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## ***THE 1926 GENERAL STRIKE IN LANARKSHIRE***



***by JOHN McLEAN  
general strike 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary studies***

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The next issue will contain discussions of Perry Anderson's recent work on the transition from slave society to feudalism by Eric Hobsbawm and Douglas Bourn.

The cover photograph shows a Lanarkshire bus overturned in the Parkhead district of Glasgow.(Emergency Press 5 May 1926). The photograph on the back cover shows a Wishaw bus with police escort (Emergency Press 13 May 1926).

# THE 1926 GENERAL STRIKE IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

John McLean

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The General Strike of May 1926 has long been considered as a crucial period, not only in the history of British Trade Unions but also of British society. As such it has been the subject of intensive study and debate. Most of this has been concerned with national developments during the nine days; often, in fact, at the Cabinet and General Council level. However, recent work on the General Strike at the local level has shown how illuminating this area of research can be. It is therefore the purpose of this study to examine the strike in North Lanarkshire with the aim of discovering how the people in this key industrial region of West Scotland organised their lives during the nine days. To examine in particular how the local organisations of labour operated: which Trade Unions, political parties, groups, or indeed individuals played the leading roles. Furthermore, to find out how far they co-operated with each other or how far they tended to operate along sectional lines. Then to investigate the extent to which the strike affected local political consciousness: was there any short or long-term radicalisation and how did this manifest itself.

Finally, it is hoped to offer some explanations for the peculiar features which the area threw up, and in particular its highly developed network of Councils of Action. In order to do this it is necessary to examine the socio-political structure of the North Lanarkshire area. It is not intended to give a detailed account of events leading up to the General Strike, nevertheless some general points are necessary in order to put the strike into its overall political context.

The immediate cause of the strike which began at midnight, 3 May, was the refusal by the Government to continue the subsidy to coalowners granted on "Red Friday" (31 July 1925). However, its underlying causes were of a more long-term nature. A transitory post-war (1914-18) boom had by 1921 given way to a slump which served to underline Britain's weakened relative world position. The unemployment which occurred as a result of the slump also meant a weakened position for the labour movement. Both these aspects were manifested in the employers' determination to become more competitive by reducing costs often in the form of wages and in the inability of the Trade Unions to prevent this (as happened with the miners in 1921 and the engineers in 1922).

Following the defeat of the Labour Government in November 1924, a Conservative Government was returned to office which seemed more than ever committed to making Britain again internationally competitive. Their policy involved a return to the Gold Standard and a reduction "of the wages of all classes of the workers if Britain is to regain prosperity".

It is against this background that the miner's lock-out and the resultant strike must be seen. However, two further points must be made. Firstly, in the period between "Red Friday" and the outbreak of the strike the Government made extensive preparations. These included the building up of coal stocks and the development of the OMS (strike breaking organisation). Detailed schemes were drawn up for Local Authorities and an emergency system of transport was prepared. Secondly, the TUC made almost no preparation for a strike as Walter Citrine later stated:

"So far as preparation for a General Strike was concerned the General Council never attempted to do such a thing."

The failure of the TUC to plan can only be explained by their willingness to compromise with the Government for some kind of concessions in order to avoid a strike. Between July 1925 and April 1926 there had been a decisive shift to the right in the composition of the General Council: Bromley had been replaced as Secretary by Citrine, Pugh had taken Swale's place as President and J H Thomas had returned after a period as a Cabinet Minister.

It was this weakness of the national union leadership on the one hand and the intransigence of the Government on the other which must be considered as one of the major reasons for the defeat of the strike which is described in the following pages.

## 2. THE BACKGROUND IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

At the time of the General Strike, Lanarkshire was one of the most highly industrialised and most densely populated counties in Scotland. A large proportion of both industry and population were concentrated in the northern half of the county with which this study deals. A major part of the Central Coalfield of Scotland lies within this area and this resource coupled with rich iron ore deposits provided the basis for the heavy industries and for a large number of manufacturing industries geared to them.<sup>1</sup>

Coal-mining was by far the chief employer of labour. From the middle of the 19 century it had expanded (not without fluctuations) to reach a maximum in 1920 with 62,093 men employed in 210 collieries.<sup>2</sup> From this point on both the number of collieries and those employed declined rapidly. The pre-1926 depression had an important effect on the strike. Malleable iron works provided another substantial source of employment. Most of these using the puddling process, were small-scale works and tended to be concentrated in the north especially around Coatbridge. After 1918 these had suffered severe competition from the larger steel concerns and the result was depression and unemployment in the Coatbridge district. The steel industry ("Bairds of Gartsherrie" and Colvilles) whilst suffering periodic fluctuations (and also 'rationalisation') remained a substantial employer of labour in the pre-strike period. This was also true of the tube works of which Stewart and Lloyds was the most notable (Coatbridge and Motherwell). Railways provided employment especially in Motherwell and Coatbridge which, as well as being important centres, had large railway workshops. Various subsidiary industries were connected with all of these, engineering being predominant among them.

The most distinctive feature of the community dependent on these industries for their livelihood was the fact that a large percentage of the population were of Irish descent. Whilst the early native population had been mainly Protestant, the majority of the immigrants were Roman Catholic; this was particularly true of the Coatbridge, Motherwell and Wishaw districts.<sup>3</sup> Their presence had important repercussions on local trade union and political development. Initially, the Irish immigrants were employed in the unskilled trades, especially in the ironworks. However, the expansion of the steel industry had enabled many to improve their relative position on the labour ladder. In the mines sectarianism had decided the relative position within the trade. Indeed it was often deliberately used as a divisive weapon by the owners during strikes and lock-outs. However, the expansion in the last two decades of the 19 century had created opportunities for a number of Irish Catholics to become skilled faceworkers. On the railways, Catholics and Protestants were

employed in roughly equal numbers, although the latter tended to have the more skilled and higher paid jobs.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst it was possible to identify distinct Catholic (Coatbridge) and Protestant (Airdrie) communities by 1926 much of the traditional antagonism, at least in practice, had declined, although not died out. Several factors were responsible for this.

By 1926 trade union development had reached a high level in the area. The unions associated with the iron and steel industries tended to be of the "labour aristocracy" type catering for skilled workers. However, the erosion of their privileged position, particularly from the turn of the century, had in this area, as elsewhere, created a potential vanguard for the labour and socialist movement. Early in the 20 century there were branches of the SDF in many towns in North Lanarkshire. Motherwell and Coatbridge had particularly thriving branches. At the same time, the traditional local Catholic vote for the Liberal Party (on the Home Rule issue) and the ending of the Lib-Lab alliance drew the Catholic support gradually towards the Labour Party by the early 1920s.

Nevertheless this was not a straightforward process. On the one hand the Catholic hierarchy encouraged Catholics to be Labour men 'pure and simple'. On the other, as was noted by a leading advocate of this policy, J Wheatley, the Easter Rising of 1916 had also had a major effect: 'Connolly's death has removed a mountain of prejudice against Socialism. "He was a socialist and he died for Ireland". This is a common remark among the Irish population. They are now interested in Connolly and Connolly's views'. The result was a split of attitudes within the Irish Labour Movement which was to affect political development before and after the General Strike as several of those interviewed locally confirmed.

A detailed study of Airdrie and Coatbridge has shown how the Labour Party in this district consciously courted the Irish Catholic vote by playing close attention to Irish questions.<sup>5</sup> The swing of the Irish Catholics towards the left was also occurring as a consequence of their growing involvement in the trade union movement as more became skilled and unskilled unions expanded. The well-organised railway unions were an important factor in this process as was the expanding Co-operative Movement: Irish Catholics were indeed in the majority membership in many areas in North Lanarkshire. Thus by the 1920s the Irish population eventually gave Labour (both LP and ILP) a guaranteed support in Coatbridge and considerable support in Airdrie. They also pressurised both local unions and trades councils to support the Labour Party. Although the Orange-Protestant section of the communities remained officially Unionist many of its members moved towards the Labour Party as a consequence of their trade union involvement.

