

WINCHESTER IN 1926: THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

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SUMMARY

The paper describes very briefly the national background to the General Strike, in some detail the Labour movement in Winchester after 1918. The central section describes the events of the Strike in Winchester and these are placed, for comparison, with a very brief account of other events in Hampshire. In no way did the General Strike threaten the stability of the community in Winchester, but there was significant action, particularly on the railways and in the building industry.

INTRODUCTION

A previous article delineated the community of Winchester in 1926 (Breach 1983). This paper describes events in the city during the General Strike. It might be thought that, during what was essentially a large scale, industrial, sympathetic strike, Winchester would be little affected and that much of the evidence would have been lost. There is some truth on both counts. Nevertheless, all towns with railways (and Winchester had two stations) and a building industry were bound to be affected, and in fact a good deal happened in Winchester. Events can be reconstructed, in part, from the newspapers of the day and be placed quite firmly in the context of the local community. For Winchester, and probably for other similar communities, the chief disappointment for historians arises from the paucity of evidence of the strikers themselves. The minutes of the Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party have not survived, for example, though there are a number of revealing letters from its central strike committee, and from the Railwaymen's Joint Strike Committee, in the library of the Trades Union Congress. The two volumes of minutes of the Divisional Labour Party which have survived, though useful for the development of the Labour movement, are uninformative on the Strike itself.

As a national movement the General Strike, or as the TUC General Council preferred, the National Strike (to avoid the imputations of revolutionary political motivation implicit in the first term), arose from the troubles of the coal industry. When export markets shrank, owners attempted to produce the coal more cheaply, cutting wages and lengthening hours. The miners resisted. Only a government subsidy prevented the outbreak of a coal strike supported by railwaymen and transport workers in 1925. The subsidy expired in April 1926, with the problems unsolved. In the circumstances, the TUC General Council supported the miners, reluctantly, and sought to persuade the government to make the mineowners change their attitudes and, if necessary, to renew the subsidy. The deadlock was made unbreakable by the stubbornness of the miners, the bellicosity of the majority of the owners, the long history of bitterness in the industry, and the ineptitude of the government. On Saturday 1 May 1926, Labour Day, the specially summoned Conference of Trade Union Executive Representatives voted almost without exception to support the miners with sympathetic strike action – the General Strike. Last minute negotiations, 1-3 May, broke down. Among the voices of moderation was that of the Bishop of Winchester. In a letter (*The Times* 3 May) jointly written with the Bishop of Southwark, the bishops argued that the miners should not be asked to carry all the burdens of the decline in the industry and called on the government to extend the subsidy. The General Strike began on 3-4 May at midnight with the withdrawal of labour in selected industries. The miners had been idle since 30 April. It is therefore against a complex background that the Strike in Winchester is to be seen. It took place in the national context of social disruption caused by the First World War and in the

context of the mining dispute, turned, in its later stages, to something else – a nationwide sympathetic strike.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN WINCHESTER

To understand the nature of the Labour movement in Winchester it is more enlightening to consider individuals before institutions. Three of the individuals concerned whose careers are rather better known than others were Charles Gabriel Sankey, later a Conservative Mayor of Winchester, W L Woolford, and the Rector of Avington, the Rev Percy Osmond, representing between them important strands in the Labour movement: the Co-operative Society, the Trades Unions, and the radical members of a learned profession. Sankey had had an early experience of trade union work in London, working with George Lansbury, later Leader of the Labour Party, and G W Singleton who played a part in the General Strike in Hampshire. During war service in France and Belgium, Sankey was promoted Sergeant-Major; coming to Winchester after the war, he was a secretary to the Winchester Trades Council and Labour Party and local secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union. After three attempts to win St John's ward in 1926, 1927 and 1928, he was elected the first Labour Councillor in Winchester in 1929. He worked closely with C H Bones in the Labour movement and in the Co-operative Society. In 1926 he was the outgoing Chairman of the Winchester Trades Council and Labour Party (SP, HRO *passim*).

W L Woolford was elected Secretary of one of the affiliated unions, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, in 1919, having returned from the Great War as a sergeant 'in a very rebellious mood' (WM tape, 1974). As card steward on the Airlie Road site at Stanmore he was able to extract from local employers the maximum rates and benefits that national agreements allowed. Trades Unionists were not popular even with some of the working class in Winchester in the 1920s, and Woolford was booed in the Broadway in 1920 and his wife disapproved of his election as Union Secretary

(WM tape, 1973). In the building trade dispute of 1924, when owners like the mineowners, tried to reduce wages in line with the depressed state of the economy, Woolford played a leading part. A seven week lock-out resulted in, effectively, a victory for the men. Woolford was fiercely patriotic and would hear no criticism of the Royal Family. His career and attitudes shed light on the sort of men involved in Hampshire in local strike leadership; he was elected a member of the Divisional Labour Party's Executive Council in 1920.

