

In the winter of 1859, there was a great dispute in the London building trade. A nine-hour day was demanded, and the employers in answer tried to impose a document of renunciation of the Union. They went too far and had to withdraw, but the men did not gain the nine-hour day. In this dispute efforts upon both sides were wasted. In 1867, after a succession of petty strikes and lockouts, the Government appointed a Royal Commission, the leaders of the Trade Unions joining in the demand for an inquiry. Nobody had gained anything by these years of quarrel.

It may be possible that these lockouts and strikes caused Parliament to deal with the difficulties by which the public were affected. Lord Askwith's view is that the source of inquiry and the legislation of the years between 1867 and 1876, (including laws such as the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875, and the Employers and Workmen Act of the same year, and the shortening of hours in certain trades by law in 1874) were far more due to efforts of men like Mr. Frederick Harrison, Mr. Mundella, and Mr. Cross, with the legal aid of Sir Henry James and Sir William Harcourt, than to the "practical value" of lockouts and strikes. These men aimed at equality before the law, the recognition of collective bargaining by both employers and employed, and the treatment of violence and intimidation as under the general criminal law.

It may be claimed that a nine-hour day resulted in 1871 from the Sunderland strike of engineers, but unless Lord Askwith's old friend and colleague, John Burnett, had been there and had tactfully used persuasion and skill—especially in the press—to push through a half-opened door, it may be doubted whether the door would not have been slammed in the face of force. The sentiment of trade union leaders at that time may be summed up in the words of William Allan, the veteran Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, when he said before the Royal Commission in 1867: "We believe that all strikes are a complete waste of money, not only in relation to the workmen, but also to the employers."

The early seventies showed a wave of prosperity and an increase in membership of trade unions, to be succeeded in 1879 by disastrous depression through which trade unionism emerged with greatly reduced numbers. Many strikes had occurred, but all seemed to have failed. Then came the dockers' strike in 1889. Heralded by a strike of match girls, the strike showed that unorganized workers who were not trade unionists could organize very rapidly. But it was not the strike

and force which led to results, so much as the sympathy and help of the public when facts became known. The bare settlement brought the dockers' "tanner,"<sup>1</sup> but it was many years before more basic foundations for the dock workers were reached by inquiry and negotiations. In the same year negotiations brought an eight-hour day and some wage increase to London gas workers, but a strike brought back in the South Metropolitan Gas Company a twelve-hour shift and a profit-sharing scheme, at which the strikers had not aimed, which has practically endured in principle up to the present day. There were several strikes up to 1900 with negative results, among which were the Cotton Workers' strike and the Coal Miners' strike of 1893, the Boot and Shoe strike of 1894, and the engineering strike and lockout of 1897.

The Taff Vale dispute of 1900 became important owing to the litigation which led up to the Trade Disputes Act of 1906, but as a strike it was wholly unnecessary. The upshot of this strike, which was all over trivial matters, was that the Union became subject to the law for procuring persons who had entered or might enter into any contracts with the plaintiff to commit a breach of contract. The Union had to pay £35,000, damages and costs over a strike which brought neither recognition of the Union nor any material advantages to the men. The result crippled the Union for a long time. Was this strike necessary because years afterward it was used as an argument in the Trades Dispute Act?

In January, February and September of 1907 the railway companies would not admit requests for recognition and also took no steps to consider other claims. A ballot gave 76,823 in favor of a strike and only 8,773 against, for the purpose of enforcing the programme including the principle of recognition. No strike occurred. The Government pleaded Germany and foreign affairs and stepped in. The threat of the strike certainly had the effect of government action, which under the circumstances of the case met with acceptance by the chairmen of the railway companies. Mr. Lloyd George interviewed the company representatives, and the system of conciliation boards was established, although the policy of separate entities was still continued. Whether the strike would have gained the object in view, must be a matter of conjecture. All that can be said is that the railway employees gained a great deal without recourse to a strike. Lord Askwith's impression, from close knowledge in his own office as head

<sup>1</sup>"Tanner" is English slang for sixpence.

of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade, was that the men gained far more than in any strike with its inevitable aftermath and loss of public sympathy.

