

The General Strike, 1926

The General Strike of May 1926 was the occasion of a lot of confrontation between strikers and police all over the country. In Leeds, the proximity of many coal mines meant that there was no shortage of highly motivated strikers interested in seeing “all out”.

On two days, Thursday 5th and Friday 6th May, there were significant events in the town centre, both revolving around the continued operation of (some number of) trams and buses which were maintaining a reduced level of service. On both occasions, a crowd of some thousands is reported as gathering in the neighbourhood of the Corn Exchange, Boar Lane and Briggate. On the first day, a tram was compelled to stop in Duncan Street, and many of its windows were broken by missiles of coal being thrown from an appropriated lorry. There were many instances of police use of horses and truncheons, and several minor injuries and arrests. On the following day similar crowds were stoning buses and trams. One of those arrested, Violet Snowden, was told by the magistrate she confronted “You women ought to use your influence to keep the menfolk quiet”.

The Tory press had a field day in portraying the strikers as jobs, and made great play of some of the crowd having come from Newcastle - an early allegation of the use of flying pickets. It might be noted though that all court cases were dealt with under existing, minor legislation, and magistrates forbore to make use of the recently granted Emergency Regulations.

The Labour *Leeds Weekly Citizen* lost two issues as a result of the strike, but an emergency edition was printed on 10th May. It made no mention of the disturbance and was largely a rallying cry to the strikers (on the brink of defeat). Articles declared that volunteer private motorists were doing little to make up for the absence of public transport, and a TGWU official declared that there was scarcely any blacklegging on trams and buses.