The Rev P H Osmond, Rector of Avington, a founder member of the Divisional Labour Party in Winchester, was an Anglican parson who had imbibed Christian Socialism during his training at Cuddesdon under Bishop Gore (Fig 1). Avington was in the Bishop's gift, and Osmond was able to outface the hostility of the squire, Sir John Shelley Rolls (CO, 1977) in the parish. Osmond became Secretary and Treasurer of the Divisional Labour Party, and virtually ran the workers' Union, or Union of Agricultural Workers, in Avington and the villages nearby. Avington was very small, attitudes deferential, and Winchester (where he worked after the war, particularly with Loveland) offered more fertile ground. Percy Osmond was, even for the 1920s, an old-fashioned socialist: he was a total abstainer, a pacifist, an admirer of Keir Hardie, and a member of the Independent Labour Party of which there was a branch in Winchester. He disliked Ramsay MacDonald, arguing that he ought not to have taken office with minority support in 1924, as much as he disliked Karl Marx. After MacDonald took office, Osmond's work for the movement fell away, and he appears to have done nothing active during the General Strike and indeed may have disapproved of it (CO, 1977).

The formal organisation of the Labour movement in Winchester presents a rather confused picture, particularly in that evidence for the existence of Labour organisations before the war is scanty. The outcome, however, the founding in November 1918 of the Divisional Labour Party, was in accordance with the new constitution for the national party drafted by A Henderson, Party Secretary, and the Fabian Sidney

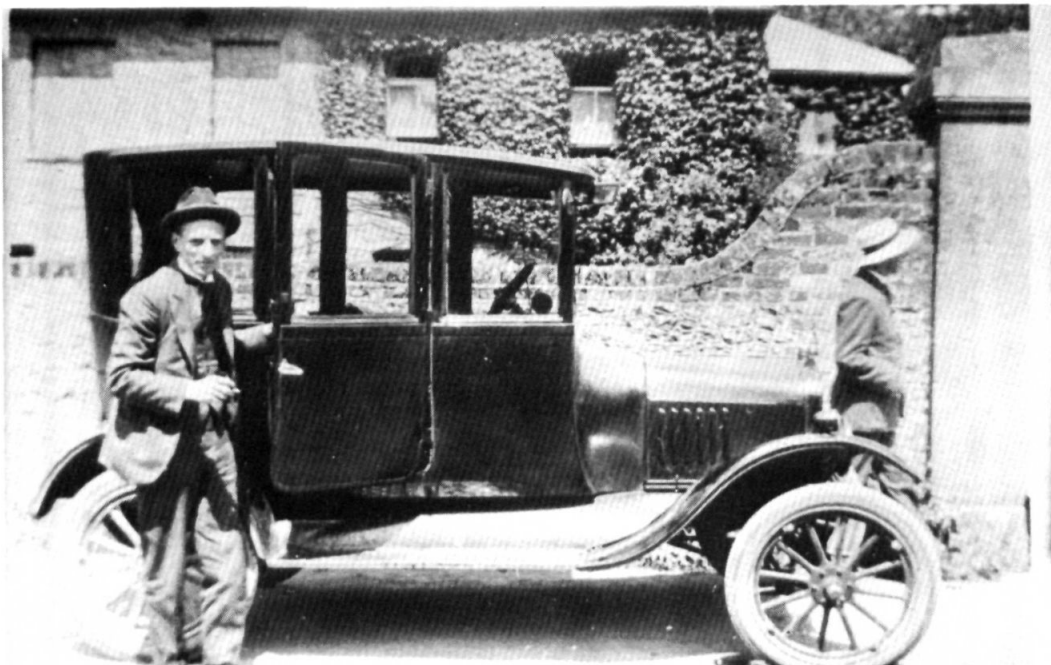


Fig 1. H W C Haycock and car, Percy Osmond in straw hat, at Avington Rectory about 1922. By courtesy of Miss C. Osmond.

Webb, and accepted by the Party Conference in January 1918.

The essential features of the new constitution were designed to create a national party which in due course would become the Government of the country. Divisional Labour Parties were to be founded to contest as many Parliamentary seats as possible; Trades Councils were to be incorporated into local Labour Parties; individuals were to be allowed to join the party (up to this point the party had been a federation of organisations); the Party was committed to a socialist objective 'the common ownership of the means of production'.

