the opportunity of reports on socialist propaganda to outline his own ideas of how a counterblast of "sound economic education" might best be propagated. He allowed himself a free rein and his advice ranged from advocacy of general propaganda to material more suitable for the conventional party political contest, as when he suggested that the increase in the price of coal, in 1920,

"should, if possible, be attributed to the increase in railwaymen's wages".²³¹ Most of his advice in the matter indicated a frank dissatisfaction with the Government. Few of the efforts made met with his approval; "What is really needed" he argued "is a number of working men propagandists who could be trusted to expose fallacies in public houses and at pit head meetings".²³² He regularly appealed to the Government to play its part by organising debates or "counter attacking" the 'Daily Herald'.²³³ Thomson had a simple faith in his cause and its appeal: "The crying need at the moment appears to be education in elementary economics, for the judgment of the British working man may always be trusted when he knows the facts".²³⁴ Even the agricultural community were not to be spared; he advocated "posters in villages with economic facts to set slow minds thinking".²³⁵ To underline his view of the Government's slowness Thomson added; "I have sent this proposal to an unofficial organisation which concerns itself with propaganda of this kind".

Thomson gave official recognition to any organisation or individual who joined the fight from the well-financed Reconstruction Society to the lone efforts of a rag and bone man who had successfully heckled socialist speakers in Birmingham Bull Ring or of Hackensmidt, a professional wrestler, who was "conducting a tour of lectures on the evils of Bolshevism".²³⁶ In September 1919 he reported "A movement afoot to establish throughout the country Labour Colleges where sound economics will be taught", adding pointedly, "it deserves every encouragement, and if funds are forthcoming to found scholarships it will go far to counteract the pernicious influence of the existing 'Labour Colleges'".²³⁷ He kept a close, and approving eye on the proliferation

of anti-Bolshevik groups: "Several organisations to combat the evil have been formed".²³⁸ He mentioned the propaganda efforts of the National Security Union and praised particularly the National Socialist Party, under Thorne, Tillett and Hyndman, which used trained workingmen speakers. The Reconstruction Society usually managed to attract large and appreciative audiences though they were reported to have encountered some opposition in Woolwich.²³⁹ He advocated that propaganda should be taken into workingmen's clubs and suggested the National Democratic Party as a suitable agent. The approach should be robust: "The ordinary Labour man (was) less suspicious if those who disagreed with him took off their gloves and fought him. He has never failed to appreciate an antagonist who uses towards him the pointed language to which he is accustomed from his mates".²⁴⁰

Thomson regarded the press, excepting naturally the 'Daily Herald', as a consistently reliable ally in the battle for the mind of the workingman. His reports contain many approving references, as for instance to the coverage of 'events' in Russia during 1919, all of which was based on official material and photographs issued by the Government. In August 1919 there was a liaison meeting at Scotland Yard when reporters were given details, and photographs of Russian Agents in Britain with information about money smuggling and difficulties of detection.²⁴¹ Thomson frequently advised the Government of the use that should be made of the press. Sometimes such advice was for ad hoc proposals such as when he suggested that the press should be persuaded to campaign for secret ballots in union elections. At other times more complex campaigns were undertaken. The Cabinet itself cleared the suggestion that materials obtained during the raid

of the Russian Trading Delegation could be released to the press as evidence of a 'Bolshevik plot'.²⁴² Similarly the exposé of the criminal records of the leaders of the big unemployment march in 1922 was a carefully orchestrated operation run by the Special Branch and the Home Office.²⁴³ J R Campbell complained that during the Engineering dispute of 1922 Scotland Yard has worked up notes for speakers issued by the Communist Party, and intercepted by the police, into evidence of a "'plot' as if it were the publicity department of the Employers Federation, and issued it broadcast to the press".²⁴⁴ This was no more than normal practice. There is evidence to suggest that some of Thomson's ideas for such publicity ventures were vetoed in the Home Affairs Committee of Cabinet, but significantly none to suggest that the press ever failed to respond as requested. Yet such amenability brought an inevitable problem. Thomson reported incessant attacks on the press in Labour circles: "These attacks must not be too lightly dismissed. Many correspondents from the North report that the working-man has ceased to believe any statements made in the 'capitalist press'".²⁴⁵ He suggested that the new scepticism had been caused by the too ready, and unanimous, condemnation of the 1919 Railway Strike. However consolation might be found: "Thousands read the Sunday papers all of which contain anti Labour propaganda".²⁴⁶

Thomson felt that members of the upper middle classes had an important part to play in the battle for the minds of the working classes. While the Royal Family were, in his opinion, attuning their public activities perfectly to this end, the reports contain a number of complaints about the 'ostentatious extravagance' of some members of the upper class and speculation about the bad effect that this has on working men. "Ocular

proof that the employer class spends money lavishly" ²⁴⁷ was said to have exacerbated concern about rising prices in 1919, and in this context, at least, the popular press were proving unhelpful as their "reports of enormous expenditure on luxuries (were) inflaming the mind of Labour". ²⁴⁸ Thomson's view of the importance of the upper middle classes in projecting a stable image of society is clearly shown by his deep concern over any breaches in solidarity. The attention given to the 'defections' of Kenworthy, Malone and Charles Trevelyan, already discussed, fall within this category. Even minor cracks in the edifice were noted; Commander Grenfell would surely have been surprised, and certainly flattered, to know that a letter he wrote to the 'Times', critical of colonial policy, had been singled out for the attention of Cabinet. ²⁴⁹ The announcement by Professor Lees-Smith of his conversion to Labour was given similar treatment. Even the elite in the making did not escape attention: "Both at Oxford and Cambridge there is said to be a growing clique among the undergraduates, of persons who profess a kind of academic Bolshevism". ²⁵⁰

A final insight into Thomson's political analysis may be illustrated by his belief in the efficacy of repressive measures against subversives. In this area too, he felt the Government to be unnecessarily cautious and continually recommended stricter legal measures and more prosecutions. To maintain a proper perspective on this view it is necessary to remember that these years were in any case marked by a great number of raids, arrests and prosecutions. DORA remained in force until 1920 and this coupled with contemporary interpretation of more traditional statutes ensured that imprisonment was an ever present possibility for radical activists. Yet Thomson's answer for many things was new

legislation. It should, he argued, be made illegal to receive money from abroad for propaganda purposes. On the prospectus of the Communist Party; he commented, "It is a document that would procure for its authors heavy sentences of imprisonment in nearly every other country";²⁵¹ On continuing communist activity, "Sooner or later legislation will be necessary for dealing with the members of an association who are preaching violence and civil war. The present procedure for selection is antiquated and useless for the purpose, which is to deal with the responsible heads of the movement and make them individually responsible to the courts".²⁵² To emphasise the urgency of the matter he added "It is easier to deal with dangerous movements in their infancy than when they are numerically strong". Thomson, on one occasion presented for the Cabinet's perusal some proposals based on legislation in force in the United States. Under such legislation "Anyone who teaches, aids or advises forcible resistance to or destruction of any unit of government" would be liable to imprisonment, "not exceeding 20 years and/or a fine of 50,000 dollars". Similarly "Anyone who advocates attacks on property or persons, either as a general principle or in particular instances" would be liable to up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 dollars, and any association contemplating the use of physical force was declared to be illegal and members of such an association made liable to up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 dollars.²⁵³

It was not to be expected that Thomson would recognise the irony in such defences of "liberty" but it might be reasonable to expect that he should anticipate the practical difficulties of such a policy. There is no evidence that he even recognised the two most obvious

detrimental effects of such a policy; namely that it would, by driving communist activity underground, make it more difficult to observe and secondly that repression might well glamorise, and increase support for those whom it sought to deter. Thomson did complain that the Communist Party's closing of ranks consequent upon the raids and arrests of 1921 had made it difficult to obtain information, but he drew no inference from this.

If the purpose of Thomson's reports was just to give the Cabinet a week by week account of left wing activities they may, to a degree, be judged successful. While they contain unimportant material they do encompass most of the important events and personalities. Yet if Thomson is to be judged as a political adviser, as an interpreter of events, he must be seen as far less successful. It is apparent that he never developed that coherent and consistent overview necessary for such a task. A central weakness in his analysis, from which a number of other weaknesses stemmed, was his failure to come to terms with the new importance of organised labour and the Labour Party in the postwar period. Thomson regarded even their basic aspirations, limited nationalisations and basic welfare provision, as being outwith the framework of legitimate politics and this inevitably led to confusion, for if the defence of the state involved frustrating measures being furthered by the official opposition in a perfectly constitutional manner he would inevitably enter the field of party politics.

To Thomson capitalism was an irreducible and irreplaceable part of the state, and indeed the civilisation, which he was defending. Not only did he hold that no alternative economic system could form the basis

of a civilised society but he failed to appreciate that capitalism could successfully accommodate itself to many of those measures which labour leaders advocated. Seeing no possibility of change all that was left to Thomson was the propagation of truth and the repression of those who refused to accept it.

While he had vivid ideas about the consequences of a British revolution, in the earlier reports Thomson exhibited no developed idea of how it might occur. Throughout 1919 he laboured with the idea of revolution as social collapse, accompanied if not precipitated by a putsch. After 1919, while he began to dismiss revolution as an immediate possibility, he never gave up the idea that circumstances might develop which could endanger the state yet he presented no clear account of those circumstances. An inevitable consequence of this failure was to accept revolutionaries, even of the Nicholson type, at their own word; to pursue those who declared themselves subversive rather than those who had some chance of success.

During the later reports Thomson did, however, begin to advance a more coherent view of dangers to the state. This stemmed eventually from his appreciation of the power of organised labour and the ways in which it could be employed. He never expressed the theory as an abstraction and he was led to it more by events than through reasoned analysis. The note of realism which it brought to his reports was a gradual growth and unconnected materials were never eliminated, yet it provided him with a valuable yardstick against which to evaluate the potential of an organisation. The central danger was thus seen as the revolutionary general strike and potential revolutionaries

judged on their proximity to and ability to influence the mass of organised workers. This analysis offered Thomson an escape from his paradoxical pursuit of "dangerous revolutionaries" whom he regarded as "villains of comic opera". He could be more specific about the danger and hence eliminate those who only aspired to influence. Thus he could move away from the world of the putsch and the vagueries of "revolution by constitutional means" and concentrate his attentions on such groups as the RILU: "It is true that the adherents number, as yet, only a small percentage of organised labour, but the important fact is that they are, almost without exception, Trade Unionists". The organisation was, he concluded "potentially as dangerous as the bickering communist groups are negligible".²⁵⁴

Thomson had become interested in liaisons between co-operative societies and trade unions during December 1919. Agreements on trade union use of co-operative banking facilities were minutely dissected and he made reference to schemes whereby co-operative wholesale societies had provided, or were prepared to provide, food or credit to strikers. In Thomson's melodramatic turn of phrase the scheme was that "strikers would be provided with food while the rest of the community starve".²⁵⁵ In the immediate postwar period Thomson was inclined to view all labour organisations with suspicion and the co-operators were included for no particular reason. Yet as he began to calm down the reports on such transactions continued. It was not that Thomson regarded co-operators as natural revolutionaries; indeed in the normal way of things he regarded them as sensible and moderate men. The danger they presented was not in terms of their opinions but rather in terms of the functions they might perform in enhancing

the industrial power of labour. They could provide the necessities of life and offer independent banking facilities; and thus the labour movement might be spared in a strike the disciplines of the market and Government interference with their funds.

Almost inevitably Thomson pushed the idea too far. Attempts to utilise the power of labour from "Hands off Russia" and the Councils of Action to the Triple Alliance were regarded as threats to political order irrespective of their limited aims. Even the formation of a General Council for the TUC was viewed with suspicion and referred to as a "General Staff for Labour".

He underestimated the practical difficulties involved in mobilising organised workers for political ends and failed to appreciate that many of the demands advanced in this way could be easily accommodated within the existing political system. It was, of course, in any case, highly unlikely that circumstances would arise in which organised labour could be used to precipitate the collapse of the state. While 'sensible and moderate' men could play their part in securing a labour victory in a limited campaign they would not continue their action to secure a political revolution unless they experienced some significant change of consciousness. It was Thomson's, somewhat hysterical, contention that a small group of men could manipulate the mass organisations of labour independently of the aspirations and beliefs of the rank and file. Thus he became a contributor to the myth of the General Strike as a subversive act, irrespective of the aims of the participants. The myth was later to prove very useful to those who sought to thwart the political aims of organised labour.

The Downfall of Thomson

The end of Thomson's career proved to be suitably melodramatic. In the House of Commons on November 7th 1921, Sir Reginald Hall moved the adjournment and spoke of the grave danger to the public safety caused by the position recently vacated by Sir Basil Thomson remaining unfilled. In Thomson's own account; "Mr Shortt, the Home Secretary, acting on instructions from his chief, Mr Lloyd George, misled the House by stating that my retirement was due to disagreement between me and General Horwood, the new Commissioner. The real facts were never allowed to transpire, and no publication of them was permitted."

Thomson's version was as follows: "On the last Sunday in October 1921, four young Irishmen tramped out to Chequers, entered the grounds and chalked up on the summerhouse the words, 'Up Sinn Fein'". All of the men were arrested. Thomson himself interviewed the men and formed the impression that the incident was "in the nature of a skylark" and let them go. However when the incident was reported to Mr Lloyd George he, "took a very different view of the matter; indeed he was seriously shaken. The fact was that among his many conspicuous qualities was an exaggerated solicitude for the safety of his own skin". Thomson was called to a meeting with the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Commissioner and told that the time had come for him to retire. He added one further factor to explain his forced retirement; "It is perhaps fair to add that my weekly reports on subversive activities on the part of certain labour leaders had prejudiced them against me as a person who knew too much, and I had reason for believing that these leaders had brought pressure to bear on the Prime Minister." It is perhaps wise to treat this last explanation with some scepticism,

for labour leaders had so little influence on the Prime Minister in other matters that it seems unlikely that they could have any in this. It seems improbable, in any case that an intelligence official should be dismissed for knowing too much. For the official explanation there seems to be no hard evidence one way or the other. From what is known of Thomson's career he appears to have been a popular and respected figure with those who worked with him. He certainly also enjoyed a comfortable relationship with the Home Secretary. However the main factor which seems to pull against the official line is the speed of Thomson's dismissal, emphasised by the fact that there was nobody in line to succeed him.

It is possible that the dismissal resulted from dissatisfaction with Thomson's work in his capacity as an intelligence chief. This is certainly something that both he and the Home Office would have an interest in concealing. It is possible to identify a number of weaknesses in his reports and it is worth considering the possibility that this is why he was replaced. However, most of the weaknesses in the reports stemmed from the rigidity of his political outlook. Those who appointed him knew of this outlook and indeed shared in it and there was no appreciable shift in Cabinet opinion between 1917 and 1921.

In the field of intelligence where the agents enjoy a unique degree of independence their reliability and loyalty are always crucial issues. Was it the case that something came to light in October 1921 which called into question Thomson's integrity? Did he fabricate evidence in order to cover incompetence or did he consciously seek to mislead the Cabinet out of loyalty to some other cause or country? The fact

that there is no immediate evidence to support any of these conjectures is no cause for instantly dismissing them, for it is unlikely that such evidence would come to light even if it did exist. Yet there is much circumstantial evidence which would strongly suggest Thomson's innocence of such charges. His background, his previous career and his subsequent actions would all tend to support his intense loyalty. There is something too in his expressed political opinions, a consistency coupled with a measure of illogicality, which suggests that they were not assumed. On the question of whether he distorted information or consciously misled the Cabinet in order to increase his own importance, there are a number of points which can be made. One has the record of the reports themselves. Not all of the material can be checked, but that which can suggests that Thomson gave the best and most straightforward account that was available to him. If we take his account of the early development of the Communist Party and set it against Klugman's version, which was substantially based on material in Communist archives, there are many similarities. There are naturally differences of emphasis and Thomson, naturally enough, failed to see the thing in a heroic light, but the same debates, disagreements and reconciliations are recorded. Thomson made a good deal of the influence of Russian money when Klugman almost played it out of existence, yet subsequent accounts, such as that offered by Kendal would suggest that Thomson's account represented, at least, an honest attempt to come to terms with the facts.

Secondly it may be argued that the nature of the information contained in the reports suggests their veracity and Thomson's complete integrity. Three examples will illustrate this point. Firstly, the case of

Jenkins' horse. A communist propagandist called Jenkins conceived the idea of using a horse and van to tour the country in the pursuance of his art. A van was easily found, but a horse proved more difficult. Jenkins sent a letter to headquarters pleading that in view of the high cost of hiring "It is therefore imperative that a horse be purchased at once". Headquarters replied regretting that they were, "unable to supply the horse for a touring van". They suggested that Jenkins might leave his van in Barrow, "until the whole matter can be thrashed out at the next divisional council meeting".²⁵⁹

The next extract concerns the commercial activities of the Leicester communists. "In Leicester several communists are now making a living by selling chocolate at 10p per lb. The chocolate is made by the Waretta Chocolate Company, Boston, USA and is forwarded to Leicester from London. The secretary of the local extremist organisation recently had four tons at his house. Further enquiry is being made."²⁶⁰ And finally; "In Coventry the local Unemployed Workers' Committee has formed a revolutionary band, consisting of six men, who play the 'Red Flag' and the 'International' while the unemployed are drawing their relief money. It is known as the 'Red Orchestra' and practices in the ILP rooms."²⁶¹ The nature and detail of such reports as this suggests their veracity. Their creation would require considerable powers of comic invention.

Another factor which suggests that Thomson's reports were not fabricated is that he was reporting on Britain. Those who read his reports might come across the events or the persons on whom he was reporting. Frequently the Cabinet must have had access to alternative sources on the same subject, as when Eric Geddes went to Yorkshire in 1920

to report on the coal strike. The Prime Minister's private correspondence reveals a great number of sources informing him of labour activities in industry. A final reason for dismissing the idea that Thomson may have been dismissed for some lack of integrity is the fact that even after his dismissal, Shortt, who was Thomson's Home Secretary, was prepared to speak for him in public on the occasion of his trial on the relatively minor, though highly embarrassing charge of having "committed an act in violation of public decency".²⁶²

There are a few other areas in which Thomson might be judged to have been vulnerable. There was his marked tendency to lecture his political masters on their duties which must have annoyed some of them. There was also a marked insensitivity on occasion as when, in explaining to a Cabinet led by Lloyd George that Bolsheviki and pacifists were merely a modern version of pro-Boers. Also if Thomson's reports are compared with those produced by General Childs, his successor, there is an implication, at least, that he indulged himself in the Special Branch penchant for melodrama. Childs' reports were much less flamboyant. He spent far less time in pursuing the political mavericks and he was far more specific about his sources. In Childs' reports he continuously makes reference to Chief Constables as a source of information. Thomson never mentioned Chief Constables and it seems probable that, as mentioned above, he deliberately created an air of mystery about his contacts. Yet there is nothing in any of this to suggest a reason for so sudden a departure. A number of people may have been predisposed against him, and it may have been that there was some dissatisfaction with the service he provided. However, it seems unlikely that the Prime Minister was a regular reader of the

reports nor deeply involved in considering Thomson's merits until the 'Summerhouse Incident'.²⁶³ In the end it seems most likely that Thomson's downfall was a result of the Prime Minister's "exaggerated solicitude for the safety of his own skin".

The selection of Thomson's successor proved somewhat difficult. The post was initially offered to Sir Joseph Byrne, who had recently resigned as Commissioner of the Royal Irish Constabulary. However this appointment was not confirmed, apparently because Byrne's record in Ireland made him unpopular with a number of leading politicians. Eventually the Home Secretary sent for Major General Sir Wyndham Childs who proved willing to take the appointment, and generally acceptable.

Childs' appointment was greeted favourably by the press. The 'Daily Mail' ran an article by a 'Brother Officer' who wrote that "the secret of his success was that he abominated Prussian methods" and claimed that Childs had the ability to become "an expert at anything he takes up". The 'Manchester Guardian' divulged that Childs was "no believer in red tape", and was, in his spare time "a good actor and a violin player of considerable gifts".²⁶⁴

At the time of his appointment Childs was temporarily retired from the War Office on half pay. His appointment was another example of the government's reluctance to promote police officers to senior positions in the Metropolitan Force. However while Childs was an outsider he had had considerable experience in politically sensitive employments. Soon after Childs' appointment as Assistant Commissioner,

the Special Branch, which since 1919 had had its own Assistant Commissioner, was once more amalgamated with the rest of the Metropolitan CID. Therefore from 1st April 1922 Childs was responsible for both the Criminal and Special Branches. Although he had to devote most of his attention to the latter he apparently managed admirably and survived until his 'natural' retirement in 1928. His police career was then judged to have proved a 'notable success'.²⁶⁵

Childs, like Thomson, had originally intended to become a barrister, but during service with a volunteer regiment during the South African War, he had decided to take up the offer of a commission in the Regular Army. His army career was blessed with frequent promotions which he attributed to the care he took to ensure that all his actions were in line with Army Laws, and to the influence and friendship of Sir Nevil Macready, of whom Childs wrote, "To him I owe everything in my military life".²⁶⁶ By the end of the South African War Childs was Provost Marshall on Macready's staff with responsibility for the military police. When Macready was called back to the War Office to become Director of Personal Services he took Childs with him as his assistant.

The Personal Services division was responsible for some of the War Office's most delicate tasks: "Discipline both of officers and men, ceremonial, education, questions of law and the use of troops in the aid of the civil power".²⁶⁷ This last function was to prove particularly exacting in the years before the First World War. Childs remembered that from 1910 onwards, "there was always a strike on somewhere and I was either present, or else assisting to tackle it under the directions of Sir Nevil Macready".²⁶⁸ In the memory of its Director, Personal

Services was the busiest division of the War Office. Macready recorded that he originally took the job with some trepidation, being aware that "the use of troops under such conditions had not been fortunate in the past",²⁶⁹ and that any mistakes were sure to provoke considerable reaction. Childs shared this awareness of the political sensitivity of the work and if he was later to show a degree of political sophistication it must be remembered that his education had been in the hands of eminent teachers. When, for example, Childs and Macready were preparing to leave for South Wales, during the miners strike of 1910, they were briefed for their mission by Haldane and Churchill. Haldane was particularly well versed in such matters, as he had sat on the Special Commission which had investigated the Featherstone incidents of 1893, and formulated conclusions which had subsequently formed the accepted guide of conduct for civil and military authorities at times of public disorder.²⁷⁰ The account Childs left of his conduct in South Wales illustrates that he had understood that it was important to avoid the impression that they were under the orders of the mine owners. Both Macready and Childs later recalled that they had had to resist the attempts of the mineowners to manipulate them. Indeed Childs' account contained the clear implication that, in personal terms at least, he felt a good deal more sympathy for the miners than the owners. The owners were prepared to indulge in underhand tactics while the strike committees, even those of the Rhondda, "strongly impregnated with the theories of Karl Marx", as they were, were "more likely to be trustworthy in dealings than the owners and their representatives". Childs felt that the contrasts between the army and the strike committee had been the "safety valve which enabled us to get through the strike without having to call upon the troops to use their weapons".²⁷¹ On the

general problem of strikes Childs recorded his belief that strikes were a perfectly legitimate tactic and argued that the role of the army was merely to aid the civil power in the maintenance of order. He displayed also some understanding of, and sympathy for, the economic privations suffered by miners and their families, but this did not tempt him to suggest any means whereby such privation might be alleviated, nor to respond to labour allegations about the implications of the use of troops in industrial disputes. However from his account of the Cambrian strike it is clear that Childs had a degree of uncertainty on some political issues and indeed a flexibility of approach that must have marked him as an exceptional army officer.

His career continued to lead him through political minefields, for in 1914 Childs and Macready were made responsible for Army discipline with regard to the Ulster crisis. Childs claimed that his insistence on strict constitutional propriety earned him the totally undeserved reputation at the War Office of being a Nationalist. Even the outbreak of war brought no relief from politically sensitive issues for Childs was sent to France to take charge of field punishments. It was characteristic of Childs that while he defended the use of the death penalty as essential to discipline, the reforms in procedure which he introduced actually considerably lessened its incidence. Childs' next appointment was to handle the problems caused by conscientious objectors. Here too his natural prejudice was for the hard line. He believed that such organisations as the No Conscription Fellowship should have been dealt with under the Incitement to Mutiny Act, yet his desire for the efficient conduct of his office led him to establish contact with that organisation.

Childs was clearly no sympathiser with the Labour cause. While he expressed concern for some of the more obvious hardships suffered by some working class people he had no admiration for those who sought to alleviate such hardships through radical political change. Yet there is evidence to suggest that Childs was somewhat at odds with Joynson-Hicks because of a certain reticence over prosecuting communists.²⁷² while he was clearly a Conservative his views were less rigid than those of his predecessor. Where Thomson found it difficult to control his strident, 'Morning Post', opinions, Childs' reports were restrained and professional. Similarly where Thomson sought out the bizarre and trivial, Childs' reports stuck to the point and lacked 'colour'. Where Thomson was inclined to lecture the Cabinet on their deficiencies, Childs insinuated gently. However any comparison of the two men's reports must be tempered by the realisation that Childs' task was considerably easier than that which Thomson had initially faced in 1919. The panic over the 'Bolshevik Terror' had substantially diminished, the Triple Alliance in action had proved unimpressive, some Conservatives had begun to recognise that the Labour Party sought political respectability and the development of the CPGB had considerably clarified matters on the far left. It was therefore relatively easy for Childs to discard much of the inconsequential material that had so troubled Thomson.

The Communist Party was clearly the 'burning question' and the core of Childs' work; ". . . it was impressed on me by the particular representative of the Government concerned with these matters that here lay the most important part of my work". The Communist Party was used as a yardstick against which to evaluate other organisations

and difficulties; hence Childs' view of the unemployed: "Disappointed and embittered, these men were trained soldiers, and if organised could prove a distinct menace".²⁷³ Inevitably it was the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement, led by the Communists, which would provide this organisation. Yet while the Communist Party was thought to be dangerous the fears it excited in Childs were not those common in 1919. He recalled later that he "never credited Communism with being capable of producing worse than industrial unrest and untold misery".²⁷⁴ and he regarded their more ambitious aspirations such as ideas for a 'Red Army', which had so excited Thomson, as being designed to impress Moscow rather than for any bearing they might have on domestic politics. However while they were not seen as bearers of revolution the Communists were still taken seriously. Childs felt, as had Thomson, that the politicians were unnecessarily lethargic in their use of legal and coercive measures: "I spent the seven best years of my life trying to induce various governments to allow me to use the full force of the law"; "People in this country who want to kick over the ballot box should be dealt with in accordance with the law: in other words for seditious libel or seditious conspiracy, and it matters not to me what this programme may be, it is the method by which they seek to achieve their ends which really matters".²⁷⁵ The only politician Childs felt who would have allowed him, "to strike one overwhelming and final blow against the Communist organisation", was Joynson Hicks; "I sincerely believe that his enthusiasm almost exceeded my own, and had he had his way there would be no Communist Party in England today".²⁷⁶ Childs shared Thomson's especial fears about Communist education: "My principal fear of the Communists in this country centred round their methods of contaminating youth". The Young Communist League " . . .

sought to teach class hatred in all its branches - atheism and immorality being a side line".²⁷⁷ An unsuccessful attempt by Sir John Butcher to introduce private members' legislation on this issue met with Childs' full approval.

The appointment of Childs did not, as far as it can be determined, lead to any radical change in the means of surveillance employed. Childs claimed that a great deal of what he needed to know could be obtained in publicly available documents and while there is some truth in this it is clear that his searches went beyond this. He claimed that he had found it impossible to place a man in "the inner circle of the Communist Party",²⁷⁸ but his reports indicate access to confidential information: "The secrecy surrounding funds was emphasised by one of the party members who recently informed my correspondent that the pay of many people was not officially shown on the books because if they were examined the expenditure of the party could be shown to exceed its income by a considerable margin".²⁷⁹ Clearly the information, trivial though it might appear, that of 12,020 pennies raised to finance the "Young Communist", 48 had been contributed by the office staff, was not obtained from publicly available sources. The NUWCM appears to have been very easy to infiltrate. Information on the activities of one section of the 1922 march was said to come from "a correspondent who is marching with this group".²⁸⁰ Such extracts and the continuous quotation from confidential memoranda and private letters provide ample evidence that the methods of surveillance had undergone no substantial change. Under Childs the Home Intelligence Branch continued much as before. The reports made more specific reference to sources, contained more direct quotation and lacked their former political flamboyance, but they did provide a sound, somewhat unimaginative account of left wing political activity in Britain.

Supply and Transport:

Precursors

During 1919, while Sir Basil Thomson was developing his intelligence department, the Cabinet was making arrangements to deal with the practical issues of labour unrest. On February 4th 1919 the Cabinet decided "that a committee should be appointed to make the necessary arrangements for dealing with any situation that might arise from industrial unrest both at the present moment and in the future"²⁸¹ It was to be known as the Industrial Unrest Committee. Its purpose was to co-ordinate the activities of the various government departments and to ensure "the supply of the essentials of life to the community" and the maintenance of law and order during strikes and lock outs. A list of its original sub-committees: Public Utility Services, Transport, Protection, Communications and Electric Works, gives an indication of its scope. On one hand the committee may be seen as a simple response to a novel industrial situation. The growth of trade unionism had virtually ensured that future strikes would be on such a scale and have so great a bearing on the community as a whole that government intervention, of some sort, would be inevitable.²⁸² It would be a mistake however to attribute the Cabinet's decision entirely to such reasoning. In the mood that existed in government circles at the end of the war simple distinctions between strikes and outright subversion were uncommon, and many who sat on the IUC believed that they were preparing for a challenge to the state itself.

Although the first meeting of the IUC concerned itself with issues arising from proposed strikes by workers in London transport services

and the electricity supply industry, it is clear from subsequent discussions that its main purpose was to counter the effects of an anticipated strike of miners, which it was feared would be supported by sympathetic action of rail and transport workers under the Triple Alliance agreement. The coincidence of dates also suggests that it was the probability of a miners strike which had prompted its creation. On January 14th the MFGB had met in conference at Southport and formulated a series of ambitious demands, among them the nationalisation of the mines. On January 31st miners' representatives had met with the Government and protested that no reply had been made to these demands. The Government reply was delayed until February 10th, and its offer of a small wage rise and a committee of inquiry was clearly well below anything the miners might have anticipated. There was clearly every prospect that the IUC would be in operation before it had had a chance to properly constitute itself.

The Prime Minister, however, did not intend to rely entirely on the IUC. On February 11th, on the eve of the MFGB Special Conference called to discuss the Government's reply, he went onto the attack. In a belligerent speech reminiscent of many wartime efforts he attacked the miners' claims and outlined the dire consequences of industrial action. Nonetheless the conference went ahead as planned and agreed to ballot the membership with a view to a national strike on March 15th. The Government intensified its propaganda against the miners. Horne wrote a letter of protest to Smillie, which was published before Smillie received it; advertisements for the Government's case were placed in newspapers, and friendly correspondents were fed the "facts" about the miners' claim.

Meanwhile the IUC was hastily surveying its forces. At a meeting on February 6th existing arrangements for the maintenance of transport services were under review. A scheme which had envisaged the use of private buses with army drivers was found to be impractical as it had been discovered that the army drivers belonged to the same union as the regular drivers and would presumably refuse to work in the event of a Triple Alliance strike. By the next day the committee were exhibiting signs of unease; Shortt and Horne demanded legislation to declare strikes illegal unless certain procedures had been complied with. On the 10th February the committee complained that the propaganda services available to them were inadequate. Even worse, on the 12th the committee discovered that the anticipated "protection" scheme was unworkable. The General Reserve, on which great reliance had been placed, was deemed by the War Office to be unsuitable for use in industrial disputes. Field Marshall Robertson reminded the committee that the force had only been intended for active service in the extremity of a German invasion and that 70% of the reserve had been forcibly enlisted. Shortt mentioned the government's intention of forming a Special Constabulary Reserve, but this was unlikely to be available in the near future. On the 17th the Home Secretary returned to the subject of protection and felt it necessary to outline the principle that ultimate responsibility should always remain with the police, even if army units had to be used.²⁸³ At the same meeting the committee received depressing news about coal stocks. Household supplies were not expected to last out the first week of a strike and though, for instance, the Electricity Companies could keep operating for four weeks, industry as a whole had stocks sufficient for only two and a half weeks. In view of the state of

the emergency services it is reasonable to suppose that the Prime Minister's appeal to Smillie, on February 21st, for a postponement of the strike, was deeply felt.

The result of the miners' ballot, six to one in favour of strike action, was announced on February 25th, but at this stage the tactic of offering a Committee of Inquiry brought some respite for the Government for Sankey brought out his interim report on the 26th, and its largely favourable findings persuaded another MFGB Special Conference to postpone strike action until March 22nd.

Thus the IUC was enabled to push ahead with its plans at more leisure, but it showed no sign of slipping into a conciliatory mood. On March 14th the committee discussed proposals for a bill to give the Government additional powers in the event of a Triple Alliance strike. The Scottish Secretary, who had a strong inclination to confuse strikes and insurrections, recommended that the Government take powers to shut all banks during strikes so that the Unions could not obtain money for strike pay. The Committee accepted the substance of the proposal but recommended that the object should be achieved by the impounding of Union funds. In addition they considered proposals to arrest strike "ringleaders", to impose a rent moratorium and to stop the sale of liquor. That the proposals were ill-considered needs little emphasis; the attempt to ensure that strikers had no money would alone do much to exacerbate the situation.²⁸⁴ They should be viewed in the context of the general panic of the post war months but it may be added that they were specifically motivated by the recognition of the Government's unpreparedness to meet any civil disorder.

The respite offered by the miners' leaders' postponement of the strike notices was not used productively. The IUC were informed during March that no arrangements had been made for organising volunteers and that only between two and three hundred lorries were available. A scheme was hastily pushed forward for the suspension of unemployment benefit in the event of a large strike and its replacement by a flat rate scheme. The Prime Minister has already suggested in Cabinet²⁸⁵ that in the payment of such benefits a distinction should be drawn between those actually on strike and those out of work because of the strike, and one member of the IUC proposed that this distinction could be effectively drawn if payments of benefit were made through employers. The determination of certain members of Cabinet to substantiate their predictions of chaos was also in evidence at the Cabinet of March 19th when a move to reduce the proposed rates of benefit was successful.²⁸⁶

However at the next meeting of the IUC a degree of order appeared to have been restored. Captain Penney of the Ministry of Food reported large supplies of food available at the docks, and that 50,000 tons had already been transferred to major centres. The Admiralty was to be responsible for the distribution of yeast and trawlers were to bring fish from Grimsby to London, provided they could get sufficient coal. It was also becoming apparent that previous estimates of available road transport had been pessimistic as the Army had around 1,000 lorries potentially available. Yet it must be judged that the Government were lucky that the miners did not put their organisation to the test at this time, and instead voted by a ten to one majority on April 9th and 10th to accept what Sankey had apparently offered.

In spite of the fact that the emergency arrangements had proved so inadequate and that members of the IUC felt that a full scale miners' strike was still inevitable the organisation actually deteriorated after April. The Ministry of Food was in turmoil, trying, with a depleted staff, to deal with the "unprecedentedly large stocks of food" which it had bought against the anticipated crisis.²⁸⁷ The Road Transport Board, responsible for co-ordinating emergency arrangements, was, according to its representative on the IUC, uncertain about its future. His conclusion, "that the organisation needed a good deal of tightening up" must appear as understatement for the Board had held no meetings and had lost three of its seven members.²⁸⁸ The Petrol Control Department, which was responsible for recruiting volunteer drivers, had all but ceased to exist and the Ministry of Food was complaining that even that small number of drivers who were available did not "possess the experience necessary . . . to deal with the transport situation if any emergency arose".²⁸⁹ Even the petrol stocks were all in the wrong place. The core of the problem was that many of the emergency schemes relied upon departments of government which were in the process of being dismantled. The inability of the Government to co-ordinate its activities must appear remarkable, particularly as the severe industrial dislocation was thought to be imminent.

It was fortuitous for the Government that the first test of its emergency arrangements should have been a regional strike. On July 17th the Yorkshire miners struck on a dispute over piece rate adjustments made on the introduction of the seven hour day. The IUC was quickly brought into operation and decrees issued through the Board of Trade to reduce coal exports to a minimum. Foodstuffs and coal were given

rail priority, Railway Companies, coal agents and Local Authorities were instructed to assemble the largest coal stocks possible, and all ships carrying coal were diverted to home ports. The emergency arrangements very quickly ran into trouble. The Yorkshire miners had withdrawn pump and maintenance men and the IUC decided that naval ratings should be used to fulfil their duties. They asked the Admiralty to make available 2,500 men, of whom 250 were immediately required. However the Admiralty informed the IUC that men in the home ports were not available for this operation as, under a previous instruction from the Committee, they were being kept on hand to man the electric works in the event of a strike there. An arrangement was hastily patched together and by August 6th, 510 naval ratings were engaged on pumping duties in the Yorkshire mines. The Admiralty however, was still uneasy. The Navy representative on the IUC complained that ships were being delayed in port and leave arrangements had been disturbed. Moreover the ratings in Yorkshire were felt to be in moral danger: "The effect on the men could not be otherwise than injurious as they found themselves in contact with men of an unsettled state of mind and revolutionary ideas and it was possible that Naval Ratings might absorb some of the ideas themselves".²⁹⁰ That road transport arrangements were inadequate may be inferred from the fact that the Local Food Control Committees were not informed that responsibility for transport arrangements had been transferred from the defunct Road Transport Board to the Ministry of Food until the strike was a week old. An appeal for volunteer drivers was not discussed until July 25th, and as late as August 6th the Food Controller, G H Roberts, was arguing against any such appeal: "as it might be construed as a direct challenge to the Transport Workers Association (sic)", whose

members were about to vote on the principle of Direct Action. The IUC even considered the compulsory registration of horses, though fear of a public outcry forced them to discard the idea. If transport arrangements were inadequate, those for protection appear to have been far more so. Horne complained on July 26th that the number of troops available was "totally inadequate" and 4 battalions were hastily seconded from the Rhine army.²⁹¹

One aspect of the arrangements was, however, subsequently judged to have proved successful and was incorporated into subsequent schemes. Eric Geddes was sent to Yorkshire to ensure that the Cabinet was kept well informed and to promote and organise local initiatives to combat the effects of the strike. Geddes was later to be chairman and most active member of the Supply and Transport Committee and his ideas were largely formed during this brief period in Yorkshire. In his opinion the IUC strategy had two major defects. Firstly its heavy reliance on government departments and their local agencies discouraged initiatives by employers and local authorities. Secondly Geddes felt the Government's efforts at publicity had been woefully inadequate. Far too little had been done to turn public opinion against the strikers. He had found employers in Yorkshire apathetic and unwilling to react strongly against the unions. The pit owners, he complained had only asked for naval ratings at the very last moment having no relish for a fight.²⁹² Geddes saw his role in Yorkshire not only in terms of ensuring that essential work was carried on but also as instigator of a general crusade aimed at stiffening the resistance of local authorities and employers. He persuaded the mine owners to set up headquarters in a Leeds hotel and called together the mayors of the principal towns in the area to discuss the enforcement of restrictions on the use of

electricity, water and gas. This, he explained to the Cabinet, must be recognised "as a factor of both moral and material importance".²⁹³

In a letter to the Prime Minister he complained about the inadequate propaganda effort, urging as a priority that the Government must "get public opinion in this district properly worked up to the gravity of the situation".²⁹⁴

When this dispute was safely over Geddes' views were not forgotten for they had a bearing on general strategy. In October 1919 the Cabinet discussed a speech made by Arthur Henderson in which he had strongly criticised the emergency arrangements. He had argued "that the Government were better situated than they had ever been before, since the War machine could be put into operation against the men and could be used to smash the trade unions and drain their funds".²⁹⁵ The Cabinet must have been aware by then that this monolithic "war machine" was a fiction. The existing arrangements guaranteed the Cabinet the worst of both worlds for they could not provide the material cover considered necessary, while their mobilisation left the damaging impression of a harsh government using its massive resources against a section of the community. Geddes' ideas, in that they transferred a good deal of responsibility to other agencies offered at least a partial solution. Yet because they relied on the efforts of volunteers and on the activity of non-governmental agencies it was clear that a scheme so organised would require a high degree of prior planning, with particular attention to propaganda. It was therefore inevitable that during the next major 'action' not more than a few of Geddes' ideas should have been absorbed.

For the Railway Strike of the Autumn of 1919 the executive powers of the IUC were transferred to a similarly constituted Cabinet Committee known as the Strike Committee. Eric Geddes was appointed Chairman. His views were reflected in the decision to appoint six regional intelligence commissioners and in the close attention paid to propaganda issues and public appeals for assistance. Yet much of the work of the committee was still conditioned by the exaggerated fears which had been the hallmark of the IUC. Its discussions indicated a majority still holding embattled attitudes and prepared to purchase immediate security at the price of antagonising large sections of public opinion. The Committee considered a proposal to withhold back pay owing to those on strike and continued to press the idea in spite of the Lord Chancellor's doubts as to the legality of the measure. They also considered how "the ordinary amenities of public life might be withdrawn from the strikers". Here they were restrained by fear of provoking opposition from other workers yet they continued to speculate on how the railwaymen might be deprived of the necessities of life in spite of warnings from their advisers, Basil Thomson among them, that strikes without resources would present a far greater threat to public order. A sub-committee was appointed to consider the practicalities of preventing the distribution of strike pay, of freezing union funds and of reducing unemployment benefit. While the Strike Committee recognised that the last measure would provoke "an accusation by the industrial classes that the Government was using the present strike as an excuse for reducing unemployment pay" it proved to be no deterrent. Another tactic was considered which was potentially even more provocative. Haig, as Field Marshall of the Home Forces, suggested that as a number of those on strike were nominally part of the 'Z'

army reserve they could be called to the colours. The Committee was evidently prepared to countenance such a plan for it requested "the War Office to take such steps as would enable them to be called up at an early date, if this should be considered necessary".²⁹⁶

Had the Railway Strike lasted longer it might have led to a spectacular confrontation. Even in the short time at its disposal the Cabinet managed to create considerable panic. Lloyd George was prepared to take the lead, claiming that the strike "had been engineered by a small but active body of men who work tirelessly and insidiously to exploit the Labour organisations of this country for subversive ends."²⁹⁷ The press reacted on cue. To the 'Daily Mail' the strike was against the public: "It is an attempt to starve the country into submission",²⁹⁸ while the 'Times' prepared for battle; "Like the war with Germany, it must be a fight to the finish".²⁹⁹ A correspondent of the Contemporary Review identified the strike as an attempt at revolution.³⁰⁰ The only justification for this view would appear to have come from the statements of the more enthusiastic supporters of the railwaymen.³⁰¹ The Government was clearly inclined to the extreme view and moved troops into Crewe, Swindon, Derby and Doncaster, "the population of which were largely railwaymen (and) where the presence of the military might be advisable."³⁰² Liverpool was afforded the benefit of a "large warship" which the Cabinet felt, would have "a good moral effect". Troops were also sent to deal with trouble which "might arise from the presence of a hooligan element" but were not to be used "in any work that might be regarded as strike breaking". This was to be entrusted to "volunteers in plain clothes" who were to be allowed to run such services as were possible. Yet such volunteers proved hard to come by and appeals for special constables proved to be especially

fruitless. The Strike Committee proposed that a "Citizen Guard" should be formed. The public were to be advised that the organisation was not military, but it was based on the National Services Organisation and army officers were to be seconded to Local Authorities to assist in its organisation. The scheme bore the marks of a hasty and ill-considered expedient and was rapidly discarded at the end of the strike.

The Government's conduct during the Railway Strike showed little improvement on previous efforts. The propaganda offensive was more intense than on previous occasions yet its timing and its vehemence might well have proved counter-productive. Instead of a continuous steady build up to put the union in the wrong the Government had attempted to shock public opinion. Horne had attacked "the dastardly nature" of the strike but his attempt to substantiate this claim by arguing that the strike was not against profit making but against a Government which was losing money on railway operations was torturous and ineffective. Lloyd George had contributed a measure of drama by arranging, the day before, that a public meeting he was to have addressed should be warned of his 'unavoidable' absence occasioned by the strike by means of a 'last minute' telegram.³⁰³ The measure of the Government's failure was the support which the Railwaymen received from other unions and the failure of appeals for volunteers. The tactics of Lloyd George might have been effective in the heightened atmosphere of war but something more subtle was necessary for the peace. A contemporary noted, "It looks as if the Government planned their course in the hope that a strike would take place, and then use all the forces at their disposal to smash the NUR, then take similar action in regard to other unions"³⁰⁴ While this was clearly a partisan statement which overestimated the

coherence of Government policy as well as the competence of the machinery at the Cabinet's disposal there was little in the Government's conduct which could be cited to refute the charge. Not only did such conduct antagonise still further those already disposed to be suspicious of the Government, but it failed to mobilise those sections of society who were potential allies. That Sir Basil Thomson could later conclude that the Railway Strike had had a settling effect on the world of labour was a measure of the Cabinet's good fortune rather than good judgment.

The Formation of the STO

After the Railway Strike the Strike Committee was wound up and its functions invested in the new Supply and Transport Committee the members of which were to be the Minister of Transport, Eric Geddes, as chairman, the Home Secretary, the President of the Board of Trade, the Food Controller, the Minister of Labour and the Shipping Controller. The first task which the new Committee set itself was to examine the conduct of its predecessors with a view to determining how it should conduct its own affairs. One sub-committee was asked to discover "what activities the Government may legitimately undertake during a strike without being accused of strike breaking"³⁰⁵. Though the asking of the question presupposed some past uncertainty the sub-committee's findings broke no new ground. They argued, with some justice, that the Government could never concede enough to avoid all accusations of 'strike breaking', and that such fears should never be allowed to compromise its overriding duty which was "to maintain the life of the community against all dangers". Any measures necessary to this end should be taken "regardless of its effect on either party to a strike". The sub-committee defined the essential minimum actions as guaranteeing the transport and distribution of food, the maintenance of water supplies, sanitation and household coal supplies, the provision of lighting and of such transport and communication facilities as would be necessary to enable all such services, and government itself to operate. The organisation was also to take responsibility for the protection of all those engaged in the provision of services. The sub-committee argued on the basis of these proposals: "There is little doubt that public opinion would support the Government in maintaining the essentials of

life, no matter what the subject of the dispute might be". It was assumed that serious political problems would arise if the Government went beyond this, and the object of the additional activity "were merely the maintenance of the normal business activity of the country". Such action might prove necessary for "the preservation of the state" if, for instance a situation arose in which so many people were made idle by a dispute that the payment of unemployment money became impossible. Its final conclusion was that government measures should always be determined by events. In formulating the idea that government activity should be made to fit the situation the sub-committee was clearly improving on the 'strategy' employed during the Railway Strike, and in outlining principles of action it was at least suggesting that future decisions should be disciplined by considerations of cause and effect.

The most immediate problem facing the supply and Transport Committee was that of the use of the military in industrial disputes. The Admiralty, as noted above, had been very unhappy about the use of naval ratings in the Yorkshire mines, and the First Lord, W H Long brought a new problem to the committee. It had been discovered that while ratings were engaged in such duties they were under no legal obligation to obey orders. Unless this law were changed the Navy in future could only be used for military duties or when the safety of the realm was threatened.³⁰⁶ The War Office was, if anything, even more disturbed by its recent forays into industry. Haig was disturbed by the sheer number of troops which had been engaged in the Railway dispute. Twenty-three thousand men had been deployed on protection duties and thirteen battalions and three cavalry regiments had been moved to positions of readiness. Fifty-nine battalions had been held in reserve

at regional commands with fourteen batallions and three cavalry regiments at GHQ. The confusion had been considerable and a number of ill-considered actions had been undertaken. The second Welsh Regiment had been sent to maintain order in Swansea and the demands of the politicians had necessitated the recall of two companies of the Rhine Army. Haig complained that the Cabinet's fears about the inadequacy of the police forces had led them to breach the understanding that the maintenance of the King's peace was ultimately a police responsibility. He felt the situation could only get worse. While the Army had in the event been able to meet the demands made upon it, this would not be possible in the future because of demobilisation. He suggested the problem must be alleviated by the more economical use of troops, by better transport facilities and by the formation of a Citizen Guard. Wilson, the CIGGS, added a supporting memorandum: "If . . . all the protection duties anticipated by the various Civil Government Departments, in certain eventualities, had been demanded it would have proved impossible for the Army in Great Britain, large as it was at the time, to have provided the necessary numbers". Existing plans required, at full stretch, 265,000 men and only 100,000 were available. Wilson argued that the police would have to be responsible for normal protection duties in strikes with the Army held "as a last resource, when the situation may be getting beyond the control of the civil power". Even at this stage the Ministry of Transport would have to be responsible for actually moving the troops. Wilson added, "I am advised that such an emergency is to be expected about the New Year" and warned that unless the situation was dealt with quickly he could not guarantee that the Army would be "in a position to meet the call that may be made upon it in the event of aggravated industrial trouble . . .".

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The Cabinet accepted the War Office view and began the search for a substitute. Haig's suggestion for a Citizen Guard was ruled out at the Cabinet of October 7th though not without opposition. The Home Secretary, in particular, was reluctant to abandon the idea yet he eventually conceded that as the idea had proved "not as popular as expected in some areas" it was better to concentrate on developing the Special Constabulary.³⁰⁸ Yet here too the situation was far from satisfactory. The Chief Constable informed the STC in December that 90,000 men were currently enrolled and 60,000 more could be relied upon in the event of a special emergency. When the Protection Sub-Committee investigated the situation they discovered a further difficulty, for while there would be sufficient numbers of special constables in most rural and residential districts, "in industrial areas the numbers would probably be very small, and in certain areas (eg some Lancashire boroughs) where the whole population are either workers or tradesmen dependent on the workers, hardly a single special constable will be obtained".³⁰⁹ An immediate appeal was ruled out on the grounds that it would prove ineffective and publicise the Government's weakness. This they argued might encourage future strikers to commit acts of violence. The sub-committee even considered the compulsory recruitment of constables but rejected the idea on the grounds that such men were liable to prove useless. They finally came to the view that the Government would have to rely on volunteers but that the appeal for assistance could only be effectively made when an emergency was imminent. Its success would "depend on how far the public appreciated the gravity of the situation, and are out of sympathy with the strikers". It is interesting that this strategy, which was the basis of all future operations, was only accepted as a last resort and in the face of

opposition from the Scottish Secretary and the Home Secretary who submitted a joint memorandum on the inadequacy of protection services. The success of such a strategy would depend on effective propaganda. In February 1920 the STC formed a Propaganda Sub-Committee; "to consider an organisation for conducting publicity and propaganda on behalf of the Government . . . and to consider the question of issuing propaganda before as well as during a crisis".³¹⁰ Arthur Neale, for the Government, warned the sub-committee that "the whole subject involved dangerous issues and required both secret and most careful handling", and that anything they decided must be submitted to Cabinet.³¹¹ In discussions of propaganda the members of the STC made many references to what was being done on the Labour side, which was frankly viewed as the opposition. The Propaganda Sub-Committee warned that "it should be realised that the Labour Publicity Headquarters Office at Eccleston Square is fully organised for any conditions that may arise. It is well staffed; it has famous writers at its disposal; its telephone and general communications organisation is complete, it welcomes press representatives at any hour and goes to endless trouble to supply articles and materials. The press are making more and more use of this establishment . . .".³¹² While they thought that the Government needed the services of a similar organisation the sub-committee were unanimously agreed that Government Departments could not produce effective propaganda before a crisis and that the decision not to establish a Ministry of Information, taken in the Spring of 1919, had been the correct one. Propaganda before an emergency would have to be handled by a nominally independent agency and the sub-committee submitted to the Cabinet a long account of the activities of organisations already in the field as likely contenders for this role. A number of them had already been brought to the Cabinet's attention through the reports of Basil Thomson.

