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RAILWAYMEN IN THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND 1890-1930:
INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND POLICIES

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
The Open University

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STATEMENT

Some of the material relating to the period before 1900 had been used in my submission for a Graduate Diploma in Humanities awarded by the then Middlesex Polytechnic in April 1987.

ABSTRACT.

Title. Railwaymen in the North East of England 1890-1930:
Industrial and Political Attitudes and Policies.

FRANK LAWSON B.A. M.PHIL. HISTORY MARCH 1995

The thesis begins with an analysis of railwaymen in the North East and an examination of the characteristics of the North East of England. It examines the state of trade unionism and industrial relations at the end of the nineteenth century on a local, regional and national basis. It pursues those developments through the first decade of the twentieth century and analyses the political situation over the same period to the extent that this is relevant to the situation of railwaymen. It then looks at individual strikes before the First World War and the hiatus which occurred during the War. It analyses the build-up to industrial strife after the War and up to, and during, the 1926 General Strike and its aftermath. It then follows through political attitudes and policies from 1918-1930. Finally, it considers to what extent there was a separate tradition among railwaymen in the North East throughout the period under study.

PREFACE

In the first edition of their *History of Trades Unionism* published in 1894, the Webbs made scarcely any mention of trade unionism on the railways. This was despite the fact that the ASRS had been in existence for over 20 years, ASLEF and the UPSS had been founded in 1880 and the GRWU in 1889. It was despite the fact that there had been in the North East in 1867 a major and bruising strike and in 1890 there had been a major strike in Scotland. It was despite the fact that at the TUC Congress of 1890 a resolution, moved by the ASRS, was passed calling for a 'much larger representation of Labour in the House of Commons by men drawn from the ranks of the workmen'.¹ However, when the next major edition of their work was published in 1920 the authors were duly penitent. They commented: 'Another great industry, that of the operating staff of the railway system - scarcely mentioned in the first edition of our *History* - has come forcibly to the front'. They excused themselves by claiming that right down to the end of the nineteenth century railway grades had played little part in trade union attitudes and in 1892 only one in seven of those employed belonged to a union.² Particular mention was made of the growth of unionism among railway clerks. The RCA was not formed until 1897 but they had steadily become a major force and moved much more quickly than the clerical unions generally.³

This change provided the basis for a study of the growth of railway trade unionism in the period between the two editions. To consider the history of all the railway unions would have meant a much larger or more superficial study. I decided therefore to confine it to one Region and chose the North East. Why the North East? In the first place during the period under review there had been, in addition to national strikes, several independent strikes in the North East including the Driver Knox strike. Secondly, that was the area in which railways started and there should therefore have been a longer and, perhaps, different tradition of trade unionism. Thirdly, the area was well known for the distinctive tradition of unionism among the miners which survived

¹ NUR: *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Co-operative Printing Society, London, 1938) p.9

² S. and B. Webb: *History of Trades Unionism* (Trades Unionists, 1920) pp.522-523

³ *Ibid* pp.504-505

well into the twentieth century and this may have had an influence. Fourthly, the mining unions had interacted with political developments and had provided some of the early workers' MPs. It would be interesting to see if the railwaymen, working in smaller and more dispersed concentrations and with a paternalistic management, had behaved similarly. Finally, I had myself been born and brought up in the town which was 'the cradle of the railways', with a father who was a railwayman and I had promised myself that, one day, I would explore the history of trade unionism.

As regards the period to be covered I decided that any two dates would be artificial but there was a case for making the opening date 1890, shortly before the date of the first edition of the Webbs' study, and to end in 1930 so as to cover the 1924 ASLEF strike and the effects of the General Strike in the North East.

The question then arose of the availability of source material. I was aware from earlier studies of the archives of the NER and LNER in the Public Record Office and of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee records. The Newspaper Library at Colindale was useful in three respects. Firstly the local, regional, national and sectional newspapers and journals included references to industrial relations and the activities of the Unions in the North East. Secondly, they contained accounts of Election campaigns and developments between Elections. Thirdly, the Library had long runs of most of the railway union journals which contained not only national developments but, to a greater or lesser extent, Branch reports and local developments. One key journal, the Locomotive Journal, was not available there but was obtainable in the British Library and in the Leeds Local Studies Library. The London Library and the British Library also contained the contemporary writings on unions, strikes and the rise of Labour at the beginning of this century.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOURCE MATERIAL

If we consider first the history of railway trade unions, Bassett Vincent published his odd little study in 1902.⁴ This told us rather more about Bassett Vincent

⁴ C. Bassett Vincent: *An Authentic History of Railway Trade Unionism* (Derby Printers reprint of 1902 edition, 1963)

than the railway unions. The year 1907 saw the publication by the ASRS of the *Railwaymen's Charter*⁵ which put forward the basis of the ASRS claim for improved conditions of service and of the attempted refutation of this by the Companies in the *Red Book on Conditions of Railway Service*.⁶ R. Bell also wrote a more general book on trade unionism in 1907.⁷ In 1910 appeared the *Souvenir History of the ASRS*⁸ which not unnaturally concentrated on the progress of the ASRS. The claims of the Union were set in context by two Government Reports which appeared shortly afterwards. The first was the Report on the Conciliation Scheme⁹ and the second was the belated publication of the Government-collected information on the wages and conditions in 1907.¹⁰ Following the unrest of 1910-1912 Kenney produced his thoughtful study of the need for a change in approach.¹¹

In 1917, reflecting the impact of the War, Cole and Arnot produced *Trade Unionism on the Railways*.¹² For major studies of the Unions concerned, we had to wait longer. Raynes produced his study of ASLEF in 1922¹³ and McKillop produced his study in 1950.¹⁴ McKillop's study was commissioned by ASLEF. In the Foreword he was described as 'a militant trade unionist since birth' and 'an ardent champion of Associated principles'. Not surprisingly, therefore, the study presented the triumph of the ASLEF viewpoint. Turning to the ASRS, Alcock, who had written the 1910 *Souvenir History*, was asked by J.H. Thomas to produce in 1922 *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism*.¹⁵ Although Alcock brought ASLEF and RCA into his account his sympathies lay with the ASRS (and the later NUR). At the time of the book he had been a Trustee of the Union from 1889 and was one of the two oldest officials. For him Trade Unionism had always been a passion as he admitted in the Preface to the book. In

⁵ R. Bell, *The Railwaymen's Charter* (ASRS, London, 1907)

⁶ *Red Book on Conditions of Service* (Railway News, London 1907)

⁷ R. Bell: *Trade Unionism* (Jack, London, 1907)

⁸ *Souvenir History of ASRS, 1910* (ASRS, London, 1910)

⁹ *Minutes of Evidence to the Commission on Railway Conciliation Scheme* (Cd.6014)

¹⁰ *PP 1912-1913*, Cd.6053

¹¹ R. Kenney: *Men and Rails* (Fisher & Unwin, London, 1913)

¹² G.D.H. Cole and R.P. Arnot: *Trade Unionism on the Railways* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1917)

¹³ G.R. Raynes: *Engines and Men: The History of ASLEF* (Goodall & Suddick, Leeds, 1922)

¹⁴ N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame* (Nelson, London, 1950)

¹⁵ G.W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism* (Co-operative Printing Society, London, 1922)

1963 Bagwell was commissioned by the NUR to produce a history of the railwaymen¹⁶ and this provides much detailed information.

Most of these studies contained an emphasis on the development of Union machinery and the influence of more, or in some cases less, powerful officials of the Unions. From the late nineteenth century onwards there were a number of anecdotal accounts of the lives and tribulations of, for example, enginemens, guards, etc. but there was only one enduring study of an individual related to his specific locale. This was Williams' *Life in a Railway Factory*.¹⁷ For more in-depth studies of the conditions of service of railwaymen we had to wait for Kingsford in 1970¹⁸ and McKenna in 1980.¹⁹

Throughout the period there was many studies, both brief and in depth, of the railways as a whole and of individual Companies. One which stands out for the purpose of this study is Tomlinson's *North Eastern Railway*²⁰ but this is patchy and brief on the years immediately before publication. Economic analysis of NER development came in two studies by Bell²¹ and Irving.²²

When looking at the development of the NER in relation to other railways, it is difficult to apply the normal rules of historiography. If we look at the separate constituents there had been several studies of the impact of the development of the railways on the economic and social life of the country. Such studies have normally followed a common line and there had been little of dispute in them. These studies generally have not singled out the North East. There have been studies of the impact of investment in railways again written from a largely national viewpoint. Histories have been written about the individual companies and, as we have already noted, there had been several about the NER. There have also been studies of the LNER.²³ These have generally been in the spirit of reportage and have not sought to develop an explicit thesis.

¹⁶ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1963)

¹⁷ A. Williams: *Life in a Railway Factory* (A. Sutton, 1984 reprint of 1915 work)

¹⁸ P.W. Kingsford: *Victorian Railwaymen* (Cass, London 1970)

¹⁹ F. McKenna: *The Railway Worker 1840-1970* (Faber & Faber, London, 1980)

²⁰ W.W. Tomlinson's *North Eastern Railway* (David & Charles, 1987 reprint)

²¹ R. Bell: *Twenty Five Years of the North Eastern Railway 1898-1922* (Railway Gazette, London, nd)

²² R.J. Irving: *The North Eastern Railway Company 1870-1914: An Economic History* (Leicester University Press, 1976)

²³ E.g. C.J. Allen: *The London and North Eastern Railway* (Ian Allan, London, 1971 edn.) and M.R. Bonavia: *A History of the LNER* (3 vols, George Allen & Unwin, London 1982-1983)

If there is an exception to this it is Irving's economic history of the NER. In drawing his conclusions, Irving points out that the NER was untypical in relation to its territorial monopoly and, except later for the Scottish traffic, was not generally affected by competition. Despite this, Irving concludes that: '... whatever differences existed between the North Eastern and other members of the industry were not sufficient to outweigh the factors they had in common.'²⁴

The NER was subject to common legislation and Government approach and it faced common problems of rising costs after 1890. It was different to the extent that it faced these problems with its own unique changes after 1900 and no company came close to emulating the improvement in freight operating efficiency after 1900.²⁵

ANALYSIS OF RAILWAY JOURNALS

In addition to books, the journals and reviews in the railway field provide an important source of information and it is necessary to look at the orientation of such journals. In general, and over a period of time, the journals reflect the predominant and controlling interests of their backers but, from time to time, a particular Editor, either because of his views or because of the time he has acted as Editor, can move the journal in a particular direction. If, therefore, we look at particular journals, we can start with the Railway Official Gazette. It represented the railway Companies and the 'management line'. It could be relied on to express concern at the ingratitude of employees, point out problems of the Companies, condemn strikes and indicate sinister motives. The Railway Times (1837-1914), which 'consistently advocated railway interests', was later incorporated into it. The Railway Official Gazette should not be confused with the Railway Service Gazette (1872-1881) which put before the public 'the just claims of railway servants'. It was the organ of the ASRS and was replaced in this respect from 1881 by the Railway Review which later performed the same role for the NUR. Both journals contained Branch Reports. The GRWU started circa 1883 a short-lived journal the Railway Express, but later notes of GRWU activities were contained in

²⁴ Irving *op cit* p.270

²⁵ *Ibid* pp.282-283

the Railway Herald (1887-1903). The Railway Herald covered general transport engineering matters and, in addition to its coverage of GRWU matters became the official organ of the Railway Clerks' Association until the Railway Clerk took its place in 1904. The Railway Clerk (1904-1919) was later renamed the Railway Service Journal (established in 1919). The objective was: 'To champion the cause, voice the needs and register the progress of the railway clerk'. The ASLEF organ was initially the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen's Monthly Journal (1888-1903) which became the Locomotive Journal (established 1904). There were several other national, regional and local short-lived journals and a long-lived one The Railway Signal or Lights Along the Line which, from 1882, was concerned with Christian Life and Christian Work on the Railways.

Of these journals the Railway Review is quoted most often in this thesis. From 1898 George Wardle, an ILP member, was a strong Editor and he was backed by a columnist 'The Candid Friend', who in 1902 revealed himself to be Philip Snowden. John Bromley was General Secretary of ASLEF from 1904-1936 and Editor of the Locomotive Journal. From time to time the Railway Review and the Locomotive Journal were in conflict as were their patron bodies and their comments on events were often not balanced and impartial. The RCA was given continuity in the form of A.G. Walkden (General Secretary RCA 1906-1936) who in 1906 became Editor of their journal which is important for tracing objectives and achievements of the RCA and was not involved to the same extent in a war against a rival journal.

THE GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS

It is not sufficient to study the NER unionism simply against the background of railway trade unionism. It is necessary to consider it against the background of the development of trade unionism as a whole. The Webbs traced the growth of local societies in handicraft trades before the Industrial Revolution and the factors which later led to more formal trade associations. In these craftsmen fought to

maintain demarcation lines against interlopers.²⁶ In the nineteenth century basic sectional interests continued and instead of a homogeneous working class it was more appropriate to refer to 'working classes'. Pelling considered that there was no homogeneous working class until the late nineteenth century.²⁷ As J. Benson points out, early accounts of the growth of trade unions concentrated on activists and 'the boring bureaucracy of trade unions and proletarian parties'.²⁸ The early trade union movement was seen as protecting the interests of the workers and bringing about the growth of the Labour Party. Although the distancing of officials from the ordinary members was a phenomenon noted by the Webbs, it was generally taken for granted that the aspirations of leadership and wider membership were much the same and that sectional and class, as well as political and economic interests, went hand in hand. More recent work by labour historians has tended to qualify this view. Comment has been made that the movement failed to touch ordinary people and that workers joined for utilitarian reasons with membership not implying total commitment.²⁹ There was a complex pattern of aspirations, interests and loyalties with divisions between the aims of officials, political activists and shop stewards together with a gap between them and the mass membership. Ordinary members had loyalties to workplace, craft and region, which often came before loyalty to a national union and had a far stronger hold on them than more general notions of class solidarity. The 'all-grades' movement was met by the continuous opposition of skilled and sectional interests and yet at the same time the pursuit of regional interests was also a force to be reckoned with. In the ASRS there were, for example, effectively two movements at the end of 1896, a national guards movement and the NER 'all-grades' movement. The NER men wanted local advances on problems in local areas and programmes.³⁰

²⁶ Webbs *op cit* pp.45-46

²⁷ H. Pelling: *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Penguin, 1974 edn.) pp.13-14

²⁸ J. Benson: *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1930* (Longmans, London, 1989) p.1

²⁹ *Ibid* pp.174-177

³⁰ P.S. Gupta: Railway Trade Unionism in Britain 1880-1900 in *Economic History Review* XIX, 1966, pp.146-149

The impact of the growth of 'new unionism' continues to be the subject of considerable debate. Although the new unionism extended the range of trades unionism, led to a more aggressive approach and had many Socialists among its leaders, the degree to which it changed the nature of trade unionism may have been exaggerated. On Tyneside the most successful of the new general labour unions was the Tyneside and District Labourer's Association, which was firmly in the Liberal-Labour tradition³¹ politically while, although the logical development from general labour unions might have appeared to be further steps towards industrial unionism and wider class action, the new unionists were soon as concerned as craft unionists not:

'... to risk the destruction of this painstakingly constructed and still fragile organisation ... [for] ...whatever hopes they may have harboured for victories gained through militant and united class action.'³²

E.R. Pease wrote of the National Labour Federation that the time was right for a new body: 'organised for a single purpose, the support of labour in its conflict with capital'.³³ Howell saw the new unions as promoting 'a bastard Socialist propaganda'.³⁴ Bell's comment in 1907 that: 'Socialism was never the object of Trade Unions'³⁵ seems still to be the more accurate analysis.

Nor must it be forgotten that, during this period of the growth of the new unionism and throughout that of employers' initiatives and federation intended to restrict trades union powers, unions were gradually consolidating their positions as accepted institutions with which employers could negotiate. As Union membership grew and also as a result of experience in collective bargaining, Unions became more representative.³⁶

³¹ M. Searles: *The Origins of New Unionism on Tyneside* in Bulletin of the North East Labour History Society, 25, 1991

³² S. Meacham: *A Life Apart: The English Working Class, 1890-1914* (Thames and Hudson, 1977) pp.146-147

³³ E.A.P. Duffy: *New Unionism in Britain 1889-1890: A Reappraisal* in Economic History Review, 1961-1962, p.310

³⁴ Quoted in K.D. Brown: *The English Labour Movement 1700-1951* (Gill & Macmillan, London, 1982) p.172

³⁵ R. Bell: *Trade Unionism* (Jack, London, 1907) p.77

³⁶ Clegg and others: *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889 Vol.1* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964) p.476

At some point, with the timing being disputed by historians, Unions became more acceptable to the establishment.³⁷

Reference is made in several Chapters to the concept of the 'labour aristocracy'. Hobsbawm referred to the behaviour of the 10% of the workforce with high and stable earnings organised into trade unions. He claimed that the railways had a medium percentage of 'labour aristocrats', e.g. engine drivers.³⁸ Pollins commented that the skilled footplate crews had little in common with other employees.³⁹ Gray saw the problem of the 'labour aristocracy' as being more complex and argued that it must be studied in relation to particular localities.⁴⁰ Joyce states that the psychology of the workers was based on the workplace which dictated the rest of life. This could involve great loyalty to the factory, the trade and the Trade Union but not necessarily to a wider class consciousness.⁴¹

In the body of the thesis we look at the influence of Syndicalism on the Unions and on industrial relations. MacDonald was dismissive: 'Syndicalism in Britain is negligible'.⁴² Holton argued that by 1914 an influential minority of the working class had been brought within the orbit of syndicalist influence.⁴³ However, he argued that it was not influential on the railways.⁴⁴ Farman, however, considers that some form of Syndicalism was present in the railway strikes.⁴⁵ Hinton comments that, after its heyday in 1910-1912, it played an important role in the origins of the shop steward movement.⁴⁶ Pribicevic points to the role of the Syndicalists in the 1912 ASRS Conference prior to the NUR being formed.⁴⁷ Saville emphasises that wage militancy was different from Syndicalism.⁴⁸

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.483

³⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm: *Labouring Men* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968) pp.286-288

³⁹ H. Pollins: *Britain's Railways: An Industrial History* (David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971), p.78

⁴⁰ R.Q. Gray: *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1976) pp.7-8

⁴¹ P. Joyce: *Work, Society and Politics* (Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980)

⁴² J. Ramsay MacDonald: *Syndicalism* (Constable, London, 1912) p.39

⁴³ Bob Holton: *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* (Pluto Press, London, 1976) p.138

⁴⁴ *Ibid* p.166

⁴⁵ C. Farman: *The General Strike May 1926* (Hart Davis, London, 1972) p.8

⁴⁶ J. Hinton: *The First Shop Stewards Movement* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1973) p.278

⁴⁷ B. Pribicevic: *The Shop Stewards Movement and Workers Control 1910-1922* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1959) p.5

⁴⁸ J. Saville: *The Labour Movement in Britain* (Faber & Faber, London, 1988) p.55

The changes brought about by the First World War are analysed in the text of the thesis. First, an industrial and political truce was observed. Secondly, rank and file movements developed when, with full-time Trade Union officials becoming an integral part of the Government's war machine: '... workers in the workshops turned more and more to the militant workers - who demanded the carrying out of regular trade union branch and district committee meetings'.⁴⁹ This led to the shop steward movement. Thirdly, it has been argued by some that the general increase in working class living standards involved an erosion of the distinction between skilled and unskilled workers.⁵⁰ Before 1914 all engine-drivers earned at least twice as much as porters but by February 1919 this had reduced to 60% more.⁵¹ However, Reid has argued that in general there was no major narrowing of gap between skilled and unskilled workers in Britain.⁵²

During the War, the Unions were closely involved in negotiation with the Government but Hinton argues that their role in the state was 'only in the most subordinate capacity and without tenure'.⁵³ As regards the activists, Hinton points out that within a few weeks of the Armistice employers were able to get rid of them.⁵⁴ After the War, Union leaders were faced with just too many problems and failed to give leadership.⁵⁵ At the same time the Government prepared for coercion by setting up the Industrial Unrest Committee in February 1919.⁵⁶ Despite the failure of their leaders, workers in general after the War began to develop a working-class consciousness.⁵⁷

The General Strike is dealt with in detail in the text of the thesis. Phillips considers that the events of 1926 were to be, in large measure, a kind of expiation for 1921.⁵⁸ Laybourn stresses the effect of the return to the gold standard forcing reduced

49 H. Pollitt: *Serving My Time* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1941, reprint of 1920 work) p.88

50 Edited Cowper, Elmsley, Marwick, Purdue and Englander: *World War I and its Consequences* (Open University Press, 1990) p.80

51 B. Waites: *A Class Society at War. England 1914-1918* (Berg, Leamington Spa, 1987) p.141

52 A. Reid: *World War I and the Working Class in Britain* in Ed. A. Marwick: *Total War and Social Change* (Macmillan, London, 1988) p.21

53 Hinton *op cit* p.54

54 *Ibid* p.271

55 Gleason *op cit* pp.253-254

56 K. Burgess: *The Challenge of Labour* (Croom Helm, London, 1980) p.188

57 Benson *op cit* p.163

58 G.A. Phillips: *The General Strike* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976) p.13

costs and wages.⁵⁹ Haigh and others quote a feeling at the time that 'the hand of the radical left' was determined to overthrow Society.⁶⁰ J.H. Thomas was devious. He said it was not revolution but an economic dispute.⁶¹ His remark: 'God help us if the Government does not win'⁶² contrasts poignantly with the entry by railwaymen in the Oxford Railway Bulletin: 'God help us if we lose'.⁶³ Of the rank and file Taylor writes:

'They were loyal to their union and to their leaders as they had been loyal during the war to their country and their generals. They went once more into the trenches without enthusiasm and with little hope'.⁶⁴

THE RISE OF THE LABOUR PARTY

The development of Trade Unions is also linked with the decline of Liberalism and the growth of the Labour Party. Initially, Trade Union leaders and workers' MPs like Burt inclined to a Lib-Lab and 'Labourist' approach. This combined intransigent working-class(es) consciousness with a voluntary acceptance of the political and cultural domination of the middle and upper classes. Caroline Benn's biography of Keir Hardie⁶⁵ shows how he started as an idealist but became progressively disenchanted. As far as the North East was concerned, for much of the period: 'The Labour Party in the North East became a bastion of right wing Labourism'.⁶⁶ Bill Purdue⁶⁷ and Maureen Callcott⁶⁸ have both analysed the long-lasting nature of Liberalism in the North East. From the beginning of the ILP, this party was important in some unions and constituencies in the North East and this aspect is considered in the thesis. Howell has stated that ILP sympathisers did secure major influence in the ASRS but 'their legacy

⁵⁹ K. Laybourn: *The General Strike 1926* (Huddersfield Poly, 1990) p.5

⁶⁰ Haigh and others: *The Guardian Book of the General Strike* (Wildwood House, 1988) p.xix

⁶¹ *Ibid* p.32

⁶² Postgate and others: *A Workers' History of the Great Strike* (The Plebs League, London, 1927) p.39

⁶³ *Ibid* p.19

⁶⁴ A.J.P. Taylor: *English History 1914-1945* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1988 reprint) p.245

⁶⁵ C. Benn: *Keir Hardie* (Hutchinson, London, 1992)

⁶⁶ B.E. Naylor: Ramsay MacDonald and Seaham Labour Politics in Bulletin of North East Group for the Study of Labour History, 1981

⁶⁷ A.W. Purdue in thesis: *Parliamentary Elections in North East England 1900-1906: The Advent of Labour* (M.Litt., Newcastle, 1974) and other publications (see Bibliography)

⁶⁸ M. Callcott: The Nature and Extent of Political Change in the Inter-War Years: The Example of County Durham in Northern History, 1980

was profoundly ambiguous'⁶⁹ and continued alongside a more Lib-Lab union policy for some years despite ILP triumphs in the seconding by Wardle of Hardie's amendment defining the independence of the LRC, Wardle's role as Editor of the Railway Review, and the affiliation of the ASRS to the LRC. Tanner has commented on the fragmentary nature of the rise of the Labour Party including in the North East where the Liberal Party held up for some time.⁷⁰ Another disputed matter, as regards timing is the extent to which social class became a dominant factor in the decline of Liberalism and the rise of Labour and this has been argued by Clarke,⁷¹ Cook⁷² and Wald.⁷³ Initially, as we see in the thesis, commentators saw no connection between Socialism and Trade Unions and some politicians thought it unlikely that workmen would change their allegiance to political parties. However, others warned that if they could not get what they wanted they would do so. Opinions also differ on when this 'sea change' occurred. Studies have concentrated on this in relation to miners and their unions rather than to railwaymen who were not so statistically important in most constituencies.

PRIMARY SOURCES: NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

It is now necessary to return to the question of historiography in relation to journals and newspapers which will be quoted in the analyses of elections, strikes and political interactions of strikes. If we turn first to the 'political' journals we should look at those which advocated the ILP and Labour viewpoints. The Labour Leader (1893-1922) was an important ILP journal. The ILP News (1897-1903) was issued by ILP to Branches and contained Branch reports. The Northern Democrat (1906-1912) had the aim of promoting ILP and Socialist ideas in Durham and Northumberland. The Clarion (1891-1932) supported the ILP and the aim of the SDF and ILP working together. The Daily Herald (1911, 1912-1914, 1919-1964) was a daily newspaper supporting Labour and in its early days often backing strikers. Moving further left in the spectrum of

⁶⁹ D. Howell: *British Workers and the ILP 1888-1906* (MUP, 1983) p.69

⁷⁰ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party* (CUP, 1990) passim

⁷¹ P.F. Clarke: *The Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain* in History Vol.57, 1972

⁷² C. Cook: *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain 1922-1929* (Macmillan, 1975)

⁷³ K.D. Wald: *Class and the Vote Before the First World War* in British Journal of Political Science, 1978

Socialist ideas, The Call (1916-1920) was published by the British Socialist Party. The Socialist (1902-1924) was the journal of the Socialist Labour Party. It was De Leonist and supported Industrial Unionism. The Socialist Standard (established 1904) was the official journal of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The Workers Weekly (1923-1927) was the journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Turning to 'industrial' journals, the Herald of Revolt (1910-1914) opposed the social democratic tradition and reformist trade unionism. The Voice of Labour (1907, 1914-1916) was anarcho-syndicalist and advocated industrial unionism. The Industrial Unionist (1908-1909) was the journal of the BAIU and was Syndicalist. The Syndicalist (1912) and the Syndicalist and Amalgamation News (1913-1914) were under the auspices of the ISEL and supported the class war. The Workers Dreadnought (1917-1924) was published by suffragettes but in 1918 became the journal of the Workers and Shop Stewards Committee. During the General Strike of 1926 there was a plethora of publications but an important one was the British Worker which was the official bulletin of the TUC and had several editions including a Northern one. It was revived by the TUC in 1927. After the strike a number of analyses were published⁷⁴ and the fiftieth anniversary and afterwards produced more of these. Most of these were national in scope and only one, apart from a Newcastle University Teaching Pack, specifically concerned the North East.⁷⁵ These books were supplemented by a large number of articles and reminiscences, some of which are quoted in the thesis.

Local elections were reported in local newspapers and often the reporting indicated the political bias of the newspaper. It is not feasible to review each of these and a few are mentioned for the sake of illustration. Some caution is necessary on two points. The first is that some newspapers strayed from their normal political viewpoint and sometimes strayed back again. Second, some of the dates need to be treated with caution. Newspapers in provincial towns changed their titles, merged their titles with others, changed their titles again, etc. and it is not always clear how far the independence of a particular title lasted. With these provisos we look first at Darlington.

⁷⁴ See Bibliography

⁷⁵ A Mason: *The General Strike in the North East* (University of Hull, 1970)

In Darlington, the Darlington and Stockton Times (established 1847) aimed 'to promote the diffusion of liberal principles, but was quoted in a later Press Guide as Independent. The Northern Echo (established 1870) supported the Liberal cause but the North Star (1880-1924) was founded by a number of Conservatives and was later categorised as Constitutionalist. In Jarrow there was the Unionist Jarrow Express (1870-1920), the Liberal Jarrow Guardian (1872-1913) and the Jarrow Labour Herald (1905-1907). Newcastle had the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, the Newcastle Daily Journal and the Newcastle Daily Leader (1885-1903). The Daily Chronicle began as a radical paper, was at odds with the Liberal party but later made peace. The Daily Journal was 'the principal Conservative and Unionist paper for the North of England. The Daily Leader was Liberal as was also the later established North Mail (1901-1922). In Durham the Durham Chronicle (1820-1930) was Liberal and the Durham County Advertiser (established 1814) was Unionist. The Consett Guardian (established 1860) was Liberal and the Seaham Weekly News (established 1860) was Conservative. In Middlesbrough the North Eastern Daily Gazette (1869-1940) was Liberal. In Barnard Castle the Teesdale Mercury (established 1855) was Independent. In Bishop Auckland the Auckland Chronicle was Liberal. In Sunderland the Sunderland Daily Post (established 1876) was Conservative but moved away from the Unionists. The Sunderland Echo (1873-1928) was initially Liberal but departed from Liberal orthodoxy.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In these days of political correctness it is probably necessary to explain why the emphasis is on railwaymen and has not extended to railwaywomen. There are two reasons. The first is that it would greatly have expanded the thesis if women's Trade Unions and related factors had to be analysed. Secondly, for much of the period women trade unionists were not a major factor. A writer in 1892 stated rather pompously and in a non-PC style:

'Although female clerks are very common on the continental railways they do not exist in this country ... in public offices they do not prove equal to the stronger

sex. They stand too much on their dignity, and their duties are gone through with an air of condescension that ill benefits a public servant.'⁷⁶

The First World War was to change this situation and this is considered in the later text of this study.

To touch, however fleetingly, on all of these aspects has meant raising a large number of questions in relation to railwaymen in the North East. It may well be that not all of these questions can be answered definitively but at the end of the analysis we should know more about the nature and motivation of railwaymen in the North East.

⁷⁶ Anon: *Railways and Railwaymen* (Chambers, London, 1892) p.66

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASLEF	Association of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
ASRS	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
BAIU	British Advocates of Industrial Unionism
BSP	British Socialist Party
BWL	British Workers League
C	Conservative
CME	Chief Mechanical Engineer
CWB	Central Wages Board
CWS	Cooperative Wholesale Society
DMA	Durham Miners Association
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EC	Executive Committee/Council
GL	Gladstonian Liberal
GM	General Manager
GRWU	General Railway Workers Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
L	Liberal
Lab.	Labour
LCC	London County Council
Lib./Lab.	Liberal/Labour
LNER	London & North Eastern Railway
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
LRL	Labour Representation League
LU	Liberal Unionist
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain

MP	Member of Parliament
NE	North East(ern)
NER	North Eastern Railway
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NWB	National Wages Board
PRO	Public Record Office
R	Radical
RCA	Railway Clerks Association
RPI	Retail Price Index
Soc.	Socialist
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SLP	Socialist (Scottish) Labour Party
TDA	Trade Disputes Act
TUC	Trades Union Congress (Council)
UPSS	United Pointsmen's and Signalmen's Friendly Society

CHAPTER 1. RAILWAYMEN AND THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND

As early as 1873 Wright commented on the lack of homogeneity of the working class. He defined the sector as:

'... broadly meaning the artisan and manual labouring classes, excluding even the clerks and shopmen who, although no better paid, and in some cases less advantageously situated than the artisan, are yet ranked apart from and above the latter class, on the ground that they follow genteel occupations'¹

As regards the nature of that class, Wright concluded:

'The working classes really are, as we hope we have shown, divided and subdivided; and not only that but divided into antagonistic sections. They are as house divided against itself ...'²

Following on from this analysis, Clegg and his collaborators have quoted Booth's analysis that there was a six-fold division of the working class with the majority of workers leading comfortable lives.³ Hobsbawm first introduced in 1954 the concept of the 'labour aristocracy'. These were the 10% of workers with high and stable earnings organised into trade unions.⁴ This labour elite:

'... stayed almost as conformist and establishment-minded as their Tory counterparts. Together they stood, the great bulwark against revolution of any kind.'⁵

Hobsbawm stated that the railways had a medium percentage of these 'aristocrats' among whom were the engine drivers. But Hobsbawm's thesis has been challenged by other historians. Gray said that not all skilled workers were 'labour aristocrats' and later research suggested that they were less privileged and secure and that the next stratum was better off so that the band was broader. Also, there were conflicts in political behaviour between workplaces and localities rather than grades of work force.⁶

¹ T. Wright: *Our New Masters* (Strahan, 1873), p.4

² *Ibid* p.25

³ Clegg, Fox and Thompson: *A History of British Trade Unions* Vol.1 (Oxford, 1964), pp.36-37

⁴ E.J. Hobsbawm: *Labouring Men* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), pp.275 et seq

⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm: *Worlds of Labour* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1984), p.244

⁶ A. Reid: *Intelligent Artisans and Aristocrats of Labour*, the essays of Thomas Wright in J.M. Winter: *The Working Class in Modern British History* (CUP, 1983), pp.171-172

Harrison has also suggested that in late Victorian times Hobsbawm's labour aristocracy was shattered by accelerated mechanisation, larger firms, deeper cyclical fluctuations, declining major staple industries and reduced differentials in pay.⁷ As regards voting we will see later in this study problems caused by registration procedures but there is also the point that voting posed practical problems for workingmen who would have to vote in the last half-hour of the evening.⁸

Later in this thesis we will be dealing with the attachment of working men to the Liberal cause but one aspect which has been paid less attention is the role of Conservative workingmen. A Conservative pamphlet of 1907 addressed to them stated: 'Remember that most of the Radical-Socialists are Enemies of the Empire and of British Rule overseas.'⁹

Henry Pelling has estimated that about 30% of the urban working class voted Conservative, 10% did so principally because of the strength of their ties with the middle-class, 10% because of personal or family commitments which left the remaining 10% as 'pragmatists'.¹⁰

Pugh has analysed strong pockets of Primrose League members in the North East at Wynyard, Seaham Harbour, Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool, Newcastle, South Shields, Consett and Jarrow.¹¹

The second problem facing us when we turn to the sector of railwaymen is lack of primary sources in relation to the rank and file. The main histories have been of companies and entities, so that we have had history written from the board-room.¹² It is true that we have had several histories of railway unions but in Victorian times the trade unionist was not a typical working man.¹³ The workers remain almost entirely anonymous and very few ordinary railwaymen have been articulate. There have been some exceptions. R. S. Joby, the son of a railway worker, wrote a sympathetic account

⁷ B. Harrison: *Peacable Kingdom* (Clarendon Press, 1982), p.200

⁸ M. Pugh: *The Making of Modern British Politics* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1982), pp.73-75

⁹ R. McKenzie and A. Silver: *Angels in Marble* (Heinemann, London, 1968), p.62

¹⁰ H. Pelling: *Working Class Conservatives* in *Historical Journal* XIII, (1970), P.34

¹¹ See M. Pugh: *The Tories and the People 1880-1913* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1985)

¹² F. McKenna: *The Railway Workers* (Faber & Faber, London, 1980), pp.15-16

¹³ M. Pugh: *The Making of ...* pp.73-75

of the more recent period and of qualities of certain grades.¹⁴ Some employees have written accounts of their jobs and background factors.¹⁵

Of the accounts of groups of workers there are studies by Kingsford, Kenney and McKenna¹⁶ but, on a geographical basis, the only study of which I am aware is that of Crewe.¹⁷

Some writers have seen a degree of homogeneity in the structure of the sector of work on the railways. Kenney wrote in 1913 'Railway work is unique and so specialised that the men engaged in it form a type distinct even among the working classes' and he considered them to be '... one of the most conscientious classes in the community'.¹⁸ McKenna wrote:

'Thus was created a new form of industrial anthropology, a tribalistic grouping of men based on an elaborate division of labour, a hierarchy of groups and a ritual adherence to territory.'

Railway work was often kept in the family and housing, as we shall see later, was often provided and was 'tied'. The 'tribe' even had their own language.¹⁹ The 'tribe' was also subject to detailed guidance and strict discipline. As McKenna put it 'The railwaymen were from the beginning ruled by instructions as detailed as those of the Koran'.²⁰ But, within the structure there were divisions. Pollins has commented that railwaymen thought first of their own grade.²¹ The number of railway employees grew rapidly from 47,218 in 1847 to 367,793 in 1884. These employees were divided into a large number of grades. The main pattern of the grades structure was established by 1850 and was extended from 1850-1870 at which time there were nearly one hundred basic grades. In 1884 the grades in which most people were employed were those of labourer (19.2%), artificers²² (15.2%), porters (12.2%) and clerks (9.2%). A

¹⁴ R.S. Joby: *The Railwaymen* (David & Charles, 1984)

¹⁵ E.g. Reynolds: *Engine Driving Life* (1880); Williams: *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915); Hewson: *Shed Master to Railway Inspector*; Tatlow: *Fifty Years of Railway Life* (1920)

¹⁶ See titles in Bibliography

¹⁷ B. Reed: *Crewe Loco Works and Its Men*

¹⁸ R. Kenney: *Men and Rails* (Fisher & Unwin, London 1913), pp.4-5

¹⁹ F. McKenna *op cit* pp.41-50 and 235-241

²⁰ *Ibid* p.31

²¹ H. Pollins: *Britain's Railways: An Industrial History* (David & Charles, 1971), pp.82 ff

²² Defined in Dictionary as craftsman

breakdown by status showed unskilled (44.7%), artificers (15.2%), skilled (12.3%) and clerical (10.3%).²³ Managerial and supervisory grades accounted for 0.2% and 3.5% respectively.²⁴

The broad groups included a bewildering variety of grades each with their own status. The man in one of the higher grades was regarded as socially superior to the lower grade man. A goods porter was regarded as an inferior animal by a shunter, a shunter was tolerated by a goods guard and a passenger guard was above a goods guard.²⁵ Each main category of staff had numerous sub-divisions each with different pay rates, e.g. in the case of porters there were passenger porters, goods porters, junior porters, parcel porters, lamp porters, coal porters, signal porters, office porters and booking porters. A goods porter was paid higher than a passenger porter and a parcels porter higher than a goods porter. Lamp and junior porters were paid less but a booking porter was paid as a clerk. In the early 1870s average rates paid varied from 10s. 3d. for lad porters to 24s. 3d. for booking porters.²⁶

Guards were divided into passenger guards (head and under), goods guards, mineral guards, brakemen and parcel guards. Rates varied from 21s. 0d. to 28s. 8d.²⁷

The grade of shunter did not appear until 1875. It was divided into passenger and goods shunters and the average rate paid was between 19s. 0d. and 23s.0d.

Turning to the permanent way men, there were three main grades of gangers, platelayers and labourers with sub-inspectors and inspectors above them. The average daily rate varied from 2s. 10d. to 3s. 8d. for the basic grades.²⁸

At the top of the 'labour aristocracy' were drivers paid at an average rate of 6s. 6d. per day while firemen were paid at 3s. 7d. per day.²⁹

²³ P.W. Kingsford: *Victorian Railwaymen* (Cass, London, 1970), p.2

²⁴ *Ibid* p.3

²⁵ Kenney: *Men and Rails* pp.149-150

²⁶ Kingsford *op cit* pp.89-91

²⁷ *Ibid* pp.92-93

²⁸ *Ibid* pp.99-100

²⁹ *Ibid* p.97-98

Turning to the clerical grades these were divided into clerks in charge, head office clerks, booking clerks, goods clerks and relief clerks. The average pay ranged from £65 5s. to £100 per annum. In comparison the average pay for a stationmaster was £74 8s.³⁰ However, some stationmasters and clerks could trade on their own account.³¹ The above analysis gives a simplified account of the grading structure. An analysis of the average wage rates of the London Brighton and South Coast railway in 1871 lists other grades defined as timekeeper, ticket examiner, watchman, carriage searcher, waiting room attendant, gas man, messenger, horse keeper, steam crane driver, hay checker, receiver, warehouseman, chaff cutter, billposter, checker, haulageman, lift bridge man, loader, coal tipper, carman, sheeter, packer, stableman, truck horse driver, luggage labourer, scavenger, coupler, carriage cleaner, scotcher,³² van setter, number taker, shedman, cokeman, firelighter, ticket printer and detective. The highest rate of pay went to the foreman of the locomotive department at 89s. 5d., engine drivers got 39s. 0d., van guards got 8s. 2d. and the train signal clerk 7s. 8d.³³

Such rates compare with the average hypothetical industrial operative of 24s. 2d. per week and agricultural worker at 14s. 6d.³⁴ Basic rates of pay could be increased by overtime pay, gratuities, bonuses, allowances (e.g. lodging), clothing or uniform allowances and housing. Hours of work were very long and in 1879 on the GWR over 40% of certain grades worked 11½ and 12 hours per day.³⁵ Kenney states that on 31st December 1901 109,280 men were on duty for 13 hours.³⁶ In January 1907 cases were reported of men working from 18-24 hours continuous duty.³⁷

³⁰ *Ibid* pp.96-97

³¹ *Ibid* p.109

³² A review of grade structure in 1920 gave two scotchers, one working with capstan-men and one with horse-shunters

³³ Kingsford *op cit* pp.100-102

³⁴ *Ibid* p.102

³⁵ *Ibid* p.118

³⁶ Kenney *op cit* p.39

³⁷ *Ibid* p.41

Of porters, shunters and labourers, the Webbs pointed out that they could be had in any number at any price.³⁸ Within the grade, and between the grades, in the structure there were complex rules for advancement and promotion.³⁹

Grading, rates of pay and promotion prospects for most of the period under study varied from railway to railway. In addition to the variety of grades listed earlier, a scrutiny of NER claims and settlements produces other grades such as capstan-men, traversers, rulleymen,⁴⁰ loftmen, fodder-choppers, benchmen, dockgate men, berthing masters, examiners and greasers and carriage washers. If shopmen are also included the position is even more complex. In 1920 in 600 workshops there were 1500 rates of pay which the NUR wanted to reduce to 8.⁴¹

There is a note of caution to be sounded. In the above analysis, and elsewhere in this study, we quote average rates of pay and earnings. When looking at the 'working class', the 'labouring poor', the 'proletariat' or any sector of these it is important to appreciate that the averages and the categories 'comprised a vast range of skill and earnings and between the various elements of which there was often little common attitude and purpose'.⁴²

If, as is often the case, averages have to be used this means that within the average some workers experience unprecedented standards of comfort while others endure unparalleled poverty.⁴³ As we have commented earlier, within the context of the working class there was the concept of a 'labour aristocracy' but one historian of the working class has said that this distinction did not coincide with reasons for non-revolutionary activity⁴⁴ and the whole concept of the labour aristocracy has been challenged by some writers.

Another factor in behaviour concerned the type and background of the worker and McKenna, in his study of the Victorian railway worker, has pointed out that

³⁸ Quoted in Clegg and others *op cit* p.32

³⁹ Kingsford *op cit* pp.128-147

⁴⁰ McKenna points out that in Newcastle horse-drawn vans were known as 'rulleys'. They were a huge wooden cart with shod wheels. Hence 'rulleymen'

⁴¹ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1963), pp.425-427

⁴² J. Burnett: *A History of the Cost of Living* (Penguin, Pelican, 1969), p.247

⁴³ *Ibid* p.195

⁴⁴ J. Benson: *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939* (Longman, London, 1989), p.153

railwaymen were often drawn from literate respectable and sober families.⁴⁵ They were also recruited from backgrounds which made the harsh discipline more acceptable. The skilled men, the footplate crews, were in general well-looked after by the companies and had little in common with other employees.⁴⁶

The wage rates also need to be related to the cost of living at the time. This again is not always easy to compute for a particular sector. Looking at these averages Ensor concluded that between 1860 and 1900 the mass of British workers substantially improved their economic position as a result of higher wages brought about by 'prosperity strikes'.⁴⁷ Hunt, in his study of labour history, calculates that between 1850 and 1900 there was a likely increase in real wages of between 70% and 80% but, so far as railwaymen are concerned, between 1896 and 1914 the wages of railwaymen fell.⁴⁸ In general, however, within the averages, railway staff were more fortunate than some others because railways were 'the only section of the industry to provide their workers with anything approaching a reasonable standard of living' consisting of salaries, a secure job and fringe benefits.⁴⁹ Prices were also relevant. Before 1893 the situation had been helped by a twenty year period of falling prices which had led to prices almost returning to their level of a century ago.⁵⁰

It is also necessary to bear in mind that household income could be increased by working wives and children. However, unlike in some other parts of the country, women in the North East did not normally work outside the home.⁵¹

Because the analysis refers to data before the beginning of our study period it is necessary to supplement it, and compare it, with information for later years. In 1907 the ASRS made their own estimate of wages being paid. It found that 100,930

⁴⁵ *Ibid* p.22 quoting F. McKenna

⁴⁶ Pollins: *Britain's Railways* p.78

⁴⁷ R.C.K. Ensor: *England 1870-1914* (OUP, 1988), pp.274-275

⁴⁸ E.H. Hunt: *Labour History 1815-1914* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), pp.73-76

⁴⁹ Benson *op cit* p.41

⁵⁰ Burnett *op cit* p.198

⁵¹ D. Clark: *We Do Not Want the Earth* (Berwick Press, 1992), p.36

or 38.8% of railwaymen were working for 20s. or less⁵² and 128,810 or 49.8% were working for between 21s. and 30s.

The average weekly rate for cleaners was 14s. 8d., for drivers 38s. 10d., passenger guards 26s. 1d., signalmen 23s. 11d. and platelayers 19s. 4d.⁵³ Although these figures were queried at the time they were confirmed some years later by a Board of Trade survey which covered 400,000 railway workers. This gave the average adult rate as 24s. 6d. with earnings at 26s. 8d. Average actual earnings of certain grades were:

Drivers	45s. 11d.
Goods guards	31s. 2d.
Passenger guards	29s. 3d.
Signalmen	27s. 6d.
Firemen	27s. 5d.
Shunters	25s. 7d.
Porters (goods)	21s. 10d.
Labourers	21s. 8d.
Platelayers	21s. 2d.
Porters (coaching and traffic)	19s. 2d.

It also quoted 25.9% earning under 20s. 0d. and 80.7% earning under 30s. The average weekly salary of clerks was 30s. 0d.⁵⁴

Turning to the North Eastern Railway, the average earnings of workers at North Road, Darlington were as follows:

1880	22s. 5d.
1885	22s. 1d.
1890	23s. 6d.
1895	22s. 8d. ⁵⁵

⁵² To compare the hardship of this income in another area see M.P. Reeves: *Round About a Pound a Week* (Virago edn. 1979)

⁵³ Quoted in Kenney *op cit* pp.49-55

⁵⁴ *Ibid* pp.70-75

⁵⁵ R.J. Irving: *The North Eastern Railway Company 1870-1914: An Economic History* (Leicester University Press, 1976) p.111

Information is also available for a later period and in 1911 average earnings were:

Drivers	47s. 4½d.
Firemen	30s. 11¼d.
Cleaners	15s. 7¼d.
Shed labourers	22s. 5¼d.
Signalmen (passenger)	29s. 9¼d.
Signalmen (goods)	27s. 8½d.
Guards (passenger)	31s. 10d.
Guards (goods)	34s. 7½d.
Shunters (passenger)	29s 8½d.
Platelayers	25s. 8d.
Gangers	24s. 11¼d. ⁵⁶

It is interesting to note that at nearby Middlesbrough the wages of ironworkers ranged from 18s. to 80s. per week. Of a total of 1270 workers 13.3% received less than 20s. per week and 31.3% received up to 30s. per week.⁵⁷

Turning to the position in 1914, staff at Darlington workshops in 1914 averaged 37s. 6d. compared with 19s. 0d. in 1863.⁵⁸

COHESION OR DIVERSITY?

There was, therefore, a great diversity of grades and pay. The lowest-paid group of clerks in the country were railway clerks of whom in 1909 only 10% earned above the income tax minimum.⁵⁹ Railway clerks had a fairly secure tenure of office but they did not maintain a very high material status.⁶⁰ Initially unionisation of railway clerks was relatively low at 7% in 1904 but by 1918 the figure had risen to 61%.⁶¹ As Price has pointed out, there were competing tensions and contradictions in railway work. A highly developed sense of independence was combined with a reliance upon

⁵⁶ *Ibid* p.304

⁵⁷ Lady Bell: *At the Works* (Nelson, 1911 edn. of 1907 work) p.81

⁵⁸ E.J. Larkin and J.G. Larkin: *The Railway Workshops of Britain 1823-1986* (MacMillan, 1988) p.81

⁵⁹ G. Crossick: *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (Croom Helm, London, 1977) pp.18-21

⁶⁰ D. Lockwood: *The Black-coated Worker* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1958), p.23

⁶¹ *Ibid* p.149

paternalism and paternal bargaining. But, towards the end of the century, there were factors at work which further increased the sectionalism and lack of cohesion. The grades mainly affected by changes were signalmen, guards and drivers and one key change was the introduction of block signalling. From the 1890s signalmen assumed a leading role in the trade union movement. With increased operating costs, companies sought to reduce labour costs by changing the pattern of distinctions, duties and rewards. One example of this was the action of the NER in 1900 which wanted a more efficient use of brakevans. This action went against a long-standing tradition of pride in individual vans which were carefully maintained. In the NER and other Companies, as we will see in more detail later, new practices, both in administration and operating, created a different management structure and method of management. Management now relied much more on oral communication and pragmatic day-to-day control.⁶²

However, on the North Eastern Railway there was less departmental exclusiveness as there was co-operation between locomen and goods guards. The situation in the North East was also influenced by the fact that the Company had a monopoly over its area, the tradition of trade unionism among the miners and the experience of industrialists on the NER Board of handling industrial relations problems.

The sectionalism was also important in relation to politics. Tanner has recorded that in Crewe, a railway town, careful campaigning by railwaymen in railwaymen's interests came up against the fact that workers in the repair yards did not have the same interests as those who worked on the roads. The former were more fragmented and dependent on a single company.⁶³ Thompson, in his study of the Edwardians, quotes Gray as saying:

'Men on the railways, the goods side and drivers and firemen not brought into touch with the public eye are Radicals but passenger guards and porters who are also underpaid but with funds augmented by tips and patronage of the rich are Conservatives.'⁶⁴

⁶² R. Price: *Labour in British Society* (Croom Helm, London, 1986) pp.120-125

⁶³ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party* (CUP, 1990) p.303

⁶⁴ P. Thompson: *The Edwardians* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1976) p.245

In addition to the problems caused by the number of grades and scattered employment, the basis of control by the companies also militated against the growth of unionism. The first aspect of this was the strict discipline imposed. As early as 1833 there were comprehensive rules and regulations to be observed by the workmen in the employ of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company. Fines and dismissals were a continuing basis of control. Activity outside work was also the subject of rules and an extract from the Taff Vale Railway Company Rule Book read:

'It is urgently requested that every person, whether on or off duty, shall conduct himself in a steady, sober and creditable manner and that on Sundays or on other holy days, when he is not required on duty, that he will attend a place of worship as it will be the means of promotion when vacancies occur.'⁶⁵

Publicity was given to misconduct and a London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Circular to the line in 1872 quotes over fifty recent cases of fines, cautions, suspensions and dismissals.⁶⁶

On the positive side emphasis was laid on good behaviour and loyalty. Gratuities were paid on both a general and a particular basis.⁶⁷ This merges in with the general aspect of paternalism. For the first fifty years or so, particularly in the North East, the attitude of the employer was that of benevolent paternalism.

Friendly Society and Railway Sickness schemes and pension schemes were established. Schools and churches were funded and reading rooms supported. Housing was another factor as many railway companies provided houses for some of their staff either as part of the wage or for rent. On the London Brighton and South Coast Railway in 1871 10.3% were in company houses and the average proportion of rent to wages was 16%.⁶⁸ It was reckoned that before the First World War some 250,000 men, women and children and lodgers were housed.⁶⁹ The type of housing varied. Crossing-keepers on the Thetford and Wotton railway were provided with simple clay-lump cottages built at a cost of £150 each. On the Stockton and Darlington Railway there were clear

⁶⁵ Quoted in J. Aye: *Humour on the Rail* (Universal Press, London, 1931) p.107

⁶⁶ Kingsford *op cit* pp.25-28

⁶⁷ *Ibid* p.29

⁶⁸ *Ibid* pp.126-127

⁶⁹ Joby *op cit* p.31

specifications laid down, e.g. at Brusselton there had to be 'Fire plate. Oven 14 ins. sq. and Pot with a Cast Iron Front in the kitchen. Stove fire place in the upper room 14 inches ...'⁷⁰ The houses were also meant to facilitate healthy living - Edward Pease wrote in a footnote to one entry in his Diary that it was fortunate that homes in Cleveland and South Durham were built facing North so that cholera and smallpox would be avoided.⁷¹ As they had to live near the works, conditions were crowded and the houses were often in back to back streets which survived, with some modernisation, to the present time. Many houses probably did not differ from those provided in Middlesbrough for iron workers as described by Lady Bell in 1907:

'Most of the houses consist of four rooms: two rooms on the ground floor, one of them a kitchen and living room which in many of them opens straight from the street, and in some has a tiny lobby with another door inside it and another room behind, sometimes used as a bedroom, sometimes shut up as a parlour. A little steep dark staircase goes up from the kitchen to the next floor where there are two more rooms.'⁷²

Tyneside also had its distinctive form of housing in the shape of 'Tyneside flats' where the front doors were side by side with the upper flat having back outside steps down to the backyard.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND AND THE NER

The history of the industrial North East in the nineteenth century was intimately bound up with the development of the railway network. Looking back at the area as it was then from the euphoria of the Stephenson Centenary celebrations in 1881, Joseph Cowen MP referred to: 'Heathclad hills, pestilential marshes, unprofitable fells, that before the era of the railways were as desolate as deserts, are now thronged with busy life'.⁷³

Some communities, like Shildon, owed their existence to the railways and their prosperity depended on them. Railway work could cause profound changes in population as is shown in the table below:

⁷⁰ PRO RAIL 667/273

⁷¹ Ed. Sir A.E. Pease: *Diaries of E. Pease* (Headley Brothers, 1907) p.209

⁷² Lady Bell *op cit* p.24

⁷³ Ed. W. Duncan: *The Stephenson Centenary 1881* (Graham, Newcastle, 1975) p.52

YEAR	SHILDON ⁷⁴	EAST THICKLEY ⁷⁴	MIDDLESBROUGH ⁷⁵
1801	101	13	-
1811	124	13	-
1821	115	11	-
1831	867	35	154
1841	2631	452	5463
1851	2144	622	-
1861	2947	1142	18892
1871	5574	1563	39284
1881	6946	1758	55288
1891	7870	1667	75516
1901	9011	2784	-

At the centenary celebrations Mr. Cowen further enthused: 'We have achieved greater material success within the last half century than was achieved in ten centuries previously - steam is our true elemental spirit.'⁷⁶

At a later celebration in 1975, Reynolds in his foreword to *Cavalcade Reflections* took a similar view commenting:

'The horizons of the masses, confined in the past to journeys by foot or horse, became almost limitless and immense benefits and impetus resulted for the well-being and progress of man-kind.'⁷⁷

There is no doubt that the railways brought about a revolution in the economics of transport of both humans and goods. As regards goods, the cost of a fraction of a penny per mile contrasted very favourably with other means of transport. Commerce was extended, harbours and docks were improved and utilised more efficiently, collieries could be exploited more easily, iron and glass manufacturers benefited and shipbuilding was stimulated. As the railways became more extensive, and as cheap fares were made available, labour became more mobile and more remote communities were opened up. Employment prospects were also greatly changed.

Cowen's comments mirror the fact that in the late nineteenth century, the North East was at the height of its prosperity and industrial importance. In 1880 there

⁷⁴ *Victoria County History of Durham* Vol.2 (Constable, 1907) p.268

⁷⁵ *Diaries of Edward Pease*, Appendix 8

⁷⁶ *Duncan op cit* p.52

⁷⁷ BR: *Cavalcade Reflections* (BR York, 1975), p.3

was a rapid revival of trade. Orders for pig iron were pouring into the district and the Eston works could scarcely keep pace with the demand for steel rails. The production of steel rails was growing and Bessemer converters were put in at the Albert Hill Works Darlington and at South Stockton.⁷⁸ However, in 1884 a recession set in.

So far we have made several references to 'the North East'. As this is not a precisely defined area we need to state the scope of 'North East' for the purpose of this study. In recent times definition has posed less of a problem for researchers because there have been defined Regional Planning Areas, DTI Industrial Policy Areas, Regional Directorates of Government Departments, etc. Before this in the 1930s there were defined North East 'Depressed' and 'Special Areas'. However, in the period covered by this study delineation of the area has to be done on a subjective and pragmatic basis. As we are concerned with railwaymen it would be possible to select the area covered by the regional railway but the NER extended well beyond the area of this study (see Appendix 1) and it later developed into the even more extensive London and North Eastern Railway. An alternative would be to take two or three Counties, e.g. Durham, Northumberland and Cumberland but this would be too extensive and also may not reflect sufficiently the influence of staff in workshops and depots and of key trade union branches. There is also the problem that County boundaries have changed in recent years and there is now a proposal for further change.

Faced with this difficulty, some researchers have not confined themselves to a rigidly-defined area but have selected key centres. The choice which I have made is to take the area in which the railway developed initially and in which there were strong railway traditions. This has meant selecting Durham, a small part of Northumberland adjoining Durham and Middlesbrough. This includes the centres of gravity of railway units and locations involved in industrial action and representations. When dealing with political influences I have broadly followed the relevant post-1885 and post-1918 reorganisations of constituencies. Prior to the 1918 Election the constituencies concerned are:

⁷⁸ W.W. Tomlinson's *North Eastern Railway* (David & Charles, 1987 edn) *op cit* p.753

Barnard Castle
Bishop Auckland
Chester-le-Street
Houghton-le-Spring
Jarrow
Durham Mid
Durham NW
Durham SE
Darlington
Durham City
Gateshead
Hartlepoons
South Shields
Stockton
Sunderland (2)
Middlesbrough
Newcastle (2)
Tynemouth

Following the electoral changes in 1918 Newcastle was divided into four constituencies and Middlesbrough into two. Some of the constituencies were renamed and in addition there were boundary changes. The new constituencies were:

Blaydon
Consett
Seaham
Sedgefield
Spennymoor

These are shown in the maps at Appendix 2 and Appendix 4.

In terms of railway centres of influence there are several such. Gateshead in 1854 became the centre for loco building and maintenance. From 1896 there was a sharp increase in employment and by 1909 the NER had become the most powerful

employer of labour in the town.⁷⁹ Darlington had been a main centre since shops were established there in 1844. In 1863 it took on work from Shildon and in the years 1878-1886 it further expanded. In 1910 this was strengthened when all new construction was transferred to Darlington. At North Road Workshops the number of staff was as follows:

1880	989
1885	1318
1890	1399
1895	1350
1911	2318 ⁸⁰

Looking at Darlington as a whole, Simmons states that of the 56000 population some 3500 men were employed on the railways.⁸¹ Shildon, the cradle of the railways, had a large wagon works. In 1896 496 were employed there and in 1902 988. At Gateshead in 1896 349 were employed in carriage and wagon areas and at Heaton in 1902 300 were employed.⁸² It is necessary to get in proportion the numbers of railwaymen employed as a percentage of total employment. In the case of shipbuilding, engineering and metals the percentage was in 1911 15.4% in Tynemouth, 20.6% in Newcastle, 29.2% in West Hartlepoons and 40.3% in Stockton on Tees.⁸³ In the same year mining accounted for 30% of total employment in County Durham.⁸⁴ In comparison with these, railway employment was 2.4% in Newcastle, 3.0% in Durham, 5.2% in West Hartlepool, 5.8% in Gateshead and 6.5% in Darlington.⁸⁵

ROLE OF THE NER

Within the North East the NER had a monopoly position. It was formed in 1854 from the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway, the York and North Midland

⁷⁹ J. Simmons: *The Railway in Town and Country 1830-1914* (David & Charles, 1985) pp.180-181

⁸⁰ R.J. Irving *op cit*, p.111

⁸¹ Simmons *op cit* pp.181-182

⁸² Irving *op cit* p.112

⁸³ D.J. Rowe: *Occupations in Northumberland and Durham 1851-1911* in *Northern History* VIII, 1973, p.127

⁸⁴ N. McCord: *North East England* (Batsford Academic, 1979) pp.111-117

⁸⁵ D.J. Rowe *op cit* pp.127 et seq

Railway and the Leeds Northern Railway but it subsequently acquired further lines and, altogether, 54 railway companies and four dock companies were merged in the NER.⁸⁶ Despite its monopoly position this further growth was easily achieved. Committees to which the NER had to make its case were basically concerned with ensuring that acquisitions would add to the general good and regional resources and they did not see their role as involving the promotion of competition.⁸⁷ The authorised capital of the Company grew from £23 millions in 1854 to £87 millions in 1904 and the revenue from £1,600,000 to £9,300,000.⁸⁸

By 1890, however, the rate of take-over of Companies had slowed down and after 1890 only four railway companies and one Dock company were taken over. As the table below shows, revenues rose over the period 1883-1901 but so did working expenses as a percentage of gross revenue and dividends were variable.

YEAR 31 DEC	CAPITAL EXPENDITURE	GROSS REVENUE	WORKING EXPENDITURE % GROSS REV	DIVIDENDS PAID ON ORDINARY STOCKS
1885	59625486	6131051	53.77	6
1890	62034019	7280951	55.64	7¼
1895	67887797	7315599	57.7	5 ⁵ / ₈
1900	72809837	9214017	62.73	6 ³ / ₈ ⁸⁹

The area covered by the NER was dominated by heavy industries of manufacturing, coalmining, shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Within the area the ports of Hull and West Hartlepool acted as service ports for the West Riding. The industries were not only subject, particularly in the case of coalmining, to industrial action and disputes, but also to the fluctuations of the trade cycle. The great industrial age of the century began in the 1850s and lasted some forty years with a rising tempo of expansion in iron, steel and related industries.⁹⁰ The years 1885-1886 were years of

⁸⁶ Tomlinson *op cit* pp.778-779

⁸⁷ D. Brock: *Railway Consolidation and Competition in NE England* in *Journal of Transport History* 5 p.5

⁸⁸ Tomlinson *op cit* p.759

⁸⁹ Extracted from Tomlinson *op cit* Appendix D p.777. Column 2 is cumulative

⁹⁰ J.W. House: *North East England: Population Movements and the Landscape Since the Early 19th Century* (University of Durham Research Series No.1, 1954) p.14

recession and the upswing came in 1887 with prosperity in shipbuilding and the coal trade. In the period 1881-1911 the most rapid rate of expansion on the Tyne and Tees led to the major towns becoming industrially specialised in iron and steel, shipbuilding and engineering.⁹¹ By about 1890 Consett produced some 175,000 tons of steel annually with ship plates remaining a major interest. By 1881 Teesside had 27 smelting plants operating 99 blast furnaces. By the 1880s the creation of the Teesside iron industry had sparked off not only shipbuilding and marine engineering but also bridge-building, metal-pipe and tube making and manufacture of large quantities of railway rolling stock and other equipment. There were major ancillary businesses and a fleet of ships. In 1889 Wear shipyards produced 217,000 tons of shipping and in the same year Smith's Dock Company became one of the largest ship-repairing works in the world.⁹² By 1911 the North East employed at least 50,000 men in shipbuilding which was almost half of the national total. In 1891 United Alkali Company, the forerunner of ICI, was founded. In 1909 North Shields was a major port for fishing with 76 steam trawlers. The most rapid growth in coal shipments from the North East also came in the years 1879-1908.⁹³ In 1893-1894 ninety warships were launched on the Tyne and this activity, accompanied by energetic marketing, was the nearest thing to a white-hot technological revolution which this region had.⁹⁴

There was also an increase in passenger traffic on the railways. The early and mid-nineties were a period of depression with the only areas of growth in passenger and sea-coal traffic.⁹⁵ In 1894 a coal strike in Scotland led to increased demands for coal from the North East.⁹⁶ By the end of the century the major tasks facing the NER included the extension of Middlesbrough Docks, the Hartlepoons extension, the Joint Dock in Hull and Barnsley, a second bridge across the Tyne, the Durham Coast Line from Hartlepoons to Seaham, the York HQ and the purchase of the Hull and Netherlands

⁹¹ House *ibid* p.14

⁹² N. McCord: *North Eastern England* pp.120-128

⁹³ *Ibid* pp.111-117, 141, 149

⁹⁴ *Ibid* pp.76-77

⁹⁵ Irving *op cit* pp.34-43

⁹⁶ Tomlinson *op cit* p.756

marine business.⁹⁷ In commercial management terms they faced growing expenditure, competition from electric tramways and reorganisation of the traffic department.