Government intervention failed in a cotton dispute, a great strike of engineers, and another of the shipwrights and joiners. The parties were subsequently brought together and they settled by themselves upon machinery for dealing with differences between employers and the men. In 1909 a very serious dispute arose over a proposed reduction of wages in the mining district of Scotland. The mine owners offered arbitration which the men refused. The great trouble was that the coal miners of England and Wales had managed to pledge themselves to come out in sympathy, which meant a national coal strike. The second was that some of the Scotch leaders had ulterior views, which become more generally known in 1917 and 1918. In the results, Mr. Smillie was overruled by his executive, and a settlement was effected by means of conciliation.

In 1910 most of the strikes could have been avoided if there had been less injured vanity on the part of one or two trade union leaders in the organized trades and if there had been better organization in the trades generally considered to be organized. The outstanding case was a cotton strike arising among the card room operatives over the displacement of a single man. The strike could have been avoided if the secretaries on both sides had followed the principles of procedure laid down, even if the particular type of case was not expressly covered. It was settled with some difficulty by conciliation. The Northumberland miners refused at first to follow the advice of their executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain on the general conditions to be observed under the Coal Mines Regulation Act. The Boiler Makers refused to accept control by their leaders and went in for sporadic strikes and were forcibly locked out. The coal miners of the Cambrian Combine striking in one pit refused to accept a provisional settlement of the chairmen of the two sides of the South Wales Miners' Conciliation Boards, advice given at conciliation meetings, and the demand of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. They were on strike for eleven months, then went back to work on terms suggested eight months before the resumption of work to find that the terms were satisfactory upon trial. Mr. Phillip Snowden was correct in his statement:

The year of 1910 had been an exceedingly trying time for all who had any responsibility for the management of trades unions and the direction of the labour movement. The men connected with a number of trades unions had shown a good deal of dissatisfaction with actions of their responsible officials.

and this dissatisfaction had expressed itself in some cases in open rebellion against agreements entered into by union executives and in unauthorized strikes. Discipline in a trades union was too important a thing to be injured by violation, and though an occasional irresponsible movement might succeed, such a practice must if frequently adopted, be destructive of trades unionism itself, for no executive can retain office if its authority is not respected.

If that comment is correct, the type of strikes to which allusion is made would not be deemed of value by trades union leaders.

In 1911 and 1912 there were strikes in almost every trade. There had been an improvement in trade but no general increase in wages. Large sections of work people had low pay, while prices were rising. Employers suggested that they ought to have time from the lean years before considering general advances. The shipping and port interests had employers within their ranks who were opposed to any concessions and to any bargaining with trade unions or conciliation boards. Some unions had been improving their organization and had unexpected sympathetic support from the masses of unorganized work people amongst whom new leaders sprung up, unaccustomed or unwilling to negotiate and sometimes knowing little of the business that they purported to represent. The trouble began with seamen and firemen at Southampton, supported by dock laborers and other transport workers, followed by similar workers at Hull, Liverpool, and Manchester. At Manchester there were twenty-three unions and a number of unorganized men all pledged together not to return to work until the claims of all sections were satisfied or arranged. The docks were at a complete standstill. The Liverpool owners tried a general lockout, but it did not succeed. The lockout was followed by a small strike of some railway men in Liverpool. This strike had the effect of the railway societies sending in an ultimatum to the railway companies demanding the right within twenty-four hours to meetings of representatives of the companies, for the negotiation of a settlement of matters in dispute affecting the various grades.

There followed a national strike in which Mr. Lloyd George used the Morocco crisis as a reason to appoint a small committee of two general managers to act on behalf of the railway companies. At a later stage, the Government had to intervene on behalf of the consumers by a unanimous resolution that conferences be held to discuss the best way of giving effect to the report of the Royal Commission that had been appointed to consider the matters in dispute, and ultimately the report, with some modification, was adopted, together with the prin-