There were apparently two main bodies engaged in anti-labour propaganda; National Propaganda and Industrial Information. In addition there were many smaller bodies, some of them working on a regional or sectional basis, among them the Reconstruction Society, the Industrial Welfare Society, the National Association of Employers and Employed, the British Empire Association, the British Commonwealth Union and the Comrades of the Great War. Some rationalisation had already been undertaken; "The two main organisations are in close touch with them and in some instances and to some extent exercise control and give financial support in return for the use of local 'machinery'". The two larger bodies kept their existence secret while many of the smaller organisations operated openly. National Propaganda was chaired by Rear Admiral Sir Reginald Hall MP, who had been head of Naval Intelligence during the War. The stated aim of that body was "the utter annihilation of falsehood and universal statement of economic truth", and thereby the diminution of industrial and social unrest. It attracted considerable financial support from firms and private individuals and was well organised and fully operational. It distributed leaflets and posters, trained and financed speakers to address meetings of working men, and co-operated with employers' federations and others to propagate the necessity for increased production and opposition to "all acts against constitutional government". It had already 'worked' forty-four industrial centres, held eighty-nine well attended meetings and distributed three million leaflets and over three hundred thousand posters. Industrial Information was financed from an unofficial capital fund which was administered by 'the Whips'. As with National Propaganda its efforts were directed against "economic misstatement, direct action and Bolshevism" and in favour of "constitutional government and higher

production". However, in contrast, it worked mainly through the existing media. Articles were prepared for the newspapers by a permanent staff of twenty-five expert journalists and economists and supplemented by contributions from outsiders. These articles, conveniently set in galley proof or stereo were distributed to the London and provincial newspapers and periodicals and to Trade Journals. Although the organisation had only been formed in October 1919 it had developed a circulation of a thousand articles a week. Seven hundred provincial papers were accepting articles, six hundred and fifty cartoons had been produced and a formidable array of outsiders had been persuaded to contribute material, among them Sir Robert Horne, George Robey and Mary Pickford. A special 'economic' number of 'Teachers' World' had been produced and twenty-five thousand free copies distributed to schools. The sub-committee concluded that an adequate amount of propaganda was being undertaken on a sound basis. From the Government's point of view the situation was ideal. They were relieved of any financial responsibility, the people in charge were 'reliable' and 'responsible', and such propaganda had more credibility than anything they might have issued themselves. One unsolicited testimonial from Mary Pickford on the manifold benefits of capitalism was surely worth a thousand official pronouncements.

The only difficulty connected with the decision to rely on private bodies for general propaganda was that of preserving secrecy. Arthur Neale warned the sub-committee that the greatest care must be taken to conceal the contacts between official and unofficial bodies.

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If the initial decision of the STC were to be maintained and the role of the unofficial organisations restricted to general propaganda, contacts could remain on an informal basis and the problem of maintaining security might not prove too great. Yet if, as was perhaps inevitable in view of their resources, the Government should decide that it was necessary to use such organisations for particular ends new means of concealing the connection would have to be found. In fact the demand for an increased role for the unofficial bodies came almost immediately. During the miners' strike, in August 1920, the propaganda sub-committee complained that, "it was not practicable to carry out a campaign by means of speakers without enlisting the assistance of certain unofficial organisations",³¹⁴ and asked the STC to reconsider its decision that such bodies could not be directly employed. Within a week a solution was found and Mr Dimbleby, an official of the Stationery Office, reported that National Propaganda had opened a branch called National Publicity which they ran on a "purely business footing" so "there was no longer any objection to engaging the services of the latter body". Some previous contact was confirmed by his statement that "they were ready" and "they would act quickly and in the right directions".³¹⁵ In addition it had been seen as undesirable "in view of the activities of the Public Accounts Committee" that the charges for intelligence services connected with such propaganda work should be met on the Stationery Office vote, so Basil Thomson had undertaken to provide resources from the Secret Service vote.³¹⁶

The use of unofficial bodies allowed the Propaganda Sub-Committee to concentrate its energies on plans for crises. It suggested that the Government should be prepared to issue press advertisements, posters,

pamphlets and articles for inclusion in newspapers. There should also be plans for a proper intelligence network and the publication and distribution of a government newspaper. The propaganda machine in operation would cost £100,000 a week, and this sum did not include the services of unofficial organisations nor the payment of official staff who would be drawn from various government departments.

The improved emergency organisation with its increased emphasis on propaganda was in action during the miners', 'Datum Line', strike of 1920. From the origins of the strike, in the miners' claim, to its conclusion the Government displayed an unwavering determination to present the miners' case in as poor a light as possible. Between the special conference of the MFGB, which recommended strike action, and the ballot of the membership the STC mounted its first campaign. Eight thousand pounds was found for advertising space in the Sunday newspapers of 22nd August, and on the 16th, as noted above, the propaganda sub-committee began to lobby for permission to use unofficial agencies, and this was granted on the 23rd. While there was, by now, wide agreement as to the necessity for propaganda there was considerable debate as to the form it should take. One party thought the publicity campaign should be restricted to the immediate objectives concerned with the current strike while the other thought the opportunity should be taken to mount a general crusade against trade unionism as such. The aggressive policy was strongly forwarded by Sir Basil Thomson who had been co-opted onto the sub-committee. He suggested that information he had gathered about the situation in Russia should be included in the propaganda, and that emphasis might be placed on the fact that donations which the unions made to the 'Daily Herald' reduced the

amount of money available for strike pay. Thomson's advice was rejected as it was thought to raise too many 'political problems': "Such propaganda would fail to unite other Trade Unions against the miners, whereas publicity of a purely economic type as to the general effects of a miners' strike would probably achieve that end".³¹⁷ Another view was that even this type of campaign was excessive. Sir Edward Troup, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, submitted a memorandum arguing that Government propaganda should concentrate on the need for volunteers for the emergency and avoid all mention of the merits of the dispute which occasioned it. Troup's advice was ignored and the committee decided to base their activities on an attack on the miners, preparing, for example, an account of absenteeism in the mines for use as required.

Yet propaganda was only one aspect of the new strategy. If it was to be completely successful it would require all public aspects of government activity to be considered in the light of their impact on public opinion. In particular it would require that emergency arrangements should not leave the impression of a "war machine" in operation against civilians. However there were several members of the STC who felt that such political niceties were misplaced. The argument came to a head at the meeting of August 18th when the mobilisation of the government forces was discussed. Those committed to the use of maximum resources, irrespective of the political consequences favoured an immediate mobilisation. This, they argued, would make the miners aware of the Government's intention to fight. If the Government delayed they would never be able to arouse opinion to the extent necessary to ensure the enrolment of the several hundred thousand volunteers deemed essential.

Opponents pointed out that this was based on an unsophisticated view of public opinion. It was not necessary to indulge in this type of overt activity to demonstrate the seriousness of the Government and besides, such action "would merely throw the miners into the arms of other members of the Triple Alliance, and would consolidate the three unions".³¹⁸ The advocates of the more subtle approach were not inclined to minimise the dangers of the situation. Like their more strident colleagues they felt that the issue went beyond that of miners' wages: "Men's minds were in the balance. What was needed was propaganda showing the suffering that would arise from revolutionary movements".³¹⁹ They too recognised the problems posed by the existence of several thousand bitter unemployed ex servicemen in every major city; "If there were trouble of any kind these men would be in it". So while they argued their case on tactical grounds; that it was important not to unite trade unions, and on practical grounds; that precipitate action might provoke a 'go slow' in the pits and reduce coal stocks, they, no less than their opponents, believed that the ultimate objective was "to form a wall of solid opinion against revolution". Their strategy, they felt, was far more likely to achieve this end than a policy of immediate and maximum mobilisation.

The STC's survey of its component parts revealed a better state of preparedness than had ever existed before. Five thousand lorries were available at short notice, adequate arrangements had been made for the transport of foodstuffs by sea, a plan to maintain electricity supplies awaited only the necessary volunteers and the Admiralty had sorted out its difficulties. In addition a regional network had been established and Civil Commissioners appointed to each area. The

idea had developed out of the feeling that Eric Geddes' presence in Yorkshire during the strike of 1919 had enabled central government to co-ordinate and encourage those local forces prepared to act against the strikers. Junior Ministers had now been allocated to particular regions and were ready to operate at the outbreak of any dispute. In addition, by means of this regional organisation local voluntary efforts had been channeled into a permanent nationwide structure of Voluntary Service Committees. By means of these organisations the Government felt able to act without the co-operation of Local Authorities many of which were regarded as unreliable because of their Labour majorities.

On September 22nd, when strike action seemed imminent the Civil Commissioners sent in reports on their respective regions. Chairmen had been appointed to all the Volunteer Service Committees and all were proving satisfactory. It was estimated that sufficient volunteers would come forward in most areas for special police duties and to maintain public utilities. The Civil Commissioners judged that opinion was largely favourable to the Government; there was 'anti miner' feeling among other trade unionists and even Labour Local Authorities might, in the main, be expected to support the Government. The chances of serious civil disturbances were thought to be low though there was a considerable list of exceptions to the rule. Trouble might be expected in Dundee, on the Clyde and in certain mining districts in the North East of England. In the Potteries raids on coal dumps were anticipated. Luton was singled out as a potential black spot and disorder might occur in Yarmouth and Lowestoft if the coal boats stopped working. There were 'dangerous minorities' in

Gillingham, Gravesend, Tilbury, Sheerness, Chatham and Dover. Even Bristol contained an unruly element and the Commissioner for the South West requested naval and military assistance to be sent there. In North Wales Wrexham was regarded as a troublesome district, but it was inevitably the mining valleys of the South where the greatest difficulties existed. The Civil Commissioner, Sir A Griffith Boscawen, believed that owing to the hostility of the population and the intractability of the Local Authorities this area would have to be left to manage its own affairs.

While the Commissioners were largely confident of their ability to maintain services in most regions they did request a number of final improvements. They asked for powers to commandeer offices and accommodation for their volunteers and asked for speakers to put across the Government case. They suggested that coal stocks should be removed from the mining valleys, and as few as possible kept on ships. The Commissioners also recommended that they should be given full executive authority in order to increase their ability to co-ordinate arrangements and that they should be empowered to form regional executive committees so that they could operate independently of central government when the need arose.

In the event the strike was neither prolonged nor bitter and the reports which the Civil Commissioners submitted to Cabinet indicated that most of the arrangements worked satisfactorily. Although a police charge proved necessary in Tonypany and there was rioting in Hamilton Burghs and Fife the fears of disturbances had, for the most part, been misplaced. The Commissioners had been free to concentrate on how

best the strike might be won. Within the organisation it was assumed without question that the object of the exercise was to defeat the miners. The Chief Assistant to the Commissioner for the North Midlands addressed himself to the question of how quickly the victory might be achieved. "The miners", he warned, had "certain means apart from their wages, eg houses, invested funds, motor bicycles and other articles which could be pawned, eg pianos, fur coats etc etc. If determined to push the strike to a successful end qua the miners these matters must be taken into account."³²⁰ Other Commissioners advocated that Local Authorities should give priority in coal supply to firms producing food, beer, and newspapers and to places of public entertainment. Every effort should also be made to maintain supplies to railway owned workshops in view of the possibility of NUR support for the miners. The Commissioners were understandably sensitive about political criticism of volunteer labour. Robert Williams remarks, that "he and his Executive colleagues look upon the policy of enrolment of volunteers, especially from the middle classes and the White Guard of the community as one that would be more provocative than the use of troops",³²¹ appear to have caused some concern.

At the end of the strike the STC felt that the main weakness remained in the field of protection. The Protection Sub-Committee reiterated its dissatisfaction with "the means available for the suppression of widespread disturbance", and the Ministry of Munitions complained that it would have had insufficient cover had force been used against its operations. The Scottish Office too, while conceding that the police forces available had been adequate in the circumstances, warned that they would not have proved so had the dispute continued longer or

been more bitterly contested.³²² The main difficulty with the enrolment of volunteers had been the "multiplicity of recruiting agencies". Local Authorities had been involved in the business of recruitment except where Civil Commissioners "were of opinion that the Local Authority could not safely be approached or that it would be useless to do so".³²³ In a large number of cases Civil Commissioners had decided to recruit on their own authority and this had resulted in some confusion. While recognising that a problem existed the STC was not able to offer any solution.

The conduct of this, the Datum Line strike, undoubtedly represented a considerable improvement on what had gone before. At the most basic level the organisation itself had functioned largely as it was supposed to have done. Perhaps more importantly those involved in the operation appear to have acquired a greater political sensitivity. The greater reliance on volunteer and private organisations, the additional attention to publicity and the Government's careful manoeuvring made for a more sophisticated operation. The replacement of DORA by the Emergency Powers Act, also made a cosmetic contribution to laying the ghost of the "war machine". The Civil Commissioners' organisation too had ensured that the Government's wish for vigorous, though politically sensitive, activity had penetrated to the regions. Immediately after the strike another element of political sophistication was introduced into the emergency arrangements. Two sets of mobilisation plans were introduced one to operate in the event of a coal strike alone and the other, the 'Zero List', in a full Triple Alliance Strike.³²⁴ In addition protection arrangements were improved by the formation of a 'Defence Force'. This was to operate in much the same way as the Special Constabulary though

recruitment would be more centralised and lists of potential recruits drawn up in advance of an emergency. Thus as the major Triple Alliance strike threatened in 1921 the Government had at its disposal an organisation which was adequate for both its publicly declared purpose of maintaining those services essential to the life of the community and its private determination, to defeat the miners and weaken the power of organised labour. The most serious threat to the effectiveness of the organisation was represented by those within the Government camp who through exaggerated fears of labour were frequently led to demand that the state should act hastily and without thought for the political repercussions.

All the deliberations of the STC in the early months of 1921 were conditioned by one significant date. On March 31st the Government was due to relinquish control of the mining industry. A prolonged and bitter dispute between the union and the coal owners was all but inevitable for decontrol would raise a number of contentious issues. Government control had involved national wage bargaining and the MFGB was strongly committed to its maintenance while the owners were equally strongly opposed. Also, under the pressure of wartime demand and in the absence of foreign supplies the Government had abandoned normal commercial considerations and expanded capacity even to the extent of re-opening redundant pits. This too would prove a fertile source of conflict between the union and the owners. Even the issue of wages, viewed at the simplest level was complicated by the Sankey award and the war bonuses. Moreover the archaic organisation of the industry made solutions to any of these difficulties seem even more remote; and the miners were liable to be even more intransigent than they

might have otherwise been after the charade of the Sankey Inquiry. The broad nature of the dispute and the fact that it involved the question of Government responsibility indicated that any industrial action might involve the other unions of the Triple Alliance. The Government could have been about to face its severest test.

In the event little needed to be added to the existing emergency arrangements. The main improvement was the formation of the 'Defence Force'. Confidential lists of those prepared to volunteer for these duties were drawn up well in advance of the conflict. In January the STC received sanction for building a further ten wireless stations to improve its communications network. Previously disparities had arisen when the dismantling of Government Departments had removed essential parts of the emergency services. The anticipated Triple Alliance strike brought permission for the STC to temporarily preserve a number of offices. In February the Supply Department was ordered to continue its existing services and the Mines Department, an inevitable victim of decontrol, was given permission to maintain a skeleton service against an emergency. The STO was mainly occupied, in the interval between the Datum Line Strike and March 31st in consolidation and maintenance of existing schemes.

In March the conflict took its, seemingly, inevitable course. The owners posted district terms which involved up to fifty per cent wage reductions for some miners. Recognising that little could be gained from the owners the MFGB argued that the Government should maintain its responsibility and continue to subsidise the industry. Horne, on

behalf of the Government refused to countenance any such suggestion and the lockout began on March 31st. The Government immediately declared an emergency, under the EPA, and on April 4th began to move troops into the coalfields. The War Office and the Admiralty cancelled all leave and on April 6th the Government turned the London parks over to the STO for the supply and protection services. On April 8th military reservists were called up and formal enrolments in the 'Defence Force' begun. The latter operation proceeded particularly smoothly because of the lists of likely volunteers which already existed in the localities. The Propaganda Sub-Committee was also quickly off the mark. In their view, "undoubtedly the ordinary news-copy of the press is the greatest force in moulding public opinion", and Lobby Correspondents were afforded the special attention of "advisers". For the greater part the press retailed the Government's case with missionary zeal but to supplement this advertisements, two appealing for volunteers, for the Defence Force and another containing the Prime Minister's speech on Direct Action, were placed. For those who avoided the newspapers, posters containing appeals for recruits; "How Can I Help the Nation?" and "Help to Keep the Peace", and pamphlets putting the Government case were issued.³²⁶ The Reconstruction Society was also employed to further the cause. An office was even set up in Wales to translate the message into the vernacular. The STC decided that racing too, could serve the propaganda campaign and they decided to suspend it, partly to save resources, but largely "to bring home to the public the seriousness of the situation".³²⁷ They even considered the possibility of posting propaganda to miners' wives. One week into the coal strike the pit ponies were called to the Government's aid. The Government used imaginary dangers to the ponies to prejudice the

issue of the maintenance men. Inevitably in such a lock out the maintenance men were not working and when the Government raised the issue with the MFGB they refused to let them return except on these conditions in force up to March 31st. It is possible that the pit ponies did have the desired effect for on April 9th the leaders of the other Triple Alliance unions urged the Miners' union to allow the maintenance men to return to work. Thus the first act of the Triple Alliance was to effectively weaken the miners' position.

Most of the discussions within the STC during the early days of the dispute were on the probable involvement of other unions. On April 7th, anticipating the Triple Alliance conference of the next day, the mood was gloomy: "Generally speaking things were as bad as they could be". They advocated that nothing provocative should be done and that, in particular, the Railway Companies should be persuaded not to stop the guaranteed week until the emergency was over. The Committee's discussions of the likely involvement of the rail unions was informed by a 'confidential' ASLEF circular which discussed restricted working as opposed to a total stoppage. They still felt however that strikes by the NUR and TWU should be anticipated but argued for "no overt preparation for fear of precipitating such action".³²⁹ However, in secrecy, Naval personnel were brought up from Portsmouth to be ready to man the electricity stations, the AA and RAC were warned to prepare their members for volunteer driving work and a preliminary warning on the requisitioning of vehicles was issued. Strike books, containing detailed instructions were held at banks, and the managers were requested to remain on duty over the weekend in case it should prove necessary to mobilise the full organisation.

On the same day, April 8th, that the STO was inching towards full mobilisation the Triple Alliance took the decision to strike in support of the miners at midnight on April 12th. However on April 11th the Prime Minister, anticipating that a postponement would result from the negotiations he was holding with Triple Alliance leaders, told the STC not to expect the strike at midnight. In the interim the Committee discussed whether it was better to allow the press to report disturbances in mining districts or persuade them to avoid reference to any such occurrences.³³⁰ The negotiations with the Triple Alliance broke down on April 12th and April 15th was fixed as the new date for the commencement of the strike. On April 14th the STO was given the final go ahead: "All preparations should be pressed on with immediately on the assumption that there would be a Triple Alliance strike on Friday April 15th at 10 pm".³³¹

The next stage of mobilisation took place very smoothly. Vehicles were commandeered, Hyde Park and Regent's Park were closed and prepared for their new function, volunteers to operate the London Underground were put on the alert and three columns of advertising space was reserved in the evening papers of April 15th to ensure the full circulation of the Prime Minister's speech to the Triple Alliance. The Minister of Education was instructed to appeal to Universities and Technical Colleges to postpone the opening of the Summer Term, "in order to enable students to volunteer for essential services".³³² After the officials had been asked to leave the STC discussed "what steps should be taken to cut off the funds of the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies and to increase the difficulties of the Unions

and Societies by restrictions through the banks on advances to those bodies".³³³ They also considered reports in the press that school children in mining areas were being given additional meals by sympathetic education authorities. There was some feeling that even this small assistance should be stopped though the committee as a whole decided not to do anything about it. They also found time to consider their own immediate safety; "Reference was made to the fact that at the present moment considerable road repairing was being done in Whitehall and large dumps of wood blocks, which would form convenient missiles in the event of a disturbance, had been created".³³⁴ Arrangements were made to have these removed.

By the 16th April the STC had accommodated to the calling off of the Triple Alliance action and the 'Action List' arrangements were being cancelled. There was, however, no relaxation in those measures directed against the mining lock out. Much of the volunteer labour could be demobilised and a circular letter, in the name of the Prime Minister was sent to volunteers praising their 'zeal' and 'public spirit'. The STC proposed 'special recognition' for the chairmen of the Volunteer Service Committees in return for their many months of secret work. All that remained was to finish off the miners' resistance.

The only real issue which arose in April was that of importing coal. It was decided at Cabinet level that the inadequacy of stocks made this desirable. On April 29th the STC learnt that dockers who were members of the TWU, had, in several ports, refused to unload imported coal. The Committee saw such action as "part of the policy of the Communist

Party" and advocated a tough response; "The Government should announce that if they were supported by the nation they were confident that they could maintain the vital services of the country. It was felt that such an announcement would bring home to the people the seriousness of the situation and the necessity for supporting the Government." While they were determined to use force if necessary to land the coal, the Committee urged that no action be taken for a few days; "The interval would be used for working up public opinion in favour of the Government and for organising machinery both at the ports and pit heads."³³⁵ The fact that stocks were down to an estimated two and a half weeks' supply was to be kept from the public.

The situation was serious enough for the STC to meet again in the evening and the suggestion to commandeer American coal bound for Italy in British vessels was considered. By May 6th the Committee was getting news that some parts of the Triple Alliance were working at grassroots level even if it had collapsed at the top, for railwaymen were refusing to operate coal trains which had evaded the dockers' boycott. On May 9th they were warned that any attempt to use volunteers to move imported coal in Glasgow would be met by a strike of both dockers and railwaymen. The unions were prepared to allow in supplies which were necessary to maintain essential services but the STC was adamant that railwaymen and dockers should not be allowed to discriminate between coal for commercial purposes and that for public utilities. However care should be taken, where resistance was anticipated, that "the issue was joined not in regard to consignments of commercial coal but in regard to coal for public utility purposes".³³⁶

By May 10th the immediate crisis was over as enough imported coal was getting through. Eric Geddes put it down to disagreements between the NUR and the TWU and the difficulties the Union Leaders had in persuading all their members to undertake the necessary action. While it kept the situation under daily review the STC again dismantled the additional machinery.

As it transpired this part of the emergency operation had worked rather too well, for demand for coal fell as a result of abnormally warm weather, the recession in industry and the enthusiasm of Local Authorities and others in providing substitute fuels.³³¹ By June 8th the Government had imported more coal than it could use. The STC were caught between political expediency and parsimony. The cement companies wanted the coal but if they sold it to them immediately they would be seen to be publicly engaging in strike breaking. Yet if they held on to the coal until the miners returned to work they stood to lose half a million pounds when the market price fell. Parsimony won and the coal was sold. The STC suggested, rather lamely, that "the supply of cement works might be regarded as . . . a matter of public importance".³³⁸

One striking feature of Government activities during the emergency was the degree to which they were prepared to intervene in areas which they would normally have felt to be beyond their legitimate competence. The London and North Eastern railway approached the Government before it took disciplinary action against a guard who had refused to work a blacked coal train. Similarly the Caledonian Railway submitted relevant disciplinary cases for the Government's opinion. For the

most part such government interference in the private sector was done with the co-operation of companies, as in these cases, but where opposition was encountered the Government was prepared to overrule it. On April 2nd, for example, the STC asked the Managing Director of an oil installation at Thameshaven to allow a detachment of naval personnel to be stationed at his premises on protection duties. The Committee suggested that if he was worried about the effect this would have on his workers he could say that "the Naval Party came merely to protect them from outrage by Sinn Fein or others".³³⁹ The Managing Director refused to accept the services of the Navy on the grounds that the small number of policemen already at his disposal were quite adequate and any additional show of force would persuade his men to join the strike. The Protection Sub-Committee refused to accept this. They conceded that Thameshaven was "away from any populous place" and as such in no danger from a "casual mob", but argued that "it could easily be taken by an organised attack". They offered no suggestion as to where such an attack might originate, but considered it sufficiently likely to recommend that the STC should overrule the Managing Director. The Petroleum Department advised that volunteer labour could easily keep the installation going in the event of a strike by employees, and the Naval Force was dispatched. The Managing Director continued to protest but the Government ignored him. In such matters they would tolerate no opposition.

In the matter of propoganda the Government received massive support from private organisations without the necessity of coercion. While L S Amery felt that the Publicity Committee's greatest achievement in

this area had been to ensure that government departments all spoke with one voice,³⁴⁰ and while over £55,000 had been spent on direct propaganda³⁴¹ it seems probable that the bulk of reasonably credible publicity was secured through the active co-operation of private organisations. Theatre and Cinema managers had co-operated in the distribution of pamphlets, and the Women's Guild of Empire had also done much useful work in this area. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association had co-operated loyally by making the necessary arrangements for film propaganda, though the scheme had never been used. The Publicity Sub-Committee had issued briefs for speakers and writers two or three times a week, "bearing no indication of their official origin", and these had been distributed through the good, and discreet, offices of the Central Unionist Association, the Coalition Liberal Association, the British Commonwealth Union, the National Political League and the Middle Class Union. It was though, the popular newspapers which had proved the Government's greatest asset. Mr Dimbleby, an official at the Board of Trade who had been heavily involved in propaganda work before, had set up an office for journalists; "reporters gladly availed themselves of the telephonic and other facilities offered". Communiques had been issued daily and the sub-committee was highly satisfied with the way in which the press had used them. Mr McCulloch had been sent to Scotland and had performed similar offices and met with similar success. Amery felt that "the altered attitudes of the Scottish papers no doubt had a very beneficial effect on the conduct of the Scottish miners".³⁴² The lessons of the Labour Research Department had been fully assimilated and had inevitably produced better results than that organisation could ever hope to achieve for while the LRD was working in a hostile atmosphere the press was, for the most part, quite willing to move in directions which the Government suggested.

Once the threat of a Triple Alliance strike had disappeared and coal supplies been guaranteed the Government had little to worry about. Indeed by June 3rd the Cabinet was contemplating dismantling more parts of the emergency machinery. The Food Organisation requested permission to demobilise and sell off its stocks. The Navy wanted to return to normal duties and the Communications and Road Transport Sub-Committees wanted to sell off their materials. Army and Navy units were withdrawn on June 21st. On July 1st the dispute was all but over and the Secretary of the Mines was authorised to dismantle the last remnants of the Mines Department which had been retained for the crisis. On July 4th the miners returned to work and the Government was left to congratulate itself on having extricated itself from its responsibilities towards the mining industry with the very minimum concessions. In the end the miners had been forced to accept the £10m subsidy to cushion the wage cuts which they had rejected on two previous occasions. The Government's campaign had been well organised and had attracted considerable support and it had also been considerably assisted by the slump in industry and the fine weather.³⁴³

In the months following the defeat of the miners the emergency organisation began to fall apart. This was partly a reflection of the new industrial situation and partly a desire to reduce the responsibilities of central government: "The sooner the duty of operating all emergency services was thrown on the Local Authorities and other bodies normally responsible, the sooner would wartime centralised methods be abolished and Government be rid of the expense arising from such methods."³⁴⁴ On November 29th the Home Affairs Committee of the Cabinet met to survey what was left of the STO and to decide what should be preserved.³⁴⁵

Before the Committee were papers by Geddes, who had retired as Chief Civil Commander on September 15th, Amery, recently appointed to that post, and Baldwin, President of the Board of Trade. Geddes' paper drew attention to the cost of previous operations. Even without including the expenses of the War Office and the cost of the 'Defence Force' the emergency arrangements had cost the Government in excess of a million and a quarter pounds. He estimated that the normal running costs of the organisation, if no strike occurred, at £55,000. While this was a reduction on his estimate of January of 1921 of £97,000, caused by the dismantling of the Food Organisation, he still felt it was much too high. Geddes felt that it was possible to maintain an adequate organisation for a negligible annual outlay. He argued that it was now possible to reduce the role of central government: "The war had created in the people a habit of looking to the Government for direction and initiative in every department of life and the Government was the only body which possessed sufficient strength to oppose the great industrial organisations. This state of things had now passed. Private initiative had once more asserted itself." Baldwin's paper pursued a similar theme: "Traders and consumers alike have become so accustomed during the last two years to regard the maintenance of food and other essential services as a normal function of government, that private enterprise can hardly be expected to reassert itself adequately unless the necessity is made absolutely clear." The improved industrial situation meant that a change to less centralised methods brought no dangers. Geddes reinforced this idea, pointing out that while in the immediate post war period government action had been necessary for "the maintenance of order and decent living", "the power of the Trade Unions had visibly diminished, principally from economic causes, and the general strike had failed".

It was Baldwin who outlined for the Home Affairs Committee the implications of the decision they had to take. The choice they made "must depend to a large extent upon the risks which the Government were prepared to take. By spending a certain sum of money the Government could be ready in an emergency after a lapse of so many days. If a smaller sum were spent the lapse would be longer". "If, however, nothing were done at all and there was a sudden general strike, it might be impossible for the Government to improvise a system in time to cope with the general dislocation that might ensue."

It was inevitable that the Committee should decide to dismantle the greater part of the STO for it was already falling apart. They abolished entirely the remaining parts of the Food Department of the Board of Trade, which had been the most costly part of the operation, and all other parts of the STO which had involved any substantial expenditure. However they did respond to Baldwin's warning and agreed that the bare nucleus of an emergency organisation, based on officials in the relevant Departments, might be maintained, though they stipulated that the total cost of the operation must not exceed £2,000 per annum.

One part of the STO which everyone wanted maintained was the Voluntary Service Committee structure organised under the Civil Commissioners and the Supply Department. In spite of its cheapness this was "one of the most elaborate sections of the Supply and Transport Organisation". There were around ninety such Committees who took responsibility for recruiting labour and carrying on basic services. Geddes argued that if the Committee decided to abandon this organisation it would take a

long time to recreate it. The Chairmen of such Committees provided for the Government "a useful body of trustworthy personnel throughout the country and can be employed to sound local opinion, and approach Local Authorities unofficially. They can even supersede Local Authorities of doubtful loyalty".³⁴⁸ The new Chief Civil Commissioner supported Geddes' view and the Home Affairs Committee readily assented to the retention of this part of the STO.

The only note of dissention was struck by the Scottish Secretary, Robert Munro, who submitted a separate paper. He questioned the analysis of the industrial situation which was at the base of the new proposals: "Can the risk of industrial troubles on a national scale (fomented possibly by communistic or other political activities) be regarded as negligible if one looks beyond the next few months?"³⁴⁹ He conceded that the economic situation precluded immediate large scale industrial action but an improvement in trade could alter matters very rapidly. Munro warned that extremists were always at work and in many areas of Scotland the Local Authorities were unreliable.

Nevertheless the reconstruction of the STO went ahead on the lines approved by the HAC. The main burden of activity was shifted to trade or voluntary associations and the Local Authorities. The Government's own organisation "would only be brought into being on the outbreak of an emergency, and then only to the extent necessitated by the nature of the emergency".³⁵⁰ At central level the organisation was to be kept in being by a Supply and Transport Sub Committee meeting every six months. Under this there were to be additional sub-committees to deal with aspects of policy, but these would meet only when required. The

work was to be largely carried out by officials and it was emphasised that "work on emergency questions should be recognised as part of the ordinary duties of a Government Department". There was to be one officer in each Department "to whom reference could be made on any questions concerning the emergency scheme". Any finance not obtained through the normal departmental vote should be under the Home Office. Thus, as had been the wish of the Treasury, the Special Services vote was discontinued. Overall responsibility for the organisation was transferred to the Home Secretary and it was he who was to decide when the industrial situation required a fuller mobilisation. The cost of the new scheme was estimated at £1,750 in a normal year.

The absence of documentary evidence to the contrary suggests that in the following months very little was done to maintain the organisation. A paper from the Cabinet Secretary in March 1923 suggested that many aspects had been allowed to fall into abeyance.³⁵¹ It was proposed that the organisation be transferred completely to the Home Office, that the Home Secretary rather than the Chief Civil Commissioner act as representative on the Cabinet Committee, and that the whole STO should be investigated by a standing sub committee of civil servants under the chairmanship of the Permanent Under Secretary at the Home Office. Amery questioned the exclusion of the Chief Civil Commissioner from the main committee. He pointed out that the Commissioner was head of the voluntary organisation and the proposal for reorganisation ignored the important part that this played. However the inter-departmental sub committee was given permission to investigate, and Sir John Anderson appointed chairman.³⁵²

Anderson's report confirmed that little had been done since 1921. Even the minimal schemes proposed in November 1921 had relied on Government machinery which had subsequently been abolished and there were now no "effective plans on a sufficiently comprehensive scale".³⁵³ Anderson's starting point was that some organisation was necessary to cope with emergencies of the type envisaged by the Emergency Powers Act. He agreed that no new machinery should be created and that as far as possible departments should deal with those matters which came within their sphere of influence. The Civil Commissioners and the Volunteer Service Committees under their chairmen, "specially selected gentlemen of local standing and influence", should be retained. This part of the STO was in being in any case and only two new appointments would be necessary. Executive functions connected with local organisation should, Anderson argued, be transferred to the Civil Commissioners and they should be allowed a staff officer, a general inspector of the Ministry of Health, to assist them. Responsibility for postal services coal supplies and protection should however, be retained by central government, except in the event of a communication breakdown during an emergency.

The post of Chief Civil Commissioner should be retained and filled by a politician of Cabinet rank. There should be an ad hoc Cabinet committee but the main responsibility for co-ordination should fall on a standing sub committee to be staffed by officials. Subject sub committees would be created for emergencies and their chairmen, under the Chief Civil Commissioner, would then take control. Anderson felt that the cost of the organisation to central government should not exceed £1,750 in a normal year.

Anderson's final concern was that of the question of confidentiality. He noted that in 1919 and 1920, "not only the detail of Government plans but even the existence of the special government organisation was kept largely secret". Anderson argued that the reorganisation of the STO and its increased reliance on outsiders precluded secrecy on the previous scale. Yet while "there was something to be said for allowing the existence of a government plan to become known, disclosure of details should be avoided so far as possible and that in so far as people have to be taken into confidence they should be told only what is essential to enable them to perform their functions". On July 11th the Home Secretary appointed a committee to give effect to Anderson's recommendations and on July 17th, J C C Davidson was appointed Chief Civil Commissioner.

Any assessment of government policy with regard to organised labour must avoid simple implications about cause and effect. Between 1919 and 1923 Governments did pursue policies which they hoped would produce a more docile workforce and, in fact, the labour situation did become a good deal calmer during these years. However it is clear that the change was basically brought about by factors outwith the Government's control. It would be unrealistic to deal with the impact of state agencies without making prior reference to the developing pattern of labour politics and changes in the general economic situation. These years saw, for instance, rapidly rising unemployment and a series of events which illustrated and exacerbated the difficulties of collective actions by labour organisations. State action must be assessed within the possibilities set by such developments; in terms of its potential to exploit or destroy the advantages offered by circumstances. Thus, for example,

while one must recognise the effectiveness of Lloyd George's improvisations in 1919, one must see them in the context of a labour movement whose innocence and good nature led them to welcome an opportunity to argue their case before the Sankey Commission.

At the beginning of the period the State's attempts at intervention were undeniably inept. The Cabinet never developed a balanced view of the situation and they adopted measures which were wildly inappropriate. They ran the risk of creating that situation which they were most anxious to avoid. Iain Maclean is correct in arguing that it was the Government, in its hysterical use of the 'war machine', which gave the 'Forty Hours' strike in Glasgow its subversive flavour. By 1923 the State had developed its agencies and its thinking sufficiently to avoid such gross errors. The surveillance services had begun to confine their activities and speculations within recognisable bounds and the Supply and Transport Organisation was structured to avoid the more obvious provocations. It is not, however, possible to identify any continuous process of argument by which these changes came about; no gradual dawning realisations nor no conversions. Yet by the end of this time a number of individuals had managed to leave their stamp on the organisation. The calmer atmosphere after 1921 must have done something to stifle the chorus demanding aggressive activity, and the fact that their plans made only small demands on public expenditure must have told in favour of those advocating a more sophisticated approach. Yet their victory did not remain unchallenged, for in the changed atmosphere of 1925 voices would again be raised in favour of campaigns of the old type. However they did not prevail, for by then the new approach was embedded into the system. In 1923 the STO was in physical terms no more than

embryonic but its reality and strength as an institution was in a network of contacts and, perhaps more importantly, a series of common understandings shared by a number of influential individuals.

Their ideas did not involve any diminution of the responsibilities of the State. The State was still seen as having a crucial role to play in industrial disputes. Also the activities of the State were still to be structured in a way that weakened the union side in the course of guaranteeing services to the community as a whole. The new plans represented a change of method rather than purpose.

It is important to emphasise the limited nature of such changes and to question those accounts which have identified in post war politics some restructuring of the relationship between state and society. Charles Maier argues: "Total war meant social transformation, the centralisation of power, equalisation of income, the concession of new rights to the working classes".³⁵⁵ Yet while such a view would have had much appeal at the time, the reality was much less clear cut. For example in the matter of personal incomes if one compares 1913/4 and 1922/24 there is undoubtedly evidence of change and moreover, it is reasonable to assume that much of that change was set in motion by the war, yet the alterations were neither of the magnitude nor of the nature to justify Maier's claims, nor do they confirm the impressions of those who lived through the period. If one compares the average earnings of particular groups of workers with other groups a rather complicated pattern emerges. While the earnings of higher professionals were subject to a small comparative decline those of managers and administrators rose by a higher amount. Earnings of lower professionals rose slightly while those of foremen and supervisory workers rose more steeply. Clerks suffered a small comparative

decline, almost exactly in line with that experienced by skilled workers. Semi-skilled workers suffered a smaller decline while unskilled workers experienced a very small rise in their comparative position. In complete contrast to the conventional wisdom of the period these years saw a distinct and significant move in earnings in favour of non-manual as against manual workers.³⁵⁶ While such figures may conceal some fluctuation over time and within categories they must effectively dispose of the notion that some significant "equalisation of income" was underway.

Available evidence about changes in the distribution of personal wealth suggests a similar conclusion. One set of figures, comparing 1911/13 with 1924/30 does show a small decline in the aggregate personal wealth owned by the top one per cent yet offers no evidence for any general redistribution as the shares of the top ten per cent and the bottom ninety per cent remained virtually static.³⁵⁷

It might be objected that such figures fail to register real changes which were taking place. Might it not be that the real improvements in the material conditions of the working population are not so much to be found in details of personal income and wealth but rather in those things owned and administered by the state on their behalf or in the growing commitment of the state to improve standards of living and provide a network of security through general social reforms? This is inevitably a more complicated area to deal with. If one takes, for example, provision for unemployment there is certainly some evidence of change. During the War the Government decided, through the 1916 Act to extend unemployment insurance to all workers. Yet there was resistance from both employers and workers and even by the end of the

War no more than a quarter of the working population was registered under the scheme. The War had also seen the introduction of the "out of work donation", a scheme whereby the state made contributions on behalf of men in the forces so that they would be entitled to six months' insurance money if they became unemployed after their military service. It was this scheme that was extended to meet the circumstances of the post war years. Clearly by this expedient large numbers of men and women were spared recourse to the Poor Law, yet it is doubtful if it is reasonable to see in this evidence of "social transformation" or "the concession of new rights to the working class". As Bentley Gilbert argued, "The Government did not proceed to unemployment insurance in deliberate and calculated steps, but was driven to it at the end of 1920 by the fear of what would happen when the unemployment donation ended".³⁵⁸ The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 cannot be taken as evidence of any fundamental change in outlook. If it seemed to go further than previous Acts it was only largely because the circumstances which prompted its passage were more complicated and were believed to hold more menace for the established social order. The very weaknesses of the 1920 Act seemed to confirm that it was a grudging response to necessity rather than the willing acceptance of some new principle.³⁵⁹

Indeed it is difficult to find in any part of post war social policy the sort of evidence which Maier's thesis would require. There is little reason to question Abrams' conclusions about the nature and extent of the failure of such policies in this period.³⁶⁰ Richard Titmuss in his essay 'War and Social Policy' drew attention to "the problem of distinguishing between policies related to peacetime needs and policies concerned only with the immediate war situation".³⁶¹

This distinction may seem particularly apt for this period, for it would appear that while governments were prepared to consider innovations during the War, they wished to return to what they regarded as normalcy as soon as the hostilities were over. The whole direction and impetus of social thinking was away from the use of the state for income redistribution or improved social welfare provision.

As has been illustrated in this chapter much was made at the time of the growth and increased ambitions of the leaders of trade unions. This might seem to offer support for Maier's point about "the concession of new rights to the working classes". Contemporary observers of all political persuasions simply assumed that some large transfer of power either had, or was about to take place. Individuals as various as the Duke of Northumberland and Robert Williams of the Transport Workers Federation expected this new power of the unions to enable them to make critical interventions in national politics.³⁶² Much of this chapter has been about how certain politicians discovered that it was possible to defeat such initiatives at the national political level. Yet at the local level it might appear that union power was even more illusory. While employers, even the more intelligent ones such as Theodore Taylor simply assumed that the exercise of union power on wage rates was pricing British products out of world markets³⁶³ there was little evidence of the ability of unions to even maintain their members' earnings. Evidence of the actual conditions of working people in this period is not comprehensive and frequently subjective yet it is sufficient to, at least cast doubt on the more optimistic estimates. The conclusions drawn by Bowley and Hogg in their study of pre and post war living standards are sufficiently equivocal to call into question

Whitling Williams' characterisation of the post war organised worker as "Full up and Fed Up".³⁶⁴ Sinclair's more subjective study of life in a mining community, Secretar's investigations of life south of the Thames and Margaret Pollock's studies of actual work experiences must suggest some major gulf between popular estimates of union power and the conditions of the ordinary working union member.³⁶⁵

Only in the formal political field can it be said that the post war period saw a clear and unequivocal "concession of new rights to the working classes". While political historians have tended to underplay its significance, recent research and arguments have now identified the Representation of the People Act of 1918 rather than the Reform Act of 1867 as "the decisive act", that point at which the working classes became an effective rather than a theoretical majority of the electorate.³⁶⁶ Yet while the importance of the Act should be recognised the significance of its actual passage should not be overemphasised. It was, in the circumstances the minimum which the Government could get away with. Thus it must be concluded that there is little evidence to support the view that the post war period saw an attempt by the British elite to defend its long term interests by schemes of social reconstruction or by the concession of new rights to working men and women. On the contrary, most leading politicians seem to have been determined to reverse or at least minimise what had been conceded during the war. They sought to maintain stability not by broadening the scope or increasing the functions of the state but by developing and modernising its capacities to fulfil its limited traditional functions.

It has been suggested in a recent study that modern states exhibit three characteristic tendencies in respect of their activities in the maintenance of civil order. Firstly there is a development towards a more rational and specialised use of coercive powers: "Legitimate coercion becomes less diffuse, pervasive and visible, and a more controlled and specialised aspect of rule".³⁶⁷ Secondly, the organisational complexity of the modern state provides the opportunity for a continuous redistribution of functions between different agencies in order to secure the optimum balance at any given time. Thirdly, in modern industrial societies there is a blurring of the distinction between state and society and the state therefore has the opportunity to enrol non-governmental bodies in its efforts.

The evidence presented here offers some support for these generalisations. There is evidence of a developing sophistication in the deployment of coercive powers. While certain politicians were tempted, in the uneasy post war months, to abandon previously agreed rules as to limitations on the use of force and the strict division between the use of the police and the use of the military,³⁶⁸ the forces of moderation did regain the initiative, and the state again began to marshal the massive coercive powers at its disposal with attention to these details. There is also evidence to suggest that serious consideration was given to the distribution of functions within the state machine. Sensitive functions were increasingly being distributed to local government or local agencies of central government. The police forces are an interesting case in point, for they illustrate the complexity of the process. While every effort was made to reinforce the appearance of the absence of central control over local forces, much thought and activity was

dedicated to minimising the practical effect of such independence. For example a circular was issued by the Home Office which sought to ensure a degree of uniformity in prosecutions for seditious speeches;³⁶⁹ during serious strikes Chief Constables had strict instructions as to types of picketing which were to be permitted and which not and under what conditions they were to intervene.³⁷⁰ When things went wrong or matters got out of hand the Home Secretary and the Cabinet could evade responsibility by emphasising the independence of their local agents.³⁷¹ The process of the distribution of functions was motivated by three main considerations: the need to guarantee the efficient operation of the service, the desire to create the appearance of a wide distribution of responsibility and, finally, the requirement that all functions should be effectively and readily subject to central control.