To Viscount Grey of Fallodon the NER seemed well poised to tackle these problems:

'The Railway was a great separate organisation playing a great part and spending large capital in the development of the prosperous industrial area of the North East of England from the Humber to the Tweed, on which our whole interest and attention were concentrated.'⁹⁸

However, the approach of the NER Board, except as regards union recognition, had been traditionally cautious. The Directors had established a routine of meeting twice a year in London and frequently in York and Newcastle. Detailed work was undertaken by Committees dealing with Finance, Traffic, Ways and Works, Locomotives and Stores. The Board Agenda was settled on Thursday afternoons and the Board met on Friday morning.⁹⁹ In terms of management, Tennant had been GM from 1871-1891 and was excessively cautious. Wilkinson, who was Secretary from 1871-1903, was also conservative. Waddington, appointed in 1892 was a believer in orthodox statistical controls. Tranah, appointed Treasurer in 1892, was also conservative. Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell was a critic of expenditure. Yet in 1898 R. Bell commented: '... seldom can any of our railways have a stronger directorate than the North Eastern Railway Board of 1898.'¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the comment was influenced by the fact that George Stegman Gibbs became General Manager in 1891. Gibbs, 'the freelance of the railway world',¹⁰¹ studied the scene in the USA and brought in new costing techniques, procedures, forms of organisation and new blood into management.

⁹⁷ R. Bell: *Twenty Five Years of the North Eastern Railway 1898-1922* (London Railway Gazette, nd) p.20

⁹⁸ Viscount Grey of Fallodon: *Twenty Five Years 1892-1916* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1923), p.59

⁹⁹ Bell *op cit* p.9

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* p.20

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* p.13

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE NORTH EAST UP TO 1890

In a later section of this study we will examine the various political and semi-political influences on railwaymen and their unions. Leaving these aside attitudes and conduct in the North East were very much determined by the 'benevolent paternalism' which had existed in relation to employment on the railways in that area. Reading biographies and contemporary accounts of the people involved in financing and establishing the early railway companies it is clear that they saw their work as a mission and, both at the time and subsequently, they marvelled at the good which had been achieved. It is therefore not surprising that some of them would consider that they were giving their employees a privileged opportunity to be part of this vision. From this concept developed the paternalistic attitude. Young, in his biography of Timothy Hackworth, states:

'Their interests were his and they acknowledged his beneficent rule while he looked after their welfare and found them responsive to any kindness. Labour troubles were unknown among them ... that confidence between master and man born of a perfect understanding between them.'¹⁰²

We turn first to the arrangements in the early years for redress of grievances. Despite the paternalism there were grievances. In 1832 Graham reported that the enginemen had conducted themselves very indifferently during the week:

'... by not exerting themselves in getting the traffic away and had come to an understanding among themselves that they would run only one trip a day and double-shift engines not more than two.'¹⁰³

In 1840 seven drivers refused to take out their engines when ordered and were fined ten shillings each.¹⁰⁴ Alcock also refers to early agitation on the Stockton and Darlington Railway when George Stephenson wrote to some complainants:

'Finding you are not satisfied with your present position under the company I have to give you notice that your services will not be required after May 12th. Please note ... you men want to be masters.'¹⁰⁵

102 R. Young: *Timothy Hackworth* (Jubilee Reprint, 1975) p.332

103 *Ibid* p.298

104 *Ibid* p.298 and PRO RAIL 667/11

105 G. W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism* (London Co-op Printing Society, 1922), p.14

This evidence is supplemented by the record of petitions. For some considerable period, petitions were the recognised method of seeking redress from the management of the railway companies both by its staff and members of the public. It was not until recognition was given to the Unions and new disputes procedures were established that they became less important. The records of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and NER Companies in the PRO contain a wide selection of petitions from both categories. In 1845 a total claim by all the guards of the NER was rejected. The period 1848-1850 saw general industrial trouble and in 1849-50 there were strikes in Consett. The first edition of the Darlington Telegram and General Advertiser on 8th June 1858 announced that '... the paper will be written for the working classes'¹⁰⁶ and in July that paper carried a report from the directors of the railway bemoaning to its shareholders the fact that 'Your revenue likewise has suffered severely from an extensive and protracted strike among certain classes of workmen.'¹⁰⁷

In the mid-1860s there were clear signs that industrial disaffection among the railwaymen was growing. A Committee of workmen had been formed to carry on the fight for a nine-hours day¹⁰⁸ and a meeting of platelayers at Stockton petitioned for shorter hours and higher wages and 'to consider what steps should be taken towards forming a union in order that they might put forth their claims with more strength and confidence.'¹⁰⁹

In September 1866 thirty men were discharged at Darlington and fifty to sixty at Shildon due to the iron workers strike.¹¹⁰ A few days later, a serious dispute existed between the Stockton and Darlington Railway and the engine drivers and firemen in their employ. It was reported that the men had joined the union and six had to leave because of this. A claim was made for wages based on a daily rate instead of mileage and for reinstatement of the dismissed men failing which there would be a strike and call

¹⁰⁶ Darlington Telegram and General Advertiser 5.6.1858

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 14.7.1858

¹⁰⁸ Darlington Mercury 14.3.1866

¹⁰⁹ Darlington Mercury 28.3.1866

¹¹⁰ Darlington Mercury 26.9.1866

out. A meeting of the Engine Drivers and Firemen's United Association comprising the NER promised support.¹¹¹

The Board Minutes also show the build-up of the situation, beginning with an acknowledgement of the request for a nine hours day¹¹² and at the beginning of October noting a threatened strike of Engine Drivers and Firemen at Darlington and Gateshead where the men had given a month's notice to quit because:

'... it appeared that the principal grievance of the Darlington men was the dismissal of three of their number by Mr. Bouch and they demanded that these men should be reinstated in the service.'¹¹³

Just over a month later the Board noted that the wages of signalmen were due to be reduced by 1s. to 2s. per week.¹¹⁴ In the meantime there had been two meetings between Engine Drivers and Directors of the NER concerning the grievances of the former.

The industrial situation was to get much worse. At the end of 1866 The Beehive reported:

'... but it is in Durham that action has been first taken. Six men on the Stockton and Darlington line have been discharged for being in the Union, and some hundreds have received notice of discharge, under guise of being surplus, on account of the iron strike.'¹¹⁵

In 1867 the Board Minutes state that on 15th February a Deputation presented a memorial which covered two statements of claim. Overall these claims involved, according to Directors, a demand for an 80% increase and the claim had been dismissed.¹¹⁶ Later discussions involved a clause by clause consideration.¹¹⁷ At that point the men were told:

'... that the board were willing to reduce the hours of labour to 60 per week but that they could not accede to the demand that all the men should be paid according to the fixed scale of wages.'¹¹⁸

111 Darlington Mercury 3.10.1866

112 PRO RAIL 527/12 12.9.1866 Min.4123

113 PRO RAIL 527/12 2.10.1866 Min.4286

114 PRO RAIL 527/12 16.11.1866 Min.4326

115 The Beehive 6.10.1866

116 PRO RAIL 527/12 15.2.1867 Min.4417 and PRO RAIL 527/12 1.3.1867 Min.4426

117 PRO RAIL 527/12 15.3.1867 Min.4441

118 PRO RAIL 527/12 22.3.1867 Min.4446

On 23rd March the men gave one month's notice¹¹⁹ but withdrew this when they accepted a settlement which left over for consideration by the Locomotive Superintendent the question of wages.¹²⁰ However, there must have been ambiguity on interpretation of the award and the NER records state that 155 Drivers and 244 Firemen and Guards struck on 11th April 'without notice or complaint but simply in obedience to the orders of the Union'.¹²¹ The NER records show that the policy following this action was to summons those 'who have taken the lead in this movement at the different locomotive stations'¹²² and to require the men to quit their houses.¹²³ Other companies were asked to provide drivers and did so.¹²⁴ The records of the Power Committee show that it observed:

'... with much satisfaction that ... comparatively little inconvenience has been the result and that there is now every prospect of the Company being well-served by non-union men ...'¹²⁵

The Company authorised the Locomotive Superintendent to take on Firemen and Drivers including those who had been on strike:

'... but that in each case such Drivers and Firemen be required to sign an undertaking to withdraw from the Engine-Driver and Firemen's United Society and not to join that or any similar society so long as he remains in the service of the Company.'¹²⁶

By then the strike had escalated and in the end about 1050 men were involved.¹²⁷ Despite promises only 25 men were reinstated and in August 1867 it was reported that upwards of 600 men formerly engine drivers and firemen 'are now virtually starving'.¹²⁸ By the end of the year distress was 'something dreadful'.¹²⁹ The Union's resources had been totally depleted and unionism had suffered a major setback.

¹¹⁹ PRO RAIL 527/12 29.3.1867 Min.4456

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ PRO RAIL 667/84 24.4.1867 p.24

¹²² PRO RAIL 527/12 12.4.1867 Min.4472

¹²³ Ibid Min.4473

¹²⁴ Pollins *op cit* p.83

¹²⁵ PRO RAIL 667/146 Power Committee 24.4.1867

¹²⁶ PRO RAIL 527/12 17.4.1867 Mins.4485-6

¹²⁷ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1963) p.40

¹²⁸ Darlington and Stockton Telegraph 17.8.1867

¹²⁹ Darlington Mercury 25.12.1867

Looking back later on the situation Bagwell commented that in the North Eastern region '... the most prolonged and bitter strike in the history of the British railways till that time was fought out'.¹³⁰ Bagwell saw as one reason for this the fact that the NER had little flexibility for manoeuvre because they had to force economies due to the heavy costs of the take-over of the West Hartlepool line. The years following the strike were marked by sporadic labour unrest in the North East but as regards the early 1880s Pollins states that the NER represented one bright area of railway trade unionism where there was a good local leadership, less exclusiveness and more co-operation between locomen and goods guards and where the railway company was willing to meet the ASRS.¹³¹

In 1888, however, there was a sectional disturbance in Darlington. A landmark was reached in 1889 when the Darlington programme was launched. It was adapted from the proposed national programme and adopted by the ASRS in the NER before it was agreed nationally. Basically this called for a day not exceeding ten hours, overtime to be paid at the rate of time and a quarter except on Sunday when it would be time and a half and no man to be called out under a day's pay regardless of the time to be worked.¹³² In connection with this programme the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants asked for an interview with the Directors of the NER. Some concessions were made but these were not regarded as enough.

In December 1889 goods staff at Newcastle and Gateshead handed in their notices for a nine hours day and overtime at one and one quarter times the normal rate. The claim went to arbitration with Dr. Spence Watson as the arbitrator.¹³³ In January 1890 he issued his award which gave a nine hours day to porters, checkers, capstan-men, traversers, chockers and grain warehousemen at Newcastle and Gateshead. The award gave nothing to rolleymen, vanmen, loftmen, fodder-choppers and stablemen.¹³⁴ The

¹³⁰ Bagwell *op cit* p.42

¹³¹ Pollins *op cit* p.131

¹³² Tomlinson *op cit* p.743

¹³³ In North East England the tradition of conciliation in the iron trade was well-established. In 1884 R.S. Watson had adjudicated in three arbitrations following the demand of employers for reductions. Altogether he acted as arbitrator in more than 100 disputes

¹³⁴ Tomlinson *op cit* p.744

award is also of interest because it was the first use of arbitration on the NER. However, it was not wholly successful, as shortly afterwards the ASRS asked for a further mandate. This led to strikes being threatened in most areas and one of the common features of the unrest was the desire of union officials for recognition. Some railway boards refused to accept this but on the NER the management agreed to meet the men either alone or with the men's nominated advisers and if possible to settle the issues. The request arose from the claim in 1890 for improved conditions in the Tyneside area which was submitted by the general secretaries of the ASRS, the GRWU and the Tyneside and National Labour Union. The Directors met the men who were accompanied by the three General Secretaries. As a result of this meeting, the Directors passed and recorded the following minute because of the importance of the principle:

'The directors have considered at their board meeting today the letter of Mr. Harford, the secretary of the Amalgamated Society, dated 15 December, addressed to the general manager of the Company and delivered at his office on Monday last. The directors do not see their way to depart from the position which they (in common with the directors of other railway companies) have hitherto maintained, that any discussion as to the terms of service of the servants of the railway company must take place directly between the servants of the company on the one side, and the heads of the different departments, the general manager, or the directors themselves, as the case may be, on the other. The directors desire the men in the service of the Company to know that, as regards signalmen, the general manager, under the instructions of the board, has had under his consideration for a few weeks some revision of the terms of service, especially in regard to payment for Sunday duty. As regards all classes of men, the board are willing, either by a committee of themselves or through the general manager, in concert with the heads of departments, to meet any committee of the men, either alone or associated with any advisers whom they may select to accompany them, with a view to discuss, and if possible to settle, the questions which have been raised.'¹³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

As we noted at the beginning of this Chapter, there is a lack of primary sources in relation to the nature of the rank and file railwaymen. Both primary and secondary sources have shown that their structure of pay and grading was highly diverse. As regards the degree of cohesion among them we have on the one hand a tribe united

¹³⁵ Tomlinson *op cit* .749

by an industry with common factors arising from the men being railwaymen. On the other hand, they were divided by sub-loyalties, pride, differing status and wages with, perhaps, a 'labour aristocracy' element of engine drivers. As 'workers' they were, perhaps, sectionalist but with sub-sections. They differed from the miners in that the sub-sections were distinct over a life's work. Mining unions were dominated by the interests of hewers but all fit and strong miners would hope to be hewers at some time during their careers. Those who were not hewers either would hope to be so or had been so. Railwaymen, in contrast, pursued in general parallel careers within the industry.

In the North East the first Companies were paternalistic and expected in return a high degree of loyalty and obedience to orders. Discipline was strict and, as the NER had a monopoly in its area, there were no alternative sources of railway employment. Set against this was the fact that the NER Board was more accustomed to dealing with Unions and industrial relations matters. Almost from the beginning of railways in the North East machinery was established for the redress of grievances. The area was in the vanguard in the formation of a railway union in the 1860s and it was the scene of a bitter strike which was ruthlessly repressed. However, the ASRS (see Chapter 2) became established in the North East. The North East led the way with the adoption of the Darlington Programme and in 1890 secured a significant declaration on the principle of 'recognition'. So, already a distinctive form of unionism in the railways had been established in the area by 1890.

With the Darlington Programme Darlington came into its own and this is a fitting point at which to conclude this opening survey. The Select Committee on Railway Servants asked: 'What is the meaning of the Darlington Programme?' and were told: 'It is very nearly upon the same lines as the National programme, there are little alterations but not anything much'. They were also told that it was intended for 'as a calculation, or a maximum of ten hours a day'.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Alcock *op cit* p.248

CHAPTER 2. THE STATE OF TRADE UNIONISM AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE LAST DECADE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the previous Chapter there was only passing mention of the railway trade unions and it is now necessary to consider their growth and position in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1839 the Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen's Association was formed and by 1862 it had 2000 members. In 1860 the Enginemen's and Firemen's Association was founded but it had a short life. The Railway Clerk's Association lasted only a few months in 1865. Bassett-Vincent formed the Railway Working Man's Provident Benefit Society which covered hours of labour and rates of pay. In 1866 the Railway Guards, Signalmen's and Switchmen's Society was formed and finally the Engine Drivers' and Firemen's United Society was established.¹ This Society was broken by the effects of the 1867 strike in the NER described in the last Chapter. As we saw in that Chapter, it was difficult to organise railway labour for a number of reasons. An NER official was quoted as saying: 'We keep the men in classes as much as we can in order to keep the wages as low as possible'.² It is interesting that, in the vacuum created by the end of the Union, Thrift Societies multiplied in the NER by some eight times between 1870 and 1890.³

In 1871 the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was formed. It represented most grades but not shopmen. It had some clerks in membership but few porters and draymen. In the 1870s it had internal problems. In 1873 George Chapman, General Secretary of the ASRS wrote:

'I would like to take this opportunity of stating that the Council is decidedly opposed to strikes, the Council being of the opinion that if railwaymen will only come forward and be firmly united they will gain that to which they are entitled without having recourse to any cessation of work.'⁴

¹ P.W. Kingsford: *Victorian Railwaymen*, pp.83-84

² P.S. Gupta: *Railway Trade Unionism in Britain c 1880-1900* in *Economic History Review*, XIX, 1966 p.127

³ Kingsford *op cit* p.182

⁴ Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism* p.134

In 1873 the Second District of the North East ASRS was founded covering Barnard Castle and Huddersfield.⁵ But, also in 1873, the Bishop Auckland Branch had nil expenditure.⁶ By 1875 the activities had virtually failed. In September 1875 'The Railwaymen's Catechism' asked 'Does the Society encourage strikes?' and answered itself 'No, it avoids them as an evil to masters and men'.⁷ In 1885 the ASRS supported the idea of railway representatives in Parliament. The Railway Review said: 'What is wanted in Parliament, in order that justice to the masses may be done, is more direct labour representation particularly in the case of railway servants.'⁸ But it was later reported that the views of ASRS Branches varied on this matter.⁹

The ASRS had a much higher proportion of their members in the North East. Because of its internal problems its membership declined from 17,247 in 1872 to 6321 in 1882. In the late 1880s steady increases took place and in 1890 membership was 26,360 after which it rose to 44,709 in 1896.¹⁰ Continuity was provided in the person of its President, P.S. McLiver MP (see Biographies) who held the post from 1883 to 1891 and its General Secretary, E. Harford (see Biographies) who held the post from 1883 to 1897 and Walter Hudson (see later in this Chapter). In 1898, following the 1897 NER strike, the ASRS lost a substantial number of members.¹¹

The role of the ASRS was also changing. In its early years it had acted very much as a Friendly Society. It had not sponsored strikes and it favoured arbitration rather than industrial action.¹² Writing of the ASRS in 1891 Howell stated that it had made less noise perhaps than some of the new ones but it had gained concessions.¹³ In 1890 Harford said: 'We have now, while still adhering to our old principles, adopted measures which are associated with robust and even aggressive trade unionism ...'¹⁴

⁵ *Ibid* p.103

⁶ *Ibid* p.132

⁷ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* p.80

⁸ Railway Review 6.3.1885

⁹ Railway Review 17.4.1885

¹⁰ P.S. Bagwell *op cit* pp.129 and 176

¹¹ G.W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism* p.299

¹² Bagwell *op cit* p.149

¹³ G. Howell: *Trade Unionism: New and Old* (Methuen, London, 1891) p.138

¹⁴ R.A. Florey: *The General Strike of 1926* (Calder, London, 1980) p.38

In 1890-1891 it concentrated on the NER and certain other areas. The NER men were presenting their case with undiminished vigour and were threatening a strike.¹⁵ By 1893 the Society had taken over the agitation of signalmen. By 1896 it was handling two movements, one a national guards movement and another an all-grades movement.

In 1898 the ILP News said of the Union: 'The chief strength and hope of the ASRS lies in the fact that it recognises the hopelessness of the strike weapon'.¹⁶

In 1899 it allowed the NER local movement to go ahead.¹⁷

The ASRS concentrated on wages, the length of the working day, compensation and union recognition¹⁸ but Pelling considered that there was no union more politically minded than the ASRS.¹⁹ In about 1897 the ASRS was being influenced by the ILP men on its executive.²⁰ In the following year the AGM carried a resolution: 'That the time has now arrived when the ASRS should be directly represented in Parliament by the General Secretary who shall be independent of either political parties ...'

In the same year the London District Council of the ASRS approached both political parties for an understanding on the choice of candidates. In 1899, at the TUC Conference, the ASRS moved the resolution which had been drafted by MacDonald: '... to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of labour members in the next Parliament' but Loraine from West Hartlepool voted against it.²¹ The ASRS were virtually the sponsors of the LRC Conference in February 1900²² and Wardle an ILP man who was Editor of the Railway Review, seconded the resolution in favour of a distinct Labour group in Parliament. Bell, of the

¹⁵ *Souvenir History of the ASRS* (Unity House, London, 1910) pp.62-63

¹⁶ ILP News October 1898

¹⁷ Gupta *op cit* pp.139-150

¹⁸ E.H. Hunt: *British Labour History 1815-1914* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981) p.303

¹⁹ Pelling: *A History of British Trade Unions* (Penguin, Pelican, 1974 edn) p.116

²⁰ Kynaston: *King Labour* (Allen & Unwin, 1976) p.154

²¹ Bagwell *op cit* p.205-206

²² See Chapter 4

ASRS, was elected to the first Executive Committee and the ASRS was the second Union to affiliate to the LRC.²³

The first blow to one union for all railwaymen came in November 1879 when the pressure from the 'labour aristocracy' of locomotivemen, resulted in the formation of the Associated Society of Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen (ASLEF). According to Alcock, an ASRS stalwart, the aim was to protect the footplate grades with their mistrust of their fellows, a lordly superiority and their selfish aims.²⁴ In 1899 ASLEF proposed an all-grades Union national programme for Enginemen and Firemen but there was apathy at that stage.²⁵ In 1904 ASLEF won the right to have representatives in Coroners' Courts for industrial accidents and in 1905 it developed a National Programme for Enginemen which led to the overall National Programme.²⁶

The United Pointsmen's and Signalmen's Friendly Society (UPSS) was founded in 1880. It was mainly a Friendly Society and had only 3000 members in the early 1900s.

The General Railway Workers' Union (GRWU) was founded in 1889 in the climate of 'new unionism'. Champion (see Biographies) founded it after failing to persuade the ASRS to reduce their high subscriptions.²⁷ All grades were eligible and it was the only union to recruit from workshops. The GRWU was also different in that it regarded itself as a union which was 'a fighting one, and shall not be encumbered with any sick or accident fund'.²⁸ At an early stage the GRWU proposed amalgamation with the ASRS but the ASRS rejected the proposal. Despite this second blow to the concept of one union main discussions continued for the next six years with the ASRS blowing hot and cold over the proposal.²⁹ Between 1889 and 1895 membership of the GRWU fell from 14,000 to 4000.³⁰

²³ Bagwell *op cit* p.207

²⁴ Alcock *op cit* p.172. But see Chapter 9 for ASLEF view

²⁵ N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame* (Nelson, London, 1950) p.69

²⁶ *Ibid* pp.84-85

²⁷ Pelling: *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (MacMillan, London, 1954) p.87

²⁸ Tracey: *The Book of the Labour Party Vol.1* (Caxton, London, nd) p.69

²⁹ Bagwell *op cit* pp.311-313

³⁰ Hunt *op cit* p.303

The GRWU was important in the North East and the Shildon Branch acted in the vanguard. In February 1900 the Branch was said to have 700 members and 140 new members joined in the next year but this number fell to 673.³¹ The growth had been seen as dramatic: 'A year ago the town was unorganised and the men in the North-Eastern works lived from hand-to-mouth. Today (it is) different with new spirit'.³²

There was pressure from Shildon to secure new Branches and Dixon and Wright from Shildon spoke at the West Hartlepoons GRWU meeting.³³ Dixon with Lowth (see Biographies) visited York to stimulate the GRWU Branch.³⁴ In 1901 Dixon pointed out to Gateshead the benefits of GRWU membership.³⁵ In September 1901 there was a mass meeting of the New Shildon Branch.³⁶ The Darlington Branch of the GRWU was reported to have gained 240 members in a fortnight.³⁷ In March 1901 the Gateshead Branch was established.³⁸ In 1901 the NER men were asked to take a cut in pay.³⁹ In April ballot papers on withdrawal of labour were being circulated⁴⁰ but Lowth at York said 'A strike was the very last weapon they should use'.⁴¹ The year ended with the Newcastle Branch meeting on the futility of strikes and it was commented that: 'The men in the North Eastern District are doing very well indeed'.⁴²

Turning to the Railway Clerks Association (RCA) this organisation was founded in 1897. In 1898 it was almost wound up and nine delegates represented only 220 members.⁴³ C. Bassett-Vincent pleaded for a National Association of General Railway Clerks⁴⁴ and the name of Stationmasters and Clerks Association was suggested.⁴⁵ The title, however, was changed to the Railway Clerks Association and

31 Railway Herald 3.2.1900; 9.2.1901; 29.6.1901

32 Railway Herald 19.5.1900

33 Railway Herald 14.7.1900

34 Railway Herald 28.7.1900

35 Railway Herald 23.2.1901

36 Railway Herald 21.9.1901

37 Railway Herald 31.8.1901

38 Railway Herald 9.3.1901

39 Railway Herald 23.3.1901

40 Railway Herald 20.4.1901

41 Railway Herald 15.6.1901

42 Railway Herald 28.12.1901

43 Railway Service Journal 15.6.1919

44 Railway Herald 1.1.1898

45 Railway Herald 9.4.1898

Hereford replaced Bassett-Vincent.⁴⁶ There was little activity and a letter from Clericus Manchester asked what had become of the movement for clerical staff.⁴⁷ The General Secretary announced a meeting in Nottingham and then resigned.⁴⁸ Following this meeting the Association was then divided into an improvement of rights section and an assistance section.⁴⁹ By 1900 the Association had 10,000 members.⁵⁰ It was active in the North East with Branches being formed at Newcastle in 1900 and Middlesbrough in 1902.⁵¹ The NER forbade their clerks to join the ASRS but did not object to the RCA.⁵² A Conference on 16th-18th January 1900 was reported to have gained a long list of concessions.⁵³ In 1900 a correspondent said there was nothing in the literature of the RCA to object to lady clerks and two years later mention was made of their employment.⁵⁴

So far we have dealt separately with each union but from the late 1890s there were constant talks about the separate Associations joining together. In 1898 the ASRS agreed with the GRWU approach but others did not and the movement failed in 1899. In 1899 the ASRS and ASLEF talked but the talks foundered and a meeting in Darlington rejected unanimously federation between ASRS and ASLEF.⁵⁵

The old-style Unions were in general conservative and non-aggressive. Political agitators and their disruptive activities were no more welcome to the average union leader than they were to employers.⁵⁶ These unions regarded strikes as: '... a regrettable necessity to be entered into as a last resort and even then to be restricted to as limited an area as circumstances would permit'.⁵⁷ However, Osborne, who was to be the cause of the Osborne Judgement, observed: '... the fundamental principle of

⁴⁶ Railway Herald 21.5.1898

⁴⁷ Railway Herald 22.10.1898

⁴⁸ Railway Herald 12.11.1898

⁴⁹ Railway Herald 31.12.1898

⁵⁰ Bagwell *op cit* pp.309-311

⁵¹ The Railway Clerk 1.5.1904

⁵² Railway Herald 20.1.1900

⁵³ Railway Herald 27.1.1900

⁵⁴ Railway Herald 28.4.1900 and 3.5.1902

⁵⁵ Railway Review 18.5.1900

⁵⁶ Hunt *op cit* p.337

⁵⁷ W.W. Osborne: *Sane Trade Unionism* (Collins, London, nd) p.57

present-day Trade Unionism appears to be a class war, a war that appeals to the worst passions of human nature'.⁵⁸

It is true that trade unionism had been changing its role. The 'new unionism' organised men by industries rather than crafts and preached political action as well as industrial action.⁵⁹ Mrs. Besant organised the strike of the London match girls in 1888. In 1889 the Gas Workers union claimed an 8 hours day. In 1889 also the London Dockers struck to obtain a standard wage of 6d. per hour and were organised by Ben Tillett, Tom Mann and John Burns (see Biographies). They gained their demand. In the same year the Women's Protective and Provident League became the Women's Trade Union League but both bodies were marginal. The success of the Dock Strike gave a great stimulus to the rise of new unionism and one of the historians of the Dock Strike stated: 'At the simplest possible level it brought another 200,000 unskilled workers into trade union organisation within a year or so according to Tom Mann'.⁶⁰ However, Poirier has stated that of the increase from 750,000 to 1,500,000 in 1892, most was due to the expansion of the 'old' unions.⁶¹ Where, however, the 'new' unions existed, they were without any inherited prejudice in favour of liberalism.⁶² But, even with these figures trade unions were, all told, but a small fraction of the total working population.⁶³

The year 1890 was a year of seventeen railway strikes involving 12,000 men.⁶⁴ These included the major railway strike in Scotland. The Scottish Companies had correspondence with the ASRS but would not recognise the Union in the strike. Looking back at the strike in 1891 J. Mavor said the aim was to reduce the hours of work. The railways had grown too fast and there had been petty treatment of the men. As a result 'Railway employment became less desirable and less desirable men undertook it'.⁶⁵ Over the whole field of labour relations the early 1890s saw an escalation of days lost in disputes:

⁵⁸ *Ibid* p.86

⁵⁹ R.C.K. Ensor: *England 1870-1914* p.206

⁶⁰ T. McCarthy: *The Great Dock Strike 1889* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1988) p.9

⁶¹ P. Poirier: *The Advent of the Labour Party* (Allen & Unwin, 1958) p.16

⁶² J. Clayton: *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain* (Faber & Gwyer, 1926) p.55

⁶³ E.J. Hobsbawm: *Labour's Turning Point* Vol.3 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1948) p.74

⁶⁴ R.A. Florey *op cit* pp.37-38

⁶⁵ J. Mavor: *The Scottish Railway Strike 1890* in *Economic Journal*, 1891, pp.206-212

1891	6.8 millions
1892	17 millions
1893	30 millions

The figures for 1892 include a disastrous 12 weeks strike by Durham coalminers. Although the figure for 1894 was down to 9.5 millions the number of disputes was the highest since 1890. But the position in the following year indicated that peace was being declared.⁶⁶ As to the outcome of disputes the Board of Trade Returns on Labour Disputes show that from 1893-1900 the number of labour disputes which were settled in favour of the workers was 34.5%.⁶⁷ In 1899 the General Federation of Trade Unions was formed. This was '... a great militant aggressive organisation and meant to be so'.⁶⁸ In 1908-1909 the Federation paid out £122,778 in respect of 638 disputes. In 1913 there were 150 societies with 884,291 members and in 1919 1,215,107 members. However, the seeds of its dissolution were present. Since 1913 the MFGB had been hostile and in 1915 the ASE seceded. The NUR supported the Federation.⁶⁹ In the North East the 'new unionism' emerged in 1885-1886.⁷⁰ The Webbs reported that the seven counties of England north of the Humber and the Dee contained at least 726,000 members of trade societies or almost half the UK total. Northumberland and Durham had 11.23% and 11.21% of trade unionists and Newcastle (including Gateshead) had 8.8%.⁷¹

In Searles' view New Unionism passed by Tyneside. The National Labour Federation was used by the SDF and then abandoned by it. The Tyneside and District Labourer's Association which replaced it was moderate and non-Socialist.⁷² It protected Liberalism by its attitude. This body in turn gave way to the National Amalgamated Union of Labour which settled 90% of its disputes without strikes.⁷³

⁶⁶ J. Quail: *The Slow Burning Fuse* (Paladin, 1978) pp.314-315

⁶⁷ P. Snowden: *Socialism and Syndicalism* (Collins, nd) p.135

⁶⁸ Watney and Little: *Industrial Warfare* (John Murray, London, 1912), p.202

⁶⁹ S. and B. Webb: *The History of Trade Unionism* (Longmans Green, London, 1920 edn) pp.554-559

⁷⁰ H. Pelling: *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (MacMillan, 1967) p.319

⁷¹ Webbs *op cit* pp.425-427

⁷² M. Searles: *The Origins of 'New Unionism' on Tyneside 1886-1891* in *Bulletin of the NE Labour History Soc.*, 25, 1991 pp.27-47

⁷³ E.J. Hobsbawm: *Labouring Men* p.189

The North East was also influenced briefly by one of the peripheral associations which grew up in the labour field namely the Knights of Labour. The Knights were an American Order with secret rituals and officers of graded ranks. Their drive in the United Kingdom began with an attempt to win the window-glass workers. They failed to unionise Pilkingtons at St. Helens but were initially successful with Hartleys at Sunderland. They held an assembly at Jarrow which was probably an offshoot of their activities with the Sunderland glass workers.⁷⁴ At their peak in 1888-1889 the Knights had 100,000 members in Britain but by 1894 the organisation had largely declined.⁷⁵

Another marginal influence on trade unionists was the IWW. The IWW was inspired by de Leon who held that there was: '... no common ground of any kind between the working class and the employing class but that they were and must always be implacable and bitter enemies'.⁷⁶

Finally the rise of the unions led to counter-activity by the suppliers of free labour and between 1893 and 1913 850,000 free labourers were provided.⁷⁷ In the 1890s the National Free Labour Association was the creature of the Shipping Federation but in the early years of the new century the role was taken over by the railway companies.⁷⁸

THE BUILD-UP TO THE 1897 STRIKE IN THE NORTH EAST

In the first Chapter we mentioned the Darlington programme. This programme plus the battle for recognition spread. On 20th December 1890 the GM met the men and the ASRS. Demands included an 8 hours day for shunters at busy yards, a six days instead of a seven days week for passenger staff, Sunday pay and increased pay for platelayers.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ H. Pelling: *The Knights of Labour in Britain 1880-1901* in *Economic History Review*, 1956, p.324

⁷⁵ H. Pelling: *A History of British Trade Unionism* p.86

⁷⁶ F. Williams: *Fifty Years March: The Rise of the Labour Party* (Odhams, London, nd) p.184

⁷⁷ K. Burgess: *The Challenge of Labour* (Croom Helm, London, 1980) p.87

⁷⁸ J. Saville: *Trade Unions and Free Labour* in A. Briggs & J. Saville: *Essays in Labour History* (MacMillan, London, 1960) p.339

⁷⁹ W.W. Tomlinson: *North Eastern Railway* pp.744-745

In 1891 the Board Minutes refer to a threatened strike at Newcastle.⁸⁰ In 1892, because of a strike by Durham miners, it was decided that the men in the North East should be put on a three day week.⁸¹ In the same year one of the railway companies dismissed men for giving evidence before a Select Committee but was rebuked for this. In 1892 there was an Engineers strike. In 1893 the Board of the NER recorded a series of initiatives by the unions. In September of that year there was laid on the table a Circular from a Committee appointed at a National Conference of Signalmen held at Derby earlier in the year about Signalmen's Hours, Wages and Conditions of Employment.⁸² In November the Board received a letter from the ASRS about the wages of platelayers on the Hull and Scarborough line.⁸³ A month later on the same table was laid 'Resolutions of a meeting of NE railway signalmen held at Darlington on 3rd instant' together with a letter from the Branch Secretary at Newcastle of the ASRS. These documents were referred to the GM.⁸⁴ Again in 1895 the Board decided to pass to the GM a letter from the ASRS concerning hours, etc. of guards.⁸⁵ This pressure on a regional level mirrored what was happening at national level. For the ASRS the emphasis from 1893-1896 in making claims had been on the best organised grades claiming improved terms and succeeding to the extent that they had such bargaining power. In 1897 however the climate changed as prices started to rise in general and all grades were affected by this rise. The ASRS had championed the case of the signalmen which had failed in the middle of 1896 but was revived again at the end of the year and the ASRS also took on the claims of goods guards, draymen, lorrymen and shunters.⁸⁶

Looking back after the 1897 Strike in the North East, Croker wrote that a '... very serious and unjustifiable strike occurred on the North Eastern Railway'⁸⁷ While

⁸⁰ PRO RAIL 527/18 Min.9925, 9.1.1891

⁸¹ *Ibid* Min.10078, 1.4.1892

⁸² *Ibid* Min.10230, 15.9.1893

⁸³ *Ibid* Min.10251, 3.11.1893

⁸⁴ *Ibid* Min.10268, 15.12.1893

⁸⁵ *Ibid* Min.10480, 26.7.1895

⁸⁶ Bagwell *op cit* pp.176-177

⁸⁷ E.J. Croker: *Retrospective Lessons on Railway Strikes* (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton and Kent, Cork, 1898) p.171

at national level the Union was seeking to avoid a strike, the North East was facing separate and unofficial action. The year 1897 began with the General Manager of the North Eastern Railway (Mr. Gibb) having been delegated by the Board to sort out arrangements for changes in the conditions of service, etc.⁸⁸ This was in response to demands by the staff for various alterations in the conditions of work. Some concessions were made, e.g. in the case of checkers the Company offered certain advances in wages and other advantages on discontinuation of overtime pay. Some accepted and others did not. On 17th February rulleymen and warehousemen threatened to cease working overtime. On 20th February seven men failed to turn in until 7.00 a.m. instead of 5.00 a.m. as required and they were suspended. Horsemen, benchmen, porters and rulleymen at Newcastle ceased work and the disaffection spread to staff at Gateshead, North Shields and Sunderland. Two days later passenger men at Newcastle threatened a strike.⁸⁹ The Newcastle Daily Chronicle on 22nd February 1897 reported that the staff at Darlington had expressed sympathy and 'will use best influence to give every support possible'.⁹⁰ On 24th February a special meeting of Directors was held.⁹¹ Two days later a Conference took place between Delegates from the Strike Committee and Mr. Gibb, the General Manager. Twenty-five delegates were accompanied by Mr. Harford and Mr. Bell (Welsh organising secretary) of the ASRS.⁹²

The precise position at the time of the meeting is not clear from the newspaper and Board accounts. Immediately after the walk-out Gibb seems to have taken a position that the men should only be reinstated if 'a humble apology' was made.⁹³ The men were regarded as being in breach of ASRS rules which would require the giving of seven days notice or the holding of a ballot or going to arbitration. As far as the employers were concerned the men had also offended against the Employers and Workmen Act of 1875 and the Protection of Property Act of 1875. The Newcastle Daily Journal of 26th February 1897 printed a warning that:

⁸⁸ PRO RAIL 527/18 Min.10622 8.1.1897

⁸⁹ PP C 9012 (1898) p.lxi

⁹⁰ PRO RAIL 527/1029

⁹¹ PRO RAIL 527/18 Min.10642, 24.2.1897

⁹² PRO RAIL 527/1028

⁹³ PRO RAIL 527/1029

'... the Company will proceed against all the men who cease work tonight without notice; and the signalmen will probably be prosecuted under the criminal portion of the Act, as endangering the lives of the public'.⁹⁴

The Newcastle Daily Chronicle of 24th February 1897 called the strike 'a blow below the belt that is deliberately prepared and viciously struck'.⁹⁵

The strikers were referred to as moral bankrupts. Initially even Harford of the ASRS regarded the strike as being premature but following the issue of summonses on 25th February 1897 telegrams were sent out which stated that 'Harford sanctions movement. Men cease work'.⁹⁶

In the meantime the attitude of the men hardened and they demanded the original programme of improvements in conditions of work. A rulleymen asked:

'That the standard day be 9 hrs and that all the time worked between the hours of 5.30 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. be paid for at the rate of 9d. per hour, the men who do stable duty on Sundays to be paid 1s. 6d.'⁹⁷

There were varying reports of the amount of support which had been given. It was reported that the passenger men at Newcastle Central Station were to come out and 135 men had been recruited to fill vacancies. On 24th February the Newcastle Daily Chronicle reported that the Darlington men had ceased working overtime and Middlesbrough had sent a message 'All with you'. In addition a manifesto had been sent by the men throughout the system.⁹⁸ It was stated in the Newcastle Daily Journal of 26th February both that 'At Darlington no action has been taken ...' and 'Goods warehouse staff decide to stop work in the morning'. In addition note is taken of the fact that a resolution was adopted to the effect that:

'... unless the NER Company ceased sending men from Darlington to work the Newcastle traffic the men will be called upon to cease work. It has also been resolved to protest against working of overtime if asked for by the Company.'⁹⁹

A letter from the ASRS in Darlington confirmed that the men at Darlington had ceased work and were backing the programme put forward by the men at

⁹⁴ Newcastle Daily Journal 26.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

⁹⁵ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 24.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

⁹⁶ Newcastle Daily Leader 26.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

⁹⁷ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 22.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

⁹⁸ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 24.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

⁹⁹ Newcastle Daily Journal 26.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

Newcastle Goods Station. The Evening Chronicle of 24th February 1897 in which this was reported quoted 70 railwaymen as being out plus '... a large number of the men employed at the goods department, including goods and warehouse staffs at Bank Top Railway Station.'¹⁰⁰ Durham men were stated to have walked out the previous day.

The situation in other places was equally unclear and in some cases it was not until after the end of the strike that it was clarified. It was reported that at Stockton all but two of the men were out. Spennymoor had been urged 'get them all out'. Shildon was a key centre. The position here was reported as follows:

'At a meeting of all grades of railwaymen in New Shildon Mission Room on Thursday night ... the representatives of about 150 shunters employed in Shildon sidings stated that they were willing to cease work at once provided the Shildon locomotive men, of whom there are over two hundred would join them. Telegrams were read from centres all round Shildon asking what Shildon intended to do and stating that such centres would fall in with them.'

Despite this show of force the Chairman said that the meeting was not representative and should be resumed on Sunday.¹⁰¹

At Bishop Auckland, a brief reference in a newspaper suggests that there the staff did not come out.¹⁰² At Ferryhill on the other hand the men were out. One of the reasons which might have led to the patchy response of staff was that the company made a deliberate attempt to appeal to the loyalty of staff. A notice from Mr. Gibb, the General Manager in York dated 24th February 1897 promises that '... the loyalty of a very large proportion of their staff ... will at the close of the strike be taken into consideration by the Board'.¹⁰³

Another factor may well have been the attitude of the ASRS Headquarters in London and the comments by Harford, the General Secretary. Early newspaper reports quoted him as saying that the strike was premature and unauthorised.¹⁰⁴ This must have been a delicate situation to be in as Walter Hudson (see Biographies) was the local secretary of the ASRS, ASRS President for the year and a leading figure in the

¹⁰⁰ Evening Chronicle 24.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

¹⁰¹ Evening Chronicle, Special Edition 26.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

¹⁰² Newcastle Daily Leader 27.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

¹⁰³ In PRO RAIL 527/1029

¹⁰⁴ In PRO RAIL 527/1029

Society. This advice was slightly softened by his reported agreement that they should not return until they had a fair understanding. Another report quotes him as advising that the men should go back and if no action was taken on their grievances they should give legal notice.¹⁰⁵ A third report records that he sanctioned the movement and agreed that all men should cease work. Some of these divergent reports may be due to biased reporting, confusion, time delays, etc. but we also have to take note that on one occasion later Harford was affected by drink.¹⁰⁶

Returning to the meeting of delegates on 26th February, it seems that at this meeting Harford put forward the proposition that he had already discussed the Terms of Settlement with Mr. Gibb. These were that the men would return to work and matters would be gone into again in a reasonable time. Harford referred to '... this unfortunate dispute, so disastrous not only to the Company but to so many people with whom we have no grievance at all ...'

Gibb suggested that to the terms of the settlement should be added a restatement of the position that:

'With a view to remove any risk of misunderstanding, the Company state that their practice is to afford opportunities for conferences between the Directors or Officers of the Company and the men about any subjects of importance ...'

One delegate intervened to ask whether the men would be allowed to return to work without any apology. Harford stated that what the men expected when the programme came to be considered by the Company was:

'... consideration in respect either of hours or of wages, and, if the company cannot satisfy the deputation which may be appointed, then if the men are not satisfied I want to inform you as I do in all seriousness that the men would be perfectly justified not in what they did last week, in taking an illegal method of terminating their contract with the Company, but in giving notice of their intention in a proper and constitutional way.'¹⁰⁷

In reply to these points Mr. Gibb took a hard line. He emphasised that the men who went out without notice were liable in damages. He insisted on a return to work and advised the men that 'You must trust your leaders'. Following this the men

¹⁰⁵ *Evening Chronicle* 26.2.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1029)

¹⁰⁶ *Alcock op cit* p.288

¹⁰⁷ PRO RAIL 527/1029

agreed on 26th February to return to work on 27th February but wanted consideration in a period of ten days. Instead of this Gibb offered a meeting on 12th March.

In the Board minutes of 5th March 1897 the Terms of Settlement are recorded in full:

- '1. The Company decline to enter upon any discussion of any matter while the men are on strike.
2. Mr. Gibb's letter of 23rd February to Mr. Bell states the Company's attitude as to the reinstatement of the men and the men undertake to return to their work at once.
3. After the men have returned to work, Mr. Gibb is willing to meet Mr. Harford to discuss the complaints of the men employed at the Forth Goods Warehouse, which led to the strike, including the question about the checkers.
4. The Company will withdraw the prosecutions which have been commenced against the men for leaving the service without notice and
5. With a view to remove any risk of misunderstanding, the Company state that their practice is to afford opportunities for conferences between the Directors or Offices of the Company and the men about any subjects of importance, and this enables the men to obtain any further discussion which they may desire on the programmes that have been put forward.

Note: An appointment for a meeting with the Directors can be given for Friday the 12th March

(Signed) George S. Gibb

(Signed) Edward Harford

26th February 1897'

This was approved by the Board.¹⁰⁸

In the interval between agreement and the meeting with the Directors the position was also assessed by the men. The men were reported as considering that they had given the Company a fright. At Shildon it was said that: 'The victory was now half won and the crisis had done more than anything to strengthen the Society'.¹⁰⁹

Bell, who had taken part in the discussions, said that the men had achieved a great victory.¹¹⁰ At Shildon it was also agreed that the men at Shildon centre

¹⁰⁸ PRO RAIL 527/18, Min.10645, 5.3.1897

¹⁰⁹ Newcastle Daily Journal 1.3.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1030)

¹¹⁰ Newcastle Daily Leader 1.3.1897 (in PRO RAIL 527/1030)

should support financially and morally the representatives of the men who had to appear before Mr. Gibb. On 12th March 1897 the Board received a deputation of Harford and 38 delegates who presented programmes of improvement. The meeting lasted eight hours. The Chairman of the Board, J.W. Pease, emphasised that the Company could 'only pay a fair week's wage for a fair week's work' and that terms of employment were good as was shown by the demand for jobs. In a typical statement of paternalism he listed the benefits of that employment. Jobs were permanent and not seasonal. If an employee went sick full pay was granted for a week or more and then half pay. Travel was at privilege rate and in 1896 441,133 such tickets had been issued. Free passes were allowed in addition to annual holidays of three to six days. Ex-gratia payments were made including those to widows. Interest was paid on bank deposits and for several years pension had been paid to the retired. He then turned to the claims saying:

'As to the different grievances, such as had been referred to, these would be enquired into. As to the enormous demands the deputation had made upon the company, the Board must take those into most serious consideration before they could make any reply.'¹¹¹

Shortly after this meeting the Board decided, honouring its earlier promise that:

'As an acknowledgement to all the men in the employment of the Company who were loyal to their service during the recent strike, the Directors authorised the distribution of special grants according to the list submitted.'¹¹²

At a special meeting of the Board on 29th March 1897 they estimated that the cost of conceding the claims would be £380,000 per annum and it would be:

'... absolutely impossible for the Board to grant the demands put forward. Receipts would have to be doubled. The Company would have to take the line that it could only pay a fair week's wage for a fair week's work.'

The Board stressed the other benefits of the job. In addition they also said that promotion must not be confined to seniority and that the eyesight test must be maintained. If staff were not satisfied they could leave and others would take their places. They were willing for the case to go to Arbitration on wages and hours but not

¹¹¹ PRO RAIL 527/18 Min.10647 12.3.1897

¹¹² PRO RAIL 667/145 18.3.1897

on the eight hours day or the claim by locomotive staff.¹¹³ The Directors met the deputation on 30th March 1897 but, as it did not meet the demands of the men in full, the deputation asked for an adjournment. On 31st March 1897 when the reference to Arbitration was to be agreed, Harford went to the Board Room very much under the influence of drink and the meeting had to be further adjourned. Bell took over on 5th April 1897 and persuaded the men to agree and accept Lord James of Hereford as the Arbitrator.¹¹⁴ On 9th August Lord James of Hereford made his award. Among other things he ruled that overtime should be paid for work in excess of 10 hours a day. He gave a rate for Sunday working (between midnight on Saturday and midnight on Sunday) of time and a half. He awarded increases to firemen and cleaners. He revised the classification of signal cabins between the ten and twelve hours categories.¹¹⁵

The Board Minutes of 26th August 1897 state that the report of Lord James of Hereford had been received. They give no details of the award but include the information that he was offered a gold pass over the NER network.¹¹⁶ The Railway Review felt that '... taking the locomotive men and goods, mineral and pilot guards, we find valuable gains'. These gains were in the area of a guaranteed day and overtime improvements. Firemen, cleaners and signalmen had benefited in a settlement which would cost £25,000 per annum. The Review repeated the conclusion 'but we do claim that the condition of a large number have been materially improved'.¹¹⁷ One month later the Review reported that it had been decided to accept the award.¹¹⁸

The outcome of the strike was devastating for Harford. At a meeting in Plymouth he was censured on a number of counts, one of which was that on 31st March he was under the influence of drink while negotiating.¹¹⁹ He was dismissed with a pension. He had devoted his life to the railwaymen but it was said that '... viewed from some standpoints his outlook on life and labour was narrow and restricted'.¹²⁰

113 PRO RAIL 527/18 Min.10651

114 Bagwell *op cit* p.182

115 *Parliamentary Papers* C 9012 (1898) p.156

116 PRO RAIL 527/19 Min.10699 26.8.1897

117 Railway Review 13.8.1897

118 Railway Review 3.9.1897 and 10.9.1897

119 G.W. Alcock *op cit* p.287

120 *Ibid* p.289

In the traditional way following a strike, the Board of the NER decided to honour the virtuous and the appropriate Minute read:

'As an acknowledgement to all the men in the employment of the Company who were loyal to their services during the recent strike, the Directors authorise the distribution of Special Grants, according to the list submitted'.¹²¹

At national level, by June 1897 there had been so many demands from individual grades that the EC decided to summon a Conference on 11th and 12th October 1897 to draft an all-grades programme. At this Conference there was neither the desire nor the intention to cause a general strike.¹²² The outcome of this Conference was not the preparation of a new master case but the adoption of a uniformity of approach. In accordance with this outcome Bell sent the overall programme of claims to all the railway companies. The Companies met on 4th November 1897 but a dichotomy of approach was revealed between the moderate approach of the NER and the determined wish of the other companies to oppose the programme. To avoid the conciliatory effect of the NER attitude, new machinery for discussion was established and on 17th November 1897 the other Companies agreed on an anti-strike agreement of common action which was later ratified by their Boards. Bell wrote again to the Companies but from all of them except the North Eastern he received a totally negative reply. At this point strong action could have been expected but it did not take place for several reasons. Bell, himself, was only acting in a temporary capacity and was therefore not in a strong position, the Board of Trade was not ready to act, the Railway Review came out against action and John Burns urged caution.¹²³

At the beginning of 1899 a Great Eastern Railway Shop labourer enthused that he heard no complaints because the men 'are becoming more happy and contented' and that the only problems are those caused by the 'ink slingers of trades' union yellow journals' because 'never has the worker been in such a prosperous condition'.¹²⁴ In the North Eastern Region however the situation was not so rosy. The year 1899 began with

121 PRO RAIL 667/145 18.3.1897 Directors' Board Meeting

122 Croker *op cit* p.86

123 Bagwell *op cit* pp.184-189

124 Railway Herald 14.1.1899

a statement in the Railway Herald that the grievances between the NER and the rulleymen at Sunderland had been amicably settled¹²⁵ but another journal recorded that in February there was dissatisfaction at Middlesbrough over delay in dealing with local grievances.¹²⁶ The next month saw a headline 'Dark Days at Darlington'. It appears that there were complaints of a serious nature at Darlington and management was not able to deal with these. They had affected morale to the extent that: 'From the driver down to the capstan lad there are innumerable grievances for which repeated representations bring forth no redress ...'¹²⁷

The grievances of the locomen in particular were becoming numerous and serious with one of the main objections being to '... the cruel system of working men seven shifts in the six working days'.¹²⁸ Locomen at West Hartlepool also objected to the question of the wholesale fining of locomen without 'apparent justification' and appealed beyond the General Manager to the Directors.¹²⁹ The locomen came to the conclusion that they were the 'most abused of any class of men on the NE Railway'.¹³⁰

In April 1899 the locomen requested a meeting with the Directors¹³¹ but in May a meeting of the locomen in the NE was held to object to the refusal of the Directors to meet the men.¹³²

Further disputes took place later in the year. In July 1899 there was a dispute at Monkswearmouth, where the carters alleged a breach of the Lord James' award. Richard Bell of the ASRS met the GM but the proposals were rejected. The men ceased to work overtime and were threatened with dismissal. For their part the men said that if this happened notice of a general strike would be given in the goods department and the ASRS executive was summoned to meet.¹³³ Subsequently Mr. Bell and a deputation representing rulleymen and warehousemen at Monkswearmouth met

¹²⁵ Railway Herald 26.1.1899

¹²⁶ Railway Review 17.2.1899

¹²⁷ Railway Review 3.3.1899

¹²⁸ Railway Review 24.3.1899

¹²⁹ Railway Review 21.4.1899

¹³⁰ Railway Review 28.4.1899

¹³¹ PRO RAIL 527/19 Min.10857 21.4.1899

¹³² Railway Review 26.5.1899

¹³³ Railway Times 29.7.1899

management at York. An amicable settlement was reached with an immediate increase in wages.¹³⁴ But, as one door closed, another opened and it was reported that dissatisfaction was rife at Gateshead. Engine drivers and firemen claimed increased wages and less hours and threatened an immediate strike.¹³⁵ In this atmosphere of industrial unrest the NER Board had to fight another battle. Shareholders were told at their August 1899 meeting that, although the Accidents Bill before Parliament was unworkable 'what the railway companies did not want was more Board of Trade control'. They also had to face a criticism from a shareholder from the floor who objected 'to the large amount paid in wages'. That shareholder, however, was rebuked by another who felt that this was '... the best way to secure industrial peace'.¹³⁶

Dissatisfaction then became centred on other matters. In September 1899 a meeting at Gateshead concerned alleged intimidation. The men who were 'simply spoiling for a fight'¹³⁷ threatened strike action. A similar meeting of complaint was held at Middlesbrough.¹³⁸ One journal said that '... some doubtless will attribute this to the unreasonableness of the men ...'¹³⁹ and another journal commented on the 'restless dissatisfied spirit abroad'. At New Shildon a strike was threatened over the rule which did not allow men to work overtime on Saturday if they were late in reporting for work on the Monday.¹⁴⁰ At Newcastle the goods clerks decided on the traditional approach of a memorial about overtime. Firemen at Gateshead came out on strike.¹⁴¹ In Autumn, in fact, there was dissatisfaction. Strikes of engine-cleaners took place at Sunderland and Newcastle..¹⁴² The ASRS in November issued a manifesto for united action.¹⁴³ This seemed to be being answered. In November 1899 a deputation of locomen from Gateshead, Tweedmouth and Heaton won concessions from management.¹⁴⁴ A

¹³⁴ Railway Times 12.8.1899

¹³⁵ Railway Times 23.9.1899

¹³⁶ Railway Times 12.8.1899

¹³⁷ Newcastle Daily Leader as report in Railway Review 15.9.1899

¹³⁸ Railway Review 15.9.1899

¹³⁹ Railway Review 22.9.1899

¹⁴⁰ Railway Herald 2.9.1899

¹⁴¹ Railway Herald 28.10.1899

¹⁴² Railway Times 28.10.1899 and Cd 316 p.68

¹⁴³ Railway Herald 4.11.1899

¹⁴⁴ Railway Times 11.11.1899

deputation of passenger guards from five districts met management and agreed on uniform changes and other matters. And, from a Darlington Conference of North Eastern Railway Servants, an all-grades programme went to Directors of the NER seeking alterations of wages and conditions of:

'... drivers, firemen, guards, shunters, dock-gate men, berthing masters, goods staff, platelayers, examiners and greasers, carriage washers, cleaners and brakemen, parcel porters, letter sorters, signalmen, passenger guards, ticket examiners and collectors, passenger porters ...'¹⁴⁵

As the firemen went back to work, shunters at Gateshead, Forth Banks, Blaydon and Heaton came out on strike about Sunday duty.¹⁴⁶

Attempts were made to find a solution. In December a Conciliation Board was suggested but the men turned this down. A leader in the Railway Review urged them to reconsider because:

'To strike for the sake of striking, or simply to demonstrate your power, is neither wise nor dignified. To adopt such a course until all other means have failed is also contrary to the rules of the society, and altogether against the principles we profess.'¹⁴⁷

Meetings were held and it was reported that 'each party is saying smooth things'.¹⁴⁸ Richard Bell pointed out that the James Award had not given general satisfaction and hours of work for signalmen were too long.¹⁴⁹ As for the management, the case was put by Sir Joseph Pease who said: 'The proposals submitted ask for a general advance of wages to 56 grades of men of different descriptions. Also for reduction of hours for many grades ...'.

He stated that these matters had been recently settled. He reminded them of the James Award. He went on to say:

'Trade in several parts of the district served by the North Eastern Railway is no doubt at the present moment very active and this may reasonably be held to influence, within proper limits, the wages of some men in the districts affected.'

¹⁴⁵ Railway Times 25.11.1899

¹⁴⁶ Railway Herald 11.11.1899

¹⁴⁷ Railway Review 1.12.1899

¹⁴⁸ Railway Herald 23.12.1899

¹⁴⁹ PRO RAIL 527/390 6.12.1899

He pointed out that the claim did involve 'very excessive demands' and he reminded them of the benefits of security of tenure. At the end of the meeting Bell said he would ask for authority to negotiate¹⁵⁰ but by 30th December 1899 over 100 platelayers in Darlington and Teesside were idle some having left work and some having been prevented from working.¹⁵¹ And, at the close of that year it was reported that 15,000 members had joined ASRS during 1899.¹⁵²

Against this background of strife it is difficult to understand some of the comments made as the nineteenth century drew to its close. At the end of 1898 the Railway Review stated: 'Never in the history of railways have there been such prosperous times ...'¹⁵³ In 1898 Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease MP of the NER said: 'As the nineteenth century neared its close, all seemed set fair for a long spell of prosperity'. However, one historian of the NER commented that 'Sir Joseph faced the half-yearly meetings of the NER shareholders with assurance bordering on complacency'.¹⁵⁴

If we look at the period leading up to the 1897 Strike and the Strike itself it is clear that the railwaymen in the North East were pursuing a separatist outlook and industrial policy. This may have been aided by two factors taking place nationally. The first was that the ASRS was attempting to increase centralisation and the second was that over industry as a whole and over the country as a whole the average attendance at Union Branch meetings was as low as 10% to 25%.¹⁵⁵ The NER actions were also surprising to some people because they were being taken against a Railway Board which had continued to be in advance of other Boards in their willingness to negotiate with the Association. As we have seen in 1890 the NER agreed to the inclusion of a trade union representative in negotiations whereas other Companies, as late as 1896, with the NER dissenting, agreed to present '... a bold front ... to the interference of the Society'.¹⁵⁶ As happened in other cases the strike was not initially over a major issue of principle,

¹⁵⁰ PRO RAIL 527/19 Min.10915 15.12.1899

¹⁵¹ Railway Herald 30.12.1899

¹⁵² Railway Review 29.12.1899

¹⁵³ Railway Review 13.10.1899

¹⁵⁴ R. Bell: *Twenty Five Years of the North Eastern Railway* pp.5-7

¹⁵⁵ G.D.H. Cole and Postgate: *The Common People 1746-1946* (Methuen, 1956) p.438

¹⁵⁶ Bagwell *op cit* pp.177-179

but because the application of an agreement was handled in a particular way by giving an option to checkers to be paid fixed wage or wage plus overtime.¹⁵⁷ The outcome was, however, important. Alcock quotes Edwards as stating:

'My readers will perhaps contrast the two NE strikes and their results. That of 1867 by enginemen led to disaster, defeat and loss, whilst that of 1897, shared alike by enginemen, guards, signalmen and others brought about the blessings of arbitration and a fair and satisfactory consideration of the workers' demands upon the Company.'¹⁵⁸

The NER had, for the first time, recognised ASRS as speaking for all employees even though it did not represent them. The NER told other companies of its arbitration proposals in 1897¹⁵⁹ and arbitration was used in that year, in 1898, in 1899 and 1900.¹⁶⁰

The railways were in fact following a well-established NE practice in other industries. In 1869 the Board of Arbitration and Conciliation for the Iron Trades in the North of England was established. We find Odger stating in 1870: 'Working men desire to settle their quarrels with their employer by arbitration ... a more equitable instrumentality for the settlement of misunderstandings than brute force'.¹⁶¹

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous Chapter we noted the distinctive features of railway trade unionism in the North East. The first point was that the position of the railwaymen and their unions was influenced by the NER's monopoly over its area. The second was that there was a strong tradition of trade unionism among the miners in the North East and the industrialists on the NER Board were more accustomed to handling industrial relations problems. From the beginning of the railways in the region, workmen had been accustomed to a regime of benevolent paternalism accompanied by a strict code of discipline. Workmen tended to be loyal partly because in some towns and cities in the

157 Tomlinson *op cit* p.751

158 Quoted by Alcock *op cit* p.302

159 G. Alderman: The Railway Companies and the Growth of Trade Unionism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries in *Historical Journal*, XIV, 1971 p.133

160 C.J. Allen: *The North Eastern Railway* (Ian Allen, London, 1964) p.227

161 Kynaston *op cit* pp.54-55

region the NER was the main employer. The area was in the vanguard with the foundation of a railway union in the 1860s but railway trade unionism in the North East received a major blow with the defeat of the 1867 strike. After some years of relative quiet in 1889 Darlington took the lead with the Darlington Programme which was adopted before the national programme. In 1890 a significant achievement was the declaration on the principle of recognition.

These tendencies continued in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The North East pursued its own Programme and was already ahead of the national unions as a result of the understanding reached in 1890. In 1897 it had its own railway strike and the outcome of this was more successful than that of the early strike recorded in the last Chapter. The men in the North East secured Arbitration on a number of occasions and the other Railway Companies noted the different position in the NER by excluding that Company from their machinery for discussion. The GRWU was strong in the North East and NER men were involved in spreading the message to other areas.

However, the seeds of future trouble were already there. From 1891 Gibbs had been introducing new costing techniques, procedures, organisations and new blood into management. The NER Board in 1898 was stated to be one of the strongest in the country. Old attitudes and paternalism were being challenged.