'The Divisional Labour Party in the Winchester Parliamentary division' (DLP 1) was founded as a result of a comprehensive conference of Labour and Co-operative delegates meeting in the Social and Military Club for two days before the Armistice of 1918. The Winchester Co-operative Political Council, Eastleigh Co-operative Society, the Winchester Trades and

Labour Council (*sic*), and the Eastleigh Local Labour Party all sent two delegates. The four societies agreed that the time was ripe for a Labour organisation to contest the Winchester Parliamentary division, and a constitution was accepted. Officers were elected: President, W Hutchings, Co-operative Political Council; Vice-President, W H Loveland, Winchester Trades Council and Labour Party; Secretary, E Browning, Eastleigh Local Labour Party; Treasurer, Henning, Tailors' Union. Money was proffered by the Eastleigh Co-operative, the Society there having set aside a farthing in the pound of gross sales on the last quarter to realise over £22.0.0.

On Trades Councils, organisations distinct from Divisional Labour Parties, most of the different trades unions in a given area were represented. In Winchester the organisation was known as the Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party. Fourteen Trades Unions sent representatives and there was an industrial

section and a political section. Meetings were held on alternative Tuesdays at the Trades and Labour Club in the High Street. The Secretary, W G Millard, represented the branch at the first meeting of the National Congress of Trades Councils, held under the Trades Union Congress auspices in 1925, and again in 1926 (NCTC, TUC 1925, 1926). Other members included Billy Carpenter, R H O Mears, G Perkin, C H Bones, A Hammond and C Axe, who acted as a bodyguard to W Woolford, who had been in danger of assault as he pushed a barrow organ in the streets collecting money for the miners' families during an earlier, bitter, strike of 1921.

There seems little likelihood that the Winchester organisation was particularly active. The Chairman, whose term of office expired in 1926 just before the strike, was C G Sankey and W H Loveland was elected to take his place. William Henry Loveland served an apprenticeship in printing with Warren and Son and worked both on their newspaper, the *Hampshire Observer*, and later on the *Hampshire Chronicle*. Later, he worked on the printing services offered by transatlantic liners to their passengers, and sailed often on the Aquitania (HC, obituary, 31 December 1981). The most militant member was probably the Secretary, Millard. Millard was employed in one of two City corn mills until his Labour activities cost him his job, and he set up as a small tobacconist in Market Street just before the General Strike.

The founding of the Divisional Labour Party greatly strengthened the movement in the area, by co-ordinating the numerous small groups, and by providing a clear objective, the winning of the division at a General Election. The early meetings tackled that difficult task with considerable enthusiasm, and developed an electoral strategy. The constituency extended from Millbrook near Southampton, north to East Stratton and Micheldever, but the heart of the constituency was Winchester itself and Eastleigh. As early as April 1919 Micheldever was persuaded by Osmond (DLP 1) to set up a vital organisation, a Polling District Committee, of which the objective was to rally and develop local Labour support. Within a couple of years

most polling districts had such committees, and arrangements were made for their direct representation on the General Committee of the Divisional Labour Party. This meant growth in the organisation, and the Party found it necessary, in 1920, to operate through a General Committee of about 25 members, and an Executive Committee, concerned with detail and the initiation of action in accordance with agreed policy. Towards the end of 1919 the Divisional Party formally affiliated with the national Labour Party, and at a conference in 1920 was encouraged, by the National Organiser E. Holmes, to adopt a candidate for the division. Comrade (*sic*) Haycock was adopted as the first Labour candidate at a meeting of the General Committee on 29 May 1920 (DLP 1).

There followed a period of considerable activity; the candidate ran recruiting campaigns, Osmond edited a sheet – Quarterly Record – and the General Committee debated the great political questions of the early twenties, passing resolutions critical of Lloyd George's policy in Ireland and his bellicosity over Chanak. It approved of the Poplar Poor Law Guardians, some of whom were jailed for ignoring Government orders restricting the level of relief to the poor. Though there was, explicitly, no truck with Communists accused of trying to overthrow the Labour Party, there was sympathy for the government of the USSR, and regret at the failure to set up a local Council of Action to protest against the Coalition Government's support for Poland, in 1920, in its war with the USSR. As was to be expected, government policy on agriculture was much discussed and some investigation promised into whether or not students from the Sparsholt Farm School went as blacklegs to Norfolk during the lock-out of farm labourers in March 1923.

Despite the feeling of purpose and enthusiasm, the practical difficulties of winning the Parliamentary seat became clear: apathy in the rural districts, poorly attended meetings even for national figures like Susan Lawrence, some indifference from the national Party who doubtless regarded more marginal seats as worthy of more effort, lack of money (the Party operating on a budget of less than £50 in 1920), the failure



Fig 2. The election of November 1922: outside Labour's Committee Room, over a small shop on the north side of the Broadway, west of King Alfred's statue. Candidate in the middle, holding hat. The man at the rear, hand held high, is C G Sankey, and immediately in front of him is Rev Percy Osmond. By courtesy of Miss C Osmond.

of organisations to provide what they had promised, particularly the Co-operative Society, and the survival of old industrial antagonisms, such as that between craft and general trade unions.