There are also clear indications of the blurring of the line between state and society in this period. This might indeed be seen as the central theme of the arguments advanced by Geddes, Baldwin, and Anderson. In this context it becomes necessary to challenge certain judgments which have been made about the political abilities of these participants. Ralph Desmarais, for example, singles out Geddes as part of a generation of businessmen turned politicians who "lacked even the feeling for public opinion that the politician needs for survival". He argues that what separated these "new administrators" from the traditional elite was that to them "considerations of efficiency were more important than style, honour or any British tradition".³⁷² This is on the one hand a somewhat oversanguine view of the pre war elite whose record in industrial disputes was often conspicuously short on style and honour and on the other a misunderstanding of the political skills of such

men as Geddes and Anderson. Geddes certainly challenged existing assumptions about what the state could, or could not do, but he was by no means apolitical. It was his recognition of the strengths of the modern state which enabled him to take a tougher line than many of his colleagues, and the distribution of functions which he advocated was not only cheaper and more efficient but far more effective politically. What Geddes and Anderson had recognised was that the main strength of the modern state was not in the forces it directly controlled, not in its physical capacity to issue propaganda nor in yards full of rusting lorries and stores of deteriorating foodstuffs. For propaganda it was far better to rely on the host of private organisations which were more than willing to be of service. Moreover, the bulk of the Press was eager to assist and issue a barrage of criticism and insults at the opponents of the Government. All the state had to do was co-ordinate such forces, and increasingly during this period they came to do this. Wal Hannington recalled the almost unanimous hostility which greeted the hunger marchers in November 1922. He had probably anticipated the accusations which were levelled against the marchers' leaders yet he might have been surprised if he had known the extent to which the campaign was instigated, orchestrated and later, monitored, from within the Home Office.³⁷³ Representatives of the "responsible" press had been summoned and in suitably melodramatic fashion, shown the Special Branch reports on the previous convictions and communist connections of some of the leaders of the march. The press responded dutifully with tales of, "A Communist Conspiracy",³⁷⁴ "Riot Mongers Working for their Salaries",³⁷⁵ "Misleading the Unemployed",³⁷⁶ and, inevitably, "A Red Plot".³⁷⁷

Similarly other resources necessary to mount a campaign against organised labour were already in existence in abundance and within the control of companies and individuals who would see themselves as the natural allies of the state in any dispute with labour. There were innumerable "gentlemen of local standing and influence" who would always view unpaid service in such a cause as part of their patriotic duty. Similarly there were countless other individuals who as supporters of 'law and order' or as antagonists of organised labour could be relied upon to offer their services at a moment's notice. Moreover a state, shielded by its natural allies, could present its anti strike measures as acts of communal self defence and thus hope to diffuse and deflect the hostility of strikers and their supporters. The old methods assumed an embattled ancien regime facing a hostile mass. The new plans recognised and exploited the more complex social and political structure of modern industrial society and the broader legitimate base of the modern state.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- 1 T Jones, Whitehall Diaries, Ed K Middlemas, Vol 1 p100
- 2 CAB 23/8 CC 502(5) 14
- 3 E Halevy, Era of Tyrannies (1960) p180
- 4 A J P Taylor, English History 1914-1945 (1970) pp186-188
- 5 B B Gilbert, British Social Policy 1919-1939 (1970) p1
- 6 H Havinghurst, Britain in Transition (Chicago 1919) p136. See also G D H Cole and R Postgate, The Common People 1746-1946 (1946) pp545-556, Arthur Marwick, The Deluge, British Society and the First World War (1965) pp206, Arthur Marwick, 'The Impact of the First World War on British Society', Journal of Contemporary History, January 1968. For a discussion of the impact of war on prominent socialists see J M Winter, Socialism and the Coming of War (1974). For speculation on the possibilities of revolution, D Mitchell, 'Ghost of a Chance', History Today (Nov 1970) 20(11) pp753-761 The impact of the war was a far less speculative matter to those who wrote immediately after it: "The continuance of civilisation is incompatible with the continuance of poverty. That is the lesson that is driven home by the Great War." C F G Masterman, The New Liberalism (1920) p131
- 7 Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 (1974) p240. See also H Matthew, R I McKibbin and J A Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', Economic History Review, Vol 1 1976 and G Chamberlain, 'The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain', British Journal of Sociology, Vol 24 1973.
- 8 W Kendal, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921 (1969) p18
- 9 Kendal, Revolutionary Movement p195
- 10 William Brace, 'Industrial Unrest'
Contemporary Review Vol CXVI Sep 1919 p257
- 11 Contemporary Review Vol CXIII Feb 1918 p121
- 12 Arthur Henderson 'The Industrial Unrest - A New Policy Required'
Contemporary Review Vol CXV Apr 1919 p361-368 (p364)
- 13 "It is difficult to estimate the far reaching effects of the unrest if it is allowed to continue and develop so as to become no longer controllable by the workers' accredited leaders. For the chief danger lies not in industrial unrest which is definitely organised and controlled and wisely guided and directed by recognised leaders, but in unconstitutional action manifesting itself in sporadic local efforts and without any fixed purpose or definite policy." p365 'The Industrial Unrest - A New Policy Required'
Contemporary Review Vol CXV Apr 1919

- 14 See also Sidney Webb's argument that Labour was the best defence against Bolshevism.
Contemporary Review Vol CXIV Nov 1918 p622
For a discussion of this tactic see also Royden Harrison 'The War Emergency Workers National Committee 1914-1920' in A Briggs and J Saville, Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971) p285
- 15 New Statesman Mar 29 1919
- 16 Gerald Gould, The Coming Revolution (1920) p19
- 17 Paul Kellog and Arthur Gleason, British Labour and the War (New York 1919)
- 18 Arthur Gleason, What the Workers Want (London 1920) p147. See also William Aylct Orton, Labour in Transition (London 1921) and W Williams, Full up and Fed Up, the Worker's Mind in Crowded Britain (New York 1921)
- 19 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation (1923) p164
- 20 "Not only the abuses but also the material, intellectual and moral gains of the previous order will have been lost." S and B Webb, Capitalist Civilisation p1
- 21 See P S Bagwell, The Railwaymen. A History of the National Union of Railwaymen (1963)
- 22 See E J Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point 1880-1900 (Hassocks 1974)
- 23 See V L Allen, Trade Unions and the Government (1960), W H Crook, The General Strike (Chapel Hill USA, 1931) Also comments on the frequency of calls for direct action during the period.
- 24 "An outstanding feature of the post war labour unrest was its overwhelmingly official nature". Tony Adams, 'The British Labour Movement and Working Class Unrest 1918-1921', Journal of the Society for the Study of Labour History (Spring 1983) p12
- 25 Charles A McCurdy, 'To Avoid Strikes'
Contemporary Review Vol CXVI Nov 1919 p483
- 26 A G Gardiner, 'The Present Discontents'
Contemporary Review Vol CXVI Nov 1919 p494
- 27 Kendal, Revolutionary Movement p195
- 28 A V Sellwood, Police Strike 1919 (1978)
- 29 See Hugh Cunningham, The Language of Patriotism 1750-1914, History Workshop 12 (Augumn 1981) pp8-33, also Denis Winter, Deaths Men (1978) and Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (1975). Also D Englander and J Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb, The Armed Forces and the Working Class', Historical Journal 21,3 (1978) pp593-621

- 30 See for example S Fremantle, My Naval Career (1944) pp274-5
- 31 Kendal, Revolutionary Movement p205
- 32 K Jeffery and P Hennessey, States of Emergency, British Governments and Strikebreeding Since 1919 (1983)
- 33 John Stevenson, 'Myth and Reality. Britain in the 1930's in A Sked and C Cook (Eds), Crisis and Controversy, Essays in Honour of A J P Taylor (1976)
- 34 See G Dallas and D Gill, 'The Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917', Past and Present LXIX (Nov 1975) pp88-112
- 35 G Almond and S Verba, The Civic Culture (New York 1963)
S P Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale 1968)
M Olsen, 'Rapid Growth as a Destabilising Force', Journal of Economic History (1963) and S M Lipset, The First New Nation (1964)
- 36 Barrington Moore, The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (1969)
- 37 F G Castles, 'Political Stability and the Dominant Image of Society', Political Studies Vol 22 (1974) pp289-298
- 38 Castles, 'Political Stability' p294
- 39 Charles A Maier, Recasting Bourgeois Europe (Princeton 1975) p257
- 40 Rt Hon William Brace MP 'Industrial Unrest'
Contemporary Review Vol CXVI Sep 1919
- 41 National Review No 74 p69
- 42 Times November 13 1918
- 43 Times February 8 1919
- 44 Times February 1 1919
- 45 T Jones, Whitehall Diaries Vol 1 p73
- 46 National Review May-August 1921
- 47 National Review May-August 1920
- 48 Times April 2 1919
- 49 Times February 15 1919 and November 8 1919
- 50 Cmd 8 A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia 1919. Curzon seems to have been the collector of the more dubious stories. - Apparently many were manufactured by an agency in Berlin which made a good profit out of them. See F S Northedge and Audrey Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (1982) p34

- 51 As above, p26. This report was very widely quoted in the British Press.
- 52 Ibid, p3
- 53 National Review March-August 1920
- 54 Times November 8 1919
- 55 CAB 24/90 GT 8304 8 Oct 1919
- 56 CAB 24/90 GT 8400 23 Oct 1919
- 57 Times November 8 1919
- 58 Times February 10 1919
- 59 Times February 17 1919
- 60 Times March 4 1920
- 61 Times April 5 1919
- 62 Times February 10 1919
- 63 Havinghurst, Britain in Transition "viewed in larger context it may be argued that the general course of British history was little affected by the War which was rather a manifestation than a cause" p136
- 64 Beatrice Webb's Diaries (Ed M Cole) (1952) p134. It is also interesting to note that other accounts, while not apocalyptic, assumed that the War had left Labour in control. See Arthur Gleason, What the Workers Want (1920) and W Williams, Full Up and Fed Up (New York 1921)
- 65 C F G Masterman, England After the War (1922) p31
- 66 Times May 19 1920
- 67 Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Rural England (2 Vols) (1902)
- 68 See F M L Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (1963) p322 and G E Mingay, The Gentry (1976) p172
- 69 Times February 8 1919
- 70 Times September 25 and 26 1917
- 71 See, for examples, G Sweeney, At Scotland Yard (1904)
- 72 H T Fitch, Traitors Within, The Adventures of Detective Inspector Herbert Fitch (1933)
- 73 H T Fitch, Traitors Within p79

- 74 H Brust, I Guarded Kings - The Memoirs of a Political Police Officer (1935)
- 75 H Brust, I Guarded Kings p100
- 76 H T Fitch, Traitors Within p19
- 77 B H Thomson, Queer People (London 1922) p47
- 78 H Brust, In Plain Clothes (1937) p69
- 79 H T Fitch, Traitors Within p60
- 80 H T Fitch, Traitors Within p59
- 81 B H Thomson, Queer People (1922) p274
- 82 Edith C Rickards, Zoe Thomson (1916)
- 83 B H Thomson, Diversions of a Prime Minister (1894)
- 84 B H Thomson, The Scene Changes (New York 1937)
- 85 B H Thomson, A History of Scotland Yard (1935)
- 86 B H Thomson, The Scene Changes (New York 1937)
- 87 CAB 24/83 GT 7671 16 Jul 1919
- 88 CAB 24/75 GT 6816 10 Feb 1919 Rep 33
- 89 CAB 23/5 Cabinet of 22 Jan 1919
- 90 B H Thomson, Queer People p274
- 91 Shortt had a great deal of admiration and respect for Thomson, and usually supported his line. When, for instance Thomson was advocating a hard line on communists to the Home Affairs Committee of the Cabinet, Shortt "strongly recommended that ministers should be guided by Sir Basil Thomson's advice. CAB 26/3 25 May 1921 The warmth of the relationship is well illustrated by the fact that Shortt was prepared to speak up for Thomson in court when he was arrested and convicted on an indecency charge. Times Feb 6 1926
- 92 B H Thomson, Queer People (1922) p274
- 93 H of C Debs 11 Aug 1921 Cd 639/40
- 94 HO 45/11000
- 95 Parliamentary Papers 1919 (222)
- 96 Namely, Kirchener and Maddox HO 45/11000
- 97 Bunyan suggests that the Special Branch had 150 offices in the war and that this fell to 120 by 1920. Tony Bunyan, The History and Practice of the Political Police in Britain (1977)

- 98 B H Thomson, *Queer People* p275
- 99 CAB 24/122 CP 2838 14 Apr 1921
- 100 CAB 24/126 CP 3179 28 Jul 1921
- 101 CAB 24/128 CP 3350 29 Sep 1921
- 102 CAB 24/75 GT 6816 10 Feb 1919
- 103 CAB 24/103 CP 1039 15 Apr 1920
- 104 CAB 24/106 Rep 59 17 Jun 1920
- 105 CAB 24/125 CP 3100 30 Jun 1921
- 106 CAB 24/107 Rep 60 24 Jun 1920
- 107 CAB 24/125 CP 3010 2 Jun 1921
- 108 CAB 24/118 CP 2452 13 Jan 1921
- 109 CAB 24/126 CP 3100 30 Jun 1921
- 110 J T Murphy, *New Horizons* (1941) pp68-71. Yet the rumours persisted. When Murphy attended a Comintern Conference in France, a local newspaper denounced him as a spy. (p172) Much later the Labour Whip, Tom Kennedy, was reported to be propagating the story.
- 111 See J T Murphy, 'Forty Years Hard, For What?', *New Reasoner* (Winter 1958/9) pp119-24. While it seems highly unlikely that Murphy was a spy there must have been a good number about. During 1917/18 the Government was spending up to £1,000 per month for names of ex-servicemen, schoolmasters etc who might provide information about subversives and help to counter them. SM Papers SM GG 194/389 and Keith Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society* (1979) p129
- 112 W F Watson, *Watson's Reply* (1920) (published by the author) p14 For similar allegations and evidence see F W Chandler, *Political Spies and Provocative Agents* (Sheffield 1933)
- 113 Watson, *Watson's Reply* p22
- 114 H of C Debs 5th Series Vol 118 Cols 644/5 17 Jul 1919
- 115 H of C Debs 5th Series Vol 118 Col 1540 24 Jul 1919
- 116 H of C Debs 5th Series Vol 119 Col 1250 12 Aug 1919
- 117 As above
- 118 CAB 24/94 CP 283 11 Dec 1919
- 119 CAB 24/119 CP 2574 10 Feb 1921. It was perhaps inevitable that the Vale of Leven and Renton as a well known centre of communism should attract such attentions. See S Macintyre, *Little Moscows, Communism and Working Class Militancy in InterWar Britain* (1980)

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121	CAB 24/96	CP 461	22 Jan 1920	
122	CAB 24/105	CP 1281	13 May 1920	
123	CAB 24/67	GT 6079	21 Oct 1918	
124	CAB 24/75	GT 6816	10 Feb 1919	
125	CAB 24/129	CP 3436	20 Oct 1921	
126	CAB 24/129	CP 3436	20 Oct 1921	
127	CAB 24/121	CP 2740	17 Mar 1921	
128	CAB 24/106	CP 1328	20 May 1920	
129	CAB 24/94	CP 256	4 Dec 1919	
130	See for example			
	CAB 24/104	CP 1129	and	
	CAB 24/103	CP 1086	14 Apr 1920	
131	CAB 24/83	GT 7671	10 Jul 1919	
132	CAB 24/128	CP 3380	6 Oct 1921	
133	CAB 24/75	GT 6816	10 Feb 1919	
134	CAB 24/88	GT 8192	18 Sep 1919	
135	CAB 24/125	CP 3010	2 Jun 1921	
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137	CAB 24/94	CP 256	4 Dec 1919	
138	CAB 23/11	CC 590 and 594		Jul 1919
139	CAB 24/89	GT 8228	25 Sep 1919	
140	CAB 24/76	GT 6976	10 Mar 1919	
141	CAB 24/126	CP 3154	21 Jul 1921	
142	CAB 24/127	CP 3252	18 Aug 1921	
143	CAB 24/123	CP 2916	5 May 1921	
144	CAB 24/99	CP 791	4 Mar 1920	
145	CAB 24/125	CP 3034	9 Jun 1921	
146	CAB 24/127	CP 3277	1 Sep 1921	

- 147 CAB 24/99 CP 791 4 Mar 1920
- 148 CAB 24/71 GT 6425 2 Dec 1918
- 149 CAB 24/126 CP 3115 7 Jul 1921. But Raymond Postgate suggested a different reason for the apparent lack of concern: "The writer of this book remembers how on receiving . . . instructions marked 'strictly secret' he suggested to the group leader that it was unwise to send most secret material through the post. He answered, 'Perhaps it was unwise. But it is not very serious for, you see it is not so much from the police we wish to keep these things secret as from other members of the Labour Movement'." R Postgate, *How to Make a Revolution* (1934) pp180-181
- 150 CAB 24/1107 CP 1444 10 Jun 1920
- 151 CAB 24/95 CP 319 18 Dec 1919
- 152 CAB 24/93 CP 125 13 Nov 1919
- 153 CAB 24/90 GT 8361 10 Oct 1919
- 154 CAB 24/123 CP 2938 12 May 1921
- 155 CAB 24/123 CP 2952 19 May 1921
- 156 CAB 24/67 GT 6079 21 Oct 1918
- 157 CAB 24/83 GT 7671 16 Jul 1919
- 158 CAB 24/90 GT 8304 8 Oct 1919. The image of disease and infection in the description and analysis of Bolshevism was a widespread and persistent phenomenon. Clemenceau called the Soviet State "a colony of lepers" and refused to allow its leaders to enter France for fear they would contaminate the Parisians. F S Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism* (1982) p30
- 159 CAB 24/96 CP 462 15 Jan 1920
- 160 "It seems that Horne has upset them all. My own impressions are all the other way . . . Basil Thomson has suggested this." Hankey to Jones, *Whitehall Diaries* (17 Jan 1920) op cit p97
- 161 "But of all the varieties of intellectual freakishness that abound there is no more desolating, or more despicable, than that human horror - that monstrous manifestation of mental malformation - the maniacal marxist." Thomson in alliterative mood, quoted with amusement in 'The Worker' 29 Apr 1922
- 162 CAB 24/92 CP 32 30 Oct 1919
- 163 CAB 24/88 GT 8192 18 Sep 1919
- 164 CAB 24/92 CP 32 30 Oct 1919

165	CAB 24/92	CP 32	30 Oct 1919
166	CAB 24/95	CP 343	23 Dec 1919
167	CAB 24/92	CP 217	27 Nov 1919
168	CAB 24/96	CP 462	15 Jan 1920
169	CAB 24/92	CP 217	27 Nov 1919
170	CAB 24/92	CP 32	30 Oct 1919
171	CAB 24/92	CP 168	20 Nov 1919
172	CAB 24/92	CP 217	27 Nov 1919
173	CAB 24/98	CP 620	12 Feb 1920
174	CAB 24/96	CP 462	15 Jan 1920
175	CAB 24/88	GT 8192	18 Sep 1919
176	CAB 24/96	CP 462	15 Jan 1920
177	CAB 24/116	CP 2273	9 Dec 1920
178	CAB 24/127	CP 3277	1 Sep 1921
179	CAB 24/108	CP 1589	8 Jul 1920
180	CAB 24/116	CP 2273	9 Dec 1920
181	CAB 24/127	CP 3261	25 Aug 1921
182	CAB 24/103	CP 1039	8 Apr 1920
183	CAB 24/127	CP 3295	Spec Rep No 21
184	CAB 24/128	CP 3309	15 Sep 1921
185	CAB 24/96	CP 491	22 Jan 1920
186	CAB 24/97	CP 579	10 Mar 1920
187	CAB 24/98	CP 620	12 Feb 1920
188	CAB 24/100	CP 840	10 Mar 1920
189	CAB 24/109	CP 1684	15 Jul 1920
190	CAB 24/110	CP 1793	19 Aug 1920

191 Nicholson was an upper-middle class misfit. Thomson rooted out his story: "He was born in 1884 of well-to-do parents and is well educated, but he appears to be quite lacking in the moral sense. At the age of fifteen he married an actress who divorced

him. When quite a boy, in association with another man, he broke into his mother's house and threatened her with a revolver, so terrorising her that she gave him into custody." Further convictions followed for burglary, theft and common assault. In 1911 he was sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for stealing a brooch. He said that he had served with the Australians at Gallipoli, but this, like his service with the Royal Flying Corps, proved impossible to substantiate.

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|-----|---|---------|---------|-------------|
| 192 | CAB 24/93 | CP 125 | | 13 Nov 1919 |
| 193 | CAB 24/96 | CP 458 | | 15 Jan 1920 |
| 194 | CAB 24/97 | CP 579 | | 5 Feb 1920 |
| 195 | CAB 24/98 | CP 686 | | 19 Feb 1920 |
| 196 | CAB 24/80 | GT 7305 | | 21 May 1919 |
| 197 | CAB 24/84 | GT 7790 | | 24 Jul 1919 |
| 198 | CAB 24/108 | CP 1589 | | 8 Jul 1920 |
| 199 | CAB 24/123 | CP 2916 | | 5 May 1921 |
| 200 | CAB 24/114 | CP 2089 | | 11 Nov 1920 |
| 201 | CAB 24/121 | CP 2765 | | 23 Mar 1921 |
| 202 | CAB 24/71 | GT 6425 | | 2 Dec 1918 |
| 203 | Charles A McCurdy, 'To Avoid Strikes', Contemporary Review Nov 1919
McCurdy confessed he was, "astounded by the profusion of extravagance and luxury which flaunts itself on every hand . . . We can hardly be surprised if the working man is inclined to turn a sympathetic ear to those who assure him he is being robbed all round". | | | |
| 204 | See for an example, Times 8 November 1919 | | | |
| 205 | CAB 24/80 | GT 7367 | Rep 5 | 28 May 1919 |
| 206 | CAB 24/81 | GT 7463 | Rep 7 | 12 Jun 1919 |
| 207 | CAB 24/104 | CP 1129 | Rep 51 | 22 Apr 1920 |
| 208 | CAB 24/84 | GT 7742 | Rep 12 | 17 Jul 1919 |
| 209 | CAB 24/79 | GT 7218 | Rep 2 | 7 May 1919 |
| 210 | CAB 24/101 | CP 902 | Rep 46 | 18 Mar 1920 |
| 211 | CAB 24/103 | CP 1009 | Rep 48 | 30 Mar 1920 |
| 212 | CAB 24/126 | CP 3100 | Rep 112 | 30 Jun 1921 |
| 213 | CAB 24/103 | CP 1039 | | 8 Apr 1920 |

- 214 CAB 24/87 GT 8082 Rep 18 28 Aug 1919
Thomson was by no means alone in his belief that football was a good distraction for the workers. F E Smith wrote "The poorer classes in this country have not got the tastes which superior people or a Royal Commission would choose for them and were cricket and football abolished, it would bring upon the masses nothing but misery, depression, sloth, indiscipline and disorder". Quoted in Tony Mason, Association Football and English Society 1863-1915 (Hassocks 1980) pp226-227
- 215 CAB 24/105 CP 1239 6 May 1920
- 216 CAB 24/101 CP 902 18 Mar 1920
- 217 CAB 24/89 GT 228 25 Sep 1919
- 218 Its editor, George Lansbury, claimed that the 'Herald' enjoyed a circulation of 250,000 in 1919
- 219 CAB 24/122 CP 2811 7 Apr 1921
- 220 CAB 24/84 GT 7790 24 Jul 1919
- 221 CAB 24/114 CP 2089 11 Nov 1920
- 222 CAB 24/81 GT 7463 12 Jun 1919
- 223 CAB 24/116 CP 2222 2 Dec 1920
- 224 CAB 24/80 GT 7305 21 May 1919
- 225 CAB 24/92 CP 70 6 Nov 1919
- 226 CAB 24/76 GT 6976 10 Mar 1919
The Scottish College appeared to prosper. In 1920 Thomson noted there were "few more active propaganda organisations in the kingdom". The only consolation was that it was suffering severe financial difficulties.
CAB 24/112 CP 1997 21 Oct 1920
- 227 CAB 24/92 CP 70 6 Nov 1919
Thomson was able to get an occupational breakdown on Newbold's students.
- 228 CAB 24/94 CP 217 27 Nov 1919
- 229 CAB 24/94 CP 217 27 Nov 1919
- 230 CAB 24/96 CP 491 22 Jan 1920
- 231 CAB 24/110 CP 1793 19 Aug 1920
- 232 CAB 24/77 GT 7091 7 Apr 1919
- 233 CAB 24/96 CP 429 9 Jan 1920

234 CAB 24/84 GT 7790 24 Jul 1919

235 CAB 24/92 CP 32 30 Oct 1919

236 CAB 24/78 GT 7195 30 Apr 1919

237 CAB 24/88 GT 8144 11 Sep 1919

238 CAB 24/76 GT 6976 10 Mar 1919

239 CAB 24/87 GT 8036 21 Aug 1919

240 CAB 24/97 CP 523 29 Jan 1920

241 Times 9 August 1919

242 CAB 23/22 CC 349(20)

243 See below p

244 'Worker' 18 March 1922

245 CAB 24/92 CP 32

246 CAB 24/99 CP 748 26 Feb 1920

247 CAB 24/96 CP 462 15 Jan 1920

248 CAB 24/95 CP 343 23 Dec 1919

249 CAB 24/112 CP 1908 30 Sep 1920

250 CAB 24/82 GT 7534 18 Jun 1919

251 CAB 24/108 CP 1564 1 Jul 1920

252 CAB 24/123 CP 2916 5 May 1920

253 CAB 24/96 CP 491 22 Jan 1920

254 CAB 24/120 CP 2603 17 Feb 1921

255 CAB 24/96 CP 462 15 Jan 1920

256 B H Thomson, The Scene Changes (New York 1937)

257 J Klugman, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol 1 (1968)

258 W Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1920 (1969)

259 CAB 24/127 CP 3261 25 Aug 1921

260 CAB 24/123 CP 2916 5 May 1921

261 CAB 24/120 CP 2698 10 Mar 1921

- 262 Ref to Times 5 January and 6 February 1926
- 263 Bunyan (T Bunyan, *The Political Police in Britain*, 1977) suggests that Thomson's dismissal may have resulted from an internal power struggle between M15 and the Special Branch. This is possible, and indeed a certain amount of inter-organisational tension might almost be assumed, but there is no evidence in subsequent Special Branch reports to suggest any significant change of function (but see below p). Bunyan suggests that Lloyd George was, at least initially a Thomson supporter. There are two interesting pieces of evidence on this matter. Thomson recalled (B H Thomson, *The Scene Changes*, New York 1937) that on one occasion he was called over to No 10 where the Prime Minister was receiving a deputation of Conservative backbenchers who were much agitated by fears of subversion. In announcing Thomson, Lloyd George declared, "Now here is the man who is my authority on what is going on. You have only to keep in touch with him and all will go well". Thomson clearly, quoted this as evidence of the high esteem in which he was held, yet it seems now to bear the unmistakable air of a theatrically arranged bromide. That Thomson was scarcely in the forefront of the Prime Minister's mind is suggested by the fact that in Cabinet on April 4, 1921, when speculating on the mood of the miners, he had to ask who had an intelligence department. The Home Secretary had to remind him of the existence of Thomson's organisation.
- 264 Daily Mail and Manchester Guardian 17 Nov 1921. Press cuttings in HO 45/18728
- 265 G Dilnot, *Scotland Yard, Its History and Organisation 1829-1929* (1929) p264
- 266 Brig Gen Sir Borlase Wyndham Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* (1930)
- 267 Rt Hon Sir C F N Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* (1924) p133
- 268 Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* p110
- 269 Macready, *Annals* p136
- 270 H of C C 7324 1893
- 271 Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* p112. Though Childs' memory may have deceived him; Page Arnot claims that troops did on one occasion fix bayonets in order to disperse a crowd. R Page Arnot, *The Miners, Years of Struggle* (1953) p66
- 272 Joynson Hicks to Prime Minister, 9 September 1929, Baldwin Papers Vol 2. Childs was much more reluctant to prosecute communists than the Home Secretary but he had a much more realistic view of their power and influence.
- 273 Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* p192
- 274 Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* p210
- 275 Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* p223

- 276 Childs, Episodes and Reflections p209
- 277 Childs, Episodes and Reflections p210
- 278 Childs, Episodes and Reflections p216
- 279 CAB 24/133 CP 3750 Rep 143 16 Feb 1922
- 280 CAB 24/140 CP 4302 Rep 180 9 Nov 1922
- 281 CAB 23/9 4 Feb 1919
- 282 See Kinglsey Martin, The General Strike and the British Public (1926)
- 283 Thomson understood this point and warned the Cabinet accordingly.
- 284 CAB 23/9 CC 538
- 286 CAB 23/9 CC 547
- 287 CAB 27 UC 22
- 288 CAB 27/59 UC 5
- 289 CAB 27/59 2 May 1919 20th meeting
- 290 CAB 27/59 6 Aug 1919 27th meeting
- 291 CAB 27/59 26 Jul 1919 26th meeting
- 292 CAB 27/59 UC 7 21 Jul 1919
- 293 CAB 23/11 CC 597 22 Jul 1919
- 294 CAB 27/59 UC 10 22 Jul 1919
- 295 Henderson quoted in CAB 23/12 3 Oct 1919
- 296 CAB 27/77
- 297 Lloyd George's speech of 27 September 1919 as quoted by Arthur J Thatcher, The 1919 Railway Strike (Manchester 1920)
- 298 Daily Mail 27 September 1919
- 299 Times 29 September 1919
- 300 Charles A McCurdy, 'To Avoid Strikes', Contemporary Review (November 1919) p483. Even those in favour of revolution tended to see the Railway Strike in this light: "If the governing classes are able to weather the present storm it will only be for a time, when they will be confronted with another even more furious. The Labour Movement is gathering strength for an attack by some form of mass action. This threatened at the time of the Railway Strike in 1919 . . ." Robert Williams, The New Labour Outlook (1921) pp156-7

- 301 In retrospect the heightened atmosphere of the strike would seem to have been substantially created by the Cabinet. Middlemas comments, "In this emergency the Government seems to have lost sight of the vision of industrial harmony which had inspired its earlier overtures to trade unions and employers". Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society p146
- 302 CAB 23/12 CC 626 26 Sep 1919
- 303 As above
- 304 Thatcher, The 1919 Railway Strike
- 305 CAB 27/77 19 Nov 1919
- 306 CAB 27/77 TC 54 5 Mar 1920
- 307 CAB 27/77 TC 29 12 Nov 1919
- 308 CAB 27/77 TC 4 23 Oct 1919
- 309 CAB 27/84 TC 33
- 310 CAB 27/84 TC 57
- 311 CAB 27/84 TSC(P) 1st cond 25 Feb 1920
- 312 As above
- 313 CAB 27/84 TSC(P) 25 Feb 1920
- 314 CAB 27/83 TCP 2nd cond 16 Aug 1920
- 315 CAB 27/83 TCP 3rd cond 23 Aug 1920
- 316 CAB 27/83 TCP 1st cond 13 Aug 1920
- 317 CAB 27/83
- 318 CAB 27/83
- 319 CAB 27/83
- 320 CAB 27/79 TC(B3) Daily Bulletins on Coal Strike Oct/Nov 1920
- 321 CAB 27/79 TC(B7)
- 322 CAB 27/77 TC 142
- 323 As above
- 324 CAB 27/77 TC 155 and TC 159 'Zero List' was renamed 'Action List'
- 325 CAB 27/83 TC 53
- 326 Four pamphlets were issued. The Prime Minister's speech to the Triple Alliance, 'The New Hundred Thousand' by Ian Hay, 'Save the Mines' (Scotland only) and 'Fourteen Points About Coal'

327	CAB 27/83		1 Apr 1921
328	CAB 27/83		7 Apr 1921
329	CAB 27/83		8 Apr 1921
330	CAB 27/83	29th cond	11 Apr 1921
331	CAB 27/83	31st cond	14 Apr 1921
332	CAB 27/83	32nd cond	14 Apr 1921
333	As above		
334	As above		
335	CAB 27/83	36th cond	29 Apr 1921
336	CAB 27/83		9 May 1921
337	CAB 24/127	CP 3293	
338	CAB 27/83		8 Jun 1921
339	CAB 27/77	TC 186	
340	CAB 27/83	TC 53	
341	Broken down into - Newspaper advertising £19,000, Posting £12,199.10.0, Printing £20,880.19.4d, Mr McCulloch (Scottish Propaganda) £963.10.1d, Reconstruction Society £1,073.5.6d, Mr Evans (Welsh Propaganda) £79.16.0, Establishment Wages £950.0.0		
342	CAB 27/83	TC 53	
343	CAB 24/127	CP 3293	
344	CAB 27/83	45th cond	4 Jul 1921
345	CAB 26/3	HAC min 101	29 Nov 1921
346	CAB 24/128	CP 3308	
347	CAB 24/128	CP 3343	
348	CAB 24/128	CP 3308	
349	CAB 24/131	CP 3516	
350	CAB 24/133	CP 3800	
351	CAB 24/159	CP 160(23)	21 Mar 1923
352	CAB 24/160	CP 260(26)	15 Jun 1923
353	CAB 24/161	CP 314(23)	

- 354 Iain McLean, 'Red Clydeside 1915-1919', in J Stevenson and R Quinault (Eds) Popular Protest and Public Order (1974)
- 355 Charles Maier, Recasting Bourgeois Europe (Princeton 1975) pp41-43
- 356 G Routh, Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-60 (1965) p107 as quoted in John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler, Class in a Capitalist Society (1977) p14

Occupational Group (men only)	Indices of earnings-occupational group average expressed as a percentage of average for all men in the same period	
	1913/14	1922/24
Higher professionals	357	326
Managers and administrators	217	269
Lower professionals	169	179
Foremen	123	150
Clerks	108	102
Skilled manual	108	101
Semi-skilled manual	75	70
Unskilled manual	69	72
All non-manual workers	142	158
All manual workers	88	83
All men	100	100

- 357 Westergaard and Resler, p112
- 358 Gilbert argues that the failure to deal with unemployment, "possibly may be viewed as the most serious single mistake in all the planning for reconstruction". Gilbert, British Social Policy p56
- 359 Gilbert, British Social Policy pp75-86
- 360 P Abrams, 'The Failure of Social Reform 1918-1920' Past and Present (1963)
- 361 Richard M Titmus, "War and Social Policy", Essays on 'the Welfare State' (1976) p77
- 362 Robert Williams, The New Labour Outlook (1921), Gerald Gould, The Coming Revolution, W Williams, Full Up and Fed Up, The Workers' Mind in Crowded Britain (1921), A Gleason, What the Workers Want, among many others. See also numerous articles in National Review and Contemporary Review during these years.
- 363 Theodore Taylor, 'The Labour Crisis' Contemporary Review May 1922 pp591-595
- 364 A L Bowley and M Hogg, Has Poverty Diminished? (1922). Also W Williams, Full Up and Fed Up, and J G Sinclair, Easingden (1926), the last of which is an account of social conditions in a mining village.

- 365 Hubert Secretan, London Below Bridges (1931) Published in the thirties reveals housing conditions little improved since the 1880s "Twelve little square boxes, all as like as peas, on one side, and on the other, at twelve feet distance, a grimy factory wall which does its best to keep out as much air and light as possible. This strange backwater of the great city is home to some sixty people . . . there is neither running water nor sink in the house itself." (pp9/10)
- "The facts are that thousands of the older houses in riverside London are swarming with these filthy pests (bugs) . . . nothing but complete rebuilding will ever eradicate them." (p11)
- Margaret Pollock, These Things Considered (1924) pp34/35 particularly and Margaret Pollock (Ed) Working Days, being the personal records of sixteen working men and women (1926)
- G D H Cole, Out of Work (1922)
- 366 See for example Alastair Reid, 'Politics and economics in the formation of the British Working Class: A response to H F Moorhouse', Social History Vol 3 No 3 (October 1978) pp347-361, H F Moorhouse, 'The Political Incorporation of the British Working Class: An Interpretation', Sociology 7 No 3 (1973) pp341-359, N Blewett, 'The Franchise Factor in the UK 1885-1918' Past and Present Vol 32 (1965)
- 367 Gianfranco Poggi, The Development of the Modern State (1978)
- 368 See for example the Report of the Inquiry into the Featherstone incident H of C C7234 1893. See also Christopher Wheeler 'Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes', Industrial Law Journal Vol 8 (1979) pp223-234
- 369 Home Office Circular quoted in W F Watson, Watson's Reply (1920)
- 370 HO 45/346578 for the 1918 Railway Strike
- 371 See for example HO 45/11032 for the degree of concern and reaction to the case in which the Liverpool Recorder expressed strong criticism of the way in which the police had handled a demonstration of the unemployed.
- 372 R Desmarais, The Supply and Transport Committee, p83
- 373 HO 45/11275
- 374 Morning Post 22 Nov 1922
- 375 Times 22 Nov 1922
- 376 Pall Mall Gazette 21 Nov 1922
- 377 Daily Mail 22 Nov 1922 and see also Wal Hannington, The Insurgents in London (1922)

CHAPTER THREE

BRITISH SOCIALISM AND THE STATE

The task of explaining the reactions of British socialists to the state might initially appear to be a simple one. Different schools of thought have left plenty of material apparently addressed directly to this central question. Moreover the differences of opinion on the issue seem attractively precise: at one end the Communists and syndicalists viewing the state as no more than the expression of the antagonisms of class society and, as such, a barrier to be removed; at the other, various species of revisionist, regarding the state as being susceptible to rational reform by political action.

However the actual business of comparison is subject to two types of difficulty. The first concerns the extent to which it is possible to define the concept of the state in isolation from other aspects of political theory. Where conventional political thought had developed clear ideas about the role and functions of the state and had placed it at the centre of reality and aspiration, socialists have always seen the state, in some degree, in a dynamic perspective and in relation to other social forces, and analysed it in terms of its propensity to facilitate or retard social change. For this reason socialists' definitions of the state have been more concerned with the question of whose interest the state serves or how it might be changed, rather than with delineating functions or describing institutions. This means, inevitably, that direct comparisons between different socialist groups can prove meaningless unless one goes beyond simple definition to an illustration of the role which the state plays within the broader political theory.

The second type of difficulty concerns the relationship between theories of the state and political practice. This is not simply a matter of identifying an obvious gap between thought and action but of illustrating the complex relationship between political thinking and political activity. This inevitably involves going beyond the explanation of the relationship offered by the socialists themselves. Socialists can present their socialism as rational theory leading to a plan of action capable of direct realisation. As a model for explaining socialist activity in historical terms this is inadequate. Here, it is suggested that theories of the state should be set in the context of expectations, modifications and rationalisations generated by political activity. Specifically it is suggested that the tendency of many socialists to universalise their theories of the state may conceal, not only real differences between actual states, but also differences in understanding generated by national experience. While one must take account of theory as expressed it is also important to attempt to deduce theory from political behaviour. An examination of political activity can reveal an understanding of the state, the state as something encountered, which is at variance with definitions which are officially subscribed to. It is thus necessary to remain aware of the potential distortions involved in placing too much reliance on official theory. At the simplest level it may well be that men do not know, or misunderstand, the doctrines to which they are nominally committed. Also there may be considerable differences of interpretation even within an apparently cohesive organisation. Yet, most importantly, there is that sense in which theory and definitions become inseparably intertwined with political activity itself. Theory may serve as a guide to political action but it can also provide a

context within which conflicts over position and interest are pursued. It might even be argued that theoretical issues only become fully articulated when they become part of active political conflict.

Thus, in order to understand the approach of socialist thinkers to the state it is necessary to examine their statements on this issue in the context of their general political theory and also to set such views within the specific historical circumstances in which they were developed. This chapter, therefore, after an examination of the main contemporary debates on the nature of the state in capitalist society, concludes by examining the activities of two parties which sought to promote political change along socialist lines. Firstly, an examination of the attempt by the Communist Party to apply Lenin's theory, and then an assessment of the First Labour Government in respect of its implications for a socialist theory of political action.

Theories of State and Revolution

While 1917 represents a clear and unequivocal break in the continuity of socialist theory and practice and though it is clear that divisions among socialist were, after that date, more explicit and more bitterly expressed it would be wrong to assume that the state socialist traditions went entirely unchallenged before 1917. It is always a difficult matter to assess the impact of theoretical works on activists. While one can find out which works were in circulation it is not possible to know exactly what was understood by what was being read. Moreover, as Parris has pointed out in a different context, a writer's influence may extend well beyond those who have actually read his books.¹ However on the basis of the evidence that is available it would appear that Karl Kautsky and Daniel de Leon were the two most influential interpreters of marxism in the revolutionary socialist parties. While Kautsky, as will be discussed later, came to be characterised by Lenin as a reviser of marxism, he saw himself, and was widely regarded before 1917, as an orthodox interpreter of Marx and Engels. Kautsky did not believe that orthodoxy demanded obeisance to the letter of the masters' texts but he clearly felt that his theoretical accommodations to political and economic developments did not involve an abandonment of the revolutionary tradition. Kautsky is particularly interesting in respect of his analysis of the development of the capitalist state and the implications for socialist transition. He placed great emphasis on the development of the state since Marx's time. The modern centralised state, he argued, had developed to a point where it had enormous economic and military power. In political terms too there had been changes, most notably the introduction of mass elections. Kautsky argued that such developments had great significance for those

who wished to create a socialist society but he believed that the state socialists had drawn the wrong conclusions. Specifically they were mistaken in their belief that such changes meant that socialism could now emerge gradually and piecemeal. Whatever had happened to the form of the state, Kautsky felt its purposes must inevitably remain the same: "Like all previous systems of government the modern state is pre-eminently an instrument intended to guard the interest of the ruling class."² Socialist change was thus necessarily dependent on revolution: "Those who repudiate political revolution as the principal means of social transformation . . . are social reformers."³ Revolution was necessary but there was no need to be dogmatic about its form for it might "assume many forms according to the circumstances under which it takes place. It is by no means necessary that it be accompanied with violence and bloodshed".⁴ For authenticity revolution required only "the conquest of governmental power by a hitherto oppressed class".¹⁵ Once this step was taken the rest would follow: "Such a class is compelled to complete its political emancipation by its social emancipation."⁶ Even the frame of surrounding events was entirely orthodox: the seizure of power would come about as a result of class polarisation caused by crises of overproduction and mass unemployment. The characteristics remained the same "never yet was any revolution accomplished without vigorous action on the part of those who suffered most".⁷ Where Kautsky parted company with a number of revolutionaries, though not necessarily with the spirit and letter of Marx and Engels, was in his ability to express a sincere enthusiasm for trade union and other reforming activities within the context of existing capitalist societies. "It would", argued Kautsky, "be a profound error to imagine that such reforms could delay the social revolution".⁸ The result of activities designed to relieve immediate

miseries would be not only the acquisition of experience of the workings of national and municipal government but also the "attainment of that intellectual maturity which the proletariat needs if it is to supplant the bourgeoisie as the ruling class".⁹ Political democracy far from being a distraction or simply a means of making propaganda is seen as "indispensable as a means of ripening the proletariat for the social revolution".¹⁰ Leszek Kalakowski argues that while Kautsky's attempt to reconcile the objectives of reform and revolution was appealing to many socialists and was vital to the unity of the German Social Democrats it was more successful in terms of a theoretical formula than it was in "social and psychological reality".¹¹ Whether this was inevitably the case may be a matter for argument but it is clear that the particular circumstances of the war years created a reality in which Kautsky's formula failed to achieve its political objectives. Yet, as it will be argued later the eclipse of Kautsky's ideas could still be regarded as unjustified and, indeed, unfortunate. Whatever their weaknesses Kautsky's formulations on state and socialist transition were based on an appreciation of the actual political situation which confronted socialists in Western Europe.

The assessment of de Leon's contribution to the debate on the state is a more difficult matter. In the British context de Leon can only be discerned as if through two distorting filters. De Leon was misunderstood by some of his followers and misrepresented by his opponents. De Leon's British disciples tended to apply his ideas in a piecemeal way. Some displayed a tendency to over personalise his political ideas. Where de Leon criticised labour leaders and socialist intellectuals on the basis of the role they fulfilled his British followers indulged

themselves in denunciations of those who filled the roles. De Leon had little or no opportunity to explain himself to his followers let alone any machinery to impose an orthodoxy. The often misplaced enthusiasms of his followers could only exacerbate an opposition which, given the nature of the basic political message, was already inevitable.

On the strength of what filters through about de Leon and his followers it is difficult to see how they could have exercised any appeal at all. Their most pressing causes would appear to have been opposition to existing trade unions and, at the least, a deep ambivalence towards all existing forms of political action. The prevailing adjectives are uncompromising, fanatical, disciplinarian and sectarian. To Holton, de Leon was an important publicist, though unoriginal and sectarian.¹²

To Kendal the Socialist Labour Party was a schismatic sect imbued with a narrow-minded calvinism which bequeathed to the Communist Party many of its more unattractive traits.¹³ To Pierson de Leon's British followers failed to appreciate the dialectical element in Marx and displayed an over idealistic insistence on theory and understanding.¹⁴

Cole and Postgate conceded that the SLP wielded an influence out of all proportion to its numbers but on the strength of what else they say about the Party it remains impossible to see why this should have been so.¹⁵

It is possible to cast some initial doubt on the reliability of this account of the SLP. A memoir suggests that Party life may not have been as fanatical and cheerless as most historians have suggested.¹⁶ While such judgments have a strong subjective element, it does appear that the Party newspaper, the 'Socialist' was too eclectic and lively, indeed too interesting, to suggest that it was the product of men

whose attachment to politics was confined to sectarian bigotry. Even comparison with other socialist groups of a similar size would tend to suggest that the SLP could have possessed no monopoly on narrow mindedness. The history of Hyndman's reign over the SDF and his imposition of a mechanical marxism might even reflect some comparative credit on the SLP.

Historical judgments tend to be so negative that it is scarcely surprising that the key to understanding the positive side of de Leon's appeal should come rather in a personal memoir. Frank Budgen explained the core of the matter: "What gave all believers faith in de Leon's interpretation of marxist theory was that it showed a way ahead unobstructed by a dictatorship of the proletariat", "De Leon's interpretation made of democracy the ally of revolution", "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself".¹⁷ The attacks on craft unions and the 'labour lieutenants of capitalism' appear in a more positive light when industrial unions are identified as the necessary means of socialist transformation. To Budgen, "it seemed eminently reasonable to advocate . . . that the defensive organisation of labour should fit it also for its supposed creative social role".¹⁸ There was no need for a political dictatorship as the unions would come to express "the needs, the hopes, the aspirations and the will of the working class".¹⁹ The socialist intellectual as guardian, guide and repository of trust of the working class during the revolutionary process was declared obsolete. Even the intellectual's role as propagandist and persuader was curtailed for to de Leon the work of conversion was not a matter of education or propaganda but would be accomplished by the productive process itself. It was capitalism that created the converts, "in the mire and mill it teaches one lesson everlastingly,

without ceasing, and it prepares their minds for our gospel to which they hearken year by year more willingly and in greater numbers".²⁰ Socialists might facilitate the process but they could not supplant it.

Suggestions that de Leon and his followers were especially equivocal about political action are difficult to understand. Naturally enough, as a marxist, de Leon did deny politics an autonomous role in human affairs but there is no evidence to suggest that he was in favour of ignoring the political process. On a number of occasions he specifically advocated using all such political opportunities as the modern state afforded. Theoretically he believed that political action was an essential element in socialist activity: "Without political organisation, the Labour movement cannot triumph; without economic organisation the day of its political triumph would be the day of its defeat."²¹ A clause in the constitution of the American SLP affirmed the necessity of practical political action and when syndicalist elements sought to delete it de Leon campaigned for its retention. While there were those in the British SLP who felt the attractions of syndicalism and while there were others who underestimated the importance that de Leon attached to politics most would appear to have understood the point. Pierson quotes the advice of the SLP to the electorate not to vote in the 1906 election as evidence of the anti political drift, yet it is one thing to advise against voting in a particular election but quite another to dismiss the significance of elections in general. Budgen's recollection of Party arguments suggests that this is the distinction which may have been drawn: "What about universal suffrage, free speech, right of association? Those things are civilisation not capitalism -" "Who's denying it? Voting for a capitalist gang at Westminster is where we draw the line."²²

Kendal argues that there are strong similarities between the British SLP and the Communist Party of Great Britain, into which a majority of its members eventually transferred. He cites the SLP's rigid insistence on discipline, its possession of a glorious messianic vision of the future and contrasting penchant for squalid internal heresy hunting and denunciation, and its reliance for theoretical inspiration and guidance on the works of a foreigner as characteristics which the two parties had in common. Moreover Kendal also argues that all Leon's ideas were in certain key respects similar to those of Lenin.²³

While the first points contain an element of truth it is necessary to advance a number of qualifications. Of the socialist groups of the time the SLP had no corner in bitter factional infighting and on this criterion alone it might be equally justifiable to trace the ancestry of the CPGB in the SDF/BSP line. It is also relevant that Leninist parties which had no antecedents in de Leonist parties exhibited these traits to no less a degree. The point about foreign influences is interesting but it too may be slightly misleading in that the influence of de Leon over the SLP is not directly comparable to that of Lenin over the CPGB. De Leon's influence was almost exclusively intellectual while that of Lenin was reinforced by the highly effective authority structure of the Communist International. Yet the most serious difficulty with the comparison of the SLP and the CPGB concerns Kendal's suggestion that there are strong theoretical similarities between de Leon's views and the political activities of the Bolsheviks. As James Young has pointed out this argument did in effect become a political question: "The heritage of Western marxism was an obstacle preventing the immediate acceptance of Leninist ideas . . ." ²⁴ The political

views of de Leon, clearly an important element in that tradition, thus became a target for denigration or misrepresentation. In reality there is an unbridgable gulf between de Leon and Lenin. In terms of his views of the nature of the working class in capitalist society, his opposition to the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, his attitude to the role of socialist intellectuals and perhaps above all, in his insistence that a socialist revolution could only be created by socialist workers de Leon is clearly removed from the theoretical world of Lenin and the practice of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The SLP was clearly overwhelmed by the events of 1917. Some of those who left attempted to make theoretical accommodations. Of these some demonstrated a degree of confusion about their new faith, others that they had no deep understanding of the one they had recently abandoned. Yet there is evidence that those who remained with the SLP continued to view developments from a standpoint which was distinctively de Leonist. In criticising the CPGB in 1921 for predicting, in line with Comintern orthodoxy, that civil war was about to break out in Britain, a writer in the 'Socialist' attacked the idea that there was "a dictatorship of the capitalist class" and went on to attack the classical Leninist formula: "No dictatorship of the proletariat can solve the social problem because the dictatorship of the proletariat is an impossibility in these days . . . The capitalist class rules; the capitalist system exists by the consent of the vast majority . . . the proletariat can replace the capitalist system and abolish capitalist class rule as soon as it is so minded and organises for itself the requisite social power that is as soon as it organises itself as the producing class."²⁶

It would be too much to argue that Kautsky and de Leon were major influences on British socialist thought in the pre 1917 period. The main state socialist tradition went on its way largely untroubled by the problems to which they addressed themselves. They were not ever the major theoretical sources for those who found themselves in opposition to the mainstream tradition. The fact that, as foreigners, their theories were influenced by different national experiences also limited their influence. The British Labour movement never exhibited that critical tension between reform and revolution which was the energising source of Kautsky's writings and de Leon's advocacy of dual unionism was clearly more directly appropriate to the USA than to Britain where existing unions were far less developed. While it would be wrong to push this argument too far: for example the followers of de Leon were able to achieve remarkable feats of industrial organisation for their numbers; it was clearly the case that these ideas would have required a creative reworking and application if they were to achieve anything substantial in the British context. Both traditions were to be denied such development as they were effectively eclipsed by the events of 1917. Yet it is certainly open to question whether they perished for their own merits, or lack of them. Both in their different ways, attempted to come to terms with the problems of the capitalist state and socialist transition as experienced in the West. The new and overwhelming popularity of Leninism with revolutionary socialists might in retrospect be argued to have more to do with the magnetism of success than its actual political relevance.

Lenin's view of the state in capitalist society was very straightforward and up to a point, an uncontentious interpretation of marxist ideas. In the "State and Revolution" he sets out to demonstrate the

complete inadequacy of the revisionist view of the state. The state could not in any way, he argued, be regarded as an institution for the reconciliation of classes for it was itself the product of class antagonisms. If the state is "the product of the irreconcilable character of class antagonisms", if it is a force standing above civil society and "separating itself gradually from it",²⁷ it inevitably follows that it is only through the destruction of the state machine that society can be set on course for a socialist society. When the capitalist state has been destroyed a new state will be required, but this state, while being inevitably coercive, will be a dictatorship of the majority which will go about the business of social reconstruction and will, in particular, abolish private property. During this period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat there would be no army but the people themselves would take on the role of an armed militia. All officials of the new state would be elected and subject to dismissal by the working class. This state, when it had performed its historical function, would wither away. "State and Revolution" is remarkable, as has been pointed out, in that it contains no mention of the role of the Party in all of this. Lenin's ideas on the role and organisation of the revolutionary party are usually considered to represent his most significant contribution to marxist theory. In a later lecture Lenin appeared to assume that there was no difficulty in the Party assuming the role which he had assigned to the working class in "State and Revolution".²⁸ This inevitably raises the question of the connection between Lenin's theory and his practice of revolution. Clearly the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in practice contained less than a shadow of the democratic elements prescribed in theory. While the importance of the particular circumstances of the Bolshevik Revolution

must not be overlooked it must appear, not only in the light of Lenin's actions but in his defence of them, that the democratic elements within the Dictatorship period were not a critical element in the overall theory of revolution. What remains as clear and indivisible is the dismissal of any notion that the institutions of capitalist society could be adapted to socialist purposes. These institutions reflected only the political antagonisms of capitalism which arose exclusively from property relationships. The central terms of revolution were the destruction of the bourgeois state and the abolition of private property. In effect these acts are so overwhelmingly necessary that the question of how they are accomplished is a secondary question. If, in practice, the form of the Dictatorship was not of primary importance, arguments about the political structure of post revolutionary society were, to Lenin, a matter of indifference. As the political antagonisms of capitalist society had all arisen out of property relationship the abolition of private property was both a necessary and a sufficient act of revolution. Political structures had only existed for the management of political antagonisms and hence would be unnecessary in a socialist society. The only political opposition which could arise would be based on the restoration of private property and it was clearly out of the question to provide a structure for its expression. Miliband's criticism of Lenin for failing to allow for some political structure for post capitalist society, no matter how sensible it may appear to many modern observers particularly, perhaps, in the light of Soviet experience, is in Lenin's own terms, meaningless.²⁹ Civil society, to Lenin, was to be liberated by the abolition of private property. When it had been it could only require administrative machinery for there would be no antagonistic conflicts to be suppressed.

Lenin's British followers had less trouble with his interpretation of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat than they did with his more immediate injunctions as to party structures and activities. Lenin was soon aware that his version of "what is to be done" went against the grain of the revolutionary traditions in Britain. J T Murphy later recalled that he had to go to considerable lengths to alter the perceptions of British communists: "We had got to learn that the Communist Party was the General Staff of a class marching to civil war, that it had to be disciplined, a party organised on military lines, ready for every emergency."³⁰ William Gallacher and Sylvia Pankhurst had similarly to be coached out of their 'infantile disorders'.³¹ Yet even when the British communists had been brought to appreciate the need for a new type of party they still had to be taught that its purpose, as they tended to assume, was not to progress immediately or directly to revolution. Many British socialists misunderstood Lenin on this point. H J Stenning, for example, gave voice to the widely held assumption that Bolshevism was a "recrudescence of Blanquism".³² Whatever the nature of Bolshevik practice Lenin made his theoretical objections to Blanquism clear enough: "Without an alteration in the views of the majority of the working class, revolution is impossible . . ."³³ A well organised conspiracy could never, on its own, destroy a capitalist state: "To be successful revolution must rely not upon conspiracy, and not upon a party, but upon an advanced class."³⁴ Insurrection, then, would only prove successful at the appropriate historical juncture, that "crucial moment in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height . . ."³⁵ The business of revolutionaries was to prepare for this day, to be ready to exploit the situation when it arose. To

this end they should enter working class organisations in order to gain influence over those who were to be the instruments of successful revolution. Lenin's criticisms of the previous activities of the revolutionary Left in Britain highlighted its sectarianism and its tendency to base activity and propaganda on theoretical issues. The conversion of the masses required revolutionaries to involve themselves in day to day struggles. Any change in outlook would come through "the political experience of the masses and never by propaganda alone".³⁶ What reconciled this with the creation of military style parties was Lenin's assumption that the circumstances suitable for revolution would not be long delayed.

Given his immense political success and his practical genius it was inevitable that Lenin's ideas should exert a major influence over the socialists of his generation. Beyond this his ideas had the merit of a valid internal logic and he was usually more consistent and thorough than his socialist opponents. Yet for all this there must remain some doubt about the relevance of his thought for the socialist movements of Western Europe at this time. Even as he saw it himself much of what he predicted depended upon the development of a revolutionary situation in Europe in the foreseeable future. Yet after the immediate post war months most of the would-be revolutionaries of the West faced, not the equivalents of the tottering threadbare state of Tsarist Russia, but formidable, broadly based, modern industrial states, capable of manoeuvre and adaptation. Lenin's followers might organise themselves efficiently, they might enter parliaments, permeate other working class parties and trade unions, yet they were offered no hope of undermining the state, or any other meaningful progress until the existing society itself began to crumble.

At this point it is useful to reintroduce Kautsky into the debate as he became after 1917 the most formidable marxist opponent of Lenin in the European Labour movement. If Lenin's theory of state and revolution owed little to the traditions of the Western European Socialist movement, Kautsky's clearly reflected them. His concern with political democracy itself might be argued to owe more to the experience of the SPD than to the logical development of his revolutionary socialism, but while there is some justice in Lenin's identification of inconsistencies in his thought, it does not undermine all that Kautsky has to offer on this subject.³⁷ He is interesting because he is attempting to explain, or discover, a position which is explicitly socialist while, at the same time resistant to the fashion for Bolshevism. In effect, Kautsky is attempting to retain some element of the values and experiences of the Western European labour movement at a time when many socialist intellectuals seemed determined to abandon all previous ideas and adopt the Russian model. While this in itself might render Kautsky's work intellectually interesting, there is also much which is analytically important. If for nothing else, Kautsky deserves recognition for his early prediction of the dangers of dictatorship in Russia and the possible consequences, and for his understanding of the political beliefs which actually influenced the working class movements of Europe. The works may lack theoretical perfection and might even be argued to have failed in the central objective of outlining a probable road to socialism, but along the way they offer much in the way of political understanding.³⁸

Central then to Kautsky's later works is this experience of the working class movements of the Western, politically developed, part of Europe. The influence is, on the one hand, implicit, in that Kautsky's concerns

and priorities are clearly born of this common experience, and also explicit, in that he believes real political progress to be dependent on taking into account certain features of this development.³⁹

Kautsky then, was not primarily concerned with criticising what had happened in Russia, but in arguing that it was not applicable in the West. While the methods of the Bolsheviks may have been almost inevitable in the conditions there, they were undesirable and impracticable in countries which had enjoyed some measure of political democracy. A single statement of this nature removed Kautsky from the Communists twice over, for in Lenin's terms such a position was not only tactically incorrect but "utopian", in that it represented a desire to make choices which were not actually available in the real world. This utopianism, as contrasted with Leninist determinism, was apparently deeply rooted in Western socialists, and it was this aspect of their thought that even those who committed themselves to the Bolshevik methods found most difficult to discard.