The developments in the North East railway unions must be considered against developments nationally and with developments in the mining unions in the North East. Nationally there was the development of 'new unionism'. As Halevy puts it: 'Grades of labour too poor to pay large subscriptions and until now, too crushed by the hardship of their lot to dream of revolt, learnt to organise and form their unions ...'¹⁶²

Dockers, unskilled workers on the railways, the gas workers, and the seamen founded such unions with low subscriptions and organised for strikes. As regards political affiliations: 'The strong desire of nearly all sections of Trade Unionists for this or that measure of legal enactment ... does not, for the moment, attach them as Trade Unionists, to any political party ...'¹⁶³

¹⁶² E. Halevy: *History of the English People: Epilogue Book 2* (Penguin, London, 1939) p.143

¹⁶³ Ibid p.162 quoting Webb: *Industrial Democracy* p.539

Initially the new unions took a more aggressive attitude and derided the older 'friendly society' types. They were led by younger leaders who were less identified with the old regime. But, from 1890-1900, membership of new unions fell by between one-third and two-thirds. However, some of the new unions did well in certain industries and large works.¹⁶⁴ They were a mixture of 'general' unions and 'industrial' unions.¹⁶⁵ The early militancy in many cases changed to a more conciliatory tone.¹⁶⁶

As with the miners of Durham and Northumberland, railwaymen in the North East demonstrated a propensity not only to be strong Trades Unionists but also to take a distinctive regional line within the national movement. Their self-consciousness as railwaymen was high but they saw themselves very much as North East railwaymen with special problems, interests and policies. So it was similarly with the Durham and Northumberland miners.

The first Coal Union was established in Durham in 1825. In 1869 the Durham Miners' Association was formed and in 1878 the Durham County Federation brought together a number of related coal unions in Durham.¹⁶⁷ In 1892 Durham had its own major strike which ended only as a result of mediation by Bishop Westcott. In 1892 Durham applied to join the Miners' Federation of Great Britain but could not agree terms. Durham and Northumberland stayed outside of the MFGB and consistently opposed the 8 hours Bill. Speaking in one of the debates John Wilson said: '... my position ... is that we in Durham would like to be left to manage our own affairs'.¹⁶⁸

There are two other aspects which should be mentioned. The role of any or the 'labour aristocracy' on the railways is dealt with in Chapter 1 and at other points in this thesis. Even committed supporters of the concept admit that it applied basically during a limited period and in certain industries. On the railways, the pay and grading structure established a sort of 'labour aristocracy' of engine drivers. They had, from the beginning of the ASRS, pressed for their own Association and ASLEF was established to

¹⁶⁴ Hobsbawm as quoted in Clegg and others: *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889: Vol.1* p.87

¹⁶⁵ Clegg *ibid* p.91

¹⁶⁶ Clegg *ibid* p.93

¹⁶⁷ R.P. Arnot: *The Miners* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1949) pp.65-87

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid* pp.213-272

meet this need. However, its influence was for many years limited in comparison with that of the ASRS. At the other end of the scale, the GRWU - a 'new union' - catered for general labourers. Both represented a set-back to the ASRS vision of one union for railwaymen. At times the unions co-operated but at other times they competed and differed.

The second aspect is the change in management styles. The changes in union attitudes and policies did not simply reflect general changes in the nature of Trades Unionism during the period, the influence of Collectivist ideas or changes in the economy but were in part reactive to changes in the attitudes and methods of management. From the end of the nineteenth century, the management practices of the NER were changing in the interests of efficiency and economy to the degree that the Railway Review commented in April 1904: 'The chiefs are rarely seen and when they are the men are only so much machinery'.¹⁶⁹ These changes will be discussed in a later Chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Railway Review 1.4.1904

CHAPTER 3. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ISSUES 1901-1910

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NORTH EAST

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a watershed in the economic development of the railways. They were faced with stagnant profits and trade and mounting costs. Management did not think that they were in a position to offer benefits and this led to resentment in all grades and problems in industrial relations.¹ The North East suffered from such changes but should have been in a more advantageous position. It had earlier embarked on an ambitious scheme of reducing costs and improving management control and efficiency. In the period from 1900 there were a number of significant changes in operational matters. The average goods train load rose from 44.18 tons in 1900 to 94.24 tons in 1912 and mineral from 92.49 tons to 182.85 tons.² Trains became more powerful, increasing from 576 to 660 tons and 80 loaded wagons. Wagon capacity increased from 8 to 10½ tons to 15 to 40 tons. In 1903 the 20 ton wagon became the standard with an increase of 34% in revenue.³ Statistics on passenger-miles and ton-miles were compiled. Thirty-seven miles of railway were equipped for electric traction.⁴ Management was reorganised. Gibb appointed Jasper (aged 39) as General Goods Manager. In 1892 he created the post of Superintendent of the Line and Burtt took this post in 1897. In 1902 the Superintendent of the Line became General Superintendent. In 1900 a General Traffic Manager was appointed and in 1902 nine Districts were created and the Loco Department was reorganised. Gibbs introduced Traffic Apprentices and early bright entrants to this grade included R.L. Wedgwood, H.G. Lewin and F. Pick. In 1904 E.C. Geddes entered NER from an overseas railway. Gibb dragged the NER from being a provincial company to a model

¹ R.J. Irving: *The North Eastern Railway Company* p.64

² Tomlinson: *North Eastern Railway* p.780

³ *Ibid* pp.727-728

⁴ *Ibid* pp.730-731

for other railroads. He did, however, meet with opposition from Tennant who had been kept on the Board and Lowthian Bell and finally he went to another job.⁵

Secondly, the NER should have been at an advantage in respect of its more progressive industrial relations policy because it should not have provoked militancy, the management were accustomed to dealing with labour questions in a new climate and railways were critically important in the economy of North East England. On the negative side the NER was not favourably disposed to unionisation of the clerks as they saw this group as having responsibilities for the commercial success of the Company.⁶

In respect of its industrial relations background another historian of the Company has stated:

'It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that after having led the country in its recognition of a trade union - the ASRS - the North Eastern suffered more from strike action, and in several cases without notice, than any other British railway.'⁷

The NER was seen as 'the most complete monopoly in the United Kingdom'.⁸ Its position also isolated it from the other Companies:

'Secure in the position of its own district the North Eastern has never been inclined to enter into any closer understanding with its neighbours than the actual working of the through traffic necessitated ...'⁹

The new management structure introduced by Gibb militated against the former close paternalistic working relationships and in 1904 the Railway Review commented: 'The chiefs are rarely seen and when they are the men are only so much machinery'.¹⁰ When Gibb resigned in 1907 he was replaced by A.K. Butterworth.¹¹ After his resignation the Railway Review stated that there was probably no railway with a more discontented staff than the North Eastern or more honeycombed with Socialist ideas.¹² The years 1907, 1910 and 1911 were prosperous years for the NER and by

⁵ Irving *op cit* pp.213-226 and p.261

⁶ *Ibid* p.73

⁷ C.J. Allen: *The North Eastern Railway* p.228

⁸ Railway Review 5.8.1904

⁹ Lord Monkswell: *The Railways of Great Britain* (Smith, Elder & Co., 1913) p.36

¹⁰ Railway Review 1.4.1904

¹¹ PRO RAIL 527/20 11.1.1906 Min.11428 and 2.3.1906 Min.11469

¹² Railway Review 27.9.1907

1913 the revenue was up 48% on the 1898 total.¹³ The prosperity was vital for towns such as Darlington with its high share of railway employment but, seeing the prosperity, the men wanted a share in this.

REVIEW OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE NORTH EAST

It is against this background of new commercial challenges, new solutions and major organisational change that we must consider the record of NER railwaymen in industrial relations.

The century appeared to begin on a brighter note. The Railway Review contained a tribute to Bell for the results he had achieved in regard to negotiations concerning overtime, the hours of signalmen, wages for goods department men, shunters and engine drivers¹⁴ but Newcastle, Gateshead and Darlington were dissatisfied with the settlement.¹⁵ There was also concern in the North East because Gibb was said to have issued instructions that clerks in the North East could not belong to the ASRS as they had access to confidential information.¹⁶ There was unrest at Shildon leading to a strike in April.¹⁷ At Darlington a Conference of all grades met to commence a new hours and wages movement for an increase of 2s. per week and better rates for night duty.¹⁸ Further meetings were held in October and December at Darlington and led to a claim for a 10% increase, time and a quarter for night duty and time and a half for Sunday duty.¹⁹ In September Mr. W. Collinson of the National Free Labour Association referred to discontent among railwaymen.²⁰

In December 1900 the mineral guards at Gateshead came out and they were followed by those at Sunderland, South Dock and Tyne Dock. The dispute concerned a ruling that guards should take out the first available brake van.²¹ The

¹³ Bell: *Twenty-Five Years of the North Eastern Railway* p.55

¹⁴ Railway Review 26.1.1900

¹⁵ Railway Review 9.2.1900

¹⁶ Railway Review 5.1.1900

¹⁷ Railway Review 17.2.1900 and C689 p.62

¹⁸ Railway Review 22.6.1900

¹⁹ Railway Review 12.10.1900 and 7.12.1900

²⁰ Railway Herald 15.9.1900

²¹ Railway Review 14.12.1900 and C689 p.xlvi

dispute had been simmering since March.²² Guards were attached to their vans and one told the Northern Echo that it was '... a place of abode. He kept it well dusted'.²³ The dispute spread and involved about half of the mineral guards. Percy Main and Blyth came out²⁴ and Middlesbrough wished to do so but were told to continue working.²⁵ Bell (see Biographies) urged a return to work and the men saw Gibb and returned. They were considered to have acted too hastily.²⁶ The Railway Herald condemned the action as an '... ill-timed and irresponsible outbreak which will check the work of trade unionists where its need is greater than on the highly-paid North East Railway'.²⁷

The NER Traffic Committee authorised bonus pay to those who took no part in the strike of the mineral guards and others in the Newcastle District.²⁸ The dispute was resolved on the basis that each man was to have his own van when it was available and otherwise would take the first van on hand.²⁹

The Railway Review concluded about the year 1901: 'There, though everything is not yet perfect, an automatic channel does exist for the redress of grievances and the adjustment of disputes'.³⁰ If this was so it could only refer to the NER as elsewhere the machinery was still being demanded.

In the North East even with the machinery in existence there was unrest. A meeting in Newcastle Central Branch of the 'NE men's movement' resulted in a monster mass meeting. A similar meeting at Newcastle City Branch sought a 10% advance in wages.³¹ This demand was countered by management's refusal to have a meeting and a suggestion that reductions may need to be thought of.³² From this point the situation deteriorated further and the Railway Review stated that if the dismissal of NE men continued there was the prospect that 'an agitation will commence the

22 Railway Herald 10.3.1900

23 Northern Echo 12.12.1900

24 Railway Review 21.12.1900

25 North Star 18.12.1900

26 Railway Review 21.12.1900

27 Railway Herald 22.12.1900

28 PRO RAIL 527/1258

29 Bell: *Twenty-Five Years of the North East Railway* p.24

30 Railway Review 4.1.1901

31 Railway Review 15.3.1901

32 Railway Review 22.3.1901

consequences of which one can but faintly foretell'.³³ The year ended with a 'spirited discussion' on the signalmen's movement at Durham where it was agreed to support the same and at Middlesbrough there was a large meeting on the 8 hours day.³⁴ Meanwhile in the country as a whole a Conference of railwaymen in March had objected to the rejection of a 10% claim.³⁵

Throughout 1902 the issues continued to develop. At Middlesbrough the position of the locomen was most deplorable according to the Railway Review.³⁶ Adding to the discontent was the introduction of new operating procedures and efficiency measures, which have been discussed earlier in this Chapter: 'The changes on the NE amount to something like a revolution'.³⁷ One of these changes was the separation of the operational and commercial duties on the railway and in the docks with the Superintendent of the Line becoming a General Superintendent.³⁸ The year 1903 began on a more conciliatory note. The Railway Review of 2nd January 1903 contained a comment that the strike weapon was becoming less effective but this was glossed by Puck in 'From the North Eastern Railway' pointing out that it was still available but must be better organised.³⁹ The position of the North Eastern firemen was raised at mass meetings but Gibb refused to meet them⁴⁰ and in May ominous grumblings were reported from the various loco centres in the North East.⁴¹ The NE men pressed for a pension scheme but their proposal was condemned by the Railway Review⁴² and by Hull, Leeds and Middlesbrough Branches.⁴³ At the end of the year the NER Board agreed to receive a deputation of the men to discuss the scheme.⁴⁴

The next year the pattern continued. The year began with the GM NER submitting to the Board a draft reply to R. Bell, General Secretary of the ASRS, who

33 Railway Review 24.5.1901

34 Railway Review 13.12.1901

35 Labour Leader 30.3.1901

36 Railway Review 3.1.1902

37 Railway Review 24.1.1902

38 Bell *op cit* p.25

39 Railway Review 2.1.1903

40 Railway Review 20.3.1903

41 Railway Review 8.5.1903

42 Railway Review 23.10.1903

43 Railway Review 13.11.1903

44 PRO RAIL 527/20 18.12.1903 Min.11250

had written about conditions of service.⁴⁵ Although Darlington Branch noted that complaints were becoming very numerous in most grades⁴⁶ the year was dominated by the grievances of signalmen. A letter writer in the Railway Review said that signalmen in the NER were in a state of panic⁴⁷ and in August those working electric trains demanded more money.⁴⁸ The pressure for an 8 hours day also continued.⁴⁹ At Shildon the year 1904 ended with an expression of hope that better times would come with the New Year.⁵⁰ At the beginning of that New Year the local newspaper predicted that Shildon would become the central wagon-building works of the whole system⁵¹ but, later in the year, when it was confirmed that the Darlington Wagon and Engineering Company Limited was going into liquidation, the same newspaper reported that there was dissatisfaction by employees on hours and wages.⁵²

At the beginning of 1905 there had been a mass meeting in London on the effect of big engines, heavy loading of trains, long hours, Sunday labour 'and hosts of other grievances pressing adversely upon the men generally'.⁵³ A meeting with Gibb had been inconclusive⁵⁴ and a meeting in Leeds of the ASRS and ASLEF initiated a new claim for drivers, firemen and cleaners.⁵⁵ In September and October there were mass meetings in Sunderland and Newcastle.⁵⁶ At national level the Board Minutes noted that R. Bell had asked to bring a deputation re conditions of service but the Board refused⁵⁷ and correspondence continued.⁵⁸

Following the passing of the 1906 TDA there was an upsurge of union activity. There was a need for such activity in the case of railwaymen. Their weekly wage rates had increased by only 5% in the period 1886-1906 compared with increases

45 PRO RAIL 527/20 8.1.1904 Min.11254
 46 Railway Review 18.3.1904
 47 Railway Review 11.3.1904
 48 Railway Review 26.8.1904
 49 Railway Review 7.10.1904
 50 Shildons' and District Advertiser 22.12.1904
 51 Shildons' and District Advertiser 16.2.1905
 52 Shildons' and District Advertiser 24.8.1905
 53 Railway Review 17.2.1905
 54 Railway Review 17.3.1905
 55 Railway Review 21.4.1905
 56 Railway Review 24.9.1905 and 20.10.1905
 57 PRO RAIL 527/20 13.10.1905 Min.11411
 58 PRO RAIL 527/20 2.11.1905 Min.11417

of 18% to 26% in other trades.⁵⁹ Lord Askwith, the Government expert in industrial relations, wrote later that wages, generally speaking, were dangerously low. The railway companies planned rates but there was no planning on wages.⁶⁰ The attitude to wages coincided with a period of increased productivity and higher dividends on the railways due to new methods.⁶¹

In March the Railway Review reported that the grievances of signalmen had become intolerable⁶² and in June the ASRS EC faced demands from 30 Branches for a national all-grades campaign.⁶³ By December 1906 three national Conferences had been held to draw up national programmes for England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland.⁶⁴ The England and Wales programme covered an 8 hours day for all men concerned in movement of vehicles, 10 hours for others, booking-on and rest periods, overtime rates, a guaranteed week, recognition of the ASRS and an increase of 2s. per week except for the 8 hours day men.⁶⁵

The factors that we mentioned at the beginning of the Chapter were coming together. Unrest was due to wage rates but was also due to the introduction and implementation of new management techniques and reorganisation. Old working methods and relationships were being destroyed and in this industry in particular this led to clashes. Old personal relationships with management could no longer act as a catalyst and the friction showed. Looking back on 1907 one commentator observed that:

'In 1907 the country faced the imminent prospects of a stoppage of all its railways that had never happened yet. It threatened a trial of strength approaching Civil War. If it came about men did not see how life could go on.'⁶⁶

In January 1907 Bell sent a copy of the all-grades programme to the Companies. He repeated this in February and July.⁶⁷ In June Bell reported that all the

⁵⁹ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* p.262

⁶⁰ Lord Askwith: *Industrial Problems and Disputes* p.116

⁶¹ Bagwell *op cit* p.262

⁶² Railway Review 16.3.1906

⁶³ Bagwell *op cit* p.263

⁶⁴ Railway Review 7.12.1906

⁶⁵ Railway Review 28.12.1906

⁶⁶ E.H. Phelps Brown: *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (MacMillan, London, 1959) p.298

⁶⁷ Bagwell *op cit* pp.264-265

Companies had rejected the claim for recognition.⁶⁸ A summer campaign supported him. In the meantime the Voice of Labour Journal had been demanding more action: 'Direct Action, then, is what we stand for'.⁶⁹ It had urged railway workers: 'Let the Workers standard be: demand and obtain'.⁷⁰ It also consistently condemned Bell saying first 'If they (the railway workers) want their demands to be listened to, they must have a strike ...'⁷¹ and later in September 'everyone knows that for months the men have been ripe for drastic action ...'⁷²

Bell continued with his attempts to meet the Companies but in October the Companies again refused. The ASRS backed the men and Lord Claud Hamilton, one of the die-hard Railway Chairmen, said that the ASRS was making the first move in a deep-laid campaign against economic order.⁷³ A great majority of the workers declared for a strike.⁷⁴ This led to a renewed search for a solution and the 1907 Conciliation and Arbitration Agreement proposed by the Board of Trade provided: '... a scheme for Conciliation and Arbitration in questions relating to rates of wages and hours of labour of certain classes of railway employees'.⁷⁵

The scheme was accepted by the Unions.⁷⁶ In retrospect, Lord Askwith said that Bell was not strong on the recognition issue because he could not have coped in terms of resources with the machinery.⁷⁷ The solution however had inherent problems which, as we shall see later, caused even more bitter reaction. The employers regarded it as an alternative to recognition and collective bargaining and in the discussions leading to its promulgation one of the issues was whether Unions should not press for recognition for the next seven years.⁷⁸ After promulgation the Company did not act in the spirit of the scheme, awards were to last for four years and key sections of staff were

⁶⁸ Railway Review 28.6.1907

⁶⁹ The Voice of Labour 18.1.1907

⁷⁰ The Voice of Labour 20.4.1907

⁷¹ The Voice of Labour 1.6.1907

⁷² The Voice of Labour 21.9.1907

⁷³ H. du Parq: *Life of David Lloyd George* (Caxton Press, London, nd) Vol.3 p.495

⁷⁴ *Ibid* pp.495-496. The figures were ASRS 76,925:8773 and GRWU 3,101:84 (Railway Review 8.11.1907)

⁷⁵ W. Wood and Sir J. Stamp: *Railways* (HUL, London, 1928) p.152

⁷⁶ Railway Review 15.11.1907

⁷⁷ Lord Askwith: *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (Murray, London, 1926) p.121

⁷⁸ Bagwell *op cit* pp.271-272

excluded from the scheme, e.g. salaried and supervisory staffs and shopmen.⁷⁹ At the end of 1907 a request from the GRWU for a meeting was again refused.⁸⁰

The Souvenir History of the ASRS commented that in 1906 the men in the North East as usual had a movement which had been in operation from November 1903.⁸¹ This meant that for the next few years the men had to consider whether to support their own movement or the national movement.

The year began with the resignation of Sir George Gibb. The Railway Review said he was 'the most easily approachable of managers'. In the same issue Puck of the North Eastern rather qualified the favourable assessment. Finally there was a reference to 'despicable dodges to reduce wages and standards of signalmen'.⁸² In March the Review said that railwaymen were wanting to share in the savings made by the railways and the North Eastern men were taking the lead in the matter.⁸³ The same issue stated that the men of the North East were guilty of 'imagining that they are the salt of the earth'.⁸⁴ Mass meetings were held at Middlesbrough, Darlington, Sunderland, West Hartlepool, Durham, Northallerton and Stockton.⁸⁵ Six days of meetings in May produced concessions.⁸⁶ These concessions were met with general dissatisfaction initially at Darlington, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Gateshead and Shildon.⁸⁷ In the final vote those Branches who were wholly, or with qualifications, in favour were Barnard Castle, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Northallerton, Seaham Harbour and Tynemouth. Those against were Consett, Gateshead, Hartlepoons, Percy Main, Tyne Dock, Durham, Ferryhill and Sunderland. Bishop Auckland was split.⁸⁸

The ASRS Executive decided to accept, at which point Newcastle rejected it.⁸⁹ The NER Board agreed to accept the ASRS decision and gave a guarantee that no

⁷⁹ Bagwell *op cit* pp.275-287

⁸⁰ RAIL 527/20 Min.11588 13.12.1907

⁸¹ *Souvenir History of the ASRS* p.129

⁸² Railway Review 12.1.1906

⁸³ Railway Review 30.3.1906

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ Railway Review 30.3.1906, 6.4.1906 and 20.4.1906

⁸⁶ Railway Review 4.5.1906

⁸⁷ Railway Review 18.5.1906, 22.6.1906, 6.7.1906 and 13.7.1906

⁸⁸ Railway Review 6.7.1906 and 13.7.1906

⁸⁹ Railway Review 20.7.1906

one would be worse off.⁹⁰ The year ended with a meeting at Newcastle on the All Grades Movement and with Shildon calling a meeting of all drivers to discuss issues.⁹¹

The year 1907 was complicated by ASLEF presenting in January their own national programme and claiming an 8 hours day and maintaining that R. Bell was not authorised to negotiate for them.⁹² In Darlington in March a meeting of signalmen expressed dissatisfaction at the 1906 settlement.⁹³ In that month the NER Board Minutes stated that a further letter from the ASRS had been received and that the GM's draft reply had been approved.⁹⁴ In May mass meetings and demonstrations were held at Newcastle, Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Durham, Middlesbrough and Stockton.⁹⁵ In August it was reported that a request for a deputation from the ASRS had been refused⁹⁶ and in the following month a similar request for a deputation from the GRWU was refused.⁹⁷

With the national settlement of Conciliation machinery the NER men had the opportunity to vote on retaining their existing scheme or taking the national scheme.⁹⁸ Although one Branch supported the national scheme⁹⁹ most Branches including Gateshead, Durham, Ferryhill, Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Tyne Dock had criticisms and wished to pursue the NE programme for benefits.¹⁰⁰

THE RCA DISPUTE

At this point we need to break off to consider the separate development of the RCA dispute. As we have commented earlier, clerks were normally not in the forefront as regards unionisation but the Post Office and the RCA were the exceptions. In 1902 in the North East, members of the North East Passenger Clerks Association had

90 Railway Review 3.8.1906
 91 Railway Review 16.11.1906 and 2.12.1906
 92 Railway Review 18.1.1907 and 22.2.1907
 93 Railway Review 8.3.1907
 94 PRO RAIL 527/20 1.3.1907 Min.11549
 95 Railway Review 17.5.1907
 96 PRO RAIL 527/20 9.8.1907 Min.11576
 97 PRO RAIL 527/20 20.9.1907 Min.11577
 98 Alcock *op cit* p.382
 99 Railway Review 22.11.1907
 100 Railway Review 15.11.1907 and 22.11.1907

agreed to amalgamation with the RCA.¹⁰¹ But in that year also the question was asked 'What is wrong with the clerical service on the NER at Middlesbrough?'¹⁰² and the RCA found indifference at Stockton and Forth Goods.¹⁰³ Branches were formed at Darlington in 1903 and in Bishop Auckland in 1905¹⁰⁴ and by 1904 reference was being made to the previous lethargy, indifference and misplaced cringing servile attitude adopted by the clerks.¹⁰⁵ By that time Alderman West had been appointed Parliamentary Secretary of the RCA and was proceeding on non-party lines.¹⁰⁶

The RCA raised the issue of Sunday pay in 1903. In 1904 a resolution on Sunday duty was passed at the TUC and in 1905 the RCA said its business was to obtain for its members a six-day working week or payment for Sunday duty but in 1907 Darlington Branch was engaged in obtaining signatures to a memorial on Sunday pay.¹⁰⁷

In 1906 Middlesbrough pressed for railway clerks to be brought within the ambit of the Workmen's Compensation Act and in 1907 it was reported that this had been done.¹⁰⁸ In the same year the RCA asked for the appointment of a Parliamentary Commission to enquire into Superannuation Funds.¹⁰⁹ In the following years NE clerks were reported to be anxious about their Superannuation Funds and later in 1907 four RCA members were elected to the Managing Committee of the NE fund.¹¹⁰

In 1907 the railway Companies had begun to resist clerks joining unions and the NER had been part of this action.¹¹¹ This dispute continued during 1908 and 1909. The year began on a conciliatory note as the NER granted Sunday pay to clerks.¹¹²

¹⁰¹ Railway Herald 8.2.1902

¹⁰² Railway Herald 1.11.1902

¹⁰³ Railway Herald 25.11.1902

¹⁰⁴ Railway Herald 21.11.1903 and 1.1.1905

¹⁰⁵ The Railway Clerk 1.1.1904

¹⁰⁶ Railway Herald 12.9.1903

¹⁰⁷ Railway Herald 28.3.1903; 1.11.1904; 1.6.1905 and 7.7.1907

¹⁰⁸ The Railway Clerk 7.6.1906 and 7.2.1907

¹⁰⁹ The Railway Clerk 7.6.1906

¹¹⁰ The Railway Clerk 7.2.1907 and 7.8.1907

¹¹¹ G.D.H. Cole and R. Page Arnot: *Trade Unionism on the Railways* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1917) p.93

¹¹² The Railway Clerk 15.1.1908

We need to break off at this point from the specific clerical dispute to consider more general issues. The year 1908 began with issues unresolved. At the beginning of 1908 the Railway Review pointed out that the all-grades movement was neither lost nor dead.¹¹³ A meeting at West Hartlepool condemned the delay in NE management meeting the men and called for decisive action.¹¹⁴ In response to this, and similar suggestions, the NER agreed to meet to discuss methods of negotiation but not the national programme.¹¹⁵ When the GM finally met the men he agreed to discuss a new Conciliation Scheme.¹¹⁶ This was presumably the outcome of a Board discussion which took note of a letter from the ASRS re conditions of service and approved a reply.¹¹⁷ However, the outcome of the meeting was that strike notices were offered.¹¹⁸ As the Northern Democrat observed: 'The NER Company's men have for a considerable time been dissatisfied with the wages paid and the conditions under which these wages are earned'.¹¹⁹

At the same time a mass meeting at Sunderland of District railwaymen pledged support to the North East movement.¹²⁰ The attitude of the ASRS was dismissive commenting that there was '... just now in the North a mania for strikes and he (Bell) supposed that the NE did not wish to be out of it'.¹²¹ The ASRS instructed the NE group to secure a system of conciliation.¹²² The attitude of the Union was criticised by the new Journal of Industrial Unionism which commented:

'On the other hand, the 'Railway Dispute' furnished a final demonstration of the fact that, under a trade union, whole battalions of working men can be turned away from their honest purpose and jockeyed into the morass of conciliation and arbitration for the greater safety and comfort of the capitalist class.'

113 Railway Review 3.1.1908

114 Railway Review 28.2.1908

115 Railway Review 13.3.1908

116 Railway Review 17.4.1908

117 PRO RAIL 527/20 Mins. 11608 and 11612 6.3.1908 and 10.4.1908

118 Railway Review 17.4.1908

119 Northern Democrat April 1908

120 Railway Review 17.4.1908

121 Railway Review 24.4.1908

122 Railway Review 15.5.1908

The Journal later referred to working men on the railways as 'serfs' and claimed that the railways needed Industrial Unionism.¹²³

The scene was set for a strike but a mass meeting at Gateshead, so often the scene of militancy, led to the strike being averted. However, that meeting denounced the EC of the ASRS telling them to negotiate on conciliation and not the programme.¹²⁴ The NER agreed to set up a Conciliation Conference¹²⁵ after the men in the NE had voted in favour of a scheme which favoured them more - the vote being 4804 For and 2149 Against.¹²⁶ The NE scheme involved recognition of the ASRS and had no sectional Boards.¹²⁷ Shortly afterwards it was announced that a Tyne Dock strike had been settled.¹²⁸

At the end of 1908 we return to the dispute with the RCA as there were strong complaints being made about victimisation and intimidation of clerks in the NER and the threat that the matter would be raised in the Commons.¹²⁹ Early in 1909 the Middlesbrough branch reported pressure on clerks not to join the RCA or to leave it.¹³⁰ The journal also reported that clerks had received a bombshell in the form of a schedule relating to appointment and promotion.¹³¹ There was not unanimity at higher levels in the NER about the right of the clerks to membership of a union. Sir George Gibb said: '... there was no objection to the clerks organising separately in an association of their own' but A.K. Butterworth glossed this by saying: '... in the case of many of our more responsible clerks their position and duties are not compatible with membership in the Railway Clerks Association'. The RCA blocked the NER's Additional Powers Bill and referred to '... unwarrantable interference on the part of the Company with the civil rights of its clerks'. The word 'inquisition' was used in regard to treatment of enquiries at Darlington and Middlesbrough.¹³² In the debate on the Bill, Hudson,

¹²³ The Industrial Unionist 15.4.1908 and 1.6.1908

¹²⁴ Railway Review 29.5.1908

¹²⁵ PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11632 14.8.1908

¹²⁶ Railway Review 3.7.1908

¹²⁷ Railway Review 28.8.1908

¹²⁸ Railway Review 30.10.1908

¹²⁹ The Railway Clerk 15.12.1908

¹³⁰ The Railway Clerk 5.2.1909

¹³¹ The Railway Clerk 15.5.1909

¹³² The Railway Clerk 15.7.1909

Summerbell¹³³ and Atherley-Jones¹³⁴ spoke against, and Bell of the ASRS spoke in favour of the Bill. Bell was condemned by the TUC for his action.¹³⁵ The GM agreed to lift the general embargo and came to an understanding with Henderson of the Labour Party.¹³⁶ At the end of 1909 the RCA decided to affiliate with the Labour Party.¹³⁷ But the year ended with discontent in the NER about the new regulations.¹³⁸

There had been more general discontent in 1909 also. The Industrial Unionism journal commented that, where Conciliation boards had been established, they had proposed a reduction of pay. Later it listed new branches of Industrial Unionism which had been established at Chester-le-Street and Gateshead. The latter case is significant as it is to be the centre of later disputes.¹³⁹

On the general aspects of the North Eastern claim a new Conciliation Conference met. The new scheme allowed raising of local issues at national level.¹⁴⁰ As agreement could not be reached the claim was referred to an umpire¹⁴¹ and Sir James Woodhouse (see Biographies), who had been appointed Railway Commissioner in 1906, was appointed as arbitrator.¹⁴² While the arbitration was proceeding it was reported that Shildon Works were on short time.¹⁴³ Also the Railway Review, pondering on the nature of NE man, decided: 'But he has faith in his cause and faith wins and lack of faith loses'.¹⁴⁴

The Woodhouse Award was greeted with general opposition. Tyne Dock¹⁴⁵ and Sunderland opposed it.¹⁴⁶ Branches vied with each other to express their

¹³³ Summerbell was a Printer, Secretary of Trades Council, founder of Labourers' Union and MP for Sunderland 1906-1910

¹³⁴ Atherley-Jones was son of Ernest Jones, Legal Adviser to Durham Miners and Miners' Federation and MP Durham NW 1885-1914

¹³⁵ The Railway Clerk 15.9.1909

¹³⁶ The Railway Clerk 15.8.1909

¹³⁷ The vote was 4296 to 139 as reported in The Railway Clerk 15.11.1909

¹³⁸ The Railway Clerk 15.12.1909

¹³⁹ The Industrial Unionist 1.1.1909 and 1.3.1909

¹⁴⁰ R.J. Irving: *The North Eastern Railway Company 1870-1914* p.66-67

¹⁴¹ PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11669 18.6.1909

¹⁴² PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11675 9.7.1909

¹⁴³ Northern Democrat September 1909

¹⁴⁴ Railway Review 12.11.1909

¹⁴⁵ Railway Review 19.11.1909

¹⁴⁶ Railway Review 3.12.1909

degree of dissatisfaction with Tynemouth expressing 'great dissatisfaction'¹⁴⁷ and Gateshead 'entire dissatisfaction'. Gateshead called for a strike¹⁴⁸ and Middlesbrough voted for industrial action. Newcastle objected to the interpretation of it¹⁴⁹ and Durham expressed its strong feelings against the award.¹⁵⁰ However, at the end of the year, Butterworth continued to stress that he reserved the right to interpret the award.

During this period two tendencies were in evidence in the North East. The railway unions were affected by national trends which involved growing dissatisfaction and unrest and a struggle for recognition. They played their part in this scenario and especially in regard to the unionisation of the clerks. But, the ASRS in the NER was in a special position. They had secured recognition to a large extent some time earlier. They had become accustomed to dealing with a management which itself was accustomed to dealing with industrial relations problems. They had a tradition of conciliation and arbitration which went well beyond the railway industry. However, changes in management techniques and control procedures were spearheaded in the NER and produced a sharper response. In addition, having already secured some of the benefits for which others were striving, the men in the North East sought to build on these. They therefore during this period, pursued largely their own programme of action and were separate from the national programmes of the Union. The discomfiture of the NER was exploited by other Companies. Lord Claud Hamilton pointed out '... since it recognised the Amalgamated Society, there had been nothing but unrest and agitation among the staff'.¹⁵¹ As we have mentioned, however, some of this may have been due to the pace of introduction of productivity measures more aggressively than by other railway Companies and management structure changes which broke up the former paternalistic and closely-knit organisation of men and managers.

¹⁴⁷ Railway Review 26.11.1909

¹⁴⁸ Railway Review 3.12.1909

¹⁴⁹ Railway Review 10.12.1909

¹⁵⁰ Railway Review 24.12.1909

¹⁵¹ H. Du Parq: *Life of Lloyd George* Vol.3 p.494

FUSION AND FEDERATION

The evolving issue of fusion or federation has been dealt with in an earlier Chapter. In 1904 there was a joint Locomotivemen's Conference but Bell of the ASRS was uncooperative. In 1906 the other four unions met without ASLEF but talks foundered on the issue of shopmen. In that year Fox (see Biographies) of ASLEF wrote '... we contend that the idea of organising all grades of railwaymen in one society is a failure, nay it is an impossibility'.¹⁵²

In 1907 all the unions plus the Railway Telegraph Clerks Association met but talks broke up at the end of that year. ASRS after this went for amalgamation. Two years later the ASRS and GRWU met and reached agreement but the membership of the GRWU failed to ratify the agreement and in the North East Darlington, Gateshead and Hexham opposed it.¹⁵³

LEGAL ISSUES

In the first decade of the twentieth century the rail unions, together with other Unions, suffered from two legal rulings. The first was the Taff Vale Railway Company judgement. This meant that the ASRS was liable as a corporate body for the action of its members and represented a fundamental change in the status of unions. At the time astonishment was expressed at the decision but Norman McCord has recently revisited the topic and argues that it was a natural development of the 1873 Judicature Act which brought together Common Law and Equity. Under Equity members of a group could sue or be sued. Lord Halsbury stated:

'If the legislature has created a thing which can own property, which can employ servants and which can inflict injury, it must be taken, I think to have impliedly given the power to make it suable in a Court of Law for injuries purposely done by its authority and procurement.'

McCord has also said that it was not so much that the judges objected to Unions but that they objected to them being beyond the law. Farwell saw unions as '...

¹⁵² Alcock *op cit* p.595

¹⁵³ Bagwell *op cit* p.324

irresponsible bodies with a wide capacity for evil'.¹⁵⁴ A contemporary critic, Harrison, wrote:

'It is final and makes the law ... Well the only advice I can give them (the unions) is not to enter into strikes or lockouts at all, or if they do ... to be very careful to do nothing which can pinch or inconvenience anybody, workmen or employees, directly or indirectly ... so I advise them to take the terms their employers offer them and be thankful for that.'¹⁵⁵

Lushington in the *National Review* stated 'In my opinion it is just and salutary law'.¹⁵⁶ Some Conservatives, however, were scathing about the judgement because it removed strikes which had been '... the safety valve to industrial and artisan discontent'.¹⁵⁷ Bell commented that it would be '... a useful influence in solidifying the forces of trade unionism'.¹⁵⁸

The majority of the unions agreed to affiliate to the LRC to fight the Taff Vale case¹⁵⁹ but it was not until 1906 that TDA legislation corrected the situation. Taff Vale greatly strengthened the LRC as we will see in the next Chapter.

The next major obstacle was the Osborne judgement which questioned the right of unions to use funds for the promotion of parliamentary candidates pledged to accept the Labour Whip. This was a devastating judgement. The ASRS in 1901 had balloted its members concerning a levy of 1s. per annum per member to send Labour representatives to the House of Commons. Only 29% of members voted but 89% of these were in favour.¹⁶⁰ In Darlington 37 members voted against the levy.¹⁶¹ In 1905 the levy was regarded as coming within the rules.¹⁶² In 1909, however, Osborne, a member of the ASRS objected to Trade Unions requiring that all party candidates should sign and accept the Labour Party Whip and that registration arrangements should be made in constituencies represented by an ASRS member.¹⁶³ Walter Victor Osborne

¹⁵⁴ N. McCord: *Taff Vale Revisited* in *History* 78 June 1993, p.254

¹⁵⁵ F. Harrison: *The End of Trade Unionism* in *Review of Reviews* 1901 p.283

¹⁵⁶ *National Review* Vol.38 1901

¹⁵⁷ C. Benn: *Keir Hardie* (Hutchinson, London, 1992) p.246

¹⁵⁸ D. Kynaston: *King Labour* p.158

¹⁵⁹ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen* p.226

¹⁶⁰ Alcock *op cit* p.318

¹⁶¹ *Ibid* p.336

¹⁶² *Ibid* p.366

¹⁶³ H. Tracey: *Book of the Labour Party* Vol.1 pp.177-183

began as an SDF and GRWU member. He transferred to the ASRS and became Secretary of the Walthamstow Branch. The Branch discontinued its payment of the levy for Parliamentary representation and challenged a new re-imposition of it at the Sheffield Congress. He later applied for a writ declaring that a section of the Rule was not binding and restraining the Society from levying or distributing funds for Parliamentary representation. Initially judgement was given against him but the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords decided in his favour. Osborne maintained that the funds for his action came from individual trade unionists and Trade Unions but others thought he was privately funded. It was considered by some that Osborne's activities strengthened the hands of the Syndicalists (see Chapter 5).¹⁶⁴ In his judgement L.J. Fletcher Moulton said that the object of the Parliamentary Fund was to secure the return of MPs in a prescribed manner and that this was contrary to public policy. The House of Lords confirmed this on appeal.¹⁶⁵ After the judgement action was taken against 22 trade unions¹⁶⁶ and 21 unions resigned from the Labour Party.¹⁶⁷ The income of 24 MPs was affected.¹⁶⁸ The Railwaymen's Parliamentary Association was then set up as a voluntary body¹⁶⁹ and at Shildon it was decided to form a voluntary parliamentary fund.¹⁷⁰ Once more, as with Taff Vale, the judges, in destroying the old position of the trade unions, created the modern Labour Party and cemented its alliance, initially at least, with Liberalism.¹⁷¹ After all, Lord Hugh Cecil had said in 1903: 'Liberalism ... it is Trade unionist in questions affecting labour and capital'.¹⁷²

CONCLUSIONS

Events in the North East show a continuation of the growth of a distinctive attitude towards industrial relations in the Region. Having obtained earlier

¹⁶⁴ Sir H. Slessor: *A History of the Liberal Party* (Hutchinson & Co., nd) p.155

¹⁶⁵ F. Williams: *Fifty Years March ...* pp.175-178

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid* p.180

¹⁶⁷ E. Shinwell: *Labour Story* (MacDonald, London, 1963) p.73

¹⁶⁸ Bagwell *op cit* p.252

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid* p.255

¹⁷⁰ Railway Review 2.4.1909

¹⁷¹ L.T. Hobhouse: *Liberalism* (HUL, nd) p.223

¹⁷² H.H. Fyfe: *The British Liberal Party* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1928) p.157

the benefits of recognition the men sought to build on these. At the same time they were faced with the growth of the ASRS at national level and the move towards an all-grades policy. In the North East the men sought to balance their loyalty towards the national movement with the pursuit of the NER targets. In the case of the RCA this was a less difficult problem as the NER had adopted a similar policy towards its clerks being in a Union as that which had been adopted by other Companies. The men in the North East also faced a greater change in management styles and changes introduced to bring about greater efficiency. In common with men in other Companies they showed concern at the effect of the Taff Vale and Osborne Judgements and sought to have the grievances recognised. As we show in a later section of this study, the North East was influenced to a greater extent by ILP activity in certain Branches. Discontent with the Conciliation machinery was also felt in the North East. So, by the end of this period there was a solid sub-stratum of discontent.

CHAPTER 4. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS UP TO 1914

NATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The 1867 Act gave the vote to householders in the boroughs. The electorate was increased from 900,000 to 1,900,000 nationally. The 1884 Act gave the vote to householders in the counties. After 1867 the majority of the electorate in the boroughs were working class but, after 1884, the majority of the electorate generally were working class. However, one significant factor, in assessing the impact of the working-class vote, is that it is important to consider the issue of registration. Under the 1884 Act the right to be an elector on the register derived not from the simple fact of adult citizenship but from possession of property, payment of rates, payment of rent as a lodger, possession of a University degree or being a freeman. Registration was a problem and in addition the register was stale because it involved a twelve month's possession of a qualification.¹ The percentage of those who could vote was about 65% in general and about 50% to 55% of working males.² One politician writing later concluded:

'The political power of the new electorate instead of accomplishing a Social Revolution has from certain points of view made the economic position of the capitalist class more secure than before.'³

Osborne (see details in Chapter 3), writing of the late-Victorian period, concluded:

'The majority of the labour leaders were liberal by conviction and the Liberal party sought to cement the friendship between Liberalism and labour by including one of its leaders (Mr. Henry Broadhurst) in the Government, by raising others to the magisterial bench and in consulting Unions on all labour questions.'⁴

The advent of Labour was linked to the fact that many local Liberal Associations would not accept workingmen as candidates.⁵ As early as 1869 a Labour Representation League was formed with the objective of registering the votes of

¹ A.W. Purdue: *Parliamentary Elections in North East England 1900-1906: The Advent of Labour*. Thesis submitted for M.Litt. Newcastle in 1974 pp.11-17
² Clegg: *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889* (Clarendon Press, 1985) Vol.2 p.236
³ P. Snowden: *Socialism and Syndicalism* p.135
⁴ W.V. Osborne: *Sane Trade Unionism* p.6
⁵ N. Wynn: The Origins of the Labour Party in OU Brochure: *Popular Politics 1870-1950* p.8

workingmen. It had the blessing of the TUC but the TUC did nothing to support it.⁶ In 1874 the League put forward twelve candidates to join the four candidates representing miners. None of the League candidates was successful but Alex McDonald (Liberal) and Thomas Burt (Radical) of the miners' candidates were returned.⁷ The LRL, without financial support by 1875, was backing the Liberals and by the time of the 1880 Election had ceased to exist. McDonald and Burt were returned again and were joined by Henry Broadhurst⁸ (see Biographies). In 1881 the Democratic Federation was founded. Its ethos was derived from workingmen's clubs and the only 'Socialist' item in its programme was the nationalisation of land.⁹ The title of the party was changed to the Social Democratic Federation in 1884. The SDF was inspired by Marx and Hyndman but Marx and Engels did not back it. It was hostile to trade unions because it saw these as too committed to the established order and their leaders as being too closely linked with Liberalism. The SDF ran three candidates in the 1885 Election but none were successful getting 32, 27 and 598 votes.¹⁰ A number of Lib-Lab candidates stood and eleven were elected. In the 1886 Election the number of workingmen MPs was reduced to ten. In the same year a Labour Electoral Association was formed and lasted ten years. Its subject was to secure the maximum of 'direct labour representation' as part of the Liberal Party.¹¹ In 1888 the Scottish Labour Party was formed and J. Keir Hardie stood for Lanark Mid Division in that year as Independent Labour but failed to be returned, getting only 617 votes.¹²

EARLY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NORTH EAST

In the North traditions of political revolt reach back into the eighteenth century and earlier. As regards Parliamentary representation, elected representatives in Durham came from a very restricted group of the aristocracy and landed gentry, the

⁶ H. Tracey: *The Book of the Labour Party* Vol.1 (Caxton, London, nd) p.54

⁷ R.P. Arnot: *The Miners* Vol.1 (Allen & Unwin, 1949) p.289

⁸ *Ibid* p291

⁹ G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate: *The Common People* p.415

¹⁰ McCalmont *Parliamentary Poll Book*

¹¹ Arnot *op cit* pp.291-294

¹² McCalmont *op cit*

dominating names in the nineteenth century being Eden, Lambton, Vane and Bowes, Williamson, Shafto, Palmer and Tempest. If we take the area of Durham South, which includes Stockton and Darlington, between 1832 and 1881 there were seven contested Elections and five uncontested Elections. During this period no fewer than 22 Liberal nominations were successful compared with only 4 Conservatives. At that time there is no evidence that the railwaymen and their families played any major role. Most of them would not have the vote and the practice of paternalism and the obligations of employment would prevent them playing any major role in the contests even where they might have the vote.¹³ However, the Darlington Mercury roundly stated in 1868:

'... the working men themselves have it in their power to defy any amount of intimidation or undue influence ... They must never forget that no workman under the North Eastern - nor any working man whatever can be really injured by his employers for any honest part he may take in the election ...'¹⁴

Despite this assertion there were allegations, in Elections right up to the 1880s, that workmen were not free to follow their consciences when voting because they were influenced by their employers and, in some cases, were 'persuaded' that they should vote in a particular way. In 1881, at a meeting to form a Northern Reform League, a Mr. Hogg: '... alluded to such things as masters canvassing their men on behalf of candidates ... there was no such thing as free voting among working men'.¹⁵

Another factor in the early days after the Ballot Act was the attitude of such workingmen. The Northern Echo said that they were: '... not accustomed to political life; they are but partially educated; many of them are under the thumbs of the priests' others under the thumbs of the publican'.¹⁶

In the 1880 Election a workingman, not allowed to speak at a Conservative meeting, said that he spoke for:

'... a vast population of working men (cheers) ... and that these working men, even of the lowest class, had at the ballot box a power and a weight equal to that of any country gentlemen (renewed cheers) ...'¹⁷

¹³ See P. Joyce: *Work, Society and Politics* (Harvester Press. 1980) for influence of workplace on political loyalties

¹⁴ Darlington Mercury 1.7.1868

¹⁵ Northern Echo 26.9.1881

¹⁶ Northern Echo 10.1.1874

¹⁷ Northern Echo 16.3.1880

In Middlesbrough in the 1880 Election, E. Dillon Lewis¹⁸ was regarded as 'representing the working men of the Radical borough of Middlesbrough'.¹⁹ In Darlington in March 1880, even though Fry²⁰ moved among a large meeting of workmen at North Road Railway Shops, a later resolution of the Darlington Branch of the ASRS voted that members should vote for either candidate in accordance with their consciences. However, a political meeting of railwaymen at the end of the Branch meeting resolved: 'That this meeting strongly urges all railway servants and workmen generally to vote for Mr. Fry at the approaching election he being a staunch supporter of Liberal principles'.²¹

The 1885 and 1886 Elections were held in the wake of the extension of the franchise. In the 1885 Election the ASRS had posed a formal list of questions to be put to candidates.²² One local newspaper took exception to the ASRS in summoning a meeting to find out candidates' views because '... a non-political organisation was employed for the purpose of furthering the interests of Radicalism'.²³ Mr. Wilson-Todd,²⁴ the Conservative candidate for Darlington, was also reported as in favour of shortening the hours of railway servants.²⁵

The year 1885 saw also a meeting of Trades Councils, at which railwaymen were represented, when it was urged on working men in boroughs to use every effort to secure the return of working men of their own class²⁶ and the newspaper which reported this said later in the year:

¹⁸ E. Dillon Lewis was a solicitor from Old Broad Street, London with advanced political views and financial problems

¹⁹ Northern Echo 24.3.1880

²⁰ Theodore Fry was an Iron manufacturer, head of a company in Darlington, a former Mayor of Darlington and a magistrate for County Durham

²¹ Northern Echo 27.3.1880

²² Railway Review 20.11.1885

²³ Radicalism is not a precise term. Some candidates stood as Radicals or called themselves Radicals within a party. Later radicalism was linked, pejoratively in some cases, with Labour

²⁴ Wilson-Todd was a JP and Deputy-Lieutenant for the North Riding of Yorkshire and was three times a County Councillor

²⁵ North Star 29.10.1885

²⁶ Darlington and Stockton Times 6.6.1885

'That there should have been so large an assembly of men composed exclusively of the artizan classes, speaks volumes for the interest taken in political affairs by the working men of Darlington.'²⁷

The 1886 Election saw the split between Unionists and Home Rulers within the Liberal Party and in many of the North East constituencies there was an arrangement to avoid a contest. Where there was a contest the Home Rule issue was dominant. In Darlington, as the North Star ungraciously put it, Mr. Fry remained 'temporarily Member for Darlington, simply and solely because of the votes of the illiterates and the English-hating Irish'.²⁸

THE ROLE OF THE MINERS

Before turning to later Elections, we need to look at the influence of miners and railwaymen in their constituencies. Considering first the miners, by the end of the nineteenth century one in every three men employed in Durham was a miner.²⁹ Hewers in Northumberland and Durham were on a 7 hours shift while elsewhere there was pressure for the 8 hours day. One key factor in looking at the result of Elections after 1885 is that as a result of the redistribution of seats miners formed a very high percentage of electorates in newly-created constituencies. Miners were able to dominate County Divisions and secure representation without forming a new party. As they objected to legislation on hours of labour they were content with the Liberals.³⁰ They were also hostile to landowners who drew royalties. Non-conformity was a further factor as was the fear of tariffs which might damage the export of coal. Miners' leaders came to terms with the Liberal Party in 1885³¹ and remained grateful to the Liberals for the extension of the franchise in 1884-1885.³² The miners were heavily unionised. Chaloner said that mining life made miners the 'best trade unionists and the worst politicians' in the UK.³³

²⁷ Darlington and Stockton Times 21.11.1885

²⁸ North Star 5.7.1886

²⁹ H. Pelling: *Social Geography of British Elections* pp.318-319

³⁰ *Ibid* pp.344-345 and R. Moore: *Emergence of the Labour Party* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1978) pp.62-63

³¹ Pelling *op cit* p.343

³² Moore *op cit* p.91

³³ W.L. Chaloner: *The British Miners and the Coal Industry Between the Wars* (Pamphlet, nd)

In some of the constituencies covered by this study the percentage of miners was over 50%:

Mid-Durham	60-70%	
NW Durham	60-70%	
Houghton-le-Spring	50-60%	
Chester-le-Street	50-60%	34

In the matter of where the votes went, Douglas states that even in Durham less than 50% of the mining vote was given to Labour candidates.³⁵ In Durham the miners' leaders and the Liberal Party had entered into an arrangement immediately after the 1885 Act to give miners' candidates a clear run in two seats and for miners to support the Liberals elsewhere.³⁶

As compared with the miners, railwaymen expected more legislation and social improvement. The ASRS was founded by a Liberal. Railwaymen, like the miners, were also likely to lose from tariff reform and therefore were inclined towards the Liberals. Unlike miners, however, communities of railwaymen were small and scattered³⁷ and the percentages in given parliamentary constituencies in the North East were small. In municipal elections working class wards could be significant and there were specific railwaymen's wards but in parliamentary elections individual wards were not dominated by railwaymen.³⁸ But, as we will see when we look at Election results by the end of the century the ASRS, influenced by ILP supporters, was moving towards playing an important role in the growth of Labour.

This overview ends with a summary of the position in Durham in the political field. In 1874 Durham showed a marked variance from the national result returning Liberal MPs from all of its constituencies.³⁹ Northern England and Yorkshire would seem to have been almost as consistently anti-Conservative as Wales and

³⁴ R. Gregory: *The Miners and British Politics 1906-1910* (OUP, 1968) pp.10-12

³⁵ R. Douglas: *Labour in Decline* in K.D. Brown's: *Essays in Anti-Labour History* (Macmillan, 1974) p.117

³⁶ Gregory *op cit* p.62

³⁷ Pelling: *Social Geography ...* p.423

³⁸ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* pp.127-129

³⁹ N. McCord: *Gateshead Politics in the Age of Reform in Northern History* 4, 1969, p.180

Scotland. But, change was on the way. Businessmen began to displace landowners and Durham and Tyneside were to slip from mid-Victorian Liberalism to twentieth century Socialism without experiencing the intervening stage of middle class Conservatism.⁴⁰

THE ROLE OF THE ILP

The influence of the ILP was a key factor both in the role of the ASRS and in the outcome of Elections in the North East. The ILP was founded in 1893 by Keir Hardie (MP 1892-1895) to secure the return of representatives free of any connection with the Liberals. The ILP in the NE developed by gaining the support of miners' unions, the ASRS and the ASE. The ILP gained in the ASRS because of the industrial tensions and the constitution of the ASRS which made it easier for outside forces to make their presence known. The leading figure in the ASRS in the region was Walter Hudson, later President of the ASRS, who was a member of the ILP but a moderate one. Tom Peacock was a railway clerk and an ILPer and Z. Cragg was Secretary of the Shildon branch. Hudson and Peacock were largely responsible for gaining the ASRS's commitment to the selection of parliamentary candidates independent of the two main parties at the 1894 AGM.⁴¹ Wardle held the influential job of editor of the Railway Review from 1898.

Mahon founded the North of England Socialist Federation and he and Champion established the first Newcastle Labour Party. In 1893 the South Shields ILP was established. Boldon, Hebburn and Jarrow were represented at the Bradford Conference. ILP Branches were established at Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Stockton, Darlington, Spennymoor, Chester-le-Street, Washington and Shildon. The ILP had women members but these tended to be lower middle-class or upper middle-class. They included Mrs. Hansen in Middlesbrough, Miss Dodds in Tyneside and Connie Lewcock in Esh Winning.⁴² Snowden was also a key figure after 1897. For the North East as a whole, Gregory concluded:

⁴⁰ J.P.D. Dunbabin: *British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Regional Approach in English Historical Review*, 1980 pp.262-263

⁴¹ Purdue in James, Jowitt and Laybourn, *The Centennial History of the ILP* (1992) pp.24-26

⁴² *Ibid*

'... the fact remains that from the early 1890s there was in the North East a political militancy which had no counterpart in Yorkshire or the Midlands until a much later date.'⁴³

This is despite the fact that the ILP in the NE never had more than 2000 members.⁴⁴

Looking at North East England between 1885 and 1914 Purdue has shown that the politics were dominated by the Liberals. North East Liberalism was dominated in turn by local magnates; e.g. Palmer, Storey, Donkin, Furness and Saddler. South Durham was less Liberal than the North.⁴⁵ Pelling, in his Social Geography of British Elections, has looked at constituencies in this period in the light of their main characteristics and the percentage of Unionist votes and the analysis of key constituencies is shown in Appendix 3.⁴⁶

In the 1890s the Socialist parties in general were growing slowly and hesitantly. The Fabians who believed in 'permeation' had little influence in the North.⁴⁷ In 1893 the provincial Fabian branches broke with the Fabian Society to join the ILP. By 1895 out of 305 ILP Branches 18 were in the North East.⁴⁸ In the same year Atherley-Jones stated:

'It was not until the year 1895 that I first became sensible that representatives of the Independent Labour Party were to be found in North West Durham and thenceforth I had until the end of my Parliamentary career to combat its guerilla warfare.'⁴⁹

By 1897 the ILP News was reporting that encouraging progress had been made in Durham⁵⁰ but a few years later the same journal reported 'For several years the ILP movement on the Tyneside has been in a somewhat passive state'.⁵¹ In 1899 less active branches were reported at Gateshead, Shildon, Spennymoor and Stockton (all railway towns).⁵² However, later in the same year, good meetings had been reported at Shildon (2000 people), Bishop Auckland and Eldon (again railway towns).⁵³ At

⁴³ As quoted in Purdue thesis: *Parliamentary Elections* p.33

⁴⁴ Purdue in *Centennial History of ILP* p.21

⁴⁵ Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.26-27

⁴⁶ H. Pelling: *Social Geography of British Elections* pp.324-338

⁴⁷ J. Clayton: *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain* p.70

⁴⁸ P.P. Poirier: *The Advent of the Labour Party* (Allen & Unwin, 1958) pp.35-39

⁴⁹ L.A. Atherley-Jones: *Looking Back* (Wetherby, 1925) p.112

⁵⁰ ILP News April 1897

⁵¹ ILP News August 1901

⁵² ILP News January 1899

⁵³ ILP News September 1899

Sunderland the Branch had resolved to promote an ILP candidate and the NE Federation chose a short list of Sunderland, Jarrow and Newcastle.⁵⁴ In 1897 at the MFGB Conference in Leicester there was a further renewal of activity. A Resolution was passed that it was essential for the maintenance of British industries to nationalise mines, railways and land.⁵⁵ In 1899 at the TUC Conference, a railwayman's delegate moved a resolution on Labour Representation which was passed.⁵⁶ A LRC Conference was held in 1900 and membership began with 375,931 members.⁵⁷

GENERAL ELECTIONS 1892-1910

The Elections of 1892 and 1895

It is inappropriate in this study to make a comprehensive analysis of political developments and issues at General Elections. Instead we will concentrate on a number of themes. First we will outline major developments at national level in relation to the ILP and LRC (later Labour Party). Secondly we will examine the impact of these in, and on, the North East of England. Thirdly we will look at how the ASRS and other railway unions highlighted railway issues. Fourthly we will look at constituencies in which railwaymen and railway issues featured.

The 1892 Election occurred after 5 years and 10 months of Unionist power and the government were running out of steam. The Conservatives and Liberal Unionists gained 314 seats, Liberals 271, Irish Nationalists 81 and Others 4. Twelve Lib-Lab members were returned and three Independent Labour members leading to the formation of the ILP in 1893. Lord Salisbury continued in office until defeated on an amendment to the Address on the Speech from the Throne after which the Liberals and Home Rulers took charge.

As far as the North East was concerned, despite the changes in industrial and union matters which took place between 1886 and 1892, the Election of 1892 reflected many of the issues which had been a feature of the earlier Elections. The

⁵⁴ ILP News April 1899

⁵⁵ Arnot *op cit* p.301

⁵⁶ Tracey *op cit* Vol.1 pp.117-118

⁵⁷ *Ibid* p.13

debate on working-class candidates still continued and at a meeting in Middlesbrough a motion was moved: 'That this meeting is of the opinion that the time has arrived when this constituency should be represented in Parliament by a direct representative of Labour'.⁵⁸

The Conservative candidate at Bishop Auckland, Waddington, said it was 'A good thing that there should be a few working men in the House of Commons'.⁵⁹ The Railway Review was more direct urging: 'It is, then, the duty of railwaymen to utilise the election for the purpose of protecting themselves against the greed of capitalists'.⁶⁰ No doubt inspired by this, workingmen, including railwaymen, seemed to play a larger part in selection procedures. At Darlington a meeting of railwaymen pledged support for Theodore Fry and Joseph Richardson (candidate in the South-eastern Division) but the meeting was stated to be wholly unrepresentative.⁶¹ In the Evening Star Fry was attacked for pretending 'to be a special friend of railway workers'.⁶²

There was the usual conflicting advice to working-class voters. A Mr. Rider said that the Liberal Party was '... a working-class part of the railway and mining interest'⁶³ and Mr. T. Wilkinson said that Paulton, the Liberal candidate for Bishop Auckland was '... pre-eminently the working-man's friend'.⁶⁴ Others, however, advised workingmen to vote for Waddington, the Conservative candidate.⁶⁵ Bishop Auckland was the scene of a debate between candidates on which party had done most for the working classes. It was reported that in Shildon there was little interest⁶⁶ but an alternative report stated that Mr. Paulton had addressed '... a large gathering of railway servants in New Shildon'.⁶⁷

Another theme carried over from the previous Election was the questionnaire put by the ASRS Executive to candidates. The questions were very similar

⁵⁸ Evening Star 8.6.1892

⁵⁹ Evening Star 21.6.1892

⁶⁰ Railway Review 3.6.1892

⁶¹ Evening Star 30.6.1892 and Northern Star Supplement to 2.7.1892

⁶² Evening Star 4.7.1892

⁶³ Auckland Chronicle 15.7.1892

⁶⁴ Auckland Chronicle 1.7.1892

⁶⁵ Evening Star 14.7.1892

⁶⁶ Auckland Chronicle 1.7.1892

⁶⁷ Auckland Chronicle 15.7.1892

covering hours of labour, effective supervision, accident enquiries, use of safety devices, certification of enginemen, Employers Liability Bill, whether expenses for Elections should be paid out of rates and members should be paid.⁶⁸ The Stockton Branch condemned the use of such a questionnaire.⁶⁹ Some candidates answered openly, others such as Sir J.W. Pease and Arthur Pease said that they would deal with it in their meetings.⁷⁰

In the North East there were Gladstonian Liberal gains in Durham City, Durham SE and Houghton-le-Spring. There were Conservative gains at Stockton and in one of the Newcastle seats. This point is important. Despite the overwhelming influence of Liberalism, over the decade from 1892-1902 there were to be Unionist successes in Newcastle, Sunderland, Tynemouth, Middlesbrough, Darlington and Stockton.⁷¹

There was an Election in 1895 because the Liberal Government was surprisingly defeated. The Conservatives took office and called an Election. At the Election the new ILP fielded twenty-eight candidates. Many of the candidates were of the Labour Electoral Association viewpoint, there were some SDF candidates and George Lansbury (see Biographies) and J.L. Mahon stood as Independents. All the ILP candidates were unsuccessful. All the Independents except John Burns failed to be returned and there were only twelve MPs representing Labour.⁷² Samuel Woods, a defeated candidate, in his Election leaflet said: '... he was a Labour Member of Parliament but he was a radical also. The tactics of Mr. Keir Hardie did not, and do not now, commend his sympathy'.⁷³ The result of the Election was a large majority for the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. In the North East once again all candidates made a clear appeal to the working men. At Bishop Auckland Paulton was supported by labour interests⁷⁴ and claimed to promote social reform.⁷⁵ At Darlington Catholics were said to

⁶⁸ Railway Review 3.6.1892

⁶⁹ North Star Supplement 2.7.1892

⁷⁰ Railway Review 1.7.1892 and Darlington and Stockton Times 25.6.1892

⁷¹ Purdue in *Centennial History of the ILP* p.17

⁷² Arnot *op cit* p.295

⁷³ *Ibid* p.204

⁷⁴ Auckland Chronicle 4.7.1895

⁷⁵ Auckland Chronicle 11.7.1895

have been urged to vote for Pease, the Liberal Unionist candidate.⁷⁶ The Northern Echo said that Pease had deteriorated from his progressive stance and urged support of Fry who had fought the battle of workingmen and they gave the dramatic slogan: 'LIBERALS BE THIS YOUR BATTLE CRY, FOR COUNTRY HONOUR AND FOR FRY ...'⁷⁷ When Fry was defeated the paper attributed it to the Church and the brewers but conceded that:

'Perhaps if we could get at the bottom of the matter we should find that weary despair at the depressed condition of trade on the part of the working class has had more to do with the poll than any other cause whatsoever ...'⁷⁸

There is not much evidence of the involvement of railwaymen in this Election except that '... some questions were put by railway servants' and a large meeting was held at the railway gates at New Shildon.⁷⁹ Before the Election there had been a meeting of labour representatives who discussed an Agenda including 'Any other questions affecting the working classes'.⁸⁰

The results in the North East produced Conservative and Unionist gains. At Darlington Arthur Pease, the Liberal Unionist, defeated Fry. At Hartlepool the Liberal Unionist Thomas Richardson defeated Sir C. Furness. At Newcastle Morley lost to the Conservative Cruddas. At Sunderland the Conservatives gained one seat from the Liberals. At Durham SE the Liberal Unionist Havelock-Allan defeated the Conservative Wrightson.