On a county scale it is possible to trace this trend through the General Election results. In 1918 Duncan Graham (nominated by the Mining Union) became Lanarkshire's first Labour MP for Hamilton. In 1919 J Robertson became Labour MP for Bothwell. A later statement by Robertson accurately sums up the change in political orientation which had taken place.

"The Irish question has kept me out of Parliament for 20 years—the one side could not vote for me because I was a 'home-ruler', and the home-rulers could not vote for me because the Irish vote had to go to the liberal."<sup>6</sup>

In 1921 J Welsh became Labour MP for Coatbridge. The most dramatic swing to the left in the North Lanarkshire region, at least before 1926, was the election of Walter Newbold, a member of the Communist Party, as MP for Motherwell in 1922.

At the municipal level 'Labour' candidates were gradually winning seats on the Town Councils and also representation on the Parish Councils. This latter body was particularly important during the nine days of the General Strike.

There were also smaller active groups and parties working in the area. The Socialist Labour Party, with a strong syndicalist influence was prominent, particularly in Airdrie and Coatbridge. The British Socialist Party had small branches throughout North Lanarkshire. In 1920 the formation of the Communist Party had an important effect on the labour movement. From its inception branches proliferated throughout the area often drawing members from the SLP, BSP and SDF. These tended to remain small (although Cambuslang had 60 members in 1926) but their influence in 1926 in industrial and political life was greater than a mere count of card members would suggest.<sup>7</sup> In Coatbridge, for example, there were two communists on the Parish Council and three on the Town Council in 1926.<sup>8</sup> However, the expansion of the Communist Party in the area was inhibited by two specific local forces of opposition. On the one side the Catholic Church's active opposition from the pulpit, and on the other Orange/Mason opposition.

Apart from these distinct parties there were other organisations and groups which operated across party lines such as the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement and the Defence League. This latter body organised opposition to eviction of the unemployed and was particularly active in the depressed areas such as Coatbridge pre-1926. The work of both of these bodies was especially important in relation to the General Strike because of their ability and experience in mobilising people across party lines. This practice was a vital element in the strike. It was in this role of being able to operate across sectional lines and mobilise a broad front that the development and expansion of the National Minority Movement was important. Founded in 1924 in order to carry the message of the Communist Party through agitation, and to draw together militant elements within the trade unions not at that stage in the Party, it made rapid headway in North Lanarkshire. It was most influential in the Lanarkshire Miners' Union and it is therefore appropriate, before describing the work of the Minority Movement leading up to the strike, to look at the Miners' Union itself pre-1926.

The Lanarkshire Mineworkers' Union had traditionally provided the basis and often the vanguard for the labour and working-class political movement in the county. Two of its early pioneers, Alexander McDonald and Keir Hardie, had become national trade union and political leaders. The union had a long history of industrial struggle and had been involved in particularly fierce strikes and lock-outs in 1894, 1912 and 1921. This had not in any way dampened the militancy of the miners in North Lanarkshire, indeed they were much more radical than most other unions in the area in the 1920s. This was partly due to their past struggles, partly to the erosion of religious segregation already described (e.g. R Smillie, Scottish Miners President, a Belfast Protestant, was supported by Catholics in North Lanarkshire) but also to a particularly strong socialist and Marxist influence within the Union. From the early stage the miners had been a strong driving force behind the Labour Party, I LP and SDF in the area. Education played an important part in this political radicalisation.

In this respect John MacLean had an early influential role. From 1908, when he first held Marxist Education classes in Burnbank, to the early 1920s he and his supporters continued their agitation and Marxist instruction throughout the Lanarkshire mining villages. During one of these tours in 1921 MacLean was arrested in Airdrie for making a speech "Likely to cause sedition and disaffection among HM Forces and the Civil Population".<sup>9</sup> MacLean was also instrumental in setting up the Scottish Labour College which taught Marxist edu-

cation to workers. The Lanarkshire Miners' Union allocated £300 to this to provide for miners to study in the 1920/1 session.<sup>10</sup> Many of the miners' leaders passed through here or similar colleges. In October 1925 at the 3rd Annual Conference of Lanarkshire Labour College, G Aitken (for Miners) stated:

"Labour Colleges are emphatically for and with the working-class in their battles. Many old leaders had sound working-class instincts but if this had been backed up by correct knowledge and tactics it would have given great impetus to the Labour movement"<sup>11</sup>

It was within this background of political militancy that the Minority Movement made rapid headway in North Lanarkshire. Early in 1925, W Allan of the Lanarkshire Miners' Executive (and a full-time student at the Scottish Labour College in 1921, later General Secretary of the United Mineworkers of Scotland) became President of the Scottish section of the Minority Movement and two other Miners' Union leaders, J McKendrick and A McNulty were elected to the Executive. By March 1925 it was reported that the Minority Movement "had made greatest progress in Lanarkshire, where groups were forming and working in a very satisfactory manner—Lanarkshire always being in the van of progress".<sup>12</sup>

The paper of the Minority Movement, the Worker, was distributed throughout the county and during 1925 and up to May 1926, W Allan was responsible for a series of articles on the coalmining industry in general and Lanarkshire in particular. In these he warned the miners about the false victory of "Red Friday", urged them to organise "a network of councils of action" and continually criticised the official leadership of the union:

"In Lanarkshire as a consequence of the general collapse of the coal industry, there were hundreds of cases of purely arbitrary and unwarranted cutting of tonnage rates and of vindictiveness and spite by the pit officials towards the workmen who refuse to knuckle under,"

He blamed the union leaders for this because they had:

"during the last 5 or 6 years filtered away the strength and morale of men by their prehistoric policy of petty sectional fights and strikes."<sup>13</sup>

Allan and other Minority Movement leaders continued to urge the miners to organise and in August 1925 they published their 'Fighting Programme' for the miners. By March 1926 the Minority Movement's campaign to galvanise the miners for a fight had reached a high level and the Worker carried a front page article by Allan entitled **A Call to Action**. In this the leaders at the labour movement were criticised for not realising that "the capitalist is an enemy to be fought, not merely a misguided fellow-citizen to be placated ... it is this blind and foggy-minded leadership which constituted one of the gravest dangers to the workers in 1926". He went on to warn that the capitalist class were organising through organisations like the OMS, and on the propaganda front, whilst the official labour movement was doing nothing and he urged that, "every miner who reads this should become a veritable cyclone of agitation."<sup>14</sup>

From March 1925 the Minority Movement had outlined how in fact this militant action was to be organised through a network of Councils of Action. At the March 1926 Conference it continued with this tactic and emphasised that, against the general offensive of the capi-

talist class it was necessary to mobilise all the forces of the working-class "to repel the attack and to secure the demands of every section of the workers" through the Councils of Action. Details of how these were to be set up were outlined (see Appendix 1). It was these organs which were the vital focus of working-class action during the nine days especially in the North Lanarkshire area and form an important part of this study.

On April 10, 1926 a Minority Movement Conference was held in Hamilton and was attended by delegates from eighteen branches and a delegate from the NUWCM. This emphasised that time was running out not just for the miners but other workers and that, "Our only hope lies along the line of solid, efficiently organised, militant action".

It is against this background that the General Strike in North Lanarkshire must be examined.

During the 1921 lock-out Lloyd George claimed that: "The population of the Scottish mining villages are a savage folk".<sup>15</sup> The following chapter describes how these "savage folk" successfully organised their lives during the General Strike.