Kautsky argued that there were grave practical dangers in telling the workers that political democracy was a "useless ornament". Its achievement represented a major advance and the workers should be persuaded to defend it "tooth and nail". The value of political democracy to Kautsky, lay in the dependency of the democratic state on public opinion. He did not dispute that the ambitions of the Ruling Class remained the same under political democracy. The underlying class position was the same. What did change was the means at the disposal of the two sides in the class struggle. It would inevitably require political effort and political will: "But if the proletariat in a democratic state grows until it is numerous and strong enough to conquer political power by making

use of the liberties which exist, then it would be a task of great difficulty for the capitalist dictatorship to manipulate the force necessary for the suppression of democracy."⁴⁰ The attempt to use force would open up divisions in the ruling class of a democratic country. Where democratic rights had been long established and had become deeply ingrained in the culture of a country, and hence its labour movement, the forms of transition to a socialist society would be bound to be different to those in a country where a repressive autocracy had been in power.⁴¹

Kautsky conceded that the idea that a minority could hasten a revolution was attractive and superficially plausible, yet he argued that unless some element of democracy was very quickly re-established after the seizure of power the situation would decline into simple despotism.⁴² He reiterated his often expressed view that Marx had meant the dictatorship of the proletariat to refer to the idea that the ends of the new society should not be questioned rather than to the form of rule that should be adopted. The Russian Bolsheviks had adapted Marx to suit their own political environment. The necessity for conspiratorial politics under the Tsarist autocracy had fostered autocratic habits in the leaders of the socialist movement, and the absence of a democratic tradition had meant that there were few within the movement who had the necessary skills or the desire to challenge the leaders.

The differences between Kautsky's ideas and those of the Bolsheviks were made very clear in Kautsky's list of conditions for the successful achievement of socialism.⁴³ First he argued that as every conscious action presupposes a will, the will to achieve socialism must be the

first condition of its accomplishment. Secondly, socialism could only gain its necessary support where there was large scale industry, as, when the predominant mode of production is small scale, workers only aspire to their own small property. The third factor concerns the strength to achieve socialism: those who want it must be stronger than those who wish to resist them. The fourth factor is the capacity of the proletariat. It must be able not only to seize power but to hold it and to make use of it. The most important factor to Kautsky remained this question of the maturity of the proletariat.

Kautsky's outline provides a very useful example of the methods of thought which effectively separated many Western socialists from the Bolsheviks. The move to socialism was not, in the end, regarded as an acceptance of necessity nor even as some desperate last throw. The socialists of the West were encouraged by their circumstances to believe that they might exercise some degree of control over the historical process and to see the possibilities as a range of choices.

This outlook might be seen as stemming from an experience of a particular sort of state. To Kautsky the state was, "the greatest power within modern society . . . that at times acquires an ascendancy over the classes which are socially and economically dominant".⁴⁴ In this situation all classes make attempts to come to terms with and to use the power of the state. Those concessions which the labour movement had drawn from the state, freedom of the press and the right of parliamentary consultation for example, were real and important and should be defended as the basis for future claims. Kautsky also argued that under these conditions it was a mistake to regard the ruling class as

if it were a monolithic force, agreed on all matters. In this group, he argued, there would be those who wanted to use coercive power against the working class yet there would be other sections who, when faced with the new power of the workers would want only "to keep it in good humour by concessions".⁴⁵

Kautsky's works in general did not attract the same serious consideration after 1917 as they had before. Opponents were often content to dismiss them very lightly. Postgate for instance, was content to demonstrate that Kautsky was not a "marxist".⁴⁶ This and other criticisms of a similar type, failed to come to terms with the qualities which Kautsky's work did possess. While it might be judged to have failed in its grander aims it did offer a number of ideas which bore far more relevance to the immediate political struggles of Western Europe than the more consistent and purer schemes of his opponents. He recognised for instance, that the extension of the political franchise changed the structure of potential political action and that this was bound to have major implications for the conduct of labour politics. Moreover he recognised that the conflict between the state and the working class was unlikely to express itself in stark physical conflict. The modern state set on its broad legitimate base had a range of tactical devices at its disposal before it needed to resort to force.

Again it must be stressed that it is difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy the influence which the works of Lenin and Kautsky had on the ideas of socialists in Britain. Lenin is a special case and his influence must be dealt with at greater length in the context of the development of the Communist Party, though it has been suggested that even though this Party was, to a large extent, his own creation,

even his most faithful followers in Britain failed to glean the full meaning he intended. In dealing with the influence of Kautsky after 1917 we are on even more difficult ground. Even where it can be shown that British socialists were influenced by ideas similar to those of Kautsky's it is impossible to say whether this may be attributed to any particular thinker or whether they merely reflect a similarity of outlook between British and German socialists consequent upon certain aspects of common experience. The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' was published by the ILP press in translation in 1920 and its translator propagated Kautsky's ideas in newspapers and journals. Some of this was probably quite widely absorbed for if one follows debates in the ILP, at this time the major socialist body in Britain, during the next few years the ideas of Kautsky, along with those of Lenin, do form major points of reference.

It has frequently been argued that British socialists, in contrast to their continental counterparts, have remained relatively indifferent to questions of political theory. In respect of this period and on this issue this can be no more than partly true. While it is possible to identify a reluctance to ascend to abstraction, the issues which generated conflict also generated a great deal of theoretical debate. The arguments about state and society in Britain cluster around two main axes: the first, the debate between liberals and state socialists on the question of how increasing state activity might infringe upon or promote the liberties of the citizen, and the second, between the state and socialists and revolutionary socialists, as to whether political activities within the framework of the existing state offered any possibility of direct progression towards a socialist society.

While we shall here be more concerned with the second debate it is important not to lose sight of the first for it substantially conditioned much of what took place later. The debate between liberals and state socialists was so central to the tradition of politics in Britain that other socialists with a different point of view always appeared as outsiders attempting to break in. Bruce Glasier's objection to the would-be revolutionaries; "It was not the State that compelled children to act as chimney sweepers, or to go down the mines or into the factories for sixteen hours a day. It was the State (capitalist though it was) that abolished these customs", so closely mirrored the mainstream tradition of the British left that it could appear as little more than plain common sense. Relatively sophisticated replies to such claims and their related assumptions could be, and were made; William Paul for instance had argued that the Factory Acts were the result of conflict between landlords and industrialists and that, "the granting of reforms like the Education Acts, made the workers more efficient producers",⁴⁸ but this was swimming against a strong tide of opinion which had come to associate the idea of the state with the defence of the weak against the more obvious miseries of liberal society. While alternative views were vigorously canvassed it could reasonably be argued that it was only after 1917 that the native tradition of state socialism was put to any real test. As late as 1913 Philip Snowden could doubt the reality of a substantial division within the ranks: "The distinction between the Revolutionary and Evolutionary socialist is more in name than reality. The title of Revolutionary Socialist is assumed by many young men because it seems to denote a very robust and energetic type of the article . . ."⁴⁹ This was going too far but it did contain an element of truth. The idea of revolutionary

transformation had been kept alive in the small parties and syndicalism had briefly broken up the surface of respectability⁵⁰ but accounts of socialist activity in the years before the First World War can betray a sense of innocent ecumenism. Some socialists appear to have been able to handle their arguments and divisions in a spirit of friendly rivalry born of an assumption about some commonality of purpose.⁵¹ There were those who consciously set themselves outside the mainstream but an examination of the ideas of some of the rebels reveals disagreements which were a good deal less fundamental than they were thought to be at the time. If, for example, one examines the opinions of Victor Grayson, popularly regarded as the socialist 'wild man' of his day, Snowden's view might be thought to have some foundation. It is in fact quite remarkable how much Grayson relied on the tradition of democratic radicalism for his method of social transformation.⁵² His differences with other state socialists would appear to have been over the speed of the progress that was possible and desirable and the degree of moral outrage which it was useful to exhibit, rather than to any systematic disagreement about avenues of political action. For example, while Grayson drew attention to the appalling poverty which existed in the midst of national wealth, he saw such poverty as being "the result of improper government". Grayson clearly regarded himself as an uncompromising socialist and set his measures in the context of a programme of social transformation. He conceded that such a programme could not be achieved overnight but believed that it was necessary to tell the poor that "tinkering with capitalism will have very little effect on their poverty".⁵³ Yet, in the end Grayson's socialism was, "only a matter of insisting that wealth shall be properly distributed by the organised action of the State expressing its wishes by laws and

regulations".⁵⁴ Grayson argued against the Labour Party as it existed and advocated the formation of a new, specifically socialist organisation, yet the strategy of this party would still be parliamentary. It would be more uncompromising, its members would make parliamentary demonstrations on behalf of the poor and, if necessary, risk being debarred from the floor of the House of Commons, but the ultimate aim of the party would still be to secure a majority at a general election and institute a government of "scientists and administrators (and) . . . the most careful students of sociology".⁵⁵

Because the central beliefs of the state socialists had not been subjected to sustained criticism within the socialist movement the spokesmen of the tradition were mainly concerned to argue a case against liberal critics and those within the labour movement who were not socialists. They did on occasion take time to explain their differences with continental socialists, but such explanations tended to be superficial and not a little patronising: the continental socialists, they argued, had had to develop their ideas in a hostile situation where practical advances were not possible. Hence, in contrast to Britain, where reforms and concessions could be obtained, the continentals had developed the habit of impractical speculation. As Macdonald argued, "The eyes of a party in an irresponsible legislature like the Reichstag are fixed upon the horizon, those of parties in a responsible legislature like our own House of Commons are fixed at their feet".⁵⁶

On the central question of the nature of the state and its relationship to socialist transformation there was broad agreement. Works in the tradition continually return to the same themes. All writers emphasise the fact that socialism, far from representing an upheaval in society,

was actually a natural development rooted in existing traditions. Glasier used Mill's definition of socialism as his own. The continuity in ideas was part of the evolutionary development of society itself. To Snowden, "the attainment of the Socialist Commonwealth" would come about by no more than, "the further development of forces which are now operating in society".⁵⁷ This process of social development was cumulative; socialists were "trying to bring about reforms which cumulatively will establish the Social Revolution".⁵⁸ To Glasier, the reforms introduced in the nineteenth century were the beginnings of a process which socialists would complete.⁵⁹ The fact that the process of social development was seen as evolutionary did not, as it could have, undermine the state socialists' belief in the importance of political activity. Macdonald sought to deal with this problem by arguing that while the evolutionary principle meant that socialism was inevitable it was so, "not because men are exploited or because the fabric of capitalism must collapse under its own weight but because men are rational".⁶⁰ Political action was the practical expression of this rationality and it would ensure and hasten progress. The state was not seen as some outside force but as part of the development of society. It recorded and expressed previous advances and could be the instrument of future progress. Glasier brushed aside the views of the revolutionary socialists: "The affirmation that the state is a capitalist institution is untrue." While the "State always is for the time being very largely the instrument of the self interest of the dominant person, faction or class in the community", this was neither permanently nor exclusively the case. In the end, "The State is and will be what the general voice and consent of the community wish it to be".⁶¹ Macdonald had earlier made the same point in arguing that where a measure of

political democracy existed, "If the masses of the ordinary people are agreed upon any policy, neither rich electors, privileged peers, nor reigning houses could stand in their way".⁶²

However it is not correct to see the state socialists as no more than advanced liberals. While they had few fixed ideas about the nature of the future socialist society and didn't believe in socialism as some finite and finished state of society, they believed that the object of their political activity was the control of economic power and the restructuring of the material basis of society. Yet in their understanding of the means whereby this situation was to be brought about the British state socialists differed little from the radical liberals. They agreed with Kautsky that the widening of the franchise was important, but where Kautsky believed that political democracy provided a situation which socialists would have to come to terms with, to take the opportunities it offered until the possibility of revolutionary change presented itself, the British state socialists believed that political democracy in itself provided the opportunity for the advance to a socialist society. It was only necessary to persuade a sufficient number of voters to elect, and then continue to support, a government committed to the reconstruction of society. Naturally, it was accepted that the process would take some time and, as with all political processes, be subject to reverses, but in essence it was agreed that the political machinery already on hand was sufficient to manage the transition to socialism. The British state socialist tradition thus encompassed an almost innocent view of the supremacy of the democratic elements within the state.

Thus it is clear that though there had always been a tradition of opposition to the mainstream of state socialism it was only after 1917 that the idea of revolution began to play a major role in socialist debate. In 1917 William Paul published his "The State, its Origins and Functions" and while Paul at that time was no Leninist, his work attracted a broad interest more because of events in Russia than on its own intrinsic merits. It is also interesting as the first work by a British marxist to deal specifically with the problem of the state. Paul was a member of the SLP and, up to a point, his work reflected a de Leonist approach yet parts of the analysis owed something to the inhospitable climate in which British revolutionaries lived. Paul's attack on the state socialists contained a distinctively personal element. They were, he argued, ambitious middle class men, an "intellectual proletariat"⁶³ who had perverted the labour movement and directed it to their own ends. They saw in the development of the state an opportunity to secure occupations for themselves and their children: "Small wonder that the middle class looks upon the state as a glorified institution, as something destined to save the world."⁶⁴ Their plans and schemes such as Nationalisation and Municipalisation had nothing to offer: "These things are no more 'steps' in the direction of socialism than is the general centralisation and concentration of capital."⁶⁵ Paul would admit of no qualification of his view of the state as a tyrannical instrument of the capitalist class. In the nineteenth century, "While it was officially opposed to state intervention the capitalist class was always eager to use the state against the workers",⁶⁶ and all new forms of state activity were, he argued, directed to precisely the same end. Far from offering a new opportunity to the working class movement the extension of state power during the

War offered only the prospect of "a social despotism organised from above". The new capitalist state would be manned by "armies of official bureaucrats, who will only be able to maintain their posts by tyrannising and limiting the power of the workers".⁶⁷ Paul contemptuously dismissed the "reforms" welcomed by the state socialists. They were no more than devices designed to make the worker more productive. Similarly the granting of political democracy was meaningless: the Press was controlled by the capitalists who could use it to manipulate the workers' votes.

Not all British revolutionaries adopted as pure an anti-state line as Paul. John MacLean, for example, argued that the purists were doing a great deal of harm to the people they claimed to represent. While MacLean held a conventional marxist view of the relationship between state and society: "Britain is under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the robbed ruled by the police, soldiers and sailors of the robbers."⁶⁸ and emphasised the coercive policy of the state: "If the wage workers in big numbers demand shorter hours, the batons are used as on Friday, 31st January in Glasgow; or bayonets as in Liverpool as in August 1919, or soldiers and sailors are used as scabs as in the Yorkshire mines."⁶⁹, he felt that revolutionaries could not simply ignore the state. In working with the Glasgow unemployed, MacLean worked on the principle that it was important "to exhaust every constitutional method" before considering anything else.⁷⁰ Socialists who wished to assist the unemployed should act cautiously and consider the broader consequences of their actions rather than simply demonstrating revolutionary intransigence: "To rush a work just now would mean split heads and a defeat for the Labour candidates. To use the misfortunes of the unemployed

to increase those misfortunes is pitiable, but at the same time to defeat Labour is positively criminal. A Labour Town Council will respond to our pressures more readily than a bourgeois one."⁷¹

MacLean, at least, felt it was never enough to condemn those who disagreed with him, and sought to develop a strategy for pursuing definite political ends through changing and unpropitious circumstances.

Yet, in the end it is necessary to keep in mind that it was not the nuances and details of theory and practice which accounted for the increased appeal of revolutionary ideas among socialists but the fact of revolution in Russia. If one examines the activities of the ILP in this period it is clear that while many of its members felt the new appeal of revolution there was some confusion as to what it entailed and what implications it had for the previously held beliefs associated with state socialism. Gerald Gould, an intellectual member of the ILP attempted to come to terms with the problem in a book which attracted some interest in the Party.⁷² Gould was clearly excited by the events in Russia and by what he saw as the prospects of revolution in Britain but his attempts to reconcile this with the tradition of state socialism are no more than an attempt to have it both ways at once. He declared, for example, his belief in an "evolutionary revolution" which was "merely what was happening". "Human society, like the human body renews itself periodically, and becomes a different thing. We cannot prevent that."⁷³ Yet Gould also held a different conception of revolution as an event which could occur almost overnight. Thus: "Never have we been so near to revolution in the crude violent sense as during the Railway Strike of last year." It was not that Gould felt that the railwaymen had been seeking a revolution, nor that he himself felt a

revolution on such a basis would have been desirable: "A revolution precipitated in that way would have no merits whatsoever to compensate for its disasters."⁷⁴ In the end Gould retreated to that ground where the majority of British socialists seemed most comfortable. "We have got to realise that the issue is a moral one." While revolution was inevitable the tasks of education and persuasion remained vital ones: "We can accept the redistribution, and have a peaceful revolution. We can, by illegitimate and violent means resist the redistribution, and have a bloody revolution."⁷⁵ In the end Gould's prescriptions are little more than a restatement of the main themes of British state socialism with the added warning that if reforms were too long delayed civil disorder could occur.

If Gould's analysis indicated a degree of confusion, it is quite clear from other sources that he was not alone in the ILP during this period. During 1920 and 1921 the central dilemma of the Party was over the relevance of the Russian experience to British socialists, and specifically whether they should leave the Second and affiliate with the Third International. This debate illustrated in some detail the main analyses and disagreements on the question of the state and on the possible courses of political action open to socialists.

Kautsky's ideas were presented in the columns of the 'Labour Leader' by his translator, H J Stenning. Stenning recognised that in the post-war period revolutionary socialism was challenging established beliefs: "The old glamour of Marxism, as a system of thought which explains all past development and solves all present problems, exercises its fascination with renewed strength. Properly speaking, what we see now is a

recrudescence of Blanquism, the notion of a resolute and instructed minority seizing power at a time of social ferment, and forcibly carrying through a socialist programme."⁷⁶ It naturally followed from this that Bolshevism had nothing to offer to British socialists. Indeed Stenning felt that the post-war unrest should not be regarded as progress: "Rather it suggests that the class struggle has relapsed to a crude and primitive form." Stenning's view that: "If the masses lack the intellectual conviction and the moral energy to turn them (circumstances) to their own account I can discover no remedy short of infusing into the people the requisite interest and initiative."⁷⁷ must have attracted some support, though the analysis of the situation in Russia excited criticism. One correspondent complained: "I am struck by the unreality of his premises and grave obscurity as to his facts. He simply takes for granted that the Bolsheviks represent a minority and govern by force and suppression of free speech."⁷⁸ A good deal of early support for the Bolsheviks was based on similar grounds. A quite justifiable suspicion of some sources of information on the situation in Russia led to a suspicion of all sources of information. The fact therefore that a man supported the Bolsheviks could not be taken to mean that he understood the implications of that support, or that he favoured, in the British context, a policy significantly different from that advocated by Stenning. Few ILP members would have been content to work for a simple breakdown of capitalism. Macdonald had earlier complained that this marxist notion contained "no real guarantee that change is progress".⁷⁹ There is no reason to suppose that in terms of British politics at least, the bulk of the ILP membership had changed their minds. They still believed that real change depended upon education and persuasion. There were however rising

doubts about previously held views of the state. While few members took an outright Leninist position there were considerable doubts expressed as to whether it could be regarded merely as a neutral instrument. One correspondent of the 'Labour Leader' asked what the State would do when a Labour Government was formed and it attempted to introduce socialist legislation. There would be, he argued, a revolt of the House of Lords, the Law, the Church, the Army and the Navy.⁸⁹ This correspondent was clearly unconvinced by the Kautsky argument that a democratic state would have difficulties in sabotaging the work of an elected government. He suggested that the programme could only be got through by recourse to referenda, or by the institution of soviets, or perhaps by syndicalism. Methodological pluralism could go no further.

Thus it is as well to remember that while Leninism had a distinct if limited effect on the ILP the debate on the Internationals took place at a time when the issues were not particularly well defined. A great deal of early support for the Third International, here as elsewhere, was attributable to an understandable awe at the success of the Bolsheviki rather than a full appreciation and acceptance of Lenin's doctrines or the organisational principles of the Comintern.

In January 1920, the Scottish ILP, "amid scenes of great enthusiasm", voted by 158 votes to 28 to affiliate to the Third International. "There followed a demonstration of enthusiasm such as had never before been equalled in a Scottish ILP Conference."⁸¹ This vote injected some urgency into the debate on the relative merits of the two Internationals and the relevance of the Russian experience for British socialists. On January 29 Wallhead wrote an article for the

'Labour Leader' which expressed what was eventually to become the line of the majority of the Party. He argued that while dictatorship might prove to be a temporary necessity, it was wrong to present it as a central and necessary part of socialist policy, and that it must never be made an alternative to basing the revolution on broad numbers.

G D H Cole argued that there was no need for British socialists to restrict the debate to a choice between Soviets or a Parliament.⁸² He was not completely satisfied with the parliamentary system but neither did he think that the Soviet would form the future unit of government in Britain. He concluded by suggesting that the existing local government institutions provided a far better model for the governing of a future socialist society. Cole was open to the accusation that he was confusing administration with the question of political power, but he was not alone in wanting to avoid the main issue. One can detect in Clifford Allen's contribution a desire to be free of the whole business of politics: "We distrust the old Parliamentarianism, and are chiefly concerned with political action as one of the means of overturning the capitalist order of society."⁸³ Not that Allen was advocating violence: Russian methods "would tarnish our social ideals". The revolution would have to meet force, but it was on no account to prepare for it. Allen's socialist ideals did not include political democracy as understood by the state socialists. On this point he was emphatic: "Democracy is meaningless until economic equality is established." There was no need for democratic machinery in the short term when it was clear that, "The whole community will benefit by the removal of the terrible havoc now wrought by the class struggle". The Soviet was basically to be understood as government by the working class organisations, and the dictatorship of the proletariat was just another way

of describing government by the majority of the nation. This was written at a time when Allen must have known, providing he read the journals he wrote for, of the suppression of the other socialist parties in Russia. Macdonald took issue with Allen: "I do not believe that 'Dictatorship' of any sort can be made to square with Mr Allen's former claim for 'Liberty of Conscience'."⁸⁴ Macdonald made the point that he and many others in the ILP kept returning to, that if socialism did not involve the changing of opinions it would only be a surface phenomenon and would never achieve its central objective, which was to change the social structure.

The actual debate at the ILP's 1920 Conference only rarely achieved such clarity. Mr Wyndham Albery, in supporting affiliation to the Comintern missed the point in arguing, "It is to be hoped that the Moscow International will agree to a reformation of the International without conditions which take away the independence of the affiliated organisations".⁸⁵ Mr Herron captured the tone to be adopted by many future apologists of the USSR in viewing the business as some gigantic exercise in applied social philosophy: "The Russian statesmen have made concrete the theories of the philosophers . . . (the Conference) ought to give weight to an experiment that had succeeded." Strangely, he felt it would be inconsistent for the ILP to press for the diplomatic recognition of the USSR while at the same time refusing to affiliate with the Comintern. He felt that too much had been made of Bolshevik absolutism. Lenin and Litvinoff had been described as "absolutely doctrinaire", yet Mr Herron felt that they "could be converted"; "He was convinced that if they joined an International of that character, they could make their point of view known, and the communists would not seek to impose on them something that was absolutely foreign to their

nature." Mr Herron was supported by Mr Pickles who thought the matter was relatively simple: "Surely if they were anything as socialists they were communists?" Democracy was irrelevant as it did not describe the existing situation nor offer anything for the future: "We had had a dictatorship ever since the institution of private property." Walton Newbold, predictably, drew a lesson from history. It was not, he argued, a matter of wanting to fight, but "just as the Barons or the Parliament in the seventeenth century, they had no choice. They had to fight". Newbold added that he felt it would be possible for the ILP to affiliate with the Comintern and to remain within the Labour Party.

Those delegates who were opposed to affiliation to the Third International tended to base their case on what they saw to be the realities of the British situation. Macdonald argued that they were not faced with the situation that the Russians had been faced with and anyone who thought that the state was about to collapse was dealing in "nursery politics". Mr Benson registered his concern at the way many delegates spoke of violence. "Was there", he asked, "some mystical virtue about the rifle which broght men who were on the wrong side of the ballot box to the right side of the barricade?" Snowden made a principled attack on violence in his Chairman's address and spoke of his moral anger against those who wished to exploit misery to produce violence.

It was clear however from the voting that the Russians and their International were far more popular on this occasion than they ever were subsequently. The Conference voted for disaffiliation from the Second International by 520 to 144 votes. The vote on affiliation to the Third was not a direct one, for Fenner Brockway had made a highly

pertinent contribution to the debate in suggesting that before they voted to affiliate they should attempt to find out what the conditions were. Therefore the vote was between those who favoured immediate application to the Comintern, irrespective of the conditions, and those who favoured further investigation and the postponement of the decision. The latter course of action was passed by a majority of 472 to 206, which represented, considering the alternatives, a very large minority. Wallhead was sent to Moscow to find out more about the Comintern. In view of the degree of confusion in the Party as to the nature of that organisation further investigation could scarcely fail to be useful.

In the interim the debate rolled on in the columns of the 'Labour Leader'. Fairchild, a former member of the BSP, in commenting on recent unity proposals which had come from the Communists argued: "The Communists are tired of the effort to give knowledge to the slowly moving mass. They ask us to believe they have found a royal road."⁸⁶ This to Fairchild, was "The revival of government by aristocracy". He argued that this was too dangerous: "There is no ground for the view that men from the working class can be entrusted safely with a power which it is dangerous to give to the wealthy. Power has a corrupting influence." To replace the old state with the dictatorship of the proletariat did not overcome the problem. There was no shortcut to be had by limiting political democracy. The only way was to build up political and economic rights at the same time.

The Special Labour Conference in August 1920 on intervention in Russia provided a boost to the radical wing of the ILP and their view of political action. The Councils of Action movement was established to

co-ordinate labour opposition to the Government's plans for military involvement. The issue proved a popular one, perhaps more from a sense of war weariness and disillusionment rather than from a wide support for the Soviet state, but leaders such as J H Thomas were forced along with an action they regarded as "Momentous" and "A challenge to the whole Constitution of the country". The limited nature of the objectives of the plans for direct action indicated that this was not the breakthrough that the revolutionaries had been waiting for, but it was encouraging for them in that it indicated that the mass movement was not inevitably the property of the right.

On September 3 Arthur Ponsonby reported that the ILP had received the conditions of affiliation of the Third International and as these were "Directly contrary to the letter and spirit of the ILP constitution their decision on the subject (became) perfectly easy".⁸⁷ This was too optimistic for there was bound to be, at least, minority opposition. The recently published draft constitution of the ILP indicated that there was some desire, or necessity to fudge the divide between themselves and the revolutionaries. One aim, for instance, was expressed as "the capture of local and national government bodies, with a view to the development of administration on socialist lines and the destruction of the machinery of the capitalist state".⁸⁸

The Conference of 1921 however offered no prospect of ambiguity on the issue of Comintern affiliation. Mr Palin opened the debate with what was becoming the traditional Party view, arguing that while he wished to express his support for what the Russians were doing in their own country, he did not think civil war was "relevant" to the political

situation at home.⁸⁹ Mr Paton emphasised the degree of control which the Comintern demanded over member organisations. They reserved to themselves the right to expel members and to determine policies and activities. The Comintern would turn them into an illegal insurrectionary movement. Supporters of the Comintern attempted in vain to avoid the obvious implications of the Theses. Helen Crawford pointed out that the ILP had been involved in illegal work during the war; Mr Norman argued that the choice was only between "a dictatorship of the English plutocracy or the working class". Saklatvala made what was perhaps the most intelligent speech in favour of affiliation. He admitted that the rules and structure of the Comintern were incompatible with the previously agreed aims and nature of the ILP, but he argued that the immense strength of international capitalism demanded that sort of organisation on the labour side if it were to be effectively combatted. However it can have come as no great surprise that the ILP, in full possession of the facts about Comintern affiliation, should reject the proposal by 521 votes to 97.

Even after this vote and the consequent defection of some of the substantial minority it could not be argued that the ILP was once again clearly committed to mainstream state socialism. Some continued as before, others felt themselves to be revolutionaries. There was, however, a fair degree of working unity on the question of activity. Almost all members were agreed that there was something to be gained from working within the existing political system and that the development of a socialist society would require majority support thus making necessary a continuous effort in the field of propaganda and education. Beyond this Party unity was fostered by a degree of

vagueness in the formulation of policy and a practical toleration of diverse and conflicting views. What also may have kept the more radical members within the ILP was a recognition that the smaller organisations had a poor record in terms of effective politics. In this they probably agreed with Macdonald who had bluntly pointed out that the choice was not between reform and revolution or any such grand formulation, but between mainstream electoral politics, with all its attendant dangers and compromises, and the minority pursuits of the political fringes.

Viewed from one perspective the British socialist tradition can appear diverse and divided. For example there are differences of style and substance between the Fabian tradition and the evangelical style of politics, fostered by Robert Blatchford and continued in this period by such leaders as George Lansbury, that can appear almost unbridgable. Yet on questions of political methods, those steps which might be taken immediately, there were possibilities for unity. Most of the diverse traditions could unite on the idea that it was possible to make real progress by becoming involved in the work of socialist propaganda and by operating within the existing political system. This idea, essentially a continuation of the radical liberal tradition, held a number of drawbacks for socialists. It inevitably tended to encourage its adherents to overestimate the power of elected government both within the state machine and the society as a whole, and it failed to offer any understanding of the way in which the state was locked into the existing hierarchical order of society. Its great advantage was that in offering a prospect of immediate fruitful action, it could unite a variety of people of varying persuasions into a coherent political force.

There also remained the alternative political tradition, albeit an infinitely weaker one, which defined itself in conscious opposition to the state socialist mainstream. The main analytical strength of this tradition was its ability to recognise the inherent biases in the composition and structure of the state. However it failed to develop any sophisticated model of the operation of state power and, partly as a result of this, failed to discover any means of becoming involved, on any permanent basis, in political or industrial organisations, and even on occasion made a virtue of that extreme theoretical purity which is only possible in isolation. While, in this period, the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia brought a number of proponents of this position into the limelight, it must not be forgotten that these too were good years for the state socialist tradition. The socialists had succeeded in committing the Labour Party to a programme of socialist policies and the Party seemed firmly on the road to office.

It was into this situation that the CPGB sought to introduce and apply Lenin's ideas on the state and socialist transformation. Their task would inevitably be difficult for not only did the ideas bear little relation to the mainstream, but they would also attract considerable opposition within the minority revolutionary parties.

The State, the Revolution and the Communist Party

The Communist Party of Great Britain was brought into being specifically to apply Lenin's doctrine of revolutionary politics. As such, its failure to make any significant impact must offer some insight into the theory and practice of socialist politics in Britain.

Before proceeding to the main argument it may be necessary to examine this question of the Party's failure. A number of spokesmen for the Party have challenged the view that the history of the CPGB should be so characterised. Monty Johnstone, writing in the 1960s, argued that the Party had "played a part in left wing politics in Britain out of all proportion to its membership and electoral support".⁹⁰ Apologists for the Party's record can legitimately point to the influence which has been maintained in a number of trade unions, the Party's work on the fringes of the movement with, for instance, unemployed workers and to the fact that many of those who subsequently rose to positions of authority passed through the CPGB on their way. While these points are reasonable it is also fair to point out that Communists have often failed to make a distinctive impact in those unions which they nominally controlled and also, that having once been a member of the Party has only rarely been seen to have exerted a lasting influence on an individual. William Gallacher, writing in 1940, a good but precarious year for the Party, argued that vis-à-vis the Labour Party "the balance sheet of these twenty years is on the side of the Communist Party. There could in fact be no greater condemnation of the Labour leadership . . . than the present war".⁹¹ This though, was no more than a claim for moral or theoretical superiority and was reminiscent

of that ineffectual left tradition of British politics that the Communist Party had set out to improve upon. A more realistic estimate of the Party's success was offered by another founder member: "After twenty years the CP was no more than a sect and further away from its objective than when it started its travail in 1920"⁹². Yet in fairness it was a sect that was still in existence, when so many similar formations had perished in the British political climate. Given a certain reading of the political culture and the volatility of other left wing groupings the fact of survival itself might be seen as a considerable achievement.

Yet ultimately this claim to have achieved a partial success will not do for it fails to take account of the mood in which the CPGB was formed. The instigators of the Party sought to mould history, or even at the very least convert what they regarded as the progressive sections of the working class movement. In this context the tenacious and peripheral survival of the Party cannot be viewed as anything but a bitter failure.

Three major elements have formed the basis of the various explanations offered for the failure of the CPGB. The first lays greatest emphasis on the activities of the opponents of the party, whether agents of the Labour Party or the State, the second relates the failure to theoretical weaknesses of the Party's own leadership while the third seeks to place the Party's failure in the context of a generally antagonistic and unrewarding political environment. While few accounts deal exclusively in terms of one set of factors there is a marked tendency for the Party's official spokesmen to stress the first type of explanation and opponents on the revolutionary left to deal primarily with the second.

The first part of this examination is concerned with the activities of the State with respect to the Communist Party and in particular with the question of how much such activities might have hampered the Party's development. The basis of these activities was the analysis and information offered by the Special Branch. While neither of the Directors of Intelligence in the period with which we are dealing believed that the Party was ever on the brink of a major political breakthrough they both devoted considerable attention to it. To Childs they were his 'main task'. While he never believed they could achieve what they sought he "never underestimated their ability to create untold misery and havoc".⁹³ The darkest suspicions of Party members about Special Branch attempts to open mail and infiltrate organisations seem to have been amply justified.⁹⁴ Klugman's claim that, "scores of plain clothes police haunted Party meetings and Party offices, and began to follow around Party activists and members of their families. Letters between Communists and addressed to Communists were opened wholesale, correspondence delayed, telephones tapped, provocateurs from time to time inserted into the movement"⁹⁵ can be substantially supported. So great was the police interest in the Party that the Intelligence Reports offer an exceptionally detailed account of its early history. While such reports inevitably reflect the particular preconceptions and obsessions of those who wrote them the account of the Party which they offer does not differ materially from those offered by others with different sources, and alternative political perspectives. Childs, as Director of Intelligence, quickly identified those areas in which the CPGB represented a break in the tradition of the revolutionary left; the idea of a Party impatient with the traditions of argument and discussion, organised with military discipline, a Party seen as part of a broader international movement, and a Party determined to contest elections and to seek affiliation with official

Labour organisations. All these aspects of the CPGB, together with the opposition of such individuals as Sylvia Pankhurst, are profusely examined and illustrated within Childs' Reports. For example in the case of the campaign for Labour Party affiliation, every stage of the operation was monitored. As well as collecting information on the Party's attempt to elect members and sympathisers to the Labour Party Conference,⁹⁶ Childs was also able to identify undertones of internal opposition. He quoted a letter from Fred Peet who complained that it had been difficult to get the Party's press to support the line of the leadership on Labour Party affiliation. When the articles did appear they drove him to despair: "The whole idea seems to be missed, or am I very dense? Two of them are very good articles in their place, but to write two slashing attacks on the Labour Party appears to be the height of folly. It makes one feel like going in for gardening."⁹⁷ Childs reported the defeat of the Communist Party's initiative at the Edinburgh Conference but noted that the United Front policy was to be continued, the Executive instructing branches: "It is therefore henceforward the duty of members of the Communist Party to apply for membership of the individual sections of their respective Labour Parties."⁹⁸ While the Party press was made to reflect more accurately the intentions of the political leadership Childs continued to record problems associated with the 'United Front'. At the Party Congress of October 1922, "the resolution on the Labour Party and the United Front provoked three hours' discussion".⁹⁹ Even in March 1923, the Committee was still attempting to instil into the British Party the true meaning of the policy. The aim was: "to show how weak the Labour Party is".¹⁰⁰ The problem was however not merely to persuade their own members, but to persuade the Labour Party

to accept help. Childs recorded during the General Election campaign of 1923: "It is reported from many areas that the communists have endeavoured to give effect to the 'United Front' policy by supporting Labour candidates: in several cases the help was unwelcome and in others definitely refused."¹⁰¹ Philips Price, standing as Labour candidate for Gloucester 'confided' to Palme Dutt that he had had to deny his Party membership; "A statement that I am a member of the Communist Party would very adversely affect my position here. The very most that the Trade Union people here will stand is communist sympathies . . . they dislike the idea that I should be bound to the discipline of a body which is outside the Labour and Socialist organisation of Gloucester."¹⁰² Childs continued to report efforts by communists to influence local Labour Parties. During 1924, for example, he noted that communists were attempting to fill vacancies on the Parliamentary Panel of the Workers' Union with their own candidates¹⁰³ and that the Executive had seen fit to issue new orders for Party members on how they should operate in Local Labour Parties, including injunctions to "cultivate a spirit of comradeship" and to "always be better informed than an opponent: Do not talk unless you know your subject."¹⁰⁴ Perhaps with an eye to the susceptibilities of a Labour Prime Minister Childs also began, during 1924, to note where local Labour Parties had adopted communists as prospective candidates. Childs continued to draw two general themes from the 'United Front' policy; firstly, that it was often ineptly carried out and resulted in contradictions: "The Communist Party has on the one hand passed a resolution advocating the secession of the "class conscious revolutionaries" from the ILP to the CP and on the other circulated draft resolutions intended to further the Party's application for affiliation

to the ILP",¹⁰⁵ and secondly that the policy continued to run counter to the instincts of many British revolutionaries. As late as 1924 the Congress of the CPGB was still explaining the basic aims of the policy to its own members.¹⁰⁶ Childs argued that it was only through the authority of the Comintern and their British representatives that the policy was maintained.

Opinions inevitably differ as to the accuracy of this analysis. Klugman and Johnstone for instance play down the ineptitude of the application of the policy and Johnstone specifically denies that Palme Dutt acted in such matters as the effective representative of the Comintern line. Other accounts suggest that Childs' interpretation may not have been too far out of line. Murphy offers support for the ineptitude thesis and is supported by Macfarlane¹⁰⁷ who argues that from the first the 'United Front' provoked division and that even the supporters of the policy spoke of it publicly in such terms that could only offer ammunition to those in the Labour Party who wanted to resist it. Macfarlane also suggests that the contradictions in the policy did not all originate at the British end: "The CPGB was told on the one hand to exert pressure to compel the Labour Government to fight the capitalist class and on the other to convince the working class through its own experience of the futility and treachery of the Labour leaders."¹⁰⁸ Support for the inept application of the policy by the CPGB can also be found in the proceedings of the Executive Committee of the Comintern who at the conference on Britain, in Moscow in July 1923 castigated their actions as "inadequate and aimless".¹⁰⁹ Such accounts cannot be held to prove Childs was correct but they do indicate that his interpretation was, at least reasonable.

A major source of conflict within the CPGB during its early years concerned what was termed the process of 'Bolshevisation'. Here too Childs offered a great deal of detail and an interpretation. The process he believed originated in the dissatisfaction of the Comintern Executive. The CPGB had originally been constituted on traditional principles and it was only in the years immediately following its creation that the Comintern principles came to be properly applied. Childs saw that the process involved the abandonment of sectarian impulses and the adoption of the working practices and ethos of a Leninist party. Habits of federal organisation and open discussion were to be curtailed under the principle of democratic centralism. Childs reported that though Macmanus had attempted to persuade the Comintern that "the Party had a very great political influence and that it was a centralised and disciplined party", they had insisted on a complete reorganisation. The device they hit upon was a Commission to investigate Party activities and recommend changes. The members of this Commission and their supporters came to exercise, according to Childs, an almost monolithic authority throughout the Party. They succeeded in persuading a special conference to accept their activities and recommendations: "The conference provided yet another proof of the dictatorship of officials". Knowledge and education were apparently playing a large part in this: "My informant reports that during the discussion of the 'mass party' the delegates displayed acute ignorance of the terms used and for an hour the proceedings were quite beyond them." The Commission's first report, delivered in the summer of 1922, was predictably critical of the Party's activities. It pointed to the dwindling and inconstant membership, the exaggerated size of the paid staff and an overall

lack of organisation. The Party was still too federal and representative in character with inadequate facilities for training and propaganda. It lacked central direction: "We are not yet a party. We are still only scattered individuals struggling here and there up and down the country." The new structure must be hierarchical and functional and discussions on policy should only take place at the top. They would have to break with "the old socialist traditions of ineffectiveness" and create "an efficient machine of the class struggle" rather than "some propagandist society or revolutionary club". Finally the Commission acknowledged its intellectual debt, "our guide . . . exists in the principles laid down in the theses and based on the experience of the international movement".¹¹¹

Childs saw the victory of the Commission as the victory of the Comintern. While the Commission and some subsequent commentators have argued that Comintern offered only general principles, Childs argued that the practice of the Communist Party indicated that it gave a good deal more. He pointed out that the Comintern was striving to avoid the impression of pulling the strings but was secretly concerned that it might lose some of its ability to control member parties when it had to cut its allocations of money.¹¹²

Childs offered some insight on how the leadership sought to gain the acceptance of the new style of Party. Inkpin explained to the Scottish organiser before the Annual Congress in 1922 that, "We have got to educate the membership". Branches must send their delegates to London with a "practically free hand". They must dispel "old fashioned ideas as to Party Congresses composed of delegates with

minute and binding instructions as to how they should vote on every paragraph".¹¹³ This Congress accepted the Commission's recommendations, though the Bridgeton branch did secede, and the Party proceeded to reorganise itself. The new idea of Party training involved the communists separating themselves from other labour organisations: "The Labour College classes, even when they are not actually hostile or indifferent to the Party do not provide for these needs . . . we cannot allow members to be trained under alien influences."¹¹⁴ New training syllabuses included instructions on how to undermine the State, "How a Trade Union branch nucleus works" and "How to set up a District Committee".¹¹⁵

The reorganisation of the Party provoked a good deal of internal opposition. Childs reported that rank and file communists in Liverpool were complaining that they would no longer have any influence over Party affairs.¹¹⁶ He quoted one Glasgow dissident at length: "It is simply a case of money talking. The party is in the grip of Moscow and nobody in the Executive, least of all the paid officials at Headquarters, has sufficient backbone to tell the Mr Brown, of the Third, that they are not going to obey the dictates of the Comintern, when it means walking over a precipice with one's eyes open. I also object to these so called representative meetings in Glasgow whenever it suits the representatives of Moscow to put in an appearance. If the agents of the Comintern have anything to put before the Party let them face the branches instead of having these semi-theatrical, semi-secret gatherings which overpower the average rank and file present because of the appearance of the mystery man from the Third."¹¹⁷ Such feelings were probably widespread for the Executive constantly

complained that branches were maintaining too much independence and failing to send sufficient information about their activities to the centre. In May 1923 a new scheme was introduced whereby branches had to file a monthly report giving details of all activities and the extent to which its members had penetrated Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies and Labour Parties. Yet the conflicts continued.

Saklatvala was reported as having ignored a summons to Moscow and to have refused financial assistance, ¹¹⁸ in July there was conflict in the CPGB delegation in Moscow, ¹¹⁹ in September Postgate resigned and disputes continued between headquarters and the districts. By November Childs felt that the Party's programme of activities had all but collapsed and there was reported conflict at the top between Macmanus on the one hand and Gallacher and Dutt on the other. ¹²⁰ Zinoviev had come to regard the CPGB as "the Achilles heel of the International". ¹²¹

The Special Branch laid great emphasis on the financial connection between the Comintern and the CPGB. During 1922, Childs reported, the amount of money sent from Moscow had been cut. One British Communist apparently felt that this was not necessarily a bad thing. The Russians he felt had been sending more money than was good for the Party. "We then set up top heavy machinery, poured money into literature and various branches, set up a heavy list of paid officials, ¹²² out of all proportion to membership dues." Money continued to come from Moscow but it was in smaller amounts and tended to be related to specific projects. The bulk of the money was in future to go to the RILU. ¹²³ An indication of the new relationship was the following intercepted message from the Comintern to the Executive of the CPGB: "Please submit before us a detailed estimate of the funds required

to carry out satisfactory printed agitation and propoganda among the transport workers, metal workers and miners."¹²⁴

While Childs may have placed too much emphasis on the precise connection between finance and control there can be little reason to doubt the factual accuracy of his accounts of financial transactions and the disputes within the CPGB over the report of the Commission. Childs' sources were excellent and there was no need, in reports written for this purpose to make propoganda. The precise point about whether or not Palme Dutt, who substantially wrote the reports of the Commission was or was not Moscow's nominee is unimportant. What is important is that he clearly set out to instigate a reorganisation of the CPGB on Comintern principles. Childs' account of this event can be substantiated from a number of sources. Bell later recorded what he believed to be the reasons for the extent of the adverse reaction provoked by the Commission. He pointed to "On the one hand an ideological unpreparedness on the part of many members for such novel and drastic changes and on the other a certain passivity and bureaucratic formalism in operating these decisions"¹²⁵. Postgate later recorded his own objections to a Communist Party organised on such lines. Murphy recalled that "the attempt to 'Bolshevise' the socialists who formed the Communist Party" caused so much dissension that its membership was reduced by almost eighty per cent in two years.¹²⁷ Murphy also later tended to support Childs' view of the importance of finance in arguing, "had the Communist Party not received big financial shots in the arm it would . . . have probably gone out of existence in within a year or two of formation".¹²⁸ It must therefore be allowed that Childs' analysis here, as on the policy

of the 'United Front' represented a reasonable attempt to come to terms with the reality of communist politics.

To what extent then, could it be claimed that the activities of the State hampered the activities of the CPGB? Clearly if good intelligence is the best preparation for action the State was very well prepared. Childs' analysis of where the Communists stood to make most progress and cause most disruption, namely in trade unions and among the organised unemployed, coincided with their own view, so all he had to do was intercept their own information and reprint it. It is doubtful though, whether the discovery of the facts of communist life did much to upset the Party. The nature of the connection with Moscow was always treated as a secret yet it was not the State so much as former friends who were the source of public information. Sylvia Pankhurst was quoted as saying that, "it was quite true that Russian money had been spent in this country on communist propaganda: the Third International sent sums of money to communists in all parts of the world; in her opinion it was not such a terrible thing as people seemed to think".¹²⁹

The major direct attempts of the State to hamper the activities of the CPGB were through the arrest of its officials and raids on headquarters and the seizure of documents. The arrests and seizures tended to be sporadic, for while the police wanted to operate a more rigorous policy against the Party, which they regarded as an illegal organisation, successive governments wisely restrained them. While such arrests and seizures as did take place could disrupt the Party temporarily it is extremely doubtful whether this could account

for its overall failure. The State could cast the Party in a criminal light and could aid and abet the newspapers in their campaigns against communists. Yet those who were liable to be influenced by such matters would be unlikely to become supporters in any case. In the section of the community to which the Party was appealing the detrimental effects of arrests in an organisational sense would probably be more than compensated for by sympathy and a recognition that arrests were evidence of seriousness of purpose. The arrests of 1925 actually heralded the best period of recruitment that the Party had ever seen.

We may now consider that body of argument which suggests that the CPGB was responsible for its own failure in that it adopted the wrong organisational structure. Criticisms of the Party on such grounds have as long a history as the Party itself. Many on the left of British politics, even, as is illustrated above, some of those who joined the CPGB were uneasy with its structure, its line on Parliament and its willingness to affiliate with other labour organisations. Sylvia Pankhurst quickly withdrew from the negotiations to form the Party and began to voice her objections: "I told the comrades that if we were before the barricades, if we were in the throes of revolution, or even somewhere near it, I could approve a rigidity of discipline which is out of place here and now." It will be most useful to examine the validity of these types of criticism through the medium of a recent and systematic statement of similar arguments.¹³¹ Hinton and Hyman are primarily concerned with the industrial policy of the CPGB between 1924 and 1926. In its internal policy during this period the Party was offering "no countenance to the revolutionary

optimism of those who hold we are on the eve of immediate revolutionary struggles",¹³² in contrast to its aspirations of its first months. By 1924 it was emphasising firmly, if not entirely consistently, its commitment to the 'United Front' and restraining its attacks on the left within the Labour Movement. Hinton and Hyman suggest that the British Party went further along this road of 'right opportunism' than the Comintern required and they were reprimanded for relaxing Party control over members who were elected to union offices. Evidence of 'right opportunism' is also detected in the Communist Party's conduct during the General Strike. J T Murphy was unwilling to recognise "the revolutionary possibilities of the Strike" and in adopting this view failed to take the opportunity to demonstrate the inadequacies of the left of the official Movement. Hinton and Hyman do not, however, base their criticism of Murphy on a fundamentally different view of the political circumstances of the General Strike: "It is only in the most abstract sense that 1926 can be described as a moment of revolutionary opportunity. Not only did the "established institutions of the Labour Movement (exert) a profound influence over the working class", but "the possibilities of effective and independent rank and file organisation (had been) largely destroyed". Thus Hinton and Hyman are not suggesting that the Communists, in adopting different tactics would have experienced rapid growth of support or influence, but rather that by avoiding contact with the official left they would have established themselves as an independent 'revolutionary cadre' offering criticism from without in the best British revolutionary tradition.

The difficulty of this type of criticism is that in arguing for a different strategy for the CPGB it actually ends up suggesting that

it should have been an entirely different type of party. Many of those who joined the Party did so in order to break out of what they regarded as the impotence of revolutionary purity. Lenin's lesson rested on the idea that in order to begin to influence the working class it was necessary to become involved in the organisations in which they were grouped. The fact that in the course of increasing its contact with the Labour Movement the British Party was led into 'right opportunism' must be related to the strength of the movement and its traditions rather than ideological weakness on the part of the communists. They believed, rightly or wrongly, in involvement and this could not be achieved if they, for example, attacked the official left after the defeat at the General Strike.

The Hinton and Hyman argument ultimately comes to rest on the fact that the Communist Party, in failing to achieve its broader purposes, also dissipated the "rich theoretical gains" of the British revolutionary movement, and, by implication that some other formation could have preserved these. Yet it was surely doubts about this movement which persuaded so many of the British revolutionaries to join the Communist Party in the first place. Parties such as the SLP could advance an articulate analysis of the operations of State power and could offer cogent criticisms of State socialism, yet none of its theorists could offer a practical answer to the question of how the next step was to be taken. The Shop Stewards Movement had offered a lively challenge to the official unions and the State alike but it had never found any balance between spontaneity and permanent organisation and had, moreover only been effective in the circumstances of a war which had cast its antibureaucratic traditions and its

pursuit of differential interest in an unusually subversive light. The revolutionary tradition would inevitably have had to discover a new form if it was to survive. Men and women came to the CPGB because it seemed to offer a greater opportunity of breaking the bonds of ineffectuality than the organisations to which they had hitherto belonged. The industrial strategy of the CPGB, "to create a more numerous opposition trade union movement" and to create communist groups in unions "as a point of crystallisation round which the opposition elements will concentrate"¹³³ was not doomed because it was 'right opportunist' nor because it betrayed an existing vigorous tradition but because it rapidly came up against the official Labour Movement. The particular character of that movement, with its insistence on organisational loyalty coupled with an effective toleration of a wide range of opinions presented the communists with a problem which they were to find insoluble.