If we look at the general position in Durham towards the end of the century nearly all the mining seats voted against the Conservatives and the connection with the Liberal vote seemed closer than ever.⁸¹ This reflected the continuing support of the organised working class for Liberalism. Conservatism, however, held its own in the larger towns. The ILP which seemed on the move in 1892 had a major setback in 1895.

⁷⁶ Northern Echo 10.7.1895

⁷⁷ Northern Echo 13.7.1895

⁷⁸ Northern Echo 15.7.1895

⁷⁹ Auckland Chronicle 18.7.1895

⁸⁰ Auckland Chronicle 27.6.1895

⁸¹ M. Kinnear: *The British Voter. An Atlas and Survey since 1885* (Batsford, London, 1968) p.24

As regards municipal elections the picture was more promising. The ILP realised the importance of local government and the ILP News in 1897 stated: 'There is no possibility of irresistible Socialist effort in Parliament if Socialist activity in the local governing bodies is neglected'.⁸² In the North East Stockton had three ILPers in the early 90s. On Tyneside by the end of 1894 there were three trade union backed councillors at Newcastle, five at Gateshead, four at Jarrow and six at South Shields of which several were members of the ILP. At Hebburn a trade union party took ten of the twelve seats on the UDC. But advance of the party in local government had a setback in the later 90s.⁸³

As the decade ended more efforts were being made to change the attitude of the working man in the North East and in his essay, published in 1897, Duckershoff referred to Tom Mann having several meetings in Newcastle and finding many supporters.⁸⁴

GENERAL ELECTIONS 1900-1910

In an earlier section of this Chapter we noted events leading up to the calling of a Conference to consider Labour representation. The motion in 1899 was largely the work of the ASRS and the Editor of the Railway Review.⁸⁵ The Conference took place in February 1900 and the LRC was established. The formation of the LRC initially did not arouse a great deal of interest and, indeed, the only full account which I have been able to find of the meeting was in the Ironworkers' Journal.⁸⁶ The 1900 Election came too early for the LRC and they spent only £33 on the Election. The Lib-Lab MPs did not rush to join the new Party. Two Labour MPs were returned in the 1900 Election. One was Richard Bell who was the first railwayman to enter the House of Commons. Bell was essentially Lib-Lab and wished to maintain his freedom. In

⁸² Quoted in K. Laybourn: *The Defence of the Bottom Dog: The Independent Labour Party in Local Politics* in Ed. D.G. Wright and J.A. Jowitt: *Victorian Bradford* (Bradford, 1981) p.240

⁸³ Purdue in *Centennial History of ILP* p.23-24

⁸⁴ E. Duckershoff: *How the English Workman Lives* (P.S. King & Son, London, 1899) pp.22-23

⁸⁵ A.R. Moore: *Emergence of the Labour Party* p.75

⁸⁶ Ironworkers' Journal April 1900. See also Clarion 3.3.1900

1901 Bell and J.H. Wilson supported the Liberal Imperialist candidate at Newport.⁸⁷ Nevertheless he started well as an MP. In the ten weeks ending in January 1902 he made 41 representations to Ministers about excessive hours of work on the railways.⁸⁸ But in the next few years he encountered a lot of opposition to his views and by 1912 he had gone and the extreme journal The Syndicalist referred to him as: 'Now working for the Blackleg agencies called 'Labour Exchanges' ...'⁸⁹

The election of Bell was an indication of the greater interest which the ASRS had shown in the representation of the union and its role in the 1900 Election. It gave a firm indication to railwaymen that where Labour Candidates were standing they were pledged to support them as a result of the February Conference and repeated the need for a nucleus of a distinct Labour group in Parliament.⁹⁰ They also produced a list of questions to candidates asking if they favoured:

1. Enforcement of a ten hours day by the Board of Trade.
2. Certificates of competency for Engine Drivers.
3. The Workmen's Compensation Act to be amended to include all workers.
4. The 1896 Conciliation Act to be made compulsory.
5. Relatives to attend inquests.
6. Leave of absence for Union delegates.
7. Nationalisation of railways.
8. Payment of members and expenses.
- ...
10. The provision of workmen's trains.⁹¹

The other successful candidate was Keir Hardie. Bell did not work well with Keir Hardie. Keir Hardie increasingly pursued his own line. He became, as his latest biographer points out, a 'Party of One'.⁹² He gradually became disillusioned and Beatrice Webb claimed that he turned against the Labour Party because it became clear

⁸⁷ Labour Leader 27.4.01

⁸⁸ F. Bealey and H. Pelling: *Labour and Politics 1900-1906* (MacMillan, London, 1958) p.20

⁸⁹ The Syndicalist October 1912

⁹⁰ Railway Review 21.9.1900

⁹¹ Railway Review 5.10.1900

⁹² C. Benn: *Keir Hardie* passim

to his sincere but limited mind that Labour Leaders in Parliament were no different from aristocrats and were not going to bring in revolutionary progress.⁹³ However his contribution to Parliament was to insist that Parliament should honour all citizens equally and hear small questions of working people's lives.⁹⁴

Looking at the North East as a whole at the time of the 1900 Election we saw in the earlier Chapter of the growing influence of the ILP and the influence of the ILP in the ASRS and in militant Branches of the ASRS in the North East, e.g. Stockton and Gateshead. In the North East, as elsewhere, local issues were important⁹⁵ and certain constituencies were affected by either war hysteria or self-interest, e.g. in ports.⁹⁶ Purdue has pointed out that members of the ILP in county divisions were miners, schoolteachers and, around Shildon, railway workers.⁹⁷

ASRS members were prominent in militant branches, e.g. Stockton, Darlington and Gateshead.⁹⁸ In Middlesbrough the first ILP councillor had been elected by 1895 but by 1898 the Branch was in a poor situation and in 1900 they voted to wind it up but it was later resurrected. The Branch was hostile to alliance with unions.⁹⁹ The influence of the ILP was long-standing. Most Divisional Labour Parties were based on ILP Branches and the ILP were at the centre of Gateshead politics until 1931.¹⁰⁰

The results in the North East with 4 Liberal Unionists and 7 Conservatives returned, led the North Star to comment: 'This general election has exploded the idea which possessed the minds of some people that the North East of England was Radical'.¹⁰¹

For two years development of the LRC hung fire and the aggregate membership did not reach half a million.¹⁰²

93 *Ibid* p.331

94 *Ibid* p.127

95 R. Price: *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) p.97

96 M. Kinnear: *The British Voter. An Atlas and Survey Since 1885* p.26

97 A.W. Purdue in *Centennial History of the ILP* p.23

98 *Ibid*

99 S.J. Cass in thesis: *Labour in Middlesbrough 1900-1914* (for MA Local History degree, Teesside Polytechnic 1982) pp.19-21

100 M. Gibb and M. Callcott: *The Labour Party in the North East Between the Wars* in NE Group for Study of Labour History, Bulletin 8, 1971 pp.16-17

101 North Star 13.10.1900

102 S. and B. Webb: *History of Trade Unionism* 1920 edn p.685

The opportunity for quicker development soon came. We saw earlier what was the effect of Taff Vale in the industrial relations field but its major impact was in the political field. McBriar stated that the fortunes of the LRC were made by the fierce reaction of unionists to the Taff Vale decision and the ILP taking advantage of it.¹⁰³ MacDonald had now arrived at the position which Hardie had foreseen and for which he had worked hard for twenty years - an alliance between the Socialist enthusiasts and the moderate unions.¹⁰⁴ They had a common desire to secure a statutory reversal of these setbacks with crucial implications for the Labour Party and the 1906 General Election. In 1902 and 1903 there was a flood of trade union affiliations to the LRC.¹⁰⁵ Taff Vale also strengthened MacDonald's hand in dealing with the Liberals and allowed him to make a secret compact with Gladstone which gave the LRC candidates a clear run in 30 (later extended to 35) constituencies.¹⁰⁶ MacDonald followed up the compact with Gladstone by an agreement between the LRC and the TUC in 1905 ruling out contests between LRC and Lib-Lab candidates. All in all this was a remarkable show of strength as the LRC had affiliated groups in only 73 constituencies by 1906.¹⁰⁷

Following the 1900 Election and the Taff Vale reaction there was a resurgence of Socialism in the North East. By June 1901 the Trades Councils of Newcastle, Gateshead and District, Stockton, Thornaby and Sunderland were affiliated to the LRC.¹⁰⁸

The ILP grew stronger in the North East. There was an energetic ILP Secretary at Shildon, an active Darlington Branch and an active Branch at Spennymoor.¹⁰⁹ By 1905 there were 16 branches of the ILP in Durham.¹¹⁰ As in other parts of the country, the position regarding the Labour vote was complicated just before the 1906 General Election. There were those who wished to create a pressure group

¹⁰³ A. McBriar: *Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918* (CUP, 1962) p.326

¹⁰⁴ J. and J. MacKenzie: *The First Fabians* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1977) p.310

¹⁰⁵ N. McCord: Taff Vale Revisited in *History*, 78, June 1993

¹⁰⁶ P. Poirier: *The Advent of Labour* p.142 and pp.190-192

¹⁰⁷ N. McCord: *British History 1815-1906* (OUP, 1991) p.400

¹⁰⁸ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.35

¹⁰⁹ *Labour Leader* 9.2.1901, 23.3.1901 and 24.8.1901

¹¹⁰ A.W. Purdue: George Lansbury and the Middlesbrough Election of 1906 in *International Review of Social History* 1973 p.334

without necessarily transforming the political climate. A second group wished to create an independent group. A third group wished to create an independent group and then come to terms with the Liberal Party. We have to remember that there was in existence the secret MacDonald and Gladstone compact.

In 1901 the ASRS decided to ballot members on an annual levy of 1s. for representation in Parliament¹¹¹ and in 1902 Keir Hardie addressed a main meeting in Newcastle of trade unionists under the auspices of the ASRS to promote this concept.¹¹² In the following year a meeting in Darlington agreed on the need for Labour representation in Parliament¹¹³ and in that year plans were made to run Labour candidates at Darlington, Stockton, Barnard Castle and Sunderland.¹¹⁴

Before the 1906 Election there were two by-elections in the North East. At Barnard Castle in 1903 Henderson (see Biographies) stood as an LRC candidate, was opposed by a Liberal tariff reformer, offered to support the miners' Lib-Lab candidates in other constituencies at the next Election and was successful.¹¹⁵ The second by-election was in Gateshead in 1904. The local Liberals adopted J. Johnson as the candidate and he was supported by both Bell and the United Irish League. The local ILP and LRC were anxious to run a candidate against Johnson. Peacock, a railwayman and Secretary of the Gateshead ILP, wrote to Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald however was determined not to run an LRC candidate and Johnson won.¹¹⁶ He then proclaimed: 'From a railwayman's standpoint it is a centre of very great importance. Railwaymen have taken a gallant stand in this election'.¹¹⁷

The jockeying for position for candidates for the 1906 Election continued. By 1903 there were five LRC candidates for Darlington, Stockton, Newcastle, Sunderland and Jarrow.¹¹⁸ It is significant that at least three of these were constituencies where railwaymen had some influence. By March Darlington had Isaac Mitchell as an

¹¹¹ Railway Review 6.12.1901

¹¹² ILP News February 1902

¹¹³ Railway Review 30.1.1903

¹¹⁴ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.49

¹¹⁵ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.100

¹¹⁶ Purdue in thesis p.113

¹¹⁷ Railway Review 29.1.1904

¹¹⁸ A.W. Purdue: *George Lansbury and the Middlesbrough Election of 1906* p.334

ILP candidate. Mitchell was from ASE and was President of the General Federation of Trade Unions.¹¹⁹ He signed the LRC Constitution in 1904 but he did not wish to upset the Liberals and had to be deterred from liaison with them. Mitchell clashed with the ILP as the Darlington ILP was dominated by critics of national policy.¹²⁰

The Liberals opposed the LRC in Newcastle. Walter Hudson (see Biographies) was a prominent NER employee. He had been President of the ASRS from 1891 to 1899 and Irish Secretary 1898-1906 and had held other significant posts. He was supported by the ILP and was selected as a trade unionist candidate for one of the seats.¹²¹

In 1902 Pete Curran was selected as Labour candidate for Jarrow. In 1904 the Tyne Dock Branch of the ASRS held a combined meeting with the Durham miners and GRWU to support Curran in Jarrow.¹²²

By 1906 the Liberals had agreed to make way for LRC candidates only in Barnard Castle, Darlington, Newcastle and Sunderland but the ILP also wished to put forward candidates in Gateshead, Chester-le-Street and Middlesbrough.¹²³ In NW Durham MacDonald suggested the names of LRC candidates, including H. Parfitt and A. Fox of the Locomotive Engineers but the selection was not settled in time.¹²⁴

THE ELECTION OF 1906

Unlike the Election of 1900 the Election of 1906 was not fought in a jingoistic climate. In 1905, because of pressure from within the party for tariff reform, the Conservatives resigned and Campbell Bannerman called an Election in 1906. Labour had been strengthened by the Taff Vale Judgement and by the return of Shackleton and Crook.

The railway unions defined the issues to be faced by candidates. The RCA had asked each candidate to support the application of the Public Health Act to

¹¹⁹ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.52

¹²⁰ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party ...* pp.235-236

¹²¹ Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.67-72 and ILP News October 1903

¹²² Railway Review 4.3.1904

¹²³ Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.105-106

¹²⁴ *Ibid* pp.120-123

railway premises.¹²⁵ The ASRS listed the Trades Disputes Bill, the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Truck Act and the 8 hours day. A letter from the TUC Parliamentary Committee stated: 'Labour never had a better opportunity of asserting its power than at the present time'.¹²⁶

Shortly afterwards the Railway Review stated: 'Since the abolition of serfdom this is the most important event in the annals of Labour'.¹²⁷ The Election resulted in a Liberal landslide and the election of 29 LRC candidates.¹²⁸

In addition to the overwhelming Liberal victory perhaps the most outstanding event was: '... the appearance of a large and compact body of Labour members'.¹²⁹

Turning to the fortunes of the candidates in the North East in constituencies with railway connections, we begin with Darlington. Isaac Mitchell was eventually backed by both LRC and Liberal Associations in Darlington. Mitchell had been a Lib-Lab, Socialist and a De Leonist but at the time of his candidature he had moved to the right and was opposed to Socialism and the ILP. He attacked trade unions. Lloyd George supported him as: '... a good thing for Labour and for capital ...'¹³⁰ He did not mention the LRC in his manifesto or that he was a Labour candidate.¹³¹ The Darlington and Stockton Times denounced Mitchell as: '... a paid political adventurer, a Socialist in his earlier stages and latterly a sort of Liberal ...'.¹³² Many Liberals were put off by the Labour links and Mitchell was defeated. The Railway Review noted his defeat as the one great drawback to their progressive members.¹³³ Herbert, of the Liberal Party, regretted this failure of the compact saying that Mitchell was a 'good man'.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ The Railway Clerk 7.2.1906

¹²⁶ Railway Review 5.1.1906

¹²⁷ Railway Review 12.1.1906

¹²⁸ F.W.S. Craig: *British Electoral Facts* (PRS Chichester, 1981)

¹²⁹ Lodge (USA) quoted in B. Dugdale: *A. J. Balfour by his Niece* Vol.2 (Hutchinson, London, 1939) pp.14-15

¹³⁰ A.W. Purdue: Isaac Mitchell and the Progressive Alliance in NE Labour History Society Bulletin, 11, 1977 pp.2-11

¹³¹ *Ibid* pp.7-8

¹³² Darlington and Stockton Times 13.1.1906

¹³³ Railway Review 26.1.1906

¹³⁴ F. Bealey in Journal of the Institute of Historical Research, 1956, p.273

At Sunderland Summerbell was 'strongly Socialistic'.¹³⁵ T.R. Plummer (Liberal) said: 'Mr. Summerbell was representing Labour, and, if returned, that class and that class only'.¹³⁶ Summerbell's running mate Stuart made many more references to helping Summerbell than was the case vice versa. Summerbell called for the nationalisation of the railways.¹³⁷ At Newcastle many liberals were in favour of leaving one seat for Walter Hudson who, as we have seen earlier, was an ASRS stalwart.¹³⁸ Thomas Cairns, the Liberal, urged his voters to vote for Hudson but initially Hudson would not reciprocate: 'I cannot have freedom inside (the House of Commons) if I make a condition to get there'.¹³⁹ Hudson eventually came round to the idea of the Alliance. Hudson, like Summerbell, advocated nationalisation of the railways.¹⁴⁰ The Railway Review enthused at Hudson's 'stupendous majority'.¹⁴¹ At Middlesbrough Lansbury had a good agent and a good campaign but no local roots. Lansbury came bottom of the poll and Wilson was elected.

One of the most interesting campaigns was at Jarrow. Curran was a Socialist but he did not fight on this basis. Much of his support came from the miners.¹⁴² The Jarrow Guardian said that hundreds, if not thousands, of workmen repudiated Curran's claims¹⁴³ and that it was ill-conceived and a most ungracious act on the part of a section of trade unionists to split the progressive forces.¹⁴⁴ Once again Palmer was returned.

The LRC could be well pleased with its results. The Railway Review saw them as: '... the dawn of a new day for the working classes of England ... a new Government will be judged by its works and not by its promises'.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁵ Sunderland Echo 1.1.1906

¹³⁶ Sunderland Daily Post 4.1.1906

¹³⁷ Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.200-203

¹³⁸ *Ibid* p.154

¹³⁹ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 3.1.1906

¹⁴⁰ Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.193-196

¹⁴¹ Railway Review 19.1.1906

¹⁴² Purdue in thesis *op cit* pp.210-216

¹⁴³ Jarrow Guardian 5.1.1906

¹⁴⁴ Jarrow Guardian 19.1.1906

¹⁴⁵ Railway Review 26.1.1906

In the North East, following the Election, there were two by-elections. The first was in Jarrow in 1907 after the death of Palmer. The contest was complicated by there being four candidates and, at one time, the possibility of a fifth. However the fifth candidate, Hunnab, an Empire Builder, was not nominated. On the Labour side, Curran stood again but O'Hanlon stood as Irish Nationalist and Labour candidate.¹⁴⁶ Curran did not mention Socialism in his Election address.¹⁴⁷ Curran won.

In Newcastle, on the death of Cairns, there was a by-election in 1908. The NEC and Walter Hudson MP opposed Labour contesting this second seat but Newcastle Socialists, the SDF and ILP nominated Hartley of the SDF.¹⁴⁸ In Woman Worker Hartley was described as a: 'whole-hearted Communist'.¹⁴⁹ Hartley came bottom of the poll and the Conservative won the seat.

In the North East from 1906 onwards, the ILP gradually increased its hold on the DMA.¹⁵⁰ By 1906-1907 there were 60 Branches and the ILP Report said that: '... the County of Durham especially is in the very van of the movement for Labour and Socialism'. However, support of the ILP was not universal among trade unionists. Some saw the aims of the ILP as a diversion from the traditional objectives of trade unions and the Lib-Lab link. As we have noted earlier the ILP had gained influence in the ASRS and a number of ASRS Branches, e.g. Stockton, Darlington and Gateshead were ILP inclined. In Gateshead Peacock was a key figure.¹⁵¹ Strong ILP Branches existed at Gateshead, Bishop Auckland and Hartlepool and there were also Branches at Beamish, Sunderland, Newcastle, Trimdon, South Shields, Stockton, Chester-le-Street, Stanley, Tow Law, Spennymoor, Shildon, Byers Green and Darlington.¹⁵² In 1908 the question of a Labour candidate at Darlington was being considered.¹⁵³ At the end of

¹⁴⁶ Jarrow Guardian 28.6.1907 and Jarrow Express 28.6.1907

¹⁴⁷ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.263

¹⁴⁸ Purdue in thesis p.263

¹⁴⁹ Woman Worker 25.9.1908

¹⁵⁰ R. Moore: *Emergence of the Labour Party* p.124

¹⁵¹ R. Moore: *Ibid* pp.122-123

¹⁵² See Northern Democrat January 1907, February 1907, May 1907, December 1907 and May 1908

¹⁵³ Railway Review 17.4.1908

1909 railwaymen were being urged to support Labour candidates in the forthcoming Election.¹⁵⁴

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 1910

The first General Election in 1910 followed the rejection of the Lloyd George Budget of 1909 by the House of Lords. The Liberal tradition was much stronger in the North than in the South among the middle classes. Much of the working class remained loyal to the Party.¹⁵⁵

In dealing with these Elections it is necessary to bear in mind that a minority of the adult population was on the electoral register and up to 40% of males were not. The process of registration explained some of the discrepancy and removals were also a factor. In the North East in Middlesbrough about 32%, and in Tyneside about 39%, of removals took place each year and it took seven months for the list to be compiled.¹⁵⁶ In Middlesbrough and Stockton there were low levels of enfranchisement.¹⁵⁷ But, of those enfranchised, a very high percentage voted averaging 79% but reaching 87% in Gateshead and 95% in Darlington.¹⁵⁸

In the North East the Liberals allowed Labour a free run in Barnard Castle and Chester-le-Street.¹⁵⁹ In Sunderland Storey and Knott were returned as Unionist candidates. At Newcastle one Liberal and one Labour fought two Unionists and Liberal and Labour were successful. At Gateshead, Johnson, for Labour was opposed by Liberal and Unionist and came bottom of the poll. At Middlesbrough the intention had been to nominate Allen of the ASRS but Walls was chosen. He put forward few Socialist policies.¹⁶⁰ He was opposed by a Liberal and a Unionist and the Liberal was successful. In Jarrow the Liberals regained the seat. At Bishop Auckland, House (Independent Labour) was bottom of the poll. At Jarrow Curran lost.

¹⁵⁴ Railway Review 17.12.1909

¹⁵⁵ N. Blewett: *The Peers, the Parties and the People* (MacMillan, 1972) p.406

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* pp.27-38

¹⁵⁷ R. McKibbin: *The Ideologies of Class* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990) p.74

¹⁵⁸ S. Rosenbaum: The Election of 1910 in Journal of Royal Statistical Society May 1910

¹⁵⁹ Tanner *op cit* p.217

¹⁶⁰ S.J. Cass: *Labour in Middlesbrough* pp.32-34

In Darlington Trebitsch Lincoln was elected as a Liberal. This was regarded as either: '... a massive personal achievement secured against immense odds' or as: '... one of the oddest aberrations in British political history'.¹⁶¹ In Darlington - as in many constituencies - there was no Labour Party to fight the constituency. Of the electorate a record 92.5% voted.

Labour defeats were variously explained. The Northern Democrat commented: 'In Jarrow, Gateshead and Bishop Auckland we were a danger to progress and our dear friends the Liberals sat upon us'.¹⁶² Another explanation was that in Gateshead, Sunderland and Middlesbrough Labour had to fight at the end of a wave of trade depression.¹⁶³ The Labour Leader also found another reason: 'Internal troubles among the miners have prevented, for the present, Bishop Auckland and Gateshead coming into line'.¹⁶⁴ The result of the Election was more or less a tie between Liberals and Unionists and the Liberals required Labour support.

THE DECEMBER 1910 ELECTION

A second Election was necessary to get endorsement of the Liberal proposals for constitutional reform to control the actions of the House of Lords. Labour sought the reversal of the Osborne Judgement as regards levies for Parliamentary representation. After their setback in January Labour contested only six seats in the North East. At Bishop Auckland House stood again and did better. He played on his mining background. Shildon, the railway town, went almost solid for Labour¹⁶⁵ and the Northern Democrat called for a similar effort in other parts of the constituency on the next occasion.¹⁶⁶ The Liberal lead in the constituency fell from 18% to 4.5% and House came second. He later retired to give way for Ben Spoor.¹⁶⁷ At Jarrow Palmer defeated the Unionist by 111 votes and Curran came bottom of the poll.

¹⁶¹ B. Wasserstein: *The Secret Lives of Trebitsch Lincoln* (Penguin, 1989) pp.77-78

¹⁶² Northern Democrat February 1910

¹⁶³ Labour Leader 21.1.1910

¹⁶⁴ Labour Leader 4.2.1910

¹⁶⁵ Northern Democrat January 1911

¹⁶⁶ Northern Democrat April 1911

¹⁶⁷ Tanner *op cit* p.219

At Newcastle, Hudson, the stalwart NER former employee, stated: 'My candidature has been endorsed by my old comrades and railwaymen generally ...'¹⁶⁸ He held on to the seat. At Darlington Trebitsch Lincoln could not stand again because of his money problems.¹⁶⁹ Maddison (see Biographies) stood as a Radical but it was a mistake to send him to a large railway centre because he had always shown hostility to labour and the ILP.¹⁷⁰

The result of the second Election was equally inconclusive. As regards the role of the Labour Party a letter in the Railway Review said that Labour MPs had: '... simply become the tail of the Liberal Party ...'¹⁷¹ But in 1910 not one Labour MP had been elected in a three-cornered contest.¹⁷²

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN 1910 AND 1914

The Election of 1910 turned out to be the last one before the First World War. After the miners' strike in 1912 and by 1914 Labour had reached parity with the Liberals in most mining areas in South Wales and in some parts of Durham.¹⁷³ If we look at the North East in 1914 there were local Labour Parties in Newcastle, Gateshead, South Shields, Jarrow and Sunderland. There were local Labour Associations in Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland and Hartlepoons. Darlington had Trades Councils. The BSP was in Newcastle. There were Fabian Societies in Newcastle and Sunderland.¹⁷⁴ The ILP was strong in the North East particularly in colliery villages and among railwaymen. If an Election had been held they would probably have fought Newcastle, Sunderland and Jarrow.¹⁷⁵ As Callcott has demonstrated, there were differences in the development of the Labour Party in the Durham constituencies and it took a decade for them after the

¹⁶⁸ Railway Review 2.12.1910

¹⁶⁹ Wasserstein *op cit* pp.93-96

¹⁷⁰ Northern Democrat January 1911

¹⁷¹ Railway Review 6.10.1911

¹⁷² G.D.H. Cole: *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948) p.4

¹⁷³ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party* p.199

¹⁷⁴ G.D.H. Cole: *A History of the Labour Party* p.11

¹⁷⁵ Tanner *op cit* pp.244-246

war to reach the point where they provided 17 of the 18 Durham MPs.¹⁷⁶ Right up to the outbreak of war Labour candidates in Durham did very badly indeed.¹⁷⁷

CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to state and define the influence of railwaymen in the North East in terms of specific seats and Elections. In the first place the numbers of railwaymen in any constituency were small in comparison with those of, for example, miners in certain constituencies. The miners had come to terms with the Liberals and had built up a number of seats. Their Parliamentary machinery was already in existence. Railwaymen came from a paternalistic industry and were probably inhibited to some extent in their voting patterns. Their dispersion and hours of work also militated against playing a major role in local politics. However, the ASRS was influenced by ILP ideas and individuals and ASRS members belonged to some of the militant Branches of the ILP. The ILP also had strong backing in the North East as a whole. The ASRS at national level played a large part in the Conference establishing the LRC and was one of the first unions to be affiliated. Railwaymen, much more so than miners, required changes to be introduced by the legislature and towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century it became clear that the Liberals would only go at a certain pace. The Taff Vale and Osborne Judgements impacted initially on the railway unions and there was pressure for change.

When we look at how the workers were influenced by political movements, McCord has warned that it is easy to exaggerate the extent to which North East workers involved themselves in political matters.¹⁷⁸ Jack Lawson wrote in his autobiography: 'For the men of Durham were Liberals and we Socialists were fools'.¹⁷⁹

Historians have also commented on the lack of interaction between working class industrial action and the rise of the Labour Party in the early years. As P.

¹⁷⁶ M. Callcott: *The Nature and Extend of Political Change in the Inter-war Years. The Example of County Durham in Northern History* pp.215-216

¹⁷⁷ Moore *op cit* p.125

¹⁷⁸ N. McCord: *North East England* p.192

¹⁷⁹ J. Lawson: *A Man's Life* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1944) p.93

Thompson has pointed out: 'The industrial militancy was never effectively carried over into political consciousness'.¹⁸⁰ And the historian of British Anarchism stated: 'The working class militants at the storm centres were hostile to, or ignored, the representative political system at local or national levels'.¹⁸¹

But for the railway unions the potential was there. Although most railway industrial disputes were economic rather than political the early pressure for nationalisation of the railways and for legislative provision for safety and shorter hours created a political link and synergy between political and industrial matters. This was a factor in the ASRS support of the ILP.

¹⁸⁰ P. Thompson: *The Edwardians* p.273

¹⁸¹ J. Quail: *The Slow Burning Fuse* pp.255-256

CHAPTER 5. 1910-1911: YEARS OF INDUSTRIAL STRIFE

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

We have noted in preceding Chapters the factors which kept under control any militant tendencies of the railwaymen. These include the fact that there was a 'labour aristocracy' of a kind among railwaymen, the sectionalism which operated as a result of this and the grade structure, the cautious, and perhaps reactionary, leadership of the Unions, paternalism and its associated benefits and obligations and, perhaps underlying all of these, a belief among railwaymen that, gradually and inevitably, improved conditions would appear without militant action. We have seen also how the advent of the ILP and the LRC, later the Labour Party, impacted on these views. However, from 1909 to 1914, and in particular from 1910-1912 there were other external influences at work to counteract those factors.

At the time of the 1910-1912 strikes in particular, there was much talk about the influence of Syndicalism on the strikers. Syndicalism was an import from Europe where it had penetrated major unions, e.g. in France and had inspired several major strikes and disturbances. There was no unanimity about the nature of Syndicalism. Snowden wrote that: 'Syndicalism is one thing according to one of its exponents and something very different according to another'.¹

As regards its policies it was sometimes anti-political, other times non-political, other times a mixture of industrial action and political action.² But, Tom Mann, who was to proselytise in the United Kingdom, was less equivocal saying 'I despise the law. I will do my best to bring it into increasing contempt'.³ As regards its attitude towards strikes Snowden quotes the French view on this:

'With regards to the everyday demands, Syndicalism pursues the coordination of the workingmen's welfare through the realisation of immediate ameliorations, such as the diminution of working hours, the increase of wages etc. but this is

¹ P. Snowden: *Socialism and Syndicalism* p.205

² *Ibid* p.206

³ *Ibid* p.209

only one aspect of its work ... it commends as means to this end the general strike ...'⁴

Later Snowden emphasises that the general strike is the central idea of Syndicalism.⁵ He contrasts this with the attitude of British Trade unions who have always seen the strike as a first weapon of defence but have never conceived it as being 'a weapon for affecting a revolutionary change'.⁶ And the Syndicalist newspaper saw the distinction also: 'We Syndicalists shall never forget that it is the Labour politicians who have either killed strike agitations or rendered them abortive, like they did the railwaymen and the miners'.⁷

Regarding the attitude of Syndicalism towards the unions Snowden stated that they wished to organise all workers in a trade into one union⁸ and that they believed in management of the railways by the railway workers.⁹

Authorities differ on the importance of Syndicalism. Snowden pointed out that there was no Syndicalist Party in Britain and no union which accepted Syndicalism.¹⁰ Askwith saw it as one of a welter of movements within the field of labour¹¹ and that its significance was that it was opposed to central authority and therefore a change of masters would not be enough.¹² J. Ramsay MacDonald thought that Syndicalism in England had a negligible effect.¹³ A.D. Lewis writing in 1912 thought that there were only one or two Syndicalists in England¹⁴ but referred to its influence in the teaching of the Central Labour College on newer men in the railway unions.¹⁵ The historian of the shop stewards' movement emphasises the importance of Trades Councils in the growth of Syndicalism.¹⁶

4 *Ibid* p.216

5 *Ibid* p.218

6 *Ibid* p.223

7 The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News February 1913

8 Snowden *op cit* p.208

9 *Ibid* p.206

10 *Ibid* p.220

11 Askwith: *Industrial Problems and Disputes* p.347

12 *Ibid* pp.336-337

13 J.R. MacDonald: *Syndicalism* (Constable & Co., London, 1912) p.39

14 A.D. Lewis: *Syndicalism and the General Strike* (T.Fisher, Unwin, 1912) p.187

15 *Ibid* p.181

16 B. Pribicevic: *The Shop Stewards Movement and Workers Control 1916-1922* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1959) p.20

In his study Holton has suggested that there was an indigenous British movement but that it was limited to an influential minority.¹⁷ Holton saw the growth of Syndicalism as due to falling real wages, increasing capitalist industrial power, technological change and labour leaders being taken into politics.¹⁸ Soldon saw Syndicalism, if it was not a direct cause of the unrest, as at least another sign of disillusionment with political action.¹⁹ In the railway unions Syndicalism supported the movement towards the formation of the NUR, moved a motion at the 1912 Conference and possibly influenced the moves of the RCA in 1913 and the NUR in 1914 in calling for a share in control of the railways.²⁰ The considered view of Holton was that Syndicalists were not influential on the railways.²¹ Overall he attributed the increasing Syndicalist expansion to unrest and revolt against social legislation.²² However, the journal The Syndicalist in October 1912 told railwaymen: 'By the use of Direct Action in August 1911 you brought the Railway Companies to their knees ...'²³ In that year the journal had a circulation of 20,000 and attendees at the Annual Conference included railwaymen.²⁴ Farman concluded that some form of Syndicalism was present in railway strikes.²⁵ McKenna accepted that the formation of the NUR showed the power of Syndicalism but that it was soon replaced by Labour Party doctrines.²⁶ In the North East Holton mentions the existence of Syndicalism at Gateshead which was the scene of several industrial outbreaks.²⁷ Opposition from the left in the ASRS included C.A. Henderson from Tyneside.²⁸ The movement was important in Chopwell and Wardley.²⁹ In Chester-le-Street there was a De Leonist influence with George Harvey and Jack Nichol.³⁰ De Leon's fundamental thought sprang from his experience of the American

17 B. Holton: *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* (Pluto Press, 1976) p.138

18 *Ibid* p.27

19 N.C. Soldon: *Women in British Trade Unions 1874-1976* (Gill & MacMillan, 1977) p.70

20 Pribicevic *op cit* p.5

21 Holton *op cit* p.166

22 *Ibid* p.134

23 The Syndicalist October 1912

24 Holton *op cit* p.139

25 C. Farman: *The General Strike* (Hart Davis, London, 1972) p.8

26 F. McKenna: *The Railway Worker* (Faber & Faber, London, 1980) p.59

27 Holton *op cit* p.106

28 *Ibid* p.109

29 *Ibid* p.169

30 *Ibid* p.143

trade union movement where he controlled 72 unions. He called old trade unions 'a nest of crooks'. He supported IWW and moved towards industrial unionism.³¹ The Voice of Labour journal was important because it drew together anarchist-syndicalist groups in North East England.

We need briefly to consider the link between Syndicalism and Anarchism. Snowden thought that there was a distorted view of Anarchism:

'Anarchism is popularly regarded as a movement for the overthrow of society by revolution, and one whose only weapons are the bomb and the dynamite. But there are two schools of Anarchists, and they are distinct in their doctrines and methods. They are the Individual Anarchists and the Anarchist Communists.'³²

Snowden saw the Individual Anarchists as not believing in the regulation of hours of labour but being opposed to violence and favouring passive resistance. But the Anarchist Communists under Kropotkin had a different approach.³³ As far as the UK was concerned it was announced in May 1885 that 'a circle of English anarchists is about to be formed'.³⁴ The Anarchists were involved in labour movements but did not think that trade unions were sufficiently revolutionary.³⁵ The Anarchists were also opposed to parliamentary action and the journal Herald of Revolt stated 'all parliamentary action necessitates some abandonment of principle'.³⁶

In the North East Anarchism had sporadic activity. Anarchist meetings were reported in Newcastle in 1892.³⁷ The International Anarchist Federation of the English Provinces was formed in November 1907 and representatives attended from Newcastle and Sunderland.³⁸ In April 1909 Newcastle Anarchists sought closer cooperation with industrial workers³⁹ and, in September 1909, there was Anarchist propaganda in Darlington.⁴⁰

³¹ W. Kendall: *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) pp.62-67

³² Snowden *op cit* p.203

³³ *Ibid* pp.203-204

³⁴ J. Quail: *The Slow Burning Fuse* p.49

³⁵ *Ibid* p.88

³⁶ Herald of Revolt January 1911

³⁷ Quail *op cit* p.129

³⁸ *Ibid* p.250

³⁹ *Ibid* p.253

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p.251

From the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism (BAIU) founded in 1907, the Industrial League splinter was formed and this was the Anarchist faction of BAIU.⁴¹ By May 1913 a Workers Freedom Group had been established at Chopwell, Durham by Will Lawther⁴² and at a national Conference of Anarchists in 1913 delegates attended from Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle and South Shields.⁴³ In the Herald of Revolt Emma Goldman is quoted as saying: 'Anarchism is the higher form of Socialism'.⁴⁴

THE 1910 STRIKE: A QUESTION OF DIGNITY?

We need to turn now to the details of the strife in 1910 and 1911.

The historian of the Anarchist movement records factually that in mid-1910 the NER men struck for three days.⁴⁵ Other commentators were less dispassionate. The strike began in July 1910 at Park Lane Engine Works at Gateshead. It arose from the suspension of a shunter at Gateshead who refused to move to a shunting yard on the other side of the city. It spread to Forth Bank, Newcastle, Heaton, Dunston, Trafalgar and New Bridge Street. Then it spread quickly to Sunderland, Stockton, Darlington, Blaydon, Hartlepoons, Blyth, Percy Main, Tyne Dock and Shildon. It involved shunters and outside men, engine-drivers, firemen and passenger-service men. At Ferryhill and Durham sympathy was expressed with the strikers. Hull stated that it would stand by the strikers. The Gateshead men called for a general stoppage. Estimates of those involved varied between 5,000 and 7,000 workers but it was considered that 30,000 were at risk⁴⁶ and the Railway Times claimed that from Berwick to Darlington some 200,000 men were out of work as a consequence.⁴⁷ The strike was unofficial. There was no consultation with ASRS or GRWU officials and in any case no strike was allowed within 3 years of the Conciliation Agreement. The Railway Times said that extremists were

⁴¹ Pribicevic *op cit* p.13

⁴² Quail *op cit* p.279

⁴³ *Ibid* p.278

⁴⁴ Herald of Revolt April 1911

⁴⁵ J. Quail: *The Slow Burning Fuse*, p.257

⁴⁶ Railway Review 22.7.1910 and Railway Official Gazette 22.7.1910

⁴⁷ Railway Times 23.7.1910

located in the NE and reported T. Williams of the ASRS stating: 'We had no knowledge at the head office that any state of discontent existed in that locality such as might lead to a serious crisis ...'⁴⁸.

Following a meeting with the GM and with Walter Hudson MP (see Biographies) and the ASRS present, terms of settlement were offered involving:

- a return to work
- no legal proceedings to be taken or records of workmen to be marked
- the GM would discuss grievances within a week
- the GM would meet Shunter Goodchild to review the position but in the meantime he would remain suspended pending a decision as to whether he could return to his former work

At first the men refused the terms but the company would not change its decision on Goodchild. Williams of the ASRS said that he could not recognise the strike. They had got 19 out of 20 points at issue and what he regarded as a very generous settlement. He accepted that it was necessary to have discipline. A further meeting authorised the strike committee to settle the dispute.⁴⁹ The Company had stated that it would withhold wages and threatened to reconsider legal proceedings if the strike continued.⁵⁰ Later the GM decided that Goodchild should return to work at the place to which he had been assigned at the beginning of the dispute.⁵¹

The review decision did not meet with approval from the men. A mass meeting at the Hartlepoons condemned the result.⁵² Durham protested.⁵³ In other areas the scope of dispute was widened. At Darlington the grievances of all grades were discussed.⁵⁴ Middlesbrough decided to compile a list of all grievances in consultation with other branches and ultimately this list involved 600 grievances.⁵⁵ At Gateshead it

⁴⁸ Railway Times 23.7.1910

⁴⁹ Railway Review 29.7.1910

⁵⁰ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 22.7.1910

⁵¹ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 30.7.1910 and Railway Review 5.8.1910

⁵² Railway Review 5.8.1910

⁵³ Railway Review 19.8.1910

⁵⁴ Railway Review 12.8.1910

⁵⁵ Railway Review 4.11.1910

was agreed that their grievances should be tabulated in this way.⁵⁶ Blyth criticised both the settlement and the involvement of Hudson and Williams who should have 'allowed the men to conduct their own fight'.⁵⁷ One group did not need to press their case as the NER paid a bonus to 'loyal staff'.⁵⁸

There is no doubt that in this case, using the normal bases of comparison, the level of 'militancy' (see basis in Chapter 12) shown was high. First it was unofficial, the men did not want the involvement of their union and resented such interference as we have seen from the attitude at Blyth. Secondly, it put at risk the Conciliation Machinery in the North East. Philip Snowden was quoted by Askwith, the industrial relations negotiator, as condemning the action because it was 'destructive of collective bargaining and of trade unionism itself'.⁵⁹ Thirdly, the action in the North East was independent of action by railwaymen in other parts of the country. Fourthly, it was - or some thought it was - basically a local dispute. Fifthly, it did not arise from an alliance with another form of action or issue of principle, except to the extent that lack of belief in Conciliation as such was involved. Sixthly, it did not arise from, or benefit from, alliance with a political movement, e.g. the rise of the Labour Party.

There was no lack of comment at the time and subsequently about the causes of the strike. Several reasons were put forward and these are examined in turn.

1. Was it 'Summer Silliness'?

An Editorial in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle was in no doubt about the cause. It stated that there was '- no parallel for such a complete exhibition of childish incompetence'.⁶⁰ Dangerfield, a historian of Liberalism as it was in the pre-World War 1 period, described the strikers as:

'a favoured group of 10,000 railwaymen employed by the North Eastern Railway (which paid them particularly well and even condescended to recognise their Union) had suddenly struck over some insignificant little incident, held up all

⁵⁶ Railway Review 5.8.1910

⁵⁷ Railway Review 29.7.1910

⁵⁸ Railway Review 26.8.1910

⁵⁹ Further quoted in Tracey *op cit*, Vol.1, pp.194-195

⁶⁰ Newcastle Daily Chronicle 21.7.1910

traffic for three days and calmly gone back to work without offering any apology'.⁶¹

The Railway Review expressed the same theme:

'It is doubtful if, in the whole history of industrial disputes there was ever so spontaneous an uprising, so sudden in its beginnings, so widespread in its ramifications and so rapid for what, in and by itself, seems so trivial a cause'.⁶²

Philip Snowden referred to 'a matter of the most trivial character' leading to a strike which for a few days paralysed the railway system.⁶³

The Labour Leader journal commenting on the fact that the strike had collapsed as quickly as it had begun forecast, rather ambiguously, that the verdict of the average man would be that it was 'magnificent but not war'.⁶⁴

2. Was it the First Rumbings of a Later Earthquake?

Not everyone dismissed the incident as being silly and arising from a trivial cause. Speaking at Chester-le-Street Keir Hardie described the strike as being 'one of the most significant events in recent industrial history' because it revealed the power possessed by the railwaymen.⁶⁵ This theme was followed by the historian of the rise of the early Labour Party who saw in it the fact that 'Labour has become aggressive and is not merely opposing attack, but is determined upon advances'.⁶⁶

3. Was it Due to Northern 'Cussedness'?

The Railway Review, which had criticised the action as we have seen, also referred to the special characteristics of the Northern temperament and to one aspect which we will come across in later disputes. It commented that

'The men on the North East Coast are largely a race apart, possessing qualifications which these superior persons might find it not so easy to regulate as they now seem to imagine'

61 G. Dangerfield: *Strange Death of Liberal England*, (Constable, 1936) p.228

62 Railway Review 29.7.1910

63 As quoted by Askwith in Tracey *op cit*, Vol.1, pp.194-195

64 Labour Leader 29.7.1910

65 *Ibid*, p.476

66 Tracey *op cit*, Vol.1, p.195

and it then referred to 'A question of dignity'.⁶⁷ A correspondent in a later issue of the Journal, who was a guard on the NER, explained it as being 'the spontaneous protest of a body of men against the undermining of their very manhood'.⁶⁸

4. Was it a Local Reaction, or Over-reaction, to a Local Situation?

At the time of the strike a local ASRS man said that the strike was the result of tyrannical work among officials.⁶⁹ More graphically a correspondent in a later issue of the Railway Review described the railwaymen as living 'in a state of warfare, the warfare of a people fighting for life ...'.⁷⁰ It was a fact that in the area there had been, in the previous months, a steady build-up of tension. At Newcastle there had been agitation about the conditions of signalmen,⁷¹ the deployment of casual labour in the goods department⁷² and intermittent Sunday duty.⁷³ At Gateshead the year had begun with criticism of the arbitrary action of Harrison in dealing with disputes⁷⁴ and just before the strike references to a 'profound discontent of mineral guards'.⁷⁵ And, in the area as a whole there had been a reclassification of six signal boxes from the 8 hours a day category to 10 hours.⁷⁶ At Newcastle men who had been laid off by the funeral of Edward VII had a half day's pay deducted from their wages.⁷⁷

The Railway Official Gazette quoted the leaders of the strike as stating that the dispute had not arisen over any individual question but as the result of the general attitude displayed by officials towards certain men throughout the northern district.⁷⁸ The Railway Clerk attributed the revolt to dissatisfaction which had been growing for years and stressed factors such as large engines, large wagons, increased pressure, general economising and speeding-up.⁷⁹ It had seen increasing membership at

67 Railway Review 29.7.1910
 68 Railway Review 2.9.1910
 69 Railway Review 22.7.1910
 70 Railway Review 2.9.1910
 71 Railway Review 4.3.1910
 72 Railway Review 10.6.1910
 73 Railway Review 22.7.1910
 74 Railway Review 25.2.1910
 75 Railway Review 8.7.1910
 76 Railway Review 24.6.1910
 77 Railway Review 3.6.1910
 78 Railway Official Gazette 22.7.1910
 79 The Railway Clerk 15.8.1910

Newcastle and Sunderland⁸⁰ and, as regards the latter place stated: 'The men of the North are quietly but most certainly realising their true position'.⁸¹ However, taking a different line, the Railway Times argued that employees had been treated too lightly by managers⁸² and quoted the ASRS view that there was a lack of discipline.⁸³

5. Was it Due to the Workings of the infant Conciliation Scheme in the N.E. and/or the Reaction of Workers to this?

The historian of the working class in Britain during this period commented that by 1910 all well-organised industry except the railways had a system of collective bargaining and stage-by-stage dispute procedures.⁸⁴ The railways had, of course, Conciliation machinery but this was restricted in coverage and did not, for example, cover discipline. It also left a lot to the discretion of the Companies in interpreting awards and the Railway Review commented that in the Conciliation machinery the Companies had 'a mechanism for giving their own decision the appearance of an agreement'.⁸⁵ At the same time the machinery prevented the use of other devices, e.g. strikes which, as the Newcastle Daily Chronicle pointed out, were only justified when all methods of settlement had been tried which was not the case in the Gateshead dispute.⁸⁶

In the North East 1910 had begun with dissatisfaction with the Woodhouse award from the last dispute. At Bishop Auckland there were objections to the award⁸⁷ and this was so at the Hartlepoons.⁸⁸ At Darlington⁸⁹ and Newcastle No.1⁹⁰ complaints were made about the dilatory action of the Boards. The Railway Review in March made reference to the attitude of the Company in interpreting the award commenting on 'the devices of the N.E. Company in getting behind the award of Sir James Woodhouse ...' and warned: 'The attempts to get behind the real spirit of the

80 The Railway Clerk 15.2.1910

81 The Railway Clerk 15.5.1910

82 Railway Times 23.7.1910

83 Railway Times 30.7.1910

84 John Benson: *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939*, p.181

85 Railway Review 29.7.1910

86 Newcastle Daily Chronicle 20.7.1910

87 Railway Review 14.1.1910

88 Railway Review 4.2.1910

89 Railway Review 6.5.1910

90 Railway Review 22.4.1910

award are so flagrant and transparent as almost to justify any action however extreme being taken.⁹¹

In the following month it reported on general dissatisfaction in the North East on Conciliation Boards.⁹² It is interesting that, after the strike, as a result of a 12 hour session the N.E. Conciliation Board was reported as agreeing on all outstanding points.

6. Or a Question of Dignity?

At the end of the strike the Railway Review, which had speculated several times with some degree of puzzlement, on the causes of the strike commented that it could have been '... really about injustice in which their honour as men who were called upon to defend an injured comrade was involved'.⁹³ In coal mining and on the railways in the North East the concept of loyalty to a 'mate' is very strong and we will see it in action again in the 1912 Driver Knox Strike.⁹⁴

THE 1911 NATIONAL STRIKE AND THE SITUATION IN THE NER

The strike began at Liverpool on 5 August. Union and non-union carters in the employment of the North Eastern Railway ceased work. Other transport workers in Liverpool followed. On 14 August the ship owners locked out all cargo grades in Liverpool. This led to a general strike of all transport workers in Liverpool. Other railwaymen came out elsewhere. In an unprecedented show of unity and strength the four Executives of the Unions issued a 24 hours ultimatum to the Railway Companies threatening a national stoppage. On 16 August the Board of Trade saw Companies and men separately. The Prime Minister was also involved.⁹⁵

The Government offered a Royal Commission to review the 1907 Conciliation Scheme⁹⁶ but the men objected to the menacing comments of Asquith who took an attitude of 'take it or leave it' and on it being refused muttered 'Then your blood

⁹¹ Railway Review 25.3.1910

⁹² Railway Review 8.4.1910

⁹³ Railway Review 29.7.1910

⁹⁴ See Chapter 6

⁹⁵ Lord Askwith: *Industrial Problems and Disputes*, pp.160-161

⁹⁶ Railway Official Gazette 25.8.1911

must be on your own head'.⁹⁷ It also seemed likely that the Companies would not accept recognition. By this time 50,000 men had left work.⁹⁸ The Unions sent out 2,000 strike telegrams: 'Your liberty is at stake. All railwaymen must strike at once. The loyalty of each means victory for all'.⁹⁹ The Executive called for a united blow for deliverance from petty tyranny.¹⁰⁰ As regards the scale of the strike Bagwell estimates that 200,000 men came out in total and that the NER lost 21.7% of receipts¹⁰¹ but the Annual Report of the Board of Trade quotes 145,000 men involved from 5-24 August and 485,000 days lost.¹⁰² The strike was against the letter of the Conciliation Boards and in breach of contract.¹⁰³

After further meetings with the Government agreement on a Commission solution was reached and telegrams were sent calling-off the strike. Much of the credit for the formula must go to Lloyd George who persuaded the Companies to agree because of the threat to national security posed by the Agadir Incident.¹⁰⁴ The Government feared a bloodbath and the possibility of 100,000 engineers coming in.¹⁰⁵ There had been emotional talk and action. Asquith had said the Government: '... will use all the civil and military forces at their disposal to see that the commerce of this country is not interfered with'.¹⁰⁶ Churchill made troops available whether or not cities wanted them¹⁰⁷ and employed the army to make strikers back down.¹⁰⁸

Full support was given to the strike in the North East and Bishop Auckland for example reported that all members were on strike and many non-members.¹⁰⁹ However at Greenfields Shops at Gateshead the skilled tradesmen kept on

⁹⁷ P. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen*, p.293

⁹⁸ *Railway Review* 25.8.1911

⁹⁹ P. Dangerfield *op cit*, p.258

¹⁰⁰ Askwith *op cit*, p.165

¹⁰¹ Bagwell *op cit*, pp.295-296

¹⁰² Cd 7658, p.84

¹⁰³ *Railway Review* 18.8.1911

¹⁰⁴ Dangerfield *op cit*, p.267

¹⁰⁵ N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame*, p.94

¹⁰⁶ R. Kenney: *Men and Rails* (Fisher & Unwin, London, 1913) pp.186-187

¹⁰⁷ R. Geary: *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985* (CUP, Cambridge, 1981) p.37

¹⁰⁸ P. Addison: Churchill and the Working Class 1900-1914 in J.M. Winter: *The Working Class in Modern British History*, p.60

¹⁰⁹ *Railway Review* 25.8.1911

working.¹¹⁰ At Sunderland strong exception was taken by the RCA to the Company asking clerks to stand by them¹¹¹ and at Newcastle there was a notorious circular on the loyalty of clerks during a strike.¹¹² At the RCA Conference the NER Circular was attacked and clerks were advised not to blackleg.¹¹³

The settlement was not favourably received and the North East held out one day longer than others. Percy Main voted not to resume until the Newcastle programme had been discussed.¹¹⁴ Stockton wanted to hold out but, as agreement had been endorsed by Newcastle, York, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Tyne Dock, Darlington, Shildon, Saltburn, Whitby and other centres they accepted it but advised that they did not like the settlement imposed on them.¹¹⁵

Settlement in the North East was, in any case, difficult because the NER Company said that it was outside of the agreement. The Unions insisted however on the men being re-engaged. This was done but there was further trouble as Butterworth had advertised for Drivers, Firemen, Cleaners, Managers, Shopmen, Signalmen, Shunters, Guards, Porters and Rulleymen. The NER had considered that their men had illegally joined in a strike.¹¹⁶

It is significant that the men in the North East held out one day longer than those in the rest of the country¹¹⁷ and Newcastle was involved in this protest.¹¹⁸ The telegram from the Union calling off the strike had to be repeated.¹¹⁹

One of the interesting aspects of the 1911 strike was that it was accompanied by a strike of schoolchildren and militant activity by them. In the North East these occurred in Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Stockton, Sunderland and West Hartlepool.¹²⁰ At West Hartlepool 100 boys came

¹¹⁰ The Socialist Sep. 1911

¹¹¹ The Railway Clerk 15.3.1911

¹¹² The Railway Clerk 15.4.1911

¹¹³ The Railway Clerk 15.6.1911

¹¹⁴ Railway Review 25.8.1911

¹¹⁵ Railway Review 1.9.1911

¹¹⁶ Railway Review 25.8.1911

¹¹⁷ Railway Official Gazette 25.8.1911

¹¹⁸ Railway Official Gazette 25.8.1911

¹¹⁹ Railway Review 25.8.1911

¹²⁰ History Workshop Pamphlets No.9: *Children's Strikes in 1911* (by Dave Marson), p.11

out.¹²¹ At Newcastle demands included the abolition of the cane, institution of a weekly half-holiday and payment of a penny each week out of the rates.¹²² At Low Felling changes of school hours were demanded.¹²³ At Darlington school hours were to be reduced and one shilling a week paid for attendance.¹²⁴

Reaction of NER Board to the Strike

The NER had not been invited to the Board of Trade Conference and were not parties to the settlement. They regarded the NER men as having illegally joined the strike out of sympathy. However the NER Board decided on the conditions of return to work:

1. The men should return to work without delay
2. The men would be required to work amicably with, and not to molest, or annoy, such of the Company's employees as have not joined in the strike
3. Either the Company or the men to be entitled to require the adaptation of whatever procedure may be recommended by the proposed Commission in their report as the best means of settling disputes.¹²⁵

However following a meeting with Mr. Butterworth on 22 August 1911 Condition 3 was amended to read:

'The Company desire it to be understood that they hold themselves free to adopt whatever procedure may be recommended by the proposed Commission in their report as the best means of settling disputes'.¹²⁶

Later, and presumably with the agreement of the Board, A. Kaye Butterworth wrote to The Times a letter in which he questioned why the NER had been affected by the strike and why it lasted longer there.¹²⁷ In its traditional way the Company authorised bonus payments to staff during the strike¹²⁸ who remained loyal.

¹²¹ *Ibid* p.17

¹²² *Ibid* p.10

¹²³ *Ibid* pp.9-10

¹²⁴ *Ibid* p.9

¹²⁵ PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11807 21.8.1911

¹²⁶ PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11807 Note added

¹²⁷ Railway Official Gazette 1.9.1911

¹²⁸ PRO RAIL 527/20 Min.11809, 22.9.1911

A number of suggestions have been put forward at the time, and since, for the break-out of industrial action. These are examined in turn.

1. Was it the Weather?

It was not until 1990 that the previous record temperature recorded in the Summer of 1911 was marginally exceeded. Bagwell considers that the hot weather played its part¹²⁹ but it can hardly be considered as having been a major cause.

2. Was 1911 simply a year in a chain of periodic outbreaks?

Askwith, the experienced Board of Trade Industrial Relations expert, warned in 1911 that the country was 'in the presence of one of those periodic upheavals in the labour world such as occurred in 1833-34'.¹³⁰ Webb also commented: 'Suddenly in August 1911 the pot boiled over'.¹³¹

3. Were there underlying economic causes of trouble?

The journal, The Socialist, stated that the unrest was the 'coming to consciousness of the underworld' which had seen through the Conciliation fake.¹³² A historian of the railway workers saw it as '... the revolt of the railway slaves'.¹³³ Commentators differed on the importance of the wages issue. Writing in 1912 Cox pointed out that both railway workers and colliers were relatively well-paid and that the unrest was due to intellectual rather than material causes.¹³⁴ Another commentator writing in the same year blamed the all-round increase in the cost of living.¹³⁵ A later historian glossed this slightly by stating that although railwaymen may have been embittered by the fall in real wages the strike could have been avoided if the Companies had negotiated pay increases.¹³⁶ But contemporary politicians had stronger views. John Burns was quoted as saying: 'You ask me why there is unrest among railwaymen? My

¹²⁹ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen*, p.289

¹³⁰ Quoted in S. Koss: *Asquith* (Allen Lane, 1976) p.129

¹³¹ Quoted in Bagwell *op cit*, p.289

¹³² The Socialist Sep. 1911

¹³³ F. McKenna: *The Railway Worker*, p.57

¹³⁴ H. Cox: *Labour Unrest* (BCA, 1912) pp.3-4

¹³⁵ F. Henderson: *The Labour Unrest* (Jarrold, London, 1912) p.138

¹³⁶ Clegg: *A History of British Trade Unions* Vol.2 1911-1933, p.41

answer is 100,000 railway employees receive 20s. per week and 600,000 25s. per week
 ...'.¹³⁷

One of Asquith's biographers quotes Asquith as conceding that the men had real grievances.¹³⁸

4. Was it related to a 'sea-change' in the attitude of workers to Trade Unions and their role?

Asquith, the Industrial Relations Negotiator, commenting on the strikes of the period said: 'Often there was more difference between the men and their leaders than between the latter and employers'.¹³⁹ Kenney in his analysis of the 'Railway Ferment' pointed out that trouble had been brewing for many years¹⁴⁰ and another contemporary commentator said it was the aftermath of the unsatisfactory settlement of 1907.¹⁴¹

The transformation of trade union policy is normally a gradual process and is unlikely to develop in any single year. Dangerfield, however, singles out one important aspect of 1911. He states that the great strikes of 1911 began among non-Union men who joined the Union and then stimulated it to be more activist. At the 1911 Trades Union Congress a moderate urged: 'Let those strike who have never struck before and those who have always struck, strike all the more'.¹⁴² Another important aspect was that moves towards amalgamation and/or federation, which had dragged on inconclusively for years, found the occasion on which to unite as was shown by the action of the four ECs.¹⁴³ The Unions also saw the need for such action because it was clear that, after Osborne and on the basis of the attitude of the Liberal Government of 1906, and the inconclusive Elections of 1910, political solutions were less likely. Overall faith in the Conciliation Boards had weakened with even the Railway Review commenting: 'The Conciliation Boards have broken down. They have become

¹³⁷ Northern Democrat, September 1911. Snowden quoted 63% paid less than a pound per week (P. Snowden: *An Autobiography*, p.235)

¹³⁸ Koss *op cit*, p.129

¹³⁹ Quoted in G. Wigham: *Strikes and the Government 1893-1981* (MacMillan, 1982) p.24

¹⁴⁰ R. Kenney: *The Railway Ferment*, English Review 1911

¹⁴¹ F. Henderson *op cit*, p.23

¹⁴² Quoted in Dangerfield *op cit*, p.270

¹⁴³ Bagwell *op cit*, p.290

instruments of oppression ...'.¹⁴⁴ In November 1911 the four Unions agreed to consider 'fusion'.

5. Did militant political action influence the workers?

H.G. Wells, in analysing the unrest, suggested: 'It may be that we are in the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war'.¹⁴⁵ He referred to the profound distrust which the new generation of workers had concerning the ability or good faith of the property-owning, ruling and directing class.¹⁴⁶ Labour had become 'reluctant, resentful, critical and suspicious'.¹⁴⁷ Some attributed it to the Plebs League. It had many members in the ASRS.¹⁴⁸ Large numbers of railwaymen were said to be educating themselves at Ruskin College and the Central Labour College was turning out agitators and malcontents who were the main agitators in the 1911 Strike.¹⁴⁹ Snowden blamed the Syndicalists.¹⁵⁰ Guild Socialists urged that the workers should take over responsibility for their industries.¹⁵¹ To combat the Socialist influences more than a million Anti-Socialist pamphlets were given away in the 1911 campaign in Durham and North Lancashire.¹⁵² In a considered view Halevy stated that many strikes from 1910 onwards were anarchist in the sense that they were revolts of the working masses instigated by unofficial agitators against agreements previously concluded between employers and union officials.¹⁵³

6. Was it due to mismanagement by the Government?

The freedom for manoeuvre by the Government, both before and after the Report of the Commission, was limited. The Government exploited the national alarm at the time of the Agadir Incident to appeal to the patriotism of the Railway Directors and the workmen. However, Asquith did give the impression of threatening the men and

¹⁴⁴ Railway Review 18.11.1911

¹⁴⁵ H.G. Wells: *The Labour Unrest* (Daily Mail reprint, 1912) p.1

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* p.6

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid* p.15

¹⁴⁸ H. Pelling: *History of Trade Unions*, p.140

¹⁴⁹ R. Kenney: *The Brains Behind the Labour Revolt* in English Review March 1912

¹⁵⁰ P. Snowden *op cit*, p.237

¹⁵¹ Tony Lane: *The Union Makes Us Strong* (Arrow, London, 1974), p.99

¹⁵² K.D. Brown: *The Anti-Socialist Union* in K.D. Brown: *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, p.248

¹⁵³ E. Halevy: *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century. The Rule of Democracy* Book 2, (Benn, London, 1952) p.476

giving them the choice of either the Royal Commission or reprisals and his remark before leaving the meeting - 'Then your blood be upon your own head' caused alarm as did Winston Churchill's deployment of troops.¹⁵⁴ Asquith himself, however, had said he would 'employ all the forces of the Crown to keep the railway lines open'.¹⁵⁵

Levels of Militancy in the North East

In this particular case the bases of comparison are different from those of 1910 in relation to levels of militancy. In 1911 there was militancy on a national scale in relation to other strikes and disputes and in other parts of the railway system. However even in this situation the men in the North East showed higher levels of militancy in the following respects:

1. They need not have taken part in the strike because they had earlier achieved the position of recognition of the Union. Walter Hudson MP of the ASRS and Secretary of the NER Conciliation Conference maintained that there was no quarrel in the NER¹⁵⁶ and this was also the view of the NER Board as shown by A. Kaye Butterworth's perplexed letter to The Times.
2. The men in the North East stayed out a day longer than those directly concerned in other railways.
3. The overall settlement was opposed by the ASRS as a whole, as we have seen, and by other Unions, but the basis of rejection in the North East was different and was based on their own programme.
4. The distrust of Conciliation in the North East was, if anything, stronger there than in the rest of the country as we will see later in this Chapter.
5. Most NE Branches sought resolutely solutions to a battery of complaints in relation to all grades and had continued this tendency from earlier years.