### 3. STRIKE

The official control of the strike in Scotland rested with the General Council of the Scottish Trade Union Congress whose headquarters were in Glasgow. The policy and instructions emanating from this body, regarding the conduct of the strike, were strictly along the lines laid down by the General Council of the British Trade Union Congress. The Scottish body considered it their overriding aim to see that "the policy laid down by the BTUC is carried out loyally".<sup>16</sup> To this end they set up a system of communications throughout Scotland by which daily bulletins, and later the Scottish Worker, outlining the general strike plan, could be distributed from the headquarters to the localities and in turn local news transmitted back to headquarters.

The initial instructions contained in the General Strike bulletins ordered the setting-up of strike committees in all areas, composed of a representative from each union plus a representative from the Trades and Labour Councils where these existed. Within the General Strike Committee there were to be sub-committees of the various trades whose functions were to carry out specific tasks arising from the overall plan. The most important of these tasks was connected with the issuing of transport permits, especially for the transportation of food; building permits, allowing repair work to be carried out where the sub-committee considered sanitation and health were at risk, and with preserving law and order, and preventing disturbances. Many considered the first of these to be of crucial importance at the local level and that the very success of the strike itself depended on it because:

"Whoever handles and transports food that same person controls, whoever controls food will find the 'neutral' part of the population rallying to their side. Who feeds the people wins the strike. The problem of the General Strike focussed down to one thing—the struggle for food control."<sup>17</sup>

Despite this realisation, and the STUC certainly acknowledged its importance, the failure by the central body to make any real practical arrangements with the Co-operative Movement is a significant indication of the organisational unpreparedness of the official movement at the national level. Indeed the Scottish Co-operator was later to claim that "they had got the heavy end of the stick" as a consequence.<sup>18</sup>

On the official propaganda front the daily bulletins contained news of the general Scottish situation and messages of encouragement along the "keep up the good work" line. From the 10 May the Scottish Worker was printed on the presses of the ILP's paper **Forward** and reached a daily circulation of 80,000. This gave more detailed information of the situation and at the same time urged people to heed only information issued by trade union sources and not to "place reliance on information which may be transmitted by blackleg newspaper production or the wireless".<sup>19</sup> The belated appearance of the Scottish Worker and the fact that its paper stocks were almost exhausted after six days, as **Forward** later stated: "Goodness only knows what we should have done had the strike lasted another week",<sup>20</sup> underlines the lack of official preparation. The daily bulletins themselves further emphasise this condition by showing how the STUC's plan was of an extemporary nature, developed and copied from the spontaneous action of certain individuals and groups in the localities.

In sharp contrast to this were the preparations made by the Government and reinforced by the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies which placed itself under Government control. In this respect Scotland was organised along similar lines to the rest of Britain. The Government organisation had its Scottish headquarters in Edinburgh and from here daily detailed reports of the Scottish situation were transmitted to London. Although the British Gazette did circulate, the most important propaganda vehicle (in printed form) was the Emergency Press. This was a joint publication of newspapers (viz Glasgow Herald, Record, Bulletin, Evening News, Evening Times, Evening Citizen) which had substantial circulations in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. The Emergency Press put the Government's case regarding the strike, usually along patriotic lines, reported enthusiastically the number of 'volunteers' coming forward during the nine days, and tended to highlight incidents of violence. It appeared first on 5 May, was published daily throughout the strike and claimed to have reached a circulation of over half a million. But although a considerable proportion of these sales should have been in the North Lanarkshire area, none of those individuals interviewed in the preparation of this study recollect having seen a copy. It would therefore seem that the exhortations to trust only "union" information was effective at least in curtailing its sale in the area.

The official declaration of the General Strike had an immediate impact in North Lanarkshire. The calling out of the "first line" which included all transport workers, men employed in railway engine shops, rolling stock repair and manufacture, and those engaged in iron and steel works, engineering and building, was particularly effective, even at the official level, when considered against the area's industrial structure. That the workers in North Lanarkshire responded to the STUC's strike call with particular alacrity and solidarity is testified to in a letter by James Jarvie, Secretary of Lanarkshire Joint Trades Industrial Committee to STUC headquarters in Glasgow on May 5, the second day of the strike. This Committee, on the receipt of STUC instructions, had convened an emergency meeting in order to see that these were carried out. Their successful execution had resulted in the fact that by the second day of the strike it could be reported that "all are all out in this county ... we picketed three works this morning and got them all to stop work, about 2,000 men."<sup>21</sup> This is the only reference to the operation of the Joint Industrial Committee during the strike and the co-ordination of the strike throughout the county was taken over by the Lanarkshire Joint Committee of the Council of Action.

This body had been set up at the Miners' Union headquarters in Hamilton on the weekend before the official strike call and had, according to the Emergency Press, been arranging demonstrations and speakers throughout the county from that time.<sup>22</sup> The Joint Commit-

tee was in contact with twenty-three Councils of Action in Lanarkshire (mostly in the North) to which it issued information and instructions including the STUC daily bulletins and later the Scottish Worker. This it did through an efficient relay system throughout the county, using cars, motorcycles and push bikes.

One incident especially demonstrates the enthusiasm and determination of the workers involved in this sector of organisation. A Lanarkshire railwayman operating as a despatch courier was involved in a collision in which his motorcycle was smashed and he himself suffered a lacerated shoulder and an arm wound that required a number of stitches. Despite these injuries he insisted on completing his journey and continued to remain on duty as a push-bike courier for the rest of the strike.<sup>23</sup>

It has not been possible to ascertain on whose initiative the Council of Action was set up and who was actually involved in its daily organisation. Nevertheless the fact that the County Miners' Union offices were used for its headquarters and that its chairman and seven of its forty delegates were members of the Communist Party<sup>24</sup> suggests that the Party and/or the Minority Movement were involved both in its conception and operation. The significance of this will be discussed later in this study. From the outset the Joint Committee of the Council of Action had appealed both to the Education Authority to make special provision for the feeding of school children, and to the Parish Council for the alleviation of distress. It urged all the other Councils to do likewise and this was to be an important aspect in all the districts of North Lanarkshire in winning popular support.

It has proved impossible to find detailed information of the organisation and operation of all the councils of Action in contact with the central body in Hamilton; often because no detailed minutes were kept, or where they were taken they had to be destroyed after the strike to prevent prosecution or victimisation. It is therefore intended to give an account of areas where information does exist and where the strike organisations, particularly the Councils of Action worked efficiently, and the nine days eventful enough to merit detailed attention.

Such was the case in Airdrie and Coatbridge. Prior to the General Strike these towns had separate Trades and Labour Councils but on the weekend of May 1-2 there was set up a Joint Council of Action to co-ordinate the strike activities in the area.<sup>25</sup> Separate Councils of Action continued to exist in each of the towns to facilitate specific tasks, such as deputations to the Town and Parish Councils to alleviate distress. As described earlier the area was a key railway and steelworks focus and was also ringed with mines. The composition of the separate and joint councils of action reflected its industrial structure: there were representatives of miners, railwaymen, transport workers, iron and steel, tube workers, building trades, painters, engineers, patternmakers and also representatives of the various workers political parties and of the Defence League (see above) on these bodies. The chairman of the Council of Action was an engineer named Mitchell (chairman of the local AEU branch and member of the Communist Party) and the secretary was Walter Pape of the NUR. The NUR and the Railway Clerks Association played particularly prominent roles throughout the nine days.<sup>26</sup>

The Council of Action set up sub-committees to deal with transport, picketing, and propaganda. The first of these was of vital importance because, as well as the two large railway depots (Caledonia and Kipps), there was also the large Midland Bus service of J C Sword, and a number of private companies which had only one or two buses often with no fixed routes. These had attempted to run services to and from Glasgow on the first two days of the strike by "approaching the district by circuitous routes as far north as Cumbernauld".<sup>27</sup>

This resulted in disturbances in the outskirts of Airdrie and Coatbridge on the 5 May when buses were stoned and forced to return to Glasgow. A special committee was set up with Matt McCallum (Labour Party and later town councillor) to organise pickets to stop all transport not bearing TUC permits. The picketing of transport in Airdrie and Coatbridge was so successful that by the third day of the strike, "all public means of transport by bus or rail were at a standstill."<sup>28</sup>

The picketing of works and factories was unnecessary after the first two days of the strike. During these days mass pickets, estimated at several thousand, had marched to those factories which had continued working and successfully persuaded the workers to come out. The miners were responsible for picketing the mines themselves, although this seems to have been a token gesture because no blacklegging was even attempted, according to all sources consulted.