In the General Election of November 1922, H W F Haycock (Fig 2) polled 7,000 votes against 14,000 for the Conservative, G Hennessy. No Liberal stood. A report on that election (DLP 2) indicated that there were perhaps 100 workers for the Party in Winchester, the same in Eastleigh, and some 30 are mentioned for Swaythling. The cost of the election was just under £200. A further guide to the scale of the movement is that about fifteen members almost invariably attended committee meetings.

The intellectual and organising power of the Divisional Labour party probably derived from the Rev Percy Osmond. He was critical of his own failure to make progress for the party in the rural districts, but more particularly of the indifference of his colleagues to the hard issues

of finance and organisation which needed to be resolved if the seat were to be seriously contested. He resigned as Secretary-Treasurer in September 1925; the minutes written subsequently show a falling off in fullness, cogency and presentation, and the omission of currently important national issues. The loss of confidence in the Divisional Labour Party is also paralleled by the movement's national disarray after the serious setback to the party in the 'Zinoviev letter' election of October 1924, which had followed a rather ragged ending to the first Labour government. The industrial crises of 1925, and the dramatic events of that year and the first months of 1926 go unrecorded in the Minute Books of the Divisional Labour Party. No mention at all is made of the General Strike.

It is clear from this sketch that Winchester, on the eve of the General Strike, was a small, county and cathedral city, dominated by the social, political and economic power of the est-

ablished ruling class (Breach 1982) and that the Labour movement which sought to challenge it was small and had perhaps passed its peak in terms of enthusiasm and organisation. It had never had any revolutionary intentions, and its members individually were in some ways part of the establishment they appeared to challenge – Loveland and Wild were JPs; Singleton became Mayor of Winchester, after the Second World War. Members sought to alleviate the capitalist system by, for instance, sitting on the Board of Guardians, or on the Committee on Employment (WD 1926) set up to advise the Labour exchange, rather than to overthrow it, and they sought to achieve their political ends by securing Parliamentary representation. Though this constitutionalism was loudly proclaimed by the national leader, Ramsay MacDonald, and the history of the Labour Party confirms that it was indeed true of the party in this period, in the early twenties the party appeared to many people to be, potentially at least, revolutionary. Nationally, a largely hostile press, a recent background of Revolution in Russia, for which Labour leaders expressed sympathy, and the setting up of a Bolshevik government with which Ramsay MacDonald in his first ministry had made a commercial treaty – these events combined with memories of 'Red' Clydeside just after the war, the Campbell scare, and the Zinoviev letter – all lent plausibility to the fears of the middle classes.

In the event, the General Strike received little more than token and embarrassed support from the national politicians of the Labour Party and both locally and nationally the running was made by the industrial wing of the movement.

EVENTS 4–12 MAY

The General Strike began nationally at midnight, 3 May, on the instructions of the TUC General Council, with the withdrawal of labour by all transport unions, which affected railways, docks, roads and airports, and printing, including the Press; production industries, iron and steel, metal and heavy chemicals; building trades, all workers except those working on working class housing and hospitals, but in-

cluding suppliers; electricity and gas to industry, but not to homes and hospitals. Workers in health and sanitary services and those distributing food were expressly excluded from the strike. These decisions were less clear than they looked. The NUR quickly decided that no trains should run, even food trains, and the instructions to the suppliers of power proved very difficult to operate. The lack of previous preparation meant a good deal of confusion, particularly as to who was actually responsible for the running of the strike.

The TUC decided that the calling out of the men was for individual unions, but it was for the Trades Councils to ensure that law and order was maintained on the union side, and that information was sent and received between the TUC Headquarters at Eccleston Square and the strikers. Such an arrangement led to, or reflected an already existing, duplication in the direction of the strike. On the Government side, elaborate preparations had been made over a longer period to ensure the maintenance of essential supplies, and of law and order, by using troops, volunteers and a network of government appointed committees which would use local authorities as they saw fit. Additionally, there was a private organisation, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, OMS, under some distinguished retired military figures, set up to oppose the strike, and fear of this was expressed by speakers in Winchester.

The Government at once argued that the General Strike was not an industrial dispute in support of the miners, but a revolutionary movement designed to overthrow the Constitution and the authority of Parliament. The TUC maintained the contrary. The outcome of national events may be summarised thus: remarkable solidarity was shown by the strikers, and the transport system and much of industry came to a halt. On the other side, the government's plans worked well, law and order and supplies were maintained. After nine days of the General Strike, the TUC General Council called off the strike because they were alarmed at its revolutionary implications, because they convinced themselves that the Government would now accept some improvements in the wages

offered to the miners, and because they feared for the employment prospects of strikers other than the miners. The strike ended in general confusion and some victimisation of men seeking to return to work; the miners remained locked out until mid-November when they admitted defeat by the owners and returned at, generally, terms worse than those they had consistently refused throughout the dispute.