¹⁵⁴ Dangerfield *op cit*, pp.258-9

¹⁵⁵ Koss *op cit*, p.130

¹⁵⁶ Railway Official Gazette 1.9.1911

To some extent the issues which were applicable in the rest of the country applied also in the North East to a lesser or greater extent. These issues are analysed below

1. Was the North East the major irritant?

Looking at the country as a whole in Spring 1911 the Railway Official Gazette was dismissive of the general level of discontent but singled out the problem in the North East:

'On most of our railways the murmurs are not of much importance, and the policy of conciliation appears to be working as well as can be expected. But on the North-Eastern this is not the case: out breaks more or less important in themselves and even more unsatisfactory in their actual results so far have been taking place with great frequency, at Newcastle; at Hull, and at Sunderland among other places ...'.¹⁵⁷

Certainly, as we have seen earlier, there was considerable disenchantment with the Conciliation machinery in the North East. The suggestion that the whole of the matters leading up to the strike had been disposed of to the 'satisfaction of the men'¹⁵⁸ seemed to be over-optimistic. Hartlepool considered that there should be a ballot 'as to whether we continue the present system of conciliation'.¹⁵⁹ P.S. Hancock writing in the Railway Review also suggested that Branches should review the future of Conciliation.¹⁶⁰ However, Newcastle No.1 recognised that it was evident 'that a large amount of satisfaction can be gained by conciliation methods'.¹⁶¹ In June Butterworth issued a Circular giving the record of the achievements of the NE Conciliation Board.¹⁶² But Gateshead, the scene of previous disputes, resolved to work against the Conciliation Scheme.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Railway Official Gazette 7.4.1911

¹⁵⁸ Railway Review 27.1.1911

¹⁵⁹ Railway Review 3.2.1911

¹⁶⁰ Railway Review 3.2.1911

¹⁶¹ Railway Review 17.2.1911

¹⁶² Railway Review 16.6.1911

¹⁶³ Railway Review 5.5.1911

2. Were feelings about the 'Closed Shop' stronger in the North East?

A study of the Railway Review makes clear that feelings against non-members (nons) ran high throughout the country. Feeling was as high in the North East and practical demonstrations against non-members were possibly higher.

In March a mass meeting at Bishop Auckland demanded that non-unionists should join the ASRS.¹⁶⁴ In Darlington in June it was suggested that Conciliation Board gains should be granted only to ASRS members.¹⁶⁵ In July a mass meeting against non-unionists was held at Newcastle when it was decided that 'the time has arrived when the organised workers on the NE should fix an early date to give notice to cease working with non-unionists'.¹⁶⁶ At Shildon, where it was complained that the guards are the worst organised of any grade at Shildon, 1500 took part in a demo against non-unionists.¹⁶⁷ The Railway Official Gazette, under the heading of 'Trade Union Tyranny on NER' quotes from an ASRS circular:

'We have definitely come to the conclusion that steps must be taken to ensure that everyone who reaps the fruits of our labours must bear a hand in the burden. Non-unionists can no longer be tolerated'.¹⁶⁸

A reply came later from the Chairman of the NER who said: '... and in a free country the question whether a man should or should not join a particular organisation was one decision which must rest with himself'.¹⁶⁹

3. Did the North East have issues outstanding over and above those in the rest of the country?

Some of the issues raised in the North East were general ones. Durham Branch supported the 8 hours day.¹⁷⁰ This was also featured in the programme which was the basis of the meeting of the NE Federation of District Councils which met at Shildon on 19 March 1911 and pressed for the 8 hours day, no casual labour to be

¹⁶⁴ Railway Review 17.3.1911

¹⁶⁵ Railway Review 16.6.1911

¹⁶⁶ Railway Review 21.7.1911

¹⁶⁷ Railway Review 18.8.1911

¹⁶⁸ Railway Official Gazette 14.7.1911

¹⁶⁹ Railway Official Gazette 18.8.1911

¹⁷⁰ Railway Review 26.5.1911

employed on the NER and pressure for non-unionists to join the Union.¹⁷¹ But there were additional NE items of dispute. In 1911 there were several areas of discontent. First in the permanent way Department¹⁷² where later there were to be wholesale discharges of men.¹⁷³ Secondly at Stockton there was the problem of classification of rulleymen.¹⁷⁴ In the course of the year other issues arose, e.g. the Newcastle City Branch supported the Railway Clerks Association in their objection to a circular requiring 'loyalty' from them.¹⁷⁵ In March 1911 the Railway Review predicted: 'There are all the portents of another serious strike on the North Eastern because of the treatment of local officials'.¹⁷⁶ Following this other disputes were added to the list: The GM in NER had tried to prevent policemen from joining the ASRS and this in itself led to a threatened strike at West Hartlepoons.¹⁷⁷ In Middlesbrough there was a dispute over the 'first van' policy and Bishop Auckland supported Middlesbrough on this issue.¹⁷⁸

4. Was it due to the Northern temperament?

The Railway Official Gazette saw the issues in the North East rather more starkly than other commentators and returned to a theme which we have come across earlier and will see again in 1912. They claimed that the strike was not due to recognition problems but the character of workers in the North East. They were described as fine workers but 'orgulous'.¹⁷⁹ This word is rarely used but in the Larger OED is defined as meaning of a proud and argumentative nature. The Gazette felt that the ASRS had failed to check its members in the North East.¹⁸⁰ Lord Monkswell, writing on the Railways of Great Britain, was less certain. He pointed out:

'Whether owing to the North country character, or for some other reason, the North Eastern has been somewhat liable to strikes on the part of its servants ...'.¹⁸¹

171 Railway Review 24.3.1911

172 Railway Review 13.1.1911

173 Railway Review 24.2.1911

174 Railway Review 20.1.1911

175 Railway Review 24.2.1911

176 Railway Review 3.3.1911

177 Railway Review 19.5.1911

178 Railway Review 21.4.1911

179 Railway Official Gazette 7.4.1911

180 Railway Official Gazette 28.4.1911

181 Lord Monkswell: *The Railways of Great Britain*, p.37

5. Was it due to the quality of management in the North East?

As we saw in the analysis of the 1910 strike, management on the North Eastern was introducing many changes and pressure for improvement was constant. This, and structural reorganisation, altered the nature of supervision and management and it became more remote and statistical. This ran counter to the earlier paternalism of the NER and its advanced record in respect of recognition and dealings with the trade unions. In his evidence to the Commission on the Railway Conciliation Scheme, Kaye Butterworth drew attention to the much stronger element of trade unionism and that Board members were accustomed to deal with unions. He said that he did not think it was fair to put the North Eastern strikes down to recognition.¹⁸² Watney and Little in their 1912 Study of Industrial Warfare also referred to the North East of England as 'a very stronghold of Trade Unionism' and said that the Directors had done their best.¹⁸³

The Commission reported on 18 October and recommended changes in the Conciliation Scheme.¹⁸⁴ There were some good aspects. Agreements were to last for twelve months and the scheme was to be reviewed after November 1914. But petitions had to be signed by 25%, not 10%, of staff and the sectional Boards were retained.¹⁸⁵ The four Executives who had called the strike decided that they could not accept the Report and asked the Government to make changes but the Government said that the Companies were satisfied.¹⁸⁶ The four unions agreed to consider fusion.¹⁸⁷ Discontent in the North East led to a permanent strike committee being established at Darlington with four delegates from each Union on it.¹⁸⁸

A Resolution of the House on 22 November urged the Companies to reconsider and meetings were held on 7, 8 and 11 December.¹⁸⁹ Agreement on 'recognition' was reached.¹⁹⁰ The Railway Review then argued that not only had the

¹⁸² Cd. 6014: *Evidence to Commission on Railway Conciliation Scheme*, pp.567-575

¹⁸³ Watney and Little: *Industrial Warfare*, p.243

¹⁸⁴ G.W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism*, p.437

¹⁸⁵ Bagwell *op cit*, pp.300-302

¹⁸⁶ Railway Review 10.11.1911

¹⁸⁷ Railway Review 17.11.1911

¹⁸⁸ Railway Review 8.12.1911

¹⁸⁹ Askwith *op cit*, p.169

¹⁹⁰ Dangerfield *op cit*, p.269

principle of recognition been conceded but there would be better wages and conditions and no victimisation.¹⁹¹

As far as the NER Board was concerned the Board minutes record that the Report of the Commission on Railway Conciliation Scheme 1907 had been received¹⁹²

'and the Board considered that this offered 'an opportunity of entering into some arrangement with the men in the Company's employment with a view to securing more cordial cooperation between the men and the management and for this purpose they empower the General Manager to discuss with Mr. Walter Hudson MP confidentially such schemes as those set out in his memorandum on 11th November 1911'.¹⁹³

In the following month the Railway Boards met to consider the Report¹⁹⁴ and an agreement was signed.¹⁹⁵

As far as the Unions were concerned the reception of the report in the North East was negative. A mass meeting at Newcastle opposed the settlement.¹⁹⁶ Gateshead objected to seeking nominations for the NE Conciliation Board until matters had been resolved.¹⁹⁷ Percy Main objected to Walter Hudson MP supporting the NE scheme in evidence to the Commission.¹⁹⁸

Several Branches supported the separate NE movement, e.g. Durham, the Hartlepoons,¹⁹⁹ and South Shields.²⁰⁰ Darlington voted to defer on the national situation until the North Eastern programme had been decided on.²⁰¹ Durham stated that: 'Better wages and shorter hours are at present the war cry of the faithful Durhams'.²⁰² The Railway Review considered that there was a case for the NE men to be left out of the ballot²⁰³ and West Hartlepool decided that this was their position

¹⁹¹ Railway Review 22.12.1911

¹⁹² PRO RAIL 527/20, Min.11817 17.11.1911

¹⁹³ PRO RAIL 527/20, Min.11818, 17.11.1911

¹⁹⁴ Railway Review 8.12.1911

¹⁹⁵ Railway Review 15.12.1911

¹⁹⁶ Bagwell *op cit*, p.299

¹⁹⁷ Railway Review 1.9.1911

¹⁹⁸ Railway Review 15.9.1911

¹⁹⁹ Railway Review 10.11.1911

²⁰⁰ Railway Review 3.11.1911

²⁰¹ Railway Review 17.11.1911

²⁰² Railway Review 24.11.1911

²⁰³ Railway Review 10.11.1911

also.²⁰⁴ The debate continued with continued support for the NE Programme from Darlington, Durham, Ferryhill and Hartlepoons branches.²⁰⁵ At Darlington also it had been resolved to keep in existence a permanent strike committee with four delegates from each Union.²⁰⁶

It can be argued that the strike in the country as a whole was successful.

Williams of the ASRS stated:

'The powers of organised labour was for the first time demonstrated and after long years of uphill work we succeeded in making railway Trade Unionism a force to be reckoned with'.²⁰⁷

J.H. Thomas said '- to railway servants it was a splendid move forward on the road to progress'.²⁰⁸ Bagwell considered that it had succeeded because of the unity of the Unions, the effect on trade, the national perception of the danger from the Agadir Incident, and the public dislike of railway managers.²⁰⁹ As regards Conciliation Boards the men gained a concession in that their representatives could appoint a Secretary who tended to be a trade unionist.²¹⁰ However, as regards wages and hours Bagwell considered that the result was that:

'they (the men) entered the period of the First World War substantially worse off in respect of hours and wages than the employees of any other major occupation with the exception of agriculture'.²¹¹

The Clarion considered it 'A colossal fiasco'²¹² having earlier said that the strikers '- held in their hands the key to the whole industrial problem'.²¹³ McKillop, the historian of ASLEF, wrote that possibly the 1911 strike produced nothing very startling in the way of material advantage.²¹⁴ Kenney pointed out that full recognition was not obtained²¹⁵ but Holton argues that the significance was that it allowed Union officials for

204 Railway Review 1.12.1911

205 Railway Review 22.12.1911

206 Railway Review 8.12.1911

207 As quoted in Alcock *op cit*, p.442

208 J.H. Thomas: *My Story* (Hutchinson, London, 1937) p.34

209 Bagwell *op cit*, pp.297-8

210 H. Pelling: *History of Trade Unions*, p.137

211 Bagwell *op cit*, p.305

212 The Clarion 1.9.1911

213 The Clarion 25.8.1911

214 McKillop *op cit*, p.97

215 R. Kenney: *Men and Rails*, p.209

the first time to represent workers.²¹⁶ This last point may be significant. Cronin considered that the labour unrest represented a qualitative breakthrough in the extent of organisation. It was a rebellion against the leaders and the real issue was one of power.²¹⁷ Even the Unionists recognised that new ideas were needed and F.E. Smith in 1911 chaired the Unionist Social Reform Committee which had a sub-committee on Industrial Unrest and made several 'radical' suggestions.²¹⁸

Sir Edward Grey also referred to: '... a disposition to displace the union officials'²¹⁹ and Dangerfield listed it as one of the causes of strife although he gave key importance to Syndicalism.²²⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The pattern of industrial relations in the North East and the behaviour of union members there follows the earlier history. The men in the North East have, and are recognised as having, a distinctive brand of unionism and an independence of action. 'Fairation' and loyalty to a comrade are demonstrated in the 1910 strike. In 1911, this independence almost reaches its peak. As regards the cause of general unrest in the country it would be simplistic to examine the comments made at the time and select one main cause. Strikes are rarely like that. There may be specific causes but, usually, these depend on a festering understructure of discontent. In 1911 a number of events came together. Fay, a General Manager, in giving evidence to the subsequent Commission, reminded the Commission that the good times of 1907-1908 were followed by the bad times of 1909-1910. These were reflected in the awards by Arbitrators and led to the reduction of working expenses which in turn led to regrading of men, closing of signal boxes, etc.²²¹ This was superimposed on a mood in any case which regarded the earlier Conciliation settlement as a partial solution to earlier troubles and which did

²¹⁶ B. Holton: *British Syndicalism 1900-1914*, p.108

²¹⁷ J.E. Cronin: *Strikes 1870-1914* in C. Wrigley: *A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914* (Harvester Press, Portsmouth, 1982) pp.90-92

²¹⁸ J. Ridley: *The Unionist Social Reform Committee: Wets Before the Deluge* in Historical Journal, 30, 1982

²¹⁹ Sir E. Grey: *Sir David Dale* (Murray, London, 1911) p.81

²²⁰ Dangerfield *op cit* p.238

²²¹ Railway Times 23.9.1911

not concede the issue of recognition. Unions also were expanding and there was pressure from new members for a more democratic control of them. The North East was, of course, in a different position with the men having won earlier the principle which was being fought for nationally. However, the men in the North East faced some of the same economic pressures and changes in the attitude of the membership of the Unions. They had their own programme of new demands and improvements. Men in all Companies, and the men in the North East perhaps more so, faced the pressure of new technological and management changes. So, the men in the North East, fought the fight and fought it longer.

The discontent in the North East, as we have shown, must be seen in the context of the general national discontent. The reasons for the industrial discontent have been analysed earlier in this Chapter. However, the discontent was much wider. As Dangerfield puts it: 'For it was in 1910 that fires long smouldering in the English spirit suddenly flared up, so that by the end of 1913 Liberal England was reduced to ashes'.²²²

He traces the combined progressive impact of the Tory rebellion, the women's rebellion and the workers' rebellion. He suggests that the great Labour Unrest of 1910-1914 might be seen: '... as a profoundly unconscious assault upon respectability, a vital revolution in the world of the soul?'²²³ The labour unrest caused separate disputes by the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers. But, looming in the background, was the approaching Triple Alliance of the three unions. It would be brought about by the growing agitation among the rank and file trade unionists rather than by the TUC.

²²² Dangerfield *op cit* p.vii

²²³ *Ibid* p.209

CHAPTER 6. 1912-1914: FURTHER UNREST AND THE DRIVER KNOX

STRIKE

As we have seen, the 1911 settlement did not resolve all the issues either nationally or in the North East. The year 1912 was not a good year for the Companies. The miners were on strike and by 1 March about 1 million men were out leaving railway workers idle.¹ Railway Companies had falling productivity and restricted opportunities for increases.² There was still suspicion of Conciliation Boards and contemporary commentators suggest there was reason for this:

'During the four years of its working the Conciliation Board has proved a fresh means of harassing and terrorising the railway servants and wages had actually decreased and conditions of service worsened under its operations'.³

In the North East the year 1912 began with Newcastle City Branch objecting to turning down the NE movement⁴ and Gateshead wishing to vote on giving six months notice to terminate the North East Conciliation Scheme.⁵ Bishop Auckland District Council also discussed the NE programme.⁶ In March both Bishop Auckland District Council and Darlington Strike Committee of railwaymen met to consider the coal crisis and the banning of military special trains.⁷ Discontent was also recorded in the North East at the lodging system and eyesight tests.⁸ As regard the Conciliation Scheme at the beginning of the year 18 men were elected for 1912, 1913 and 1914 to the Conciliation Conference and W. Hudson became Secretary.⁹ In June the GM made concessions to lower paid grades.¹⁰ The Railway Review recorded in May that at

¹ Dangerfield *op cit*, p.281

² Holton: *British Syndicalism 1900-1914*, p.28

³ Frow, Frow and Katanka: *Strikes: A Documentary History* (Charles Knight, London, 1971) p.142 quoting J. Keir Hardie. See also Watney and Little *op cit*, pp.51-52

⁴ Railway Review 12.1.1912

⁵ Railway Review 26.1.1912

⁶ Railway Review 16.2.1912

⁷ Railway Review 8.3.1912 and 15.3.1912

⁸ Railway Review 8.3.1912. The test was subjective and resented

⁹ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.11827 12.1.1912

¹⁰ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.11856 14.6.1912

Shildon the slack work problem had lasted for five years!¹¹ In October it complained that the Company would not communicate with the ASRS at West Hartlepool in regard to foremen.¹²

The year 1912 was also a year of dispute and growth for the RCA in the North East. New Branches were formed at Tyne Dock, Blyth, Tynemouth and Bishop Auckland and Stockton.¹³ In February many clerks in the North East were told that on promotion they must be prepared to move.¹⁴ A series of meetings at Tyne Dock, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Leeds, Darlington and Sunderland led to the NER conceding an exemption clause.¹⁵

THE DRIVER KNOX STRIKE

Driver Knox appeared in Court on 5 November charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting PCs Railston and Hunter on 26 October. It emerged that Driver Knox had worked for the NER for 37 years. Driver Knox stated: 'I was not under the influence of drink ... I am practically an abstainer when I am off duty'. He admitted to having had two halves of hot rum on this occasion. He was off duty at the time. As regards being drunk and disorderly he was found guilty and fined. As regards assaulting the police he was found not guilty and, indeed, one witness at the time had complained that the police had assaulted Driver Knox.¹⁶ Driver Knox was reduced in grade to pilot driver¹⁷ which involved him in a loss of 9s. a week.¹⁸

An initial meeting at Gateshead decided to postpone strike action until a meeting had been held with the General Manager on 4 December 1912. Following this meeting a large number of men left work without notice on 7 December and thereafter. The Board of Trade Report states that 6465 men were involved and 37,000 days lost.¹⁹

¹¹ Railway Review 17.5.1912

¹² Railway Review 11.10.1912

¹³ The Railway Clerk 15.1.1912, 15.2.1912 and 15.12.1912

¹⁴ The Railway Clerk 15.2.1912

¹⁵ The Railway Clerk 15.11.1912

¹⁶ As reported in Daily Herald, 11.12.1912

¹⁷ Daily Herald, 9.12.1912

¹⁸ Daily Herald, 10.12.1912

¹⁹ Reports on Strikes and Lockouts in 1912 Cd.7089, p.88

In a startling escalation of the total number of men affected by the strike the Daily Herald quoted 100,000 men as being idle 'including all grades of railwaymen, pitmen, steel-workers, dockers and furnace men'.²⁰

Initially on the NER about 3500 men came out and shortly afterwards 1200 men at Tyne Docks decided to come out also.²¹ It was reported that about 1000 men had ceased work in the Shildon and Bishop Auckland districts and that efforts were being made to get GRWU members called out.²² Later it was reported that the GRWU at Shildon were ready to down tools when required to do so.²³ Bishop Auckland ASRS appealed to the Executive to take official action to call out all men. Hartlepool called for a national strike.²⁴ The North-Eastern Council of ASRS branches supported the strikers.²⁵

There was, however, one key branch which did not give support. At Darlington the railwaymen adopted a resolution expressing regret at the unconstitutional methods of the Gateshead branch before taking the branches into consideration and declining to cease work until called out by the executive committee.²⁶ South Shields were also not involved.²⁷ Otherwise the districts involved were listed as Newcastle, Heaton Manors, Forth Goods, Gateshead, Percy Main, Tyne Dock, Blaydon, Blyth, Bedlington, The Hartlepoons, Bishop Auckland, Shildon, Sunderland, Monkwearmouth Goods, Sunderland Docks, Seaham Harbour and Carlisle.²⁸

The Railway Times commented:

'Instead of stoutly asserting the strike was a mistake, the Society has very weakly sat on the fence, and, indeed, but for public opinion would probably have thrown in its lot with the strikers'.²⁹

20 Daily Herald 12.12.1912
 21 Daily Herald 9.12.1912
 22 Daily Herald 10.12.1912
 23 Daily Herald 13.12.1912
 24 Daily Herald 11.12.1912
 25 Daily Herald 9.12.1912
 26 Daily Herald 9.12.1912 and Railway Times 14.12.1912
 27 Railway Times 14.12.1912
 28 Daily Herald 13.12.1912
 29 Railway Times 14.12.1912

The Daily Herald, which was later reproved in a letter to the Editor from Ernest Bevin for its 'unjustified abuse of representatives of the men',³⁰ stated that the attitude of Unity House was that strikes were 'unauthorised and unrecognised'.³¹ At the beginning of the dispute both Williams and Hudson urged the men not to strike³² and at the end the journal Railway Review acknowledged that there had been a want of faith in the Trade Union which had been a serious problem.³³ The same point had been picked up by the Daily Herald which said that the incident exemplified the prevailing tendency for the rank and file to break away from their leaders and declare a strike.³⁴ At one point it was reported that the ASRS Executive had a meeting with the President of the Board of Trade but the outcome was not reported in the popular press.³⁵ The Executive was to face even more pressure after the settlement when they were being asked to call a national strike against the fines which had been imposed by the NER management³⁶ and 10,000 men were stated to be ready to strike.³⁷

The management viewpoint was strongly influenced by the traditions of paternalism and military-style discipline which had characterised the attitude of the North Eastern Railway and other Railway companies. In 1911 it was reported in the North Eastern Railway Magazine that Mr. Philip Burt, DGM, had stated that he should like all concerned with the movement of trains to be total abstainers.³⁸ Shortly after the strike started this viewpoint was stated as follows:

The Company's duties towards the public make it impossible for them to allow men who are known to be occasionally the worse for liquor to take charge of their trains. To quote the words of one of the Board of Trade Inspectors in a recent report 'Drunkness even off duty is an unpardonable offence'.³⁹

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- 30 Daily Herald 19.12.1912
 31 Daily Herald 11.12.1912
 32 Daily Herald 9.12.1912
 33 Railway Review 20.12.1912
 34 Daily Herald 9.12.1912
 35 Daily Herald 14.12.1912
 36 Daily Herald 17.12.1912
 37 Daily Herald 18.12.1912
 38 North Eastern Railway Magazine Vol.1 1911
 39 Daily Herald 9.12.1912

The off-duty aspect, which seemed to be of major importance to the men, was referred to at the end of the strike by Butterworth in some patronising remarks that the men were afraid that their leisure was being interfered with.⁴⁰

The management were also sensitive to the point that the action was unofficial and in the terms of the final settlement required an undertaking in the following terms:

The men's representatives state that they deprecate these spasmodic strikes and consider that, in future, North Eastern men must not strike except with legal notice to the Company, and in the case of members of a Trade Union in accordance with Trade Union rules ...'.⁴¹

The management were also sensitive to the point that the North Eastern Railway Company, which had been one of the most progressive in its attitude to recognition and conciliation, appeared to suffer more than the others. Butterworth was quoted as saying: 'It was realised that the policy of conciliation had been construed as weakness'.⁴² Opponents of the NER Company suggested that the NER was paying the price for its divergent attitude as the strike was 'an extreme example of the utter futility of trade unionism as applied to railway administration'⁴³

As the Company utilised the efforts of its loyal staff and of its new recruits a point of principle became that these groups must not suffer in any settlement. On 14 December the Company agreed to take back the men on strike and find work for them as soon as possible but they would not discharge the new ones who had been recruited.⁴⁴

When the settlement was reached on 14 December 1912 it embodied the points mentioned:

1. The Company would reinstate Knox if the Inquiry cleared him.
2. All men on strike to report for work which would be found for them as soon as possible.

⁴⁰ Daily Herald 16.12.1912

⁴¹ *Alcock op cit*, p.459

⁴² Railway Times 21.12.1912

⁴³ Railway Times 14.12.1912

⁴⁴ Daily Herald 14.12.1912

3. Returning strikers must work amicably with those who did not strike.
4. All strikers to be fined six days pay
5. The men's representatives were required to give an undertaking on their behalf.⁴⁵

There were several views of the cause(s) of the strike.

1. Was it folly?

At the end of the strike the Daily Chronicle regarded it as '... one of the most foolish strikes ever declared'.⁴⁶ The Railway Review referred to a Standard flysheet description of the 'strike for the right to get drunk'⁴⁷ and the Syndicalist journal was aroused by this approach in 'lying articles'.⁴⁸

2. Was it a general spirit of revolt?

The Daily Herald, although it solidly presented the facts of Driver Knox's case, set it in a wider context: 'The disrating of Driver Nichol Knox ... was but the accidental side-wind, which fanned the smouldering embers of discontent into the blaze of revolt'.⁴⁹

It also commented:

'This strike, like various other strikes, throws a flood of light upon contemporary working conditions and the growing spirit among the workers ... The spirit of revolt is abroad ...'.⁵⁰

After all this was not the only strike in 1912. Following the major disturbances of 1911, the year 1912 saw 38,142, 101 days lost in strikes.⁵¹ The Syndicalist also explored this viewpoint stating:

'It was quite evident to the state that if Knox's question was not settled in his favour and quickly at that there would be another strike of the railwaymen on a scale of immense magnitude'.⁵²

⁴⁵ Daily Herald 16.12.1912

⁴⁶ As quoted in Daily Herald 17.12.1912

⁴⁷ Railway Review 20.12.1912

⁴⁸ The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News January 1913

⁴⁹ Daily Herald 10.12.1912

⁵⁰ Daily Herald 9.12.1912

⁵¹ Dangerfield *op cit*, p.296

⁵² The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News January 1913

3. Was it due to Syndicalism?

Although as we have noted earlier there is now less belief that Syndicalism played a major part in fomenting industrial action, commentators at the time, and immediately afterwards, attributed significance to the role of Syndicalism. Philip Snowden saw the strikes of 1911-1912 as being a result of conversion to Syndicalism.⁵³ In 1912 Fred Crawley, a railwayman, and others were sentenced to imprisonment for circulating a 'Don't shoot' leaflet to troops.⁵⁴ At the 1912 Congress of British Railwaymen a key motion was moved by a Syndicalist.⁵⁵ After the event a Syndicalist journal claimed credit seeing the strike as being 'the finest example of the power of Syndicalist tactics and methods'.⁵⁶ It also demonstrated 'the power of Solidarity and the efficacy of Direct Action'.⁵⁷ This point was widened by The Clarion which stated that the strikers had 'taught the workers of Great Britain (nay, of the whole world) that the one supreme thing is solidarity'.⁵⁸ The general role of Syndicalism is discussed earlier in this thesis.⁵⁹

4. Was it an objection to police practices?

One of the more unusual assessments was made by the Railway Review:

'When the time arrives for the writing of a complete history of the NE strike it will then be said it marked a change from friendliness to positive dislike upon the part of railwaymen towards the police'.⁶⁰

5. Was it due to 'fairation'?

In a Chapter in 'The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus' Ken Coates states: "'Fairation" or some similar conception is the watchword of the overwhelming majority of militant actions, whether they concern wages or not'.⁶¹ We need to consider, as did his colleagues, whether Driver Knox was treated fairly or not. The initial evidence, although conviction on one count followed, suggested doubts

⁵³ P. Snowden *op cit*, p.221

⁵⁴ Cole and Postgate *op cit*, p.453

⁵⁵ P. Snowden *op cit*, p.210

⁵⁶ The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News January 1913

⁵⁷ The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News January 1913

⁵⁸ The Clarion 20.12.1912

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5

⁶⁰ Railway Review 27.12.1912

⁶¹ Ken Coates in R. Blackburn and A. Cockburn: *The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus* (Penguin, London, 1967), p.82

even if the point was accepted, which it was not, that the Company had a right to interfere in an employee's leisure time. Driver Knox appealed to the Home Secretary who appointed a magistrate, Chester Jones, to enquire into the basis of conviction and in the meantime Driver Knox was temporarily reinstated.⁶² Chester Jones came to the conclusion:

'If Knox were charged before me with being drunk and incapable, I should say that there were no suggestions of it. If charged with drunkenness and assault I should say that no magistrate would convict'.⁶³

Dealing in more detail with the count on which Knox was convicted Chester Jones said:

'The evidence that I heard totally failed to satisfy me that Knox was drunk or disorderly or that he was drunk and incapable, or that he was drunk at all in what, for want of a better definition of the term, I may call the police court sense of being drunk.'

As a result of this the Home Secretary advised the King to grant Knox a free pardon.⁶⁴

The strike involved the question of fairness and in their survey of the working class view of politics in 1911, Reynolds and Woolley had said of the British worker: '... fair play is his chief standard of judgement'.⁶⁵

The Railway Review grudgingly recognised this aspect of the case when it said that the strike

'was an exhibition of magnificent loyalty to a comrade almost without parallel in the annals of industrial history but the means were strangely disproportionate to the end to be achieved ...'.⁶⁶

Driver Knox, as we have seen, was vindicated and he was re-instated in his former grade. We might reasonably have expected that he would now leave the stage following his moment of fame. However, the year ended with a fresh appearance as he was suspended for duty because on Christmas Eve he went past signals.⁶⁷ Non-striking

62. Alcock *op cit*, p.459

63. Quoted in Daily Herald 14.12.1912

64. Daily Herald 16.12.1912

65. Reynolds and Woolley: *Seems So: A Working Class View of Politics* (Macmillan, London, 1911) p.147

66. Railway Review 20.12.1912

67. Daily Herald 30.12.1912

drivers got their reward from the Company in the form of a gratuity of £100 each.⁶⁸ As for the returning strikers the year ended with widespread unrest over the principle of the fines and the practicality of collecting them. One striker might remind readers of the Railway Review that they gained 'peace with honour'⁶⁹ but another was less sanguine:

'We have been defeated on every point, and we are going back worse than we came out. We came out to establish a principle that the company should have no say in what we do in our leisure time but we have not done that, and we are going back to lose a week's wages'.⁷⁰

The Clarion, which had said benignly: 'It is good to see these sudden bursts of unorganised anger on their part ...'⁷¹ related it to the general struggle:

The end of most of these struggles between Capital at bay and Labour on strike is the same: the terms of the agreement say, in as pleasant words as possible, that the men are beaten and the masters have won ... The strikers on the North Eastern Railway have gained nothing which can be measured in terms of shorter hours, better wages, or any general material improvement in their condition of economic slavery.⁷²

Raven, the CME, who had taken the original disciplinary action against Driver Knox put it more succinctly: 'Take your beating like men'.⁷³

Levels of Militancy in the North East

In this case there was no doubt that the men in the North Eastern Railway had behaved in a more militant manner than their colleagues elsewhere and against the wishes of their Association. There is no clear indication that militants in the form of Syndicalists, or more conventional Socialists, were behind this outbreak. Certainly there was an element of social militancy in the resentment of the police action and the reaction against having their leisure time activities monitored by the paternalistic Company. Also, as some of the commentators quoted have stated, the incident which caused the strike was a spark igniting a general discontent in the country as a whole and in relation to the conditions on the North Eastern Railway. But a large element of the reaction was

⁶⁸ Daily Herald 19.12.1912

⁶⁹ Railway Review 27.12.1912

⁷⁰ Railway Times 21.12.1912

⁷¹ The Clarion 13.12.1912

⁷² The Clarion 20.12.1912

⁷³ Daily Herald 16.12.1912

probably due to instinctive loyalty and the conception of 'fairation' because it seemed that an employee might have suffered an injustice. As such it is a fascinating incident possibly outside the mainstream of railway industrial relations at that time.

The Years 1913 and 1914

In addition to the Driver Knox strike there was trouble at Shildon where the GRWU had 1100 out of 1200 members on strike on matters 'entirely distinct from the Driver Knox Strike'.⁷⁴ In Ireland, Larkin organised a Transport Strike and he travelled throughout the UK but he had little effect on the NUR because he had accused them of not being sufficiently favourable to sympathetic strikes.⁷⁵ The NUR was gearing itself up for the next great battle and did not want a distraction. Perhaps lulled by attitudes like this The Times was able to report in August as regards unrest: 'The general interest in the subject has died away'.⁷⁶ However, in 1913 there were more strikes than in any other year and 1914 began in the same way.⁷⁷ The employers, in response, dropped out of the Industrial Council.⁷⁸ Wage discontent continued and the Railway Review reported that the great majority of railwaymen were from 3s. 3d. to 2s. 9d. worse off than in 1895.⁷⁹ A social history of the time cited railway working as an area where earnings had tended to 'fossilise'.⁸⁰

The dispute over fines levied after the Knox Strike continued to rage in the North East. Gateshead objected to them.⁸¹ A letter in the Railway Review argued that fines were illegal⁸² and at West Hartlepool 200 met to discuss the issue.⁸³ The handling of the dispute also attracted attention with Tyne Dock objecting to Hudson being brought in and West Hartlepool wanting a ballot before strikes in future.⁸⁴

⁷⁴ Railway Times 28.12.1912

⁷⁵ Dangerfield *op cit*, p.311

⁷⁶ *Ibid* p.302

⁷⁷ Holton *op cit*, pp.135-136

⁷⁸ *Ibid* p.137

⁷⁹ Railway Review 16.5.1913

⁸⁰ S. Nowell-Smith: *Edwardian England 1910-1914* (OUP, London, 1964) p.130

⁸¹ Railway Review 10.1.1913

⁸² Railway Review 17.1.1913

⁸³ Railway Review 24.1.1913

⁸⁴ Railway Review 10.1.1913

The men in the North East continued to back their own programme. Bishop Auckland District Council wanted a clean sheet for the Darlington programme⁸⁵ and later reported a big demo at Shildon for improved conditions.⁸⁶ Support was pledged at West Hartlepool No.1, Gateshead and Sunderland.⁸⁷ The Railway Review stated that the North East programme was the most serious proposition which workers had been up against in their time.⁸⁸ Formal Union action was supplemented by 'ginger groups'. At Newcastle No.1 the Locomen's Vigilance Society was formed⁸⁹ and this was backed by Gateshead.⁹⁰ In 1913 the NE programme had to be adopted to fit in shopmen.⁹¹

The year ended nationally and in the North East with action against Conciliation Schemes. In October both NUR and ASLEF wanted an end to it and the NUR gave notice to cease it at the end of 1914. ASLEF wanted a Sectional Board to represent interests of locomen.⁹² In the North East objections came from Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Bedlington, Northallerton, Darlington and Hartlepoons.⁹³

Throughout the year there was dissatisfaction among members of the RCA. Newcastle Branch began the year by regretting they had had two blacklegs during the recent strike.⁹⁴ North Eastern clerks in the Wagon Shops and Locomotive Sheds especially at Walkergate, Shildon, York and Neville Hill were reported to be very dissatisfied with their low pay and short-time working.⁹⁵ Delay in the treatment of the Salaries Memorial presented in January 1912 was voiced by West Hartlepoons and Darlington at the RCA Conference and this stand was supported by Bishop Auckland, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Tynemouth.⁹⁶ A Sub-committee of the Board of Directors met a deputation but there was dissatisfaction with the reply and a mass

⁸⁵ Railway Review 28.3.1913

⁸⁶ Railway Review 4.7.1913

⁸⁷ Railway Review 20.6.1913 and 22.8.1913; 8.8.1913; 3.10.1913

⁸⁸ Railway Review 25.7.1913

⁸⁹ Railway Review 11.4.1913

⁹⁰ Railway Review 2.5.1913

⁹¹ Railway Review 23.5.1913. See Chapter 9 re ASLEF influence

⁹² Cole and Arnot: *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, pp. 40 and 43

⁹³ Railway Review 12.12.1913 and 19.12.1913

⁹⁴ The Railway Clerk 15.2.1913

⁹⁵ The Railway Clerk 15.3.1913

⁹⁶ The Railway Clerk 15.6.1913; 15.3.1913; 15.4.1913; 15.6.1913; 15.7.1913

meeting was held at Newcastle.⁹⁷ At the end of the year the Directors were told by the GM that a 12½% increase had been given to the staff in the Conciliation Conference and an increase would be necessary for clerical staff.⁹⁸

Despite this settlement the prospects for 1914 were not good. The Unions were working on the termination of the Conciliation Scheme, recognition issues loomed large and a further 5s. per week was sought.⁹⁹ In 1913 joint action by the TUC and the Unions representing miners, railwaymen and transport workers had led to agreement on a Triple Alliance. The year 1913 had also seen the establishment of the NUR. The Labour Press Agency stated: 'This is the first instance of any trade union adopting the Syndicalist idea of a union covering all sectors of an industry'.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The Driver Knox strike illustrates well aspects of railway trade unionism in the North East on which we have already commented. First is the independence of unionists in this area. The Driver Knox incident was a local one and it was fought on this basis. Second is the concept of 'fairation' and loyalty to a colleague. This applied not only in his own area but also in a number of other centres. Thirdly is the tendency for men in the North East to win their disputes. Driver Knox was reinstated and received a royal pardon. Fourthly the men held out despite ridicule in the popular journals attributing the strike to the right to get drunk.

The action in the North East must be seen against national developments. The clouds to which we referred at the end of the last Chapter were now that much greater. From 1907-1910 there had been an average of 480 strikes a year. In 1911 there were 872, in 1912 834 and in 1913 approaching 1500 disputes. These had '... started up without reason, suddenly, instinctively, and as suddenly disappeared'.¹⁰¹ Sir George Askwith said: 'Within a comparatively short space of time, there may be movements in

⁹⁷ The Railway Clerk 15.8.1913; 15.10.1913 and 15.11.1913; 15.12.1913

⁹⁸ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.11931 12.12.1913

⁹⁹ G.D.H. Cole: *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789-1927* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1927) Vol.3, p.94

¹⁰⁰ E.A. Pratt: *The Case Against Railway Nationalisation* (Collins, London, 1913) p.126

¹⁰¹ Dangerfield *op cit* p.317

this country coming to a head of which recent events have been a small foreshadowing'.¹⁰²

Another significant development was the growing impact of technological change on trades unions. This brought about more class consciousness and increased the proportion of semi-skilled workers. The change produced confusion and resentment.

The period was also marked by a decline in real wages and Chiozza Money has shown that railwaymen did not match the rising prices between 1899 and 1909. The same point was made by the President of the ASRS in 1911.¹⁰³

Other developments would impact on the NER men. The formation of the NUR was one indication. Three unions came together and, although the ASRS was the major one, the pattern of decision making would become more formalised.

In the spring of 1914, the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, representing more than a million and a quarter workers was formed. One of the parties to it, the NTWF had been organised by Tom Mann, the syndicalist. The younger leaders of the miners had been greatly influenced by syndicalist ideas. Smillie, the President of the Miners' Federation suggested: 'It may well be found advisable to extend the scope of the alliance in the general interests of labour as a whole'.¹⁰⁴ Although Syndicalism was not particularly strong in the railway union, some of the younger leaders had been influenced by attending the Central Labour College.

However much one union retained its freedom of action this would be another bar on 'wildcat' actions. The likely approach of a World War was a third portent, because, clearly in these circumstances there would be a more direct relationship between the Government and the Companies as a whole. So, perhaps, the Driver Knox strike marks a watershed.

¹⁰² *Ibid* p.318

¹⁰³ S. Meacham: *A Life Apart* pp.214-216

¹⁰⁴ F. Williams: *Fifty Years March* (Odhams, London, ?1950) p.211

CHAPTER 7. THE FIRST WORLD WAR 1914-1918

If we look first at the national situation at the beginning of 1914, many commentators had forecast a rapidly deteriorating situation in political and industrial relations. George Dangerfield, in his brilliant, and racy, analysis of the decline of Liberalism in England, depicts several major crises, separate but interlinked, all leading to such a development in late 1914¹. One of these crises was the 'rebellion' of the workers. The years before 1914 had seen a combination of lots of little strikes and major strikes. Syndicalist speakers and journals preached violence and the overthrow of Government. This took place against a background of 'real wages' falling slowly during the period 1900-1914 following two periods of rising 'real wages' in the periods 1892-1897 and 1897-1900².

By 1913 transport workers, miners and railwaymen all had a sense of grievance. This situation led to the TUC, in 1913, agreeing that the NUR, MFGB and National Transport Worker's Federation should combine in a Triple Alliance³. This was in line with a motion at the 1913 Miners Annual Conference for linking up of miners and railwaymen and dockers in future strikes⁴. This led on 4 June 1914 to a proposal to submit to a national conference a scheme for a working alliance between the MFGB, NUR and Transport Workers Federation⁵

The Triple Alliance has been said to be less a declaration of war than a cost-related exercise⁶. Clause 7 allowed the autonomy of each Union to act separately and the NUR opposed the provision for a ballot of members before action⁷. After the Triple Alliance had been formed the NUR demanded full Union recognition, the 48 hour week and a five shilling rise for all grades and gave notice of a withdrawal of labour on

¹ G. Dangerfield: *The Strange Death of Liberal England* passim

² J. Burnett: *A History of the Cost of Living* p.254

³ Dangerfield *op cit* pp. 316 - 317

⁴ Whitaker's Almanack 1914, pp.472 - 473

⁵ Whitaker's Almanack 1915, p.478

⁶ D Kynaston: *King Labour* p.164

⁷ P.S. Bagwell: *The Triple Alliance in Briggs and Saville: Essays in Labor History 1886 - 1923* (Macmillan, 1971) pp.102 - 103

1 November 1914⁸. In addition to this industrial proposal it is interesting that in early 1914 the Railway Nationalisation Society organised a Nationalisation Conference. At that time also Sir J. Compton Rickett MP argued for the nationalisation of railways to reduce strikes⁹ but the Anti-Socialist Union opposed this¹⁰.

Developments nationally before 1914 had been reflected in the North East as we have seen in earlier chapters and both nationally and in the North East there was a feeling of further industrial trouble ahead. The Railway Review quoted The Times as stating:

'perhaps the most salient features of this turmoil at the moment is the general spirit of revolt, not only against employers of all kinds but also against leaders and majorities and Parliamentary or any kind of constitutional and orderly action¹¹'

The same railway journal referred later in the year to ominous signs of dissent in the North Eastern Railway.¹² Railway Clerks at Darlington were reported to be dissatisfied with their salaries¹³ and there were veiled hints of a strike by NER enginemen and firemen.¹⁴ There was a meeting at Darlington in July to consider the future of conciliation.¹⁵ The North Eastern Railway led on the issue of the growing importance and status of signalmen.¹⁶ So, overall, in 1914 there was a feeling of "Wait 'till Autumn" when there could be a General Strike.¹⁷

Into this situation, however, came the outbreak of war with Germany. As had happened at the time of the Boer War, patriotic sentiment took over from sectional interests and additionally, in this case, other measures were taken. State control of the railways had been under debate since 1912¹⁸ but an Order-in-Council, made under Section 16 of the Regulation of Forces Act 1871, temporarily transferred control of the

⁸ E.H. Phelps Brown: *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (Macmillan 1959) p.330

⁹ The North Star 10.2.1914

¹⁰ The North Star 12.2.1914

¹¹ Railway Review, 16.1.1914

¹² Railway Review, 13.3.1914

¹³ The North Star, 26.2.1914

¹⁴ The North Star, 14.3.1914

¹⁵ Railway Review, 31.7.1914

¹⁶ Railway Review, 6.2.1914

¹⁷ Dangerfield, *op cit*, p.384

¹⁸ P.S. Bagwell: The Railwaymen, p.346

railways to the Government, which would be assisted by a Committee of General Managers.¹⁹ It was agreed that from 24 August 1914 there would be an Industrial Truce and, from 29 August 1914, a Political Truce which would mean that no by-elections were to be contested.²⁰ The Railway Review reported, in line with this, that there was to be an immediate attempt to terminate all disputes.²¹ In September 1914 the Government orders the wages, conditions of hours, etc. were fixed for North East railwaymen in special work.²² Two historians of the period have suggested that the Industrial Truce was accepted so easily because many people thought that the War would be over in a matter of months.²³ The effect was quite dramatic. The railwaymen's Executive withheld their new national programme, the transport and general labour amalgamation scheme lapsed and the great triple alliance was left incomplete.²⁴ In August 1914 disputes fell from a previous total of 100 to 20.²⁵

Before considering developments in the North East we need to define the main national issues which arose during the period of the First World War. These were:

1. Measures of Government control and their impact.
2. Wartime conditions of service.
3. Cost of living and wage increase negotiations.
4. Pursuing pre-war objectives.
5. Inter-union issues.
6. Breaches of the Industrial Truce.

INCREASING GOVERNMENT CONTROL

When it became clear that the War would not be over in a matter of months the Government increased its pressure to control the economy and war effort. In March 1915 the 'Shells and Fuses' Agreement provided that automatic machines could

¹⁹ Railway Review, 7.8.1914

²⁰ Tracey, *op cit*, Vol.1, pp.203-204

²¹ Railway Review, 28.8.1914

²² Railway Review, 11.9.1914

²³ G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate: *The Common People 1746-1946* (Methuen, London 1956 ed) p.508

²⁴ The Labour Year Book 1916, p.22

²⁵ Askwith *op cit*, p.356

be manned by women and young persons. As one historian has pointed out, the significance of this Agreement was that 'where formerly they [the Unions] had opposed they now participated'.²⁶ At a Conference on 17 March 1915 the Unions agreed to the First Treasury Agreement which provided for the giving-up of the strike weapon and the acceptance of Government arbitration and relaxation of normal rules with, for example, semi-skilled workers being substituted for fully-skilled workers. In the Second Treasury Agreement the Government undertook to try to restore the status quo after the War. The Agreement was given the force of law and was strengthened by the Munitions of War Act 1915 which controlled establishments, limited profits, enforced no strikes and introduced Leaving Certificates.²⁷ In October 1915 the Dilution Scheme covered women and the upgrading of jobs. In September 1916 the substitution scheme allowed women to be installed in skilled jobs and in mid-1917 the upgrading of women was allowed.²⁸ The Central Munitions Labour Supply Committee was set up '... that no skilled men should be employed on work which can be done by semi-skilled male or female labour'.²⁹

LIABILITY FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

The Government measures above interacted with the need for, and the call-up of, men for the armed services. In the early years there was not a coherent approach to the overall use of manpower. Initially, 'Pals Groups' were encouraged and there was one from the NER.³⁰ In 1915 the 18-41 age group was allowed to attest.³¹ The TUC opposed conscription in September 1915 and in January 1916 Thomas (see Biographies) and Bellamy led the opposition on behalf of railwaymen.³² They feared that military conscription would lead to industrial conscription and this would lead to

²⁶ A.J.P. Taylor: *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1988 reprint) p.29

²⁷ C. Wrigley: *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement* (Hassocks, 1976), p.112

²⁸ G.D.H. Cole: *Trade Unionism and Munitions* (Oxford 1923) pp.36-37

²⁹ C. Addison: *Politics from Within 1911-1918* (Jenkins, 1924) Volume 1, p.183

³⁰ J. Stevenson: *British Society 1914-1945* p.51

³¹ *Ibid*, p.63

³² Cole: *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, p.87 and M. Cole: *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924* (Longman, 1952) pp.53-54

further dilution of craft unions.³³ However in 1916 compulsory military service was first introduced for single men and then for married men subject to certain exemptions for reserved trades. When the second Act was passed neither the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC nor the Labour Party Executive pursued opposition to it.³⁴ Some Union support may have been because Unions were allowed, for some time, to issue 'trade card' exemptions from conscription³⁵ but this right was removed from them in April 1917.³⁶ The revocation and further dilution was opposed by shop stewards³⁷ and this led to a strike on the Tyne.³⁸ Opposition to conscription was also voiced by the Triple Alliance in 1917.³⁹

The issue of trade cards was replaced by the Schedule of Protected Occupations in April 1917 which allowed railwaymen to be called up and this was strengthened in 1918.⁴⁰ In October 1917 Chamberlain abolished leaving certificates but a strict scheme replaced them.⁴¹ It was not, therefore, until late 1917 that manpower was treated as one whole source of effort, to be recruited for either factories or forces under a single Ministry of National Service.⁴² Increasingly with conscription and the other measures dilution had become substitution.⁴³

In the North East, as in the country as a whole, railway establishments were affected by the changes. The Darlington works handled gun mounts, Shildon Shops produced shell fitments and Gateshead works converted to trolley building for the Ministry of Defence.⁴⁴

Like other Railway companies the NER was hard-hit by the enlistment of men and their replacement by women. The NER released 18,339 men or 33.7% of its

³³ G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate: *The Common People 1746-1946* p.523

³⁴ G.D.H. Cole: *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* p.28

³⁵ H. Pelling: *A History of British Trade Unionism* p.154

³⁶ Cole and Postgate *op cit*, p.527

³⁷ B. Waites: *Popular Politics in World War I and the Post-war Period* (in OU Booklet: Popular Politics 1870-1950) p.14

³⁸ Cole and Postgate *op cit*, p.527

³⁹ *Railway Review*, 25.5.1917

⁴⁰ G.D.H. Cole: *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, pp.134-135

⁴¹ *Ibid* pp.152-155

⁴² David Thomson: *England in the Twentieth Century* (Penguin, 1977 edition) p.51

⁴³ A. Marwick: *The Deluge* (Bodley Head, London, 1965) p.79

⁴⁴ R. Bell: *Twenty-Five Years of the North Eastern Railway 1898-1922* pp.58-59

total staff⁴⁵ and even by the end of 1914 10.1% were with the colours.⁴⁶ Women had been employed earlier as waiting-room attendants, charwomen, etc. but had been paid less than men, e.g. in 1913 women carriage-cleaners were paid 15s. a week c.f. with 21s. for men.⁴⁷ During the War as we have seen earlier the Unions had to accept dilution and the employment of women as part of the Treasury Agreement and the Munitions of War Act. From 1914 the whole field of industry was thrown open to women and their right to work was established leading to major social changes thereafter.⁴⁸ The arrival of women caused problems for trade unionists because women in general were not concerned with Unions or craft practices but favoured equal pay.⁴⁹ On the railways a sub-committee of the Railway Executive suggested:

'The employment of women to be materially extended, e.g. in booking, parcels, goods and weighbridge offices, as travelling ticket-examiners, ticket-collectors, messengers or dining car waitresses: the working of light machines in factories: cleaning work at stations: carriage cleaning, etc.'⁵⁰

During the war the NER increased the total of women and girls employed from 1470 to 7885 including over 1000 at the Darlington National Projectile Company.⁵¹ Within the railway industry the attitude, according to Alcock, was that:

'With regard to women, some members would have liked to have placed them outside the pale of railway employment but the more far-seeing saw the national necessity, and apart from that equal rights for either sex was against the proposal'.⁵²

At the outbreak of war there were 13,046 women employed on the railways. This figure rose to 68,000 women in 135 occupations. At the 1915 AGM the NUR decided to admit women to membership and by the end of the War they had 30,000 women members although this was to decline later to 3,000.⁵³ Similarly by

⁴⁵ E.A. Pratt: *Railways and the Great War* (London, Selwyn and Blount, 1921), Vol.1, p.371

⁴⁶ *Railway Review*, 11.9.1914

⁴⁷ B. Drake: *Women in Trade Unions* (Allen & Unwin, 1920) p.147

⁴⁸ H. Hamilton: *History of the Homeland* (Allen & Unwin, 1947) p.339

⁴⁹ Taylor *op cit* p.38

⁵⁰ Pratt *op cit*, Vol.1, p.351

⁵¹ *Ibid* Vol.2, p.1069

⁵² Alcock *op cit*, pp.510-511

⁵³ Drake *op cit*, p.147 and J.B. Hamilton: *British Railways in World War I* (Allen & Unwin, 1967) pp.105-107

December 1918 the RCA had 13,000-14,000 women members.⁵⁴ The NUR wanted a minimum rate for women but regarded their membership of the Union as being temporary.⁵⁵ However in 1918 W. Carter of the NUR was quoted as saying: '... No assurance has been given that women's labour is a temporary expedient only'.⁵⁶

Initially women were increasingly employed as railway clerks. In mid-1915 the Railway Review was able to say, gallantly:

'The lady clerk is already becoming a familiar feature at the various stations of the N.E., and so far as can be ascertained no fault is to be found in any way with the service given'.⁵⁷

The attitude of the Journal representing the clerks was not so gallant. Initially it warned that 'Ladyitis is spreading and in consequence the whole position of the N.E. clerk is endangered',⁵⁸ and followed this up with a warning: 'If the situation is to be saved, speedy and specific action is an imperative necessity'.⁵⁹ A year later a writer in the same Journal forecast percipiently that eventually there will be women who 'desire no other lot than that of an office career' and suggests that lads should be employed instead.⁶⁰ Branch comments were usually non-committal with references to new members 'one a lady', (Bishop Auckland),⁶¹ 'including our first lady' (Newcastle),⁶² 'ten new members including six ladies' (Bishop Auckland)⁶³ but the cartoonists were often less restrained. It is reported that Middlesbrough Branch passed a Resolution on female labour⁶⁴ and that the view was taken quite early in the period that women should not be paid less than men.⁶⁵

Although the Railway Review had been gallant about the employment of women as clerks the grades whom it represented did not have the same approach when it

54 Drake *op cit*, p.174
 55 Cole and Arnot *op cit*, p.63
 56 The Call 17.1.1918
 57 The Railway Review 30.7.1915
 58 The Railway Clerk 15.7.1914
 59 The Railway Clerk 15.12.1914
 60 The Railway Clerk 15.6.1915
 61 The Railway Clerk 15.9.1915
 62 *Ibid*
 63 The Railway Clerk 15.10.1915
 64 The Railway Clerk 15.4.1914
 65 The Railway Clerk 15.6.1914

spread to other grades, although their motives often appeared to be of the highest kind. A meeting of guards in Newcastle on 26 November 1916 called for a conference of trainmen:

'not to allow the employment of females as railway guards, as we are of the opinion that it would be dangerous to themselves, other railway employees, and the general public'

and that the duties would not be practicable for them to perform.⁶⁶ The pressure was maintained. In 1917 at the Conference of North Eastern Branches a motion was passed: 'That this Conference considers the employment of women should not be introduced into any more grades' but they also supported that women should be subject to the same conditions as men, including pay.⁶⁷ A similar resolution came from Shildon No.2 Branch which protested against the introduction of females into any more grades commenting:

'There is still a good deal of work to do with reference to the employment of female workers because we find in almost every grade where they have been introduced the management is evading the wages question'.⁶⁸

At the Bishop Auckland District Council it was reported that the Superintendent had given an assurance that women would not enter the signal-box until they had passed an examination but, as the Council pointed out, this was due to a misunderstanding as '- we don't intend to have them at all'.⁶⁹

The battleground was then further extended as the NER wanted to employ women as passenger guards - 20 on Branch lines - but the men argued that 'women are unsuited to carry out the responsible duties of a guard ...'⁷⁰ Local Branches including Bishop Auckland, Middlesbrough No.1 and Newcastle opposed the experiment⁷¹ as did the signalmen of Hull.⁷² As a result the experiment was suspended but in October 1918 Bishop Auckland District Council was supporting the Midland District Council in its

⁶⁶ Railway Review 8.2.1916

⁶⁷ Railway Review 26.1.1917

⁶⁸ Railway Review 2.3.1917

⁶⁹ Railway Review 30.3.1917

⁷⁰ Railway Review 27.4.1917

⁷¹ Railway Review 11.5.1917

⁷² Railway Review 25.5.1917

efforts to prohibit the employment of women as signalmen and porter-guards.⁷³ In 1918 also the battleground was further extended when it was reported that the NER was using women police constables 'with exactly the same status and power as their male colleagues'.⁷⁴ In October 1918 the N.E. Federation of District Councils requested the withdrawal of all female police from that service.⁷⁵ And yet, the employment of women continued to increase and the 18th Annual Conference of the National Union of Railwaywomen's Guild reported 74 branches with 2294 members.⁷⁶ Over industry as a whole, however, after the war women left industry and by 1921 the proportion of women in paid employment was smaller than before the war.⁷⁷

Both nationally, and in the North East, a sudden transition had to be made from the previous mood of 1914 to the wartime ethos. It must be remembered that in March 1914 the NUR had expressed disgust at the attitude of the management and an SGM had voted to ask the Triple Alliance to call a national strike although this call was later cancelled.⁷⁸ Also the NUR had given notice to terminate the Conciliation Schemes.⁷⁹

Throughout the War the railwaymen, and their Journals, felt that they had to put across the theme of the need to make sacrifices for the men at the Front. These men included, as we have seen, a substantial number of their own colleagues.