One important function carried out by the Joint Committee of the Council of Action was to prevent destitution especially of the most vulnerable sections of the community. To this end, separate deputations appealed to the Town and Parish Councils to make use of the powers of the Board of Health and Poor Law to make special provision for an estimated 1500 families who they considered would need assistance within several days of the dispute. Soup kitchens were also set up in improvised premises such as the wash-houses used in Coatbridge. However, during the nine days this seems to have been more on the grounds of engendering and maintaining a spirit of comradeship, in which the women of the district played a prominent part, rather than of actual physical need. During the miners lock-out after the strike, the latter was the prime influence.

On the propaganda level a courier system was set up using cars, motor-bikes and push-bikes in order to keep in touch with Hamilton and also direct contact with STUC headquarters in Glasgow.

Hugh Hendrie, an I LP member and a contributor to this study, put his car (Morris Cowley, 12 h.p.) at the services of the Council of Action for this purpose. For most of the strike the car was driven by his brother Tom and bore a permit supplied by the Council of Action. Early in the strike, on a journey into Glasgow, he witnessed the overturning of a bus in the Parkhead district a photograph of this has been used on the front cover—and the halting of all traffic not bearing 'union permits'.

Through this line of communication official daily bulletins and Scottish Workers were distributed. The Joint Committee was also responsible for publishing a strike bulletin of their own. This consisted of a single page and it appeared roughly every second day giving local news with county and country-wide strike information. Copies of the Communist Party bulletins were collected from Glasgow and an estimated 8,000 of these were in circulation in the district by the end of the first week.<sup>29</sup>

A series of meetings were held in the various trades and labour halls throughout the first week and on Saturday, the 8 May, "very successful meetings were held in the districts covered by the Airdrie and Coatbridge Strike Committee. The meeting in Airdrie was packed out. The RCA representatives were real active members of this Committee and the Chairman of the local branch of that union addressed a meeting at Bo'ness and Bathgate".<sup>30</sup> On the following Monday the Joint Committee organised a meeting which "was packed to overflowing" in the cinema in Airdrie. This was addressed by William Allan (Lanark Miners & Minority Movement) and was the most militant in the district during the nine days. Allan urged the strikers not to "go without whilst food was in the shops".<sup>31</sup>

From the very beginning there was a tremendous feeling of solidarity in the area. There was an almost 100% immediate response to the strike call and within several days even those workers not in the "first line" had come out in response to the demonstrations at their workplaces. Initially the strike was seen by the majority as a question of support for the miners and the solidarity expressed throughout testified to the sympathy felt. At the same time the Joint Committee had attempted to operate along the pacific lines laid down by the STUC. This however had not prevented the use of mass pickets during the early stages to prevent "unauthorised" transport or bring out the remaining works as described. The lack of Council of Action minutes makes it difficult to determine to what extent it authorised this action, but interviewees have testified quite conclusively that members of the Council were certainly involved in their organisation.

By the end of the first week the Joint Committee appeared to be totally in control and the district completely strike bound. The solidarity and orderliness of the district at the end of the first week is confirmed by the local press reports: "Locally the situation was unchanged all was reported to have been quiet over the weekend,"<sup>32</sup> and by the daily reports from OMS headquarters in Airdrie, "uneventful up to Saturday. Town completely isolated, as far as passenger traffic is concerned, by either rail or road. Nothing has run after Tuesday last".<sup>33</sup>

This orderliness and lack of violence during the first week owes much to the fact that the normal forces of authority had kept a very low profile during the period. No arrests were made in connection with the strike in either town or their environs. Over the weekend the attitude of the authorities appears to have changed. This was also seen at the national level: the reason for this changing in policy and its consequences will be later discussed. At the local level it can be detected in a series of announcements and actions which appear to stem from a more militant policy on the part of the Government agencies.

On Saturday the 8 May, the Emergency Press published the request from the Sheriff of Lanarkshire "that people were not to congregate on the streets for their own safety, and to help the police."<sup>34</sup> On the same day a meeting of the Magistrates in Airdrie was held "with a view to strengthening the forces for the preservation of law and order, and also the resuming of a service of buses to and from Glasgow."<sup>35</sup> The success of picketing in this latter aspect seems to have been particularly galling to the authorities and the business community cut off from their offices in Glasgow. On May 10 two further items appeared in the Emergency Press reflecting behind the scenes activity on the part of the authorities and confirming a more militant line.

Firstly, the Emergency headquarters issued instructions that demands by pickets for transport permits should be ignored as these were illegal, and that police should be informed wherever this had occurred. This had an immediate consequence in Coatbridge. On the same day as it appeared, the premises being used by the transport committee of the Council of Action were raided by six policemen. Those present were asked on whose authority permits were being issued. When they replied "under the authority of the General Council of the TUC", all documents and bulletins were seized and the men warned that "<sup>36</sup>they could be charged with sedition or under the Emergency Powers Act".<sup>36</sup> This was the first recorded interference by police with a strike committee in Scotland. The incident was reported to headquarters in Glasgow who in turn informed the British TUC.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, the Emergency Press carried a message from the Lord Advocate of Scotland calling on the public to resist the strike, "uphold liberty and defend national wellbeing"

because "we are fighting for freedom, for democratic government, for the breaking of the type of tyranny which has reached its culmination in Russia".<sup>38</sup> This seems to have been intended not only to strengthen the resolve of those who opposed the strike but also to create divisions among the strikers by conjuring up the "red bogey" and possibly discrediting the more left elements in the localities. In the Airdrie/Coatbridge area this latter intention does not appear to have produced any tangible results whilst the former does, as subsequent developments demonstrated.

Despite the intention to run buses on the Monday, this had not happened. On Tuesday, May 11, under the personal direction of Keith, the Chief of Police, for the whole county, and assisted by Christie, Chief Constable of Airdrie, a fleet of buses, under a strong police escort, was run from Airdrie to Glasgow. When the buses returned to the town a crowd had gathered, and although there was no violence or attacks on the vehicles, Christie ordered that the people must disperse and threatened to read "the Riot Act" if this happened again. Despite this threat by 3 p.m. when the buses were due to return to Glasgow to pick up their passengers, a large crowd, numbering several thousand, had again gathered near Airdrie Cross. The Joint Committee had officially refused to authorise pickets in this instance, but this seems to have had little impact on the strikers. Moreover many of those present were women and children and not directly under their control.

A large force of police and special constables were marched from their headquarters in Anderson Street; they spread out towards Airdrie Cross and Rialto Corner. The Riot Act was read, batons drawn and the police moved straight into the crowd. This created panic and many began to run. At the same time "men and women were being smashed at random". Some were knocked down in the confusion and an eyewitness reports: "one man being mercilessly hit by a policeman's baton, three hefty strokes, blood streaming from his face and the police moving on a yard or two for the next victim". The brutality of the police during the baton charge was testified to by several contemporaries and alluded to in the local press.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand there were only three arrests: one man was discharged, and the other two sentenced, W Carnegie received 21 days and R Stafford 60 days.