In Winchester many of these events were to be found, in some form or other, on a small scale. The newspapers estimated that about 150 men (HC 15 May) came out on strike, and the railway system, employing 100 men or so, was totally paralysed for two days, until volunteer labour ran one or two trains a day. The building trades came out. Gas and electricity supplies were maintained to houses and hospitals, but the street lighting was turned off by the authorities, except in places specified by the Chief Constable. Winchester endured the General Strike in public darkness.

A day by day account of the strike can be written. It was preceded (HC 8 May) by the traditional May Day Labour parades at the Broadway, on Saturday 1 May, and a large orderly meeting of over 300 listened for two hours to speeches by George Perkins, a member of Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party, and L Bighton, prospective Labour candidate for the New Forest, in support of the miners and the political objectives of the Labour Party. The staple arguments were employed: the miners were paid less than two pounds a week, whilst royalty owners, such as the Duke of Northumberland and the Church Commissioners, enjoyed £80,000 *per annum* for doing nothing; the Post Office had proved how successful was public ownership, in principle; an attack on the miners implied an attack on all workers' wage rates; there should be a capital levy to wipe out the National Debt and another subsidy to the mines to provide for a decent wage. More interestingly, there was an appeal to soldiers and police to remember that they were the same 'flesh and blood' as the strikers. In some parts of the country men were arrested by police for incitement to mutiny for speeches of that kind. A Miss A Williams, who also spoke,

claimed that many people in Winchester sympathised with the Labour movement but were afraid to join it. The speakers certainly expected the strike to take place and the last minute national negotiations at that time under way were scarcely mentioned. Speakers invoked no Marxist visions of the strike.

The newspapers carried full coverage of the speeches, the *Hampshire Chronicle* declaring itself mildly against the national strikers as men attempting to hold the nation to ransom, loftily commending Winchester employers for allowing (*sic*) the men to strike if their conscience so dictated. The *Hampshire Observer* in later accounts took the same non-inflammatory line, also in condemnation of the strikers. Both papers printed a good deal of national news and also reported in detail the comments of the Dean of Winchester, Dr Hutton, and the Bishop, Dr Woods, who both called for a humane and just system of industrial relations based on Christian principles. Their sympathetic attitude towards the strikers was widely held amongst churchmen.

On the Labour side, the railwaymen dominated the strike in Winchester, as nationally. A Railway Grades Joint Strike Committee (GSP, TUC for Southern Region) was set up at once under the Chairmanship of A J Slater of the National Union of Railwaymen, the Associated Society of Locomotive engineers and Footplate-men (ASLEF) and the Railway Clerks Association (RCA). Reports, the first dated 7 May 1926, were sent regularly to Eccleston Square, headquarters of the TUC, signed by G E Matcham, the Secretary, on the notepaper of the various unions in turn. The committee met in the same hall, Oddfellows Hall in St George's Street, daily at 10.00, as the committee set up by the Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party, known as the Local Strike Committee or the Central Strike Committee. This set out to include representatives of all the unions involved and met for the first time on 8 May. Games, talks and a 'Sacred Concert' were arranged. The Central Strike Committee also sent regular reports to Eccleston Square, and relationships between it and the Joint Strike Committee were avowedly, on both sides, excel-

lent. The Joint Strike Committee concerned itself only with the affairs of the railway. It was confident, and determined, that the railwaymen would not return until victory was achieved, and crusading in tone. 98% solidarity was claimed right up to the last existing record, the letter dated 10 May, sent to TUC Headquarters (GSP, TUC, for Southern Region). The Railway Clerks Association, nationally the weakest link in the railway chain, was solid in Winchester.

The City Council did not rush to meet, waiting till Thursday 6 May (HC 8 May), when the Mayor, W Hayward, appealed to everyone to keep cool and assured colleagues that no food shortages were likely. The Town Clerk, T Holt, reported that he was bound to set up an emergency committee under the Ministry of Health circular of November 1925, but he confessed he did not know what it should do. A circular from the government Mines Department required a coal committee to be set up to ensure distribution of supplies, so the Council economically settled for one committee composed of Hayward and the ex-Mayor, H D Johnstone, W H Forde, Miss Firmstone, W G Symes, W Hamblin and E A Dickinson. There are no records of its deliberations, if any occurred, and only a line or two on the strike in the minutes of the City Council.