The War meant railwaymen had longer hours, greater responsibility, difficult conditions, the suspension of certain agreements and, as we shall see later, a strongly rising cost of living but this had to be contrasted with the awesome lists of their dead colleagues listed in the Journals and local newspapers. One of those Journals printed, in August 1915, a cartoon with the title 'A Call from the Trenches'. The message of this was: 'Don't forget to maintain our rights whilst we're away; keep the

⁷³ Railway Review 11.10.1918

⁷⁴ The Northern Echo 7.1.1918

⁷⁵ Railway Review 11.10.1918

⁷⁶ Railway Review 26.7.1918

⁷⁷ Drake *op cit* p.107 and Taylor *op cit* p.139

⁷⁸ Bagwell *op cit*, p.378

⁷⁹ G.W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Trade Unionism* (London Cooperative Printing Society Limited, London 1922), p.475 and F.A. McKenzie: *British Railways and the War* (Menpes, 1917) p.14

union flag flying and fetch the Trade Union 'slackers' in'.⁸⁰ When it was reported in the same Journal that Resolutions from Branches indicated there was spreading unrest a railwayman in the trenches wrote to say that he was appalled by this.⁸¹ The NUR and ASLEF agreed not to present fresh demands and not to support any strike.⁸² In other words: 'We are not to ask for any more. We are to keep the peace'.⁸³

But not all agreed with this approach. Some rank and file movements condemned trade union officialdom for selling-out to Lloyd George and this later led to the Workshop-based movement.⁸⁴ Even in the first few months of the War one correspondent in the Railway Review complained that the Company 'is merely using the men's patriotic sentiment as a handle with which they may worsen the conditions of the men employed'⁸⁵ and the Newcastle Branch put on record that there must be changes after the War.⁸⁶ And, not unnaturally, as the War dragged on attitudes began to harden. In 1917 it was reported at the Bishop Auckland Branch meeting of the NUR that approaches to MPs over the opening-up of peace negotiations had not led to a satisfactory result and that members were '- dead sick of butchery and mutilation'.⁸⁷ The West Hartlepool No.1 Branch of the NUR would not agree to visit the Front as they considered that they did not need to be convinced of the seriousness of war.⁸⁸ Throughout the country as a whole many Branches had passed resolutions for an early end to the war.⁸⁹ Even among those committed to the situation there was concern about the inadequate relief to soldiers and sailors and their dependants.⁹⁰ And in 1917 the Bishop Auckland Branch reported wryly that it could not pursue some cases because of the 'blessed name of war'.⁹¹

80 Railway Review 20.8.1915

81 Railway Review 17.9.1915

82 Railway Review 22.10.1915

83 Railway Review 29.10.1915

84 B. Waites *op cit*, p.13

85 Railway Review 16.10.1914

86 Railway Review 23.10.1914

87 Railway Review 10.8.1917

88 Northern Echo 12.1.1918

89 Bagwell *op cit*, p.369

90 The Railway Clerk 15.12.1914

91 Railway Review 12.11.1917

As we have seen earlier from this study long working hours and conditions of service had formed an integral part of the dissatisfaction. During the war conditions naturally deteriorated and although this had to be tolerated there was concern for the future. In 1916 the North Eastern Northern District Platelayers' Vigilance Committee said:

'- the time had come when the end of the war should be anticipated and a programme for improved conditions for platelayers formulated ready to be presented to the N.E. Company at the conclusion of the war'⁹²

and this anticipated the wider action of the Triple Alliance which in August 1916 saw the PM about the return to normalcy at the end of the war.⁹³ In 1917 Middlesbrough No.1 Branch of the NUR suggested a need for a Conference to draw up a programme of conditions of service at a time when another North East Branch, Bishop Auckland No.1 backed an application for a substantial increase in wages⁹⁴ and the NUR decided not to support a threatened strike by ASLEF.⁹⁵

Apart from the question of the working hours there were a number of particular problems which arose during this period. The whole matter of signalmen's promotion in the N.E. was an acute question.⁹⁶ There was reference to new problems caused by the Shildon-Newport electric trains.⁹⁷ An agreement was negotiated to make it easier for married men on transfer to move to another area.⁹⁸ Towards the end of 1916 the Triple Alliance met and objected to the use of coloured labour.⁹⁹ At Bishop Auckland complaint was made about signalmen being laid-off on public holidays¹⁰⁰ and the same Branch objected to the long-standing obligation to have eye-tests. At Newcastle the whole question of management and discipline was raised and support was sought from other Branches.¹⁰¹ At Darlington there was emphasis on the grievances of shop

92 Railway Review 21.4.1916

93 Railway Review 11.8.1916

94 Railway Review 10.8.1917

95 Railway Review 17.8.1917

96 Railway Review 14.5.1915

97 Railway Review 23.10.1915

98 Railway Review 13.8.1915

99 Railway Review 22.12.1916 and 29.12.1916

100 Railway Review 14.12.1917

101 Railway Review 29.3.1918

members and it was decided to meet Sir A. Kaye Butterworth the GM/NER.¹⁰² And through 1917 and the early part of 1918 there was opposition to hostels being built in the N.E. so that men could stay away from home. The Darlington Branch of the NUR viewed with alarm the increased use of lodging especially in the NER and pledged themselves to do everything in their power to prevent an introduction of the scheme at Darlington '- and to eradicate the same from the railways of the United Kingdom'.¹⁰³ Actions culminated in 1918 with the men in the North East deciding to refuse to lodge away from home.¹⁰⁴ And in dealing with these, and other issues, the Unions had troubles. In 1915 many Branch Secretaries were reported as having difficulties in dealing with grievances as Managers say it is an individual grievance or case of discipline.¹⁰⁵ Probably, also, with so many members in the Forces, Union Branches were understaffed and one of these, Bishop Auckland, reported in 1916 that there were no aspirants for the General Secretary's job.¹⁰⁶

THE COST OF LIVING AND WAGE INCREASES

The third wartime issue was the rise in the cost of living and the wage increases granted to offset this. The War caused a sharp increase in the cost of living. From July 1914 to September 1915 the cost of living had risen by 37%¹⁰⁷ and by August 1916 this increase had risen to 60%.¹⁰⁸ Between 1914 and 1919 prices doubled¹⁰⁹ with food prices in November 1918 being 133% above those of 1914.¹¹⁰ Although there was a willingness to accept sacrifices there was widespread condemnation of the fact that profiteers were able to flourish and food was not fairly allocated. In 1916 there was a demonstration of between 6000 and 40,000 (sic) railwaymen objecting to increases in food prices and the activities of profiteers and requesting a wage increase. They were

¹⁰² Northern Echo 19.8.1918

¹⁰³ Railway Review 30.3.1917

¹⁰⁴ Railway Review 15.3.1918

¹⁰⁵ Railway Review 23.4.1915

¹⁰⁶ Railway Review 30.6.1916

¹⁰⁷ Railway Review 24.9.1915

¹⁰⁸ Railway Review 1.9.1916

¹⁰⁹ Taylor *op cit*, p.140

¹¹⁰ Cole and Postgate *op cit*, p.531

told by R. Williams of the Transport Workers Federation: 'Take action and take it now ... and don't be bound by duration of the war'.¹¹¹ In March 1917 a great meeting of Railwaymen was held in the Royal Albert Hall to discuss food and wages questions.¹¹² In Darlington in 1916 a meeting was held to protest against the iniquitous increase in the price of foodstuffs.¹¹³ More than a year later the Railway Review was complaining about the unfair distribution of food¹¹⁴ and in March 1918 a Special Meeting of the Triple Alliance was convened to press for a fairer allocation.¹¹⁵

The war presented a problem of mechanics in the resolution of wages. This was discussed in successive issues of the Railway Review in 1915 when it was argued that rising prices meant that there must be an increase in wages regardless of the war.¹¹⁶ There were two options. Either the existing machinery could be used or new machinery could be invented.¹¹⁷ To use the existing machinery would be difficult and would cause delay because of the need to give six months notice.¹¹⁸ In February 1915 the REC decided to by-pass the Conciliation Boards as the Government would meet three-quarters of the cost.¹¹⁹ Following a meeting of Managers and men¹²⁰ the next issue of the Railway Review reported triumphantly that there had been a 'Great National Settlement. War Bonuses. Increases all Round'¹²¹ but in fact this new concept was limited in reference to pay levels, did not cover shopmen and excluded the NER.¹²² Some Companies however did extend it to shopmen.¹²³ The concept of a War Bonus raised of course the problem of duration of payment and the Darlington Branch suggested that it should be payable until commodities could be bought again at reasonable prices.¹²⁴

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- 111 Railway Review 1.9.1916
 112 Railway Review 9.3.1917
 113 Railway Review 17.11.1916
 114 Railway Review 4.1.1918
 115 Northern Echo 1.3.1918
 116 Railway Review 22.1.1915
 117 Railway Review 29.1.1915
 118 Bagwell *op cit*, p.346
 119 Clegg *op cit*, Vol.2, p.120
 120 Railway Review 12.2.1915
 121 Railway Review 19.2.1915
 122 Railway Review 19.2.1915
 123 Railway Review 26.2.1915
 124 Railway Review 26.2.1915

Naturally the NER followed suit and as is recorded in the Board Minutes, extended it to pensioners.¹²⁵ The NER agreement was subject to good time-keeping and attendance but included shopmen.¹²⁶ The concept or rather its application, was not universally accepted. The Newcastle Railway Clerks objected to decisions on the War Bonus, e.g. the exclusion of those under 18 and the cut-off level.¹²⁷ Stockton-on-Tees objected to married clerks getting less bonus than single men.¹²⁸ Shildon No.2 Branch of the NUR protested against EC accepting increases for a section of members instead of for all.¹²⁹ The different treatment of shopmen was a continuing theme. In 1916 a meeting of the North-Eastern Shopmen's Vigilance Committee pressed for advances of 2s. per week on time rates and 5% on piece prices for all shopmen in the N.E. and also suggested a shopmen's committee.¹³⁰ Later in 1916 the dispute continued with shopmen being left out of the settlement initially and the Bishop Auckland Branch regretted it.¹³¹ Shopmen were later included¹³² and it was suggested in the Railway Review that they should join the NUR.¹³³ Another excluded group as far as the NER was concerned were women.¹³⁴

Further bonus payments were made in April 1917 and on that occasion the same rules were negotiated for shopmen with the Railway Shops Organisation Committee of Craft Unions and the NUR.¹³⁵ Later that year War bonuses were discontinued and were incorporated into wages so that they would count for overtime and Sunday duty.¹³⁶ A similar arrangement was made in respect of shopmen.¹³⁷ In December 1917 'a war advance' was given and this would apply until at least 31 March 1918.¹³⁸ In March 1918 a new bonus was awarded and the NUR undertook not to support a 12½% pay

¹²⁵ PRO RAIL 527/21 Mins. 11993, 12003 and 12043

¹²⁶ Railway Review 5.3.1915

¹²⁷ The Railway Clerk, 15.4.1915

¹²⁸ The Railway Clerk, 15.5.1915

¹²⁹ Railway Review 5.11.1915

¹³⁰ Railway Review, 24.3.1916

¹³¹ Railway Review 29.9.1916

¹³² Railway Review 13.10.1916

¹³³ Railway Review 13.10.1916

¹³⁴ Railway Review 1.12.1916

¹³⁵ Railway Review 20.4.1917

¹³⁶ Railway Review 17.8.1917

¹³⁷ Railway Review 24.8.1917

¹³⁸ Railway Review 7.12.1917

claim.¹³⁹ Then in September 1918 there was another settlement. A feature of this settlement was that women got the same level of increase but this was given without prejudice to the work of the Committee on equal pay.¹⁴⁰ In this settlement the shopmen got a lower settlement but in future they were to get the same as engineers and women and boys in shops would benefit equally.¹⁴¹ The whole experience seems to bear out the statement made in the Railway Review in early 1917 in relation to a Liverpool Vigilance Committee circular when a writer said: 'We do not need to be told when we want a raise of wages as our wives can do all that is necessary in this direction'.¹⁴²

Overall the arrangements for wage increases kept broadly in line with cost-of-living increases. Wages and earnings rose from 26s. 6d. in 1914 to 51s. 8d. in 1918. Earnings of engine drivers rose from 42s. 11d. in 1913 to 103s. 0d. in 1920, guards from 30s. 9d. to 84s. 6d. and goods porters from 22s. 11d. to 72s. 11d.¹⁴³ But, during the war the gap between unskilled and skilled wage rates was permanently narrowed.¹⁴⁴ On the railways only during 1916 did the agitation erupt when ASLEF threatened a strike.¹⁴⁵

PURSUING PRE-WAR OBJECTIVES

Despite the industrial truce and the abandonment of pre-war practices, some pre-war objectives remained in a state of suspended animation and were resuscitated from time to time. The NUR objection to the pre-war Conciliation Scheme has already been mentioned. In 1916 a new Conciliation Scheme was proposed but was defeated¹⁴⁶ and the Railway Review commented that for the moment Conciliation Boards may be regarded as defunct and conciliation methods as non-existent.¹⁴⁷ In the following year the Bishop Auckland District Council decided that it would not press for shopmen

¹³⁹ Railway Review 3.5.1918

¹⁴⁰ Railway Review 27.9.1918

¹⁴¹ Railway Review 27.9.1918

¹⁴² Railway Review 23.2.1917

¹⁴³ J.M. Winter: *The Great War and the British People* (Harvard, 1986) p.234 et seq

¹⁴⁴ Taylor *op cit*, p.122

¹⁴⁵ N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame*, p.112

¹⁴⁶ Railway Review 7.4.1916

¹⁴⁷ Railway Review 28.4.1916

to be included in the Conciliation Scheme¹⁴⁸ but shopmen continued to press for this.¹⁴⁹ However the North-East Federation said no further steps should be taken in relation to negotiating machinery for N.E. shopworkers.¹⁵⁰

Another issue was the battle against non-members. We noted earlier in this study the plea from a railwayman at the Front for his colleagues to strengthen the Union. At a meeting of the Darlington No.1 NUR Branch a strong feeling among members was noted 'that drastic action should be taken with the "nons"'.¹⁵¹

Earlier in this study we have noted the long history of the attempt to achieve an eight hours day and the opposition to this in some quarters. Between 1906 and 1910 Walter Hudson, the railway union MP for Newcastle, had repeatedly introduced an 8 hours Bill¹⁵² but his efforts failed. Hours of work increased during the War and in 1916 there were Press reports that the NER would increase the hours of signalmen from 8 to 10 hours a day in order to liberate more men for the war effort.¹⁵³ ASLEF in 1917 sought an 8 hours day and threatened a strike which would have been in breach of the Munitions of War Act 1915 which made a strike illegal.¹⁵⁴ The Leicester programme covered an 8 hour day with a guaranteed day and week but shopmen wanted a 48 hours week.¹⁵⁵ In August 1917 following an ASLEF notice of strike Stanley promised to look at the issue sympathetically one month after the end of the War.¹⁵⁶ Meetings took place on the 5 and 6 December 1918 and in that month it was announced that the 8 hours day would be introduced from 1 February 1919.¹⁵⁷

INTER-UNION ISSUES

In 1914 the formation of the NUR had been only a partial step towards the rationalisation of Unions which had been sought by some railwaymen. In 1914 the Craft

¹⁴⁸ Railway Review 26.1.1917

¹⁴⁹ Letter from W. Jevons in Railway Review, 23.3.1917

¹⁵⁰ Railway Review 30.3.1917

¹⁵¹ Railway Review 17.11.1916

¹⁵² Bagwell *op cit*, p.365

¹⁵³ Railway Review 28.1.1916

¹⁵⁴ Railway Review 24.8.1917 and McKillop *op cit* p.116

¹⁵⁵ Railway Review 30.11.1917

¹⁵⁶ McKillop *op cit*, p.117 and Clegg *op cit* Vol.2 pp.194-195

¹⁵⁷ McKillop *op cit*, p.119

Unions wanted the NUR not to recruit shopmen and in February 1915 the Railway Shops Organisation of Craft Unions was formed.¹⁵⁸ Membership of Unions among craftsmen was divided. There were 86,000 mechanics in the ASE, other craftsmen belonged to the Boilermakers, Iron Founders, Steam Engine Makers, Blacksmiths, Metal Workers and Woodworkers Unions and there were 73,000 labourers.¹⁵⁹ The new Committee played its part in securing wage increases for shopmen throughout the War.¹⁶⁰

The Year 1914 also saw moves towards the formation of one Union. Stationmasters in the North East joined the Railway Clerks Association.¹⁶¹ The Darlington Branch of the RCA in 1914 supported a ballot on federation with the NUR.¹⁶² The war intervened but in June 1917 the RCA again considered the matter.¹⁶³ In 1918 the RCA Conference voted not to merge with the NUR.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile the Bishop Auckland District Council had, at the beginning of 1918, completed arrangements for a one-Union meeting at Shildon and protested at the treatment of shopmen in the 1917 settlement.¹⁶⁵ Also in that year a Conference of N.E. Loco Firemen held at Darlington announced that a Conference would be held in Newcastle to consider the question of one union for railwaymen.¹⁶⁶ The Bishop Auckland Branch stated: 'Our next duty is the extermination of the craft and sectional unions so far as railways are concerned'.¹⁶⁷ In 1918 the NUR rejected the concept of Whitleyism, i.e. Joint Industrial Councils machinery for the railways because it wanted complete recognition.¹⁶⁸

OVERALL EFFECTS OF DISPUTED ISSUES

In the February 1917 Railway Review it was stated that:

'Excellent as were the relations of the North-Eastern Company with their employees in pre-war days, notwithstanding repeated dust-ups which always

¹⁵⁸ Cole and Arnot *op cit*, pp.74-75

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid* p.83

¹⁶⁰ Pratt *op cit*, Vol.2, pp.778-781

¹⁶¹ The Railway Clerk 15.5.1914

¹⁶² The Railway Clerk 15.6.1914

¹⁶³ Railway Review 22.6.1917

¹⁶⁴ Northern Echo 25.2.1918

¹⁶⁵ Railway Review 11.1.1918

¹⁶⁶ Northern Echo 13.8.1918

¹⁶⁷ Railway Review 10.11.1916

¹⁶⁸ Northern Echo 22.6.1918

seemed to leave the relationship more cordial than ever, the war has considerably improved such relations'.¹⁶⁹

In support of this it quoted the Company offering loans so that employees could contribute to the Victory War Loan but the spirit of this contrasted with the action of the Bishop Auckland Branch in November 1916 when it decided to take no action

're the invitation from the local War Savings Committee to cooperate with them. It takes us all our time to get the bare necessities and we do not favour the idea of saving at the expense of our bellies and our backs'.¹⁷⁰

However the action of the NER Board was in line with other actions during the War. This included discretionary grants to dependants of men killed in the war,¹⁷¹ an ex gratia payment to the NER Railway Employees War Relief Fund,¹⁷² War allowances to officers,¹⁷³ and sending relief to Prisoners of War.¹⁷⁴ But this generosity was matched by the attitudes of the staff. When a proposal was made that staff should contribute to a relief fund, the proposal had a good reception¹⁷⁵ and Middlesbrough and Darlington districts subscribed £2,316 14s. 5d. to various war relief funds.¹⁷⁶

As regards the degree of unrest during the War one of Beatrice Webb's Diary entries read: '31.1.16. As no one is allowed to report either the talk or the disorder, the world will be assured that there is industrial peace in Great Britain'.¹⁷⁷

In fact, in the North East, on the Tyne, dilution was introduced with little disturbance compared with the action on the Clyde.¹⁷⁸ But there was underlying unrest among rank and file members. Even in 1916, across industry as a whole, some four million days were lost on strike.¹⁷⁹ In 1917 the constitution of the Triple Alliance was ratified.¹⁸⁰ A meeting at Leeds urged the planning of local Soviets. A letter in the Railway Review in

¹⁶⁹ Railway Review 16.2.1917

¹⁷⁰ Railway Review 10.11.1916

¹⁷¹ PRO RAIL 527/21 min.11999

¹⁷² PRO RAIL 527/21 min.12125

¹⁷³ PRO RAIL 527/21 min.12131

¹⁷⁴ PRO RAIL 527/21 min.12132

¹⁷⁵ Railway Review 29.1.1915

¹⁷⁶ Railway Review 29.1.1915

¹⁷⁷ M. Cole: *Beatrice Webb's Diaries: 1912-1924* p.55

¹⁷⁸ C. Wrigley: *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p.159

¹⁷⁹ Francis Williams: *Fifty Years' March. The Rise of the Labour Party* p.238

¹⁸⁰ A. Hutt: *The Post-War History of the British Working Class* (Left Book Club, Gollancz, 1937), p.11

March 1917 referred to an earlier incident when '... we in Shildon, had 87 lads come out on strike'.¹⁸¹ A Commission of Inquiry into unrest in 1917 found that in the North East this was due to:

- food prices
- housing because of influx of Munitions workers
- trade card system
- dilution, changes of practice, leaving certificates, inequality of earnings, delays in settlement of disputes, piece rates, industrial fatigue, shop discipline¹⁸²

In November 1917 an NUR Conference on After War Matters voted for workers control of the industry¹⁸³ and pressed for a new approach to post-war policies including nationalisation of the railways.¹⁸⁴ In 1918 there was an unofficial railway strike in South Wales, largely of locomotivemen, in protest against Union leaders settling wages.¹⁸⁵ At the end of 1918 the NER Board Minutes noted that 'the nationalisation of Railways has been announced and may shortly take place'.¹⁸⁶

Both nationally, and in the North East, the war-time years represented a hiatus in normal development and working-through of solutions to explosive issues. It is, perhaps, surprising that bearing in mind the position immediately before the war, the truce held and there were relatively few breaches of it. The achievement of the eight hours day should have neutralised one point of contention. Also, as a result of the bonus payments and the overtime opportunities real earnings throughout Industry rose sharply from 1914-20. However this was achieved at the expense of the fact that the gap between unskilled and skilled wage rates permanently narrowed.¹⁸⁷ Many major issues had simply been put on the shelf for the duration of the war and much would depend on the climate in which such issues had to be resolved in the post-war years. The future of

¹⁸¹ *Railway Review* 30.3.1917

¹⁸² Cd 8662: *Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest No.1 Division - N.E. Area 1917*

¹⁸³ Bagwell *op cit*, p.370

¹⁸⁴ G.D.H. Cole: *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* p.42

¹⁸⁵ Cole and Postgate, *op cit*, p.541 and Bagwell *op cit* pp.355-356

¹⁸⁶ PRO RAIL 527/21, 13.12.1918 min.12137

¹⁸⁷ Taylor *op cit*, p.122

the railways was clearly to be a major issue as they had, in effect, been nationalised for four years.

At the end of the war the Unions were in a much stronger position. For trade unions as a whole the number of members rose from 2¼ millions to 4½ millions¹⁸⁸ and from 1910-1917 the membership of the railway unions rose from 116,214 to 400,000.¹⁸⁹ During the War direct negotiations took place between the Unions and the Companies and this had a great importance.¹⁹⁰ Restrictions on amalgamation were also modified in 1917.¹⁹¹ However the Unions faced internal difficulties with District Councils being formed and local Vigilance Committees opposing the Unions.¹⁹² A Conference in March 1918 to unite the shop stewards movement with miners reform committees and railwaymen's vigilance committees was not successful.¹⁹³ At the end of the war the NUR pushed through a hasty and not wholly satisfactory national agreement for signalmen simply to get a national agreement.¹⁹⁴

Perhaps the mood was set for after the war when ASLEF, in accepting the 1918 settlement added: '... and to conserve their strength for that fight with the government and the profiteering classes which we know will take place in the future'.¹⁹⁵

The year 1918 had also seen a strike in South Wales. The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph praised the 'admirable tact shown in handling a difficult situation by Mr. Thomas'. After this however Thomas resigned in protest at the South Wales action¹⁹⁶ but later withdrew his resignation.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS 1914-1918

We need to look only briefly at political developments in this period because there was a political truce. However, there were several areas of interest. We

¹⁸⁸ Hutt: *The Post-war History of the British Working Class* (Gollancz, 1937), p.11

¹⁸⁹ Cole and Arnot *op cit*, p.12

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid* p.55

¹⁹¹ Hutt *op cit*, p.11

¹⁹² Clegg *op cit*, Vol.2, p.177

¹⁹³ W. Kendall: *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain* p.166

¹⁹⁴ C. Wrigley: *A History of British Industrial Relations* Vol.II (Harvester Press, 1987) p.77

¹⁹⁵ The Call 26.9.1918, p.5

¹⁹⁶ The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph 20.9.1918, 24.9.1918, 26.9.1918 and 30.9.1918

have seen earlier in this Chapter that industrial unrest simmered and, in some cases, flared out into the open. The Clyde was one such area. As a result of the unrest a large number of workers became imbued with ideas of economics and political economy.¹⁹⁷ To avoid this spreading too far into the political area the official Labour Party had effectively contained the influence of the Clydesiders.¹⁹⁸

A Conference of Workers and Soldiers was held in June 1917 but by mid-July the Labour Party had declared that none of its Branches should have anything to do with such Councils.¹⁹⁹ In opposition to the Councils the British Workers League was formed to unite patriotic trade unionists in the war effort.²⁰⁰

In the North East, as elsewhere, there were a number of by-elections. At Hartlepool in September 1914 Sir Water Runciman (L) was returned unopposed. In April 1915, however, at Mid-Durham there was initially a contest with the NUR and RCA supporting House for Labour but with Galbraith officially adopted, House later withdrew²⁰¹ and Galbraith was returned unopposed as Lib-Lab. In 1917 an election was contested. In Stockton the Liberals chose Watson and no Labour candidate was nominated. However, Backhouse stood as a Peace-by-negotiation candidate. The local Labour Association put questions to both candidates. Watson (Co.L) was convincingly elected.²⁰² South Shields in 1916 had seen an unopposed election of Cochrane (L(LG)). In October 1918 when Cochrane resigned, it was expected that Havelock Wilson would be returned unopposed and Horatio Bottomley offered help. Labour did not compete and Havelock Wilson (CL) was returned unopposed.²⁰³ In May 1918 E. Shortt was re-elected unopposed at Newcastle East following his resignation on becoming Irish Secretary.

¹⁹⁷ R.K. Middlemass: *The Clydesiders* (Hutchinson, London, 1968) p.78

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid* p.69

¹⁹⁹ K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds: *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890-1918* (Croom Helm, London, 1984) pp.191-193

²⁰⁰ *Ibid* p.195

²⁰¹ The Durham Chronicle 9.4.1915 and 16.4.1915

²⁰² Stockton and Thornaby Herald 3.3.1917, 10.3.1917, 17.3.1917 and 24.3.1917

²⁰³ The Shields Daily Gazette and Shipping Telegraph 15.10.1918, 17.10.1918, 18.10.1918, 21.10.1918 and 28.10.1918

Towards the end of the war, the trade unions started to prepare for the next Election but the NUR faced a shortage of funds, their membership was scattered and many Union members were at the Front.²⁰⁴

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, in the North East, as elsewhere, at the beginning of 1914 the industrial relations scene on the railways was building up to an imminent explosion in the Autumn of that year. The War brought an end to this with agreement to an industrial truce. Despite this truce emotions seethed and there was an outbreak at Shildon when 'the lads' came out on strike. In addition fundamental changes took place in membership. In 1915 the NUR decided to admit women to membership and had at one time 30,000 members although this later declined to 3,000. The RCA had 13,000-14,000 women members. Dilution was introduced on an increasing scale and, with wartime wage settlements, differentials were affected to some extent. Many active members of the Unions must have been among those who joined the Army and were among those who were killed. The Government dealt nationally with the Railway Companies and the Unions and the earlier differences between Companies tended to change. ASLEF came into greater prominence and was a main force in securing the Eight Hours Day. There was a strong expectation that the Railways would be nationalised. But, during all the carnage and uncertainty, the Unions kept in view the need for changes after the War.

The unions would be in a much stronger position to achieve their changes. The Clyde Workers' Group had shown the potential for direct action although this was never really exploited to the full. The CWG boldly stated their aims:

'To obtain an ever increasing control of workshop conditions, the regulation of the terms upon which the workers shall be employed, the organisation of the workers upon a class basis to prosecute the interests of the working class until the triumph of the workers is assured.'²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Tanner *op cit* p.401

²⁰⁵ J.T. Murphy in A. Gleason: *What the Workers Want* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1920) p.189

J.H. Thomas wrote: 'The workers must be taken more into the confidence of the employers ...'²⁰⁶ Clynes commented: 'Labour has been curiously elevated by the demands of the war ...'²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ J.H. Thomas: *When Labour Rules* (Collins, London, 1920) p.14

²⁰⁷ Clynes in S.J. Chapman: *Labour and Capital After the War* (John Murray, London, 1918) p.18

CHAPTER 8. THE 1919 STRIKE

As we saw at the end of the last Chapter there were two aspects which suggested that the post-war years would be years of conflict. The first was that many issues had been shelved but allowed to fester for over four years. The second was that the Unions had gained strength both in numbers and negotiating powers during the war. This assessment was confirmed in a Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War published by the Garton Foundation:

'The war has not put an end to industrial unrest. Everyone of the old causes of dispute remains and others of a most serious nature have been added in the course of the war'.

And the survey showed a change in the nature of the discontent:

'The discontent of Labour is not exclusively a matter of wages and hours of work ... question of status and social conditions'.¹

In addition the balance of power among the Unions had shifted with the vanguard role passing from the skilled engineers to organised miners, railway workers, etc.² The rising discontent was not mollified by the early action of the Government in carrying out the pledge to restore pre-war practices.³

THE IMPACT OF THE RCA DISPUTE

Throughout 1919 the special aspects of the discontent of the RCA interacted with the general discontent of other grades on the railways. In the early part of the year it concerned recognition and in the later part of the year its struggle to achieve its national programme.

If we take first recognition, the RCA Journal commented in January: 'They (our representatives) must have with them the strike weapon: without that they will be treated with contempt'.⁴ In the same month the Railway Executive Committee

¹ The Garton Foundation: *Memorandum on the Industrial Situation After the War* (1916) pp.10-11

² B. Waites: *The General Strike* (in OU Booklet: *Popular Politics 1870-1950*) p.15

³ G.D.H. Cole: *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, p.195

⁴ Railway Clerk 15.1.1919

would not accept a delegation from the RCA but the Board of Trade would do so.⁵ The RCA were seeking to extend the terms of recognition which had been granted to them earlier.⁶ They were in a much stronger position to press their claim as in 1919 they had 82,000 members compared with 30,000 in 1914.⁷ At Conference the members were represented by 450 delegates.⁸ The RCA had also formulated its national programme.⁹ By February 1919 the RCA was actively considering strike action if recognition could not be obtained.¹⁰ In fact, the Board of Trade granted recognition on 4 February to cover grades previously excluded such as Stationmasters, Agents and supervisory clerks but by then Newcastle had come out claiming that it had acted in accordance with the Special Delegate meeting of 2 February.¹¹ Tyne Dock also came out.¹² Darlington celebrated recognition with a Social.¹³

It was reported that two Inspectors' Associations in the NER had come over en bloc.¹⁴ Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Sunderland branches reported strong attendances but there was also complaint of:

'... intense indignation that clerks suffering from effects of war and some particularly disabled should be compelled to sit for qualifying examination before being entitled to higher rates of pay ...'¹⁵

With recognition out of the way the Association pursued its national programme and this led to further militancy. The Journal commented: 'If the RCA should be forced to strike in order to get a satisfactory settlement of its national programme the members must be all out to win ...'¹⁶

The RCA obtained increases at first for clerks earning £300 or more but later also for those earning £150 or more.¹⁷ Increases amounted to 100% above the pre-

⁵ Railway Service Journal 15.2.1919

⁶ The Call 23.5.1918

⁷ Railway Service Journal 15.11.1919

⁸ Railway Service Journal 15.6.1919

⁹ Railway Service Journal 15.7.1919

¹⁰ Railway Review 7.2.1919

¹¹ Railway Service Journal 15.2.1919 and 15.4.1919

¹² Railway Service Journal 15.3.1919

¹³ Railway Service Journal 15.4.1919

¹⁴ Railway Service Journal 15.5.1919

¹⁵ Railway Service Journal 15.5.1919

¹⁶ Railway Service Journal 15.8.1919

¹⁷ Railway Service Journal 12.9.1919

war scale but from 1920 there were to be reductions.¹⁸ However, the settlement of 1919 improved the position of clerks, only 10% of whom in 1909 earned more than £160 a year.¹⁹

PRELUDE TO STRIKE ACTION

The year 1919 began badly. The Labour Leader reported that a meeting of delegates of the NUR in London had determined to call a General Strike.²⁰ In March it reported that: 'Into Labour Unrest there has entered a new conception of the rightful place of labour in 'Industry''.²¹ The strength of feeling in the North East can be gauged by the fact that in April the NER suggested that staff might like to contribute to the cost of a War Memorial²² but the staff thought that the Company could pay.²³

In February 1919 the Southern Railway was on strike, the Railway Clerks were seeking recognition and the Triple Alliance was considering action.²⁴ On 20 March 1919 a Special Conference of Railwaymen asked the Triple Alliance to back them but then called off the action.²⁵ In April and June 1919 there were two Government Agreements with the NUR and ASLEF for Conciliation grades covering: a Guaranteed Day; the 48 hour week; overtime rates; night duty rates; Sunday duty rates; rest periods and holidays with pay²⁶

From February to August complicated negotiations on 'standardisation' of wages which involved amalgamation of basic rates and bonuses took place.²⁷ In April the call for a strike was revoked²⁸ but Bishop Auckland Branch said: 'The settlement has made a volume of discontent'.²⁹ ASLEF was successful in its claim but told the NUR:

¹⁸ Railway Service Journal 15.10.1919

¹⁹ D. Lockwood: *The Black Coated Worker* pp.42-46

²⁰ Labour Leader 23.1.1919

²¹ Labour Leader 6.3.1919

²² PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.12162, 11.4.1919

²³ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.12170, 9.5.1919

²⁴ A. Clegg: *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889*, Vol.2, p.275

²⁵ *Ibid* Vol.2, p.288

²⁶ Wood and Stamp: *Railways*, p.153

²⁷ A. Hutt: *The Post-war History of the British Working Class*, p.25

²⁸ Railway Review 4.4.1919

²⁹ Railway Review 9.5.1919

'If you want help we are standing by'.³⁰ In August 1919 the NUR and ASLEF came to an agreement on standardisation of pay and wages.³¹ In September 1919 it was reported that '... a very serious situation has arisen in conjunction with our negotiating'.³² This arose from a 'definitive' offer from Geddes which the Unions computed as involving cuts of between 1s. and 16s. a week and a basic rate of 40s. per week. The Government did not make clear, as was later claimed, that these cuts were dependent on a drop in the cost of living. Geddes would not allow any discussion and the NUR on 24 September called a strike. The NUR had not notified the Triple Alliance and had a very limited amount of cash.³³ Despite the fact that it had secured its own settlement ASLEF supported the NUR. Lloyd George said: 'This is a direct issue between the State and a class of workmen'.³⁴

Before the main dispute there had been two episodes of strikes in the North East. One related to a strike over new eyesight tests. Areas concerned were Heaton, Tyne Dock, Percy Main and Blaydon.³⁵ The men on strike were reinstated with the national eyesight test to be adopted.³⁶ The men in the North East also struck prematurely in relation to the RCA dispute.³⁷

At the end of the strike it was reported that on the NER 88% of the staff left work but more of the essential grades did so.³⁸ The Daily Herald reported the reaction in several areas in the North East. In Newcastle all ranks were solid but this was no surprise because of discontent over the eyesight tests.³⁹ In Sunderland the men held an enthusiastic meeting.⁴⁰ In Newcastle the foremen joined, in Durham the men

30 N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame*, p.132

31 Wood and Stamp *op cit*, p.153

32 Railway Review 26.9.1919

33 Hutt *op cit*, p.26

34 Railway Review 3.10.1919

35 Railway Review 18.7.1919

36 Railway Review 23.7.1919

37 Railway Service Journal 15.2.1919

38 Railway Official Gazette 10.10.1919

39 Daily Herald 26.9.1919

40 Daily Herald 30.9.1919

were firm and at Darlington all men were out.⁴¹ In Sunderland and District they were out to a man.⁴² New Shildon called for the resignation of the Geddes brothers.⁴³

Further details of response were recorded in the Railway Review which gave an overall review as follows:

Annfield Plain - all out

Darlington - all out

Durham - all out

Denton - all men out solid. Want RCA men out

Ferryhill - all out

Hartlepool West - over 2000 ceased work

Middlesbrough - solid and strong in support

Newcastle - 1200 support EC

Northallerton - unanimous support

Percy Main - all men out

South Shields - satisfactory

Seaham Harbour - all on strike

Sunderland 2 - endorse action

Shildon - all men out. No settlement satisfactory unless shopmen included

Spennymoor - all out

Tyne Dock - all out

Wear Valley - all out

West Hartlepoons - over 2000 ceased work⁴⁴

Against this summary we have to take account of the picture as recorded in summaries prepared for the Cabinet Committee. They made mention of the position at Newcastle where supervisory grades passed a resolution urging all such grades to come out.⁴⁵ Elsewhere it was reported that in Durham County feeling was good and

⁴¹ Daily Herald 1.10.1919

⁴² Daily Herald 2.10.1919

⁴³ Daily Herald 3.10.1919

⁴⁴ Railway Review 3.10.1919

⁴⁵ PRO CAB 27/60 p.383

instances had been recorded of a desire to return to work. At Gateshead there was 'anxiety' but at Morpeth they were tired of the strike. On the other hand, at Middlesbrough the men were recorded as 'out to win'. A solitary incident of violence was recorded in the form of stone-throwing at Heaton South.

As regards the success of the company in running trains the figures vary from day to day but a table records the position as follows:

29 September	36
30 September	74
1 October	100
2 October	128
3 October	161
4 October	184 ⁴⁶

The Cabinet papers also record the fact that the strike in the North East persisted beyond the end. They stated that on 6 October NE Goods warehouse staff at Gateshead, loco staff at Normanton and Selby, Tyne Dock men and those at Percy Main, Tweedmouth and Carlisle were still out.⁴⁷ During the strike the Government withheld a week's pay from railwaymen and were considering the control of food and the setting-up of a Citizens Guard.⁴⁸

Agreement was reached on 5 October. The war wage was to last until September 1920. There was to be a review of standardisation and the 40s. minimum. No one was to receive less than 51s. linked with an RPI of 110%.⁴⁹ Shortly afterwards shopmen got an increase of 5s. from arbitration.⁵⁰

The year 1919 was also marked by a movement urging the Government to take "Hands off Russia". In February 1919 the Bishop Auckland District Council of the NUR attended a meeting of the South Shields SLP to discuss this.⁵¹ In June 1919 the

⁴⁶ PRO CAB 27/61 p.313

⁴⁷ *Ibid* p.325

⁴⁸ Hutt *op cit*, p.2

⁴⁹ Railway Review 10.10.1919

⁵⁰ Railway Review 14.11.1919

⁵¹ The Workers Dreadnought 1.2.1919

Labour Leader reported that railwaymen now had authority to take action for stopping attacks on Russia.⁵²

CAUSES OF THE STRIKE; GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACY?

One popular explanation of the reasons for the strike was that the Government had steered it in this direction. Among those holding this view were the Webbs. In their *History of Trade Unionism* they suggested that the aim of the Government in 1919 may have been to get a free hand in reorganising the railways after the war.⁵³ Beatrice Webb in her *Diaries* commented that the strike had been desired by the Government and that the Geddes brothers represented the universal determination of the capitalists to reduce wages to pre-war level either in money terms or in commodity value level.⁵⁴ She also added: 'Never has there been a strike of anything like this in magnitude or social significance', that it was subconsciously desired by the PM and that the railwaymen had been tricked into a false position.⁵⁵ The Labour Leader considered that the struggle was '... a contest between capitalism represented by the Government, and the existence of Trade Unionism'⁵⁶ and that 'There never was a strike more justifiable than this railway strike'.⁵⁷ The view is also supported by Hutt who said that, as action by the unions was not coordinated, the Government played off one against the other.⁵⁸ Cabinet papers indicate that Sir R. Home believed 'the railwaymen even if called out on strike would be half-hearted ...'.⁵⁹ It does not look as if the Railway Companies had anticipated severe action as the NER records show that the NER had to hastily adopt control operations prepared for 1914.⁶⁰

⁵² Labour Leader 26.6.1919

⁵³ S. Webb: *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edn), p.538

⁵⁴ M. Cole (ed.) *B. Webb's Diaries 1912-1924*, pp.167-8

⁵⁵ *B. Webb's Diaries* Vol.3 1905-1924 (Virago, 1984) pp.349-350

⁵⁶ Labour Leader 2.10.1919

⁵⁷ Labour Leader 9.10.1919

⁵⁸ Allen Hutt: *The Post-war History of the British Working Class* (Left Book Club, Gollancz, 1937), p.16

⁵⁹ PRO CAB 27/59, p.75

⁶⁰ PRO RAIL 393/253

CAUSES OF THE STRIKE; ATTITUDES OF THE RAILWAYMEN

Some held the view that the strike had been brought about deliberately by the railwaymen and that it was an aspect of a more sinister conspiracy. A contemporary commentator said: 'They (Bromley and Cramp) and their rank and file are as radical as the miners'.⁶¹ They were helped by the radicalism of the printers unions because a revolt of compositors and printers assistants threatened to strike and stop the newspapers altogether unless the railwaymen were allowed to present their case and unless abusive posters were abandoned.⁶² True to its traditions the Railway Official Gazette claimed to be astonished at the strike: 'The railwaymen's demands have been generously met'. It regarded them as '... spoiling for a fight'.⁶³ It considered that the strike was over such a trivial issue.⁶⁴ Lloyd George called it an 'Anarchist conspiracy' despite the fact that the NUR did not appeal to other unions or the Triple Alliance⁶⁵ and, indeed, Thomas told the Premier that he had refused repeated offers of assistance from other trade unionists.⁶⁶ The REC was told by Government that some of the men were working for a complete change in the social order and were seeking government by trade unions. The advice concluded: 'The Strike really amounted to civil war'.⁶⁷ And a message despatched to other countries on 6 October 1919 referred to the '... gigantic failure' of the strike which '... offers no encouragement to those who imagined that England was a fertile field for revolution'.⁶⁸ In 1919 the Anti-socialist Union produced a leaflet appealing to strikers to throw over bolshevik leaders.⁶⁹

In the North East condemnation came from a clerical source - Hensley Henson recorded his view that: 'My difficulty is that the case of the men seems so

61 A Gleason: *What the Workers Want*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1920) p.90

62 *Ibid* p.498

63 Railway Official Gazette 26.9.1919

64 Railway Official Gazette 3.10.1919

65 G.D.H. Cole: *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement* Vol.3, p.171

66 Bagwell *op cit*, p.110

67 PRO CAB 21/146

68 *Ibid*

69 K.D. Brown: *The Anti-socialist Union in Essays in Anti-Labour History*, pp.253-254

thoroughly bad that there is nothing to mitigate the condemnation which one must needs express'.⁷⁰

RESULTS OF THE STRIKE

The Government, immediately after the strike, had no doubts about who had won. Lloyd George commented: 'The railwaymen have been thoroughly beaten and they know it'.⁷¹ The Socialist Standard also felt that the Government had secured a victory in the railway strike.⁷² One of the magazines representing women workers concluded that the standard of living of the men would be reduced to about what it was before the war and that women would lose 14s. per week.⁷³ However, on this point, Taylor takes a different view stating that it led to railway wages being better in comparison with pre-war than those in any other industry with an index of 117 for 1920 compared with 100 in 1914.⁷⁴ The Labour Leader considered that the railwaymen had gained about two-thirds and the government about one-third of points at issue.⁷⁵ Hutt considered that the railwaymen had won and attributed their victory to the following factors:

1. Solidarity with the locomen joining in.
2. The effect of mineral and heavy goods traffic ceasing.
3. Economic paralysis.
4. 400,000 other workers were affected.
5. Financial support from, for example, CWS.
6. The support of the Triple Alliance.
7. The action of compositors.
8. Overall support including from the middle classes.

⁷⁰ H. Hensley Henson: *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life*, (OUP, 1946) p.316

⁷¹ K.D. Morgan: *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979) p.61

⁷² The Socialist Standard October 1919

⁷³ The Woman Worker October 1919

⁷⁴ A.J.P. Taylor: *England 1914-1945*, p.141

⁷⁵ Labour Leader 9.10.1919

9. Effective presentation of their case by the railwaymen using the LRD and key writers.⁷⁶

On this last point it is worth noting that Thomas went so far as to have a film made explaining the case for the railwaymen.⁷⁷

In their assessment the Railway Boards paid tribute to those staff who had remained at their posts and those who had offered their services and officials of the Companies.⁷⁸ They also thanked the public and volunteers.⁷⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The 1919 agitations were the first since the changes of the First World War and must be viewed against the national and international background. The Report of the Provisional Joint Committee to the Industrial Conference stated:

'The fundamental causes of Labour unrest are to be found rather in the growing determination of Labour to challenge the whole existing structure of capitalist industry than in any of the more special and smaller grievances which come to the surface at any particular time'.⁸⁰

Gleason, in his analysis in 1920 of what the workers wanted, comments: 'The old British industrial system was killed by the War ... the workers have obtained such control over industry as to render it unworkable at their will'.⁸¹

Kirkaldy, in his study of British Labour 1914-1921, states: 'Success in certain directions has perhaps led some of the more ardent spirits to expect more from their Unions than working conditions allowed'.⁸²

Even cautious J.H. Thomas wrote in 1920: 'I do not think that there is anyone today who fails to realise that the old order of things can never be reestablished'.⁸³

⁷⁶ Hutt *op cit*, pp.27-29

⁷⁷ C.L. Mowat: *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940*, (Methuen, 1968) p.40

⁷⁸ PRO RAIL 527/21 17.10.1919, Min.12195

⁷⁹ *Ibid* Min.12194

⁸⁰ Cmnd 501 p.xi

⁸¹ A. Gleason: *What the Workers Want* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1920) p.4

⁸² A.W. Kirkaldy: *British Labour 1914-1921* (Pitman, London, 1921) pp.xxx-xxxi

⁸³ J.H. Thomas: *When Labour Rules* (Collins, London, 1920) p.8

As regards the Russian experience, Tawney wrote: 'If Russia is the only country where the war has meant an explosion, there is no country in which it has not closed an epoch ...'⁸⁴

As we have seen however there were regional variations. In the RCA dispute one NER group came out even though at national level there had been second thoughts and they justified their action as being in the spirit of the Special Meeting. A strike also took place in the North East on a regional issue of the subjective 'dot and wool' eye tests and the feeling over this helped to ensure solidarity in the national strike. In the course of the strike the men of the North East maintained a very high level of support. Also, as we have also seen there were Branches in the North East which remained out after others had returned. It seems therefore that the level of militancy was marked and the North East were towards the front of the action. This view was held by Alcock:

'... but ever against that stands the historic fact that this Company (the NER) had more labour disputes than any other, and it was often resented by the workmen on other companies, who made the comment often that it was no encouragement for their company to make advances in the light of that experience of the North-Eastern. The fault was that the Executive did not govern, and did not enforce rules and make obedience to them one of the primary conditions of a well-governed union, which might have hastened the spreading of benefits over all other railways. The other companies used to say when their own men made advances 'Look at the North-Eastern' and they were justified in saying it.'⁸⁵

⁸⁴ In S.J. Chapman: *Labour and Capital After the War* (Murray, London, 1918) p.93

⁸⁵ Alcock *op cit* pp.546-547

CHAPTER 9. REORGANISATION AND REACTION: 1920-1925

As we noted at the end of an earlier chapter, there was an expectation on the part of the NER Board that the railways were to be nationalised. This was very much desired by employees but in one of the many books published dealing with the prospect Pratt made a much needed cautionary comment:

'That no guarantee is afforded of the danger of railway strikes being minimised by railway nationalisation, which would rather lead to a renewal of industrial unrest since it would excite on the part of the workers exaggerated hopes beyond the range of possible fulfilment.'¹

In 1920 73.7% of Railway employees were in Unions.² From 1920 to the mid-thirties the Unions were mostly engaged in negotiating wage reductions and they had little choice.³ By 1921 industrial militancy was thought to be on the wane.⁴ NUR membership fell from 458,000 in 1920 to 310,000 in 1929 and to 272,000 in 1933. In April 1921 156 Branches of the NUR had reservations about industrial action.⁵ Only one trade unionist in ten attended Branch meetings.⁶

Between 1921 and 1923 there was a drop of over 2,000,000 in TUC membership.⁷ Some of this was linked with unemployment. There were over 2,000,000 unemployed.⁸ The North East had a great share of unemployment with Hartlepoons in 1922 having 60%, Stockton 49% and Jarrow 43%.⁹ In the 1920s a substantial additional number were covered by National Insurance - in 1920 some 8 millions¹⁰ and it was commonly said that in the winter of 1921 and 1922 the 'dole' saved Britain from

¹ E.A. Pratt: *The Case Against Railway Nationalisation*, p.247

² A. Clegg: *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, Vol.2, 1911-1933, p.545

³ Lane: *The Union Makes Us Strong*, pp.145-146

⁴ R. Miliband: *Parliamentary Socialism* (Allen & Unwin, 1961), p.92

⁵ P.S. Bagwell: *The Triple Industrial Alliance 1913-1922* in Briggs and Saville *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, p.121

⁶ A.J.P. Taylor *op cit*, p.172

⁷ Hutt *op cit*, p.63

⁸ Hutt *op cit*, p.64

⁹ Mowatt: *Britain Between the Wars*, p.126

¹⁰ Cole and Postgate: *The Common People*, p.556

revolution.¹¹ Unemployment became a highly emotive issue during the first Labour Government but Margaret Bondfield asserted, as the responsible Minister:

'Nothing that I did or omitted to do increased the number of names upon the register to any degree worth thinking about compared with the total increase produced by the economic blizzard'.¹²

The situation was exploited both within the Unions and outside. Vigilante sections were formed. The Minority Movement was inspired by the Communist Party. It resisted wage cuts and tried to turn Unions into revolutionary organisations.¹³ It was strongest on the railways.¹⁴ In 1925 the Railway Section of the National Minority Movement appealed for action. J.H. Thomas, at Glasgow, said: 'There will be no strike if I can stop it'.¹⁵

WAGE ISSUES

In January 1920 following the undertaking given at the end of the strike, standard rates were fixed for Categories A and B with A rates being tied to the index. These rates were rejected in respect of the standard rates, indexation, the exclusion of shopmen and those employed on the Irish railways and the date of application. Further changes were offered to include negotiations on shopmen and the offer of £1 back pay and the terms were accepted in January 1920.¹⁶ But in the North East there was growing distrust and the Railway Review mentions the NE Platelayers Vigilance Society and the NE Ticket Collectors and Vigilance Society.¹⁷ This was the time when the shop stewards movement had collapsed as they had no influence among miners or railwaymen in the great industrial unions. Gallagher is quoted as saying that the 'Despised dockers and railwaymen, the miners ... have now become the pioneers of emancipation from the demoralizing power of capitalism...'.¹⁸

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.564

¹² M. Bondfield: *A Life's Work* (Hutchinson, London, 1949), p.308

¹³ Lane *op cit*, p.141

¹⁴ C. Wrigley: *A History of British Industrial Relations* Vol.2 (Harvester Press, 1987) p.98

¹⁵ International Transport Worker, March/April 1925

¹⁶ Clegg: *A History of the British Trade Unions Since 1889*, Vol.2, p.289 and Railway Review 16.1.1920 and Railway Review 23.1.1920

¹⁷ Railway Review 9.1.1920

¹⁸ J. Hinton: *The First Shop Stewards Movement* (Allen & Unwin, 1973), p.319

In 1920 the miners' dispute was coming to a head. In August 1919 the Miners Federation had voted to compel the Government to adopt the scheme of national ownership and joint control recommended by the majority of the Commission. As the Government did not respond there was a call at the TUC for a general strike but this was negated and a political campaign was accepted instead.¹⁹ In July 1920 the Federation asked for wage increases and a reduction in the price of coal. Strike action notices were issued to expire on 25 September. An appeal was made to the Triple Alliance but railwaymen would not be involved. The strike took place on 16 October. The Supply and Transport Committee of the Cabinet had, during early 1920, assumed that there would be a national coal strike plus a Transport strike.²⁰ Later the mood changed and in August it was reported that: '... it was doubtful whether the railwaymen would side with the miners and generally railwaymen were not considered sympathetic to the miners'.²¹

In October the discussions revealed some slight hope of moderation among railwaymen.²² Some attempts were made to conciliate the railwaymen. In March the Minister of Transport had agreed with the RCA and NUR on wage increases for those earning less than £250 and had ordered the Companies to pay these from 1 August 1919 and cease War Bonuses.²³ The White Paper on Railway Reorganisation had suggested that workers representatives should be added to the new Boards.²⁴ But throughout 1920 there was a large amount of dissatisfaction in the railway services.²⁵ Shopmen's and signalmen's conferences were held.²⁶ An application was made to the National Wages Board for a £1 per week increase.²⁷ The NWB awarded increases of from 4s. to 7s. 6d. in urban areas and 2s. to 3s. 6d. in rural areas from 14 June 1920²⁸

¹⁹ Hutt *op cit*, p.31

²⁰ PRO CAB 27/73 p.62

²¹ PRO CAB 27/73 p.101

²² PRO CAB 27/73 p.169

²³ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.12225 19.3.1920

²⁴ PRO RAIL 527/21 Min.12253 23.7.1920

²⁵ Railway Review 23.4.1920

²⁶ Railway Review 21.5.1920

²⁷ Railway Review 28.5.1920

²⁸ Railway Review 11.6.1920

and this offer was accepted.²⁹ September 1920 saw the NUR involved in the discussions on action in the coal strike³⁰ but the following month a new special General Meeting was called because the NUR were threatened with a withdrawal of the guaranteed week. Strike notices were sent out but then suspended.³¹ The year ended in the North East with the Newcastle District Platelayers Vigilance Committee asking for a further 10s. per week³².

In 1920 a special shopmen's campaign was launched³³ with shopmen calling for a special general meeting on a national stoppage.³⁴ Shopmen's pay was a problem of inter-union rivalry. In 600 workshops there were 1500 rates of pay. The NUR called a National Conference of Shopmen. The AEU blocked proposals. The NUR wanted a reduction to 8 grades and a minimum wage.³⁵ In 1924 there was a ruling that the NUR were right to regard this as a industry issue. The LNER would not accept this. The EC of the NUR threatened a strike and the LNER referred it to the Industrial Court which decided on implementation from 1925.³⁶

In 1920 a new Conciliation Structure was introduced with Local Departmental Committees, Sectional Councils, a Central Wages Board and a National Wages Board. The year 1920 also saw a proposal for major grade restructuring.³⁷ It also saw the introduction of the Emergency Powers Act and in October the Daily Herald commented that Trade Unions were now to be classed with foreign enemies of the country.³⁸

Another issue which had continued throughout 1920 was the "Hands off Russia" campaign. The British Socialist Party in June 1920 voted for a national Conference to organise a General Strike and urged that members should not assist against

²⁹ Railway Review 16.7.1920
³⁰ Railway Review 17.9.1920 and 24.9.1920
³¹ Railway Review 22.10.1920
³² Railway Review 19.11.1920
³³ Labour Leader 24.6.1920
³⁴ Labour Leader 19.8.1920
³⁵ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen*, pp.425-427
³⁶ *Ibid*, p.428
³⁷ G.W. Alport *op cit*, p.556
³⁸ Daily Herald 25.10.1920

Russia.³⁹ In August of that year Shildon No.3 Branch voted to support the Council in action against war with Russia and was ready to strike.⁴⁰ However the threat of a general strike prevented anti-Russian aid.⁴¹

The effects of the recession continued during 1921 and by the end of that year wage cuts had been imposed on 6 million workers.⁴² The Cabinet Committee monitoring the industrial situation assumed in early 1921 that there would be a Triple Alliance Strike⁴³ but later modified that view.⁴⁴ The Railway and Transport Workers called for a general railway and transport strike in April 1921. A State of Emergency was declared but Thomas called off the strike.⁴⁵ In 1921 the guaranteed week was suspended from 2 May 1921⁴⁶ but was restored in July 1921.⁴⁷ Wages were reduced by 4s. per week as a result of the sliding scale review.⁴⁸

In the North East in 1921 Vigilance movements continued their pressure. The Northern Signalmen's Vigilance Committee sought to put pressure on the National Executive.⁴⁹ The North Eastern (Newcastle) Platelayers supported the national grades movement for resolution of policies.⁵⁰ The North Eastern Foremen and Supervisors' Association claimed to have achieved results.⁵¹ Shildon No.3 (Loco) Branch commented: 'We believe the slump in trade to be a capitalist stunt on the workers of this country'.⁵²

In the following three years the Companies continued to press for reduction in wages. The year 1922 saw such an attempt⁵³ and also in that year the Companies agreed to refer to the Industrial Arbitration Court the issue of a reduction in

³⁹ Hutt *op cit*, p.37

⁴⁰ Railway Review 27.8.1920

⁴¹ Taylor *op cit*, p.144

⁴² Quail: *The Slow Burning Fuse*, p.302

⁴³ PRO CAB 27/73 p.259

⁴⁴ PRO CAB 27/73 p.277

⁴⁵ Hutt *op cit*, pp.59-60 and W.R. Garside: *The Durham Miners 1919-1960* (Allen & Unwin, 1971), p.147

⁴⁶ Railway Review 6.5.1921

⁴⁷ Railway Review 8.7.1921

⁴⁸ Railway Review 1.7.1921

⁴⁹ Railway Review 7.1.1921

⁵⁰ Railway Review 21.1.1921

⁵¹ Railway Review 4.2.1921

⁵² Railway Review 11.3.1921

⁵³ Railway Review 31.3.1922

the bonus paid to shopmen.⁵⁴ There was also retrenchment - up to March 1922 59,068 railway employees had been dismissed.⁵⁵ The Unions attempted to consolidate their position. In 1922 the NE Central Division Carriage and Wagon Grades Vigilance Committee met at Darlington and sought to link up with the whole of the North East.⁵⁶ Later that year 35 branches were represented at the NER Locomotive Council meeting in Darlington.⁵⁷ The battle against non-members was continued. In February 1923 the Newcastle District Council proposed to withdraw labour for one day a week until all men were in the Union.⁵⁸ In 1924 the NE Federation of District Councils raised the question of non-members and industrial action.⁵⁹ In 1923 a Joint Committee was formed between the TGWU and NUR to unionise the road transport labour force but there was little result.⁶⁰

The year 1923 began with a docking of 6s. 6d. a week from the shopmen's War Bonus.⁶¹ In June the Central Wages Board authorised a 2s. per week reduction.⁶² This was followed by a mass meeting of protest.⁶³ In December 1923 the National Wages Board decided on the retention of the sliding scale.⁶⁴

THE 1921 RAILWAYS ACT

A further significant development was the passing of the 1921 Act. This implemented changes in the organisation of the railways following the War. The purpose of grouping together in four Companies 114 previous railway companies was 'the more efficient and economical working of the railway system of Great Britain'.⁶⁵

Writing at this time J.H. Thomas argued:

⁵⁴ Railway Review 25.8.1922

⁵⁵ Railway Review 5.1.1923

⁵⁶ Railway Review 3.3.1922

⁵⁷ Railway Review 8.9.1922

⁵⁸ Railway Review 9.2.1923

⁵⁹ Railway Review 11.1.1924

⁶⁰ P.S. Bagwell: *The Railwaymen*, p.444

⁶¹ Railway Review 12.1.1923

⁶² Railway Review 22.6.1923

⁶³ Railway Review 21.9.1923. See also J. Klugmann: *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1919-1924* Vol.1 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1968), p.104

⁶⁴ Railway Review 28.12.1923

⁶⁵ *A Brief History of the LNER* (1946), p.6

'To the workers the only way out of the morass is Nationalisation and in putting forward a plea for this change we wish to save the public, because we ourselves do not anticipate getting any more out of the state for ourselves than we could, if we wished, force out of the unwilling hands of the private owners'.⁶⁶

As part of the reorganisation the LNER included the North British, North Eastern, Great Northern, Great Eastern, Great Central, Great North of Scotland, Hull and Barnsley and many subsidiary companies.⁶⁷ The Railways Act of 1921 was to apply from 1 January 1923.⁶⁸ The Act provided for recognition of NUR, ASLEF and RCA and provided a complete scheme of local and national staff machinery. The LNER had sought changes. The Board Minutes refer to a Confidential Memorandum of April 1921 which said: '... there must be a reduction in the wages bill over and above what will come automatically through the sliding scale'. Apparently the intent was to transform this into part of a resolution concerning the Railways Bill but this was not possible.⁶⁹

William Whitelaw became Chairman of the LNER. He described it as a system covering practically the whole of eastern Britain from the Thames to the Moray Firth, serving 80% of the urban population of the country: two-thirds of its business was in conveying freight and one-third in passengers.⁷⁰ The total staff in 1923 was 202,000 and by 1930 this had fallen to 195,030.⁷¹ Office and Clerical Workers accounted for 24,597 staff, engine cleaners for 3689, engine drivers and motormen 11,154, firemen and assistant motormen 11,670, permanent way staff 19,079 and signalmen 9021.⁷² Wedgwood became Chief General Manager. The North Eastern unit survived comprising the NER and the Hull and Barnsley companies.⁷³ Commenting at the time of the 1921 Bill J.H. Thomas urged greater increases in productivity for the Companies and cited the example of the LNER which carried the largest number of tons per truck.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ J.H. Thomas: *The Red Light for the Railways* (Cassell, 1921), p.12

⁶⁷ Allen: *The North Eastern Railway* p.14

⁶⁸ Wood and Stamp: *op cit* p.172

⁶⁹ PRO RAIL 527/21

⁷⁰ G. Hughes: *LNER* (Guild Publishing, London, 1986) p.140

⁷¹ *Ibid* p.147

⁷² *Ibid* p.148

⁷³ *Ibid* pp.16-17

⁷⁴ J.H. Thomas: *The Red Light for the Railway* p.31

Despite Thomas's plea the railways remained private and a historian of the Labour Party commented that:

'... the railwaymen while regularly passing resolutions in favour of the nationalisation of the railways had not, up to the 1924 Conference of the National Union of Railwaymen, taken any special steps to indicate that they regarded these resolutions as more than pious expressions of opinion'.⁷⁵

WAGE ISSUES: THE RCA ASPECTS

At first sight the RCA appeared to have won their battles but 1920 began with further discontent. The Newcastle Branch of the RCA passed a strong resolution calling for Conference to discuss an immediate strike.⁷⁶ The Journal later reported that 'The long-awaited settlement is no settlement'.⁷⁷ Middlesbrough mentioned many complaints and Newcastle 'Dissatisfaction strongly expressed re classification'.⁷⁸ Middlesbrough went on to demand full recognition in place of the apology which they had.⁷⁹ Objections continued. Butterworth had referred to the agreement lasting 'during the period of Government control ...' and this caused uncertainty at a time when new measures were being considered.⁸⁰ Exception was taken to the fact that women had been excluded and a Special Conference rejected it on that aspect.⁸¹ The women's case was in fact settled in September.⁸² But discontent continued in the North East with a resolution being raised at a special meeting calling for 'immediate withdrawal of labour to enforce our just demands'.⁸³ Both Middlesbrough MPs were involved in discussions on issues.⁸⁴

In 1921 the RCA claimed for 25% as opposed to the NUR claim for 10%.⁸⁵ The RCA General Secretary referred to the fact that nothing could be guaranteed

⁷⁵ H. Tracey: *The Book of the Labour Party*, Vol.2, p.20

⁷⁶ Railway Service Journal 15.2.1920

⁷⁷ Railway Service Journal 15.3.1920

⁷⁸ Railway Service Journal 15.4.1920

⁷⁹ Railway Service Journal 15.5.1920

⁸⁰ Railway Service Journal 15.6.1920

⁸¹ Railway Service Journal 15.7.1920

⁸² Railway Service Journal 15.9.1920

⁸³ Railway Service Journal 15.11.1920

⁸⁴ Railway Service Journal 15.12.1920

⁸⁵ Railway Service Journal 21.2.1921

beyond August and drew attention to the General Manager of the NER saying that wages might be standardised to maintain dividends.⁸⁶ Another battle was called in aid when the Journal stated: 'It is as true today as it ever was, that the miners are fighting the battle of the railway workers'.⁸⁷ In May 1921 the RCA had their 25% claim rejected⁸⁸ even though in that year the RCA had 9 out of every 10 staff eligible to join as members.⁸⁹

In 1923 the National Wages Board met to consider the Railway Companies' proposals for reducing earnings or incomes of many, if not most, railway workers.⁹⁰ The Companies argued that wages of railwaymen were out of step with employees of every other industry in the country and they proposed abolition of the sliding scale.⁹¹ In 1924, however, the RCA recommended acceptance of the NWB recommendations.⁹² In the same issue of the Journal noting this mention was made of the fact that Mr. Romeril had become the first RCA MP.⁹³

The worsening position of the Railway companies did not bring unity to the unions. In 1924 the Gateshead Branch deplored the lack of amity among Unions⁹⁴ and later in the year a new Union was formed for signalmen.⁹⁵ Some members were also discontented at the action of their Unions and the Railway Services Journal mentions the strong protests at Bishop Welldon's attitude towards the railwaymen's forward movement at Middlesbrough.⁹⁶

THE ASLEF STRIKE

In 1923 the Companies tried to reduce conditions for locomen. The NUR accepted those conditions but ASLEF did not. Drivers stood to lose one-fifth of their earnings. Bromley of ASLEF, told MacDonald:

86 Railway Service Journal 21.3.1921
 87 Railway Service Journal 21.4.1921
 88 Railway Service Journal 21.5.1921
 89 Railway Service Journal 21.8.1921
 90 Railway Service Journal 23.11.1923
 91 Railway Service Journal 23.12.1923
 92 Railway Service Journal 24.1.1924
 93 Railway Service Journal 24.1.1924
 94 Railway Service Journal 24.2.1924
 95 Railway Service Journal 24.8.1924
 96 Railway Service Journal 25.2.1925

'If the success of the Labour Party and of a Labour Government can only be built on such serious losses in wages and conditions then I am sure that the workers will not welcome a Labour Government under such conditions.'⁹⁷

ASLEF struck from 20-29 January 1924. The NUR would not support ASLEF. ASLEF was very bitter then and later about the pressure put on the men by NUR to continue work.⁹⁸ However, about 38% of drivers, 56% of firemen and 50% of cleaners were estimated to be on strike. A considerable number of NUR men came out at Darlington and smaller numbers at Newcastle. On 24 January men returned to work at Darlington, Sunderland and Newcastle in small numbers.⁹⁹ Shildon was honourably mentioned by the Locomotive Journal because there 83 out of 85 members came out on strike.¹⁰⁰ The Journal also referred to an alleged telegram by Cramp which claimed that 'seventy per cent of North Eastern men were now working'. Middlesbrough Branch of ASLEF claimed that ASLEF had won the sole right to represent locomotive men.¹⁰¹ The Locomotive Journal claimed that the fight of the Locomotivemen had been against an insidious attempt to introduce compulsory arbitration and reduction in pay.¹⁰² The NUR lack of support led to loss of members by the NUR and the formation of a separate union for signalmen.¹⁰³ It was claimed that in the Northern Area hundreds of members joined ASLEF.¹⁰⁴ Also in August 1924 the National Minority Movement was launched and District Conferences were held.¹⁰⁵ The Railway Minority group issued their programme on 24 June 1924. Loeber and Figgins of the NUR were active in that movement which encouraged the All-Grades Programme of 1925.¹⁰⁶ The NUR and RCA All-Grades programme included a bid for 12 days holiday and pensions at 60.¹⁰⁷

97 F. McKenna *op cit* p.182

98 Locomotive Journal February 1924

99 PRO CAB 27/257 24.1.1924 report

100 Locomotive Journal March 1924

101 *Ibid* June 1924

102 Locomotive Journal July 1924

103 McKillop *op cit* pp.136-144 and S.W. Lerner: *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Unions* (Allen & Unwin, 1961) p.195

104 Locomotive Journal March 1924

105 Hutt *op cit* p.84

106 R.M. Martin: *Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924-1933* (Clarendon, 1969) pp.49-62

107 International Transport Worker December 1924

The Role of ASLEF in the NER

Having considered the ASLEF strike it is now appropriate to discuss the role of ASLEF in the North East during the period of this study. So far there has been virtually no mention of that union. There are several reasons for this. In 1890 recognition was given to ASRS. ASRS organised its negotiations and Conciliation machinery so that locomotivemen were included in the All-Grades structure. In the year before the strike, the Locomotive Journal admitted that footplatemen in the North East Region took very little part in trade union matters.¹⁰⁸

In June 1924 new sectional councils started operation but there were delays in the LNER scheme.