The effect of this on the mood and conduct of the strike was twofold. Firstly, it created great bitterness on the part of a large section of the community towards the police and special constables. The latter, up to this stage, had been looked on with derision rather than animosity. For at least some of those involved the incident also gave the strike a far more political class significance. To quote one, it provided 'a clearer understanding of what it was all about'.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, those on the Council of Action who had most consistently pushed the pacific policy of the STUC were largely discredited and those who had warned of events like the above were listened to more sympathetically from this time. The immediate result was the formation of a Workers' Defence Corps. The NUR and Defence League members played an important part in this.<sup>41</sup> The Corps was reputedly armed with the sawn-off weighted ends of billiard cues obtained from the Rosehall Miners' Institute.<sup>42</sup> However, the effectiveness of such a Corps was never put to the test as the strike was ended the next day. The implications of its formation and the overall change in the mood of the strikers and their families in the district will be considered in the next section.

Whilst Airdrie and Coatbridge supplied the most detailed information regarding the strikers' organisation this is not to suggest that other towns and villages in North Lanarkshire were not as highly organised or as solid.

The Bellshill, a Council of Action was set up consisting of fourteen members from the various Labour and political organisations under the chairmanship of Bill Cameron, a member of the Communist Party, as were several other members of the Council. Like Airdrie and Coatbridge, sub-committees were set up to deal with the picketing of pits, and factories, and transport control. Permits were issued for the transportation of food. Papers and bulletins were brought from Glasgow both from the STUC headquarters and from the Watson Street premises of the Communist Party/Minority Movement in Glasgow. No local bulletins were printed but mass open-air meetings were held regularly in Bellshill Green.

The most significant event reported in Bellshill during the strike was the raid by five policemen on May 11 at the Bellshill Miners' Welfare Institute when the six members of the transport sub-committee were dealing with applications for permits. As in the Coatbridge raid, the police warned those present that the issuing of permits was illegal and asked if permits were only being issued by the committee "to their own class". The reply was to the effect that these were issued under the instructions of the STUC to those who satisfied the conditions and were being issued "in order to preserve law and order".<sup>43</sup> All papers and documents were again confiscated.

In Shotts all trades responded solidly to the strike call. A Council of Action was set up representing fifteen local Labour and political organisations and was completely in control of the area throughout the nine days. A Peace Corps was formed along the lines suggested by the official policy and it co-operated with the local police to prevent disorder. There was a strong Communist Party representation on the Council of Action which was responsible for producing and distributing a daily bulletin and also one for the neighbouring Council of Stoneyburn.<sup>44</sup>

Cambusland was another exceptionally well-organised town, and again this owed much to the presence of a strong Communist Party branch which had 60 members by May 1926. The local Trades Council was formed in the main by Miners, Steelworkers, Transport and Railwaymen. However, once the Council of Action was set up on Sunday, 2 May, other political groups and non-affiliated unions were allowed representation on this. The chairman and secretary were in the Communist Party. As in other Councils of Action, committees were set up to deal with specific aspects of organisation. Again food and transport were vital areas and much of the activity was concentrated on this. The picketing of transport was most successful. Even after the official ending of the strike as reported in the Emergency Press on 13 May, "few buses ventured forth after the first bus in the morning was stoned. Others avoiding the town. Some vehicles stopped by mass pickets".<sup>45</sup> Tramcars ran on the Wednesday afternoon from Glasgow after the announcement was made but these were also attacked and windows smashed and "the car service was then withdrawn".<sup>46</sup>

In Cambuslang a twice weekly duplicated sheet was produced and widely circulated and the daily STUC bulletins were posted up (received through a daily courier service direct with STUC headquarters in Glasgow) and daily meetings centred around these. A mass meeting was held in Eastfield public park at which the local Labour MP, Wright, was lucky to escape physical injury after he suggested that perhaps the strike was a mistake.<sup>47</sup>

On the whole relations with the police were cordial, but after several raids by strikers on the local goods depot, Marines were drafted in to guard it. In this town there was a wonderful feeling of solidarity not only among the strikers but also their families: the women played an exceptionally important part in the area.<sup>48</sup>

As the strike progress, the organisation in Cambuslang improved and one incident in particular testified to the enthusiasm and determination of the strikers in the town. This was the clash between pickets and police at Ruby Street tram depot in the East End of Glasgow. This was later reported in the Emergency Press under the headline "Cambuslang Raiders". The Council of Action in Cambuslang was asked to assist with picketing duties by the Dalmarnock branch of the Tramwaymen. This had met with an enthusiastic response and nearly 500 miners from the Cambuslang and Newton areas had marched overnight (6-7 May) to the depot where blacklegs were reputedly billeted overnight. The miners clashed with the police who made a baton charge. Whilst controversy exists over who started the clash it would seem to be in line with the more militant attitude of the authorities being adopted in other areas of the county. The result was the arrest of twelve miners who later appeared in court, several swathed in bandages and all of whom were sentenced to three months' hard labour.<sup>49</sup>

In Hamilton where the Joint Committee met, a separate strike committee was set up to deal with the town itself. It was organised along similar lines to those already described. Its operation was successful and the workers response so enthusiastic that by the second day of the strike the Emergency Press reported:

"There was a complete deadlock in the industrial life of the community. The town is isolated by road and by rail, and people who tried to reach Glasgow offices found the task impossible except by walking. A few who accepted lifts in commercial vehicles were stopped by strikers from Blantyre at the outskirts of the town. No news except by broadcast has been received in the district and great public uncertainty about the situation is apparent."<sup>50</sup>

The public, in this instance, must have meant the none-working-class section of the town, as Hamilton, being the centre of the county Council of Action and the distribution centre for the STUC daily bulletins, probably had the best informed "strike force" in the county. As Hamilton was the "strike centre" the Government had obviously been prepared for trouble in the area and a section of the South Staffs Regiment were stationed in Hamilton Barracks. These, however, were never used in any confrontation and on the day the strike ended played a musical programme in Hamilton Public Park.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless there was one serious incident of violence in the area when a clash occurred between strikers and County and Burgh Police on the evening of May 7. This seems to have been the result originally of animosity between the strikers and the owner of the "Ranche" public house in the Cadzow district. A police superintendent was injured and ten men arrested and remanded without bail.<sup>52</sup>

In Motherwell the strike was 100% solid. The Council of Action was in total control and all trades and working-class parties were represented on it. Sub-committees again dealt with picketing, food, propaganda and transport. The issuing of permits was under the central transport committee with Hugh Higgins as secretary. Daily meetings were held in the vacant space opposite the ILP Hall in Miller Street. Motherwell, considering its size and "red" reputation, was singularly free from disturbance. It was, however, also particularly solid throughout the nine days as the local press reports confirm, "Motherwell—red and revolutionary Motherwell—has been a perfect model of peace and quietness ... it was also one of the towns where solidarity was the keynote all during the conflict".<sup>53</sup>

One distinctive feature in this town was that it was the venue for the regular meetings of the Lanarkshire NUR. This union adopted a particularly militant stance throughout the

strike which seems to have been at variance with the national leadership. Following a meeting of the union the following report was sent to the STUC headquarters:

"Right throughout the entire county, the same call is heard 'No surrender until victory is assured'. The railwaymen in our big county are prepared to carry on the fight realising that this is not a miners' fight but is a fight of the working-class of Britain against organised slavery".<sup>54</sup>

The Wishaw Council of Action had a close liaison with the one in Motherwell and operated along similar lines of solidarity and efficiency. Again control of transport was exceptionally well-organised and all vehicles had to carry a permit such as that cited in the local press bearing the instructions 'This is to certify that .... has permission to carry school-children between Wishaw and Glasgow for the duration of the strike'. This particular permit was signed by a member of Motherwell No. 3 branch of the NUR and by a member of the Motherwell branch of ASLEF.<sup>55</sup>

However there seems to have been particular religious strife in this district which added to extremes both of feeling and action. According to the local press the control of transport by the Council of Action had caused great indignation and the Chief Constable and local Superintendent Welsh had met and called for specials to help deal with the situation. This had brought a large number of volunteers among whom was "at least one man who had worn the black and tan uniform". This seems to have met with a response from some of the strikers. On Tuesday, 12 May, the main railway line at Omon was damaged by gelignite preventing the running of the 8.10 from Glasgow to Edinburgh. There was a sequel the following morning when workmen, attempting to repair the line, were stoned and had to have police protection in order to carry out the work.<sup>57</sup>

Councils of Action were also set up in the following districts in North Lanarkshire; Stonehouse, Strathaven, Bothwell, Carluke, Salsburgh, Coalburn, Blantyre, Larkhall and Rutherglen. All of these were in contact with the Joint Committee in Hamilton. Although it has not been possible to find precise details of events, the general picture of organisation and solidarity in these places is confirmed by interviews, local press, the Scottish Worker and Emergency reports to the Cabinet sub-committee.