On Friday 7 May, the County took a hand. The Lord Lieutenant presided over a meeting at the Guildhall of local emergency officers, at the Mayor's invitation. Major-General J E B Seeley declared that complete calm prevailed in the county, that only on the railways was there important strike action, and there was no risk of shortages of goods. Tramways, with one exception (Southampton), were running normally, and up to one hundredweight of coal per household per week was available.

The bricklayers in Winchester, independent and militant, decided on strike action at a meeting on 7 May, and did not return to work until 15 May. Painters, decorators and some carpenters came out, after some hesitation as to the meaning of the TUC's instructions. In 1921 there were 115 bricklayers and 46 bricklayers' labourers (Census 1921 Table 16); the total

number of men out in the City was perhaps 150, of whom at least 75 were railwaymen. It is clear that not all bricklayers came out – the reality is probably that those who were union members came out, probably less than half, although the Joint Strike Committee claimed 75%. The point that any strike was vulnerable unless the non-union men could be brought out too was made at the Broadway meeting after the strike. Coal hauliers remained at work, except the two who belonged to the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, and the Typographical Association men at Warren's Printing Works (which printed the *Hampshire Observer*) voted by 13 – 10 not to strike, on the grounds that the men at the rival newspaper works of the *Hampshire Chronicle* did not belong to the union, or any union, and were unlikely to strike. The Joint Strike Committee sought TUC advice on how to bring the Typographical Association men out. The Transport and General Workers Union stayed at work, being engaged in food distribution.

On 8 May, the Winchester and District Board of Guardians met to discuss a potentially explosive question: the payment of relief to the families of strikers (HC 15 May). A Mr G Ludford proposed that 'no relief shall be given to strikers or their families', arguing that it was unfair on the rate payers to have to subsidise revolution. He was seconded by F Morley and supported by E Eames, who denounced agitators who misled the men; he feared for the constitution and quoted the view of the distinguished lawyer and Liberal politician Sir J Simon, which had been expressed on 6 May, that the strikes were not lawful. Nowhere else in the record of events is the right wing view so clearly expressed.

It was opposed by many members, including, naturally, W H Loveland, the new Chairman of Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party, although his arguments were obscure and indecisive, and the Rev Dr Davies who argued that the Board's role was to administer the law as interpreted by the Minister of Health, ie to relieve 'destitution and pauperism' and not to adjudicate on a political issue. Strikers could not receive relief, since a condition of granting it was that men who were able bodied could not refuse

work on offer, but strikers' dependents were eligible.

On the railways, a very small-scale service developed, and the services of Lord Beaulieu were put to driving a locomotive. No trains ran for two days, and none during the nine days on the GWR line from Chesil Street. Two trains ran on Thursday, four on Friday, one of them carrying beer, austere exploited as propaganda by the Joint Strike Committee who claimed that the Government sought to bribe the strikers 'with dope', and even on 15 May, after the strike, only 22 trains ran. The signalmen and some other grades were offered immediate reinstatement when the strike ended but, in a gesture of solidarity, waited for the national agreement to be made general before there was a return. There seems to have been no railway victimisation at Winchester, although in other parts of the country it was quite extensive.

On 8 May another large and orderly meeting of about 300 people was held at the Broadway, addressed by D Hillman, the organiser of the Dockers Union (*sic*). He gave a clear and precise account of miners' wages and all speakers were at pains to emphasise the industrial nature of the General Strike. These meetings were of great importance to the strikers because of the great thirst for information. To know what was happening elsewhere was essential to morale, but even from the outset BBC bulletins were distrusted as 'instruments of the Government' (BW No 4, 8 May). The *British Gazette*, produced by the Government under the direction of J C C Davidson and W S Churchill, offered the official version of events, and the TUC's paper, the *British Worker*, propounded the strikers' viewpoint. Both Millard, for the Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party, and Williams for the Central Strike Committee testified to the demand in Winchester suggesting, perhaps, a widespread degree of support for the strike under the surface of events. The papers came to Winchester by despatch rider, a Mr Wickstead, from Eccleston Square, and he took back the reports of the committees – the TUC's route 11 (GSP, TUC).

The two local newspapers obviously functioned throughout – a report in the window of

the *Hampshire Chronicle* that A J Cook, the militant Miners' Federation secretary, had declared of the strike 'it is all hopeless' was withdrawn within the hour after a deputation from the Joint Strike Committee.