If we look back to the early days of ASLEF we find that it was established because: '... none of the existing societies can protect the labour of the enginemen and firemen efficiently unless we combine to protect ourselves from injustice'.¹⁰⁹

In 1904 the Locomotive Journal referred to existing Branches at Darlington, Gateshead and Middlesbrough.¹¹⁰ In the same year the ASRS and ASLEF worked together to put forward jointly a national programme for locomotivemen¹¹¹ and the two bodies worked together to promote unionisation of locomotivemen and lower grades.¹¹² Meetings were held at Leeds on 11th and 12th April to discuss the national programme¹¹³ and there was reference later to the North Eastern Movement.¹¹⁴ For the next three years there was silence about the NER. In the Locomotive Journal of 1909 a letter from Pecksniff claimed:

'Over twelve months have passed since the Conciliation Boards were formed, and we have, practically speaking, gained nothing by the transaction ... it appears to have caused a rupture and endangered the harmonious relations that hitherto existed between the directorate and the men'.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Locomotive Journal April 1923

¹⁰⁹ Locomotive Journal September 1905

¹¹⁰ Locomotive Journal January 1904

¹¹¹ Locomotive Journal October 1904

¹¹² R.V. Sires: Labour Unrest in England 1910-1914 in Journal of Economic History, 15, 1955

¹¹³ Locomotive Journal May 1905

¹¹⁴ Locomotive Journal August 1906

¹¹⁵ Locomotive Journal January 1909

In 1910 references to the North East began again. The Branch at Gateshead was referred to as a 'little branch'.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, ASLEF demanded to be consulted: 'But our North-Eastern Railway members, now rapidly approaching 600, are determined to have a say in this matter and in all future strikes and settlements'.¹¹⁷

In 1911 the ASLEF agent was summoned to Middlesbrough where a strike was threatened but it blew over.¹¹⁸ The major national strike then occurred and it was referred to as a 'brief but significant struggle'.¹¹⁹ Towards the end of that year, ASLEF and ASRS held a joint meeting to consider the grievances of engine-drivers, firemen and cleaners in the NER.¹²⁰ In the following year there was a sudden flurry of activity. The Newcastle Branch opened with 18 members¹²¹ and this was followed by Tyne Dock. The Journal claimed: 'The best men of the North are already with us or are coming'.¹²² Branches followed at Blyth, Blaydon, Shildon, Durham and Stockton-on-Tees.¹²³ In 1913 membership approached 1400 and the Newcastle Branch had 100 members.¹²⁴ During the Knox strike the ASLEF representative stated: 'I found that all our members were on strike at Newcastle, Blaydon and Blyth and all but half-a-dozen at Gateshead, Tyne Dock and Sunderland'.¹²⁵

Towards the end of the war ASLEF referred to the promise which had been made to them by the Minister to sympathetically consider the shorter working day.¹²⁶ In the North East in 1918 matters of NER interest were listed as eyesight tests, lodging allowances and promotion.¹²⁷ The battle over eyesight tests continued in 1919 and men were dismissed. This led to a strike followed by agreement.¹²⁸ The NER eyesight test was considered to be too severe and the Composite Conciliation Board was

¹¹⁶ Locomotive Journal March 1910

¹¹⁷ Locomotive Journal November 1910

¹¹⁸ Locomotive Journal July 1911

¹¹⁹ Locomotive Journal September 1911

¹²⁰ Locomotive Journal November 1911

¹²¹ Locomotive Journal July 1912

¹²² Locomotive Journal August 1912

¹²³ Locomotive Journal September 1912, November 1912 and June 1913

¹²⁴ Locomotive Journal June 1913 and December 1913

¹²⁵ Locomotive Journal January 1913

¹²⁶ Locomotive Journal September 1917 and April 1918

¹²⁷ Locomotive Journal May 1918

¹²⁸ G.R. Raynes: *Engines and Men: The History of ASLEF* (Goodall & Suddick, Leeds), p.256

considered to have little idea of its importance. ASLEF claimed that the NUR took a rigid line in relation to the Strike Committee whereas ASLEF consulted the men and this led to an increase in ASLEF members.¹²⁹

The Journal carried in 1920 the first report of the Shildon Branch even though it had opened in September 1912 with few members and in one of the strongholds of the NUR on the North Eastern Railway.¹³⁰ In August of that year, however, the Branch recorded 146 new members.¹³¹ The main drive did not take place until 1920. In May of that year the Journal stated that 50% of the 6,000 locomotivemen in the North East were in their ASLEF Branches¹³² and in the following month the Stockton Branch said that new ground was being opened out in the NER by new Branches.¹³³ The opening of new Branches at Barnard Castle, Ferryhill and Annfield Plain was noted.¹³⁴ Membership figures were given for Tyne Dock (80) and Darlington (145).¹³⁵ In January 1921 ASLEF stated that it had increased membership in the NER by 100% and now had 5,000 members in 41 Branches.¹³⁶

In 1922 dissatisfaction arose again with the claim that local promotions were not being carried out in accordance with the seniority agreement and at Middlesbrough there was opposition to lodging plans.¹³⁷ In that year new locomotive sectional Councils were established as were new conciliation boards in the NER.¹³⁸ The Locomotive Journal proudly claimed that ASLEF had finally broken into the 'holy ground' of the NUR in the North East.¹³⁹

129 Locomotive Journal August 1919 and September 1919

130 Locomotive Journal January 1920

131 Locomotive Journal August 1920

132 Locomotive Journal May 1920

133 Locomotive Journal June 1920

134 Locomotive Journal April 1920 and December 1920

135 Locomotive Journal February 1920 and March 1920

136 Locomotive Journal January 1921

137 Locomotive Journal April 1922

138 Locomotive Journal May 1922

139 Locomotive Journal May 1922

Post-strike Situation

In August 1924 the result of a ballot by ASLEF in relation to a further strike showed a majority of 2,590 against.¹⁴⁰

As far as the new claims submitted by NUR and RCA were concerned they ran counter to pressure from shareholders who, not content with wage claims being turned down, also called for a 'substantial reduction in railway wages'.¹⁴¹ The Unions were invited to meet the Companies to discuss the financial position of the railways.¹⁴² The Companies had suggested a reduction of 4s. per week in London and 6s. per week in rural areas.¹⁴³ From 1 July 1925 a reduction of 1s. per week was proposed.¹⁴⁴ Thomas said: 'It was probably true to say that the industrial position was never worse than it was today'.¹⁴⁵ At this point a 5% cut for all grades was proposed.¹⁴⁶

In the North East the LNER Directors were concerned at the financial position of the company and implemented a programme of economies for 1925, 1926 and 1927.¹⁴⁷ Middlesbrough No.1 Branch recorded that a report on economy practices adopted by the Company at Stockton and other places had been received with great indignation.¹⁴⁸ The Darlington and District Platelayers Vigilance Committee stated that it would accept no reduction in wages or increases in hours.¹⁴⁹ Old issues were also pursued. In July the Newcastle No.1 Branch had a resolution asking for an appeal to the Company to refrain from introducing additional female labour 'so that limited promotion prospects shall not be further curtailed'.¹⁵⁰ A special Conference discussed cuts and the Industrial Alliance.¹⁵¹ The RCA opposed the new Superannuation Scheme.¹⁵² Towards the end of the year the RCA sanctioned mass meetings in the LNER.¹⁵³ The year ended

¹⁴⁰ Locomotive Journal August 1924

¹⁴¹ PRO RAIL 390/2 Part 1, p.179

¹⁴² Railway Service Journal 25.7.1925

¹⁴³ Railway Review 13.2.1925 and International Transport Workers February 1925

¹⁴⁴ Railway Review 19.6.1925

¹⁴⁵ Railway Review 10.7.1925

¹⁴⁶ Railway Review 10.7.1925

¹⁴⁷ PRO RAIL 390/2033

¹⁴⁸ Railway Service Journal May 1926

¹⁴⁹ Railway Review 24.7.1925

¹⁵⁰ Railway Service Journal 25.7.1925

¹⁵¹ Railway Service Journal 25.8.1925

¹⁵² PRO RAIL 390/7 30.10.1925, Min.533

¹⁵³ Railway Service Journal 25.11.1925

with the Companies asking for a reduction in wages based on a fall in the cost of living from 1921 to 1925.¹⁵⁴ In the previous month the National Wages Board decided against both the Companies and the Unions.¹⁵⁵

During this period the mining dispute had continued to develop towards the 1926 situation. In 1924 the MFGB gave notice to terminate the 1921 wages agreement. This led to the Buckmaster Report. Then the mine owners gave notice to terminate on 30 June 1925. The Court reported in favour of the miners and the TUC backed the miners. The Government agreed to pay the subsidy for 9 months. The Samuel Commission reported. The Government undertook to pay for a further period if agreement was reached by 1 May but then the miners would have to accept wage sacrifices. However the owners wanted longer hours, district wage settlements and other points. The miners reacted with the slogan: 'Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay'. The Government promised a Royal Commission not later than 31 December 1929 but otherwise supported the owners.¹⁵⁶

On 1 April 1926 the mine owners offered less than in 1925. In Durham the men would have got 7s. 2d. instead of 9s. 11d. Piece rates were to be lower and housing and coal allowances were withdrawn in the North East.¹⁵⁷

Turning once again to the railways the NUR began 1926 with a further grievance when the Court of Inquiry rejected the NUR claim that Decision 728 of the Industrial Court should apply to shopmen.¹⁵⁸

CONCLUSIONS

In earlier Chapters we have commented on changes produced by the First World War and the formation of the NUR and have suggested that these could make more difficult the preservation of a distinctive attitude towards railway industrial relations in the North East. In the period under review in this Chapter even more

¹⁵⁴ Railway Service Journal 25.12.1925

¹⁵⁵ Railway Review 11.11.1925

¹⁵⁶ H. Tracey *op cit*, Vol.1, pp.284-297

¹⁵⁷ G.A. Phillips: *The General Strike* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976) p.107

¹⁵⁸ Northern Echo 10.2.1926

significant developments occurred. The 1921 Railways Act made it possible for the Government to exit from the railway business. It arranged for a concentration of the Companies and the establishment of a new basis of Union representatives on the Boards of Directors and Arbitration machinery. Relationships between Unions were changed as recognition was given to NUR, ASLEF and the RCA. In the North East, ASLEF had its own sectional Councils and Conciliation Boards and it began to exert a much greater influence there. The question of which Union was responsible for Shopmen became more acute. With the coming into effect of the Railways Act the NER was absorbed into the greater unit of the LNER, although within the LNER an NER identity was initially preserved. In addition to these changes the economic position of the railways deteriorated and the Companies attempted to impose savings. Unemployment was high in the country as a whole but in the North East it was particularly high. Unions and their members were forced on the defensive and union membership fell sharply.

During this period in the North East the Branches continued to play a major role and were neither behind nor ahead of the field. Vigilante movements were strong and maintained pressure on the Union Executive Council. Issues, including the problem of the non-unionist members, were faced up to. The major issue of justice for the shopmen was also pursued in the North East. As far as the ASLEF strike in 1924 was concerned the North East was neither more militant nor less militant than in the rest of the country, but the period revealed a greater impact in the region of ASLEF. This was due, partly, to reorganisation of the railways and the creation of new negotiating machinery. It was due, partly, to ASLEF having played a greater role with Government on a national basis during the Great War. It was due also, partly, to the perceived erosion, and threatened greater erosion, of the position of skilled workers which began during the War and caused militancy on 'Red Clydeside'.

CHAPTER 10. THE GENERAL STRIKE AND ITS AFTERMATH

The General Strike of 1926 was an important event in British history and was a key event in industrial and Trade Union history. Both contemporary and later accounts differ as to the blameworthy individuals and institutions. Some saw it as inevitable. Julian Symons considered:

'It is fair to say that the General Council did everything in its power to avoid a general strike which it did not want, and for which it had not prepared. The attitudes of the Government (and coal owners) on one side and of the miners on the other, made the strike inevitable'.¹

He saw it also as the outcome of 15th April 1921 (Black Friday) and 31st July 1925 (Red Friday). Florey also saw it as inevitable in a post-war pattern of class war after the Great War. He cites the 1925 TUC resolution that the 'Trade Union Movement must organise to prepare the Trade Unions in conjunction with the Party and the Workers to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism'.² Morris put it in the context of the continuing development of the co-operation which had been built up during the First World War between the Government and businesses to meet the challenge from the trade unions.³ She saw it as the climax of a long and complicated series of events involving the interaction of the responses of all the main interested groups in Britain to the economic and political difficulties after the end of the First World War⁴ but considered that it was not inevitable that it would lead to a general strike. That it did so was due to the militancy of the miners,⁵ the coal owners⁶ and Baldwin's divided Cabinet.⁷

Turning to the railwaymen, the attitude of the rank and file was based again on a concept of fairness and support for other fellow workers. Fyfe commented that the General Strike was '... so splendid a demonstration of comradeship'.⁸ As regards their leader, J.H. Thomas worked from the start to end the strike and: 'More

¹ J. Symons: *The General Strike* (RU, London, 1959) p.230

² R.A. Florey: *The General Strike of 1926* (Calder, London, 1980) p.103

³ M. Morris: *The General Strike* (Penguin, London, 1976) p.13

⁴ *Ibid* pp.107-108

⁵ *Ibid* p.134

⁶ *Ibid* p.135

⁷ *Ibid* p.146

⁸ H. Fyfe: *Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike* (Labour Publishing Co., London, 1926) p.89

than any other single person he was responsible for the final capitulation and the consequential split in the Labour Movement'.⁹

THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

In April the Government was being advised that there was no reason to suppose that the NUR would come out and that a majority of railwaymen were pleased that the strike was not to take place.¹⁰ Even a Strike Bulletin referred to 'strong distaste for a strike among railwaymen'.¹¹ However, Bromley of ASLEF said: 'As far as my own people are concerned every member of our Union without exception will be thrown into battle at once ...'.¹² Cramp on 3 May 1926 instructed all his members not to take duty after the next Monday.¹³ A telegram from Unity House said: 'Perfect loyalty will ensure success'.¹⁴

The overall position on response of staff was that in the LNER 27,000 out of 191,000 employees and clerical staff were on duty.¹⁵ In the North East out of 11,500 staff only 94 locomen were on duty on 5 May and 127 on 12 May.¹⁶ In some areas response was of the highest nature, i.e. 90% to 100% and this was the case at:

Chopwell

Darlington (railwaymen)

Durham (including Station Master)

Ferryhill

Hartlepoons (railwaymen)

Moor Row (railwaymen)

Newcastle (including clerks)

North Shields

Stockton

⁹ Morris *op cit* p.231

¹⁰ CAB 27/80

¹¹ CAB 27/79, Strike Bulletin TCB8

¹² R. Page Arnot: *The General Strike, May 1926* (1975 edn), p.133

¹³ *Ibid* p.164

¹⁴ *Ibid* p.170

¹⁵ Phillips: *The General Strike*, p.210

¹⁶ Bagwell *op cit*, p.479

Sunderland (railwaymen)

Tyne Docks

West Hartlepool¹⁷

In other areas it was satisfactory, i.e. wholly effective:

Gateshead

Shildon (railwaymen)

In one area it was weak and the RCA set a bad example:

Tynemouth (railwaymen)¹⁸

On 8 May the LNER said that 550 signalmen were at work.¹⁹ Two days later it said that it had placed over 5,300 volunteers, 28,000 men were on duty and 603 strikers had returned.²⁰ It was also the case that railway clerks staying at work were liable to be shifted on to manual work.²¹ The government assessment at this time was that while Railway Clerks in the North were likely generally to stop work it was possible that the response would be less general in the South. The strike of NER signalmen and locomotive men was reported as being almost complete. Labour in the North Eastern Division was concentrating all its efforts on supplanting Government authority.²² The NER Board was being told that volunteers of excellent type were being trained in large numbers as drivers, firemen, signalmen and guards.²³ The number of trains run in the LNER rose from 148 on 4 May to over 1000 on 11 May.²⁴

ORGANISATION OF STRIKE IN THE NORTH EAST

Trades Council were active in the North of England. In the country as a whole they formed 400 or 500 joint strike committees and Councils of Action.²⁵

The strike in the North East was important because the strikers

¹⁷ Postgate and others: *A Workers History of the Great Strike* (The Plebs League, 1927), p.31 and The Workers Chronicle 8.5.1926

¹⁸ Postgate *op cit* p.21 and p.26. Also Morris *op cit*, pp.42-43

¹⁹ Railway Official Gazette, 7 and 14 May 1926

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Phillips *op cit*, p.156

²² CAB 27/331

²³ PRO RAIL 393/261, 9.5.1926

²⁴ LNER News 11.5.1926

²⁵ Phillips *op cit*, p.189

organised on the same basis as the Government.²⁶ However there was no organisation in the North East before 1-2 May²⁷ and a Council of Action was not formed before 12 May.²⁸ Although the Joint Strike Committee in the North East gets frequent mention it is likely that its influence was limited to the area between Ashington and Gateshead.²⁹ Nevertheless the North East did act as a central point and a meeting at Gateshead was attended by 28 Councils of Action and 52 Strike Committees.³⁰ The Joint Transport Strike Committee appointed five-man Rota Committees staffed by ASLEF, RCA and NUR. These kept in touch with committees and railway union strike committees at Ferryhill, the Hartlepoons, Shildon, Gateshead, Northallerton, Saltburn, Redcar, Spennymoor, Wingate, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Stockton, Barnard Castle and Durham.³¹

The main centres of the strike activity were in Middlesbrough, Stockton and the Hartlepoons.³² In Middlesbrough a Central Strike Committee was established with the Secretary of the NUR in the Chair and an NUR Vice-President.³³ Other Joint Strike Committees were formed at Stockton and Blyth.³⁴

In the 1926 General Strike some Strike Committees at, for example, Middlesbrough were resentful of outside interference.³⁵ The Middlesbrough Central Strike Committee acted as a co-ordinating and not directional body.³⁶ At Darlington the failure of the railway unions to co-operate with the local Council of Action stemmed from the old exclusiveness of the aristocracy of labour.³⁷

²⁶ A. Mason: *The General Strike in the North East*, (University of Hull, 1970) p.11

²⁷ *Ibid* p.15

²⁸ *Ibid* p.19

²⁹ *Ibid* pp.22-23

³⁰ *Ibid* p.25

³¹ *Ibid* pp.28-29

³² *Ibid* p.31

³³ *Ibid* p.31. See also oral history of J. Feeney in Bulletin of NE Labour History Society, 1970

³⁴ *Ibid* pp.34-35

³⁵ T. Lane: *The Union makes Us Strong*, p.21

³⁶ A. Clinton: *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain 1900-1940* (MUP, 1977), p.126

³⁷ Waites: OU Pamphlet on the General Strike, p.25 quoting A. Mason's University of Hull thesis 1970

Another indication of the importance of Newcastle was that the General Council selected Manchester and Newcastle as centres for the publication of the British Worker and a small Sunderland firm was used to print it.³⁸

As regards cases of violence Mason considered that Durham, Northumberland and Glamorgan had more than their fair share,³⁹ but, as far as the North East is concerned, the reports do not show this aspect. We have records of the police dealing firmly with incidents in Newcastle and Chester-le-Street.⁴⁰ There was only one case of an attempt by miners to derail the Flying Scotsman,⁴¹ but in addition at Middlesbrough the police were called out⁴² when there was heavy rioting and lorries were chained to the rails in an attempt to wreck a passenger train while crowds wrecked the station.⁴³ At Middlesbrough one man got 9 months hard labour and two others 3 months.⁴⁴ Three platelayers were arrested for stoning a train.⁴⁵ At Gateshead a crowd of 15,000-18,000 assembled with the arrest of two Blaydon councillors.⁴⁶

THE RCA AND THE STRIKE

The Sunday Times of 9 May reported that loyal clerks in the North East had said '... the RCA in many centres is governed by a small coterie of extremists high-minded and autocratic ...'.⁴⁷ The Railway Service Journal looking back saw it differently as RCA men and women playing a splendid and leading part in the greatest industrial struggle this country has ever seen. In the North East a correspondent in the Journal reflected with pride that it had rejoiced 'at having seen the day when 450 Railway Clerks in Darlington signed the Strike Roll, among the first being our own

38 Phillips *op cit*, pp.173-174

39 Mason *op cit*, p.103

40 R. Geary: *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893-1985*, p.51

41 Taylor *op cit*, p.245. Postgate and others p.68 and Mason *op cit*, p.69. I. Turner in Bulletin of NE Labour History Society 1984 claims they were looking for a coal train

42 Postgate and others *op cit*, p.57

43 Knowles: *Strikes - A Study in Industrial Conflict*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1952) p.290

44 CAB 27/332 10.5.1926

45 CAB 27/332. Bulletin 11

46 CAB 27/332. Bulletin 12

47 Railway Official Gazette 7 and 14.5.1926

Labour Mayor'. It referred to, in the country as a whole, wonderful responses of 50% out here, 60% out there, 75%, 80% and up to 90%.⁴⁸

As regards RCA members the Workers Chronicle reported that at Tyne Dock and Spennymoor all were out, at Darlington, Stockton and Middlesbrough 80% were out and at Tynemouth 50%.⁴⁹

Looking back much later a woman paid tribute to the fine achievement of the women who stood by their men.⁵⁰

Not all members of the RCA agreed with the strike and a correspondent in the October issue of the Journal stated: 'It is generally admitted that the general strike was a ghastly failure ...'.⁵¹

The year had begun with the general RCA case being rejected.⁵² The National Wages Board said that neither Unions nor Companies had established their case.⁵³ In the North East there were mass meetings.⁵⁴ Newcastle No.1 Branch was still concerned with the issue of women clerks.⁵⁵

As regards the legality of the strike Sir John Simon argued:

'Every railwayman, for example, was himself personally liable to be sued in the County Court for damages. Every trade union leader who had advised and permitted that course of action was liable in damages to the uttermost farthing of his personal possessions'.⁵⁶

Arguing against Simon, Slessor said that the strike was only illegal if it could be proved to be seditious conspiracy against the State and there was no evidence of this.⁵⁷ On 11 May Mr. Justice Astbury trying a case arising out of the general strike pronounced that it was not a trade dispute within the meaning of the law and there was no immunity.⁵⁸

48 Railway Service Journal 26.6.1926

49 The Workers Chronicle 8.5.1926

50 Mrs. Jolly in Bulletin of NE Labour History Society 1985 as quoted by M. Callcott

51 Railway Service Journal 26.10.1926

52 Railway Service Journal January 1926

53 Railway Service Journal January 1926

54 Railway Service Journal January 1926

55 Railway Service Journal January 1926 and February 1926

56 Haigh and others *op cit*, p.70

57 Felling: *History of Trade Unions*, p.176

58 Samuel: *Memoirs* (The Cressett Press, 1945), p.189

CAUSES OF THE STRIKE

There were many who thought that the Government had regarded a General Strike as inevitable and had determined to win it. These saw the strike as being political in nature. This view was supported by a statement of C.T. Cramp who said: 'Let us not trifle with the facts. Although denials were made to the charge that this was a struggle against the Government it obviously was such a struggle'.⁵⁹

Baldwin took an extremely simple but very stubborn line that the General Strike was an attempt at political revolution.⁶⁰ He said: 'There can be no negotiations. It can only end in a complete surrender'.⁶¹ The Daily Herald appeared to confirm this view when it commented: 'If it be war, so be it'.⁶²

This view however is countered by the comments of the Trade Union and political leaders. Thomas said: 'God keep us if the Government does not win' and 'I have never been in favour of a general strike'.⁶³ Initially the struggle began with high-level cooperation between the Government and the TUC to avert a coal stoppage.⁶⁴ Looking back in his autobiography, Snowden said that he was impressed by the incapacity and folly of the Government and the Trade Union leaders.⁶⁵ Hodge, the TU leader, described it as the greatest blunder ever committed in the history of Trade Unionism. Bevin commented that, before the strike, they were within five minutes of a settlement.⁶⁶ Beatrice Webb considered: 'The failure of the General Strike shows what a sane people the British are'.⁶⁷ Beatrice Webb had never been in doubt as her Diaries show. She recorded that the Strike was 'a monstrous irrelevance in the sphere of social reform'⁶⁸ and that 'the British labour movement has made itself ridiculous'.⁶⁹ She had

⁵⁹ Hutt: *The Post-war History of the British Working Class op cit*, p.148

⁶⁰ R.R. James: *Memoirs of a Conservative*, p.232

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.235

⁶² K. Martin: *The British Public and the General Strike*, p.65

⁶³ Postgate and others *op cit*, p.39

⁶⁴ McDonald: The Defeat of the General Strike in G. Peele and C. Cook: *The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939*, p.69

⁶⁵ P. Snowden: *An Autobiography*, p.732

⁶⁶ M. Stephens: *Ernest Bevin - Unskilled Labourer and World Statesman 1881-1951*, p.69

⁶⁷ As quoted in Pelling: *A History of British Trade Unions*, p.180

⁶⁸ B. Webb: *Diaries 1924-1943*, p.77

⁶⁹ *Ibid* p.81

forecast the failure recording, magisterially: 'The General Strike will fail - We have always been against a General Strike'.⁷⁰

Some other commentators considered that the attitude of the men had been reinforced by the hand of the radical left but this view was disputed by another contemporary commentator who referred to the Trade Union leaders' detestation of violence and their determination to make changes only by constitutional means⁷¹ and that the extremists had sunk out of sight.⁷² The Times commented: 'No one suggests for a moment that any considerable number of men on strike are animated by revolutionary motives'.⁷³ J.H. Thomas maintained: 'This is not a revolution, it is a plain economic dispute in which we want justice'.⁷⁴

As far as railwaymen are concerned Bagwell has pointed out the unusual nature of the strike because, although the 1926 strike was the longest, most complete and most costly strike, it had, unlike every other strike, nothing to do with the immediate objectives of the railwaymen.⁷⁵ A contemporary chronicler, Hamilton Fyfe, said that the problem was that miners never gave the General Council the power to act or withheld it.⁷⁶ A similar view was taken in the memo drawn up by a Labour Department official after the strike when he stated that the Industrial Council of the TUC would not throw over the miners by taking up any independent attitude.⁷⁷

As regards preparing for the event the record of the TUC does not suggest an attitude of determined planning for victory. The Government had prepared for a strike and the TUC had not.⁷⁸ The TUC Special Industrial Committee was established in July 1925. The council was left to deal with the mining dispute from Autumn 1925 to 27 April 1926. On 27 April 1926 the Ways and Means Committee replaced it.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁰ M. Cole: *B. Webb's Diaries 1924-1932*, 3.5.1926, p.90

⁷¹ Fyfe: *Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike* (Labour Publishing Co. Ltd., 1926), p.62

⁷² *Ibid* pp.68-69.

⁷³ Quoted in *ibid* p.70

⁷⁴ R.H. Haigh and others: *The Guardian Book of the General Strike* (Wildwood House, 1988), p.32

⁷⁵ Bagwell *op cit*, p.453

⁷⁶ Fyfe *op cit*, p.77

⁷⁷ PRO LAB 27/9, p.15

⁷⁸ Kingsley Martin *op cit*, p.26

⁷⁹ Lovell: The TUC Special Industrial Committee January-April 1926 in Briggs and Saville: *Essays in Labour History 1918-1939* (Croom Helm, London, 1977), pp.36-38

SIC had no policy and did not wish to get involved in negotiations.⁸⁰ In January 1926 the TUC discussed whether to have a general strike or action by Unions in sections. Meantime in September 1925 the Government had set up OMS to provide vital services.⁸¹ The TUC did not establish an actual Strike Organisation Committee until 5 May 1926 and it was not until 27 April that the full General Council considered the breakdown of negotiations.⁸² Cook later bitterly claimed that some leaders, notably Thomas, either from hypocrisy or lack of knowledge, were determined that no preparations should be made.⁸³

Shortly after the end of the general strike the LNER News reported that 800 strikers had returned to work⁸⁴ but a later issue recorded that:

'The Railway Unions have instructed their members that a Railway Strike has been called and some of the LNER men who returned to work this morning have left us again'.⁸⁵

The LNER and LMS stated that they could not give employment at that moment to more than 50 per cent of the pre-strike staff.⁸⁶ The LNER issued a Notice warning staff that the number of staff who could be employed would be substantially reduced.⁸⁷ When the railwaymen resumed work the Companies agreed to this but reserved the rights they (the Companies) possessed in consequence of their breaking their contracts.⁸⁸ The LNER Board Minutes show that the Board consulted Counsel whether they could claim against:

- (a) Workmen
- (b) The TUC and Unions
- (c) Officials

They were advised:

- (a) Yes

⁸⁰ *Ibid* p.53

⁸¹ Postgate, Wilkinson and Horrobin: *A Workers History of the Great Strike*, pp.11-12

⁸² Phillips *op cit*, p.139 and Farman: *The General Strike*, p.86

⁸³ A.J. Cook: *The Nine Days* (London Co-op Printing Society, n.d.) p.7

⁸⁴ LNER News No.4 13.5.1926

⁸⁵ LNER News No.6 14.5.1926

⁸⁶ Rapid News Service 13.5.1926 and Radio News Service No.5 14.5.1926

⁸⁷ LNER News No.6 14.5.1926

⁸⁸ H. Fyfe *op cit*, pp.82-83

(b) No

(c) No

In the case of workmen damages would probably be nominal.⁸⁹

At the end of the strike the government made clear that they had no powers to compel employers to take back every man who had been on strike and they had not entered into any obligation of any kind in that matter.⁹⁰ The Railway companies laid down certain conditions for reinstatement immediately after the end of the strike and the Unions ordered their members out on strike again.⁹¹ It was then agreed that the railwaymen would be taken on at their old wages and their old positions as fast as the railway companies could resume work.⁹² However railwaymen had to admit guilt for 'a wrongful act'.⁹³ Fenner Brockway referred to this agreement as an incredible document.⁹⁴ Thomas had claimed: 'I have seen to it that the members of the railways will be protected' but Cramp doubted this.⁹⁵

The immediate cause of the strike of railwaymen continuing was that men returning had to sign a statement that the railways reserved their position regarding the rights of men who had been on strike.⁹⁶ The LNER Company also said that they would give preference to those who had remained at work or sought re-employment immediately. The RCA in the North East decided to resume on 13 May.⁹⁷

In the North East the end of the general strike was greeted with little enthusiasm. Newcastle sent a deputation to London to confirm the capitulation.⁹⁸ York asked Darlington, Hull, Leeds and Doncaster to join in a continuation of the strike.⁹⁹ Men remained on strike at: Darlington, West Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Durham, Sunderland, Gateshead and Newcastle¹⁰⁰

⁸⁹ PRO RAIL 390/7 2.7.1926 Min.618

⁹⁰ Haigh, Morris and Peters: *The Guardian Book of the General Strike*, p.133

⁹¹ *Ibid* p.136

⁹² *Ibid* p.154

⁹³ *Ibid* p.158 and *British Worker* 15.5.1926

⁹⁴ F. Brockway: *Towards Tomorrow* (Hart Davis, London, 1977), p.73

⁹⁵ Hutt *op cit*, p.160

⁹⁶ *British Worker* 14.5.1926 and Bagwell *op cit*, p.486

⁹⁷ Mason *op cit*, pp.91-92

⁹⁸ Phillips *op cit*, p.264

⁹⁹ Postgate and others, p.90

¹⁰⁰ Mason *op cit*, p.93

The Darlington railwaymen after deliberations lasting nearly 24 hours decided to stand loyal to the agreement and to return to work. Newcastle did also but several at Gateshead and Blaydon sought further details. The majority of South Shields railwaymen did not return to work on the Saturday.¹⁰¹

The LNER made the customary public relations claim that their victory was:

'... largely due to the speed with which emergency services on the railways were established and to the wonderful and increasing efficiency with which they were maintained and improved day by day'.¹⁰²

Later in the year the LNER Board took two decisions. In July 1926 it took note that there was a need to review the War Bonus. This was because the cost of living had fallen substantially. The Company was involved in National Insurance and pensions, and the financial position of the Company had deteriorated. It was therefore decided to reduce the amount by 2s. per week after 1 July 1926.¹⁰³ In the next months there were signs that it was disposed to modify its attitude towards the disciplined clerks referred to as the 'Clause 4 cases'.¹⁰⁴

As for the Unions, following the strikes reaction set in. At Newcastle the Trades Council 'slumped into lethargy and exhaustion'.¹⁰⁵ At Middlesbrough affiliation of the Trades Council to the Labour Party was withdrawn.¹⁰⁶ In Darlington a further mass meeting was held on 21 May.¹⁰⁷ In October, with a continuing coal strike, the NUR had 45,000 men still out and 200,000 on a 3-day week.¹⁰⁸ Between 31 December 1925 and 31 December 1926 in the North East alone the NUR lost 1,000 members.¹⁰⁹ Shinwell estimated that the unions eventually lost ten years of membership.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ *The British Worker* 17.5.1926, No.11. See also PRO CAB 27/332, Bulletin 13A

¹⁰² PRO RAIL 390/7 24.6.1926, Min.612

¹⁰³ PRO RAIL 390/169 15.7.1926, Min.408

¹⁰⁴ *Railway Service Journal* August 1926

¹⁰⁵ Clinton: *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trade Councils in Britain 1900-1940*, p.170

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* p.170

¹⁰⁷ Mason *op cit*, p.94

¹⁰⁸ Hutt *op cit*, p.161

¹⁰⁹ Mason: *The General Strike in the North East* (1970), p.97

¹¹⁰ Shinwell: *Labour Story*, p.132

For the local authorities the continuing distress led to greater expenditure. The Government took note that the amount provided for the feeding of children in County Durham was raised from £26,000 to £160,000¹¹¹ and a later report showed that the County Durham Education Committee had expended £300,000 in relief. The Tynemouth Board of Guardians had raised the poor rate from 2s. 8½d. in the pound to 6s. 2d. in the pound.¹¹²

AFTER THE STRIKE

It was reported that pressure from King George V prevented penalising action being taken after the strike.¹¹³ Nevertheless the LNER was said to have endorsed the records of their staff with detailed indications as to their attitudes to the company during the strike and that this issue was still not settled in August 1927.¹¹⁴ After the 1926 strike the number of unemployed railwaymen rose from 9,376 to 20,126.¹¹⁵ The number of those making claims on the Poor Law rose to one and a half million claimants.¹¹⁶ In June 1926 111 wages clerks and 12 wages staff had not yet been taken back. It was reported that only 15% of LNER staff had not been reinstated compared with 20% of GWR and 25% of LMS.¹¹⁷

By the end of 1926 the NUR had spent almost half of its assets.¹¹⁸ The Railway Companies undertook to take back all employees except 'persons who have been guilty of violence and intimidation' but they suspended the guaranteed week except for employees who had not struck.¹¹⁹ However the Union had to engage in a tremendous fight for the re-employment of all of its members.¹²⁰ Fenner Brockway recorded: 'It looked as though the end of the strike might be the beginning of the revolution'. Even

111 PRO CAB 27/333

112 PRO CAB 27/334

113 Taylor *op cit*, p.247

114 Bagwell *op cit*, p.492

115 Knowles: *Strikes - A Study in Industrial Conflict*, p.273

116 Stevenson: *British Society 1914-1945*, p.300

117 PRO RAIL 390/2033 22.6.1926

118 Clegg *op cit*, Vol.2, p.407

119 Clegg *op cit*, Vol.2, p.411

120 Clegg *op cit*, Vol.2, p.415

the TUC responded to the general anger against the victimisation.¹²¹ The TUC and the Labour Party separated their organisations.¹²² The number of trade unionists continued to fall from 8.3 millions in 1920 to 4.4 millions in 1933.¹²³ The number of LNER staff fell from 207,500 in 1924 to 166,700 in 1933.¹²⁴ From 1926 the working classes remained quiet as the Labour Party concentrated on political issues and many former supporters switched allegiance to the Conservative Party in 1931 and 1935.¹²⁵ At an RCA meeting in early 1927 at Stockton only 4 members were present.¹²⁶ In November 1927 the LNER senior management were being advised: 'Since the strike there has been a considerable change in the attitude of the staff who are willing to waive their prejudices'.¹²⁷

Following the General Strike there were a number of reactionary actions. There were changes in unemployment benefit regulations, legislation regarding the Poor Law and action against certain Boards of Guardians and the 1927 Trade Disputes Act.¹²⁸ The 1927 Act made illegal any sympathetic strike or any strike 'designed or calculated to coerce the government'.¹²⁹ While it was a Bill one radical newspaper commented that it 'breathes hate and spitefulness in every clause'.¹³⁰ The Bill was opposed by the NUR, ASLEF and the RCA.¹³¹ There was an extensive 'Kill the Bill' movement and Bevin and McKinder visited the North East.¹³² A 'Kill the Bill' meeting was held at Stockton.¹³³ The Railway Service Journal expressed the hope that everyone would strongly oppose the Bill or 'we are lost'.¹³⁴ In the North East the resentment at the imposition of penalties on former strikers continued.¹³⁵ Overall the next few years up to

121 Brockway: *Inside the Left* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1942), p.192

122 Pelling: *A History of Trade Unions*, p.172

123 Stevenson *op cit*, pp.195-6

124 Bonavia: *A History of the LNER, Vol.1: The Early Years 1923-1933* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1982), p.84

125 Lane *op cit*, p.146

126 Railway Service Journal 27.4.1927

127 PRO RAIL 390/2033 25.11.1927

128 W. Hannington: *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936* (Wal Hallington, London, 1936), p.169

129 Taylor *op cit*, p.250

130 British Worker 29.4.1927

131 British Worker 13.5.1927

132 British Worker 6.5.1927

133 British Worker 20.5.1927

134 Railway Service Journal 27.5.1927

135 Railway Review 29.4.1927

1933 were bleak with Union officials fighting a prolonged rearguard action to save the achievements of 1919-1920.¹³⁶ The only favourable points were that the guaranteed week was to be restored¹³⁷ and that in the North East full-time working was restored for shopmen¹³⁸ and in August 1927 works and departmental line committees were established for shopmen.¹³⁹ It is interesting that in this climate the Darlington Branch of the NUR found time to urge recognition of the 'New China'.¹⁴⁰ The adverse climate did not cause the Unions to pull together. In 1928 the TGWU wanted to organise all transport workers but the NUR claimed 'men employed on railway-owned vehicles'¹⁴¹ and as late as 1933 the dispute continued.¹⁴² Negotiations at the same time for a merger between ASLEF and RCA were also bogged down and finally broke down in 1929.¹⁴³ Also in 1928 the Railways Salaried Staff (non-political) Association was formed but this was in the course of dissolution in 1929-1930.¹⁴⁴

A PERIOD OF CO-OPERATION

During this period of conflict some were arguing for co-operation between employers and employees to face the common problems. C.T. Cramp of the NUR suggested a Parliament of Industry to take industrial matters out of politics and this led to the joint Mond-Turner talks on co-operation.¹⁴⁵ The NUR Conference in Newcastle recorded agreement with the principle of co-operation.¹⁴⁶ In 1928 there were wholesale dismissals of cleaners.¹⁴⁷ On 18 July the NUR EC were told that from the end of that month the remaining war bonus would be withdrawn, enhanced payments for night duty, Sunday duty and overtime were to be cancelled and the guaranteed week and day were to

¹³⁶ Bagwell *op cit*, p.499

¹³⁷ Railway Review 25.2.1927

¹³⁸ Railway Review 1.4.1927

¹³⁹ Bagwell *op cit*, p.429

¹⁴⁰ Railway Review 18.2.1927

¹⁴¹ Bagwell *op cit*, p.505

¹⁴² Bagwell *ibid*, p.507

¹⁴³ Bagwell *ibid*, p.507 and Northern Echo 3.5.1929

¹⁴⁴ A.R. and C.P. Griffith: *The Non-Political Trade Union Movement in Briggs and Saville: Essays in Labour History 1918-1939*, p.133

¹⁴⁵ Wigham: *Strikes and the Government 1893-1981*, p.67 and p.70

¹⁴⁶ Railway Review 6.4.1928

¹⁴⁷ N. McKillop: *The Lighted Flame*, p.187

be withdrawn.¹⁴⁸ These proposals were rejected but the Unions agreed to a reduction of 2½% in wages of all staff.¹⁴⁹ The Railway Service Journal reported that in the North East Newcastle No.1 Branch members were swallowing the pill of the reduction with good grace.¹⁵⁰ July also saw a warning that short-time was likely to be imposed again on shopmen.¹⁵¹

In 1929 the LNER Board Minutes record that the

'Chief General Manager reported verbally on negotiations with the Railwaymen's Unions in connection with their applications for the discontinuance of the voluntary deduction of 2½% ...'.¹⁵²

The Board agreed that the 2½% would remain in force until 12 May 1930 and then increases or decreases would apply up to November 1930.¹⁵³ In October 1929 it was agreed that the 2½% would be restored on 12 May 1930 and normal conditions of work would be resumed in November 1930.¹⁵⁴ Earlier in the North East the Middlesbrough Branch at a meeting of the Railway Women's Guild had proposed that married women should be sacked but the motion was lost.¹⁵⁵ At the North Eastern Shopmen's Council Heaton Branch asked for the machinery for shopmen's negotiations to be withdrawn.¹⁵⁶

The year 1930 brought no relief. The LNER Board Minutes record pressure to reduce the wages of railwaymen.¹⁵⁷ At Darlington a dispute over a change in piece prices was to be referred to the Industrial Court.¹⁵⁸ Shopmen were to go on a five-day week from the end of April.¹⁵⁹ In August it was reported that 2,000 men had been dismissed in the North East and a meeting in October would fix a new programme.¹⁶⁰ There had been a large number of early retirements in the Region.¹⁶¹ Disputes extended

¹⁴⁸ Bagwell *op cit*, p.510

¹⁴⁹ Bagwell *ibid*, p.511

¹⁵⁰ Railway Service Journal 28.10.1928

¹⁵¹ Railway Review 6.7.1928

¹⁵² PRO RAIL 390/7 27.7.1929 Min.1065

¹⁵³ PRO RAIL 390/7 25.10.1929 Min1076

¹⁵⁴ Railway Review 18.10.1929

¹⁵⁵ Railway Review 19.7.1929

¹⁵⁶ Railway Review 9.8.1929

¹⁵⁷ PRO RAIL 390/7 25.7.1930 Min.1188, 26.9.1930 Min.1204 and 28.11.1930

¹⁵⁸ Railway Review 28.3.1930

¹⁵⁹ Railway Review 25.4.1930

¹⁶⁰ Railway Review 15.8.1930

¹⁶¹ Railway Review 5.9.1930

to the clerical side. At the beginning of the year Newcastle No.1 RCA Branch reported: 'All spoiling for want of a fight, preferably for better conditions and pay'.¹⁶² Later in the year mention was made of dismissals of clerical staff 63 and over.¹⁶³

Matters came to a climax at the end of the year. The RCA put in a claim for improved conditions of service following a special Conference.¹⁶⁴ The Companies countered this in November 1930 by making drastic proposals for worsened conditions and a wage cut.¹⁶⁵ The proposals were rejected in November and December.¹⁶⁶ The Railway Service Journal reported that: 'The great struggle has begun'.¹⁶⁷ At Middlesbrough a mass meeting of clerks decided to support the EC.¹⁶⁸ At Stockton the warning was made: 'Remember, if onslaught on railwaymen successful it will inevitably pave way for vicious attacks upon unorganised workers ...'.¹⁶⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Both the general strike and the subsequent railway strike were national in basis and the North East therefore followed suit in the national tradition. In both spheres however the level of militancy was no less than in other parts of the country. In the aftermath of the General Strike it would be unrealistic to expect a greater degree of militancy in the North East at a time when it was bearing the brunt of the heaviest unemployment. In his account of A Derelict Area, T. Sharp states that probably 70% to 75% of the total number of mineworkers were more or less permanently unemployed and only 14% of females were employed.¹⁷⁰ Between 1921 and 1931 in Shildon, County Durham 18% of the population migrated¹⁷¹ and Shildon was one of the most stricken places in the district.¹⁷² This pattern was repeated elsewhere. The North was no longer

¹⁶² Railway Service Journal Feb. 1930

¹⁶³ Railway Service Journal Sep. 1930

¹⁶⁴ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930

¹⁶⁵ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930 and McKillop *op cit*, p.198

¹⁶⁶ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930 and McKillop *op cit*, p.201

¹⁶⁷ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930

¹⁶⁸ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930

¹⁶⁹ Railway Service Journal 30.12.1930

¹⁷⁰ Sharp: *A Derelict Area*, (Woolf, Hogarth Press, 1935) p.27

¹⁷¹ *Ibid* p.32

¹⁷² *Ibid* p.33

so strong in its Unionism. In regard to contracting-in Northumberland and Durham had only 70.62% compared with the national average of 82.38%¹⁷³ although Middlesbrough recorded 84%.¹⁷⁴

It is not surprising that the end of the strike produced bitterness. Northern Light said: 'There is only one explanation for this treachery - our own leaders do not believe in Socialism'.¹⁷⁵ The Workers Weekly considered that the railwaymen's leaders had betrayed railwaymen.¹⁷⁶ A.J. Cook referred to J.H. Thomas as 'Judas Iscariot'.¹⁷⁷ C.T. Cramp in January 1927 said: 'We have not to blame the General Council for taking the action they did in calling off the strike. The pity of it is that it was ever called on'.¹⁷⁸ There was feeling also about the attitude of managers. Recollecting some fifty years later, Godfrey wrote in the Evening Despatch: 'It was the beginning of an 'us and them' brand of bitterness which was to poison industrial relations for the next half-century'.¹⁷⁹ There was feeling about 'blacklegs'. Detailing his memories Carr wrote of one who went back: 'He was blacklisted from our home for ever'.¹⁸⁰

There was feeling also against the Conservatives. It may have been that, when Baldwin portrayed himself as defending the British constitution against external threat, he played a winning card¹⁸¹ but the bitter hatred of the miners and other workers against the Tories was deep indeed and continued for fifty years.¹⁸²

As to the effect on relations between the Government and Trade Unions in the longer term there are conflicting views about this. Some commentators now argue that Trade Unions were less frequently attacked by employers after 1926 and the pace of wage reductions slowed considerably.¹⁸³ Others believe that the General Strike saw the

¹⁷³ Railway Service Journal June 1928

¹⁷⁴ Railway Service Journal August 1928

¹⁷⁵ Quoted by R. Page Arnot: *The General Strike in the North East*, p.274 in Ed. L.M. Munby: *The Luddites and Other Essays* (Michael Katanka, London, 1971)

¹⁷⁶ Workers Weekly 4.6.1926

¹⁷⁷ W.L. Chaloner: *The British Miners and the Coal Industry Between the Wars*

¹⁷⁸ J. Klugmann: *Marxism, Reformism and the General Strike* in J. Skelley: *The General Strike* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1976) p.98

¹⁷⁹ Evening Despatch supplement May 1976

¹⁸⁰ Bill Carr: *Memories of the General Strike* in the Bulletin of the North East Labour History Society 1976

¹⁸¹ Harrison: *Peaceable Kingdom* p.343

¹⁸² Carr *loc cit*

¹⁸³ E.g. K. Laybourn: *A History of British Trade Unionism c 1770-1990* (Sutton, Stroud, 1992) p.152

collapse of miners for more than a decade and it weakened the trade union movement. Both Citrine (TUC) and Bevin (Transport and General Workers' Union) sought accommodation with employers.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, at the end of 1930 the climate in railway industrial relations was as turbulent and threatening as it was at the beginning of the period under view in this thesis. But the Unions were much weaker to combat this situation.

¹⁸⁴ J. Saville: *The Labour Movement in Britain* (Faber & Faber, London, 1988) p.54

CHAPTER 11. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS FROM 1918-1930

During the war, Labour reiterated radical Liberal views and maintained its roots in radical Liberalism. Liberalism moved right because of the war.¹ The Representation of the People Act in 1918 transformed the electoral situation. It gave the vote to men over 21 and women over 30 if the woman or her husband owned or occupied land or premises of £5 or more.² The size of the electorate increased from 7,709,981 in 1910 to 21,392,322 in 1918 and this necessitated a redistribution of constituencies.³ Despite these changes there were a large number of absent voters in many constituencies, including of course soldiers. It was estimated that 1,500,000 soldiers did not vote in the 1918 Election.⁴ The overall effect of the changes in 1918 was to give Britain for the first time an electorate in which the industrial working class was predominant.⁵ The Act created more seats which Labour was likely to win.⁶ About a third of all constituencies in Britain were dominated by working-class and mining groups compared with a quarter before.⁷ An Election was necessary in 1918 because Parliament had exceeded its duration in the course of the war. When the Labour Party left the Coalition, Lloyd George was determined to exploit the Coalition situation and decided the Election would be fought on a Coalition basis. Certain candidates were given a 'Coupon'. In 1918 the ILP sponsored 50 candidates but the trade unions sponsored 160 of which half were from miners.⁸ The railway unions sponsored 15 candidates.⁹ The Labour Party included in its manifesto a claim for the nationalisation and democratic control of the railways.¹⁰ The importance of railways in the programmes reflected the growing power of the unions as a result of wartime developments. In

¹ D. Tanner: *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* p.382

² D. Thomson: *England in the Twentieth Century* p.61

³ C. Cook: *The Age of Alignment* (MacMillan Press Ltd., 1975) pp.3-4

⁴ H. Tracey: *The Book of the Labour Party Vol.1* p.231

⁵ R. McKibbin: *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (OUP, 1974) p.xv

⁶ Tanner *op cit* p.384

⁷ *Ibid* p.392

⁸ Tanner *op cit* pp.411-429

⁹ Purdue in thesis *op cit* p.40

¹⁰ F.W.S. Craig: *British General Election Manifestos*, pp.31-32

November 1917 the NUR put forward demands for post-war policies including nationalisation of the railways and the election of workers' representatives.¹¹ In the Election campaign Churchill said that nationalisation of the railways had been decided upon.¹² A Newcastle City member of the NUR produced a masterly pamphlet on the need for political work of the unions¹³ and J.H. Thomas appealed to all railwaymen to support Labour candidates.¹⁴ The Election saw the operation of new Parties. Altogether there was a bewildering range of party affiliations.¹⁵

The result was a landslide for the 'Coalitionists' and a disaster for the uncouped Liberals and for the ILP with only three of the latter being elected. Of the 57 Labour MPs 25 were members of the MFGB.¹⁶

Turning to the North East constituencies, there, as in other parts of the country, constituencies had been reorganised as a result of the 1918 Act. The effect of this change was to make Sedgefield go towards the Unionists and Seaham towards the Liberals.¹⁷ Newcastle was divided into 4 seats and the constituencies were renamed. (See Appendix 4).

The mining unions in the North East adopted a positive approach towards Elections. By the end of January 1918 local Labour Party associations had been established in all the County Divisions except Sedgefield. Seven of the eleven County Divisions in Durham supported the official miners candidate.¹⁸ The DMA in Durham provided and funded agents and other staff in a number of places.¹⁹

The Election began with some dissension between three Labour candidates over the end of the Coalition. Neville opposed it and Batey and Swan supported it.²⁰

In the North East there was a range of parties putting forward candidates. The results in the North East reflected broadly the situation in the country as a whole

11 Cole: *A History of the Labour Party* p.42

12 North Star 5.12.1918

13 Railway Review 8.3.1918

14 Railway Review 22.11.1918

15 Cole: *A History of the Labour Party*, p.83

16 E. Hopkins: *A Social History* ... p.222

17 Kinnear *op cit* p.70

18 W.R. Garside: *The Durham Miners 1919-1960* pp.319-322

19 Tanner *op cit* Appendix 5 p.465

20 North Star 18.11.1918

with the 'Couponed' candidates being largely successful. This was the position at Durham City, Gateshead, Darlington, South Shields, Sunderland, Newcastle, Tynemouth, Blaydon, Sedgefield and Jarrow. At Stockton and Chester-le-Street the Coalition candidates had a walk-over. At Hartlepoons the Independent Unionist Howard Gritten was elected and claimed: 'The workingmen of the Hartlepoons had stuck to him'.²¹ At Consett the Liberal candidate was successful.

There were some Labour victories in contested seats. Bishop Auckland provided one of the most interesting results. At the beginning of the campaign Ben Spoor, the Labour candidate, said he would stand down and this was accepted by the Divisional Association.²² He changed his mind and offered to stand if the ILP Council agreed. He was then chosen.²³ Rutherford, the Liberal candidate, suggested that the Bishop of Durham should be asked to arbitrate on whether he or Spoor was the true progressive candidate but Spoor would not agree to this.²⁴ It was reported that Vick, the Coalition candidate, had addressed a meeting of railway workers and was well received²⁵ but Thomas of the NUR urged all members of the NUR to back Spoor.²⁶ Spoor was elected. He wrote to Glasier of the ILP in December 1918:

'no agent was to be had: so two of our ordinary workers, a schoolteacher on holiday and a railway employee, who lost time in order to help, undertook the work ... the miners and railwaymen rallied in increasing numbers.'²⁷

However, Purdue attributes Spoor's success to his reputation as a lay preacher.²⁸ As opposed to his success, Hudson, the NUR candidate at Newcastle East and Cramp, the NUR nominee at Middlesbrough, lost: '... because we had the whole united forces of capitalism against us'.²⁹

²¹ North Star 30.12.1918

²² North Star 13.11.1918

²³ North Star 25.11.1918

²⁴ Auckland and County Chronicle 5.12.1918

²⁵ North Star 27.11.1918

²⁶ Auckland and County Chronicle 12.12.1918

²⁷ The Labour Leader 2.1.1919

²⁸ Purdue in *Centennial History*, p.36

²⁹ Quoted in Railway Review 10.1.1919

In 1919 there was a by-election at Chester-le-Street. The DMA sponsored J. Lawson. The Divisional Labour Party sponsored Henderson but Henderson withdrew and Lawson won.³⁰

THE ROLE OF THE ILP

Before looking at the Elections in the 1920s we need to consider the influence of the ILP, nationally and in the North East, in that period. The North East became a stronghold for the ILP. Some Trade Union Branches were Socialist in their complexion. The DMA remained a strong force providing candidates, agents and other help. There were also Clarion groups and a number of Socialist Sunday Schools. The Women's Section of the Labour Party absorbed the Women's Labour League.³¹ When we talk of ILP candidates we refer to those sponsored by ILP Branches, those whose main financial backing was from the ILP and members of the ILP.³² By 1922 the ILP Group numbered 32 MPs.³³ At the General Election of 1923 the ILP financed 91 candidates of whom 45 were elected but 120 of the 191 members of the Parliamentary Labour Party were members of the ILP.³⁴ In the General Election of 1924 the ILP sponsored 87 candidates of whom 32 were returned.³⁵ In 1922 it was estimated that there were 35,000 members of the ILP.³⁶ Railwaymen, especially signalmen, were the backbone of the Labour Party in the outposts.³⁷ In 1924 the ILP claimed nationally 5,000 of the 10,000 Labour councillors.³⁸

In the North East in the early 1920s the British Workers' League remained a factor. There was a strong Branch in Newcastle³⁹ and meetings were held at Darlington, Middlesbrough, West Hartlepool, Thornaby and Stockton.⁴⁰

³⁰ Garside *op cit* p.326

³¹ Gibb and Callcott: *The Labour Party in the North East Between the Wars*

³² R.E. Dowse: *Left in the Centre* (Longmans, 1966) p.92

³³ *Ibid* p.90

³⁴ *Ibid* p.102

³⁵ *Ibid* p.114

³⁶ Empire Citizen January 1922

³⁷ C. Howard: Local Labour Party Expansion in the 1920s in J.M. Winter: *The Working Class in Modern British History*

³⁸ A.W. Purdue in *Centennial History of the ILP* p.35

³⁹ Empire Citizen February 1922

⁴⁰ Empire Citizen August 1922

ELECTIONS FROM 1922-1924

By 1922 the Unionists had decided against continuing the Coalition under Lloyd George and voted to withdraw their support, which meant that Lloyd George could not continue. With the fall of the Lloyd George Coalition, and up to the General Election of 1924, the face of British politics was transformed.⁴¹ In the municipal elections the Labour Party made substantial gains especially in mining areas like Durham and South Wales.⁴² By 1921 a large section of the politically conscious working class had gone over to Labour.⁴³ The Labour Party had, meanwhile, broadened itself in several ways. In 1918 it had a new Constitution and it had allowed individual membership and women's organisations.⁴⁴

Looking at the North East, in Newcastle in 1921 the middle-class vote represented 20.3%.⁴⁵ The mining vote remained important, particularly in such areas as Bishop Auckland (50.7%), Blaydon (53.6%), Houghton-le-Spring (53.6%), Consett (55.4%), Chester-le-Street (56.6%), Durham (58.5%), Spennymoor (62.2%) and Seaham (71.4%), where it accounted for more than half.⁴⁶

There had been some defections from Labour. By 1920 the Communist Party of Great Britain had been founded and was made up of the BSP, most of the SLP and the South Wales Socialist Society.⁴⁷ The creation of the CPGB ended the SDF-BSP, SLP, Shop Stewards and Guild Socialism movements.⁴⁸

In the early 1920s the Lloyd George Liberals created their own organisation in many constituencies. In the North East these included Middlesbrough East, Middlesbrough West, Newcastle-on-Tyne E, Newcastle-on-Tyne N, Newcastle-on-Tyne W, Sunderland, Bishop Auckland, Blaydon, Jarrow and Spennymoor.⁴⁹

⁴¹ C. Cook: *The Age of Alignment* p.3

⁴² Hutt *op cit* p.30

⁴³ Morgan: *Consensus and Disunity* ... p.215

⁴⁴ E. Wertheimer: *Portrait of the Labour Party*, p.119

⁴⁵ Kinnear *op cit* p.122

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p.116

⁴⁷ Hutt *op cit* p.51

⁴⁸ Kendall *op cit* pp.276-282 and p.303

⁴⁹ Kinnear *op cit* p.88

The 1922 Election was basically a vote for freedom from Lloyd George at any price as the Liberals had been losing Elections and the Coalition had outlived its time.⁵⁰ Labour, in its programme called for the nationalisation of the mines and railways, worker control and adult suffrage.⁵¹ One analyst has stated that the 1922 Election was a most confused Election with hundreds of candidates standing as representatives of one of a dozen parties or groups of parties or no party at all.⁵²

The Conservatives gained 344 seats, Labour 142, the combined Liberals 115 and others 14. Mining seats provided 39 of the 82 Labour gains while Glasgow, Greater London; Newcastle, Gateshead and Sheffield provided 28 more.⁵³

In the North East Labour made its main gains in Durham and Northumberland.⁵⁴ At Darlington, Crooks, the Liberal candidate, was formerly of the ASRS. Both he, and Sherwood, the Labour candidate, addressed railwaymen at North Road shops.⁵⁵ Labour held Bishop Auckland and Chester-le-Street. It made gains in Spennymoor, Consett, Blaydon, Seaham, Gateshead, Sedgefield, Newcastle (3 seats), Durham City and Jarrow. It lost the seat at Barnard Castle. In Middlesbrough East, in a three-way contest, the Conservative won. In Middlesbrough West, where Thompson stood as a Liberal, opposed by a Coalition Liberal, Thompson won. In South Shields the Liberal Harney won.

The 1923 Election was brought about by Baldwin's announcement of a proposed Protectionist policy. Of the Labour candidates 89 were from the ILP. The NUR contributed £10,000 of a £23,565 fund to get Labour's message across⁵⁶ but Nationalisation, as a part of Labour's programme, was only mentioned by candidates with a large number of miners or railwaymen among their constituents.⁵⁷ The issue of control of the railways was in general played in low key in view of the recent Act as:

⁵⁰ P. Stead: 1922 and All That in *Historical Journal*, 1974

⁵¹ F.W.S. Craig: *British General Election Manifestos...* pp.36-43

⁵² Kinnear *op cit* pp.40-41

⁵³ Kinnear *op cit* p.42

⁵⁴ Mowatt *op cit* p.44

⁵⁵ *North Star* 1.11.1922 and *North Star* 9.11.1922

⁵⁶ R.W. Lyman: *The First Labour Government 1924* (Chapman & Hall, London, 1957), p.65

⁵⁷ *Ibid* p.60

'the companies could hardly have wished their position to become an Election issue'.⁵⁸ In the North East Thomas urged railwaymen in Hartlepoons to support Labour.⁵⁹ At Bishop Auckland, Bainbridge, the Liberal candidate, was a member of the NUR and a railwayman of thirty years standing.⁶⁰ Ben Spoor, the Labour candidate, addressing a large meeting outside the Works' gates at Shildon, repudiated the claim of the Liberal candidate that he had the support of railwaymen.⁶¹ At Gateshead the Liberal candidate told railwaymen that their rights would be at risk under Labour.⁶² In Darlington Sherwood addressed an open-air meeting at North Roads Shops.⁶³

The Election result gave the Conservatives 258 seats. Labour's share was increased to 191, the Liberals got 158 and others 8.

In the North East the Labour Party organisation depended, as we have seen very much on the miners. In non-industrial England the Liberals remained as the alternative to the Conservatives whereas in such industrial areas as the North East and Yorkshire they were a rival to Labour.⁶⁴ Labour remained frustrated by the Liberals continuing to hold industrial areas such as Tyneside and Teesside.⁶⁵

In the North East Labour lost some ground and its seats were reduced from 17 to 14. In Gateshead the Liberals won the seat and at Middlesbrough East there was also a Liberal gain. At Newcastle Labour lost two seats. In Newcastle East Henderson who had won the seat in a by-election in January was the victim of an anti-Labour pact.⁶⁶ At Barnard Castle Labour gained the seat. At Sedgefield the Conservative won from Labour by six votes. At Darlington there had been a by-election in February 1923 and W.E. Pease succeeded and held the seat for the Conservatives at the General Election.