#### **4. ENDING AND IMPACT**

The initial reaction to the ending of the General Strike in North Lanarkshire was a mixture of relief and jubilation. Relief that the strike had not brought any extreme hardship and jubilation because most thought that they had won a victory. This latter feeling was hardly surprising as the strikers experience in North Lanarkshire had been of particular solidarity and organisational efficiency through the Councils of Action, If anything, both of these had increased as the nine days progressed.

In the Airdrie/Coatbridge premises of the Council of Action there was rejoicing on receipt of a telegram on the afternoon of May 12 notifying the end of the strike and only one or two voices (J Hendrie and J McKeown) warned that celebrations should be postponed until the conditions were known.<sup>58</sup> At the Joint Committee's headquarters in Hamilton, thousands of strikers crowded outside the offices looking for clarification of the position. Already, however, some were more distrustful of the official leadership and more prescient as to what the ending would mean, A bus was stoned later in the afternoon. In Cambuslang, buses from Glasgow were stoned and forced to return or avoid the town, when pickets continued to block the road after the receipt of the news. The confusion existing in the

North Lanarkshire region following the termination of the strike can be illustrated through the reaction of the railway unions who had played vital roles in the Councils.

On Thursday, May 13, at a mass meeting of railwaymen in Motherwell Town Hall, the chairman, George Fraser, informed the meeting that instructions had been received to return to work from Mr Bromley, and that, "as they had come out as an organised body and they were going back as they had come out." This was warmly applauded by the meeting. He continued saying, that further instructions had been received from Glasgow to accept "no terms" and to return only on the pre-strike conditions and that any delay in restarting would only be temporary and employment would pick up as traffic increased. Continuing in this optimistic mood he stated: "that concessions had undoubtedly been won for the miners", and that because of this they could all go back to work "glad at heart".<sup>59</sup>

The following day the Scottish Worker's headline "Peace with a Thick Stick"<sup>60</sup> revealed the true situation of the conditions being imposed on the railwaymen as well as the defeat for the miners. Despite J H Thomas's assurances "that conditions were eminently satisfactory considering all the circumstances" the Scottish railwaymen remained out. At a meeting in Glasgow of 2,000 RCA members, including those from Lanarkshire, a resolution was passed refusing to return to work except under conditions existing before the strike.<sup>61</sup> This militancy did not last and the drift back to work began the following week. In North Lanarkshire, the railway companies rigidly enforced clauses four and five of the Terms of Agreement, reached on 14 May with union leaders, in re-starting men.<sup>62</sup> In the Airdrie/Coatbridge branch where the RCA had come out 100%, the most active members "were victimised for life"<sup>63</sup> either through loss of jobs or employed in a different position with no hope of promotion. The ability to impose these conditions on what had been one of the best organised and militant sections during the strike, at the local level, reveals the weakness and impotence of the national leaders.

It is not the intention to examine the miners' lock-out here, although two points are worth making as they are relevant to the analysis at the end of this study. Firstly, during the strike the "left" members of the Parish Councils in the North Lanarkshire area, although in the minority, had been able with the full force of the strikers behind them to pressurise these bodies into waiving some of the stringent conditions governing relief. With the ending of the strike much of their bargaining power and authority evaporated and the most conservative elements again came to the fore. On June 12 in Hamilton "a private conference of merchants, professional and business people"<sup>64</sup> met in order to press for an interdict to prevent relief being given to applicants in cash. This re-assertion of middle-class authority was felt throughout the county in the following months much to the distress and anger of the miners. In October, a mass demonstration protesting against the reduced relief rates marched to the Parish Council in Holytown and "while the Trades Council deputation went into the meeting the crowd sang the Red Flag but dispersed quietly".<sup>65</sup> As the weeks went by the distress and demonstrations increased throughout North Lanarkshire.

Secondly, within the Miners' Union, W Allan and the Minority Movement continually criticised the weak leadership at the national and county level and emphasised the militant mood of the rank and file. Allan accused the county officials of scare-mongering by talking of "broken heads, bloody skulls and baton charges" thus allowing "scabs to emerge from their rat-holes".<sup>66</sup> He urged the miners to get their leaders into the districts and organise pit-head meetings and force them to lead. Throughout the lock-out the Minority Movement urged the MFGB to stick to the "not a penny off stance. On 17

August a Lanarkshire Minority Movement Conference was held at Blantyre with delegates from Cambuslang, Burnbank, Bothwellhaugh, Chapelhall, Douglas Water, Newmains and Shotts and other districts in North Lanarkshire. This called for the leaders to listen to the demands of the rank and file and "to stand by the mandate given them by the whole coalfield".

The response of the rank and file in the miners' union in Lanarkshire to the lead given by Allan and the Minority Movement before, during and after the General Strike, and the total disillusionment with the lead given by the officials was reflected in the 1927 mid-summer elections. Allan was elected General Secretary of the Lanarkshire Mineworkers' Union in place of the nationally known W B Small by a vote of 5102—4311. This move to the left in Lanarkshire had already been indicated early in 1927 when Allan had been nominated as the miners' candidate for MP for North Lanark. Allan's candidature was eventually rejected under the Labour Party's proscription on Communists: the branch had several times refused to accept this decision but eventually gave way.<sup>67</sup> The swing to the left in Lanarkshire became even more decisive in November 1927 when in the NUSMW Executive nominations the Lanarkshire men voted for J.Bird, a left-wing candidate from Fife, instead of their own nationally-known Bob Smillie. Further, the financial vote of the branches in Lanarkshire returned a majority of left-wing representatives. This as R Page-Arnot notes was "a landslide" and this in trade union elections is "extremely infrequent".<sup>68</sup>

Whilst it is possible to see a distinct radicalisation in the Miners' Union following the General Strike it is much more difficult to assess quantitatively either radicalisation or demoralisation amongst the rest of the workers involved in the strike in North Lanarkshire. This is primarily because local trade union minutes are no longer in existence. Nevertheless, an initial reaction has already been described and throughout the weeks immediately following the strike a series of meetings took place in the area from which the temper of the workforce can somewhat be gauged.

On the 17 May a meeting, under the auspices of the Motherwell Trades Council, was held in the Town Hall with Duncan Graham (miners MP) as a speaker. The meeting was full to overflowing and most trades were represented. Graham was asked from the body of the hall if it would not be better in the light of the conditions being imposed on the miners, railwaymen and other trades, to resume the General Strike. He replied that this was not advisable and that the TUC and union leaders' advice should be heeded. He was then asked:

"Hadn't the TUC turned reactionary and deserted the industrial field at a moment too when the workers in all trades were in solid array determined to win a victory hadn't they betrayed the whole labour movement ?"