Any complete answer to the question of why the CPGB failed demands some further definition of what would have constituted success. A comparison of the origins of the British Party with some of its continental counterparts might suggest a new measure of success and failure. In Germany, France and Italy parties of the Third International failed to achieve a dominance but did manage to establish themselves as permanent and substantial presences in their respective labour movements. Thus it is possible to identify a line of Party development which falls short of revolutionary success yet which might still be defined as fruitful activity. In this sense the success of Communist Parties becomes amenable to that type of analysis which might be applied to more conventional political organisations.

While one must recognise their special position as parties of programmatic change seeking to attract rationally convinced and dedicated adherents with the object of producing fundamental social change, it is clear that some European Communist Parties also came to fulfil a more limited and conventional role within the framework of existing societies. Thus it is not enough to explain the 'failure' of the CPGB solely in terms of the absence of a revolutionary opportunity. One must also ask why its growth was so restricted.

The immediate fields of action of the Third International parties were their respective labour movements and here too international comparisons can prove interesting. If we look first at France it is in the very origins of the Communist Party (PCF) that an immediate and striking contrast with the CPGB occurs. The PCF was formed on the basis of a large breakaway group from the Socialist Party (SFIO) which itself at its 1920 conference in Tours, had voted in a proportion of more than three to one to affiliate with the Comintern. In 1921 the newly formed PCF could claim a membership twice as large as that of the party it had just left. While membership was in decline over the next decade its membership in relation to other competing groups was always substantial and it maintained a considerable presence in the totality of labour organisations. Thus while the CPGB was formed from groups on the fringes of a strong official movement the PCF was formed in the heart of French labour and socialist organisations. The Comintern policy of participation in elections produced, in the 1924 election, in marked contrast to Britain, 26 Assembly seats the basis of nine per cent of the popular vote. It has been claimed that the PCF was merely building on ground which had already been won;

that they were not starting afresh but 'bolshevising' a Communism already in existence.¹³⁴ Jaures had espoused a 'revolutionary legalism' and the tradition of syndicalism provided some parallel with the industrial cell organisation advocated by the communists. Yet perhaps more important than the actual ideas in circulation was the fact of division itself. As James Joll argues the Socialist Movement became more deeply divided after 1914 than it had been before.¹³⁵ Many of those who voted for the Third International did so in ignorance of the principles of that organisation indicating that there was a considerable body of opinion ready for any change of direction. Communism in France thus thrived in a situation where labour and socialist organisations were divided, small and relatively unsuccessful. It was, however, founded at the centre of these movements and quickly developed a level of support which allowed it to survive the deprivations of the period of 'Bolshevisation'.

If divisions in existing socialist organisations are seen as one of the conditions of success for a communist party, Italy can easily be identified as fertile ground. Italian socialism had always been faction ridden often on geographical as well as political lines. Its history was more or less the rise and fall of factions with little evidence of reconciliation or merger. Immediately before the Great War, the Libyan War had produced an acrimonious split which had involved disputes over whether assembly members should be independent or under the control of the Party Directorate, and whether the Party was to be reformist or revolutionary. The Great War, if anything, deepened the divisions and one historian has argued that, by 1919, the Party leadership was reduced to the necessity of total indecisiveness in

order to maintain even a semblance of unity.¹³⁶ While the Party was nominally opposed to Parliamentary action they had neither the plans nor the organisation for anything else. As early as 1919 the Party leadership had decided to affiliate to the Comintern. While this decision was reversed at the Leghorn Conference it was still a substantial minority which broke away from the main party at Livorno in 1921. Two of the issues which were cited as reasons for the split; the need to expel reformists and the necessity of preparing for revolutionary struggle represented almost traditional features of Italian socialist politics. All this took place only months before the march on Rome so most of the early history of the PCI was in the context of the strictures of the fascist state. One historian has claimed of the first two decades of the Party that, "it existed as a largely ineffectual and wholly dependent outpost of the International Communist Movement".¹³⁷ While it is true that Comintern did control the PCI and that, inevitably it failed to exercise any influence over domestic politics, such a view fails to relate the pre Second World War activity of the Party with its postwar prosperity. While the Party was being "squeezed between the fascist police and the demands of the Comintern officials"¹³⁸ it was, as a focus for opposition, establishing a base on which it could later build. Bolshevik discipline and the fact of being part of an international movement were assets in this context. Again the contrast with the CPGB and the British Labour Movement is most marked.

The German case would initially appear to be quite different. In contrast to its French and Italian counterparts the SPD was a more substantial and prestigious party. However its unity was much more

fragile than appearances suggested. The origins of the Party lay in the joining of two quite different types of socialist organisation under the impetus of antisocialist legislation and an unrepresentative legislature. The subsequent history of the SPD demonstrated divisions on fundamental questions, all pertinent to Lenin's arguments. The Party was divided on whether it should pursue national or international objectives, on whether they should seek to establish a parliamentary democracy or establish class rule and on whether they owed any loyalty to the existing state or whether they should destroy it. Unity had been maintained by preaching one thing and practising another. While leaders were nominally pursuing fundamental socialist objectives as outlined in the Erfurt programme, in practice they were content to work towards the democratisation of the existing state machine.¹³⁹ The divisions within the SPD were opened up and exacerbated by the War, the defeat, and the tenure of power of the SPD leaders in the postwar state. Thus the KPD was born out of division at the heart of the socialist movement. Moreover it was created at a time of defeat and under conditions of considerable internal instability. Having survived its early persecutions the KPD successfully exploited the opportunities afforded it by the political and economic difficulties of Weimar Germany.

Thus it is argued that the failure of the CPGB must be explained in terms of its relationships within the British Labour Movement. The nature of this movement made it inevitable that the Communist Party should seek affiliation with the Labour Party, but at the same time rendered it equally inevitable that it would be rejected. A single theme underlay the negotiations between the Communist and Labour

Party Executives and that was the question of organisational loyalty. Henderson pointed out that the Labour Party was not a monolithic organisation and would tolerate a wide degree of disagreement over policy. Yet the communists were unacceptable allies because they could only say to the Labour Party "our object is to diametrically and fundamentally oppose what you have built up".¹⁴⁰ It was argued by A J Cook and subsequently by many others that in excluding the communists the Labour Party was depriving itself of its own left wing.¹⁴¹ Yet, as Jowett pointed out at the meeting of the Executives this was not really the case for the communists were members of another organisation which demanded total loyalty from its members. The motion put forward at the 1921 Conference that the Communist Party be admitted "on the condition that the constitution of the Labour Party is accepted and the rules of the Communist Party are in conformity with the same", was, argued Jowett, simply not relevant as the rules of the Comintern illustrated that this could never be the case. While it is true that the CPGB handled its negotiations with the Labour Party with consummate ineptitude this did not materially affect the issue. The Communist Party had everything to gain from affiliation and the Labour Party had everything to lose. Communists could as individuals attract extensive support in local labour Parties and even influence a substantial number of constitutional parties to court their own expulsion but they could never overcome the organisational barrier to their own affiliation, and affiliation was, as Lenin recognised, a precondition of their own success.¹⁴²

Labour and the State

The short life of the First Labour Government must assume a special importance in any discussion of British socialist reactions to problems of state and revolution. The only grounds on which the significance of this experience might be minimised; that is that the lack of a parliamentary majority effectively altered the character and achievement of the administration; has been effectively dealt with by Miliband and others. The actions and attitudes of the leading Labour ministers may be taken to reasonably reflect their political beliefs.

No contemporary could legitimately claim that the moderate intentions of the Labour Cabinet had taken them by surprise. Communists had predicted the 'failure' of a Labour Government well in advance of its creation and all that they subsequently added were dates and names. The communist analysis was not particularly impressive, being little more than an illustration that the Labour Party was not a party of programme, was, in fact, engaged in the business of mainstream electoral politics and as such valued electoral success more highly than doctrinal purity; that it was after all, the Labour Party, and not the Communist Party. Unremarkable as this analysis was it remains in advance of that offered by those who have failed to take this into account in their analysis of Labour actions.

While the communists were not disposed to overestimate the socialist intentions of the Labour Government they still claimed to find some significance in its advent. Page Arnot found in the Labour Government a sign of, "the awakening of the working class and the beginning of

the end of capitalist politics in Great Britain".¹⁴³ It is difficult to tell whether this and other similar comments should be taken to represent analysis or were merely confidence boosting rhetoric, for if the communist press was inclined to view the rise of Labour as a new step on the road to the rapidly approaching capitalist cataclysm, it was at this time so disposed to view many events. What however is clear is the considerable impact which the experience of a Labour Government did have on other sections of socialist opinion. The effect was greatest on those who were attached to the Labour Party, and on those who had maintained the fondest illusions about the immediate compatibility of fundamental socialism and electoral and parliamentary politics. The disillusionment and doubt expressed by some socialists over the following few years are directly traceable to this experience of office. One ILP intellectual captured the mood well: "A decade ago, when a man said he was a socialist, you knew clearly where he stood. There were differences - often of importance - as to method and speed, but all were agreed as to the end."¹⁴⁴ Perhaps the ILP had always contained such conflicts which only the absence of office had minimised or contained, for doctrinal confusions and generous enthusiasms are most comfortable when furthest from power. F G Stone's description of the ILP's attempt to muddle its way through the ideological minefield has a ring of truth: "The ILP seems to be saying 'surely there is something between reformism and communism? God knows what, but whatever it is, we are for it."¹⁴⁵ The vagueness extended to personalities as well as ideas. Lyman has convincingly argued that the rhetorical vagueness of Macdonald, his ability to be something to most men, had proved his strongest qualification for

leadership. The relationship between such a leader and his followers is bound to be less comfortable in office than in opposition. In opposition there was little to go on and one might interpret as one wanted. It was true that a close examination of Macdonald's work would provoke unease in a fundamentalist breast; Macdonald made his attachment to principles incompatible with doctrinal programmatic socialism clear enough, yet so long as there was no record of office, when the implications of such beliefs would be demonstrated, it was possible to live comfortably with such differences. The evident pain of a number of Labour Party socialists after 1924 was, one suspects, based not so much on a sense of betrayal, which may after all contain elements of personal and political comfort, but on being forced to question their own comfortable and established notions. Those 'minor' disagreements about methods and speed would have to be rethought and the results were bound to be more restrictive than the previous careless formulations. The dreary and painful business of attempting to reconcile the promised land of socialism with the machinery and muddle of secular democracy proved too much for some. Joseph Clayton was one who felt impelled to announce his retreat. To Clayton this Government represented the defeat of forty years of hope and endeavour. The end had come with, "the discovery, forty years later, that only the name remained, that socialism was no longer a cause, a new order of society to be set up, but a programme of social reform . . . the socialist movement had come to a standstill". What, one must wonder, had Clayton been expecting? He had been upset by Macdonald's statement that socialism would not come in fifty years, yet if this socialism was the same discrete, untarnished, apolitical entity of Clayton's imagination Macdonald would surely have represented the

position better had he dismissed the project out of hand. Clayton could find no refuge in communism. The British communists he dismissed as ineffectual, which judgment must appear, in the light of his own aspirations, a little harsh. Clayton may be an extreme example, but he might serve as representative of a process that, in varying degrees, was widespread among Labour Party socialists. After 1924 the debate about ends and means would have to be more realistic if the left wing of the movement were not to retreat into empty rhetoric.

Too much of the debate on the first Labour Government has centred on the legislative record. This is partly to be explained by the fact that legislation assumes a large importance in British radical politics, and also because legislative proposals and the arguments about them become public property far more readily than do administrative decisions. Yet the major business of governments is not legislation, and it is usually the case that even effective legislation depends more upon its time within the executive machine than on its public stages. The reactions of the Labour ministers to the processes of state power are far better revealed in the administrative record than in their public activities.

The concentration here will be on the exercise of power in areas which had previously proved controversial in the Labour Movement, and in particular the areas which had been held to reveal a tendency of the state to favour capital over labour. While there was some agreement within the movement that the state had revealed such a bias there was fundamental disagreement as to why this should be so. For

the revolutionary left the answer lay in the very nature of capitalist society and the relationship of the state to that society, while for the rest of the movement, the vast majority, the answer lay in the nature of the political commitments of those who had previously held governmental office. The clear implication, indeed the *raison d'être* of official Labour politics was that the state machine could be given a significant change of direction by a Labour government. Thus the conduct of the Labour ministers would inevitably have implications for all future discussions on the nature of the state in Britain.

Discussion of the conduct of the Labour Government has tended to begin with the debate about political strategy. Miliband quotes Snowden as arguing that it was open to the Labour government either to "propose some bold Socialist measures", which would lead to defeat in Parliament and fight an election on that basis, or alternatively pursue limited objectives and demonstrate that the Cabinet was "not under the domination of the wild men".¹⁴⁹ While there were those in the Party who advocated the first course of action; Clifford Allen for instance saw the first task of government as appointing "economists to draw up the order in which various industries should be nationalised",¹⁵⁰ Snowden's remarks are misleading as an explanation of the actual decision for there is no evidence that those in a position to materially affect the outcome seriously considered the radical alternative, nor that they were put under any pressure to do so. Sidney Webb himself was of the opinion that the Labour Party may have been afforded the opportunity of office by its opponents in the hope or expectation of "a Labour Government being formed of such weakness and outrageous character as to be straightaway condemned by public

opinion".¹⁵¹ According to Miliband the strategy of prudence was decided "privately and secretly, at a meeting at Sidney Webb's house attended by Macdonald, Snowden, Thomas, Henderson and Webb himself".¹⁵² Yet Webb claimed the matter was also discussed at meetings between the Parliamentary leadership, the National Executive and the General Council of the TUC, where the Parliamentary leaders' view of the importance of accepting the responsibilities of governing was accepted. To centre the argument about the Government on this issue is to confuse the debate. The whole logic of Labour Party politics demanded that the responsibilities of office should be accepted. What was really at issue was how these 'responsibilities' might be interpreted.

Special Branch surveillance of labour organisations had been the aspect of state activity which had excited the darkest suspicions within the Labour Movement. The encounter between the Labour Government and the Director of Intelligence would inevitably raise a number of delicate questions for while the Special Branch were by 1924 concentrating their activities on the communists, their files contained references to members of this Cabinet. A subsequent, somewhat speculative version of the encounter put the matter in dramatic terms "The moral that Labour can draw from this account is that Macdonald, having omitted or failed to destroy the 'Secret Service', the latter quickly mastered and, in the end, destroyed him".¹⁵³ The reality was more prosaic, but no less interesting.

Before the formation of a Labour Government Childs had distributed his weekly report to all members of the Cabinet. When governments

had changed previously the practice had continued undisturbed. Evidently Childs felt that Labour was something different for he ceased to circulate the reports and instead, sent a single copy to the Prime Minister with an attached note.¹⁵⁴ In the note he pointed out that he had marked the most important passages in the report and sought the Prime Minister's view as to whether he wanted the circulation to Cabinet Ministers to be discontinued. At this stage Macdonald was clearly unimpressed by the Special Branch and replied in a somewhat flippant manner.¹⁵⁵ He thought, "little of the news contained in it was likely to be unfamiliar to members of the Government or, indeed anyone who reads 'Workers Weekly' and similar papers". The report, Macdonald argued might be made more "entertaining and attractive" if it were expanded to include "other political activities of an extreme nature" such as the Fascisti. Maybe, Macdonald asked, Childs could investigate the "influences behind the 'Patriot' or the secret history of the Crusaders Movement": "The sources of 'Morning Post' funds might give an exhilarating flavour to the document and by enlarging its scope convert it into a complete and finished work of art." Childs chose to ignore its ironical tone and sent a stiff, and very literal, reply in which he pointed out, "I have never deemed it proper to investigate the activities of any organisation if it appeared that their activities, although extreme, were directed towards the achievement of their aims through the medium of the ballot box". The Communists he felt were "within the reach of the law" and, he complained, he had investigated the Fascisti who, while nominally loyal, did envisage the use of violent methods. As for the 'Patriot' and the 'Morning Post', he had not 'ascertained' that they advocated revolutionary activities. As to the future of

his service: "The question as to whether or not a weekly report on revolutionary movements is to continue is one upon which the Commissioner will no doubt receive instructions from the Home Secretary." 156

The Reports were never circulated to Cabinet Ministers as they had been previously but Macdonald continued to receive a weekly copy. It is interesting that in spite of Macdonald's initial scepticism the actual collection of material never became an issue. The only question on which the Prime Minister was invited to offer an opinion was that of circulation.

There is evidence that Childs began to tailor his material to suit his new readers and used a blue crayon to point up matters of particular interest to a Labour Prime Minister. This was done, not by including information on right wing groups, but by concentrating on the activities of the Communists within the official Labour Movement, and in truth, the Special Branch could offer much that was of interest to a Labour Prime Minister. Some parts of Macdonald's copies of the reports are marked in ordinary pencil which perhaps indicates some growing interest. One passage which speaks of a "secret communication" is so marked, which might indicate that the Prime Minister had begun to realise that Childs had more to offer than could be found in the 'Workers Weekly'.

Childs reported the general campaigns of the Communist Party against the Labour Government: "A more hostile attitude on the part of the Communist Party towards the Government is becoming manifest in the public actions and speeches of the communists." He quoted such 157

material as Zinoviev on the "Lessons of Macdonaldism"; "the¹⁵⁸ government is accused of acting as a tool of the bourgeoisie", and the draft programme of the CPGB: "The governing classes can no longer hold their sway over the masses without the aid of the reformist Labour leaders and social democrats."¹⁵⁹ Yet perhaps of more interest were the details of the specific campaigns of the Communists to enter the Labour Party and the Trade Unions. Childs kept the Prime Minister in touch with attempts to implement the resolution; "The Communist Party considers it its duty to enter into the ranks of the Labour Party in order to strengthen the militant and fighting elements¹⁶⁰ of the Labour Movement." The Communists' preparations for the Labour Party Conference were reported in detail:¹⁶¹ even the arguments which the Party members were to use were included, as was the secret document, "How to obtain recruits from the Labour Party" which gave the tactics in minute detail: "cultivate a spirit of comradeship", "try¹⁶² to get the Labour Party as a body to act in association with you". There was information on contacts which had already been established: "Five members are engaged in officially directing work for the Labour Party and seeing that it is kept on Communist lines", and news of a communist campaign to get their own candidates onto the Parliamentary Panel of the Workers Union.¹⁶³ Alfred M Wall, who was an active communist, was reported to have been adopted as prospective parliamentary candidate by the Streatham Labour Party and attempts were being made to get Albert Taylor, another Communist, adopted for Rossendale. Childs also had interesting material to offer on communist activities within the unions and in particular their attempts to cause or prolong strikes. It is probable that it was a panic over strikes which changed the attitude of Cabinet Ministers to those aspects of

the state machine of which they had previously been critical. Henderson, who on occasion was panicked into believing that Labour was in the same position as the Kerensky cabinet, was an easy convert for the Special Branch. He never allowed Childs to circulate his reports to all Cabinet Ministers but he felt that his colleagues should not be denied the benefit of the material available, and to this end prepared an edited account of the Special Branch file on communist activities.

Henderson's report on the Communist Party is interesting for a number of reasons. ¹⁶⁴ It provides an insight into his analysis of the communist operations and its likely impact on the Labour Movement, and it also illustrates how a particular circumstance was used by the Labour Cabinet to justify and to continue an aspect of state activity about which they, or some of them, had expressed serious reservations. The report was clearly conceived in part as an educative document. Henderson began with an account of the formation of the CPGB and an outline of its objectives. He emphasised that the ECCI of the Comintern, which was in effect the Soviet Government, exercised complete control over the CPGB, and that one of the objectives of the organisation was "the annihilation of the entire bourgeois government apparatus, from top to bottom, parliamentary, judicial, military, bureaucratic, administrative, municipal etc". The main object of the report was to explain recent communist activity directed at the unemployed and the official trade unions and to warn that communists did not believe in holding to legal methods; even their participation in representative institutions was only devoted to the end of intensifying the class struggle. All the points made were supported by reference to documents, some of

which were clearly intended to be confidential. Henderson rendered detailed accounts of the money sent to the CPGB from Moscow, noting that the ECCI had instructed the CPGB to spend 30 per cent of its grant on propaganda, and showing how the salaries of some officials of the RILU were paid by Moscow, in one instance quoting a letter from the acting secretary of the RILU to the British Bureau:

"Tom Mann being an old and experienced fighter on the labour front and Chairman of the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions deserves adequate pay for his services. Our funds are unfortunately extremely limited . . . however he is to continue to receive £25 per month for the bureau."

The same letter revealed that 'Comrade Gallacher' was also receiving a regular monthly salary of £25.

Henderson paid some attention to the membership position of the party, reporting that leaders of the party were expressing anxieties about the number of people leaving. For these and other reasons the ECCI and the Party Commission were intimating deep dissatisfaction with the CPGB.

Yet Henderson's greatest concern was with the activities of the communists within the unions. He quoted in detail their tactical instructions on conducting a union branch and warned that communist activity was liable to be particularly intensive during strikes as the Comintern had advocated mobilisation in "full force, especially in terms of strikes, lock-outs and other mass dismissals of the workers". Henderson then looked at how these injunctions had been put into practice. The Agricultural workers' strike of 1923 had aroused some interest in the Comintern but no effective action by

the CPGB. Communists had been active in the dockers' strike of the late summer of that year and had made themselves responsible for the bulletins published by the unofficial strike committee. They had also involved themselves in the Dock and Railway strikes of 1924, and Henderson noted that Inkpin, secretary of the Central Committee of the CPGB had issued a confidential circular which spoke of the need for sabotage to render ineffective government attempts to maintain an alternative transport service during a proposed Tramway strike. The objectives of such activity, Henderson warned, were to prolong the strikes and, where possible, to weaken the hold of the union executives.

From his report it is clear that Henderson found little to object to in the activities of the Intelligence Department. Meetings were still being monitored, organisations infiltrated and mail opened but all had apparently been rendered acceptable by being directed against communists, and communists he regarded as being beyond the political pale. It was apparently justifiable to interfere with the political liberties of those who directed their activities to such noxious ends as the undermining of official trade union leaders.

In examining the broader field of Cabinet actions with regard to industrial disputes it is difficult to determine whether the communists were a pretext or a cause of ministers using aspects of state machinery of which they had previously disapproved. One of the early acts of the Cabinet was to set up an Industrial Unrest Committee with the terms of reference: "To enquire into the facts in regard to recent strikes, with a view to ascertaining whether any appreciable percentage of the unfortunate aspects of these strikes was due to Communist

activity."¹⁶⁵ While nobody took the Communist Party seriously in broad political terms a number of members of the Cabinet came to share Henderson's anxiety about the ability of the communists to cause trouble within the union movement. Added to the general concern which any government might feel about such matters were the deep defensive feelings of an organisation for its home base. At one of the meetings of the IUC Clynes was at pains to draw the distinction between Communists and opposition groups within the Labour Party, arguing that "members of the Labour Party would not have intervened in disputes for the express purpose of making trouble between the workers and their union".¹⁶⁶

Henderson pointed out that the Cabinet could make further use of the resources of the state in this battle and recommended that they should discuss the matter with the "Heads of the Metropolitan Police". Webb clearly felt that the discussion was getting out of hand and stressed the need "to distinguish between incitement to criminal actions . . . and inciting men to strike, which, however deplorable, was not, in itself, criminal and moreover, did not constitute action which it was possible for any government to suppress". In Webb's view the only difference between the communists and those who had led the strikes in 1912 was the foreign money. Wheatley supported Webb, arguing that though the communists were agents of Moscow and while their objective was to subvert the capitalist system, the influence they could have was very small.

The Committee's findings were reassuring. They argued that " . . . while the Communist Party have undoubtedly intervened in recent industrial disputes with a view to their prolongation and extension and have done their best to persuade the workers to reject the advice

of the Trade Unions concerned there is little evidence (save perhaps in one or two cases) that the Communists themselves have actually initiated a dispute". The Committee also warned that the importance of the communists had been "grossly exaggerated", and that the public pronouncements of Labour leaders had done much to encourage such exaggerations. The Committee advised the Government not to take legal measures against communists for the time being though they acknowledged that "In certain circumstances it might become imperative for the Government to initiate such proceedings". The Committee advised against the Government's becoming involved in counter propaganda as it felt that this would merely serve to advertise the CPGB. In this there is a great similarity between the conduct of this Government and previous administrations. However one final recommendation made by the committee does show that there was one additional avenue open to Labour governments. The committee advised that "steps should be taken to convey informally and confidentially to responsible Trade Union leaders the information possessed by the Government as to the real object of the Communists and the manner in which their activities are being fostered and encouraged from abroad". This recommendation was later accepted by the Cabinet.

The Labour Government was determined from the first to take an active part in industrial disputes, believing it had special abilities in this area. When a dock strike threatened early in 1924 the Cabinet instructed the Minister of Labour "to watch the situation carefully" and "either see the Chairman of the Port of London Authority himself . . . or request the Prime Minister to see him with a view to doing everything possible to avoid a deadlock". On February 12th the

Minister of Labour reported to the Cabinet that as negotiations had broken down he had convened a meeting between the parties. As the prospects of a dock strike became clearer the government was pressed to publicly define its attitudes. A Parliamentary question was set for the Prime Minister asking, "Whether he will give an assurance that promises of full maintenance to people engaged in industrial disputes will not be sanctioned". The Cabinet agreed that Macdonald should reply that payment would only be made according to existing statutes and court rulings. The Cabinet also stuck to precedent by setting up an Emergency Committee "for the purpose of enquiring into the emergency organisation". At the first meeting of this Committee Sir John Anderson spoke to his paper, discussed above, which he had prepared for the previous administration. While Anderson's proposals were a good deal less provocative than earlier Supply and Transport schemes it is perhaps somewhat surprising that the Emergency Committee so readily decided "to recommend the Cabinet to adopt the scheme which, if adopted, involved the immediate appointment of a CCC". The use of this scheme involved the use of regulations under the Emergency Act, 1920. While Miliband overstates the case in claiming that this Act was "bitterly resented" by the whole Labour movement; the Labour opposition in Parliament had at the time concentrated on criticisms of the timing and style of the Act rather than its substance and only 43 Labour MP's had voted against it; there were probably grounds for expecting more caution than the Cabinet actually demonstrated. The Labour men did recommend some changes; "The Emergency Regulations (under the EPA) should be based on the corresponding regulations issued in previous emergencies of the same nature but that the Law Officers should have full discretion to delete from them all objectionable, vindictive or inapplicable clauses, and should add a clause

to deal with profiteering. "The recruiting poster for volunteers to man the emergency services was to be modified to include the slogan "No Blacklegging Involved". The Committee believed that there was no longer any need for elaborate secrecy and hinted at a broader understanding of the government's role in disputes by suggesting "that the opportunity should be taken when any announcement was made to deal with wider aspects of the problem of industrial unrest."¹⁷⁴ However there is no evidence that this last suggestion was given substance.

J C Wedgwood was appointed Chief Civil Commissioner and seemed to take to his task with enthusiasm. The concern which J C C Davidson felt on handing over his pet organisation to a Labour Cabinet has been recorded as has Wedgwood's reply to the effect that he had done nothing about it.¹⁷⁵ Far from doing the things Davidson feared a Labour representative might have done, Wedgwood had actually mobilised the organisation. Wedgwood believed that all that the STO required was a change in its public image and that this could be achieved by essentially cosmetic alterations. He felt that secrecy could be relaxed. It had, he argued, only been "due to the supposition that a considerable party in the state might be in opposition to the actions of government. Whether this supposition was well or ill founded, it is obviously incorrect with a Labour Government in office".¹⁷⁶ Wedgwood felt any residual unease his colleagues might be feeling could be discounted: "There is nothing to be ashamed of in action which will tend to preserve the essential services and the life of the people." All matters could be publicised in future except, obviously, the proceedings of Cabinet and its committees and details of air mail and transport schemes

which were vulnerable to sabotage and only for use in the event of 'dislocation'. More use in the future should be made of Local Authorities. The arrival of a Labour administration meant "that there is less ground for presupposing disloyalty on the part of Local Authorities in the future".¹⁷⁷

The Dock Strike was settled in February without Government intervention, but when a transport strike was threatened in March the full paraphernalia of the counter strike measures were mobilised. The Cabinet decided at its meeting of March 26th to proclaim a state of emergency under the EPA. The Emergency Committee immediately made arrangements to supply charabancs as an alternative means of transport. In a memorandum the Chief Civil Commissioner conceded that little in practice had been changed: "The late government had made, and had put into operation during 1921, elaborate arrangements for dealing with national emergencies of this character. Though unsatisfactory these arrangements must be continued for the moment."¹⁷⁸ Ten Civil Commissioners were appointed to go to the regions and food, transport and recruiting agencies were made ready to operate. As under Anderson's scheme, Wedgwood recommended that primary responsibility for obtaining labour for dock and transport work would rest with the appropriate associations and government would not be directly involved in recruiting "except when it has been shown to be absolutely necessary for the carrying out of essential services". The Chief Civil Commissioner reported that protection and publicity arrangements were underway but it had been decided in respect of the latter that "it would not be desirable that any propaganda or anything but facts should be issued". Where all previous schemes had been co-ordinated by the Home Office Wedgwood argued that

responsibilities should now devolve to individual departments: "The practice in the past had only arisen because Governments anticipated factions in opposition to their emergency measures and feared discussion in the House." If nothing else had changed, the absence of a Labour opposition ensured a smoother ride for such measures. In the event of a transport strike the Cabinet eventually decided "after a long discussion, that the Government should confine its activities to providing means for the transportation of Government employees". Beyond this they were prepared to employ special constables and "to offer adequate protection to any bus, tube or tram service that found themselves able to run and to make a general appeal to the motor driving public to render any assistance in their power".
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When, in the June, the Cabinet was faced with the possibility of strikes on the Great Western Railway and by Electric Power workers its responses were similar. In the latter case it was again attachment to precedent rather than innovation that was the main motivation. The Cabinet immediately authorised the Minister of Labour to make a statement "if he thought fit, to say that if society were subjected to this sort of strike it would be paralysed. If asked whether the Government would protect people remaining at work, and others who wished to keep the public services going, he should reply in the affirmative".¹⁸⁰ The Minister was asked to stress "that the Government regarded it as its first duty to maintain law and order". The First Lord was instructed to have naval ratings ready to run the power stations. The only doubts which the Government had about this scheme was, as under previous governments, whether the naval ratings could

be put into the power stations without the issuing of an emergency proclamation. The Cabinet record of discussion of industrial disputes supports Sidney Webb's recollection that the mobilisation of the emergency services was undertaken "without hesitation and without a dissident voice".¹⁸¹

There can be little doubt that the Labour Cabinet was at its most unimaginative in its conduct of strikes. Given the overall political complexion of the Party nobody could have seriously anticipated any radical break with tradition but the manner in which the Cabinet was panicked requires some explanation. The administrative machine was finely attuned to reminding ministers of the dislocations created by strikes. Each anticipated major strike would produce reports from a range of departments; at a minimum, the Home Office, the Board of Trade, the Scottish Office and the Ministries of Labour, Transport and Agriculture, outlining political difficulties and the particular responsibilities of government. These would range from the maintenance of order, or the electricity supply to special arrangements for the transport of fish. Many of the matters were apparently technical yet failure in any of them might adversely affect the Government's reputation. While inexperienced ministers might have prepared themselves on matters of policy they can have had no prior warning of issues such as this. The Prime Minister's papers leave an impression of a man at the centre of a network constantly reminding him of his responsibilities, and warning him of the consequences of failure. It might be a memorandum from a civil servant reminding him of a hitherto unknown Prime Ministerial function or a letter from the king reminding him of the numerous problems which would be created by a Dock Strike.¹⁸²

While there undoubtedly were other ways of dealing with strikes, such alternatives needed more time, and the immediacy of such problems was constantly being brought home to ministers. It was this type of pressure which predisposed Labour ministers to accept without question the readily available conventional solutions to the difficulties created by strikes.

One final issue which may be used to illuminate the behaviour of the Labour Ministers is that of the police strikers. As a result of the second police strike in 1919, 2,300 men had been dismissed. The fact that their strike had been called in support of a campaign to form a union affiliated with the TUC made their cause a popular one in the Labour movement. Moreover many of the ex-policemen had become active members of the movement and resolutions demanding their reinstatement were a regular feature of Labour Conferences. Henderson, inevitably, had to take up the issue but quickly came to the conclusion that he would do nothing. His reasons, as outlined to Cabinet, are interesting.¹⁸³

The first police strike, of 1918, Henderson argued had been justifiable because it was in the nature of an industrial dispute. The demands concerned wages and conditions as well as the recognition of an independent union (The National Union of Police and Prison Officers). The Government offered concessions on pay and conditions but only allowed a representative organisation on condition that there was no right to strike and no affiliation with other Labour organisations. While a Police Bill was being prepared NUPPO had called a second strike with the aim of forcing the Government to concede "full and frank recognition of the union". It had been the 2,300 men who joined this strike who had been dismissed. In this matter it is Henderson's

reasoning rather than the actual decision which is interesting. He based his refusal to reinstate the men on the grounds that the 1919 strike did not constitute a normal industrial dispute: "It will be seen how entirely different the circumstances of the 1919 strike were from any industrial dispute . . . The sudden withdrawal from duty with the avowed object of forcing the hand of the Government on a matter then before Parliament must be regarded as a breach of discipline and of the obligations of the Police to the public as would in any circumstances have merited dismissal." ¹⁸⁴ Clearly the reasoning here is inadequate. Was it so automatic that any strike "forcing the hand of government" could not be seen as an industrial dispute, especially where the Government was, as employer, directly responsible for those terms and conditions of employment which were in dispute? This was clearly not an interpretation, as was made explicit later, which could be acceptable within the broad traditions of the Labour Movement. Anderson's biographer records that Anderson, as Permanent Under Secretary at the Home Office, dismissed out of hand Henderson's initial enquiry as to whether anything could be done for those men. ¹⁸⁵

The official view was clearly that it was not desirable for the police to have a trade union and that affiliation with other labour organisations was thought to be particularly undesirable. Henderson's inability, or unwillingness, to do battle with his officials is revealed in his lifeless repetition of highly conservative views presented as if they were argument. He pointed out that the Police Union had caused "bad discipline"; "To a great extent the force has now regained its morale, and I am assured that the dismissal of those who took part in the strike of 1919 undoubtedly contributed very materially to this result." He concluded: "I could not assume the

responsibility of suggesting, or even countenancing, the reinstatement of the dismissed strikers without seriously compromising my position." Henderson's biographer, who took a favourable view of his ¹⁸⁶ tenure of office, recognised this issue as one on which he might have been expected to take action, yet: "A committee set up to report into the police strike revealed legal difficulties not appreciated before the party came into office." ¹⁸⁷ If this had been the case Henderson did not mention it to his Cabinet colleagues and the balance of evidence would suggest that this abandonment of the cause originated in political timidity rather than legal necessity.

Henderson's failure to do anything for the dismissed strikers attracted a good deal of unfavourable comment at the subsequent Labour Party conference. ¹⁸⁸ If the Home Office had been able to convert Henderson he could do nothing with the Conference and a resolution demanding their reinstatement was passed unanimously. Mr H Dawson Large of the St Pancras Labour Party, for example, complained: "The attitude taken by the late Labour Government struck a very severe blow at those who were getting the support of these splendid fighters either for Trade Unionism or the Political Movement." The debate demonstrated that a number of people within the Party saw the question in the broader context of the nature of the powers available to the state. Mr Blackwell of West Ham pointed out, "They were deeply indebted to the police strikers for what they knew about this Secret Service Department". Mr Colyer of the Holborn Labour Party moved, "That this conference protests against the use of members of the secret service for spying upon, and if possible, corrupting working class organisations . . . and declares that it will be one of the first duties of

a Labour Home Secretary to put an end to this discreditable system of spying, and to give full publicity to all documents and alleged records accumulated by the Secret Service under the present system." The police strikers had done their work well for the Conference was well informed about the activities of Special Branch Officers. Comment was made on the fact that CID men had been found under the platform at a CPGB meeting, and on the opening of mail. Mr R Bishop brought up the case of the dinner at which Mr Wheatley had been present where the waiters were "carefully disguised members of the Secret Service". He added: "The Labour Movement apparently could not repudiate anything of that kind because they found people like Mr Henderson attending dinners given by the CID at which these sleuths were present."

Henderson's contribution to the debate suggested some justifiable unease. He admitted that the incident concerning the Secret Service waiters had taken place but said that the Government had issued an order that it was not to be repeated. He added: "They were definitely opposed to the very vicious system of spying upon people in the way indicated", but this was at best, ambiguous. Henderson avoided any practical commitment when he resisted the demand that the next Labour Government should publish the relevant documents. He argued that this could not be done, "without committing them to publish all the documents no matter what they were, and that might have been in the archives for a very long time"¹⁸⁹. This surely would render documents more amenable to publication. Yet Henderson's whole statement is, at best, misleading, for it is clear from the inside record that he had little difficulty in accepting both the principle and practice of such

activities. There are perhaps two main factors in explaining this acceptance. On the one hand Henderson's, and the Government's, willingness to accept the conventional definitions of responsible action suggested by their civil servants, and on the other the fact that much of such activity was at this time directed against the communists and their sympathisers, who were regarded as troublesome and illegitimate competitors on Labour's home ground.

Interpretations of the conduct of the Labour Administration inevitably assume some general understanding of the nature of the Labour Party. A number of studies have, by beginning with too narrow a view of the objectives of the Party, come to conclusions of only limited interest. There is nothing very surprising in arguing that the Government failed if the judgement is based in the belief that the sole, or even main aim of the Party was the pursuit of socialism, defined as an achievable, finite and readily recognisable state of society. That there was a relationship between the Labour Party and socialism is undeniable but that relationship was too ambiguous, too clouded by internal disagreement, to form an adequate basis for judging anything.

In some dismissive accounts of the Labour Government the historical experience itself seems essentially unimportant. Coates ¹⁹⁰ doesn't assume that the Labour Party is socialist, but believes that the priorities which it should have set itself could only have been achieved had it adopted a certain kind of socialism. On this basis the conduct of a particular administration can be seen as no more than the inevitable progress to some predetermined failure. What can such an account make of those who thought of the Labour Government as only a

limited failure, or even a limited success? Henderson's biographer, for example felt there was much to be said in its favour: "It lasted for but nine months, yet as a demonstration of capacity to handle the higher tasks of statesmanship, and to cope with the problems of large scale administration, it was undoubtedly a success." ¹⁹¹ It is surely more revealing, rather than immediately dismissing such a statement as mistaken or malign, to attempt to recreate the belief system and the interpretation of circumstances on which it was made. If, instead of criticising the Labour Administration in terms of the objectives and beliefs of other parties, one evaluates it in terms of its own, one produces a far more interesting and in the end, more telling criticism.

It is however difficult to define the objectives and beliefs of the Labour Party. Membership was not dependent on accepting any doctrine about the means or ends of political activity, and such statements as to doctrine or structure that did exist were open to the competitive internal politics of the Party. It is possible to make a beginning by suggesting four understandings of party purpose. In the simplest, and perhaps most fundamental sense Labour was the party of an organised sectional interest, the party of the trade unions. This interpretation reflected the organisational and financial base of the Party which was granted full recognition in the constitution of 1918. In another sense, and as emphasised by another section of the party, Labour was the party of class interest, the working class party, furthering the interests of those who earned, or failed to earn a living by their labour. In a third sense, Labour was a party of and for the whole community. This theme was very much in evidence in the rhetoric of 1918 Conference and was regarded by the leadership of the

Parliamentary Party as a necessary element in the Party's electoral appeal. Finally, Labour was a socialist party with the objective of creating a new society dedicated to human equality and based upon the popular control of the means of production. Beyond the sketch offered in Clause Four there was of course little agreement on the nature of this socialism nor on how it might be achieved, even amongst those who felt that this was or should be the overriding objective of the Party. Such a description of party purposes should not be taken to imply that individuals may necessarily be defined as having belonged exclusively to one group or another. Even this variety of purposes was in practice much complicated by questions of interpretation. Again most party members would, when emphasising one of these definitions of purpose, argue that the others were not incompatible with it. Parliamentary leaders concentrated on the need to serve the whole community but argued that this was not to neglect the interests of the working class; trade union leaders pursued the interests of their union members but implied that these were synonymous with those of the working class, and indeed the whole community. Socialists could argue that the pursuit of socialism could produce a society where such conflicts of interest would be meaningless. Yet in terms of the politics of the first Labour Government such a scheme is useful as it emphasises that contemporary judgments can only be understood against a plurality of objectives and conflicting definitions.

While it is unrewarding to debate whether or not the Labour Party's leaders should have formed an Administration it is useful to consider their interpretation of the role of government in the light of the variously interpreted purposes of the party. That the Home

Secretary passed on secretly gathered information on the activities of communists within trade unions to trade union leaders might suggest that a Labour Cabinet would use its special relationship with organised labour to add a new dimension to government. Yet if there is evidence of co-operation here there is little anywhere else. For the most part it would appear that Labour ministers contented themselves with a rigid, conservative interpretation of the rights and duties of ministers. When, in March 1924, the Government was preparing a Factory Bill, the TUC General Council asked to be informed of the contents of the measure before it was placed before Parliament. In his reply Henderson made a virtue of rigid adherence to precedent, arguing that this type of consultation would not be "in accordance with the usual practice of Departments": "The Government's business is . . . to be open to receive and examine suggestions from any quarter, and when they have considered all the materials at their disposal, to present their proposals to Parliament." The lesson in constitutional priorities was concluded with the observation that "no other course of action is open for any Government".¹⁹²

The emphasis on the conventional nature of the Government was, if anything, even more apparent in the conduct during strikes. Inevitably the acceptance of the responsibilities of governing meant that a Labour Cabinet had to ensure that emergency services were maintained during industrial disputes but as the activities of previous governments had always aroused justifiable suspicions of partisanship, it might have been expected that a Labour Government might attempt to devise a scheme which was less disadvantageous to organised labour. A joint meeting of the TUC General Council and the National Executive

Committee called in response to the use of the EPA in the Transport Strike suggested that if services had to be kept going this should be done by the regular employees at the wages and conditions asked for until a committee of enquiry had reported.¹⁹³ Yet far from giving serious consideration to this or any other alternative proposal the Cabinet seemed determined, indeed eager, to commit itself to actions even more rigid than the Conservative predecessors. Ben Tillet voiced his complaints about the Ministers at the 1924 Conference: "When he met their Labour Minister, or the under Minister, he found that they were in fear and trembling, and some were saying that if the men were brought out on strike it would lead to bloodshed. In the whole course of his life, after having dealt with a good many governments, he had never heard from Tory or Liberals the same menacing tones and the same expressions of fear."¹⁹⁴ Beatrice Webb recorded a similar panic in the Cabinet where Henderson was illustrating their plight by reference to Kerensky's Government.¹⁹⁵ The situation arose because of the Cabinet's interpretation of its role and the way it chose to handle its special relationship with organised labour. Instead of using this relationship it sought to restrict it, almost to deny it. In seeking to prove itself a government of 'the whole community', the Labour Ministers sought to demonstrate that labour had no hold over them. Moreover they apparently felt that they would be held responsible for the conduct of all labour organisations. Thus the Cabinet was in a situation where it thought its public standing depended on its ability to deliver a docile workforce while at the same time being seen not to offer it any concessions. This isolated the Government from a potential source of support and left it at the mercy of the administrative machine and the aridities of precedent.

In another area of traditional Labour concern there was a similar pattern of inactivity in deference to traditional patterns of government. A subsequent critic, in claiming that: "There was too much smug respectability in the Labour Party to deal with the unemployment problem",¹⁹⁶ was offering no more than a partial explanation. Labour did respond better to the employed, paid up worker rather than the unemployed, but the Cabinet's inactivity went deeper. Macdonald's reply to subsequent criticism illustrates the matter rather well: "It was", he protested, "not enough to put themselves in the position of the unemployed . . . they had to put themselves in the position of the Minister of Labour who was responsible for the constructive legislation that was going to settle the problem."¹⁹⁷ Of course it all depended on how one was to interpret the role of Minister. Labour's record seemed to imply that one must fulfil roles according to precedent, and this bore some implication for the possibility of producing change. The record on unemployment had been negligible; Thomas Jones recorded, "It was rather disappointing to find Sidney Webb, the author of pamphlets innumerable on the cure of unemployment regardless of cost, now, as Chairman of the Unemployment Committee, reduced to prescribing a revival of trade as the one remedy left to us".¹⁹⁸ Even allowing for the triumphant negativity of the professional administrator this was a fair characterisation of the situation of the Labour Government. Only in the minds of sentimental radicals do effective measures flow directly from party manifesto to statute book, so Labour would inevitably have to place some reliance on the administrative machine. Yet professional administrators unless faced with plausible and sophisticated alternatives will inevitably adhere to existing patterns of thought and activity. As it was the Labour ministers appear to have

been so ill prepared, to have thought so little about the actual pressures of office, that they seemed to rely on the machine for political survival and hence adopted its values and 'solutions'. That a Labour Government would be influenced was inevitable. Labour politics was not iconoclastic and as a government they could not be immune to the Parliamentary view of its competence nor the polished conservatism and administrative sophistication of the professional administrators. To enter without clear ideas was to invite the machine to run the politicians; which function it was admirably equipped to perform. Ministers could be expertly briefed to act as champions for their respective departments in the internal battle for prestige and resources and the Government could be given the glaze of informed competence in its public appearances. The only price was the abandonment of the possibility of a collective radical purpose.

Labour politics offered no developed understanding of the role of government and the state. It was one thing to believe that one could change a social and economic system by capturing the political executive but quite another to explain how that political executive might be transformed. There was no appreciation of the difficulties which would be encountered, let alone suggestions as to how they might be overcome. If Labour politics had a tradition of political statics, it was painfully short on dynamics. There is no evidence of debate on how to create the political situation in which such rational schemes might be applied; no thought on how initial political supports might be channelled and sustained through the difficult business of change. The political methodology was a rag bag of liberal constitutionalism and radical populism, overestimating the

power of Parliament and the popular will, and ignoring the power of the state machinery and the inbuilt biases in its structures and methods. Even party radicals, while they suspected that the machine was not neutral, failed to see the full implications of the problem. The machine could neither be ignored nor instantly demoted for an elected Labour government could not function without its expertise and information. The unrecognised problem was how this need could be prevented from developing into total dependence. Bevin's was a telling indictment and his suggestion that Labour must never again take office when in a minority reasonable enough, but it did again put too much stress on the legislature and legislation.¹⁹⁹

It is important to bear in mind that none of the criticisms offered at the time had any effect in that in 1929 largely the same Cabinet took office on very similar terms. There are a number of features of Labour politics which render it difficult to draw rational lessons from past mistakes and to formulate new approaches. The fact that Labour is an electoral party enjoying and depending upon mass support removes it from the ideological freedoms open to the smaller sects. While it is often misleading to draw precise conclusions about the connection between policies and electoral support it is necessary to remember that for the Labour Party discussions on the rights and wrongs of policy must be clouded by additional considerations of popularity. When in office a Labour Government, mindful of the need to maintain electoral support, must often make bargains and compromises to maintain an economic equilibrium, which ideally it might not countenance. There is the connected point that Labour, as a large party with a wide membership inevitably came to reflect something of the diversity

of the society around it. Finally Labour is an open party. Doctrines, positions and policies are the subject of open competition. This too, tends against a precise discussion of means and ends or a properly dispassionate examination of past failures. Decisions and policies, party history itself becomes distorted by the competition for power.

Yet even granting all of this there does remain the problem of explaining how Labour ministers managed to avoid serious criticism. Part of the answer must be sought in the historical circumstances of the Government. While subsequent accounts concentrate on policy and doctrine most contemporary reactions were in terms of the personalities and class origins of the ministers. The question of Labour's 'fitness to rule' was not seen in terms of its ideas but in terms of the backgrounds of its leaders. All of those involved in politics at this time had had their expectations of politics substantially formed in the years before the First World War, and in that world the working man who achieved high office was regarded as something unusual. In popular terms the Labour Government was far more important as a symbol of social change than as a political instrument. While today we inevitably approach 1924 as the beginning of an era it might be more valuable to see it as the end of one: as the fulfilment of the Victorian dream, as the final arrival of 'Rochdale Man', proving at last his fitness for full admission to political society. If critics were restrained it may have been that they were with Clynes, "marveling at the strange turn of fortune's wheel that had brought Macdonald, the starveling clerk, Thomas the engine driver, Henderson the foundry labourer and Clynes, the mill hand, to this pinnacle . . . "

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In addition, in accounting for this absence of effective criticism one must take account of how the particular nature of the Party's socialism failed to lend itself to the creation of an alternative strategy on which to base such criticism. It might seem that socialism played so small a part in the conduct of the government as to scarcely merit consideration. On the basis of present day understandings of the term it would perhaps be enough to record that socialism, as such, nor any substantial measure associated with it appeared in the manifesto of 1923,²⁰¹ and leave it at that. Yet this would be to ignore the complexities and ambiguities of Labour politics, for if there was no reference to socialism in the manifesto there was clear evidence of its existence in other areas of Party life. Aspirations to social equality and fundamental change were abiding themes of party rhetoric and there had been the recent clear commitment to a programme of major social reconstruction. How could the Government ignore these factors and indeed, evade any substantial criticism for so doing? Part of the answer must lie in the internal Party dynamics, already discussed, but a fuller explanation must take account of contemporary understanding of the meaning of socialism itself.

The traditions of the British left are frequently categorised as piecemeal and reformist, but this is only partially true. Behind the day to day campaigns for amelioration there exist broader social criticisms, and aspirations towards more ambitious alternatives. These ideas can be difficult to recognise for later generations for they are drawn within prevailing intellectual assumptions. Socialist ideas, in this period, were expressed in terms conditioned by Victorian moral assumptions and evolutionary views of society. Such views did not preclude

their holders from taking part in more mundane political activities, though there was obviously a broad gulf between such aspirations and immediate action. Many of the socialists of this period quoted Mill as their mentor and in Mill's writings this division between immediate practice and the eventual harmonious society is quite explicit. Mill was at pains to separate his advocacy of reforming measures, intended to promote better life chances for the disadvantaged, from socialism, a morally ordered society of the future well beyond such mundane measures. The thousands who were influenced by Blatchford's vision of a future moral order were not persuaded by it to abandon their efforts for immediate improvement. Even the Fabian Society which came to be associated with a particularly practical style of politics, had a history of attachment to imprecise utopian aspirations. It is in this context that the contradictions of a Party identified with the cause of Socialism, a Labour Government not even attempting socialist measures and a left, unable to mount a systematic criticism must be understood. It is here too that an answer to Pimlott's question as to how radical populism and strict constitutionalism can co-exist on the Labour left will be found.²⁰² Macdonald accepted much of the liberal representative view of the state in that he thought little stood between elected governments and the implementation of their programme. Yet he never believed that socialism could be brought about by the election of one, or even successive, Labour Governments. The socialist society could only come on the basis of a community which was morally developed to the point where it was irrevocably committed to the creation of a new order. If Macdonald was imprecise about the connection between the goal of socialism and immediate political activity he was only reflecting the mainstream tradition of British socialist politics.