On the Government side the preparations had scarcely been needed. In the county only 312 people had been given jobs, of the 1500 volunteers who enrolled, and those mainly in Southampton docks. Lorry loads of volunteers left Winchester, amidst some jeering, daily and were received with some stone throwing. About 50 students from the Winchester Diocesan Training College, now King Alfred's College of Higher Education, worked in the docks (Breach 1978). Their experiences are of some interest in that they bear out the often stated view that many people undertook voluntary tasks in a spirit of adventure, or for the money, and enjoyed themselves doing unaccustomed manual labour. Students then at the College confirm the accuracy of the newspaper report in nearly all details: the canvas covered lorries, a thin line of pickets at Southampton, the absence of violence at the docks. Though there were arguments in the College, there was no pressure either from College staff or fellow students. The volunteers named themselves 'the Noble Voluntary Service Corps', worked to unload the potato crops from France and the Channel Isles, and on the Mauretania and the Aquitania, in whose first class saloon they ate their meals and smoked free Players cigarettes. Other students took part, including the Marquis of Clydesdale, then at Oxford, his baby Austin hoisted each night on to the boat for fear of reprisals by stevedores.

The 250 Special Constables in Winchester, including the Headmaster and staff at Winchester College, were not used at all. There seems to have been no violence in the City or, indeed, in the County, although in some parts of Britain there was a good deal, and no use was made of the extra police truncheons, an order given to the well-known firm of Laverty's in St. Swithun's Street (A L 1977). There was some victimisation in the building and construction trades afterwards, and perhaps some ostracism of some men who had not come out with their mates on the railways. The Head Constable

reported the men, that is the strikers, 'behaved like gentlemen', illuminating a class attitude as well as making a local statement about law and order. There appear to have been no arrests for sedition under the Emergency Powers Act, though some thousands in the country at large.

The Strike ended on 12 May 'amid general incredulity', the same date that the last report from the Winchester Central Strike Committee reported to the TUC: 'very satisfactory, all out solid' and secretary Williams asked for 36 dozen copies of the *British Worker* to be despatched to Winchester (GSP, TUC). Also on the 12 May, the Bishop of Winchester was dramatically summoned to Lambeth to advise the Archbishop of Canterbury on his peace making moves. At the Saturday meeting on the Broadway, 15 May, W H Vincent and the prospective Labour candidate, R Stamp, spoke eloquently and sadly of the strike. Their speeches contained the standard, moderate view of the strike: there had been amazing solidarity, and that was true of Winchester; no revolution had been sought, but the miners deserved every support. In Stamp, naturally, as candidate for Parliament, was the implicit view that the strike was an error, and that political action by voting Labour was more likely to secure for the working man what he deserved. There was a final touch, almost of pathos: Vincent announced at the end of the meeting that he had heard that he was 'all right' – he meant that he would recover his post on the railway.

The strike did not last long enough to cause deep distress amongst strikers. The Guardians were able to distribute 12/-d (60p) for a woman and 4/-d (20p) for a child to a striker's family, these increased rates having been accepted by the Cabinet in the first days of the Strike, and if a striker ceased to be able-bodied through privation during the strike, he too became eligible. These facts are a grim reminder of the risks run by railwaymen and building workers, who had no quarrel with their own employers. The Winchester Board of Guardians took an enlightened view, agreeing to consider each case for relief on its own merits. In the event two strikers applied for and were given relief as above, money subsequently recovered when they returned to work.

There was a slight increase only in the total numbers receiving relief during the period of the strike.

The Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party held a *post mortem*. An undated newspaper cutting in Sankey's papers records that 'The meeting went into committee to discuss a report from the Central Strike Committee' (SP; RO; ND) and nothing would be of greater value, probably, to the historian than to be able to trace and use this document. When the Labour Research Department in London asked Trades Councils to describe their role in the strike no return was made by the Winchester branch, and the local Federation of Trades Councils for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight wrote only to say that it had made no contribution to the strike. Some kind of crisis, perhaps, attended the ending of the strike because the Winchester District Trades Council and Labour Party Chairman, W H Loveland, resigned and only after many had been asked was a new chairman elected, W Bowsher.

The General Strike in Winchester was surprisingly solid on the railways and in the building trades. The national weaknesses in bus services were repeated in Winchester and there are no reports of the five bus companies in the City being affected. Nor, curiously, are there reports of picketing: how did blackleg labour actually get on to the railway platforms, for instance? It was orderly, as the TUC had insisted from the beginning, and this perhaps inhibited picketing. The strike was, for its scale, over-organised. At one point there were possibly three bodies seeking some direction of the strike – the Joint Strike Committee, the Central Strike Committee and, finally, the latter on 9 May set up a Transport Strike Committee to review travel permits. The strike had a political aspect, shown in the three large meetings held on 1, 8 and 15 May in the Broadway, with Police permission. The enthusiasm of the strikers, and their confidence, is remarkable – they saw themselves in pursuit of justice for the miners and were proud of the solidarity and efficiency of labour.