Graham replied to the effect that the questioner did not realise the reasons which weighed with the TUC and that the miners would soon be advised by their executive to go back. This was greeted with cries of "shame" and boos. The mood of the meeting was throughout opposed to the sentiments expressed by Graham.<sup>69</sup>

At the beginning of June, the ex-Communist Walter Newbold, MP for Motherwell, held a series of meetings in North Lanarkshire. In these he criticised those who were in favour of a continuation of the General Strike, supported "MacDonald, Thomas and Co." and defended the TUC. The only real means of redress for the working-class was through the

ballot box, claimed Newbold. According to the Worker, his trump card at these meetings was his estimation "that coal was going out of date as a source of power". In all the meetings he held he was severely heckled and booed by the audience, even in his own Motherwell constituency. In Wishaw at a meeting held by the ILP, he was forced to abandon the hall after great hostility from the majority of those present and W Allen took over. Newbold's eight week advertised tour of Lanarkshire was curtailed after this.<sup>70</sup>

To make a more quantitative estimate of radicalisation as a consequence of the General Strike in the area is difficult. A continued existence of Councils of Action would be a measure but most of these seem to have broken up as soon as the strike was over and operated strictly along Trades and Labour Council lines again. However, the Worker of May 29 does contain a letter which suggests that the Joint Committee of the Lanarkshire Council of Action had a token existence for a short period after the strike. The letter reported that the following resolution had been passed by this body and desired that it be given the widest publication:

"This Council call upon the TUC the Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive of the Labour Party to take measures to secure the immediate release of all persons arrested during the General Strike for having broken laws, the violation of which, only demonstrated their loyalty to the working-class movement."<sup>71</sup>

No further references to meetings of this body or other Councils of Action have been discovered after the strike.

One yardstick does exist however: the 1926 November municipal elections. Throughout the whole of Scotland there were fifty-three Labour gains. Of these, four were in Motherwell and Wishaw, three in Hamilton and one each in Airdrie and Coatbridge. It is difficult to gauge how far this was a radicalising effect of the General Strike or just part of the trend towards Labour "pure and simple" described above. The Communist Party continued to have active groups in most of the towns in the area and in the immediate weeks after the strike their correct assessment and warnings about the possible official betrayal gained them prestige in the localities. The same can be said of the Minority Movement. Nevertheless, the continued proscriptions by the Labour Party on Communists tended to hold back membership of these and resulted in some resignations. In Coatbridge those of J Wilson and D Mullen, were made known publicly in the local press on June 23, 1926.

Many others were certainly demoralised, especially in areas where the industrial depression intensified and unemployment rose. The later splitting up of the Trades and Labour into separate sections certainly had a de-politicising effect on these bodies and paved the way for more right-wing leadership in some areas.

The last two chapters have described the General Strike and its impact in the North Lanarkshire area. The last chapter will attempt to suggest why the area responded as it did and place it within the overall national picture.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to examine the course and conduct of the General Strike in North Lanarkshire. From this it is possible to draw some definite conclusions and some tentative ones, but it also poses several questions.

The response by the workers to the strike call was 100%. Indeed, even those not called out in the "first line" had in many instances joined the strike before the end of the first week. If as Anthony Mason suggests "the effectiveness of the stoppage in the transport section of

industry may be a useful guide to the effectiveness of the strike as a whole", then in this area it was wholly effective. No trains left any of the depots in the area and all bus services were withdrawn within the first two days. Whole towns were isolated except for transport bearing permits issued by the trade unions, The feeding of the population was carried out effectively, often with the collaboration of the local co-operatives, despite the lack of official guidance in this sphere. No newspapers were published except those of the workers' organisations.

Thus it can be seen that the workers were in control of most of the daily functions of the community. The vehicle of this control was the Council of Action. These organs, by operating across sectional union and political barriers, were able to mobilise a much wider support than the ordinary Trades Councils. Furthermore, once mobilised they were able to galvanise and direct this support in an efficient manner. The initiative for the setting up of these Councils did not come from the official trade union movement. Here as elsewhere in the country little official preparation has been made for the strike as regards organisation. Nevertheless over the weekend before the strike twenty-three Councils of Action under the control of a Joint Committee had sprung up. The main influence behind their institution were the local members of the Communist Party and Minority Movement and in some instances ILP. The work carried out prior to the strike among the Lanarkshire Miners was of particular importance in this respect. In one other area of Scotland, Fife, where Councils of Action were set up and operated in a similar manner, the Minority Movement had a strong influence. One further element which facilitated their inception and operation in North Lanarkshire was the fluid nature of the political divisions at the local level.

As the nine days progressed and the control of the Councils increased they resembled embryo Soviets. Their existence alongside the 'legal' authority created a dual power situation. However they lacked one vital element which the legal authority possessed and were prepared to use a police force. After the baton charge in Airdrie a Defence Corps was formed. All the evidence suggests that the use of police in this way was the result of a harder national line being adopted by the Government now thoroughly alarmed at the growing success of the strike and the way whole communities were becoming 'isolated' under trade union control. A repetition of such police action elsewhere in Lanarkshire could well have stimulated a much wider adoption of defence measures by the workers.

It is the very ending of the strike itself which poses the questions. Those workers who previously had little experience of industrial struggle and who initially saw the strike as solely support for the miners were in many instances, through their contact with more militant workers in the Councils of Action, becoming radicalised as the days progressed. All of those interviewed confirmed this growing feeling of "excitement" and "power" even among those previously considered "moderates". Some saw the situation as "pregnant with possibility". How far this would have gone if the strike continued is open to question. It is almost certain however that a move towards the left was taking place. The ending of the strike saw an ending of this radicalisation except among the miners who continued their struggle.

At this stage it is still too difficult to say how far North Lanarkshire was unique in its response. Very few local studies of this nature have been carried out. Only comparison with similar studies would make it possible to fit this area into a comprehensive national picture. Nevertheless one thing this study has certainly shown is that if the General Strike failed it was not due to any lack of determination on the part of the "savage folk" of North Lanarkshire. Their response to the strike call and their organisation of their own daily lives, without the assistance of the normal forces of law and order, was tremendous.

## APPENDIX

### MINORITY MOVEMENT RESOLUTIONS ON COUNCILS OF ACTION

MARCH 1926

#### 1. Present Position of the Unions

This Conference, viewing the present position of the Trade Unions, believes that the policies which have hitherto dominated the Trade Unions have been demonstrated by hard facts to be utterly useless against the organised Employing Class. The lessons of 1921 and its aftermath are that sectionalism and class co-operation are dangerous to the prospects of even maintaining the present standards of living, let alone raising it. This Conference believes that as the Railwaymen, Miners, Metalworkers, and Transport Workers are all pressing forward for improvements in their conditions, they should go forward as a solid body.

At the present moment, the Employers aided by their reactionary Government are preparing to take the offensive again and still further reduce the Workers to Coolieism.

This Conference, believing that Solidarity in Action and fighting qualities must replace Sectionalism, Craft Prejudice, and Class Collaboration as the dominant policies of the Trade Unions, endorses the proposal of a Joint Council of Action in order to attain this end.

#### 2. Tasks of the Council of Action

This Conference, surveying the present state of Trade Unionism in this District and its preparedness to wrench better conditions from the Employers, lays down some of the principal immediate tasks of the Council of Action:-

- (a) The initiation of a campaign in which the whole Labour Movement will participate for the purpose of rebuilding the Numerical strength of the Unions. The Council of Action, in tackling this question will bear in mind that the workers who have dropped (sic) have, in the main, done so because of the total inability of the Trades Unions to protect their members from the aggression of the Employers. In the Campaign, therefore, stress should be laid on the question of attracting the lost members by pointing out the necessity of altering the outlook of the Unions from that of compromise with the Employers to one of aggression against them.
- (b) Concurrently with this Campaign should be consistent efforts to build up the somewhat shattered Shop Steward Organisation in the Workshops, and the establishment of the closest possible collaboration and reporting between District Committees and Shop Stewards.
- (c) The creation of Factory Committees whenever and wherever possible. This is entirely a necessary task in order to bring the whole of the workers in the shops into the struggle as participants—not as spectators leaving it to a few active spirits to bear the whole brunt.
- (d) The establishment of the closest possible contact and co-operation with the Co-operatives in the Districts.