It was then, a tradition which had little practical advice to offer an elected government. It had nothing to offer on how a rational political purpose might be sustained in the face of the demands of electoral politics, it had no suggestions of how cumulative reforms might be extended into a pattern of qualitative social change and it had no plan for how a social democratic government might summon other social forces to its aid in order to create changes within the existing state machine. While the history of the First Labour Government illustrates a good deal about labour politics it is much less revealing on socialist theories of the state. On the issues raised by Lenin and Kautsky of whether socialism can be brought about through the use of existing state machinery it had nothing to offer. The theory of social democratic transformation cannot be held to have been disproved by the conduct of this Government for, quite simply, it was never tried.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- 1 H Parris, 'The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Government - a Reappraisal Reappraised' in H Parris, *Constitutional Bureaucracy* (1969)
- 2 K Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (New York 1971) p109
- 3 K Kautsky, *The Social Revolution* (1909) p158
- 4 Kautsky, *Class Struggle* p90
- 5 Kautsky, *Class Struggle* p158
- 6 Kautsky, *Class Struggle* p158
- 7 Kautsky, *Class Struggle* p159
- 8 Kautsky, *Class Struggle* p93
- 9 Kautsky, *Social Revolution* p172
- 10 Kautsky, *Social Revolution* p172
- 11 L Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism, Vol 2 The Golden Age* (1978) p56
- 12 Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* (1976) p211. H M Hyndman dismissed the question of Syndicalism out of hand. "It is certain that there is no effective Syndicalism in the French sense in this country." H M Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences* (1912) p457
- 13 See W Kendal, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921* (1968) p66
- 14 S Pierson, *British Socialists. The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (1979) p89
- 15 G D H Cole and R Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (1946) pp482-3
- 16 Frank Budgen, *Myself When Young* (1970)
- 17 Budgen, *Myself When Young* p83. See also *The Socialist Labour Party, Its Aims and Methods* (Edinburgh 1908) and T Bell, *Pioneering Days* (1941)
- 18 Budgen, *Myself When Young* p89
- 19 'Socialist' October 1905
- 20 Daniel de Leon, *Socialism in America* quoted in James D Young 'Daniel de Leon and Anglo-American Socialism', *Labor History* Vol 17 No 3 (Summer 1976) p338

Not all of de Leon's British followers took this point. W Paul in 'The State Its Origins and Functions' (Glasgow 1917) p185 argued "By controlling the press, capital is able to control the workers' votes". For discussion of Paul's views see below.

- 21 Daniel de Leon, The Socialist Reconstruction of Society, SLP Edinburgh (undated) p29 (Speech actually delivered 1905)
- 22 Budgen, Myselves When Young, p92
- 23 Kendal, Revolutionary Movement in Britain pp63-76
- 24 James D Young, 'Daniel de Leon and Anglo-American Socialism', Labour History Vol 17 No 3 (Summer 1976) p333
- 25 See for example William Paul, Communism and Society (1922) and J T Murphy, 'Wanted. The Marxism of Marx', Plebs Magazine (April 1923) pp153-4. See also Young, 'Daniel de Leon' p333
- 26 'Socialist' 29 September 1921. It is interesting to contrast this view with that of William Paul who had become a member of the CPGB. At the beginning of 1922 Paul was claiming that 'capitalism' was becoming more unstable and upheavals were to be expected: "In this development there exists the greatest possibility that the social revolution may take place in the immediate future." Labour Monthly (February 1922) p166
- 27 V I Lenin, State and Revolution (Moscow 1977) p12
- 28 V I Lenin, Speech delivered at Sverdlov University Jan 11 1919 Collected Works Vol 29 (Moscow 1965) pp470-488
- 29 R Miliband, 'Lenin's The State and Revolution' Socialist Register 1970. See also Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (1976) 'However Lenin p116'
- 30 J T Murphy, New Horizons (1941) p151
- 31 W Gallacher, Revolt on the Clyde (1949) and J Clunie, The Third Communist International (Glasgow 1921)
- 32 Labour Leader 1 January 1920. A similar view was held by H W Lee "It savours too much of the old implacable bitterness of the terrorists." H W Lee, Bolshevism - A Curse and a Danger to the Workers (1919) p6
- 33 V I Lenin, Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder (Moscow 1968)
- 34 V I Lenin, Selected Works Vol 6 p218 quoted in H Laski, The Secret Battalion (1946) p6
- 35 Laski p6
- 36 V I Lenin, Left Wing Communism

- 37 See G Lichtheim, A Short History of Socialism (1970). Lichtheim argues that the German Social Democrats were ready to call themselves marxists only "on the understanding that the political struggle was to be waged peacefully and that the immediate aim was the attainment of democracy". p230
- 38 See Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism Vol 2 pp51-53
- 39 "The economic activity of the modern state is the natural starting point of the development that leads to the co-operative common-wealth." K Kautsky, The Class Struggle in I Howe, Essential Works of Marxism (1976) p168
- 40 K Kautsky, The Dictatorship of the Proletariat (Tr H J Stenning) (Manchester 1920) p10
- 41 "But it is not alone the relief of the proletariat from its misery that makes the activity of the proletariat in Parliament and the operation of the proletarian organisations indispensable. They are also of value in familiarising the proletariat with the problems of national and municipal government and of the great industries, as well as the attainment of that intellectual maturity which the proletariat will need if it is to supplant the bourgeoisie as the ruling class." K Kautsky, The Social Revolution in C Wright Mills, The Marxists (1971) p172
- 42 Kautsky, Dictatorship of the Proletariat p18
- 43 Kautsky, Dictatorship of the Proletariat Ch 3
- 44 Kautsky, Dictatorship of the Proletariat p25
- 45 Kautsky, Dictatorship of the Proletariat p38
- 46 R Postgate, The Bolshevik Theory (1920)
- 47 J Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism (1919) p185
- 48 W Paul, The State. Its Origins and Function (Glasgow 1917) p175
- 49 P Snowden, Socialism Versus Syndicalism (1913) p132
- 50 "The inroads made into Labourism let alone Liberal or Conservative support among working men were only limited" Bob Holton. British Syndicalism 1900-1914 (1976) p202. Syndicalists had problems in devising an appropriate strategy for coping with the modern state. According to Holton they "glossed over" the problem of "how the ultimate revolutionary overthrow of capitalism was to be achieved in the face of capitalist resistance, in particular resistance by the state".
- 54 Grayson & Taylor, Problem of Parliament p91
- 55 Grayson & Taylor, Problem of Parliament p92

56 J R Macdonald, The Socialist Movement (1911) p109
57 Snowden, Socialism versus Syndicalism p131
58 Snowden, Socialism versus Syndicalism p136
59 Bruce Glasier, Meaning of Socialism p185
60 J R Macdonald, Socialism and Society (1905) p126
61 Bruce Glasier, Meaning of Socialism p183
62 Macdonald, Socialism and Society p132
63 William Paul, The State, Its Origins and Functions (Glasgow 1917)
p178
64 Paul, The State p179
65 Paul, The State p182
66 Paul, The State p174
67 Paul, The State p183
68 John McLean, Foreword to the 'Class State' September 1919 quoted
in Nan Minton Ed, John McLean, In the Rapids of Revolution (1978)
p211
69 John McLean, Class State (1978) p211
70 Vanguard November 1920
71 Vanguard November 1920
72 G Gould, The Coming Revolution (1920) (Preface George Lansbury)
73 Gould, Coming Revolution p19
74 Gould, Coming Revolution p20
75 Gould, Coming Revolution p233
76 Labour Leader 1 January 1920
77 Labour Leader 1 January 1920
78 Labour Leader 25 March 1920 (P McOmish Dott)
79 Macdonald, Socialism and Society p102
80 Labour Leader 1 January 1920 (Mr Southall)
81 Labour Leader 8 January 1920 See for discussion of ILP.

R E Dowse, *Left in the Centre* (1966)
 G Lansbury, *These Things Shall Be* (1920)
 F Brockway, *Inside the Left* (1940)
 R Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (1951)
 R K Middlemas, *The Clydesiders, a Left Wing Struggle for
 Parliamentary Power* (1965)

- 82 Labour Leader 5 February 1920
- 83 Labour Leader 25 March 1920
- 84 Labour Leader 1 April 1920
- 85 The Debate as recorded in Labour Leader 8 April 1920
- 86 Labour Leader 5 August 1920
- 87 Labour Leader 23 September 1920
- 88 Draft Constitution of the ILP. Published in
 Labour Leader 11 November 1920
- 89 Labour Leader 31 March 1921
- 90 Monty Johnstone, 'The CP in the 1920's' NLR No 41 (Jan-Feb 1967)
- 91 W Gallacher, *Twenty Years* (1940) p6
- 92 J T Murphy, 'Forty Years Hard - For What?' *New Reasoner* (Winter
 1958/9) pp119-24
- 93 General Sir Wyndham B Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*
- 94 See for example Harold Grenfell, 'The Secret Service and the
 London Movement', *Labour Monthly* Vol 8 (1926) and article by
 J R Campbell in the 'Worker' 18 March 1922. Also Ex Inspector
 Syme, *Forward* 1 May 1920
- 95 J Klugman, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain
 Vol 1* (1968) p229
- 96 CAB 24/136 CP 3996 25 May 1922
- 97 CAB 24/137 CP 4046 15 Jun 1922
- 98 CAB 24/138 CP 4173 31 Aug 1922
- 99 CAB 24/139 CP 4284 12 Oct 1922
- 100 CAB 24/159 CP 144(23) 8 Mar 1923
- 101 CAB 24/163 CP 478(23) 13 Dec 1923
- 102 CAB 24/163 Rep 236 20 Dec 1923
- 103 PRO/30/69/221 Rep 248 20 Mar 1924 (Macdonald Papers)

104 PRO 30/69/221 Rep 253 20 Mar 1924 (Macdonald Papers)

105 PRO 30/69/221 Rep 258 5 Jun 1924 (Macdonald Papers)

106 PRO 30/69/221 Rep 256 22 May 1924 (Macdonald Papers)

107 L J Macfarlane, The British Communist Party. Its Origin and Development till 1919 (1966)

108 Macfarlane, p55

109 Quoted in Macfarlane, pp84/85

110 CAB 24/136 CP 3914 Rep 149 31 Mar 1922

111 CAB 24/138 CP 4164 Rep 168 17 Aug 1922

112 CAB 24/138 CP 4171 24 Aug 1922

113 CAB 24/139 CP 4207 21 Sep 1922

114 CAB 24/138 CP 4171 24 Aug 1922

115 CAB 24/141 CP 26(23) 18 Jan 1923

116 CAB 24/138 CP 4190 14 Sep 1922

117 CAB 24/138 CP 4171 24 Aug 1922

118 CAB 24/159 CP 232(23) 3 May 1923

119 CAB 24/160 CP 322(23) 12 Jul 1923

120 CAB 24/163 CP 465(23) 15 Nov 1923

121 CAB 24/163 CP 399(23) 6 Sep 1923

122 CAB 24/137 CP 4075 29 Jun 1922

123 CAB 24/137 CP 4013 1 Jun 1922

124 CAB 24/163 CP 412(23) 4 Oct 1923

125 T Bell, Pioneering Days (1941) pp84-85

126 R Postgate, How to Make a Revolution (1934)

127 J T Murphy, 'Forty Years Hard, for What?' New Reasoner (Winter 1958/9)

128 J T Murphy, 'Forty Years Hard' p119

129 CAB 24/134 CP 3827 9 March 1922

130 Sylvia Parkhurst in 'Workers' Dreadnaught' 27 August 1921 quoted in H Pelling, The British Communist Party, A Historical Profile (1958) p21. For a similar point of view, H W Lee,

Bolshevism a curse and a danger to the workers (1919): "It savours too much of the old implacable bitterness of the Terrorists - reasonable and natural enough in their secret conspiracies where a fellow conspirator might be a police agent - but utterly mischievous and out of place when introduced into open propaganda and organisation" p6. Many communists did of course feel that Europe was on the brink of revolution. See Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Ed Peter Sedgwick) for an outline and a criticism of the views of Zinoviev. See also Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976) p117

- 131 J Hinton and R Hyman, *Trade Unions and Revolution, The Industrial Politics of the Early British Communist Party* (1975)
- 132 Hinton and Hyman, *Trade Unions and Revolution* p35
- 133 Speech by Lozovsky, 4th Comintern Conference, quoted Hinton and Hyman, *Trade Unions and Revolution* p24
- 134 R Tiersky, *French Communism 1920-1972* (1974)
- 135 James Joll, *Europe Since 1870* (1973)
- 136 S De Scala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism* (1980)
- 137 D L M Blackmer, *Unity in Diversity* (1968) p6
- 138 Blackmer, *Unity in Diversity* p12
- 139 See C E Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917* (Cambridge USA, 1955)
- 140 Negotiations between the executives of the CPGB and the Labour Party. *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* No 29 (Autumn 1974)
- 141 Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party (1921)
- 142 " . . . the mass of (Labour) party members at first saw in the Communists nothing more dangerous than extreme enthusiasts for the common cause and were utterly unaware of deeper or more radical differences". Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (1929) p29. Twenty-three local labour parties were dis-affiliated by the NEC for refusing to expel their communist members. B Punlott, 'The Labour Left' in C Cook and I Taylor (Eds), *The Labour Party* (1980) pp163-188
- 143 R Page Arnot, 'Labour Tastes Power', *Labour Monthly* Vol 6 (February 1924)
- 144 S B M Potter, 'Goodbye Socialism', *Socialist Review* August 1927
- 145 F G Stone, *Socialist Review* September 1927
- 146 R Lyman, *The First Labour Government* (1975)

- 147 J Clayton, *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924* (1926). At this distance it is sometimes difficult to appreciate how firmly many Labour Party socialists rejected 'materialism'. See for example J Cochrane, 'Socialism and Materialism', *Forward* 7 April 1923. Also Margaret Pollock: "The idea of a society conscious of its corporate life and in which, therefore, the social sense is highly developed, has found expression in different ways throughout the ages . . . At times the faith has degenerated into materialism, but the nature of the ideal has not changed, and those who believe in the great gospel of fellowship and service for the common good are bound eventually to range themselves on the side of that Party which seeks to give the ideal expression in the world today."
- 148 Clayton, *Rise and Decline* p136
- 149 R Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (1973) p112
- 150 Clifford Allen, quoted in T Jones, *Whitehall Diaries Vol 1* p264
- 151 S Webb, 'First Labour Government', *Political Quarterly* (1961)
- 152 Miliband, p110
- 153 Harold Grenfell, 'The Secret Service and the Labour Movement', *Labour Monthly Vol 8* (1926)
- 154 PRO 30/69/221 (Macdonald Papers)
- 155 See David Marquand, *Ramsay Macdonald* (1977) pp314/5 for a different interpretation of Macdonald's response.
- 156 PRO 30/69/221 (Macdonald Papers)
- 157 Report 253 1 May 1924 in PRO 30/69/221. These and reports subsequently referred to were all collected in Macdonald Papers but were not released as Cabinet Papers.
- 158 Report 278 30 October 1924 (Macdonald Papers)
- 159 Report 248 20 March 1924 (Macdonald Papers)
- 160 Report 256 22 May 1924 (Macdonald Papers)
- 161 Report 258 5 June 1924 (Macdonald Papers)
- 162 Report 253 1 May 1924 (Macdonald Papers)
- 163 This information was heavily marked in Macdonald's copy.
- 164 CAB 24/166 CP 273(24) 30 Apr 1924
- 165 CAB 27/239 Terms of Reference of Industrial Unrest Committee
- 166 CAB 27/239 IUC First Conclusions 16 Apr 1924

- 167 CAB 27/239
- 168 CAB 23/47 8(24)4 18 Jan 1924
- 169 CAB 23/47 CC 12(24)4 12 Feb 1924
- 170 CAB 24/165 CP 102(24) Attended by Henderson, Thomas, Walsh, Webb, Anderson, Gosling and (officials) Anderson (HO), Whigham (WO), Lyon (WO)
- 171 CAB 24/161 CP 314(23)
- 172 CAB 24/165 CP 102(24)
- 173 Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism p109
- 174 CP 102(24) See also for discussion of Supply and Transport matters R W Lyman, The First Labour Government 1924 (1957) pp219-223
- 175 See Robert Rhodes James, Viscount Davidson, Memoirs of a Conservative 1910-1937 (1969) pp179-80, also J C Wedgwood Memoirs of a Fighting Life (1941). For suggestion that Wedgwood was only given the post because it was reckoned to be an unattractive one see C V Wedgwood, Last of the Radicals (1951) p153
- 176 See for example CAB 23/47 15 (24)2 20 Feb 1924 and
CAB 24/166 CP 211(24) 25 Mar 1924
- 177 CAB 24/166 CP 211(24) 25 Mar 1924
- 178 CAB 23/47 CC 16(24) 26 Mar 1924 and
CAB 24/166 CP 218(24) 26 Mar 1924
- 179 Thus while Margaret Morris is justified in arguing that the Labour Government neither modified nor used the STO the fact should not be ignored that arrangements were made to do so. Certainly there was no lack of political will. Margaret Morris, The General Strike 1926 (1976) p153
- 180 CAB 23/48 CC 37(24) 6 Jun 1924
- 181 S Webb, 'First Labour Government', Political Quarterly 1961
- 182 PRO 30/69/38
- 183 CAB 24/166 CP 230(24) 31 Mar 1924
- 184 As above
- 185 See J Wheeler Bennett, Viscount Waverley, (1962) 'When Henderson gave the Labour View'. Anderson obdurately withstood this view on the ground that such action would be prejudicial to the discipline and efficiency of the police forces of the country, and such was the strength of his argument that the Cabinet, on the advice of the Home Secretary, decided against the re-instatement of the strikers". p88

- 186 CAB 24/166 CP 230(24) 31 Mar 1924
- 187 M A Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, A Biography (1938)
- 188 Report of Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1924
- 189 As above p284
- 190 D Coates, The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism (1975)
R W Lyman, 'James Ramsay Macdonald and the Leadership of the
Labour Party', Journal of British Studies 1962 pp132-160
- 191 Hamilton, Henderson p180
- 192 CAB 24 CP210(24) The Cabinet subsequently endorsed
Henderson's view.
- 193 See Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism p110
- 194 Report of Annual Conference of Labour Party 1924 p248
- 195 M Cole (Ed), The Diaries of Beatrice Webb 1910-1924 (1952) pp24-32
- 196 Report of Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1925 p212
- 197 As above p213
- 198 T Jones, Whitehall Diaries p269
- 199 Report of Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1924 p245
- 200 J R Clynes, Memoirs Vol 1 (1937) p343
- 201 F W S Craig, British General Election Manifestos 1900-1974
(1975)
- 202 B Pimlott in C Cook and I Taylor (Eds), The Labour Party (1981)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GENERAL STRIKE

The outcome of the General Strike was substantially determined in the months preceding its occurrence. Anyone in possession of the appropriate facts on May 1st 1926 would not have found it difficult to predict the defeat of the TUC. While the Government's victory owed something to those advantages which any government inevitably enjoys in an ordered political community and to the particular reinforcement of such advantages afforded by the British political culture such long term considerations should not draw attention from the activities of the Cabinet in the months immediately preceding the Strike. A proper explanation of the care and comprehensiveness of the Government's victory must rest on an understanding of the way in which the Cabinet exploited and developed the natural assets which they initially possessed.

"Red Friday" and the Royal Commission

The first act in the Government's campaign was the announcement of July 31st 1925 that they would subsidise the coal industry for a nine month period so that an inquiry could take place into the possibilities of reorganisation. The Labour movement welcomed this as a victory for union solidarity.¹ The Triple Alliance had pressurised the Government into postponing the decontrol of the mines and, for the time being, miners' wage levels were to be maintained. Yet it was on this concession, its only concession of the whole campaign, that the Government was to mount the political action which culminated in its victory in the May of the following year.

Any explanation of why the Government won the General Strike must therefore begin with an explanation of why they chose to offer a subsidy

rather than to face a miners' strike, and probable sympathetic actions, in August 1925. Baldwin himself explained to his biographer that the subsidy was granted because the Government wasn't ready to face a strike.² This statement is, however, ambiguous. Those who favour an explanation of the Government's victory in terms of their material and organisational superiority have seized upon it as indicating that the subsidy was granted to buy time for material preparations. In this interpretation the Government is seen as postponing what they felt to be an inevitable conflict until such time as they were better ready to defeat it.² Such an interpretation is inadequate on three grounds. It implies, wrongly, that political victories are won by the mere accumulation of superior material resources; it assumes a unity and a competence among the policy makers which they did not possess, and it ignores the available evidence about the state of the Government's preparedness. Even Baldwin's own public statement on the matter at the time indicated wider reasons for the granting of the subsidy, for as well as mentioning the effect which a strike might have on other industries he pointed out that no one had thought out the consequences of such a strike and warned that "the community" would have to think about protecting itself against coercion by "a minority".⁴ In reality, the Cabinet only came to its decision about the subsidy after considerable argument. No other question during the whole period provoked anything like this level of disagreement. Lord Salisbury was moved to argue: "The moral base of the Government seems to me to have dropped out." In his view not only had the Cabinet given way before the threat of force and condoned the breaking of contracts, but had, "actually agreed to pay a large sum for the arrangement".⁵ The Cabinet Minute suggests that Salisbury was not isolated in his

opposition for the unusual step was taken of recording the fact that the decision was not unanimous. Even the form in which the decision was recorded suggests that an acute conflict had taken place: "That, as between a national strike and the payment of assistance to the mining industry, the latter course was the least disadvantageous."⁶

From other sources it is clear that the main protagonists were Bridgman and Joynson Hicks who supported Salisbury in arguing against the subsidy, and Baldwin, Chamberlain and Churchill who supported the award on political grounds.⁷ Thus while it is correct to view the decision to grant a subsidy as the key to a series of subsequent decisions which facilitated the winning of the conflict, it is not correct to view it as part of a well planned and expertly executed operation run by an all-competent and cohesive executive.

The question of the state of the Government's organisation is a good deal more difficult to assess than many accounts have suggested. It is quite easy, however, to cast doubt on the simpler view that the Government felt itself to be entirely unprepared. At the Cabinet of July 30th 1925 it was decided that: "The arrangements for securing the continuance of the public services during a strike of this character were examined and found to be ready and complete as far as circumstances permitted."⁸ There were disagreements about this but they appear to have been related to the broader debate. Judgments as to the adequacy of the emergency arrangements varied according to the protagonists' ideas as to the form the conflict might take. Those who took the view that a general strike must result in serious civil disorder inevitably required a good deal more of the emergency arrangements than those who took a more optimistic view. Thus Cunliffe

Lister "said roundly that the Supply and Transport Organisation was not ready",⁹ while Amery, who had a great deal of experience in such matters later recalled "the emergency arrangements had long been in working order and only needed perfecting".¹⁰ It was inevitable of course that Joyson Hicks would require much of the STO for he wished the Cabinet to proceed, "upon the assumption that on the next occasion we shall deal not with a mere economic strike but with an attempt at political revolution, such as forcing the nationalisation of the mines, by holding the country up to ransom and undoubtedly by sabotage and looting".¹¹ Joyson Hicks gave every appearance of being the only man, outside the Party itself, to believe that the Communist Party would have a substantial influence over the conduct of the Strike: "I want the most complete dossiers of every Communist leader and I want to be able to put my hand at any moment of crisis upon every leader and every Communist headquarters".¹² The Home Secretary's views provoked Robert Cecil to challenge the Prime Minister: "Do you really think the Communist danger is serious?",¹³ but Joyson Hicks was not alone in his opinions. If the Cabinet could not agree on the nature of the challenge they were expecting they would never agree on which measures were needed to contain it. An additional complication was created by the fact that a number of ministers appear to have been entirely ignorant of the principles on which the STO was supposed to work. One minister argued: "While the organisation was complete it was only a skeleton and could not be put into operation until volunteers had come forward."¹⁴ Yet that this was so did not represent unreadiness for this was how the whole thing was supposed to work. It was a central principle of the reformed STO that Government should not be expected to provide alternative services from its own resources. Essential services and supplies were to be

provided by the normal operators assisted by volunteer labour and under the protection of the police. Other protection services were to be kept in the background for as long as possible to avoid provoking adverse public reaction. The activities of Government were to be largely confined to planning, co-ordination and encouragement; to maintaining the organisational framework and handling the political strategy. The key to the reformed STO was not the materials or men directly available to the state, but the state's ability to organise, direct and draw on the resources of the community. Propaganda and publicity were clearly far more crucial to such an operation than fleets of lorries or troops of soldiers. The success of the propaganda efforts would rest primarily on the Government's handling of the dispute itself.

This inevitably makes the assessment of the state of the STO in August 1925 a more complex matter. While the organisation had not been fully operational since 1921, parts of the machinery had, as explained above, been prepared for action in the interim. The incoming Conservative government, in 1924, lost no time in raising the issue and as early as November 26th, the Home Secretary presented a memorandum on the subject to his Cabinet colleagues. The Cabinet agreed to the reorganisation of the STO on the lines proposed by Sir John Anderson to the previous Conservative administration, and appointed a new Supply and Transport Committee. While this Committee continued to meet at regular intervals until the General Strike the bulk of the work was carried out, as before, by officials. The Postmaster General, Sir William Mitchell Thompson, was appointed Chief Civil Commissioner in October 1924, though it appears that

J C C Davidson was the most active politician in this area. Davidson was appointed Deputy Commissioner in May 1925 but he was a constant attender at STC meetings before this. The amount of energy Davidson put into this work and his close connection with the Prime Minister are indications of the importance that was being attached to the emergency arrangements.

The Chief Civil Commissioner's report to Cabinet of July 14th 1925 offered evidence of a considerable amount of activity. The machinery had been overhauled and elaborated in a number of ways. The code of Emergency Regulations to be introduced under the EPA had been revised and a series of plans devised so that a range of possible responses was available for different situations. The Board of Trade had appointed a full complement of divisional food offices and advisers to work with the regional organisations of the Civil Commissioners. It had also prepared its panel of representatives from the principal food trader and all the divisional food offices had been visited and inspected by central government representatives in the six weeks prior to July 14th. The road transport arrangements were apparently satisfactory. Committees of haulage contractors were ready to operate in all eleven divisional areas and 'suitable' persons had been appointed as chairmen and conveners of the local committees which were to pool all available private vehicles when the emergency occurred. The schemes prepared by the Mines' Department were "practically complete". In common with other aspects of the operation these relied to a large extent on the co-operation of private industry though the Local Authorities were to bear ultimate responsibility for the conservation and distribution of local supplies. The old scheme to man the London power stations with

naval ratings was still in existence and ready to function at short notice as were various arrangements to facilitate official communications including a Post Office scheme to maintain telephone and telegraph services, a plan for a wireless link, and a plan for the RAF to make air mail deliveries. At this stage the only recommendation which the Chief Civil Commissioner made was for the establishment of a small permanent nucleus of staff in London to have responsibility for food and road transport arrangements.

When the immediate threat of a coal strike had been averted, on August 1st, the Chief Civil Commissioner was asked for a further report on the emergency arrangements. This report, presented on August 6th,¹⁶ again perhaps with a mind to those ministers who had failed to understand the underlying principles of the STO, had a detailed account of the principle of voluntary help on which the organisation was based. The co-ordinating role of the STC sub-committee was outlined as was the idea that this unit would split into five parts on the outbreak of an emergency, to take responsibility for areas defined as Food, Fuel and Transport; Protection; Communication; Finance; and Publicity. Details were also given of the regional Civil Commissioners' organisations: "For the co-ordination of local services and the local operation of national services and to stimulate necessary local activity": and of the Volunteer Service Committees, 88 of which were then in existence.

The organisation as outlined by this report represents little change from what had been planned and developed over the previous four years. Of most interest are the constant emphases on the dependency of the schemes on private industry and on the enlarged role to be

filled by the Local Authorities. The memorandum to food officers, appended to the report illustrates the former point for in it the officers are urged that even if requisitioning of vehicles proved necessary, such vehicles were to remain under the commercial direction of the owners who were to receive payment directly from the enterprise on whose behalf the vehicle was being used. Circular 636,¹⁷ the Government's instructions to Local Authorities also made this point: "It is not intended that the Government should substitute new machinery for that ordinarily existing to meet the essential needs of the community." The circular makes constant reference to the maintenance of normality. The Chief Civil Commissioners had been considerably upset when one of the STO schemes based on co-operation with private industry had run into difficulties. A committee of representatives of the London milk trade had "unexpectedly passed a resolution which in effect (demanded) that the Government shall take both financial and executive control" during the emergency. This was sufficiently at odds with Government thinking for the President of the Board of Trade to be urged to meet with the committee, "in an endeavour to induce the Trade to take a more enterprising view of their responsibilities".¹⁸ In the event the Government had to accept some financial responsibility for this scheme but such resistance was rare. As testified to in many reports and comments private industry enthusiastically provided the services required and submitted to Government direction. In April 1926 the Home Secretary commended "the helpful attitude of trade organisations"¹⁹ many of which were taking appropriate steps on their own initiative. It was even felt that private initiative should be allowed to run the coal importation scheme, the Chairman of the STC reporting that

his committee felt, "that consumers of coal should be stimulated to the utmost to import coal on their own account instead of relying on Government importations"²⁰. While the Government would recruit volunteers and supply forces to protect the operations private industry was to be persuaded to act in as near a normal manner as possible. This aggressive determination to force industry to act on its own account was prompted by a number of factors. Clearly the Government didn't have the material, nor the administrative resources to run an ambitious emergency organisation itself and there was also the matter of cost. The coal scheme itself was preceded by a chorus of complaint in Cabinet, led by Lane Fox, about the high cost to the Government of coal imports.²¹ Other reasons were connected with the public presentation of the Government's activities. The less the Government was seen to be included in the provision of services the more easily it could preserve its 'impartiality' and its claim that in weakening the effectiveness of the strike it was doing no more than fulfilling its inevitable responsibilities as a government. The more its organisation appeared to rely on private and popular initiative the easier could the Government escape responsibility.

The part of this report concerning 'protection' is also worthy of note in that this was an area which had always raised the greatest anxieties in the past.²² Had the strike begun on August 1st 1925 schemes would have been available for the augmentation of the regular police forces. One involved the re-enlistment of retired police officers and another the deployment of the 100,000 special constables already registered in England and Wales. Such men were to be used

on routine police duties thus releasing regular forces for more sensitive work. The two immediate questions which posed the greatest difficulty were those concerning the timing of the appeal for special constables and where, and in what guise, the military were to be used to augment the police forces. The Committee offered no recommendation on the former problem, noting, as always, that the difficulty was the problem of regional variation. While a call for special constables would bring out hordes of volunteers in the Home Counties, recruits would not be available in sufficient numbers in the industrial areas where they were really needed. There was also the additional problem that if recruiting was begun too early volunteers in the industrial areas would be subjected to social pressure before the emergency. On the question of the use of troops the Committee resurrected the notion of a Defence Force, last heard of, and dismissed, in 1921, and were comforted to note that the number of regular troops available was five times that of 1921. Yet in this the Committee was running against the official view as it had developed in the intervening period. The Army Council was opposed to the use of army units as a matter of course, feeling that it was unnecessarily provocative. The Chief Constables were also opposed to the use of regular troops who, they argued were untrained in police duties, and they felt that the recruitment of a Defence Force, inevitably untrained and poorly disciplined, presented real dangers. The official view, which prevailed, was that any volunteers should be attached to the regular police forces and that troops should only be used where it was felt to be absolutely necessary. The Committee debated whether troops should be moved to centres close to those areas in which trouble was expected before the strike began, yet

decided against this as they were advised that such movements could not be carried out secretly and therefore might produce an adverse effect in that "they might be regarded in some areas as provocative". The tradition of sending warships to ports, "where disturbances are threatened" was to be maintained but the Committee felt, "any such movement must also be considered in relation to the effect on local feeling"²³. This report, like the one of July 14th presents a picture of overall competence, and in some instances, notably publicity and communications, schemes ready to operate at a moment's notice. The only element of unpreparedness was represented by those schemes which, of their nature, could not be staffed until volunteers came forward, and such volunteers could not come forward until, in the judgment of the Cabinet, the time was opportune to issue an appeal. Even without the help of the OMS it seems highly probable that no matter how ineptly the Government handled the political case it would have enough uncritical supporters to maintain basic emergency services, though this survey inevitably re-emphasised the importance of the best possible presentation of the Government's case.

No single answer can adequately explain why the Government chose to grant the subsidy rather than face a miners' strike in 1925. It is important to emphasise the differences within the Cabinet. Some ministers remained entirely opposed to the idea on principle, others felt that while a subsidy was undesirable in itself it was better to postpone the strike. A few ministers may have hoped that by avoiding the strike in August they might be averting it altogether. Davidson felt this was the case: "Many members of the Cabinet think that the struggle is inevitable and must come sooner or later - the Prime Minister does not

share this view."²⁴ Margaret Morris suggests that both Baldwin and Steel Maitland were looking for a compromise solution.²⁵ The latter certainly understood the inherent frailty of union alliances and believed that some advantage might be gained if the parties were given time to develop their differences.²⁶ The Prime Minister had also been advised by Sir David Shackleton, who had been the Ministry of Labour's official observer at the 1925 Conference of the TUC, to treat TUC pledges to the miners with some caution: "I gathered that Labour opinion was not so enthusiastic about the recent decision as would appear from the Labour press."²⁷ Shackleton also predicted that the General Council would move to the right in the near future. What does become clear is that there is little reason to suppose that the state of the emergency arrangements was an important factor in any of these calculations. It seems most probable that the majority were motivated by the suspicion that sufficient political advantage would accrue from the subsidy to sustain the blow to principle which it represented. It was prudent to accede to the Prime Minister's view that "he needed more time to enable the public to understand the constitutional issue involved"²⁸ and to accept "the cost of teaching democracy".²⁹

Red Friday to the General Strike

There were a number of developments in the STO between 'Red Friday' and the beginning of the General Strike, but these must not be taken as evidence of unpreparedness. The nature of the decisions taken in the interim period make this quite clear.

Joynson-Hicks, sensing that his hour was come, went swiftly into action. Within a week of Red Friday he had circulated a paper recommending a partial activation of emergency schemes. Even the Home Secretary could see that immediate action, if it became public knowledge, might considerably prejudice the Government's protestations of good faith over the inquiry, but he still felt: "That the time had come when it was necessary to risk a certain amount of publicity in regard to the Supply and Transport arrangements".³⁰ He proposed that a permanent headquarters be immediately set up in each Civil Commissioner's region so that all schemes could be put into a state of readiness. A number of permanent officials should be appointed, nominally as Assistant Poor Law Commissioners, to work on emergency schemes. Joynson-Hicks also sought authority to gradually increase the Special Constabulary. By the end of August he informed the Prime Minister: "I have had consultations with the Special Constabulary people and have authorised them quietly to recruit."³¹ In September he began to agitate for the prosecution of communists.³² In October the Home Secretary reported improvements in the protection arrangements and related these to the relaxation of secrecy.³³ At the same time the Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain, was encouraging Local Authorities to take a more ambitious view of their responsibilities. The duties of

Local Authorities in emergencies were outlined in Circular 636, but Chamberlain recognised the sensitivity of the issue and asked the Cabinet whether he should circulate it before the pending local elections.³⁴ In view of previous doubts and suspicions surrounding the involvement of Local Authorities in STO matters it might seem remarkable that Chamberlain was given leave for immediate circulation. The Cabinet felt that while adverse comment might be anticipated from some Local Authorities the impact of such comments would be negligible in the new political climate. Thus, while it is clear that improvements in the emergency arrangements did take place after 'Red Friday' they must be regarded as a partial mobilisation. They do not indicate that more could, or should, have been done before August 1st 1925, but rather that the Cabinet had a freer hand after that date. The Cabinet recognised that its increased measure of freedom was based on the fact that the trade unions had "announced publicly in advance that they were prepared to use every effort to stop transport and to paralyse the community in connection with a Strike in another trade".³⁵

Frequent reports on the progress of the STO during the period of the subsidy confirm the pattern of decreasing secrecy and increasing mobilisation. So much was done that even Joynton-Hicks confirmed, in February 1926; " . . . there is very little remaining to be done before the actual occurrence of an emergency".³⁶ Fortnightly meetings between representatives of relevant departments were taking place, the Civil Commissioners had visited their regions and had had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with arrangements, and meetings between divisional staffs and Volunteer Service Committees had been held. Home Office officials had briefed the Chief Assistants and

Chief Constables had been advised of what the Home Office required of them. One interesting development was that the Government had arranged that 460 lorries should be at its direct disposal in the period May 1st to September 30th 1926. While this arrangement may have been reassuring to certain ministers, previous plans, and indeed subsequent practice, indicate that this was no more than a luxury. The Government also had time to assess the reaction of Local Authorities to circular 636. Opposition had been expressed in areas of South Yorkshire and South Wales and Joynton-Hicks complained that in the North Division, "the circular appears to have been regarded generally from a political point of view".³⁷ The Cabinet's view was that such opposition was unlikely to prove more than an irritant. A number of minor difficulties were also dealt with; for instance the question of insurance liability for property borrowed by the Government was investigated, minor amendments were made to the emergency regulations and the Civil Commissioners' organisation found time to arrange for the supply of equipment and office furniture. Evidently much of what was done at this time might have safely been left undone or at least postponed until the outbreak of the emergency. Steel Maitland protested as early as November 1925 that the whole thing was getting out of hand: "It may be true (he didn't believe it to be so) that in July last we had not sufficiently developed the system and the staffs of the emergency organisation. But we should not now run to the opposite extreme of attempts at over elaboration in advance."³⁸

The arguments over what might be done during the period of the subsidy inevitably ran over into the matter of the recruitment of volunteers. This part of the operation was closely related to that of public

support. The problem had been defined as persuading a sufficient number of volunteers to come forward at the outset of the emergency, without issuing appeals before the emergency began. It had been seen as important to avoid provocations to the labour side until they were fully committed. In addition the Government had always felt it necessary to stress that volunteering was a matter of "aiding the community" rather than strike breaking.³⁹ Such tactics were felt to be necessary not so much for the fact that they would facilitate recruiting, for it could be assumed that few of those who came forward would have scruples about strike breaking, but rather for their broader political impact. It was hoped that they would attract the support of the broad public and, at least, limit the inevitable opposition from organised labour.

Initially it appears the Cabinet felt the recruiting situation remained the same after August 1st as before and that no official recruiting could, or indeed needed to be undertaken. The Home Secretary was casting approving glances at various unofficial organisations which were collecting supporters and defending them in public debate with Ramsay Macdonald. He reported to the Cabinet on what was happening: "Various unofficial organisations had been formed for this purpose, including the OMS, the Chambers of Commerce, the Fascisti and the Crusaders, and it was understood that the persons who volunteered under these unofficial organisations would, in case of emergency, be at the disposal of the government."⁴⁰ While the political build up was evidently assisting the Government there were some ministers who wished to go further. Eustace Percy argued: "There is no longer the slightest need for privacy or secrecy in our preparations." He

felt that the formula agreed in August, to go ahead "without shunning publicity but without seeking it" was no longer relevant. The only question was whether such matters should be, "left in the hands of the OMS, the Press and so forth, or whether it should be taken up and directed by the Government itself". The latter course he felt to be "not only desirable, but essential".⁴¹ Steel Maitland brought some realism into the debate, pointing out that it was dangerous to become too optimistic about the degree of support which the Government enjoyed. The public, he felt, was not in the mood for large scale recruiting at that time and any working men who were persuaded to come forward would be subjected to pressures in their own communities which in time might weaken their resolve. To attempt to recruit and fail could have disastrous consequences. He reminded his colleagues that "the large majority of recruits would inevitably be from classes other than manual workers" and that to have such an organisation in being over a long period would polarise public opinion as many would regard it as "a mere strikebreaking organisation". "It is quite likely" Steel Maitland pointed out, "that it would be so regarded even by our own supporters".⁴² While Special Constables might be enrolled and the OMS allowed to continue independently it was important to stick to the principles of the STO and avoid over elaboration or unnecessary provocation.

The idea that the period of the subsidy saw a united Cabinet proceeding along an agreed path to an inevitable conclusion is further weakened by looking at the debate about possible legal changes that went on during these months. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Cave, argued for immediate legal measures to be taken to weaken the position of trade unions. Not only did Cave wish to render general strikes illegal,

but to outlaw all sympathetic strikes, to strengthen the law on picketing, to make all strikes subject to compulsory secret ballots and to introduce 'contracting in' for the political levy. The Lord Chancellor even felt that the tort immunity of trade unions should be repealed.⁴³

Thus it is clear that it was not inevitable that the more expedient line would prevail during the period of the subsidy. The Government had gained the political initiative with the award of the subsidy, but its advantage was not absolute. A number of things could be done after the subsidy which could not have been undertaken before, yet openly partisan actions, such as those suggested by the Lord Chancellor, could quickly destroy much that had been gained. That the initiative was preserved and the attacks on trade unionism postponed was not the result of some agreed common strategy but the outcome of a continuous argument in Cabinet.

The conduct of the Samuel Commission was central to the political manoeuvres of these nine months. By beginning with the apparent concession of the subsidy the Government bought itself a considerable advantage in the matter of the appointment of commissioners and the writing of their terms of reference. The Government was thus able to substantially predetermine the outcome without indulging in the sort of open manipulation that would have weakened the authority of the commissioners' findings. In this respect the contrast between Samuel and Sankey is most striking. Sankey in its broad composition and open terms of reference reflected the strength of the miners and the Government's weakness whereas Samuel clearly reflected the advantage of the Government. The Cabinet had no doubts about what they

wanted from Samuel. The scope of the inquiry: "Should be sufficiently wide not only to provide for an investigation of the points proposed by the miners . . . but also to enable the public to derive from the report full information as to the position of the coal industry in all its aspects." ⁴⁴ The Cabinet's understanding of "full information" was somewhat partial for they firmly rejected the miners' objection to "a commission which did not include persons with technical knowledge". ⁴⁵ Experts of that type were to be kept out of the way and only, as they put it, 'unbiased persons' allowed onto the Commission. The Government did not need to convince the miners of the 'fairness' of the construction of the Commission nor were they concerned that the miners would be unlikely to accept the findings of an inquiry so organised. Samuel was designed to set the Government right with public opinion and if possible weaken the bond between the miners and the other trade unions.

Even Joynson-Hicks saw the extreme sensitivity of the issue of the Commission. He conceded; "Any arrangements involving publicity should be postponed until after the announcement of the composition and terms of reference of the Royal Commission." ⁴⁶ It would clearly be unwise to publicly anticipate the failure of the Commission before it was constituted. Yet in private, nobody on the Government side expressed any expectation that Samuel could reconcile owners and miners. The Minister of Mines argued that the only purpose of the inquiry was that, "the public, who on July 31st had not realised the imminence of the crisis might be better informed as to the true facts of the situation by means of the Report of the Royal Commission". ⁴⁷

In the event Samuel went in more deeply than the Cabinet had intended and came up with proposals for the nationalisation of royalties and municipal trading, although he was firm on the need for wage cuts. The report produced another fierce debate in Cabinet with a number of ministers prepared to reject the whole report and thus dissipate the advantage which the Government had built up, and this, in spite of the fact that it was almost inconceivable that the miners would accept Samuel's findings. Thus it was in the teeth of their opposition that Baldwin was able to secure majority support for the official statement that "the Government is prepared to accept the Report and the whole Report if other parties will do so"⁴⁸. The Government, however, would have been in a difficult position had the owners and miners accepted.

"An Act of Community Self-Defence"

The manipulation of the Samuel Commission accurately epitomises the whole Government operation. The key to the Cabinet's strategy was to present the Supply and Transport organisation as a mere co-ordinating agency for a community engaged in a collective and voluntary act of self-defence against a dissident minority. In effect the Government initiated and controlled most of the measures. While, in reality, the liberal use of the coercive powers available to the state was deemed essential, the Government assiduously fostered the illusion of private individuals springing to the defence of the 'constitution' out of simple patriotism. Yet while the Government was presenting itself and its allies as acting only in defence of this ill-defined constitutional principle, the Cabinet was, in reality, so worried about the effect the mine owners were having on public opinion that they sent round the Prime Minister to advise them on how to present their final offer.⁴⁹

The volunteer labour organisations also provide a clear example of the working principles of the operation, for while the Government always insisted that they were totally independent, the main organisations were actually subject to direct and effective government influence. In explaining such organisations to the Prime Minister Joynson Hicks made it quite clear that from the earliest days they had state approval and encouragement and, indeed, access to the highest political circles: "There exist the Fascists, the Crusaders, and the Organisation for the Supply of Material Services (sic). One need say nothing about the first two - they are well known and, I think, to be depended upon. I have seen their leaders several times . . . "⁵⁰ It is also clear that the Home Secretary was able to exercise something greater than a general control: "The OMS are delaying their propaganda at my urgent request until after the announcement of the Royal Commission."⁵¹ In the sensitive situation which then existed it was clearly possible for the Government to control the OMS as effectively as if it had been an arm of the state. In practice of course it was better than that for it enabled the Home Secretary to have the best of both worlds: "I have explained to all these organisations that though I cannot be responsible for them they must be prepared to work under my directions and to hand over their volunteers to the Government when needed."⁵² The OMS could whip up the righteous feelings of the patriots and draw the attention of labour spokesmen while the government could still preserve its pretence of neutrality. In such a situation it was understandable that one group of OMS organisers should so forget themselves as to give the address of Hampstead Town Hall as a recruiting centre. On this occasion the Home Secretary dealt with the indiscretion by claiming it was a local government matter.⁵³

The whole of the emergency operation was designed to fit in with this strategy. In the various schemes operated by private organisations and local government the guiding principle was that of the appearance of private initiative but the reality of Government control. The Government obtained a scheme which was politically attractive, relatively efficient and, in practice, amenable to such covert control as they would want to exercise. At the end of the strike the Cabinet could state; "His Majesty's Government have no power to⁵⁴ compel employers to take back every man who has been on strike", while at the same time seeking to persuade employers to keep on the strike breakers instead of taking back the regular workers. While the Government was publicly proclaiming the independence of industry the Railway Companies were submitting, for Cabinet approval, the notices of dismissal before they were issued to their striking employees. Companies who failed to respond enthusiastically to the crisis were stimulated to 'voluntary' action. During the Strike the President of the Board of Trade reported to the STC that the Manchester Ship Canal Company had proved "somewhat supine", and refused to use volunteer labour to maintain their operation. The Chief Civil Commissioner authorised the local Civil Commissioner to exert pressure on them.⁵⁵ As the case of the importation of coal illustrates, the Government was always on hand when private initiative failed or faltered, but always under the cover of the pretence that such organisations were acting independently. The Trade Unions, however, were to be the exception to the rule of independence. One Government pronouncement made short work of their autonomy: "Every man who does his duty by the country and remains at work during the present crisis will be protected by the State from the loss of trade union benefits, superannuation allowances or pension."⁵⁶

The hollowness of the claim that the emergency measures were an act of 'community self-defence' may also be demonstrated by the fact that the Government retained the right to determine who was 'community' and who not. Trade unions were specifically excluded. At national level the offer of the TUC General Council to help with the maintenance of essential services was peremptorily dismissed: "The general opinion of the Cabinet was that it should not be answered at all or else a very stiff reply should be sent."⁵⁷ During the strike the Government went to great lengths to ensure that trade unions were effectively excluded from every level of the antistrike operation. To this end the STC carefully monitored all reports from the regions and all attempts by trade unions to institute permit schemes for the movement of essential supplies were discussed at the highest level and every effort used to defeat them. For example the Civil Commissioner for the West Midlands reported: "The Emergency Committee of the Birmingham Trades and Labour Council was trying to arrogate to itself the right to issue permits for the movement of foodstuffs."⁵⁸ The STC were pleased that the Civil Commissioner understood the matter and flatly rejected such a scheme. The Committee later recorded their belief that the refusal of the Commissioner for the North West to allow the unions to operate a permits scheme for the movement of flour had actually resulted in more rather than less flour being moved.⁵⁹ Glasgow argued that a contributory factor in the Government's victory in Liverpool was a plan whereby the Government printed its own permits which the pickets could not distinguish from those issued by the Council of Action.⁶⁰ In the case of the London electricity supply the Government was prepared to risk a complete break in the service rather than compromise with the unions. The unions had

offered to maintain an adequate supply of power for domestic use and emergency services but the Government would accept no compromise. The STC decided, "that the maintenance of the electricity supply as a whole should be regarded as an essential service and that any attempt to distinguish, for example, between the supply of power and lighting should be frustrated forthwith".⁶¹ After checking that the private supply system for the House of Commons was functioning and sending additional forces to protect the generator which supplied the wireless service the Government sent naval ratings into the power stations and appealed to regular workers to ignore the instructions issued by their unions. The scheme was partially successful and the reduced demand for electric power was met without the use of most of the available naval and volunteer labour. There was however, one minor problem. The power stations in London were municipally owned and a number of Labour controlled Local Authorities, among them Battersea, Bermondsey, Poplar, Stepney, West Ham and Willesden, were reluctant to allow power to be produced at the normal rate, yet all but Stepney were producing sufficient power for lighting and for hospitals. In spite of the fact that things were running smoothly the Government was prepared to jeopardise the whole scheme by forcing these Local Authorities into line.⁶² On May 10th the STC reported, "that the Willesden Urban District Council, owing to pressure which had been brought upon them, had passed a resolution that full supplies of power should be given for all purposes".⁶³ Evidently the functions of the STC went beyond its publicly stated purpose of the provision of emergency or essential services. The manner in which this victory was secured and the way in which other Labour attempts to become involved in emergency services were systematically defeated

indicates that the STO was sometimes used for the express purpose of isolating the trade unions. Had the Government needed anything more from organised labour than passive acquiescence some compromise might have proved necessary, but the Government was so well organised that the labour leaders had nothing to bargain with.

The question of publicity underlay Government strategy from beginning to end, but with the beginning of the Strike it entered an especially dramatic stage. The three aims of the Government's information policy might be defined as to maintain secrecy concerning sensitive aspects of the preparations, to create the impression of the Strike as a struggle between a politically motivated minority and the majority of 'the community', and to keep the issue at the constitutional level, avoiding above all discussion of the conditions of life of the miners. During the Strike the Cabinet was resolved that available media should serve these, and only these, ends. A central feature of the publicity policy was its centralisation. Ministers were forbidden to give interviews to the British or foreign press⁶⁴ and only the Prime Minister was allowed to broadcast.⁶⁵ Only the most carefully considered statements of policy were allowed to become public and the Cabinet attempted to prevent impromptu Commons debates on the issues.⁶⁶ Above all the Cabinet sought to eliminate the propagation of all independent statements about the Strike, no matter how mild or well-intentioned. The success of the strategy depended on this for Baldwin put himself forward as a national rather than a political figure; as a man serving community rather than partisan ends. Any independent perspective, no matter how ill conceived or ineffectual, would tend to remove Baldwin from his pedestal and bring his statements back into the everyday world of party politics. The personality

of the Prime Minister was clearly an important part of Government policy, and he sought to present himself as a man of peace and national unity. His most famous utterance to that effect was on March 5th 1925 when he spoke against a proposal by a Conservative backbencher to reintroduce 'contracting in' for the political levy in pursuit of the broader social unity and had appealed; "Give us peace in our time O Lord."⁶⁷ While a knowledge of later events and the changing rhetorical fashion make the speech now read as so much humbug it does appear that he made a great impression on both sides of the House of Commons.⁶⁸ It is difficult to know what effect the speech had outside the House; those in Parliament frequently fail to make adequate allowance for the scepticism or sheer indifference of those outside, but nonetheless it is clear that the Cabinet came to view the public persona of the Prime Minister as a major asset. In the aftermath of General Strike the Cabinet praised the role played by Baldwin in terms which suggested a mascot rather than an active participant.⁶⁹ If this contained a hint that Baldwin's contributions lacked substance it might be judged correct for in the end there was no more to his industrial reconciliation than that labour should accept 'economic reality' as defined by the Government and the employers, no more to industrial peace than the passivity of the workers.

Throughout the whole campaign the Government strategy placed a high reliance on publicity and propaganda and its efforts in this respect were intensified during the actual dispute. Some members of the Cabinet set great store by the 'British Gazette' seeing it in heroic terms as: "The main means by which the Government had been enabled to frustrate the attempt of the TUC to stifle information."⁷⁰

Churchill devoted his considerable energies to running the paper and demanding adequate resources for the operation,⁷¹ though his efforts were not always fully appreciated by his colleagues. J C C Davidson complained, "He thinks he is Napoleon": "Of course he was anxious, but it was unfortunate that he tried so persistently to force a skeleton staff beyond its capacity. So long as he does not come to the Morning Post offices tonight the staff will be able to do what it is there to do."⁷² Certainly a great deal of effort went into the paper but it was surely too much a government creation to carry any real authority. Its status as a newspaper is well illustrated by the suggestion of the STC that the staff of the 'Gazette' "should be asked before publishing reports received other than from official sources, to verify the facts by enquiring of the appropriate Government Department."⁷³ The fact that it did, in spite of all intentions to the contrary, manage to upset one Civil Commissioner must be attributed to extreme sensitivity on one part and incompetence on the other. The paper was so obviously a propaganda sheet that it could only manage to rally such of the faithful as managed to get hold of a copy. The Government might have had more success by the plan to offer the services of the RAF to help with distribution to the "'Times' or any other reputable paper" should they manage to produce an edition.