There was no sign of the strike disintegrating. The Joint Strike Committee at least saw the Strike as a whole, and was realistically aware of

the weaknesses inherent in non-union workmen. Though speakers from Southampton came to Winchester and a County Federation of Trades Councils existed, there was no attempt to co-ordinate the strike regionally, in the manner attempted in the North East and elsewhere. Winchester Labour men shared in the bitterness after the strike, but to some extent the strike was soon forgotten, at least by the newspapers, and Winchester's sympathies perhaps appear in the poor response to a series of letters from W G Millard, appealing for funds for the miners, locked out until November 1926. The largest sum, £1 5s 6d, in the published lists of contributors came from the Avington workers' union, no doubt largely from the Rev Percy Osmond. 'Soon after the Strike' (WCC Minutes 1926) the City fathers invited the Prime Minister to accept the freedom of the City and he finally came, in 1928, to accept a casket made by Laverty's, designed by the School of Art, and inscribed 'to a lover of England'. In his speech of acceptance Baldwin said nothing of the General Strike, but took the opportunity to warn Winchester of the threat posed to ancient cities by the growth in the number of motor cars.

EVENTS IN HAMPSHIRE

Events elsewhere in the county are outside the scope of this article, except to provide contrast and to indicate the wider context. At Southampton, railwaymen and dockers came out, though essential supplies were maintained through the port and there was trouble on the tramways where blackleg labour was employed, and retained afterwards, to create a sore reinstatement problem. Eastleigh, perhaps, showed the sharpest effect of the strike since most of its workmen were engaged in running the railways, in manufacturing engines and coaches, or in the heavy manufacturing works of Pirelli General, making electrical cable. In all sectors there was a solid strike, orderly mass meetings in the theatre and cinema, and at the end, the strike leaders W A Singleton and Johnson proclaimed the message: the ballot box is a better weapon than the strike. At Aldershot, all the rail unions and the Typographical Asso-

ciation came out, about 400 men in all. Strikers used cars to distribute the *British Worker* and 'to keep up the spirits of strikers as far as Alton'. At Basingstoke, the Strike Committee took the unusual name Vigilance Committee and its precise reports, sent to Reading (one of the centres designated by the TUC General Council as an information point), reported a 95% strike in the local union branches concerned. 'Through Basingstoke there was a momentary glimpse of a whole section of England south to Hampshire – Aldershot, Farnborough, Farnham, Winchester, Andover, Micheldever, Eastleigh, Southampton, Salisbury – nothing moving' (Horrabin *et al.*, N.D.). At Andover, the Local Labour Party and Trades Council met in a pub, appropriately the Mason's Arms, and reported 'position decidedly good considering the position in the past'.

CONCLUSION

Had the General Strike not been called off by the TUC on 12 May it is not easy, or perhaps appropriate, for historians to predict the outcome. The effect of the complete stoppage on the railways and in other key sectors of the economy would have been so strong that the government might well have sought to break the strike by using overt force. It was indeed this possibility, among others, that alarmed the TUC leaders. In Winchester the situation was that the City was cut off by rail, but not by road; it was rationed for coal. The strike could have been taken further by cutting off gas and electricity supplies, and food shortages were likely to develop and send up prices. General support amongst a population perhaps 75% working class (Breach 1982) was wider, perhaps, than overt actions indicated.

How far the peaceful strike would have remained peaceful is not certain. How far the strike, nationally, was weakening by 12 May is now under debate, with some case being made that the strike was less complete than it appeared (Phillips 1976). Evidence in Hampshire suggests that support was still solid, but that anti-strike forces were strong and generally supported by the mass of public opinion.

In the event, whatever revolutionary potential there was remained unrealised. Industrial recovery, nationally, made some progress in 1926–1929 and the TUC turned away from thoughts of the General Strike. By the 1930 worldwide economic depression, which might have provided justification for a revolution, the General Strike weapon had been, in effect, declared obsolescent.

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Abbreviations and original sources

- A L Conversation with Mr Austin Laverty, 1977.
 B W *British Worker*, newspaper of the Trade Unions Congress.
 Census 1921 Census of England and Wales 1921, 1923, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, London, in Winchester Public Library.
 C O Conversation with Miss Chloe Osmond of Sparsholt, daughter of the Rev Percy Osmond.
 HC *Hampshire Chronicle*, Winchester Public Library.
 HO *Hampshire Observer*, Winchester Public Library.
 DLP Divisional Labour Party, Minutes, 2 vols.
 GSP, TUC General Strike Papers, Trade Unions Congress.
 NCTC, TUC National Congress of Trades Councils, Library of the Trade Unions Congress.

SP Sankey Papers, HRO.

WD *Warren's Directory*, Winchester Public Library.

WM tape Winchester Museum: taped conversation between Ernest Woolford and Austin Whitaker 1974.

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