- (e) The inauguration of a campaign of work gate meetings by every available speaker in order to try and make the struggle an all-inclusive one—not one of the rank and file obeying automatically the orders of their officials. A rank and file which is fully acquainted with the whole situation will be much more effective in the struggle.

#### **Method of Procedure of Election of Council of Action**

Metal Industry to elect three delegates to the Council of Action. District Committee to elect one. The same to be followed out by the other industries, viz—Railwaymen, Miners, Transport. The Trades Council to elect three and the Co-operatives three.

## SOURCES

Interviews with activists of the General Strike period proved to be the most valuable source of information for this study. Whenever possible these were checked with local press reports and a remarkable degree of co-relation was found considering the years that have passed. This in itself is a testimony as to how important an event the nine days of the strike were in their lives. I would also like to thank all of those who co-operated in this research, in particular Paul Carter, Hugh Hendrie and John Foster, including all those not mentioned in the bibliography.

#### **Individuals**

This is not a complete list of those who were consulted, and includes only those who information was used in a direct way.

**Joseph Allen**, a miner at Parkhead East Colliery in 1926.

**Albert Beaddie**, ex-Provost of Coatbridge, member of local NUR executive in 1926.

**Michael Devine**, member of BISA KTA in Motherwell in 1926.

**Dan Docherty**, Secretary Cambuslang Trades Council in 1926.

**J. Docherty**, lived in Rosehall Miners' Welfare in 1926 where his father was caretaker.

**H. Hendrie**, teacher and member of ILP in Coatbridge in 1926, later member of Town Council.

**J. Hendrie**, founder-member of Communist Party in Coatbridge, member of Defence League and Council of Action in 1926.

**H. Hunter**, lived in Cambuslang in 1926, later full-time organiser of Communist Party from 1939-1954 in Lanarkshire and in close contact with leading individuals and organisations of the strike period.

**G. MacKay**, on committee of Bothwell Park Colliery pit branch and member of Communist Party in 1926.

**A. McCammon**, policeman at Glenmavis Station, stationed at Kipps Marshalling Yard and Byre Colliery in 1926.

**G Maxwell**, shop steward Stewart and Lloyds and member of Communist Party in 1926.

**H, Walker**, lived in Airdrie and a prominent witness of "baton charge" in 1926.

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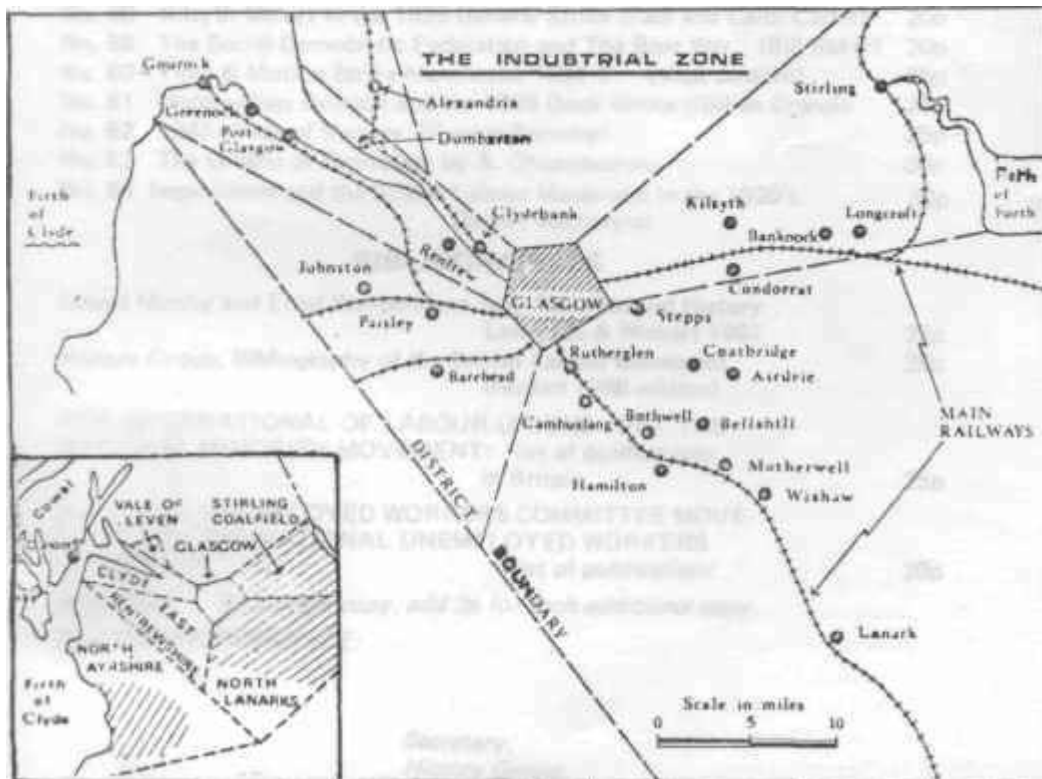
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<b>Forward</b>	May, 1926 <i>passim</i>
<b>The Hamilton Advertiser</b>	14 May 1926
<b>The Motherwell Times</b>	14,21 May 1926
<b>The Scottish Co-operator</b>	1926 <i>passim</i>
<b>The Scottish Worker</b>	<b>10-15</b> May 1926
<b>The Wishaw Herald</b>	14 May 1926
<b>The Worker</b>	1925, 1926 <i>passim</i>
<b>The Workers' Weekly</b>	21 May 1926

## FOOTNOTES

1. **G Thomson** **The Third Statistical Account, County of Lanark, (Glasgow 1960), 40-41.**
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18. **Scottish Co-operator**, 19 June 1926, 562,
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20. **Forward**, 22 May 1926, 15.
21. TUC Library, **General Strike Collection Box H D 5366.**
22. **Emergency Press**, 6 May, 3.
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24. **The Workers' Weekly**, 21 May 1926.
25. **H. Maxwell.**
26. Confirmed by numerous participants.
27. **Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser**, 15 May 1926.
28. **OMS Report**, PRO, CAB 27/133,5149.
29. **The Workers' Weekly**, **loc cit.**
30. **The Scottish Worker**, 10 May 1926, 4.
31. **H. Maxwell.**
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34. **Emergency Press**, 8 May, 1.
35. **Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser**, **loc cit.**
36. **The Scottah Worker**, 11 May 1926, 1.
37. TUC Library, **General Strike Collection**, Box HD 5366.
38. **Emergency Press**, 10 May 1926, 3.
39. **H. Maxwell, H. Walker, Airdrie & CoatbridgeAdvertiser**, 15 May 1926.
40. **H. Walker**
41. Several of those active in the Defence League claim that prior to the General Strike they had taken part in 'drilling' on Cowheath in Coatbridge under the direction of P Hanlon and P. Scullion. The former with army experience and the latter associated with the Sinn Fein movement.
42. **J. Docherty.**
43. **The Scottish Worker**, 12 May 1926, 3.
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48. **H Hunter.**
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53. **Motherwell Times**, 14 May 1926, 8.
54. **The Scottish Worker**, 12 May 1926, 3.
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60. **The Scottish Worker**, 14 May 1926, 1.
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62. Ft Page-Arnot , **A History of the Scottish Miners** (1955), 239.
63. **G Wallace** (Present Chairman Airdrie and Coatbridge Trades Council)
64. Page-Arnot , **op cit**, 177.
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67. **Lanarkshire Mineworkers Union Minutes**, 2 November 1927, 7.
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