⁵⁸ New Statesman 1.12.1923

⁵⁹ Northern Echo 28.11.1923

⁶⁰ North Star 21.11.1923

⁶¹ Northern Echo 1.12.1923

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ North Star 21.11.1923

⁶⁴ *Cook op cit* p.179

⁶⁵ *Kinnear op cit* p.44

⁶⁶ *Lyman op cit* p.64

THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT AND THE 1924 ELECTION

Following the 1923 Election, Baldwin decided to force Labour to form a minority Government. This was despite the fact that Ramsay MacDonald had previously said that no sane person would form a Government with a majority of about half a dozen⁶⁷ but, according to Hamilton, a biographer of MacDonald, he had said earlier that Labour should take the opportunity of a minority government on the basis that: 'Whoever is in office has opportunity and opportunity is always good'.⁶⁸ Shinwell commented that MacDonald had no intention of practising Socialism in a country where 5 out of every 7 votes were anti-Socialist.⁶⁹ Labour, during its period of office, sought to pulverise the Liberals, but the Liberals did not dare to precipitate an Election.⁷⁰

In the end the 1924 defeat was ostensibly due to the defeat of the Government in relation to its decision over the prosecution of a newspaper editor but it is likely that the Government resigned because the Liberals were opposed to a Russian loan.⁷¹ H.G. Wells wrote: 'But ... the new Labour Government has shown itself the least imaginative of Governments'.⁷² This was certainly the feeling of some trade union members who had lost faith because Labour had acted like all other Governments on industrial policy and the trade unions were to turn to industrial unrest and strikes once again.⁷³ However, the NUR remained loyal. In February 1924 the Darlington Branch assured Ramsay MacDonald of their support⁷⁴ and in October the NUR urged railwaymen to vote Labour.⁷⁵

The result of the Election was that the Conservatives gained 412 seats, Labour 151, Liberals 40 and others 12. Among the Labour MPs the ILP influence was significant with more than two-thirds of those returned having an ILP background although only 27 were listed as such.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Hutt *op cit* pp.77-79

⁶⁸ M.A. Hamilton: *J. Ramsay MacDonald* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1929) pp.174 and 185

⁶⁹ E. Shinwell: *The Labour Story* p.118

⁷⁰ T. Wilson: *The Downfall of the Liberal Party*, pp.268-274

⁷¹ *Ibid* p.277

⁷² Lyman *op cit* p.272

⁷³ Tracey *op cit* Vol.I pp.280-281

⁷⁴ Railway Review 8.2.1924

⁷⁵ Railway Review 24.10.1924 and Northern Echo 20.10.1924

⁷⁶ Cole: *History of the Labour Party* p.204

The Liberals lost the industrial seats.⁷⁷ In the North East Labour gained Gateshead where the Liberal vote fell from 17,300 to 9,200.⁷⁸ Labour also gained Middlesbrough East where Ellen Wilkinson was elected but in Middlesbrough West the Liberal was returned unopposed. Labour gained Newcastle East and Newcastle West. The Conservatives gained Stockton, Hartlepoons and Barnard Castle.

TAKING STOCK

Following this Election we need to take stock of the position in the North East as we prepare to consider the final Election in the period under study. The miners continued to be powerful and held a block of seats from 1922-1931. These were Blaydon (W. Whiteley), Chester-le-Street (J. Lawson), Durham (J. Ritson), Houghton-le-Spring (R. Richardson), Spennymoor (J. Batey) and, from 1929, Barnard Castle and Sedgfield.⁷⁹ In 1929 seven out of eleven Labour candidates were miners. The DMA was not dominant in Seaham, Consett, Bishop Auckland and Jarrow. Gateshead was unpredictable. Hartlepoons had a lingering Liberal tradition and Stockton was not so working class.⁸⁰

The extent of ILP influence began to diminish. In 1927-1928 there were 150 ILP Branches in the North East and in 1928-1929 120 Branches.⁸¹ At the General Election of 1929 the ILP sponsored 58 candidates of which 37 were elected.⁸²

Before the General Election there were several by-elections. At Darlington in 1926 Shepherd took the seat for Labour. The Liberals held Middlesbrough West in 1928. At Bishop Auckland Ben Spoor died and Mrs. Ruth Dalton held the seat for Labour until her husband Hugh Dalton could hold it at the General Election.⁸³

⁷⁷ Kinnear *op cit* p.46

⁷⁸ Lyman *op cit* p.26

⁷⁹ Gibb and Callcott: *The Labour Party in the North East Between the Wars* in Bulletin of the North East Group for the Study of Labour History, 1974

⁸⁰ Callcott in *The Nature and Extent of Political Change ...*

⁸¹ Dowse *op cit* p.150

⁸² *Ibid* p.152

⁸³ Auckland and County Chronicle 3.1.1929 and 14.2.1929

THE ELECTION OF 1929

The 1928 Electoral Act added five millions to the register and natural increase added a further two millions. The 'Flapper Vote' was important, as younger women secured the vote for the first time at 21.⁸⁴ The Election was the first time that female votes outnumbered male votes.⁸⁵ The Election was necessary because Parliament had run its full course. Labour blamed the Government for the General Strike, advocated nationalisation of the mines and supported emancipation of women. On railways the Party proclaimed:

'The railways could, without practical difficulty, be transferred to public ownership, while tramway and omnibus services are already in many areas owned and operated by local authorities.'⁸⁶

Railways featured in the Conservative programme. Baldwin promised that the railways would be modernised and reorganised⁸⁷ and that the Conservatives would take such other steps as were necessary to assist the railways.⁸⁸ The New Statesman, however, saw the raising of the issue as a 'stunt'.⁸⁹ The 1929 Election was also notable for having 17 RCA candidates.

At the Election, Labour gained most seats (287), the Conservatives gained 260, Liberals 59 and others 9. Trade union members were in a minority among the Labour MPs.⁹⁰ The General Election campaign was not exciting according to the Northern Echo.⁹¹ Labour held on to the seats gained at the Darlington and Bishop Auckland by-elections. Labour made gains at Sedgefield, South Shields, Stockton, Sunderland (both seats) and Barnard Castle. Referring later to the Stockton result, Harold Macmillan, the defeated Conservative candidate wrote that he had been obliged to argue 'Safety First' but his constituents did not want this 'so they properly booted me out'.⁹²

⁸⁴ Taylor *op cit* p.101 and p.262 and Cole: *A History of the Labour Party* p.217

⁸⁵ Callcott: *The nature of Political Change ...*

⁸⁶ The Labour Party: *Labour and the Nation*, p.28

⁸⁷ Northern Echo 13.5.1929

⁸⁸ F.W.S. Craig: *Manifestos ...* p.46

⁸⁹ New Statesman 18.5.1929

⁹⁰ Taylor *op cit* p.271

⁹¹ Northern Echo 24.5.1929

⁹² H. Macmillan: *The Past Masters* (Macmillan, 1975) p.64

CONCLUSIONS

The story given above as regards the contribution of railwaymen to the political scene lacks the analysis possible in relation to their contribution to the industrial relations scene. There are several reasons for this. As we saw earlier in this study, the numbers of railwaymen in individual constituencies was small in relation to the numbers of other workers, e.g. miners and they could not exert a majority influence. Throughout this period the miners in the North East maintained their strong organisation and influence on selection of candidates and had a solid block of seats. By this time with the progressive breakdown of the Liberal Party many working-class voters had gone over to the Labour Party. The railway Unions at national level backed the Labour Party and presumably many railway workers did so. Railway workers during this period, together with other workers, must have become disenchanted with political solutions to unemployment and wage cuts during the depression. The period saw the enfranchisement of women in 1918 and 1929 and the wives of railwaymen may well have added to the Labour vote. We have to speculate in these respects because there is lack of evidence.

The 1929 Election virtually completed the Labour Party's conquest of the industrial areas. Durham returned 17 Labour members, 1 Conservative and no Liberals.⁹³ By 1929 Labour held every seat in Durham County except for Hartlepool.⁹⁴ But, in terms of power in Government, the Labour supremacy was short-lived. This study ends just short of the fall of the Labour Government. It was unfortunate that Labour had to cope with the great financial and economic crisis. Much went wrong but perhaps the most surprising comment was that of Mosley, disenchanted with Labour's programme, who commented: '... yet everything is subordinated to our promotion of railway development'.⁹⁵

⁹³ New Statesman 8.6.1929

⁹⁴ Gibb and Callcott *loc cit*

⁹⁵ R. Skidelski: *Politicians and the Slump* (Macmillan, 1967) p.175

When in 1931 the Government fell and MacDonald, that 'master of political obfuscation'⁹⁶ formed a National Government, two commentators later stated: 'It was argued that 1931 should be regarded as the symbolic end of a bankrupt tradition, the demise not only of MacDonald but also of MacDonaldism'.⁹⁷

In Durham also, Labour's hold was rather tenuous. Some of the seats had been gained only because of the intervention of the Liberals making it a three-cornered contest. In 1931 Labour lost every seat in Durham except Chester-le-Street and Spennymoor.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ R. Eatwell and A. Wright: *Labour and the Lessons of 1931* (History, Vol.63, 1978)

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁹⁸ M. Callcott: The Making of a Labour Stronghold in M. Callcott and R. Challinor: *Working Class Politics in North East England* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, 1983) pp.72-73

CHAPTER 12. CONCLUSIONS

In the Preface to this study, the questions to be answered were posed. It is now necessary to consider to what extent they have been answered. But, before going into detail, we need to repeat a number of relevant points.

The first relates to 'militancy'. Throughout this study I have used, as a measure of the impact of attitudes on railwaymen in the North East, the concept of 'militancy' and this has been the case particularly in relation to industrial militancy. The dictionary defines a militant as a person 'engaged in warfare; warlike; combative'.¹ A perception of militancy however results from a subjective assessment of an individual and/or an institution in relation to their thoughts, writings and actions and this subjective assessment may vary from incident to incident, time of occurrence and nature of perceiver. In relation to the perceiver the assessment may not be a rational one but can be influenced by background and beliefs of the perceiver and the state of mind of themselves and their peer group.

Strikes are a particularly emotive aspect. In Victorian times it is clear that strikes were regarded by some as a safety-valve allowing the escape of steam and a return to a more amenable climate. Cronin states that by 1871 strikes had become common and the public came to accept them as inevitable. Howell is quoted: 'The right to strike is not seriously disputed'.² There is also the point that left-wing historians tend to see militancy as synonymous with 'political consciousness' but one could, of course, see a person, who while satisfying the dictionary definition of militancy, was militant in a defensive way. This would involve defensive actions protecting interests rather than purely offensive and revolutionary actions. This concept applies very much to the railwaymen in the North East who were protecting sectional interests and defending

¹ *Readers Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary* Vol.2 p.564

² J.E. Cronin: *Strikes 1870-1914* in C. Wrigley: *A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914* (The Harvester Press, Portsmouth, 1982) p.78

traditional practices. Such an attitude could suggest a 'labourist' rather than a 'socialist' militancy.

Trade Unions were similarly regarded as a safety valve. Churchill in 1908 stated 'They (Trade Unions) are the antithesis of socialism'.³ In 1919 he added 'With a powerful trade union peace or war could be made'.⁴ In 1919 also Bonar Law said that Trade Union organisation was the only thing between the Government and anarchy'.⁵ E.H. Hunt has also commented that political agitators were no more welcome to the average union leader than to employers'.⁶

Another factor in the assessment of militancy is the frame of reference of the managers. The basic attitude of the railway companies in the early days was a mixture of paternalism and military discipline. This was reflected in the view given by Findlay, GM North Western Railway, to the Parliamentary Select Committee: 'You might as well have a trade union or an amalgamated society in the army, where discipline has to be kept at a very high standard, as have it on the railways'.⁷

Findlay also said that contributions to benevolent funds had 'prevented the servants of the North Western to any considerable extent joining the Trades Union Association, that is, the Amalgamated Society'.⁸ In 1907, Cosmo Bonsor, chairman of the South Eastern Railway Company said: 'The company had refused, and would continue to refuse, to permit a third party to come to their Board Room to discuss with them as to how they were to carry on their own business'.⁹ The Directors of the railway Companies regarded railways as being outside of the main stream of British industrial development.¹⁰ The NER company prided itself on its progressive attitude towards the unions and industrial relations and seemed puzzled that this attitude did not save it from industrial trouble and, indeed, in the eyes of some exposed it even more. Lord Claude

³ P. Addison: *Churchill on the Home Front* (Pimlico, 1993), p.67

⁴ *Ibid* p.206

⁵ P.S. Bagwell: *The Triple Industrial Alliance 1913-1922*, p.106 in A. Briggs and J. Saville: *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*

⁶ E.H. Hunt: *Labour History*, p.337

⁷ Quoted in Pelling: *History of British Trade Unionism* p.82

⁸ Bagwell: *Transport in Wrigley op cit* pp.232-233

⁹ *Ibid* p.231

¹⁰ G. Alderman: *The Railway Companies and the Growth of Trade Unionism in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries* in *Historical Journal* XIV 1971

Hamilton stated: '... since it recognised the Amalgamated Society, there had been nothing but unrest and agitation among the staff'.¹¹ A question on this theme was put to T. Lowth, a Union witness, at the Commission of Inquiry into conciliation schemes. He was asked: 'How was it that North Eastern did not escape trouble?' He replied: 'For the reason that it was necessary for the protection of the men who were out to declare a general strike'.¹²

When analysing strikes and industrial unrest during this period we have to rely on newspaper accounts and another factor is their frame of reference. Newspapers in the North East tended to either condemn unionism and industrial action out of hand or to take what they regarded as a 'liberal' view:

'We do not ask operators to abandon their Unions but only that those Unions should restrict themselves to legitimate objects. To act in contradiction to the principles of free-trade and free labour is not legitimate ... a union of Trades might find a legitimate sphere for exerting a most useful agency - without any resort to violence, with no stoppage of work'.¹³

Although this comment came at an early stage of unionism on the railways it was reflected for some time as a viewpoint.

It is also necessary to consider the viewpoint of the workingman. We have seen earlier references to the mentality of the men in the North East and their dogged and obstinate - or pugnacious -approach. This is linked to what has since been called the concept of 'fairation' which is used as the basis of that which is tolerable or not.¹⁴

In the end, therefore, it is impossible to avoid a subjective assessment of 'militancy' to some extent at least. Looking at local and regional levels certain criteria can be applied, e.g. comparing attitudes and actions of employees and Branches with that of other employees, other Branches and the attitude taken by their Unions and the leaders of those Unions.

¹¹ Quoted in H. du Parq: *Life of Lloyd George* Vol.3 p.494

¹² *Locomotive Journal* September 1911

¹³ *The Darlington Mercury* 24.12.1864

¹⁴ R. Blackburn and A. Cockburn: *The Incompatibles* (Penguin, London, 1967), p.82

Next we need to restate some pertinent facts about railwaymen in the North East. The first point is, as we have shown earlier in this study, that railwaymen throughout the period were not numerically important or predominant when compared with workers in other trades. Coal mining was particularly important. This was so across the area as a whole and particularly so in relation to individual constituencies. Shipbuilding was important in certain constituencies. The iron and steel trade was also numerically significant in certain areas. Even where there were concentrations of railwaymen the numbers were not significant in relation to other trades like these. It is true that there were pockets of railwaymen where there were depots and workshops but these were small and less compact than, for example, concentrations of miners in particular collieries and union Branches. The railway working force was scattered over a large area.

Earlier in this study we quoted Pelling's assessments of the nature of the constituencies in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1918 there were changes in the constituencies and Maureen Callcott has updated the structure of these constituencies. Between 1918 and 1920, Constituency Labour Parties were funded in all of the Divisions. There were local Labour Parties at Gateshead, South Shields, Jarrow and Sunderland and local Labour Associations at Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland and The Hartlepoons. In her view Barnard Castle and Sedgefield were rural and vulnerable. Bishop Auckland, Chester-le-Street, Durham, Houghton-le-Spring, Spennymoor and Seaham were strong mining centres. Consett was also influenced by miners but the iron industry was important. Blaydon was a mixture with a residential element. Jarrow contained both mining and shipbuilding influences. The position in the boroughs was more complex. Only in The Hartlepoons were the railway unions influential. Sunderland was a mix of working-class and middle-class.¹⁵

Second, railwaymen worked exceedingly long hours which left them little time to vote or play any part in political meetings. In his speech on the Absent Voters Bill in 1925 Bromley, of ASLEF, pointed out that many railwaymen were debarred from

¹⁵ M. Callcott: *The Making of a Labour Stronghold* in M. Callcott and R. Challinor: *Working Class Politics in North East England* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, 1983) pp.63-69

voting at either municipal or national elections because of the nature of their employment which took them away from home.¹⁶ The Bill was defeated but in fact there were arrangements at the time for recording of absent votes.

Third, the railway industry, which started in the North East, was heavily paternalistic in style, as we have seen. However much the Company might protest that men were free to vote according to their conscience, it is clear that there were inhibitions on this in practice at least in some areas and for some time after the passing of the Ballot Act.

Fourth, by the time that the railwaymen were pressing for political representation, the DMA had the situation well in hand. Burt and McDonald were the first two miners' representatives. At the 1881 Trades Union Congress, Crawford (Durham Miners) pleaded for workmen representation and, in 1884, John Wilson of the Durham Miners proposed a motion regretting: '... that so small a number of direct representatives of Labour have been sent to Parliament'.¹⁷ The DMA came to an understanding with the Liberals in 1885 and they brought about an entrenched Lib-Lab supremacy in much of the North East. About half-way through the period of this study they moved towards the Labour Party but the Liberalism of the area remained in force for some time after that. They were not therefore a natural ally for the railwaymen.

Fifth, the DMA was in a much stronger position than railway unions, to influence the situation in the North East. For almost half of the period the DMA was distinct from the MFGB and was able to follow its own policies. By the time it joined the MFGB it had an established base of power. The ASRS branches in the North were part of a national body even though in industrial terms they pursued their own policies at times.

Sixth, the ASRS was rather late in entering the political scene. The miners had their political representatives from the 1870s onwards. It is true, that in his *Authentic History of Railway Trade Unionism*, C. Bassett Vincent made the resounding claim, in relation to the 1870s: 'I had become the Railway Men's Political

¹⁶ *Locomotive Journal* June 1925

¹⁷ Rose: *The Coming Force* (ILP, Manchester, 1909) p.35

Representative' and that at the General Elections 'we got 'our man' in'¹⁸ but there may well have been an element of doubt about this. In 1885 Branch opinions varied on a suggestion for political representation and it was not until 1899 that Thomas R. Steele of the Doncaster Branch encouraged his Branch to put forward the motion which led to the inaugural meeting of the LRC.¹⁹

Seventh, the geographical isolation of the railwaymen was compounded by the complex grade system which made both industrial and political unity difficult to achieve. For much of the period the different grades pursued their separate interests, although there were All-grades movements. Nor was there an industry-wide union and approach. An element of fusion was brought about with the foundation of the NUR but, both before and after that, relations with ASLEF were distinctly frosty. The extent to which the 'labour aristocracy' contributed to this disunity is a matter of dispute. Pelling points out that the concept of the 'labour aristocracy' was developed to allow Marx to accommodate in his theories the existence of prosperous non-Socialist workers. Engels went on in *Commonweal* 1885 to develop the concept further, but Pelling quotes Hobsbawm's view that: 'there is no single simple criteria of membership of a 'labour aristocracy' and that Engels and Hobsbawm use different criteria.²⁰ He comes down firmly against a 'labour aristocracy' in the case of railwaymen, claiming that non-recognition by the employer (except of course the element in the NER), successive all-grades movements and merging in 1913, preclude an aristocratic elite.²¹

Eighth, we need to consider the attitude of the men and the men's trade unions to political pressure. In 1900 Harry Quelch wrote:

'Trade Unions are anything - Liberal, Conservative, Radical, Home Rule, Socialist, Nothingarian (especially the latter) and while that is true there is little hope of combining them together for political action'.²²

¹⁸ C. Bassett Vincent: *An Authentic History of British Trade Unionism* (reprint Derby Printers Limited, 1963) p.21

¹⁹ K. Laybourn: *A History of British Trade Unionism c 1770-1990*, p.83

²⁰ Pelling: *Popular Politics ...* pp.37-41

²¹ *Ibid* p.51

²² L. Munby: *Marxism and the British Labour Movement 1880-1900* in *Marxism Today*, December 1957

In the Locomotive Journal of May 1909 'An Old Fogey' wrote: 'I am at a loss to understand how trade unionism and socialism can be blended'.²³ Writing in 1909, Frank Rose stated: 'Socialism and Trade Unionism are commonly regarded as distinct factors of modern industrial and social progress'.²⁴ Bell, in his study of Trade Unionism also stated: 'Socialism was never the object of Trade Unions'.²⁵ Trade Unions collaborated with Socialists because they wanted protection against legislation and judge-made law rather than from an ideological desire to change the world.²⁶

The wartime developments caused a more positive approach as we have seen but during the period 1918-1926 the dominant ideology within the trade union movement was 'neither syndicalist or conventionally Labourist. Rather it contained elements of both'.²⁷ In 1921 J. Sweeney of ASLEF, speaking at Middlesbrough, referred to the need of a closer connection between the industrial and political movements'.²⁸

A decade earlier Lloyd George had said working men would not leave their existing parties for Labour²⁹ but a wiser colleague, Riddell, warned that eventually the working classes would turn to the political machine.³⁰

There are conflicting views, as we have seen, about when trade unionists swung over to Labour and for what reason and this is linked with the cause, and timing, of the decline of Liberalism. Equally controversial is the dispute over if, and when, class became a factor. Earlier accounts said that it only became important after 1918 but later writers have challenged this. It seems probable however that Liberalism declined with the rise of class consciousness. Wald concludes: 'Some characteristics of the Liberals rendered them incapable of making the transition to a class-based party system'.³¹

²³ Locomotive Journal May 1909

²⁴ F. Rose *op cit* p.viii

²⁵ R. Bell: *Trade Unionism* (Jack, London, 1907) p.77

²⁶ Pelling: *Popular Politics* ... pp.14-15

²⁷ J. Klugmann: *Marxism, Reformism and the General Strike* in J. Skelley: *The General Strike 1926* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1976) p.377

²⁸ Locomotive Journal May 1909

²⁹ D. Lloyd George: *Better Times* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), p.34

³⁰ Lord Riddell: *More Pages from My Diary* (Country Life, 1934) p.39

³¹ K.D. Wald: *Class and the Vote Before the First World War* in Journal of Political Science 1978

THE ROLE PLAYED BY RAILWAYMEN IN THE POLITICAL FIELD

In the early days of the railway in the North East we have seen that the individual railwaymen played little part in Elections and in political debates. Some of the reasons for this are set out above in the general comments on factors affecting railwaymen. Also, right up to 1884, many railwaymen did not have the vote either because they did not meet the statutory qualifications or because of failure to get on the registers. The paternalism of the Company in addition acted as a deterrent even though, as we have seen, there were frequent indications that men could vote according to their conscience. Some railwaymen did take part in District Trade Associations and Councils where they were exposed to the influence of more radical members from the Miners and Engineers unions but there is no evidence that they were greatly affected by this. The year 1884 should have been a landmark as it gave more railwaymen the vote, subject to the rigours of registration, but there was again no evidence of significant militancy. Up to this time also the ASRS had not been out in front in demands for political action. Neither individual railwaymen, nor ASRS officials were among the first workingmen candidates to be MPs.

In 1892 a motion at the Trades Union Congress urged a scheme for Independent Labour Representation³² and the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 marked something of a watershed. The ILP soon gained influence in the Executive of the ASRS. Railwaymen did play a distinct role in the drive to Labour politics and the ASRS was in many ways an ILP union.³³ In 1894 the ASRS played a major role in putting forward to their AGM a motion for Labour representation and in 1898 the appointment of Wardle as Editor of the *Railway Review* was significant. The ILP was also particularly influential in the North East and early Branches were formed. Some ASRS Branches were more influenced than others and contained ILP members. From the 1890s onwards the ASRS became more political. At Elections model lists of questions for candidates were produced. Although some members objected, Branches

³² C. Sweet: *The Formation of the Labour Party* in Marxism Today October 1959

³³ D. Howell: *British Workers and the ILP* p.83

would indicate which candidate should be supported as better representing the interests of railwaymen. The ASRS began to feel that it should at least have token representation in Parliament through its Secretary and some ASRS Branches began to work with the ILP culminating in the moving of the motion to summon the meeting which led to the formation of the LRC. At this point Richard Bell became an MP but he regarded himself as free to support other Parties. Nevertheless he accompanied this degree of independence with constant activity on behalf of railwaymen and was indefatigable in the asking of questions and pressing for action. When in 1904 Bell was attacked for his attitude to other Parties, Newcastle, Durham and Ferryhill supported him and Newcastle declared him 'an acquisition and a credit to the Labour Party'.³⁴

The ASRS was one of the first Unions to affiliate to the LRC and it recognised the need for legislation and support to protect itself from judicial decisions of the type indicated by the Taff Vale judgement. In 1901 the ASRS decided to ballot members on an annual levy of 1s. for representation in Parliament.³⁵ As regards the Taff Vale judgement Bell was a maverick considering that the judgement would act as a discipline on members. The LRC sought to counter this independence and the motion at their Newcastle Conference in 1903 that members of the EC should abstain from identifying themselves with, or promoting the interests of any section of the Liberal and Conservative parties was aimed at Richard Bell.³⁶

Railwaymen in the North East began to play a more important role although this was restricted to a few individuals. At Gateshead, Peacock of the ASRS, was a key figure in the constituency and played a major role in the run-up to the 1904 by-election. Bell supported Johnson, the Liberal candidate, but the ILP and LRC were anxious to run a candidate against him. Peacock, a railwayman and Secretary of Gateshead ILP, wrote to Ramsay MacDonald but Johnson ran and proclaimed: 'Railwaymen have taken a gallant stand in this election'.³⁷ Walter Hudson became an

³⁴ Railway Review 4.3.1904, 25.3.1904, 8.4.1904 and 22.4.1904

³⁵ Railway Review 6.12.1901

³⁶ T. Barrow: *The Labour Representation Committee Conference at Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1903* in M. Callcott and R. Challinor: *Working Class Politics ...* p.43

³⁷ Railway Review 29.1.1904

MP and a major speaker for the rights of railwaymen. The Osborne judgement was a setback for the ASRS but the slowness of the Liberal administration in reacting to this swung a large number of trade unionists to the Labour Party.³⁸ Although in most constituencies, railwaymen were not numerically significant, they began to be mentioned more in the activities at Election time. Hudson at Newcastle singled them out for mention in his victory. Increasingly, they and their unions, urged support for local Labour candidates or, in the absence of these, for other candidates. However, as late as the 1929 General Election, ASLEF was still having to spell it out: 'The time has surely come when locomotivemen should drop old sentimental allegiance to either of the capitalist political parties and turn their attention to their own party'.³⁹

During the First World War political activity was governed by the truce. Also a high proportion of railwaymen enlisted and were not able to follow their political leanings. The 1918 Act brought in women as voters and greatly extended the electorate. Many soldiers were not able to vote and the Election was in any case a highly artificial one because of the 'Coupon' effect.

The Elections of the 1920s showed that the trade unionists had now largely swung over to Labour even in the North East where the Liberal influence had lasted for a long time. The North East was particularly strong in Labour Party organisations and the miners made sure that these were adequately staffed. Railwaymen, especially signalmen, were the backbone of the Labour Party in the outposts.⁴⁰ There were more railway union candidates. In 1922 the Locomotive Journal referred to the idea of forming in certain constituencies: 'A Joint Committee of the three Unions to organise the railway vote and direct it into the right channel'.⁴¹ In 1924 ASLEF asked men: 'to support and assist labour candidates throughout the country'.⁴² Bromley of ASLEF finally became an MP and in the late twenties played a major part in Parliament. In 1929 J.H. Palin at Newcastle West and E. Scott at Newcastle North were railway

³⁸ J. Strachey: *What Are We To Do?* (Gollancz, London, 1938) p.43

³⁹ Locomotive Journal April 1929

⁴⁰ C. Howard: *Local Labour Party Expansion ...* in J.M. Winter *op cit* p.79

⁴¹ Locomotive Journal March 1922

⁴² Locomotive Journal December 1923

union candidates and after the 1929 Election there were 20 railway union MPs.⁴³ This began to remedy the earlier shortfall of results to effort expended.

THE RAILWAY CONSTITUENCIES

As we have seen, Maureen Callcott assessed Hartlepoons as being the one constituency in the North East after 1918 in which railwaymen were influential but, prior to that date, we have seen that Bishop Auckland and Darlington were also influenced by them. It might therefore be instructive to look at the representation in these three constituencies after 1918. If we take first Darlington the seat was won in the 1918 Election by H. Pike Pease, Coalitionist Unionist. In the 1922 Election meetings of the British Workers' League were held at Darlington.⁴⁴ Crooks, the Independent Liberal candidate, was a former ASRS member but H. Pike Pease (C) was successful. In 1923 W.E. Pease (C) succeeded H. Pike Pease and held the seat at the General Election in both 1923 and 1924. In 1926 Shepherd took the seat for Labour at a by-election and held it in the 1929 General Election.

At Bishop Auckland, Ben Spoor gained the seat for Labour in 1918. He was helped in his campaign by a railwayman and he recorded that: 'the railwaymen rallied in increasing numbers'.⁴⁵ Spoor held the seat in the 1922, 1923 and 1924 Elections. Following his death, Ruth Dalton held on to the seat at the by-election until her husband Hugh Dalton could take over at the General Election.

In the Hartlepoons, Sherwood stood as a Labour candidate in 1918 and there was a Coalitionist Unionist candidate. However, Gritten stood as an Independent Unionist and won. He said: 'The working men of the Hartlepoons had stuck to him'.⁴⁶ In 1922 the Liberals gained Hartlepoons and held it in 1923. In 1924 the seat was gained by the Conservatives and in 1929 was the only seat in Durham County not held by Labour.

⁴³ Locomotive Journal May 1929 and July 1929

⁴⁴ Empire Citizen August 1922

⁴⁵ Labour Leader 2.1.1919

⁴⁶ North Star 30.12.1918

The analysis of the history of these three seats shows an inconsistent pattern. Bishop Auckland remained consistently Labour. Darlington was Conservative but went to Labour in 1926. The Hartlepoons went from Liberal to Conservative.

THE ROLE OF NORTH EAST RAILWAYMEN IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Many of the factors which influenced the political activities of railwaymen in the North East are relevant also to the industrial activities but have produced a different outcome. There were additional factors. Railwaymen were 'one of the most conscientious classes in the community'⁴⁷ and were drawn from 'literate, respectable and sober families'.⁴⁸ On this point, in a symposium on labour history in 1979, Samuel, discussing the respectability of certain trades and professions, said that, in the case of railway servants: '... the character of respectability was attained by the whole trade'.⁴⁹

With such men there was a natural tendency to rely on paternalism and paternal bargaining to protect their rights and paternalism also provided positive incentives to good behaviour and loyalty in the form of housing and pension schemes. Hackworth referred to: 'that confidence between master and men born of a perfect understanding between them'.⁵⁰

There were other factors which militated against protest. The first was that the men were subject to a strong disciplinary code because safety of life was involved and enforcement of this code covered activities outside of the job as well as within it. Secondly the men were divided into a large number of grades and one NER Director admitted: 'We keep the men in classes as much as we can in order to keep the wages as low as possible'.⁵¹ Thirdly the men should not have had to face the same causes of concern as with other Companies because the men on the North East Board had grown up in a climate of industrial relations which allowed for arbitration and were accustomed to dealing with trade unions.

⁴⁷ Kenny *op cit* pp.4-5

⁴⁸ Benson: *The Working Class* ... p.153

⁴⁹ See *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 40, 1980

⁵⁰ Young: *Timothy Hackworth* p.332

⁵¹ Gupta *loc cit* p.127

Despite these factors, men in the North East sought redress of grievances from almost the very beginning of the railways. Initially they relied on humble petitions and memorials and face-to-face contact with local management. In the 1860s they turned to trade unionism. In 1866 the Engine Drivers and Firemen's United Association promised them support and in 1867 occurred a major strike. The men were defeated, there was much personal distress and unionism suffered a major setback. Despite this, when in the 1870s the ASRS was formed, men in the North East formed branches and the ASRS had a much higher proportion of members in the North East. Their activities influenced the ASRS in 1890-1891 to concentrate on North East disputes and in 1899 to allow the local NER movement to go ahead.⁵² In the meantime the men in the North East had succeeded in obtaining an undertaking from the Directors:

'... to meet any committee of the men, either alone, or associated with any advisers whom they may select to accompany them, with a view to discuss, and if possible to settle, the questions which have been raised'.⁵³

In addition to the ASRS, the GRWU was also strong in the North East. Shildon Branch had 700 members in 1900⁵⁴ and Dixon, of Shildon, undertook proselytising activity to establish and encourage other Branches. In 1901 it was stated: 'The men in the North Eastern District are doing very well indeed'.⁵⁵

The 1890s saw strong activity in the North East particularly in relation to signalmen and this broadened into All-Grades activity. In 1897 the North East men went ahead with their own strike, at the end of which they had achieved a great victory.⁵⁶ This was followed by locomotivemen in the NE concluding that they were 'the most abused of any class of men on the NE Railway'.⁵⁷

So, throughout this period, up to the end of the nineteenth century, the men in the North East had led the field in the militancy of their reaction and had assumed a leading role in railway trade union activities. From the beginning of the

⁵² Gupta *loc cit* pp.139-150

⁵³ Tomlinson *op cit* p.749

⁵⁴ Railway Herald 3.2.1900

⁵⁵ Railway Herald 28.12.1901

⁵⁶ Newcastle Daily Leader 1.3.1897 in PRO RAIL 527/1030 quoting R. Bell

⁵⁷ Railway Review 28.4.1899

twentieth century the NER Company drastically altered its management style and its procedures to face the competition of increasing cost ratios. The men on the NER, having achieved 'recognition' early sought to build on this and to get a share of any savings and profits. In 1900 action took place by mineral guards and the concern of locomotivemen grew as it was in their field that many of the new productivity measures were taking place. The men in the North East supported the national action in 1907 but, when the claim for recognition ended in the offer of Conciliation machinery, they voted to pursue a separate scheme.⁵⁸

In 1908 an RCA dispute merged with general dissatisfaction. The NER Company had, for once, followed the action of other Companies in discouraging clerks from joining unions and in 1908 and 1909 pursued this to the extent that the unions brought about delay to an NER Bill going through the Commons.

During the 1910-1911 disputes, the NER was influenced to some degree by extremists. There was Syndicalism at Gateshead, Chopwell and Wardley.⁵⁹ De Leonism was active in Chester-le-Street. In April 1909 Newcastle Anarchists sought closer cooperation with industrial workers.⁶⁰ The year 1910 saw a distinctive and separate NER strike at Gateshead over the suspension of a striker and this was an unofficial strike. There were comments: 'The men on the North East Coast are largely a race apart ...'⁶¹ and a description of them as 'orgulous'.⁶² North East railwaymen gave full support to the national 1911 strike, even though the NER Company was outside of the dispute and agreement and they held out a day longer. In Chapter 6 we have analysed the 1912 Driver Knox strike in detail. This was an NER local movement and one which brought out the other aspect of the railwaymen, namely their belief in 'fairation'. Justice was secured for Driver Knox at Ministerial and national level.

In the period leading up to 1914 the NER men supported national movements, discontents and the steps leading to fusion and the formation of the NUR.

⁵⁸ Railway Review 15.11.1907 and 22.11.1907

⁵⁹ Holton *op cit* p.106 and p.169

⁶⁰ Quail *op cit* p.253

⁶¹ Railway Review 29.7.1910

⁶² Railway Gazette 7.4.1911

Like the rest of the country they were poised to take action in 1914 but this was averted due to the Industrial Truce. During the War there were discontents and grumbles and apparently industrial action at Shildon. But, despite earlier militancy, the Shop Steward movement and the Direct Action movements did not take root in the North East. Here again there may have been an element of 'fairation'. There were many 'Pals Regiments' and concern for the hardship of the large number of NER men serving in the trenches and appeals from the latter not to let the side down. Certainly the regional support on the causes of unrest⁶³ showed that the North East was suffering from the same troubles as the rest of the country.

In February 1919, following the Special Delegate Meeting of the RCA, Newcastle and Tyne Dock came out, even though a strike was not called. Newcastle claimed that it was acting in accordance with the SDM mandate. In July 1919 there was an NER strike over new eyesight tests and the strike ended with an undertaking to adopt the national test. In the main 1919 strike 88% of the staff of the NER left work and in the North East there was a solid response. New Shildon called for the resignation of the Geddes brothers.⁶⁴ Shildon also called for the settlement to include shopmen.⁶⁵ Newcastle urged supervisory grades to come out.⁶⁶ The strike in the North East persisted beyond the end elsewhere.⁶⁷

In the early 1920s the North East had a greater share of unemployment with Hartlepoons having 60%, Stockton 49% and Jarrow 43%.⁶⁸ This meant that redundancies and dismissals during the period of retrenchment by the railways hit the area more badly. Shildon No.3 Branch of the NUR commented: 'We believe the slump in trade to be a capitalist stunt on the workers of this country'.⁶⁹ Vigilance Societies were set up in the North East.⁷⁰

⁶³ The Reports were published as Cd 8662-8669 in 1917

⁶⁴ Daily Herald 3.10.1919

⁶⁵ Railway Review 3.10.1919

⁶⁶ PRO CAB 27/60 p.383

⁶⁷ PRO CAB 27/61 p.313

⁶⁸ Mowatt *op cit* p.126

⁶⁹ Railway Review 11.3.1921

⁷⁰ Railway Review 9.1.1920

In the 1924 Strike NUR was pitted against ASLEF. The North East had been traditionally the stronghold of the NUR but new structures introduced in the early twenties had led to ASLEF representation. ASLEF claimed that in the Northern Area the result of the failure of the NUR to support them had led to hundreds of new members. They cited with approval the fact that at Shildon all their members came out.⁷¹

In the 1926 General Strike, many centres in the North East recorded a 90% to 100% response.⁷² The strike of NER signalmen and locomotive men was reported as being almost complete.⁷³ In the 1926 Strike ASLEF reported that there were not 50 members out of 60,000 who failed to answer the call⁷⁴ and as regards the North East ASLEF recorded: '... one member in Blaydon not loyal to his workmates'.⁷⁵ The Government had forecast that in the North East the response by clerks would be so much greater than in the South and this proved to be the case.⁷⁶ Trades Councils were active in the North. The North East acted as a central point and a meeting at Gateshead was attended by 28 Councils of Action and 52 Strike Committees.⁷⁷ After the end of the Strike the men in the North East stayed out longer.⁷⁸

From 1919 to 1926, railwaymen in the North East were mainly in line with national policy but actions were, at times, more extreme. One factor may have been that the separate instincts of the men in the North East were finally diluted by the reorganisation of the railways, even though, to some extent, a separate identity was preserved for the former NER.

Another factor may have been the high levels of unemployment in the North East. From 1926 to the end of our period under study, this tendency continued. Modern historians have commented that, contrary to the general view, the period after the General Strike was not marked by repression or attempts to crush the unions. The

71 Locomotive Journal March 1924

72 Postgate and others *op cit* p.31

73 CAB 27/331

74 Locomotive Journal June 1926

75 Locomotive Journal October 1926

76 CAB 27/331 and The Workers Chronicle 8.5.1926

77 A. Mason *op cit* p.25

78 *Ibid* p.93

Mond-Turner talks dominated the closing years even though these did not produce the desired results.

We end our survey with the one recorded example, as quoted by Strachey, where there was cross-fertilisation between the political and industrial strands namely the success in stopping action against the emergent Russia. In June 1917 the ILP and the BSP called a Conference in Leeds. At this Conference a resolution called on constituent bodies to establish a council of Workmen and Soldier delegates and resolved: 'to declare a general strike and to adopt every method of agitation upon every field of social activity to begin on ...'. In 1920 when aid to Poland was in mind an Emergency National Conference set up a National Council of Action and passed a resolution: 'It therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war (i.e. the war upon Russia)'. 350 Councils of Action were set up and preparations were made for strike action but the Government climbed down.⁷⁹ Here the men in the North East pursued an active role and fully supported the national line. In August 1920 Shildon No.3 Branch voted to support the Council in action against war with Russia and was ready to strike.⁸⁰

Writing in the 1930s, Strachey singled out this episode where political and trade union pressure had come together:

'As we look back on the twenties, this event, far more than the betrayed valour of the General Strike, more even than the triumphant railway strike of 1919, or the great, if temporary, success of Red Friday in 1925, stands out as the one major accomplishment of the British Labour movement in the post-war world'.⁸¹

It is, of course, possible to look at this action differently. We have seen that railwaymen and their unions were strongly 'labourist' in pursuit of their sectional interests. This 'defensive' militancy would tend to lead to support for a Labour Party in the North East which was also 'labourist' but, in addition, was class-conscious and dedicated to the support of powerful unions. So this action could be regarded as unusual

⁷⁹ H. Pollitt: *The October Revolution and the British Labour Movement in Marxism Today 1957*

⁸⁰ *Railway Review* 27.8.1920

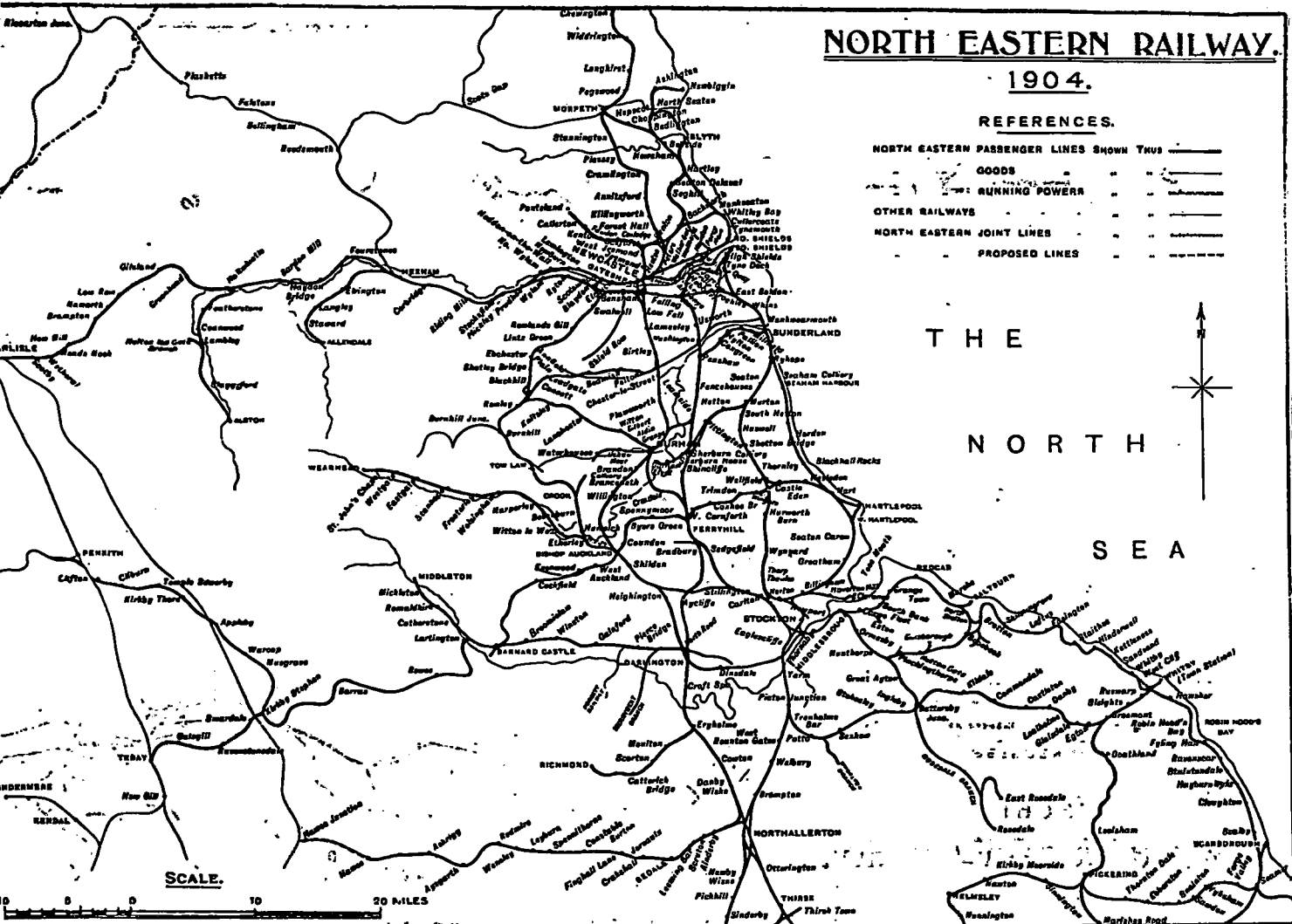
⁸¹ Strachey *op cit* p.137

because it joined Union and 'socialist' policies unrelated to bread or butter industrial issues.

In summing up we believe that the study has revealed a very distinctive approach by railwaymen in the North East to trade unionism. It combined pursuit of regional interests with whole-hearted support of national policies and actions. It was militant when required and the form of militancy reflected the peculiar characteristics of the North East character and temperament. Among these was the belief in 'fairation' and a sense of justice. It was indeed a proud record. It is fitting that, as it all began in Shildon, County Durham, our last quotation should refer to that location. In 1927, after all the traumas of the 1920s, including unemployment and the General Strike, the Locomotive Journal was able to report: '... the future will find our Shildon members in the forefront of the progressive movement'.⁸²

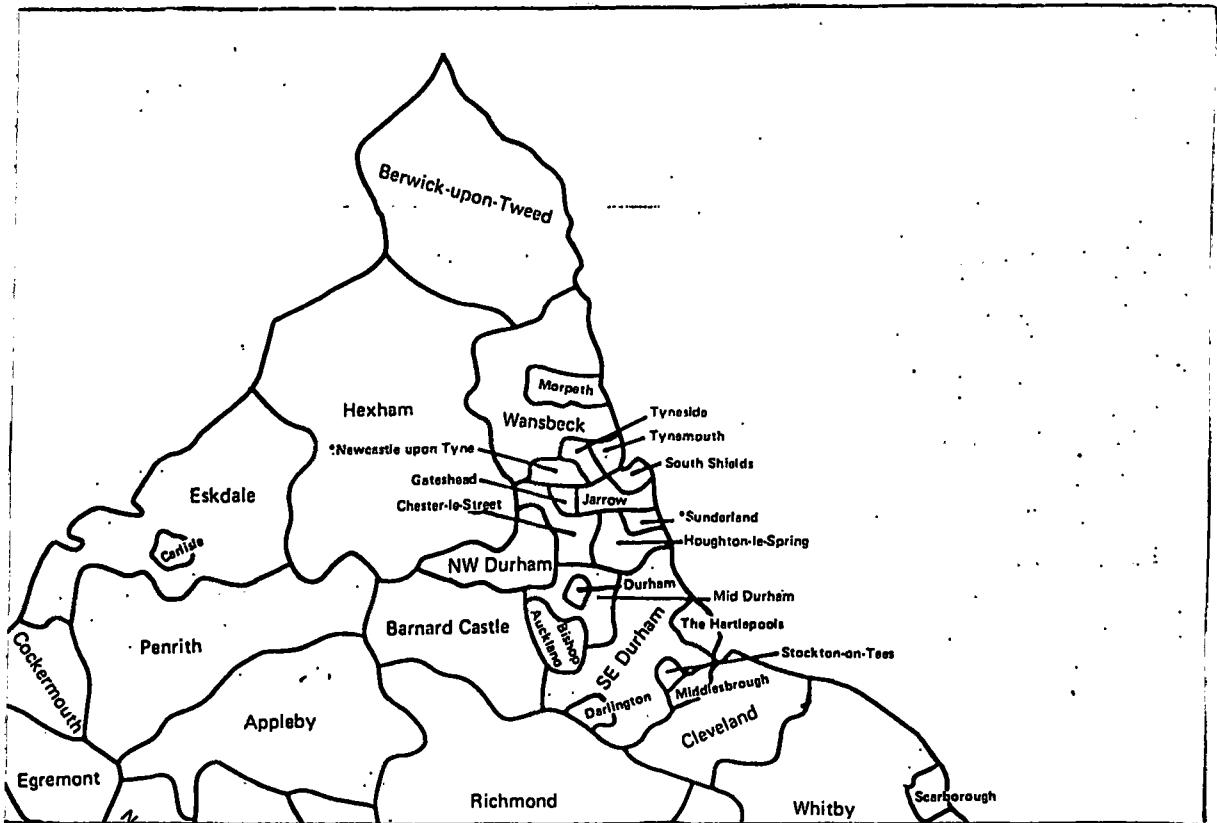
⁸² Locomotive Journal October 1927

NORTH EAST SECTION OF NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY 1904*



*From Tomlinson's *North Eastern Railway* (David & Charles Reprint 1987) post p.760

Appendix 2

CONSTITUENCIES IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1885-1918*

*From F.W.S. Craig: *Boundaries of Parliamentary Constituencies 1885-1972* (PRS, Chichester, 1972) p.188

Appendix 3

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTITUENCIES BEFORE 1918**BARNARD CASTLE**

Importance of coal miners, non-conformity and loyalty to the squire. A Liberal seat but held by Labour after Henderson's victory.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	43.9%
1900	41.3%
1906	41.2%
1910 (J)	43.3%
1910 (D)	43.0%

BISHOP AUCKLAND

A middle-class area. Agricultural emphasis. A Liberal seat with Paulton friendly to trade unionists but miners gained it in the end.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	42.6%
1900	42.8%
1906	29.1%
1910 (J)	30.0%
1910 (D)	29.2%

CHESTER-LE-STREET

A mining constituency but still influence of Lambton. Solidarity of mining vote.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	35.8%
1900	48.0%
1906	27.7%
1910 (J)	35.2%
1910 (D)	-

DARLINGTON

Pease family influence strong. More Unionist than it should have been.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	55.4%
1900	58.3%
1906	51.7%

1910 (J)	49.8%
1910 (D)	52.2%

DURHAM

Middle-class and Anglican. Small electorate. Safe Conservative seat.

The percentage of Conservative and Union votes was:

1895	50.0%
1900	61.5%
1906	47.4%
1910 (J)	59.7%
1910 (D)	60.0%

MID-DURHAM

Dominated by the miners but still some conflicting interests such as Church, landholders and free holders.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	42.0%
1900	42.5%
1906	32.0%
1910 (J)	35.8%
1910 (D)	-

DURHAM NW

Mining constituency. Ironworks with Irishmen. Atherley-Jones friendly with miners and had advantage of being the son of a Chartist leader. Also influence of Irish vote. Strong Liberal seat.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	41.6%
1900	49.9%
1906	30.4%
1910 (J)	33.2%
1910 (D)	34.9%

DURHAM SE

Large freehold vote. Strong Labour element after 1890.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	50.5%
1900	52.9%
1906	42.4%
1910 (J)	42.5%
1910 (D)	46.1%

GATESHEAD

Strong working-class elements. Non-conformity and Catholic votes. Liberal after 1910.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	48.0%
1900	46.2%
1906	34.7%
1910 (J)	37.9%
1910 (D)	39.0%

HARTLEPOOLS

An industrial and non-conformist area. Influence of Furness family. Less Unionist than expected.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	50.4%
1900	41.5%
1906	27.4%
1910 (J)	46.8%
1910 (D)	49.8%

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING

Predominantly mining but large rural and Conservative element. Only after 1900 did it become a safe Liberal seat.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	46.4%
1900	41.7%
1906	27.8%
1910 (J)	29.7%
1910 (D)	-

JARROW

A working-class constituency. Shipbuilding. Irish vote. Unionist element. Large following of Palmer and the Liberals. Curran (Labour) successful in 1907 but defeated in 1910.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	27.1%
1900	29.4%
1906	28.7%
1910 (J)	32.5%
1910 (D)	33.3%

MIDDLESBROUGH

Iron and steel works. Heavy working class vote. Havelock-Wilson fought in 1892 as a third candidate but eventually became a Liberal. Irish vote uncertain factor.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	41.2%
1900	50.2%
1906	43.2%
1910 (J)	35.3%
1910 (D)	38.9%

NEWCASTLE (TWO SEATS)

Middle-class area. Non-conformist influence. Importance of local candidates. Predominantly Liberal except in 1900.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	51.9%
1900	58.8%
1906	38.3%
1910 (J)	43.1%
1910 (D)	43.8%

SOUTH SHIELDS

Non-conformist influence. More working-class element. 10% Irish vote in 1885. Strong Liberal area. More men engaged in engineering and shipbuilding.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	49.3%
1900	35.7%
1906	26.1%
1910 (J)	34.8%
1910 (D)	-

STOCKTON-ON-TEES

More of a working-class area but less committed to Liberalism. Personality of candidates important. Strong Welsh minority. Iron and steel workers.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	47.4%
1900	51.9%
1906	45.5%
1910 (J)	44.9%
1910 (D)	46.8%

SUNDERLAND (TWO SEATS)

Smaller middle-class element than Newcastle but still sizeable. Non-conformist influence. More of a Liberal area but in 1910 brought back Conservatives.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	54.6%
1900	51.3%
1906	35.8%
1910 (J)	52.1%
1910 (D)	46.7%

TYNEMOUTH

Strong middle-class area. Non-conformist influence. Substantial industrial element. High Catholic vote. Conservative area. Personal following for Donkin.

The percentage of Conservative and Unionist votes was:

1895	51.7%
1900	53.1%
1906	45.1%
1910 (J)	47.1%
1910 (D)	48.9%

TYNESIDE

Urban area. Strong middle-class. Important of Scottish element.
The percentage of Conservative and Union votes was:

1895	48.1%
1900	51.3%
1906	37.5%
1910 (J)	37.2%
1910 (D)	37.0%

The above analysis is derived from H. Pelling: *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910*

CONSTITUENCIES IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1918-1949*



*From F.W.S. Craig: *Boundaries of Parliamentary Constituencies 1885-1972* (PRS Chichester, 1972) p.190

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

This is a very selective list of MPs, trade union representatives and leaders and others mentioned in the text.

L.A. ATHERLEY-JONES (1851-1929)

Barrister. Son of Ernest Jones, the Chartist leader.

MP N.W. DURHAM 1885-1914.

Recorder of Newcastle-on-Tyne 1906. Played a role in shaping of 1906 TDA. In General Strike attacked Simon. Liberal.

J. BATEY (1867-1949)

Appointed in 1915 Joint Committee Secretary of DMA. Represented DMA on Executive of MFGB in 1917, 1919 and 1921.

MP SPENNYMOOR 1922-1942. Labour.

R. BELL (1859-1930)

In 1876 joined GWR. Became Organising Secretary ASRS in 1891. Became General Secretary in 1897.

MP DERBY 1900-1910. Liberal/Labour.

H. BROADHURST (1840-1911)

Trade Union leader. Secretary of Labour Representation League 1873. Hostile to Socialism and new unionism. Liberal MP 1880-1892 and 1894-1906.

J. BROMLEY (1876-1945)

Cleaner at Shrewsbury. Joined ASLEF in 1896. Organising Secretary in 1910. General Secretary 1914-1936.

MP BARROW-IN-FURNESS 1924-1931. Labour.

J. BURNS (1858-1943)

Joined SDF 1884. Founded Battersea Labour League 1889. Led Dock Strike in 1889. MP BATTERSEA 1892-1918.

President of Local Government Board 1905-1914. President of Board of Trade 1914. Liberal.

T. BURT (1837-1922)

In 1865 became Secretary of Northumberland Miners' Association. Moved to Newcastle in 1872. Radical Liberal MP for MORPETH 1874-1918. Parliamentary Secretary to Board of Trade 1892-1895.

H.H. CHAMPION (1859-1928)

Leading figure with SDF but left in 1888. Went to Australia.

A.J. COOK (1884-1931)

Miner. ILP 1905. Member Executive MFGB 1919. Later General Secretary MFGB. Played major role in 1926 Strike.

C.T. CRAMP (1876-1933)

Entered railway service in 1896. Inspired by 1897 strike. In 1911 on Executive Committee of ASRS.

W. CRAWFORD (1833-1890)

In 1863 Secretary of Northumberland and Durham Mutual Confidence Association. In 1871 Secretary DMA. Secretary of Miners' National Association 1877-1890. MP MID DURHAM 1885-1890. Labour/Liberal.

P.F. CURRAN (1860-1910)

District Secretary Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union. General Organiser from 1889. Member ILP and on Council of ILP for six years. MP JARROW 1907-1910. Labour.

A. FOX (1857-1914)

Joined ASLEF in 1886. Became EC representative. Chairman 1900-1901. General Secretary 1901-1914.

T. FRY (1836-1912)

MP DARLINGTON 1880-1895. Liberal.

C. FURNESS (1852-1912)

MP HARTLEPOOL 1891-1895. MP HARTLEPOOL 1900-1910. Liberal.

S.W. FURNESS (1872-1914)

MP HARTLEPOOL 1910-1914. Liberal.

S. GALBRAITH (1853-1936)

In 1900 agent of DMA and represented Durham on EC in 1909, 1911 and 1914. MP MID-DURHAM 1915-1918. MP SPENNYMOOR 1918-1922. Liberal/Labour.

G.S. GIBB (1850-1925)

Solicitor NER 1882. GM NER 1891-1906. Director 1906-1910.

E.A. ST. A. HARNEY (1865-1929)

MP SOUTH SHIELDS 1922-1929. Liberal.

E. HARFORD (1837/8-1898)

Present at formation of ASRS in 1872. In 1882 became General Secretary ASRS. Member of TUC Parliamentary Committee 1887-1892 and 1894-1897. Dismissed after 1897 NER Strike.

A. HENDERSON (1863-1935)

In 1894 Secretary of North-Eastern Conciliation Board.
MP BARNARD CASTLE 1903-1918.
MP NEWCASTLE E 1923.
General Secretary Labour Party from 1911. Leader of Labour Party in 1931.

J. HERRIOTS (1874-1935)

Energetic as ILP propagandist in 1890s. In 1909 delegate from Spennymoor to ILP Conference. Chairman of Bishop Auckland Labour Party during First World War.
MP SEDGEFIELD 1922.
MP SEDGEFIELD 1929-1931. Labour.

W. HOUSE (1854-1917)

In 1900 became President of DMA. Vice-President MFGB 1914. Failed in three Election contests.

W. HUDSON (1852-1935)

Guard on NE Railway for 26 years. Eight times President of ASRS Congresses. Irish Secretary ASRS 1898-1906. President Labour Party Congress 1908. Chief of Movements Department NUR to 1918.
MP NEWCASTLE 1906-1918.

LORD JAMES OF HEREFORD (1828-1911)

Barrister. In 1856 became Postman of the Exchequer. In March 1869 MP TAUNTON. Became Solicitor General, Attorney General and Attorney General to Prince of Wales. Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster. Umpire in Boot and Shoe trade.

J. JOHNSON (1850-1910)

In 1890 Treasurer of DMA. In 1896 Financial Secretary.
MP GATESHEAD 1904-1910. Liberal/Labour.

I.J. LAWSON (1881-1965)

Joined ILP in 1904.

MP CHESTER-LE-STREET 1919-1949. Labour.

In 1924 FIN SEC WAR OFFICE. In 1929 PARLY SEC MINISTRY OF LABOUR.

T. LOWTH (1858-1931)

Ex-railwayman and official of NUR.

MP ARDWICK 1922. Labour.

P.S. McLIVER (1822 -1891)

Journalist. Magistrate for Somerset.

MP PLYMOUTH 1880-1885.

President ASRS.

F. MADDISON (1856-1937)

Compositor. President Hull Trades and Labour Council. President TUC 1886. Editor Railway Review 1889-1897.

MP SHEFFIELD 1897-1900.

MP BURNLEY 1906-1910.

Unsuccessfully contested Darlington in December 1910.

T. MANN (1856-1941)

Socialist in 1885. Secretary London Reform Union. Secretary National Democratic League. Member of SDF. Formed North of England Socialist Federation. Organised 1889 Dock Strike. First General Secretary ILP until 1897. In 1916 joined BSP. From 1919-1921 Secretary AEU. Associated in 1920s with CPGB and National Minority Movement.

J.H. PALIN (1870-1934)

Chairman ASRS Conference in 1906.

MP NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE W 1924-1931. Labour.

G.M. PALMER (1878-1933)

MP JARROW 1910-1922. Liberal.

G.M. PALMER (1822-1907)

MP JARROW 1885-1907. Liberal.

J.M. PAULTON (1857-1923)

MP BISHOP AUCKLAND 1885-1910. Liberal.

H. PIKE PEASE (1867-1949)

MP DARLINGTON 1898-1910 (J).

MP DARLINGTON 1910-1923. Liberal Unionist.

M. PHILIPPS (1881-1932)

In 1911 organising Secretary to Women's Trade Union League. In 1912 became Secretary of Women's Labour League. In 1920 organised Women's sections of Labour Party.

MP SUNDERLAND 1929-1931. Labour.

R. RICHARDSON (1862-1943)

Member DMA Executive 1897-1919.

MP HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING 1918-1931. Labour.

T. RICHARDSON (1886-1928)

Pioneer of Labour movement in North East.

MP WHITEHAVEN 1910-1918. Labour.

J. RITSON (1874-1955)

DMA nominee in 1918.

MP DURHAM 1922-1931

MP DURHAM 1935-1945. Labour.

J. SAMUEL (1853-1917)

MP STOCKTON-ON-TEES 1895-1900.

MP STOCKTON-ON-TEES 1910-1917. Liberal.

A.L. SHEPHERD (1884-1951)

MP DARLINGTON 1926-1931. Socialist.

E. SHORTT (1863-1935)

MP NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE 1910-1918

MP NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE W 1918-1922. Liberal.

B.C. SPOOR (1878-1928)

MP BISHOP AUCKLAND 1918-1928. Labour.

S. STOREY (1840-1925)

MP SUNDERLAND 1881-1895

MP SUNDERLAND 1910. Radical/Independent Unionist.

T. SUMMERBELL (1861-1910)

Printer.

MP SUNDERLAND 1906-1910. Labour.

J.E. SWAN (1877-1956)

MP BARNARD CASTLE 1918-1922.

Member of EC of DMA 1909-1911 and 1916-1918. In 1935 became General Secretary of DMA.

J.W. TAYLOR (1855-1934)

General Secretary Durham Colliery Mechanics Association. An early ILP pioneer in Durham.

MP CHESTER-LE-STREET 1906-1919.

J.H. THOMAS (1874-1949)

Trade Union leader and politician. President ASRS 1905-1906. Assistant Secretary ASRS 1910-1913. General Secretary NUR 1917. Parliamentary General Secretary 1919-1931. Directed 1919 Strike and settlement. Tried to prevent General Strike 1926 and key figure in ending of it. Various posts in Labour and National Governments.

A.G. WALKDEN (1873-1951)

In November 1897 joined Nottingham Branch of Association of General Railway Clerks. In 1906 became Secretary and Editor of Journal. Became Parliamentary Secretary. At centre of negotiations in 1926.

MP BRISTOL 1929-1931 and 1935-1945.

G.J. WARDLE (1865-1947)

One of first railway clerks to join ASRS. In 1897 became Editor of Railway Review until 1917. ILP member.

MP STOCKPORT 1906-1920

Became PARLY SEC to MINISTRY OF LABOUR. Denounced 1919 railway strike.

S.J. WEBB (1859-1947)

Intellectual and author. In 1885 joined Fabians. Active in formation of ILP. In 1915 member of Labour Party Executive. In 1922 Chairman.

MP SEAHAM 1922-1929.

In 1924 PRESIDENT OF BOARD OF TRADE and in 1929 SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COLONIES.

I. WILSON (1822-1899)

MP MIDDLESBROUGH 1878-1892. Liberal.

J. WILSON (1837-1915)

In 1869 played an important role in formation of DMA. In 1896 Secretary of DMA.

MP HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING 1885-1886

MP MID-DURHAM 1895-1906

MP MID-DURHAM 1906-1915. Advanced Liberal/Labour.

J. HAVELOCK WILSON (1858-1929)

In 1887 formed National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union of GB and Ireland. President in 1893. In 1894 formed National Sailors' and Firemen's Union. President. Often opposed ILP and LRC. Organised 1911 Strike. During First World War became Vice-President of BWL.

MP MIDDLESBROUGH 1892-1910

MP SOUTH SHIELDS 1918-1922. Labour/Independent Labour/National Liberal

E. WILKINSON (1891-1947)

MP MIDDLESBROUGH E 1924-1931. Labour.

JAMES WOODHOUSE (1852-1921)

Solicitor. Mayor of Hull 1891.

MP HUDDERSFIELD 1895-1906.

Railway Commissioner in 1906.

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PRO RAIL 667/146: Shildon Works 1863-1872

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