In most studies of the General Strike it has been accepted that it was the BBC which proved to be the most important medium of communication. Ralph Desmarais, for example, has cited the "brilliance of the Government's handling of the BBC as an important contributory factor to its overall victory."⁷⁴ In a recent study Jeffries and Hennessey have questioned the

conventional view on the grounds that only a quarter of British households were equipped to receive broadcasts in 1926.⁷⁵ However while the point is interesting it is by no means conclusive as it may be supposed that access to the news as broadcast by the BBC was a good deal wider than the number of wireless sets might suggest, particularly at a time when other sources of information were scarce.

Many studies have noted that the influence which the BBC brought to bear on popular opinion rested not only on its near monopoly position but also on the degree of authority which the company possessed as a result of its reputation for independence. Asa Briggs has argued that the occasion of the strike and the resistance Reith offered to the politicians' attempts to control his broadcasts actually reinforced this authority.⁷⁶ These incidents have become so much a part of the folklore of establishment liberalism that they deserve further investigation. The issue was first raised at a meeting of the STC on May 5th. It was reported that the BBC had broadcast "a somewhat alarming report of disturbances at Poplar", and this, according to J C C Davidson, was sufficient reason for the Government to take 'complete control' of the Company. At the Cabinet of May 7th complaints were made about the "quality and nature of the news that was being sent out". The matter was serious because, "the importance of the BBC in informing Public Opinion has been greatly enhanced owing to the collapse of the press". The Cabinet discussed control but came to no immediate conclusion but those in favour of control continued to raise the matter.⁷⁹ The fact that this debate took place is more important than its outcome for it demonstrates that government policy was far less cohesive than has sometimes been assumed. It must also be noted that some accounts

which make a great deal of Reith's resistance to formal political control take no account of the all important point that the Company broadcast nothing that was critical of the position which the Government had adopted. There were a few inconvenient, though accurate, news reports which upset the more timorous Cabinet Ministers but nothing to challenge the Government's definition of the conflict. Informal pressure had secured a high degree of Government control and a formal annexation would only have succeeded in destroying the illusion of independence. As the situation stood the Cabinet had no difficulty in persuading the BBC to refuse to let Lloyd George or Ramsay Macdonald broadcast. Eventually the Cabinet 'suggested' to the BBC "that there would be no objection to a broadcast announcement (which the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty informed them was in contemplation) by the General Manager of the BBC on his own responsibility of Mr Justice Astbury's judgment regarding the illegality of the General Strike, coupled with a statement that, in these circumstances the Company felt bound to desist from making or permitting any statement in support of the course of the strikers".⁸⁰ Yet Astbury was no more than a pretext for not doing what the Company did not want to do, and what the Government would not have allowed it to do, in any case. The only remarkable aspect of the affair was the fact that so many Cabinet Ministers should have wanted to destroy the authority of the BBC in pursuit of a control which they already substantially possessed. In effect the Government already had that most attractive of political assets, power without responsibility.

Any judgment on the success of the Government's policy with regard to publicity and propaganda must take account of the broader policy towards the Strike. The very consistency on which the line depended could only be maintained because the material arrangements were such as to remove uncertainty or the need for compromise. Beyond this the policy had a number of additional qualities. In the first place the Cabinet presented a united front. Restrictions on ministers were effectively enforced and the serious divisions within the Cabinet never became public. Secondly the Government came to enjoy, partly by good fortune, a virtual monopoly of mass communication during the crisis. Finally the policy was successful because it managed to exploit, and perhaps distort, beliefs which were already part of the broader political culture. An important part of that culture were popular beliefs about the law and the constitution.

Law and Order

The Government's victory in the General Strike rested in no small measure on its ability to manipulate the law to its own purposes. To attempt an explanation of how the Government achieved its ends in this area may appear contentious, or even unnecessary, for a number of accounts, either specifically or implicitly, deny the possibility of an autonomous role for the law. Hence there is no need to explain how the ruling elite managed to manipulate the law as law is seen as a superstructural phenomenon, responding directly to their will. Even were this true at some level it would still make a poor basis for historical reconstruction. Such reconstruction must take account of the subjective views of participants and it is quite clear that most of those who took part in the Strike didn't regard the law in so simple a light. That the law maintained a measure of authority, that it remained a viable political currency must in the end be related to the fact that it was widely regarded as possessing some degree of autonomy. In order to appear in this light, it is here argued, that the law did in fact enjoy a measure of relative autonomy. Such autonomy meant that the political elite had to work to make the law serve their purposes. Moreover they could not have gained the advantage they did from a law which responded automatically to their will. This is emphatically not an argument for some metaphysical 'independence' of law. Such concepts may best be classified as part of the legitimating ideology of legal and political systems. Yet it is important to stress that while, in this event, the law came to almost exactly mirror the ideas of the governing elite, it did not come to do so inevitably or automatically. The legal victory was

part of the broader political victory. While the law in its statutes, structures and administrators leaned in interpretation, procedure, intellectual inclination and plain prejudice to the side of the status quo it was not inevitably the exclusive property of the political elite.⁸¹

The Legality of the General Strike

To what extent were the Government justified in their contention that the General Strike was illegal? The question has often become obscured in the more interesting one of how the Government managed so successfully to create the impression that it was illegal, but it is still worth investigating for the answer reveals the fragile basis of the Government's case. That case was that because the Strike was an attempt to use extra Parliamentary pressure to influence a legally elected government it was both unconstitutional and illegal. It was not the Government's main concern that its view in this matter should be precise, but statements on this point were more than normally obscure. The question of whether the strike was unconstitutional is not susceptible to a precise answer. There is no statute or convention relevant to the issue and hence arguments about the constitutionality of such actions soon become involved in a debate about their political desirability. However two points can be made which do tend to weaken the Government's case. If the General Strike was held to be unconstitutional on the grounds that it was an attempt to exert extra parliamentary pressure on a government a large number of other organisations had been guilty of similar offences, most pertinently perhaps a number of Conservative politicians on the Ulster

issue in 1914. Secondly it could be claimed that the General Strike was not an attempt to persuade Government to intervene where it had not done so before but rather an attempt to act to maintain a situation it had previously guaranteed and played a considerable part in creating. The Government was not merely an innocent bystander involved in the issue only on the level of constitutional principle. It had been materially involved in the conflict over a long period and was as such, an active party to the dispute.

The question of the legality of the General Strike was investigated by Professor Goodhart.⁸² In spite of a careful perusal of a wide range of grounds on which the strike might have been supposed to be illegal, among them the law relating to treason and to seditious and criminal conspiracy, Goodhart could find no grounds for the allegation of illegality. His findings are given a measure of additional authority by the fact that he felt such strikes were undesirable and should be made illegal. As the law stood however, he argued they couldn't be regarded as criminal acts on the part of trade union leaders unless such leaders called them for criminal purposes. It was quite clear that the leaders of the General Strike had no motive other than that of offering assistance to the miners. In any case, Goodhart argued, Parliament had assumed that large sympathetic strikes were legal in passing the Emergency Powers Act in 1920. If such strikes were illegal this type of legislation would not have been necessary.

Goodhart also investigated the status of the Strike in the light of the civil law. The view that the leaders of the General Strike were liable to civil action was confidently asserted by Sir John Simon

during the course of the dispute in two speeches which greatly assisted the Government. In the first Simon warned that, for instance, every railwayman who went on strike rendered himself liable to action in the county courts and, "every trade union leader who has advised and promoted that course of action is liable in damages to the uttermost farthing of his own possessions".⁸³ In addition he asserted that no trade union could discipline a member who refused to obey instructions to join such a strike. Simon's opinion was evidently much affected by the size and novelty of the action: "We have had serious strikes before . . . but the general strike proclaimed by leaders of organised labour which disregards all contracts of employment is a wholly different matter." Whatever the truth of this assertion it still would not inevitably follow that the strike was illegal. This part of Simon's case had to rest on his contention that the strike was not called "in furtherance of a trade dispute" but was "a strike against the general public, to make the public, Parliament and the Government do something", and as such was denied the immunities offered by the 1906 Act. But on what grounds could it be claimed that the General Strike was not in furtherance of a trade dispute? The Act of 1906 and subsequent interpretation supported the view that sympathetic strikes came within the law and the General Strike was nothing more than a large sympathetic strike. A trade dispute did undoubtedly exist and the leaders of the General Strike could only, therefore, be liable to civil actions if it could be demonstrated that they held some ulterior motive. The only evidence of an ulterior motive came from the wilder shores of the Government's propaganda.⁸⁴

On May 10th Sir Henry Slesser challenged Simon's opinion in the House of Commons.⁸⁵ He pointed out that breach of contract, as Simon had implied, was insufficient grounds for declaring the strike illegal. The Trade Disputes Act of 1906 expressly granted immunity to anyone who procured a breach of contract provided that that action was in "contemplation or furtherance" of a trade dispute and the question of whether this was such a dispute could only be decided in a court of law. The Attorney General sprang to Simon's defence, praising "the great public service which was rendered by him".⁸⁶ He was evidently deeply anxious that Simon's warnings should not be tempered by contrary opinion but he could advance nothing in Simon's defence save praise for his legal reputation. When, on the next day, Simon rose in his own defence he had altered his ground significantly. He pleaded that his case be regarded, "not as a matter of narrow law, but as a matter of broad fundamental constitutional principle, that once you get a General Strike such as this, it is not, properly understood, a strike at all".⁸⁷ This evident weakening was less serious to the Government's cause than it might have been because Mr Justice Astbury had that morning pronounced on the legality of the strike in delivering judgment involving the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union. That union, which had not taken part in the General Strike, was granted an injunction restraining the officials of one of its branches from calling out its members without the authority of the Executive Council of the Union on the grounds that a, the General Strike was illegal, and b, the defendants were acting against the rules of their union. This judgment had a considerable impact on the participants in the conflict yet it was essentially superficial. Goodhart commented: "We

must remember however, that this was an offhand judgment given in a case where the defendants were not represented by counsel. Not a single source is cited to support a view which would revolutionise the law relating to strikes if carried to its logical extent."⁸⁸ Moreover another contemporary legal authority pointed out that Astbury's pronouncement on the legality of the strike was extra-judicial in that it was quite unnecessary to take this factor into account as the actions of the defendants were clearly illegal in terms of their being in breach of the rules of their union. There were no more grounds for Astbury's judgment than there were for Simon's assertion. There is, moreover, considerable evidence to suggest that the Government itself did not believe that the strike was illegal. In the first place there is the opinion of the Attorney General to that effect, solicited by the Cabinet before the strike began,⁸⁹ in the second there is the fact that the Cabinet was preparing a measure to render general strikes illegal before May 1926, thirdly there are the doubts of the Lord Chancellor and other legally qualified members of the Cabinet as to whether the Astbury judgment would stand up on appeal,⁹⁰ and finally there is the decision to go ahead, in the 1927 Act, with those provisions pertaining to political and sympathetic strikes. This last must imply, at least, some ambiguity in the law as it stood, in spite of the face saving sophistries which some ministers advanced to prove the contrary.

In spite of their fragility the pronouncements of Simon and Astbury brought much advantage for the Government. That this should have been so must, to a large extent, be explained by the absence of opposition. In the conditions created by the Strike it was not

possible to effectively propagate a challenge to the statements. However their impact cannot be fully accounted for without reference to the general respect which was accorded to law and legal judgments. While supporters of the Strike might not be entirely converted by Simon or Astbury, their judgments could have the effect of weakening morale. Such judgments could also have the important effect of reinforcing those on the Labour side who were already uneasy about the Strike.⁹¹

All in all the Government got a good deal more than it might decently have hoped for from the question of the legality of the General Strike. It managed to exploit to the full this, apparently, independent support. In this context the fact that the opinions themselves would not bear close scrutiny mattered very little, for by the time such scrutiny was possible the substance of the matter was won and lost. In such disputes the short term impression is everything, and victories of those in power have a finality about them. It is a painfully difficult matter to assemble the forces of organised labour for such an action, but to re-assemble them after a defeat, no matter how that defeat has come about, is almost impossible. Here, as on so many other occasions, an essentially tenuous legal decision proved a critical factor in the weakening of a strike.

The Question of Legislation

The possibility of legislating to make General Strikes illegal was raised in Cabinet as early as 5 August 1925. A committee was set up under the Lord Chancellor, Lord Cave, and a draft bill presented in March 1926. However in order to understand the significance of these events and the 1927 Act it is necessary to go back further. It is no exaggeration to identify trade union legislation as the Conservative obsession from 1922 onwards. The vast majority within the Party had clearly never accepted the settlement as represented by the Acts of 1906 and 1913. While different aspects of these matters were discussed at different times there can be no doubt that what was at issue was the whole question of the functions and powers of the trade unions. The agitation surfaced as soon as the Party was free of the constraints of coalition. The issue was first raised in the guise of the debate about the "contracting out" clause on trade union political funds. Colonel Meysey Thompson, a backbencher, produced a draft bill to impose "contracting in". This provoked Montague Barlow, the Minister of Labour to send a detailed warning to the Prime Minister. He argued that the widespread feeling within the Party on the issue was based on mistaken and inadequate information. Contrary to Party myth, the "contracting out" system did work as twenty-five per cent of those entitled to do this had already done so. Moreover the system had produced very few appeals to the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies. He was sceptical about complaints that the existing system resulted in the intimidation of 'non labour' trade unionists but pointed out that a "contracting in" system was just as open to that type of abuse. Montague Barlow felt that while there was little evidence to support the fears of conservative partisans there was every reason to ensure that actions in the labour area should be

"tactful and circumspect". Intemperate action would harm industrial relations and incur "damaging electoral consequences".

After the brief interlude of Labour Government the debate continued. The new Minister of Labour, Steel Maitland was just as active and able a proponent of the Ministry view as had been his predecessor. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister he conceded that there was considerable backbench and grassroots Party pressure for legislation of one sort or another but he insisted that any measure must meet three conditions. It must, he argued, be "watertight", in that it should be "as likely as possible to attain in actual practice the objects it sets out to achieve". It must also be "got through quickly" so that by the time of the next election the benefits it might bring would be clearly demonstrated and "the row created by its passing" would have died down. Finally Steel Maitland insisted that whatever happened he did not wish to become involved.⁹³ He clearly shared in his Ministry's view that its ability to contribute constructively in the industrial relations field would be removed by association with such a measure. Steel Maitland's lack of enthusiasm could not have been made more apparent yet the pressure continued to rise. Pembroke Wicks continued to bring to the Prime Minister's attention the predictable views of party activists and in particular those of the "Labour Advisory Committees" attached to constituency associations. Central Office continued to collect and propagate evidence of alleged victimisations and abuses of the 1913 Act.⁹⁴ The backbench industry group was unanimously in favour of legislation as apparently were the bulk of conservative backbenchers. However Steel Maitland found some support for his view from John Gretton, a member well informed on industrial matters and from the Engineering and Allied Employers

National Federation, which conveyed its view to the Prime Minister that such legislation was "likely to create a very embarrassing situation in the maintenance of industrial peace".⁹⁵ The Party activists however were unlikely to be deflected by such considerations for they had come to see their cause in a simple heroic light. Cuthbert Headlam warned the Prime Minister that any failure to legislate would be to let down the embattled Tory working men and moderation would appear as nothing short of cowardice. He assured the Prime Minister that there would be little difficulty associated with doing away with the political levy altogether as it was even unpopular among Labour supporters.⁹⁶ Younger warned Birkenhead that the Tory working men of Lancashire would be, "antagonised fatally if the liberty they demand in this matter be not granted to them".⁹⁷

The debate had by now come to centre on the Private Member's Bill sponsored by Albert Macquisten and dealing only with the political levy. This left many activists dissatisfied. The Central Council of the National Union, "while agreeing in principle with the Bill introduced by Mr Macquisten, is of the opinion that legislation should be introduced controlling the political activity of Trade Unions".⁹⁸ John Gretton continued to worry about the electoral effects of such legislation on wavering trade unionists but advised Steel Maitland that it was impossible to avoid some such legislation as so many people were in favour. By the end of January 1926 Steel Maitland conceded that some legislation would have to be introduced but concentrated instead on minimising the amount of damage it would do. He proposed a "non-minuted" committee including backbenchers of "good judgment and influence" to discuss various proposals. In the meantime he suggested that the Macquisten Bill should be killed and the whips used to restrain the Party until

some mature decision was arrived at. Again he pleaded to the Prime Minister to keep him out of it.⁹⁹

Many of the conservative partisans were upset by Baldwin's intervention. Macquisten himself was singularly unimpressed by the consensus it had aroused: "The enthusiasm with which your speech was received on our side was exceeded by that on the side of Labour and Liberal which seemed to me a bad sign."¹⁰⁰

After the defeat of Macquisten's Bill conservative hostility to the trade unions did not diminish but the question of legislating against general strikes came to replace the political levy as the leading issue. The primary object of the Cabinet's legislation committee, set up on 5 August 1925 was to propose measures which would render such a strike illegal.¹⁰¹ The committee presented a draft bill in March 1926. As well as dealing with political strikes the Lord Chancellor and his colleagues also took the opportunity to bring forward additional proposals to alter the legal position of trade unions. They suggested that the Minister of Labour should have the power to insist on compulsory arbitration for any dispute in a service industry and that stricter legal provisions should be introduced in respect of sedition and incitement to violence. The Lord Chancellor argued that the law as it stood failed to provide that swift and stringent punishment for offenders which he believed to be necessary. Even the system of trial by jury was thought to be inadequate for these purposes. The Lord Chancellor argued that; "the presence on the jury of one person who is in sympathy with his (the defendant's) views or is terrorised by his associates may render the trial abortive".¹⁰² The style and form of these proposals were so alien to the contemporary practice of industrial relations that the committee

was justified in its view that the measures should be kept secret as their publication "might precipitate an industrial crisis". This memorandum prompted Austin Chamberlain to offer his full support to Baldwin who, he assumed, would wish to fight such proposals: "You may count on me to follow your lead and to give you any help I can".¹⁰³ Chamberlain answered the Prime Minister that he was prepared to back his judgment on such issues and would support any line he decided to take. However the Cabinet did instruct Cave's committee to go ahead and produce a further draft.

While there were those who wished to proceed immediately with such legislation they were prevailed upon to support a temporary delay, in line with the general policy, until industrial action was underway, so it was not until 8 May 1926 that the matter was again raised in Cabinet.¹⁰⁴ The main provision of the draft bill discussed then was a clause to render illegal and outside of the immunities of the 1906 Act, "any strike which has any other object than the maintenance or improvement of conditions of labour in the industry or branch of the industry in which the strikers are engaged, and which is intended or calculated to intimidate or coerce the Government or the community". The bill also declared that it was a misdemeanour to take part in such an action and attached penalties to the offence. It was also to be made possible for an action to be instituted in the High Court restraining a union from applying its funds to any such action. Similarly, the bill made provision to protect any members of a trade union who defied their union leaders and refused to take part in strikes called for such ends. This discussion took place two days after Simon's pronouncement in the House of Commons. In spite of the fact that Simon had

declared that under existing law the General Strike was illegal, that those who took part in it were liable to legal penalties and that any union member who defied his leader's call to strike could be protected, the Cabinet still decided to proceed with the bill. It was clearly the intention that the bill should be applied to the existing dispute for the Cabinet were advised of the especial need for secrecy for the financial clauses so that the unions should not be able to anticipate the measures and protect their funds. It is difficult to identify the source of the first doubts as to the wisdom of this legislation,¹⁰⁵ but by May 10 there was considerable opposition. Even Government back benchers had got wind of the bill and were said to be opposed to it, though in view of what had gone on before this may be thought unlikely. Sir John Simon, by now firmly in the Government's confidence, had been shown the proposed measure and while favourable had recommended, understandably in view of his public declaration, that it should be made clear that the object of the bill was to declare rather than amend the law. However opposition to the measure was sufficient to delay its progress.

Yet the matter was only allowed to rest for a brief period, for with the General Strike scarcely cold the Lord Chancellor issued another memorandum. He argued that the Astbury judgment was not an adequate basis on which to let the question of the legality of general strikes rest and that, moreover, the immediate victory gave the Government the opportunity to go a good deal further in trade union legislation. The Lord Chancellor believed that in addition to measures which would render all sympathetic strikes illegal and ineffective the Government

should legislate to make all strikes illegal which had not been preceded by a secret ballot. Disputes affecting essential services should be subject to compulsory arbitration, additional protection should be provided for those who chose to work against the instruction of the union, and the political levy should be put onto a 'contracting in' basis. Most dramatically, the Lord Chancellor also proposed that the Government legislate to remove the Tort immunity guaranteed by the 1906 Act.

When the proposals came before the Legislation Committee of the Cabinet they attracted some opposition. The Committee advised against the removal of the tort immunity. While such a course of action might be justifiable in principle, "it would be construed as an attack on trade unions generally and might only result at the next election of a Government pledged to restore it".¹⁰⁶ The Committee did not wish to dismiss the idea of secret ballots out of hand but warned that "the surest way of diminishing the number of strikes is to strengthen the Executive of the unions by giving them responsibility for decisions".¹⁰⁷ The idea of legislation was popular in the Conservative Party as a whole. The 1922 Committee supported all the proposed alterations except that concerning the tort immunity arguing, with a certain degree of optimism, that it was necessary "to avoid even an appearance of an attack upon trade unions".¹⁰⁸ The constituency parties were, predictably, against 'repressive legislation' but firmly in favour of 'sound reform'. A survey of constituency opinion revealed what 'sound reform' involved. On the question of a secret ballot before any strike the constituency parties consulted were unanimously in favour. They were similarly in support of measures to restrict picketing and the amendment of the law

on political levies. They believed trade unions were inadequately managed and that they failed to sufficiently protect the rights of individuals. However there was nothing new in all of this. Party activists as well as a majority of backbenchers had always held such views. The General Strike and the Government's crushing victory had whipped them up, and they clearly felt their case had become irresistible. Yet the lesson of the Strike was by no means as unambiguous as they pretended. Was it not possible for Steel Maitland and those who thought like him to argue that as it had proved possible under existing law for the Government to secure so satisfactory a victory further legislation was unnecessary? However it would appear that the substance of the matter was beyond rational argument and Steel Maitland was committed to minimising the damage which Party enthusiasm would do. He forwarded to the Prime Minister the view of the Editor of the Yorkshire Post that the timing of such legislation would adversely affect the conflict in the trade unions between "moderates and communists" but prepared for a managed retreat. He argued that it was inevitable that some political strikes would have to be rendered illegal and that protection would have to be afforded to workers who refused to take part in illegal strikes. He conceded that some adjustment in the law on picketing would have to come. However in the matter of the secret ballot he argued, "the trouble of course is that such a proposal is very attractive until the question has been studied. The moment the question has been studied it loses the whole of its attraction".¹¹⁰ Naturally enough Steel Maitland was very worried about the forthcoming Scarborough Party Conference. He urged the Prime Minister to stage manage the debate and put up speakers who had studied the question so that, "there will be a little cold breath of reason coming in to mingle with the hot air of

other delegates". He later tried a more direct appeal to the Prime Minister's self regard. He reported that while there was great suspicion of figures like Joynson Hicks and Birkenhead in labour circles, "responsible trade unionists still believe in the Prime Minister". If legislation was really necessary they should seek to proceed in consultation with the trade unions. Above all, he argued legislation should be seen in the broader context of the relationships between employers and workers. While Steel Maitland was not unique in being able to see union legislation in the broad political and industrial context: Robert Cecil for example also warned the Prime Minister, "Unless we couple this (legislation) with a policy of reconciliation on partnership lines we may easily leave things worse and not better":¹¹¹ he was clearly standing against a strong tide. Yet perhaps the worst blow to the Ministry's line was the defection of the employers organisations. Whereas in 1924 they had been firmly opposed to legislative initiatives they were, by the middle of 1926 more partisan than the local party committees. The National Confederation of Employers Organisations were in favour of a repeal of substantial sections of both the 1906 and 1913 Acts. The political levy should be put onto a "contracting in" basis and the right to picket should be removed. The "tort immunity" guaranteed under the 1906 Act should be removed and unions should be made liable for actions for breach of contract. All trade union funds, even provident funds, should be open to such actions. The Engineers and Allied Employers National Federation also supported the withdrawal of the tort immunity and the measure on breach of contract. They wished to see a considerable restriction on the right to picket and in addition wished to see a ban on strikes in public utilities and a compulsory secret ballot before all strikes.

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The various expressions of concern for the interests of the working man and the professions of quixotic intention eventually became too much for the Minister of Labour. Steel Maitland was usually inclined to take a more realistic view than his colleagues and on this occasion he suggested that the matter was really a good deal simpler than his colleagues were pretending. The real question he suggested was, "Do we wish to attack the Trade Unions as such or do we not?"¹¹³ He also detected a note of hypocrisy in the discussion of the political levy. He questioned whether the Party's desire for change was "motivated by a burning indignation for the trade unionist who is forced to subscribe to the furtherance of political principles which he abhors", or was simply based "on a desire to hit the Socialist Party through their pocket". Steel Maitland argued that the small number of cases of injustice which arose from the operation of the levy were being used to conceal the Government's real motivations and intentions. It would be highly unrealistic to expect trade unionists to begin to view their unions as organs of repression. The ordinary trade union member knew that, "he would now and in the future be far worse off with no or with weak trade unions than under the present regime". Ministers were deceiving themselves if they believed that trade unionists would ever accept that Conservative and Liberal politicians were sincerely solicitors for the health of their unions. The only way to avoid harmful electoral consequences was to proceed in the knowledge of these deep-seated beliefs and avoid coercion wherever possible.

The legislation which emerged from the debate was the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act 1927.¹¹⁴ It declared illegal both general and sympathetic strikes and gave power to the appropriate Law Officers to sue to restrain trade union leaders from using funds for such purposes. It strengthened the provisions of the 1875 Conspiracy and

Protection of Property Act with regard to picketing, it established the system of 'contracting in' for the political levy and it imposed further restrictions on union membership by civil servants. There is no contradiction in allowing that while this legislation was narrowly partisan and intentionally vindictive it was less so than many leading politicians and a horde of lesser ones would have wanted it to be. The Cabinet stopped short of repealing the 1906 Act and eventually rejected proposals to prohibit strikes in 'key' industries, to introduce secret ballots in union elections and to ban closed shops.¹¹⁵ Yet still the fact that the carefully orchestrated and ruthlessly effected victory was used as an opportunity to indulge party prejudice stands in marked contrast to Baldwin's talk of peace and compromise in the months before the strike.

Victory in the General Strike was allowed to usher in a celebration of party superiority which must, in any broader sense, be seen as politically unproductive. Alan Anderson has convincingly argued that, while the Act of 1927 did impose some material constraints on the Trade Unions and the Labour Party, its true significance is to be found in its symbolic effect on political and social relationships.¹¹⁶ Other historians have tended to play down the importance of the Act on the grounds that one of its main provisions, on sympathetic strikes, was never used and that union secretaries found ways of limiting the politically damaging effect of "contracting in". Middlemas and Barnes, for example, claim that the Act was an empty threat rather than the crippling blow depicted by the Labour Party.¹¹⁷ Yet while such claims are reasonable they must inevitably tend to cast the decision to legislate in an even more unfavourable light. It may be justifiable to antagonise a section of the political community in order to procure a law which is believed to be a necessary

constraint on their future activities and it might even seem reasonable to do this in pursuit of a concrete partisan advantage. Yet to allow the matter to proceed only to symbolically demonstrate a political ascendancy and to temporarily satisfy the prejudices of one's immediate supporters must be seen as constituting a serious failure of leadership.

The months following the General Strike were to prove a testing time for the Prime Minister. Subsequent judgments of his achievement must rest substantially on his conduct at this time. What was at stake was his much stated commitment to social harmony. Its preservation clearly depended on his willingness and ability to maintain this outlook in the face of the partisan inclinations of his own supporters. As Middlemas and Barnes have convincingly argued G M Young was mistaken in his suggestion that Baldwin collapsed exhausted once the General Strike was brought to a successful conclusion.¹¹⁸ On the contrary the period saw a good deal of political activity much of it involving the Prime Minister. Yet while it is clear that the Prime Minister did not lack energy it was surely the case that his energy was allocated in a highly selective way. In pursuit of the Prime Minister's pledge to "loyal workers" he was unremitting. The number of cases of alleged victimisation was small and the bulk of these were easily settled as most union officials were willing to reinstate or remit the fines of those members who had ignored executive directions. The few outstanding cases were pursued almost beyond their logical conclusions at great expense of time and money.¹¹⁹ Yet no such energy was expended on the vastly greater number of cases where those who had been on strike were punished by their employers on their return to work.¹²⁰ The Government knew of such cases and must have realised the importance of such matters for the future pattern of industrial relations yet they chose to do nothing.

In the matter of the continuing coal dispute the same distinctions were made. Middlemas and Barnes offer a sympathetic view of the Baldwin Government: "Buffeted by the demands of owners and workers, possessing no artillery of its own, it had a hard time."¹²¹ But when it was willing the Government proved itself quite capable of action. It was undoubtedly the case that the coal owners were a difficult and even unpleasant group to deal with. Expressions of distaste for them, such as that uttered by Birkenhead were no doubt sincere, yet in practice the Government were always ready to bow to their intransigence. In the case of the Miners' Federation it was an entirely different matter. Here the Government discovered that it did have "artillery" to deal with opposition. In the face of a contrary recommendation by the Samuel Commission the Government imposed the Eight Hour day. Any miner who wished to break with his union was offered encouragement and protection irrespective of cost. Boards of Guardians who attempted to offer reasonable maintenance to striking miners' wives and children were rapidly brought into line.¹²² In these matters there was no inactivity, no pleas about the powerlessness of the state, no backing away from political difficulty.

These three matters, the question of trade union legislation, the general handling of the aftermath of the General Strike and the Government's conduct of the coal dispute must cast Baldwin in an unflattering light. He must appear hypocritical, in that his talk of social peace was never sincere, weak, in that he was unable to join with those who would have supported him in sustaining a policy of conciliation, or, at best, unimaginative, in that he failed to comprehend the longterm significance of these matters.¹²³

While one of the aims of this account of the General Strike is to take issue with those who seek to explain the Government's victory exclusively in terms of its coercive activities, it is not argued that the influence of these was negligible. During the strikes of 1926 the Government recruited a large Civil Constabulary Reserve and drew heavily on the vast military reserves in the country in order to supplement the work of the regular police forces.¹²⁴ Battleships were sent to the major ports and throughout the campaign the Cabinet sought to secure as many prosecutions of its opponents as was possible. Even on the last day of the General Strike the Attorney General was busying himself with the question of whether the Astbury judgment gave him an opportunity to institute criminal proceedings against strikers under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875. During the General Strike and the stoppage in the coal industry around eight thousand arrests were made for offences directly related to the disputes. Opinion in the Cabinet may not have been united on the efficacy of arrests nor on the general desirability of coercive measures, yet nobody seems to have argued that the balance of the actual policy was wrong.

However, while the coercive measures should be taken into account, the circumstances of their operation must not be ignored. Coercive measures applied at a place, a time, or in a manner widely regarded as inappropriate will produce more harm than benefit for the side using them. Their successful use during 1926 was dependent, as was the rest of the Government's policy, on the political victory which preceded the General Strike. Only when the Government's definition of the

conflict was widely accepted, only when the issue had been shifted from the concrete miseries of mining life to the abstract of the constitution, could force be used without the risk that it would antagonise popular opinion.

In Government discussions of the arrangements for 'protection services' between 'Red Friday' and the General Strike there was an optimism which had not been present for any previous post war labour conflict. There were five times as many troops available as in the coal strike of 1921.¹²⁵

The Army Council used the availability of such reserves to counter Churchill's proposal for the formation of a Defence Force. Both the War Office and the Chief Constables remained highly sceptical about the benefits to be gained from an irregular force of this nature and worried about the disorder which untrained men could provoke. When it was decided that additional forces were needed these were provided under the title of the Civil Constabulary Reserve.¹²⁶ Although this was nominally a force of civilian volunteers it was actually substantially raised by the enlistment of such units of the Territorial Army as has not previously been called to service. These units were sworn in as Special Constables and organised as a special section of the police forces. The men were to be kept in their units but to wear plain clothes and be supplied with brassards, steel helmets and truncheons. In spite of their police status the administration of the force rested exclusively with the War Office.¹²⁷ The Government was aware of the difficulties which flamboyant elements in such units might cause and insisted that only ex-military men, known and trusted at territorial headquarters, could be recruited to supplement such units. The raising of this force was never absolutely necessary as the Government

always had more than an adequate supply of force at its disposal. The Civil Constabulary Reserve was, however, useful in that it enabled the Government to restrict its use of regular army units. The use of Territorial units in this guise served the general policy well in that it sustained the myth that the counter measures were a community engaged in self-preservation. The Reserve was disbanded soon after the end of the General Strike but it was evidently judged to have been a success for its reconstitution was proposed in June in order to protect those miners who were drifting back to work.¹²⁸

If adverse public reaction were to be avoided the timing of coercive measures was critical. The Government took care that the extent of its measures should not become public until the unions were fully committed to strike action. As late as April 28 the Cabinet maintained this policy, deciding: "That no movements of troops should take place before the occurrence of a strike".¹²⁹ Even after 'zero hour' all troop movements were to be as unobtrusive as possible. It was only when he believed that the TUC had put itself beyond general opinion that Baldwin issued his order to the troops: "All ranks of the armed forces are hereby notified that any action which they may find it necessary to take in an honest endeavour to aid the civil power will receive, both now and afterwards, the full support of His Majesty's Government."¹³⁰ From this moment the Government required that its monopoly of force was paraded wherever disorders seemed likely to occur. The desire to maintain secrecy until the very last moment actually hampered the effective deployment of forces. A subsequent report by the Inspectors of Constabulary argued: "It is probable that in some districts more decided action in the early stages would have shortened public

inconvenience and would have saved the actual use of force later."¹³¹

Yet if the Cabinet had started slowly their efforts did not flag and the end of the General Strike brought no diminution of activity. If political considerations had forced the Government to act circumspectly at the onset of the strikes, such considerations soon lost their potency and the end of the major dispute found the Government actively persuading companies to keep on blackleg workers at the expense of their regular employees and far more eager in general to exploit its new political advantage and indulge its most partisan supporters than to take any lead in conciliation. Once the political victory was secured force became, and remained, the central theme of Government policy. The Home Secretary kept up a constant pressure for the maintenance of the State of Emergency. In July he argued that it was necessary to recall Parliament in order to maintain, in particular, Regulations 20 and 21, relating respectively to injury to property and acts likely to cause sedition, and Regulation 33 which permitted arrest without warrant: "The omission of these Regulations would seriously hamper the work of the Police and discourage their efforts and would encourage the agitators and mischief makers."¹³² Jaynson Hicks pointed out that there had been 28 prosecutions under Regulation 20 and 40 under Regulation 21 during the month of June alone. The Home Secretary was a firm believer in the efficacy of prosecutions for securing public order. He argued, on one occasion, that the relatively peaceful situation at Ammonford in Carmarthen was the result of a hundred cases of imprisonment which had been secured the previous year.¹³³

While the level of coercive activity remained high throughout the coal strike the emphasis changed from the maintenance of order and

protection of property to the protection of those miners who had returned to work. The Home Secretary sent specific instructions to this effect to Chief Constables: "It is the distinct wish of His Majesty's Government that the utmost protection be afforded to every man who desires to work in the coalfields of this country."¹³⁴ The Nottinghamshire coalfield was liable to be critical in weakening the strike and the Chief Constable reported in detail on the campaign being waged by Cook and other MFGB officials in the area. As the drift back to work continued the Cabinet recognised that their main task was to counter the attempt by the MFGB to renew the strike in those areas where miners were working in considerable numbers. The Attorney General, with full Cabinet approval, saw to it that Cook's speeches were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions with a view to securing a prosecution. The Cabinet also agreed that in mining districts, "a sufficient force of police should be visible . . . to reassure those men who were anxious to remain at work that they would be protected".¹³⁵ In view of these attitudes it may appear surprising that there were not a greater number of arrests and considerable disorder. Emil Burns felt that this had not been the case because of the reluctance of a number of local police forces to pursue the militant line which the Government requested.¹³⁶ Yet if this was the case it was exceptional for the forces at the disposal of the state acted in most respects with a remarkable cohesiveness. When the report by the Inspector of Constabulary drew attention to the fact: "In no case so far as I have heard, has any court come to the conclusion that force used by the police was greater than the circumstances demanded",¹³⁷ they were perhaps praising the loyalty of the courts rather than the actions of the police.

The courts were kept busy during the strikes. 7,960 people were prosecuted for offences connected with the general and coal stoppages. 4,556 of these prosecutions were for breaches of ordinary laws and 3,304 for offences against the Emergency Regulations.¹³⁸ The great majority of these prosecutions were for non-indictable offences and most were dealt with summarily. It is, of course, by no means inevitable that the seriousness of an industrial conflict will be reflected in the criminal Statistics. Hermann Mannheim commented that in Britain very large strikes could be conducted in such a way "as to leave behind but comparatively insignificant traces in the criminal statistics".¹³⁹ One account of the London Dockers' Strike of 1884 estimated that it gave rise to fewer than twenty cases in the Police Courts.¹⁴⁰ Yet even allowing for this there would seem to be little evidence to support the Government's statements about the seriousness of the law and order situation during 1926. The number of offences does not seem excessive in view of the nature and length of the strikes and, moreover, the bulk of prosecutions were for minor offences. Even the small number of more serious offences were not thought to be that grave. The compiler of the official criminal statistics commented on the more serious offences: "Few of those who committed indictable offences directly or indirectly connected with the coal stoppage were thought proper subjects for placing under supervision."¹⁴¹ There was the distinct impression on the Labour side that the courts were over enthusiastic in their desire to support the Government cause and there is some statistical support for this. The bulk of offences were dealt with in the magistrates' courts, but where defendants did appeal it appears that they had a far better chance than normal of having their sentences reduced or their cases dismissed. Of 317 persons who, in 1926, appealed to

Quarter Sessions in cases not related to the strikes, 69 had sentences moderated and ten had convictions quashed; yet out of a group of 165 other defendants who appealed, 158 of whom were prosecuted under the Emergency Regulations, 93 had sentences moderated and 25 had convictions quashed. This would seem to indicate that some magistrates, at least, got carried away on the mood of the moment.

1926 proved an unusual year in terms of other offences. Where the yearly average of offences for the years 1921-1925 was 39,937, there were 57,462 recorded offences in 1926. The great bulk of the increase came under the heading 'simple and minor larcenies': "In the mining districts many of the larcenies were thefts of coal or other fuel."¹⁴² Other increases are more difficult to explain as for instance the fact that prosecutions for malicious damage to 'trees, shrubs etc.' more than doubled whereas malicious damage to 'fences etc.' rose only slightly. Prosecutions for offences against the Poor Law regulations rose though this is perhaps to be accounted for by the larger numbers seeking its dubious protection rather than an increased propensity for the poor to misbehave. Malicious wounding prosecutions rose from 18 to 500, though maybe the most telling account of the year is suggested by the fivefold rise in prosecutions of attempted suicides.

It is notoriously dangerous to draw general conclusions from criminal statistics but it would appear that the strikes made a considerable impact on the administration of criminal law.¹⁴³ The official account, in recording that around 8,000 offences were directly attributable to the stoppages conceded that that might not be an adequate figure: "Doubtless many other offences were connected, less directly with the

same events." It is also necessary to consider the possibility that the steep rise in prosecutions represents, in part or in total, no more than an increased rate of detection consequent upon the increase in police activity in mining and other areas. How far the figures may be made to signify a campaign of repression is open to question. The Cabinet certainly believed in using the criminal law to rid itself of its most tiresome opponents and in prosecuting where it was thought convenient and possible. Yet the bulk of the prosecutions were for trivial offences and liable to dislocate and inconvenience the opposition rather than eliminate them or even permanently deter them from future political action. Similarly while the number of prosecutions may seem high initially it must be set in the context of the huge number of men involved on both sides, the seriousness of the issues and the bitterness and longevity of the coal dispute.

What does emerge clearly is the Government's ability to secure the close co-operation of those who administered the system of law even though many of them were nominally outwith its direct control. This might be explained by a number of factors. There is that undeniable tendency for those who exercise power within a community to view matters in a similar light and the fact that common social and educational backgrounds tend to reinforce such perceptions. In addition, in Britain, the cohesiveness of elites over regional and interest boundaries has been reinforced by the even development of the political system and its structure. So just as in the STO, where the government could trust in the Lords Lieutenant and others to act on their own it could rely on the unaided initiative of the majority of those who administered the system of law.

Yet such generalities, while important, should not deflect attention from the direct measures which the Government was prepared to take to ensure the public respect for, and the cohesive operation of, the system of law. The case of Tom Richards provides an example. Richards had described a Judge's summing up, in a case related to the strikes, as 'malicious lies' and the case itself as 'a travesty of British justice'. In this he was probably only giving voice to what a large number of people in the labour movement were feeling, yet the fact that Richards' opinion carried some weight because he was a Privy Councillor stimulated the Cabinet to take up the case on behalf of 'British justice'. The Attorney General asked the Cabinet if there were any political considerations why he should not go ahead with a prosecution. The Cabinet's first reaction was to prosecute but to let him off lightly in view of his rank, if he was prepared to make a public apology. As it happened Richards did publish an expression of regret and the case did not proceed, but the Cabinet had won the political point.

However while the vast majority of magistrates could be relied upon to err only in favour of the government the Lord Chancellor left little to chance. At the end of the stoppages Lord Cave reported that he had received complaints about the activities of fifty 'Labour magistrates'. He reluctantly pardoned fourteen who had only been accused of joining in or encouraging others to join in the strikes. Six men he actually removed from the bench although only one of these had been found guilty of an offence. The others he judged were accused of conduct "of such a nature as wholly to unfit them from exercising magisterial functions".¹⁴⁴ Nine men were severely censured. The 'offences' of these 'Labour

magistrates' included being involved in trade union permit schemes, attempting to interfere with the distribution of food, making statements hostile to the authorities and, in one case, saying that volunteer motor drivers 'ought to be shot'. In a number of cases the Lord Chancellor acted only on the word of a Lord Lieutenant. The Cabinet, when it saw Cave's 'most secret memorandum' on this issue, approved it in its entirety. Similar motivations inspired the Cabinet to introduce the Board of Guardians (Default) Act of 1926 by which means the government penalised those Labour guardians who had sought to provide what they regarded as adequate relief for the increased numbers in their care because of the strikes. The Cabinet was unwilling to tolerate any weak links in the state machine,

Many contemporary commentators and a number of subsequent historians have emphasised the restrained and peaceable way in which the General Strike was conducted by both sides. Many admiring comparisons have been made between the British way of conducting such affairs and the disorders they give rise to in other countries.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most widely propagated image of the conflict is that of strikers and policemen playing football together in Plymouth. It must however be open to question whether such an attractive picture of British social relationships reasonably epitomises the strike. There are, after all, many harsher images available; of striking men in Northumberland throwing stones at passing trains,¹⁴⁶ of others derailing the 'Flying Scotsman', of erstwhile respectable Justices of the Peace driven to furious outbursts by the activities of "volunteer" labour, of men in Ruthven "having a go" at members of the Civil Constabulary Reserve.¹⁴⁷ Local studies abound with instances of disorder which make it difficult to maintain that comfortable myth of the strike as a minor ripple

in a millpond of consensus.¹⁴⁸ War Office and Police files indicate that the confrontation between strikers and the forces of order could not always be contained within the rules of Association Football.¹⁴⁹ The Government itself was not above creating an image or two of coercion and confrontation. The decision to drive an armed convoy from the London docks through the East End was clearly not motivated by considerations of supply and the presence of battleships in some home ports was scarcely calculated to underline the consensual nature of British society. If a point is to be made of the relative peacefulness of the conflict it must be strictly set in comparative terms. Moreover it must not be assumed that this relative peacefulness inevitably indicates mass contentment with existing order or that those on strike lacked seriousness of purpose. The relative calm might just as easily be held to indicate a widespread feeling of ineffectuality; a recognition that the structures of order were unassailable.

In a sense there were two General Strikes. The first, as seen by the TUC, an essentially symbolic demonstration of solidarity with the miners, designed to cause limited dislocation and inconvenience in order to persuade the Government to continue the subsidy: the second, as propagated by the Cabinet, and even believed by a few of them, an attempt to undermine constitutional government by any means available. It was the Cabinet's adoption of this definition of the conflict which made it almost impossible for the unions to draw any concessions. Middlemas and Barnes have argued that once the Government had defined the issue in this way all that the unions could do was take on the conflict at that level, which was politically impossible, or capitulate.¹⁵⁰ This argument has a strong element of truth but it is not entirely satisfactory as it was still open to the unions to persuade the Government to change its mind.

It is often the case that original definitions become softened during the course of political conflict. Yet what gave the Government its strength in this instance was not only the decision to fight on the constitutional issue but also its possession of the material and organisational strength to enable it to stick by the original definition. Its victory can never be explained by material or ideational factors alone but always by the way they were combined. The unions had no desire to "starve the country into submission" or to use physical means to weaken the state. On the contrary they used all their efforts, as one participant recalled, "to keep the workers steady and quiet".¹⁵¹ They wished to maintain all vital supplies, to produce and supply under TUC permits, all basic foodstuffs and to make sure that emergency services continued to function. By such means the unions hoped to demonstrate their goodwill and extract concessions from the Government. Yet the Government needed none of this. It was in a position to reject all offers of assistance and was, as such, above compromise. No doubt it could not have held on for long on such a basis but these arrangements were always liable to endure longer than the trade union alliance.

Those many studies of the strike which have criticised the General Council for its inadequate preparations are reasonable enough but they tend to miss this central point.¹⁵² The problem for the trade union leaders was eventually a strategic one. No amount of material or organisational preparation would be of assistance if they were unable to define a ground on which to fight.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 See R P Arnot, *The Miners - Years of Struggle* (1953) p386. It was only Macdonald who had reservations about the 'victory'. Also R P Arnot, *The General Strike May 1926 - Its Origin and History* (1975) (Reprint of 1926 issue)
- 2 G M Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (1952)
- 3 J Foster, 'Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy' in J Skelley, *The General Strike 1926* (1975)
- 4 H of C Debs 5th Series Vol 187 6 Aug 1925
- 5 CAB 24/174 CP 383(25) 4 Aug 1925
- 6 CAB 23/50 CC 42(25) 30 Jul 1925
- 7 See Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin* (1969) p387, Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954) p31, L S Amery, *My Political Life, Vol 2* (1953) p482. Amery offers direct support for the interpretation here advanced: "The emergency arrangements had long been in working order and only needed perfecting."
- 8 CAB 23/50 CC 42(25) Cabinet of 30 Jul 1925
- 9 Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin* p388. See also Hankey to the King "The majority of the Cabinet regard the present moment as badly chosen for a fight, though the conditions would be more favourable nine months hence. Public opinion is to a considerable extent on the miners' side." quoted in Christopher Farman, *The General Strike* (1976) p26
- 10 L S Amery, *My Political Life, Vol 2* (1953) p482
- 11 Letter Joynson Hicks to the Prime Minister, *Baldwin Papers, Vol 2* 1 September 1925. See also H A Taylor, *Viscount Brentford* (1953) for the inexplicable information that Joynson Hicks "attached great importance to the fact that in April 1925 the executive of the Communist International at Moscow resolved that steps should be taken to strengthen the hand of the British Trade Union Congress".
- 12 See also Joynson Hicks to Prime Minister, *Baldwin Papers, Vol 2* 4 September 1925 in which he complains of the inadequacy of the Secret Service.
- 13 Robert Cecil to the Prime Minister, *Baldwin Papers, Vol 9* 10 October 1925
- 14 CAB 23/50 CC 42(25) 30 Jul 1925
- 15 CAB 24/168 CP 469(24)
- 16 CAB 24/174 CP 390(25) 6 Aug 1925

- 17 CAB 24/168 CP 441(25) 22 Oct 1925
- 18 CAB 24/178 CP 81(26) 22 Feb 1926
- 19 CAB 24/179 CP 163(26) 22 Apr 1926
- 20 Memorandum by Chairman of STC
CP 215(26) 28 May 1926
- 21 Memorandum by the Minister of Mines
CP 214(26) 28 May 1926
- 22 See paper by Keith Jeffery, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No 42 (Spring 1981). Also Christopher Wheeler, 'Use of the Military in Industrial Disputes', Industrial Law Journal Vol 8 (1979) pp223-234
- 23 Memorandum by Sub Committee of STC (Protection) CAB 27/72
- 24 J C C Davidson as quoted in Middlemas and Barnes p387
- 25 Margaret Morris, The General Strike 1926 (1976) p164
- 26 Memorandum by the minister of Labour CP 462(25) 6 Nov 1925
- 27 Memorandum by Sir David Shackleton, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 28 L S Amery (1953) Vol 2 p482
- 29 Edward Wood "I think we were right in buying off the strike in 1925, though it proved once more the cost of teaching democracy" quoted in Middlemas and Barnes p389. See again Viscount Templewood (1954) p30 ff for recollections of these differences.
- 30 CAB 23/50 CC 44(25) 7 Aug 1925
- 31 Joynson Hicks to Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 9 25 August 1925
- 32 Joynson Hicks to Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 9 4 September 1925
- 33 CAB 23/51 CC 47(25) 7 Oct 1925
- 34 CAB 24/175 CP 441(25) 22 Oct 1925
- 35 Memorandum by Minister of Transport
CP 391(25) 6 Aug 1925
- 36 Progress Report on STO
CP 81(26) 22 Feb 1926
- 37 CAB 24/178 CP 81(26) 22 Feb 1926
- 38 CAB 24/175 CP 462(25) 6 Nov 1925

- 39 The Labour Government had of course reinforced this message.
- 40 CAB 23/51 CC 47(25) 7 Oct 1925 Some reservations were expressed about the Fascisti. However the general view was that while there were "extremists" among them there was also "a sound element" which could be relied upon.
- 41 CAB 23/51 CC 47(25) 7 Oct 1925
- 42 CAB 24/175 CP 462(25) 6 Nov 1925 See also its discussions in Cabinet
CAB 23/51 CC 53(25) 18 Nov 1925
- 43 CAB 24/175 CP 237 Lord Chancellor's memorandum
- 44 CAB 23/50 CC 43(25)
- 45 CAB 23/50 CC 43(25) Margaret Morris (1976) p151 argues "It was decided to appoint men unconnected with the coal industry as otherwise there would be a danger of confusing minority reports which would destroy the Commission's usefulness as a public relations exercise." It is surely justifiable to be even more cynical about the government's real intentions.
- 46 CAB 24/176 CP 492(25) 24 Nov 1925
- 47 As above but also
CAB 24/178 CP 108(26) 10 Mar 1926 where Lane Fox argued that the only purpose of a further subsidy would be to "set the Government right with public opinion".
- 48 CAB 24/178 CC27(26) For an outline and discussion of the controversy over the Government's handling of the Samuel Report see M W Kirby, The British Coalmining Industry 1870-1946 (1977) p79
- 49 CAB 23/52 CC 15(26) 14 Apr 1926 The Cabinet agreed "that up to the present time the Government had had public opinion with them in their attitude: that the position taken up by the mine owners had not reacted adversely on public opinion: that it was very important that the mine owners should not antagonise public opinion by offering inadequate wages in their various districts."
- 50 Memorandum by Joynson Hicks, Baldwin Papers, Vol 2
- 51 As above
- 52 As above
- 53 See HO 45/12336
- 54 CAB 23/53 CC 31 (26)
- 55 CAB 27/260 STC 21st Cond
- 56 CAB 23/53 CC 31(26)

- 57 CAB 27/260 STC 27th Cond
- 58 CAB 27/260 STC 18th Cond 6 May 1926 11.30 am
- 59 CAB 27/260 STC 23rd Cond 11 May 1926
- 60 G Glasgow, General Strikes and Road Transport (1926) p50 See also Earl of Scarborough, 'Maintaining Supplies in a General Strike', English Review March 1926
- 61 CAB 27/260 ST(24) 15th Cond 3 May 1926 11.30 am
- 62 CAB 27/260 17th Cond 5 May 1926 Noon Stepney Council continued to be intractable. On 11 May the solicitors for Charrington's Brewery complained to the Prime Minister as Stepney continued to supply electricity for Hospitals and lighting purposes only.
- 63 CAB 27/260 17th Cond 5 May 1926 Noon
- 64 CAB 23/52 CC 27(26) 8 May 1926
- 65 CAB 23/52 CC 29(26) 11 May 1926
- 66 CAB 23/53 CC 31(26) 13 May 1926 But see also Kingsley Martin, The Press in the General Strike (1926)
- 67 H of C Debs 5th Series Col 839-41 5 Mar 1925
- 68 See P Renshaw, The General Strike (1975)
- 69 R H Desmarais, 'The Supply and Transport Committee: A study of the British Government's method of handling emergencies stemming from industrial disputes' PHD University of Wisconsin (1970) p9 for a discussion of this view.
- 70 CAB 23/52 CC 29(26) 11 May 1926
- 71 CAB 27/260 17th Cond See also HO 45/123431 and R Rhodes James, Memoirs of a Conservative pp233-50
- 72 J C C Davidson to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 22
- 73 CAB 27/260 STC 23rd Cond 11 May 1926
- 74 R H Desmarais (1970) p229
- 75 K Jeffery and P Hennessey, British Governments and Strikebreaking Since 1919 (1983) p118
- 76 A Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the UK, Vol 1, The Birth of Broadcasting (1961) p373
- 77 CAB 27/260 STC 17th Cond 5 May 1926
- 78 CAB 23/52 CC 26(26) 7 May 1926

- 79 Reith Diaries (Ed C Stuart) (1975) p109, Briggs, Vol 1 p373
Reith refused to allow the Archbishop of Canterbury to broadcast because Davidson instructed him to.
- 80 CAB 23/52 CC 29(26) 11 May 1926
- 81 See for some discussion of this and related points E P Thompson, Whigs and Hunters (1975) pp258-269
- 82 A L Goodhart, 'The Legality of the General Strike in England', Yale Law Journal (February 1927)
- 83 H of C Debs Vol 195 3-14 May Cols 581-588 6 May 1926
- 84 For a discussion of Simon's views see M Shefftz, 'The Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act of 1927 - The Aftermath of the General Strike', Review of Politics Vol 29 (1967) pp387-406
- 85 H of C Debs 5th Series Vol 195 Cols 787-797 10 May 1926
- 86 As above
- 87 H of C Debs Vol 195 Cols 861-876 11 May 1926
- 88 Goodhart, 'Legality of the General Strike'
- 89 CAB 24/175 CP 420(25) But see also LAB 27/9 for a paper written by Ministry of Labour Civil Servant Macmillan which firmly argued that a general strike could not be regarded as illegal.
- 90 CAB 24/180 CP 204(26) Memorandum by Lord Chancellor 17 May 1926
- 91 See for example Desmarais who in many other ways underplays the role of political and other ideational factors. "By presenting the General Strike as a constitutional challenge the Government was then playing upon a sensitive feeling in the Trade Union world." Demarais, Supply and Transport Organisation p11
- 92 Memorandum by Sir Montague Barlow, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
7 November 1923
- 93 Steel Maitland to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
14 December 1924
- 94 See for example 'Notes on cases of victimisation, evasions and abuses of the Trade Union Act of 1913' prepared by Conservative Central Office', Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 95 Gretton to Steel Maitland, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 96 Cuthbert Headlam to Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
16 January 1925
- 97 Younger to Birkenhead, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 23 February 1925
and quoted in P Renshaw pp240-241

- 98 Wicks to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 23 February 1925
- 99 Steel Maitland to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 27 January 1925
- 100 Macquisten to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 8 March 1925
- 101 CAB 23/53 5 August 1926
- 102 CAB 24/180 204(26) 17 May 1926
- 103 Austen Chamberlain to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 104 CAB 24/180 CP 27(26) May 1926
- 105 CAB 24/180 CP 204(26) 17 May 1926
- 106 CAB 24/180 CP 237(26)
- 107 CAB 24/180 CP 237(26)
- 108 CAB 24/181 CP 305(26)
- 109 CAB 24/181 CP 305(26) See also Summary of Findings of the Labour Advisory Sub-Committee of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 110 Memorandum by Steel Maitland, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 undated
- 111 Robert Cecil to the Prime Minister, Baldwin Papers, Vol 11 9 January 1927
- 112 See memoranda by these organisations in Baldwin Papers, Vol 11
- 113 CAB 24/182 CP 394(26) Steel Maitland's memorandum on Trade Union Legislation
- 114 17 and 18 Geo 5 Ch 22 For a typical contemporary discussion of the Act from the Labour viewpoint see John Hamilton, 'The Legal Attack on the Trade Unions' Plebs April 1927. For an account of the passage of the Act: M Shefftz, 'The Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act 1927. The Aftermath of the General Strike', Review of Politics Vol 29 (1967) pp387-406
- 115 See Alan Anderson, 'The Political Symbolism of the Labour Laws' and 'The Labour Laws and the Cabinet's Legislation Committee of 1926-27', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History (Autumn 1971) pp13-15 and pp37-53
- 116 Anderson, 'The Political Symbolism of the Labour Laws' (1971)
- 117 Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin p452
- 118 Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin p418

- 119 See for example 'Report of Action taken by the Ministry of Labour on cases arising out of the Government's pledges to loyal workers' Baldwin Papers, Vol 22 31 July 1928
- 120 See undated memorandum on the arrangements made in Liverpool for the return to work of Tramway strikers and Letter, Chegwiddden to Prime Minister, 9 September 1926 on the return to work on the LMS Railway. Both in Baldwin Papers, Vol 22
- 121 Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin p443
- 122 For an account of the impact of Chamberlain's measures on one region see Paul Jermy, 'Life on Circular 703: The Crisis of Destitution in the South Wales Coalfield during the Lockout of 1926' LLA Fur 2 (1977) pp65-75
- 123 Baldwin certainly did appeal to employers not to be vindictive, but what is at issue here is less what was said than what was done. In fact the reinstatement of men itself required great effort on the part of union leaders. See A Bullock, Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol 1 pp339-340. For a discussion of Baldwin's fluctuating reputation, Barbara Malament, 'Baldwin Re-Restored', Journal of Modern History Vol 44 p87-96
- 124 See reports collected in WO 32/3455 and the accounts of the conduct of the Special Constables in MEPO 2/3135. Far more special constables were recruited than was necessary. One observer claimed that the specials rapidly became a joke as it was obvious that there was nothing for them to do. H Hamilton Fyfe, Behind the Scenes in the Great Strike (1926) p39
- 125 CAB 27/260 STC(24) 15th Cond 3 May 1926 11.30 am
- 126 CAB 23/52 CC 25(26) 7 May 1926 2 pm
- 127 CAB 23/52 CC 26(26) 7 May 1926 9 am
For a general discussion of these issues see Christopher Wheelan 'Use of the Military in Industrial Disputes' Industrial Law Journal December 1979 Vol 8 Pt 4 pp223-34.
For a discussion of previous plans for a Citizen Guard (1919) and a Defence Force (1921) and the debate in 1926 see K Jeffrey, Conference Paper in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History 42 Spring 1981, Desmarais (1971) p76, Anthony Mason, 'The Government and the General Strike', International Review of History (1969), pp1-21, p16
- 128 CAB 23/53 CC 40(26) 23 Jun 1926
- 129 CAB 23/52 CC 19(26) 28 Apr 1926
- 130 CAB 27/260 STC(24) 7 May 1926
- 131 Reports of H M Inspectors of Constabulary Year Ended 29.9.26
H of C 1972(2)
- 132 CAB 24/181 CP 278(26) 20 Jul 1926

- 133 'Strength of the Police Forces in the Coalfield'
CAB 24/182 CP 364(26)
- 134 Home Secretary quoted in CP364(26) as above
- 135 CAB 23/53 CC 53(26)
- 136 Emil Burns, The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in
Action (1926)
- 137 H of C 1927(2)
- 138 Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1926. H of C Cnd 3055
- 139 Hermann Mannheim, Social Aspects of Crime in England between the
Wars (1940) p154
- 140 Sir H Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, The Story of the Dockers'
Strike (1889) p101
- 141 H of C Cnd 3055 (1926)
- 142 H of C Cnd 3055 (1926)
- 143 See Mannheim (1940) Chs 2 and 3 for discussion on these parts.
- 144 CAB 24/181 CP 274(26) The Prime Minister also received
complaints about middle class backslides. Lord William Cecil,
Bishop of Exeter had allowed Miss Bondfield to address a meeting
on church property and the Bishop of Liverpool had been somewhat
less enthusiastic in the Government's defence than Cardinal Bourne.
See Baldwin Papers, Vol 18.
- 145 See for example Lord Haldane, Autobiography (1928) p247 or John T
Macready, Mind and Money (1932) p273
- 146 A Mason, The General Strike in the North East (Occasional Papers
in Social and Economic History No 3 University of Hull) (1970)
- 147 WO 32/3455
- 148 See local studies collected in P Skelley (Ed), The General Strike
(1976)
- 149 MEPO 2/3135
- 150 See Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin p411, who argue that ". . .
unless the unions wanted revolution, efficient organisation and
a refusal to compromise left them no choice but to give in".
Ross Martin argues "The General Strike was thus a gigantic bluff
because it was eventually a revolutionary technique that could
not in the end be effectively used by trade unionists lacking a
revolutionary purpose". Ross M Martin, The Trade Union Congress,
the growth of a Pressure Group 1868-1976 (1976) p177. A recent
study considerably underestimates the symbolic and political
elements in the General Strike. Jeffery and Hennessey, States
of Emergency p104

"The success or failure of a general strike turned on the question of 'supply and transport'". This is partly true, but taken in isolation it is somewhat misleading.

- 151 H Hamilton Fyfe, Behind the Scenes in the Great Strike (1926) p33
The author worked as a journalist for the 'British Worker' and recalled that the contents of the paper were also subject to a strict censorship: "Their chief aim is to prevent anything getting into the paper which might cause uncontrollable irritation and violence . . ." p33
- 152 There is no doubt about the unpreparedness of the General Council. Citrine's memorandum makes this all too clear. It also confirms the complete lack of strategic thinking. Walter Citrine, Men and Work (1964) pp146-153 See also Trades Union Congress, General Council Minute Books, Harvester Microfilm (1975)

CONCLUSION

While most of those who have previously discussed these issues have presented their findings in terms of, and as if derived from the factual record, their works display contrasting styles of selection and interpretation which seem more related to disagreements about the nature of social systems themselves rather than events taking place within them. The most important disagreement would seem to be related to a conflict identified by Ralph Dahrendorf. He argued that studies of society fell into one of two basic camps. On the one hand there were studies which saw social structures: "in terms of a functionally integrated system held in equilibrium by certain patterned and recurrent processes". On the other there were those in which society was assumed to be, "a form of organisation held together by force and constraint".¹ These contrasting images of society have a particular relevance to any study of the role of state systems in the maintenance of political order. Those who approach the question on the basis of the integration model must inevitably begin with the assumption that it is possible for states to root themselves in a social consensus. They can maintain themselves by discovering and expressing the deeper agreements on which societies are seen as being founded. Any disagreements and conflicts which do arise will be resolvable by procedures which themselves can be founded in mutual agreement. It is possible for governments and their activities to acquire authority on the basis of the consent of the governed. Order is seen as a virtually natural state of affairs and while disorders may arise from time to time they can be eradicated by the development or adjustment of state and legal institutions so that they more properly represent the shared values and common interests of society. In contrast the second image of society, in emphasising the roles of force

and constraint, must assume a model of state activity which is the exact reverse of the above. Conflict will be seen as an inevitable and permanent feature of society and there will be no general agreements and common understandings on which institutions can be based. Institutions will, of necessity, be partial, capable only of representing a section of society at the expense of other sections. State and legal institutions will be seen as originating in, and continuing by, the use of force and fraud. If societies appear to be ordered at any particular time this will be analysed as an artificial and temporary phenomenon brought about by particular circumstances or contrived by ruling groups. Social disorder is the proper expression of inherent social conflict and its absence provokes a 'conflict based' historian, not to a reconsideration of his theory, but to a study of the unnatural factors which have muted it or an investigation of the ability of the state and its associates to coerce or confine those who should be giving expression to the conflict. From this perspective the claims of state institutions to express common social purposes are seen as no more than additional devices for confusion, and spurious justifications for the coercion of dissenters.

Disagreements of this nature must inevitably create great differences in the way in which historical material is selected. Disputes about the nature of the post war unrest for example, often seem to be based not so much on divisions about the factual record but rather on previously formulated assumptions about the general significance of such events. The respective accounts of Charles Mowat and Allen Hutt provide an illustration of views which could not be reconciled on a factual basis. Mowat views the crisis as arising out of particular circumstances, "alarming only on the surface" and as having died away

"harmlessly" after 1921. Hutt, in contrast views the same events in the context of a capitalist system "in the throes of a mortal crisis", the strikers as "battles fought by the trade union movement . . . of unexampled scope " which declined into "a series of rearguard actions" only in the face of the "employers attack". The historians of the integrative camp come to the crisis as if it were an aberration, albeit a serious one, arising out of unique circumstances and, perhaps exacerbated by the mistakes of the government and its agents,² whereas the conflict camp assume these same events must be interpreted as the active expression of conflicts permanently present at the core of society.³ In the former camp the activities of the state will be seen as attempts to come to terms with new realities but in the latter they will be viewed in an entirely different light: attempts at amelioration become "bribes" and efforts to "incorporate" labour leaders are seen as devices to isolate and repress the militant sections of the labour movement. Within the former interpretation it is possible for the state to work towards an enduring stability, even though this might be dependent on continuous activity and adjustment, but in the conflict model the state's activities are seen as more or less desperate attempts to postpone the inevitable. All they can achieve is a temporary peace; while it may be possible to seal over surface fissures, the volcanic activity underneath can never be quenched.

On application both models reveal a number of weaknesses and ambiguities. While they are too deeply rooted for anyone to entirely avoid presuppositions associated with one or the other an awareness of the most obvious difficulties might help to alleviate some of the possible distortions. For example, although integrative models stress the possibility

of consent in the relationship between government and governed they usually fail to deal with the issue in terms of quality and quantity.⁴ The practical question is always one of degree: how much consent is necessary for survival? It is quite clearly possible, even normal for states to prosper without attracting the consent of all citizens though no state could survive without attracting the support of some. A second practical difficulty with such models is that they tend to imply that where consent is absent or where over time it diminishes to a point at which the system ceases to be viable, the replacement of the existing state by a new one is an almost automatic matter. "The people" can somehow come together and instigate a new order.⁵ In practice such operations can prove so difficult that some reassessment of the theory might be required. Successful revolt requires organisation on a scale which the situation of subjects renders exceptionally difficult. Mass support can remove some of the difficulties but this will only be present, in most cases, by the final stage of a successful rebellion. The early moves against an existing state are usually dependent on chance and circumstance, and the risks which a few individuals are prepared to take. A final practical problem of history on the integration model is that it can lead to a considerable underestimation of the extent to which apparently voluntary acquiescence may in fact have been artificially manufactured or manipulated. Those in power always have access to some machinery for adjusting the ideas and moral orientations of their subjects and in practice it can prove difficult to distinguish between support freely given and support offered in the face of actual or anticipated sanctions. Opinions as to what is right may also be adjusted in the light of what is thought to be possible. Quiescence can owe as much to a belief that improvement is impossible as to any genuine recognition of the authority of the ruler.

The application of a conflict model of society to historical analysis can also produce difficulties. The first and most obvious one is that while such a model assumes that conflict is at the heart of societies and their political processes, actual open conflict tends, in most times and in most places, to be the exception rather than the rule. Proponents of the conflict model need have no immediate difficulty over this objection. They could, for example point to the considerable coercive powers which states can employ to conceal or contain conflict. If it is objected that in many societies overt coercive activity by state forces is rare, they can point to controls operated away from the centres of political power, for example in the schools and factories, which could be argued to serve the state's purposes equally well, as ideological apparatuses retarding the development of a popular recognition of the real bases of society. The difficulty here is not that such explanations fail to cope with the initial objection but rather that they dispose of it rather too completely. Nairn, for instance provides a model which adequately accounts for the development of the most "numbed and docile"⁶ working classes in Europe within a conflict model yet he leaves himself little room for explaining why some individuals escape the prevailing influences to mount fundamental attacks on the system. If these mechanisms of control or confusion are as effective as is sometimes claimed, how can it be that anyone escapes their influence? The fact that some escape should surely suggest that the actual processes whereby individuals acquire their capacities to understand political issues are more complicated than such analyses might suggest. This point can be related to a wider difficulty which arises out of the application of the conflict model, for in emphasising conflicts not visibly present, attention can be drawn away from the

confusion and complexity of immediate political events. The focus of debate is shifted from the explanation of what happened to an explanation of why what should have happened, didn't happen. It is at this point that the agents of the state and their allies come to be awarded a reputation for foresight and manipulative competence which they can rarely be seen to have deserved.⁷

In the face of such fundamental differences it can never be possible to write an account of the activities of a state which would be universally acceptable. No tide of empirical evidence could submerge conflicts of this nature. Thus, while much of what is presented here might usefully illustrate the conflicting theories it could never conclusively prove one theory or another. There is, of course much here that could be used in support of a basic marxist view of the state in capitalist society; that is as an instrument for furthering and protecting the interests of the owning class. Clearly there is much which must undermine the more optimistic liberal accounts of the exercise of state power. There is little evidence of even-handedness, much less neutrality towards competing groups of citizens. There is sufficient evidence of their subjective concern for the interests of capital to suggest that many politicians would have been content with a job description that mentioned "the management of the common affairs of the bourgeoisie". In matters of dispute between capital and labour the vast majority of politicians and officials were willing and active partisans of capital. They maintained contacts at all levels with representatives of the industrial and financial sectors and they often manipulated the forces at their disposal so that they might more directly serve what was regarded as the common purpose. Yet while the available evidence must indicate that the state apparatus was biased towards capital it cannot prove that this was inevitably the case.

A number of recent writers in the marxist tradition have been interested in this problem but have specifically rejected analyses of the state in capitalist society which rely on the presentation of empirical evidence of contacts and connections between state functionaries, politicians and representatives of capital. It has been suggested that even if there were no evidence of collusion nor no discernable pattern of direct influence there would be no reason to reject marxist assumptions about the nature of the state for, it is argued that it is in the structural constraints imposed by the economic order that the direction of state activity is determined.⁸ The state is not driven in a certain direction in response to the intercessions of particular interests but rather operates in a situation of which the simple logic of events draws it on. To serve the interests of capital is to do no more than accept the obvious constraints imposed by the situation and to follow the dictates of common sense. This type of view clearly takes the debate about the nature of the state well beyond the confines of this type of investigation.

In a more obvious sense it could also be argued that the material presented here fails to impinge on the debate about the ultimate nature of the state as the partisan use of state institutions illustrated here was no more than a proper reflection of the openly displayed political orientations of the elected ministers. They favoured capital yet they always maintained that this, in their view, was the best way to further community interests. While it might appear that the formation of a Labour Government could add a further dimension to the debate, as the Labour men were not the partisans of capital that their Conservative opponents were, the central question in reality, remains as open as before. Though the evidence from 1924 suggests, at the least, that

a reforming government would have found it difficult to bend the state machine to radical purposes, the determination of the Labour administration was never strong enough nor its broader political position sufficiently unambiguous for it to bring the issue to the test.

Obviously the state machine was not the insipid purposeless body ordained by the strictest versions of constitutional theory: senior civil servants were politically engaged and were expected to argue for policies which they favoured, and established practices of consultation and discussion were geared to assist certain groups and exclude others, but Labour ministers were never sufficiently secure to attempt to find out how resilient ingrained procedures and attitudes really were.

Clearly the dominant issue of post war politics was the rise and development of the trade union movement. The sheer size of the movement meant that some new relationship between the state and labour would have to be developed. One contemporary observer felt that a "vast shift" had already been made: "The famous moment of history has come when a nation ushers in another class to power".⁹ Gerald Gould was slightly more circumspect but he believed that any failure on the part of the existing state to offer substantial concessions would lead to widespread social disorder.¹⁰ Later observers, in the knowledge that the existing state did survive, and moreover without making substantial concessions, have developed more sanguine theses. John Foster, in an account of those events deeply rooted in the conflict theory of society, has suggested that the response of the state to the development of organised labour was, "a set of bribes that bypassed the market and went direct from state or employers to (or through) trade union leaders and politicians. They were thus able to reach all organised workers . . . ". Foster

argued that "the establishment's solution seems to have been worked out in three stages". Before 1922 they attempted to prevent the rise of labour as a political identity, but after the Labour Party's success in the General Election of that year their attention became "focused on 'educating' Labour, using various forms of ideological persuasion to turn the new political identity into constitutional reformist channels": "A climate of opinion would be created by a growing battery of mass influence - newspapers, radio, the church, education and government itself. The Labour leadership would be persuaded to adopt a course of action that would enable it to "win this Public Opinion". Only after "the shock of Red Friday" did the "establishment" turn to "more drastically coercive methods".

The central weakness of this analysis is that it considerably overestimates the competence and cohesiveness of the "establishment". Politicians are credited with an ability to manipulate events and foresee consequences which finds little support in the available records. If we take the Conservative Party as the political arm of this "establishment", it is very difficult in their records of debate and discussion to find any such clear pattern of change. There were clear divisions on the issue of how labour might best be dealt with. The "diehards" associated British labour with Russian Bolshevism and interpreted all emanations of unrest as evidence of subversive intentions. They became and remained spiritual crusaders against labour and opposed all concessions. There were others, Lord Salisbury for one, who, while they did not regard labour as revolutionary threat in the comic opera sense that the Duke of Northumberland did, did believe that the measures of nationalisation which a successful Labour Party might introduce would

inflict permanent damage on the interests they were pledged to defend. On the other wing of the party there were those such as Steel Maitland who consistently recognised the constitutional intentions of Labour leaders and moreover understood the fragility of labour alliances. There is no evidence of any authoritative synthesis of these ideas. The different positions attracted additional support and exercised influence when they appeared to provide the most appropriate reaction to the circumstances of any given time. For example, the 'hard liners' were defeated over the political levy question in 1925 but when the changed circumstances of 1927 appeared to afford a greater credibility to their position they managed to gain that and a good deal more.

Foster is however, undoubtedly correct in pointing out that many leading Conservative politicians were not precipitated into panic by the electoral advances of the Labour Party in 1922 and 1923. In confirming this impression Maurice Cowling has suggested two alternative reasons why this might have been so: "Whether these judgments were made because Labour had arrived and it was useless to argue with a steam roller, or because the Labour Party was an easy party to beat there can be no doubt that they reflected very little fear".¹² The arrival of Labour as the second party was not something that the conservatives had, or could have planned, but a fact which they had to accommodate themselves to. If the Labour Party rather than other available parties had managed to attract the support of substantial numbers of working class voters the fact must be primarily attributed to the ability of that Party and its leaders to reflect and represent the aspirations and ideas of these voters. If because of this some long term advantage accrued to the defenders of existing order it must be recognised that the advantage

was gratuitously acquired. Nor was it necessary, as Foster argues, for the conservatives to "educate" labour leaders. Labour was firmly and publicly committed to a policy based on moderation and adherence to constitutional propriety. Within the Party this was widely assumed to be the only available basis on which to compete for electoral support. Even many advocates of 'direct action' felt it was an additional weapon rather than an alternative strategy in itself.

The attempt to discover in the actions of conservative politicians some master plan for the containment and manipulation of labour seems unlikely to succeed for tactics appear to have been determined in a rather haphazard and opportunistic way. Behind their actions there were basic agreements, frequently unspoken and rarely developed, that they were in politics to defend constitutional government and private ownership and to protect landowners and employers against the encroachments of trade unions or the state. Yet there was much disagreement as to how the defence should be conducted and how such concerns might best be related to immediate political issues. There was certainly no attempt to divide and rule, no concerted effort to detach moderate labour from the left in order to secure long term goals. Instead, in the belief that it would secure for their Party the immediate electoral advantage, the conservatives' propaganda consistently ignored divisions and sought to colour the whole of the labour movement with the material provided by the few.

While there is no material evidence to support the claim that conservative politicians developed coherent long term strategies to contain labour the conduct of the state in the shorter period of the General Strike must suggest some firm central direction. Yet, as argued above,

such consistency as Baldwin was able to maintain even in this short period was achieved in the teeth of internal opposition. Moreover the "strategy", on closer examination amounted to little more than the mobilisation of the natural allies of the government by the arousal of traditional prejudices. In the event Baldwin's achievement was to deter his more militant colleagues from dissipating the opportunity which the Labour movement presented them with. The absence of any grand design was only emphasised by the events which followed the strike. The hard liners were able to gain the ascendancy by arguing that the events of 1926 vindicated their opinions. Arguments for prudence and moderation had lost their force with the defeat of organised labour.

A contrasting theory of the changing relationship between the state and labour has been offered by Keith Middlemas. Middlemas argues that during the course of 1917 a number of influential politicians came to believe that existing institutions of government were incapable of dealing with conflicts which were arising in industry. In order to stem this source of social disruption these politicians began to develop communications between the state, organised labour and employers organisations, in particular the TUC and the NCEO. By means of such contacts the state was able to exert influence in areas which it could not otherwise reach: "Schematically the process may be described as a series of interactions of declining importance: first the triangular co-operation between government and governing institutions (in this case employers and trade unions), secondly between those institutions and their constituents (TUC and unions, BEC or FBI and federations of particular industries), thirdly between individual members (federations and firms, unions and branch officials or shop stewards)."¹³ The state is

therefore seen as using employers and trade unions as agents of influence: "To put it simply, what had been merely interest groups 14 crossed the political threshold and became part of the extended state." However Middlemas argues that it would not be justifiable to see this as the development of a corporate state. It was rather a system with a "corporate bias": "Progress towards institutional collaboration and the avoidance of economic competition and class conflict is a tendency and not an irreversible trend."¹⁵ Moreover the system had no formal basis: "What was created was never precise, nor contractual in the sense ascribed by Maine or Dicey to the law of the constitution, but existed as a code among those groups admitted to the process of government - a sort of outillage mental acquired by the leaders of institutions as part 16 of their political apprenticeship, or a passport into the state domain." This triangular relationship is thus the new "efficient secret" and, like Bagehot's earlier version, it legitimated itself by reference to dignified, but obsolete institutions: "Governing institutions and parties combined to take issue with the excluded, not on the question of their threat to their own role in the composition of the state, but of the threat to the already obsolescent parliamentary system - forcing them, almost by definition, to attack from outside the confines of what the great mass of the electorate still accepted as the legitimate centre of political activity."¹⁷ The outsiders, for example those who created the Shop Stewards' Movement, who formed the Councils of Action, who forced the General Council into the General Strike, thus were made to appear as "dinosaurs", as romantic remnants of a past age.

While Middlemas' analysis does possess a number of merits, not the least of which is to deal in terms of options which were understood and

contemplated by some of those who took part in these events, it fails to deal adequately with important questions. In common with other corporatist analyses of political power it tends to concentrate on the processes of bargaining rather than on the questions of how the participants were selected, what was the real status of each participant, and who determined what was to be on the agenda. Middlemas' claim that this process was the new 'efficient secret' can only be conceded if it can be demonstrated that questions of real substance were raised and disposed of at this point.

Michael Dintenfass has conceded that meetings between the state and representatives of employers and trade unions did take place but has suggested that the parties were only allowed to discuss a restricted range of topics.¹⁸ The effective parameters of the debate were predetermined by others who were not party to these discussions. Dintenfass argues that industrialists and trade unionists had to confine their suggestions within an overall economic policy which owed much to the influence of financial interests. Rodney Lowe has made a similar point in his studies of the Ministry of Labour during these years.¹⁹ Lowe argues that while there were agents and apostles of the corporatist tendency within the Ministry and that they successfully propagated knowledge of industrial and labour matters within the system of government they were always subject to the constraints of Treasury orthodoxy. The decision to return to the Gold Standard in 1929 while it had a major influence on most sectors of industry was taken in response to this financially orientated orthodoxy. That many industrialists were prepared to go along with the decision must be related to the fact that they were conditioned to acquiesce in such matters rather than to any calculation of their own interests.²⁰

Proponents of the 'corporate tendency' thesis must also demonstrate that contacts between the groups went beyond normal consultations. They must produce evidence of mutual understanding about the permanent status of groups and their unchallenged right to act as representatives of their members. Some employers do not seem to have viewed matters in this light. Middlemas himself points out that the mine owners used the government to impose the eight hour day on union members and then refused to keep their side of the bargain. Far from enforcing the original agreement the Government then advised the owners how best to present their subsequent defence. Yet even if, as Middlemas suggests, the mining industry can be discarded as anachronistic, there is evidence to suggest that other employers could act in a similar way. The NCEO was certainly in frequent contact with government but even on Middlemas' evidence its main concern was to defend its members' immediate interests. It devoted much energy to resisting the forty-eight hour week which had been agreed under the Washington Convention, and to opposing the introduction of employers' contributions to the national insurance scheme. When its private representations in the matter of the forty-eight hour week appeared to have failed and the Government seemed to be about to ratify the Washington Convention, the NCEO went public and instituted a campaign of press advertising. They even attempted to mobilise sympathetic backbenchers in opposition to the policy. Such evidence is not conclusive but it does suggest a reluctance on the part of employers to compromise on matters of direct interest or to confine their opposition to the inner councils. This is an indication that employers tended to regard negotiations with government as an opportunity to pursue an interest rather than a forum in which interests could be readjusted and redefined.

In respect of trade unions there are more serious problems. In order to sustain the corporatist tendency thesis it is not necessary to demonstrate that the government afforded the trade unions an equal share with employers in the bargaining process, but it is essential to show that they had a role which was permanent and relatively constant. Middlemas argues that the tendency to incorporate union leaders originated in 1917, disappeared in the post war crisis and was gradually to re-emerge as orthodoxy by 1926. As illustrated elsewhere there are good reasons to be sceptical about the conversions of 1917. It is not sufficient to identify political figures who believed that a corporatist solution was desirable. What is necessary is to demonstrate that governments were prepared to devote significant resources to the establishment and maintenance of trade union leaders at the centre of the system. As illustrated above, governments were frequently unable to adequately protect and recompense labour leaders for their co-operation. In the immediate post war period many conservative politicians became obsessed with what they saw as the subversive potential of trade unions and viewed all developments with hostility. No scheme for industrial reconciliation stood much chance in this atmosphere. The National Industrial Conference was never really a corporatist scheme being based rather on the view that capital and labour should be brought together and then left to settle their differences. However it foundered on government attitudes as few politicians were prepared to leave such matters alone. As James Cronin has argued, the central aim of government appeared to be to downgrade both the labour and employer sides of industry in order to return to traditional policies.²¹ Views of the positive contributions which the state might make were in effect more restricted than they had been in the prewar period.

The events of 1926 and 1927 would tend to confirm that no substantial change of outlook had taken place. The passage of the Trade Disputes Act is particularly difficult to reconcile with the corporatist tendency thesis. A central feature of corporatism must be the acceptance by the state of the right of group leaders to speak on behalf of their members and to regulate the internal affairs of their own organisation. The Trade Disputes Act was firmly based on the assumption that the state had the right to regulate the affairs of trade unions and to appeal over the heads of union leaders directly to their members. There is moreover something in the very character of this legislation which is directly antithetical to the spirit of corporatism. While some clauses sought to place specific restrictions on the activities of the labour movement others, as Alan Anderson has convincingly argued, were more concerned with the symbolic downgrading of labour. It is this indulgence in the politics of symbolism which is most clearly outside a corporatist frame of reference.

While Middlemas is correct in pointing out that a number of trade union leaders were prepared to become involved in longterm discussions with employers after 1927, it is going too far to see some new 'efficient secret' of government in the discussions between what were the leaders of a defeated and demoralised trade union movement and the representatives of a downgraded industrial sector.

A central theme of this study has been the changes which took place within the Special Branch, the Supply and Transport Organisation and other state agencies designed to contain and oppose groups who wished to readjust power relationships within society. As so many accounts of such agencies from both the left and the right have tended to surround

such agencies with an air of mystery it is important always to emphasise the political context within which their activities took place. This is not to deny that such agencies breached constitutional rules, as strictly and publicly defined, nor that they did so regularly as to suggest that some irregularities became part of their normal operating procedures. Agents intercepted the private communications of many individuals who could not be, in any sense, regarded as being involved in illegal activities. The Watson case suggests that, in addition, attempts were made to corrupt political activists. There is evidence to suggest a network of secret contacts in labour and socialist organisations. The brief history of the OMS provides evidence that the state was, at least on occasion, prepared to allow public institutions to be used by private political organisations, and the contacts between state agencies and National Propaganda and the like indicates a partisanship which went beyond the limits of constitutional propriety.

Yet notwithstanding these and many other breaches of the formal rules it is important to emphasise the considerable quantitative and qualitative differences between this situation and anything which might realistically be described as a police state. Brian Chapman suggests that a modern police state comes into existence: "When the police apparatus is immune to control by the Civil Service, the judiciary and the army, and is an independent leading state institution in its own right . . ."²² While the actual rules governing the conduct of the Special Branch were at variance with the official rules, they were rules nonetheless. The power exercised by police officers and other state agents was never arbitrary. While officials may have been able to avoid direct political control in matters of detail, their activities were in all essentials

subject to supervision by senior civil servants and ministers. They had to give frequent account of their work and on occasion justify their existence. The interchanges between Macdonald, as Prime Minister, and Childs show that while they could deny politicians access to their files they had to tolerate irreverent intrusions into their activities. There are indications that they bridled at the constraints placed upon them but recognised, as with other senior civil servants, that their ability to remove or alter such constraints depended on their ability to convince others. The Thomson dismissal indicated clearly that Directors of Intelligence had no independent power base. Senior politicians could remove them at a whim without fear of the consequences.

Although governments went to considerable lengths to conceal the extra constitutional elements of their activities it would not seem likely that they would have encountered much difficulty had the substance of the matter become public knowledge. Except for a brief moment after the War most of the actions which infringed on the liberties of individuals were directed at those who were already politically isolated. Evidence of partisanship towards mineowners and the use of the OMS in 1926 might have proved embarrassing had it become public, yet it is useful to remember that those who opposed government policy at this time suspected such things were going on and those who supported it would, undoubtedly, have been prepared to swallow a defence of such activities based on 'the necessities of the Law'.²³ Thus while the state operated outside the formal rules it was always well within the limits of its political legitimacy.

Yet while there were restrictions on what the police could do and while such restrictions were in line with popular ideas and the political

principles of many senior politicians it would be misleading to present them as if they were not subject to change according to political circumstance. The powers available to political policing tend to increase in inverse proportion to the confidence of politicians. Indeed it is not unheard of for the police to attempt to undermine the confidence of their nominal masters in order to increase their influence. When regimes are on the brink of losing control considerable power can accrue to the police. Only a regime in decay, such as the Tsarist autocracy could have afforded Zubatov a stage for his imaginative and arbitrary experiments in social control. The fact that Britain did not develop such a system must be related not so much to cultural predisposition or the principles of the political elite as to the political circumstances of the time. In dealing with the British state at this time it is important to emphasise that, in spite of the odd diversion, one is not dealing with a situation in which the defenders of order are desperately squaring up to the proponents of revolution for some decisive encounter. Politicians could, at all times, still muster considerable support for their general aims and their right to operate and thus the introduction of an arbitrary element would have been unnecessary, out of place and counter-productive. There was far more to be gained by operating within the political rules than by breaking them.

If in the end it was conventional measures which were pursued this should not obscure the fact that some politicians were prepared to contemplate more exotic strategies. Lloyd George suggested on a number of occasions that an ambitious scheme of social reforms would provide a cheap and effective guard against revolution. Some politicians did feel that trade union leaders might be permanently incorporated into the state and others advocated the development of more authoritarian forms of rule. All such

schemes had their supporters and all were, in this sense at least, possibilities. Yet in the end there is no evidence of anyone being prepared to contemplate the political costs involved in such radical departures. Such changes as did take place were within the confines of established prejudices and the potentialities of the existing state. The state continued to ground its claim to legitimacy in traditional liberal propositions about the proper relationship between government and society. A few politicians did recognise that this formula left certain groups excluded yet they made no consistent attempt to alter the situation. After 1919 the greater part of the state's political energy seems to have been devoted to extricating itself from recently acquired responsibilities and to propagating the idea that, in general, its field of competence was necessarily restricted and that, in particular, economic conditions and their consequences were beyond the scope of political activity.

While it appears likely that this policy was arrived at as much by default as by rational foresight, it was not, given the resources of the state and the expectations of the broader society, an unintelligent way to proceed. At the most obvious level, by restricting its activities the state minimised the number of things which could go wrong. The experiences of the war years had emphasised the pitfalls associated with new administrative structures and had demonstrated that it was all too easy to become involved in a spiral of rising expectations. During the war each new responsibility accepted seemed only to generate further demands. In the post war period politicians such as Baldwin and Geddes came to recognise that the policy that the government was drifting into was not only convenient and comfortable but that within its confines it was

possible to achieve an entirely satisfactory level of security. At one level they recognised that working class opinion was not as disaffected as some of their colleagues had assumed. While a large number of working people were newly organised and even to an extent radicalised it did not automatically follow that they were immune to more traditional appeals. In contrast to many of their colleagues who tended to define the post war problem in the same way as Gramsci as being, "How to reconstruct the hegemonic apparatus of the ruling group, an apparatus which disintegrated as a result of the war in every state throughout the world",²⁴ Geddes and Baldwin recognised that in Britain at least, astute political leaders could rejuvenate existing authority structures. Providing they were modernised and applied with sensitivity the existing liberal forms could provide an effective system of rule. On the basis of a restricted range of functions it was possible for such a state to achieve a high level of acceptability, even popularity. The authority of the liberal state rested on its claim to provide, for the benefit of the community as a whole the basic conditions of order under which private individuals and groups might pursue their legal enterprises. The more perceptive politicians recognised that the pursuit of such goals actually afforded them considerable opportunities to influence events.

The main difficulty for the liberal state surrounded the contradiction between this claim to pursue community ends, which clearly required the state to demonstrate some impartiality between competing groups, and that other requirement of a liberal state, to achieve some alignment with the predominant economic groups within society. Only in this way can the liberal state guarantee that basic level of material prosperity on which ultimately all claims to authority must rest. This is not,

however, to imply that such an alignment was automatically or perfectly achieved. Between such groups, and even sometimes within them, there existed both conflicts of interests and disagreements as to how common interests might best be pursued. Perceptions of interest were also affected by the passage of time and changing circumstances. Thus politicians had a measure of flexibility in their dealings with such groups. On occasion circumstances could afford them the opportunity to define and explain some common interest. Yet there were always limits on the independence of politicians because they ultimately depended on the functioning of private industry and finance. Governments overcame the contradiction between the need for public impartiality and the requirement to respond to private capital in three ways. The most obvious device was secrecy. The necessary contacts and negotiations took place within the administrative structures of government. However secrecy alone could never have been adequate for in the first place it can never be absolute and in the second it can only conceal the fact of contact and not its outcome. The second device was for politicians to claim, without admitting precise details, that the constraints on policy imposed by powerful interests were in effect part of the natural order of affairs and as such both inevitable and even desirable. Such arguments can have a broad appeal for within a restricted framework of argument, it will often appear to be the case that the best way to achieve general prosperity is to follow the wishes of those who dominate the economy. The third factor easing the state over the contradiction was the fact that existing major interests, by their very nature, only rarely required direct action by government and were for the most part content with inactivity. Inaction will usually serve to maintain a status quo already favourable to those who own and direct and it is relatively easy in a restricted commonsensical way to pass off such passivity as impartiality.

Baldwin and Geddes instinctively recognised that extending the field of state activity could do more harm than good. The state could best secure its position by removing itself, wherever possible, from contentious areas and leaving the production of social order on a day to day basis to the "dull compulsion of economic relations".²⁵ At best the activities of such bodies as National Propaganda could only exercise a marginally beneficial influence on beliefs and expectations which were essentially moulded by the experience of the material universe as structured by the private enterprise system. The liberal state should offer no more than a gentle support and reinforcement of the ideas generated by this system when the opportunity arose. It could also in a crisis draw on this fund of wisdom and apply it to the particular circumstances of the time. However a more abstract or principled defence of the economic system could raise difficulties. It would inevitably call into question the "impartiality" of the state but, more importantly, it would appear to invite debate at that level and suggest the availability of some alternative. The objective was not to defend a particular order but to reinforce the view, by word and deed, that the existing state of affairs was, in some sense, natural. Here, as in other matters the state should accept a restricted role. Only at moments of acute conflict should the state assume wider responsibilities and even then it should seek to act as a co-ordinator, marshalling the resources of its more vigorous allies and exploiting its carefully constructed eminence to encourage friends and isolate opponents.

Those who favoured the development of a more authoritarian form of state failed to recognise that this would inevitably require a reconstruction of the means whereby the legitimacy of the political and economic systems were secured.²⁶ There might be immediate gains in direct control but

these could only be secured at the price of longer term difficulties. At the very minimum the state would have to become involved in the ideological defence of the economic order. Developments in a corporatist direction would have inevitably raised similar difficulties. Even if corporatism enabled the state to carry its authority into new areas it would have been at the expense of, what has been termed, the "isolation effect",²⁷ that capacity of the liberal state to deal with its subjects as individuated citizens rather than as component parts of groups. Corporatism would have legitimated those group identities which conservative politicians were most anxious to diffuse.

Any assessment of the state which did emerge soon encounters a paradox of strength and weakness. The new liberal state was weak in the sense that it was dependent for the performance of a number of basic functions, on groups and individuals over whom it had little formal authority. The machinery at its immediate disposal was inadequate for many of the tasks which it might be required to perform. In this context the nervousness of conservatives in 1919 is easy to understand. The new dominance of trade unions in vital industries was only one aspect of the developing interdependence within modern industrial societies and they were correct in recognising that a number of groups had acquired the physical capacity to disrupt the operations of the whole social system. However the mistake which these conservatives made was to believe that the only way of achieving a tolerable degree of security was for the state to take to itself similar physical powers and thus render itself immune to pressure. Given the growing interdependence such a solution was scarcely a practical possibility, yet neither was it necessary, for the liberal state, with its capacity for developing informal alliances and its freedom of political manoeuvres, could operate more successfully without such

encumbrances. Its partiality could be concealed within appeals to commonsense, controversial activities could be passed on to private organisations or performed by volunteers, repressive measures could be presented as acts in defence of basic order or the public interest, and the grievances of organised groups of citizens deflected to the individual level and redefined as private issues.

From the point of view of those who sought to mobilise opposition to existing social structures such a state presented a formidable obstacle, not least because of its determination to avoid direct confrontation. When the state did become involved it usually managed to justify its intervention in terms of the need to defend abstract or community ends. Its whole inclination was to minimise the recognisably political content of its actions and thus avoid that principled defence which might offer greater coherence and credibility to the claims of its radical opponents. When matters were handled properly the spokesmen for such a state were free to concentrate their attack on the methods of the radicals and to point out the threat which such methods represented to existing social values. Those who sought to offer a principled opposition to such a state were thus faced with an eternal uphill struggle. They were always at least one stage removed from the central issue. Before they could begin their own argument about the iniquity of existing social arrangements they had to demonstrate that there was an issue worth arguing about. Attempts at political or industrial action had to be publicly discussed in terms of its propensity to disrupt the affairs of the community or offend against its laws rather than in terms of its own intrinsic merits.

While the functions of the liberal state were, by definition and design, restricted, they were nonetheless vital to the maintenance of the social order. While that society itself provided the necessary supports and resources that political core was still required for mobilisation, coordination and, above all the creation of the climate of opinion in which actions would be most effective. While the world of production could provide a structure within which social beliefs would be shaped there was still a necessary role for the state in reinforcing, refining and propagating such beliefs, in action as much as words, and on occasion, directing them to particular ends. Thus the survival of the economic and social order rested on the performance of the political state and as such the state represented a point of vulnerability. Yet in normal circumstances the operations of that state could be performed without great hazard or difficulty.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

- 1 R Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1964) pp158-165
- 2 See for example C L Mowat's characterisation of the period immediately following the post war crisis as "coming to rest", or his comment "Thus harmlessly did the acute industrial unrest which followed the war die away, without bringing either the reconstruction of society or the nationalisation of industry", C L Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (1968) p43

Graves and Hodge were even more explicit: "In spite of the Bolshevik bogey that they manipulated, it was correctly assumed that the country was 'sound at heart'. The elder members of the working class for the most part resented the identification of their trade unions with socialism . . . 'They knew their place'. The younger members were socialistically inclined but even the few who picked up the marxian catchwords had no ambition to overthrow and displace the capitalist class." R Graves and A Hodge, *The Long Weekend* (1941)

A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* also stresses an underlying stability. "In Glasgow a general strike was called to secure the forty hour week. The red flag was hoisted on the town hall. Troops were sent, though the police managed to restore order without them. Gallacher, a future communist; Shinwell, a future Minister of Defence and Kirkwood, a future Peer were imprisoned. Then the danger died away." p187

- 3 Gallacher was later to see 1919 as a wasted opportunity. "We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution." W Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, p221. Allan Hutt's account clearly reflects the "conflict model" (Allan Hutt, *British Trade Unionism, A Short History 1800-1961* (1962)) "Capitalism in Britain, as throughout Europe was in the throes of mortal crisis" p84 "Battles fought by the trade union movement were of unexampled scope" p90 Hutt also has an appropriate account of the "coming to rest", which identifies the continuing conflict: "After Black Friday there remained nothing but a series of rearguard actions, stubbornly contested but unable to hold the employers' attack, which was pressed home throughout industry" p97

Even those who disagree on the interpretation of 1919 can find some agreement on the fundamental presence of conflict. "By 1921 the Government had succeeded in resolving this dilemma. While avoiding a general strike they managed to abandon most of the reconstruction programme, dismantle most of the apparatus of control, and go far to depoliticising the sectional strikes and lockouts that accompanied the employers' counter attack or inflated wartime wage rates." J Hinton, *Labour and Socialism, A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974* (1983) p110 But see also recent articles by Richard Price and Patrick Joyce which have made an interesting addition to this debate. Price in two recent articles has been concerned to argue against what he sees as the prevailing tendency of marxist writing to underestimate the importance of actual workplace resistance to the power of capital: "Marx did not foresee, therefore, that resistance to capitalist control of the labour process could make

- much of an impact. Rather, he envisaged that the powerlessness of the working class at the productive process would force them into the separate realm of revolutionary political activity." (Richard Price, 'Rethinking Labour History: The Importance of Work', in James E Cronin, and Jonathan Schneer (Eds), *Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain* (1982) p205) See also Richard Price, 'The labour process and labour history', *Social History* Vol 8 No 1 (1983) pp57-75 in which he develops this argument. Patrick Joyce argues that in drawing attention to the labour process, Price has laid too much stress on conflict and undervalued "the force of compromise and co-operation in the relationships, obtaining between labour and capital". (Patrick Joyce, 'Labour, capital and compromise: a response to Richard Price', *Social History* Vol 9 No 1 (1984) pp67-76) See also extended 'Debate', *Social History* Vol 9 No 2 (1984) pp217-231
- 4 David Horne, *Essays* Vol 1 p110, quoted in A V Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England* (1905) pp1-16
 - 5 This view might be traced back to John Locke. Clearly the suspicion must exist that its proponents find it theoretically necessary to admit of revolution as a possibility yet cannot seriously contemplate it as a practical possibility.
 - 6 T Nairn, 'The Anatomy of the Labour Party', *New Left Review* Nos 27 and 28 (1966)
 - 7 This also raises the problem of whether it is justifiable to approach 'working class' politics in isolation from the politics of the broader society.
 - 8 See Nicos Poulantzas, *The Problem of the Capitalist State*, NLR No 58 (1969) for perhaps the best known statement of this view ". . . the direct participation of members of the capitalist class in the state apparatus and in the government, even where it exists, is not the important side of the matter. The relation between the bourgeois class and the state is not an objective relation. This means that if the function of the state in a determinate social formation and the interests of the dominant class in this formation coincide, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the state apparatus is not the cause but the effect, and moreover a chance and a contingent one, of this objective coincidence." Though not all of Poulantzas work on the capitalist state contains "this stress upon the primacy of objective structures." B Jessop, *The Capitalist State* (1982)
 - 9 A Gleason and P Kellog, *British Labour and the War* (New York 1919) p167
 - 10 See Gerald Gould, *The Coming Revolution*, p1
 - 11 J Foster, 'Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy' in J Skelley (ed) *The General Strike, 1926* (1975) p20 ff
 - 12 M Cowling, *Impact of Labour*. It is also important to bear in mind that politicians can be erratic and inconsistent. It is interesting

that Bonar Law on one occasion could declare, "Trade union organisation was the only thing between us and anarchy". (Middlemas and Barnes, Industrial Society p145) yet perhaps more revealing that he did nothing to build on the perception. It is also by no means the case that the new 'moderation' of the Labour Party met with universal conservative approval. John Gretton MP warned the Prime Minister "The most dangerous position is when a 'moderate' Party by so called constitutional means soothes public opinion while stealthily and with smooth words it proceeds step by step to revolution". (Gretton to the Prime Minister, February 1925 Baldwin Papers Vol 11)

- 13 K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society, p372
- 14 As above, p373
- 15 As above, p372
- 16 As above, p371
- 17 As above, p376
- 18 M Dintenfass, Review Article, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No 41 (Autumn 1980)
- 19 R Lowe, 'The Ministry of Labour, Fact and Fiction', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No 41 (Autumn 1980)
- 20 S Pollard, The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967 (1973) pp227-30
- 21 Cronin and Schneer, Social Conflict and the Political Order, pp134-5
- 22 B Chapman, Police State (1970) p119
- 23 See correspondence in Times, Macdonald and Joynson Hicks, on the OMS in HO 45/12336
- 24 A Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971) p228
- 25 K Marx, Capital Vol 1 (1976) p689, "The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self evident laws of nature. The organisation of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of relative surplus population keeps the law of supply and demand of labour, and therefore keeps wages in a rut that corresponds to the wants of capital. The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally. In the ordinary run of things the labourer can be left to the 'natural laws of production' ie to his dependence on capital, a dependence springing from, and guaranteed in perpetuity by, the conditions of production themselves."
- 26 See N Poulantzas, State, Power and Socialism (1978) p241

"While authoritarian statism involved a definite strengthening of state power at the expense of representative democracy, it also involved a definite weakening of its effectiveness in securing the conditions for bourgeois hegemony."

27 N Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes (1973) p168

"This means that the capitalist state is related to socio economic relations as refracted through the 'isolation effect', ie class relations are constitutively absent from the organisation of the capitalist state and its actions aim to secure cohesion and unity among individuated citizens."

It is not necessary to accept the whole Poulantzas system to appreciate the acuteness of some of the insights.