

*Transcribed from a typescript sent by Fred Warburton to Bill Moore. Mis-spellings and obvious inconsistencies only have been corrected.*

*Roger Boyle, Ford Maguire Society, January 1999.*

## **The General Strike in Leeds**

Although the strike started on the Monday, May the 3rd, preparation had begun seven months before, when the Leeds Trades Council set up a Council of Action.

It had become apparent to the Socialist section that Baldwin and the Employers were determined to have a showdown especially after Baldwin had declared that "The wages of all workers MUST come down", and also they had thought that if they cut off the head of the main opposition - i.e. The Communist Party - they would strengthen the hand of the Employers so they sent to prison 12 men who they thought consisted the leadership to 6 & 12 months imprisonment, the present Lord Hailsham's father was the prosecuting counsel for the crown. but in Leeds as in many other towns and cities there was a leadership that could replace the National Leadership and what Baldwin had done was to create a feeling among local leaders that theirs was the responsibility now that the 12 had been sent to prison.

At the November meeting of the Trades Council (1925) a resolution was presented by the representative of the Water Haigh Miners branch that a Council of Action be formed and Fred Warburton in a speech lasting over twenty minutes outlined the government's attitude and also the preparations that had made telling the name of the person who was to be in charge who happened to be a Tory Councillor, the council of over 130 delegates unanimously accepted and a Council of Action was formed, the first in the country. What was known then as the Lib-Labs could only say in one case, he didn't think one necessary and the other that he didn't like the name. Comrade Warburton's reply was short, he knew the Leeds Trades Council delegates recognised the danger the miners were in and as for the name he didn't care whether they called a spade a spade or an agricultural implement it was the result we wanted.

And so the Leeds Council of Action was set up with Harry Robinson of the power workers as chairman.

Fred Warburton	Miners
G Adamson	Miners
S Norton	Miners
G Bloom	Tailors & Garment Workers
H Beecham	Leather Workers
J Wells	Dyers & Bleachers
J D Mack	N.U.D.A.W.
J Brearly	Compositors

J Brotherton      A.E.W. Secretary

Bertha Quinn      Tailors

Of these 5 were members of the Communist Party and also members of the Minority Movement and 2 more were members of the Minority movement but not members of the Communist Party. I am mentioning this as during the strike it was used to try and break the Council of Action.

We had several meetings to formulate our policy and at one J.D. Mack came with a list of things we should do. Mack always thought he was a born Leader because his uncle had been a GENERAL in the Australian Army (MONASH) and one of his suggestions was that we should CO-OPERATE with the police, Now at that time to suggest anything like that to the miners was really asking for trouble as the memory of 1921 was still fresh.

The General Council of the T.U.C. had declared that Trades Councils were to be the local body in charge and thus gave sanction to the Council of Action.

Sunday before the strike was MAY DAY and the rally that year was held on Hunslet Moor and what was the largest crowd since the Chartist days assembled. Of the three platforms the Trades Council manned one with the President Harry Robinson, Fred Warburton, Jack Brotherton with Tom Stamford who was M.P for West Leeds and an ILP-er. In moving the resolution Tom Stamford said he did not think there would be a strike as he thought the Baldwin would continue the subsidy as he was a reasonable Prime Minister. Fred Warburton as V-chairman had to second and was a complete contradiction to Stamford declaring that Baldwin was a leader of British Industry who would treat workers in any fashion as long as they got their sacred profits etc etc.

Monday Morning:

Trades Hall complete co-operation. The Railwaymen had retained the skeleton of their own strike committee sent their greeting and would like to be represented on Council of Action this was done and two delegates appointed.

The Trades Council had no machinery for producing News Bulletin so the local Communist Party decided that they would and the first issue was edited by a member of the Hospital board at Leeds and got on the streets before midnight on the Monday after which it was produced until the end of the strike.

Tuesday:

The local T.U. leaders now found themselves no longer in charge and began to form what they called an Ad Hoc committee. When challenged J.D.S. Highman of the G. & M.W. said there were members of the Minority movement on the Council of Action. Harry Robinson then went down to the T.U.C. and returned with instructions that the Council of the Trades Council was the BODY that must lead. In the mean time the G. & M.W. office in Gt George St had begun to sabotage by issuing transport passes other than those allowed by the terms of the T.U.C.

Wednesday:

Students from the University were now Black-legging by driving trams and working in the electric department and the City Council were buying beds and blankets for them.

Thursday:

5.30am tram proceeding up York Road got level with Freehold St when about 400 miners and others came out of Freehold St and surrounded the car, when the student saw them he stopped the car and ran towards East End Park. If his time could have been recorded he would have held an all time record for the 880 yds. As an old lady had been knocked down the 400 leaned on one side of the tram and it keeled over. Each night we held a public meeting in the Town Hall Square, the statue of Queen Victoria was there then and we spoke from the steps. Bertha Quinn was speaking when she suddenly remembered the episode of the tram and she paraphrased i.e. "You've heard of Rudyard Kipling who said "East is east and west is west", well we've beat that because this morning the first tram that went EAST went WEST".

Thursday:

By now the strike had settled down and although there was a continual application for passes we never issued them unless they complied with the T.U.C. schedule.

The News Bulletin was eagerly awaited and the police had been told to get our equipment as we had got a typewriter and duplicator from Spinks on the Hire Purchase, but as we moved it every day they did not find it, they raided several houses including mine!!

The Secretary Jack Brotherton and I seemed to become the target for the police even to the old game of heel tredding I got so fed up that I got an interview with the Chief Constable, and the only thing he said was "There's fools in the Force as well as out". I replied that you can coach a fool at which he rang the bell for the end of the interview.

Monday:

And more people on strike than before and many clamouring to come out had to be restrained. The Ad Hoc committee had now lost all its power and the attacks on Communists in the committee was getting more severe, the police got the typewriter etc, they had found a young Jewish member whose parents had never taken out naturalisation papers and they crowded him in the C.I.D. and threatened to send his aged parents back to Poland so he squealed, personally I felt sorry for him but we could not trust him again.

On the Wednesday night I was speaking as usual and said if they call out the soldiers they won't shoot this time. Two minutes the police moved; about 6 of them got round the platform and two jumped on and rushed me inside, one of them said we've been waiting for you for a bloody week.

Thursday

Before a cleared court, and the news that the strike had ended. I was bound over having three Justices of the Peace as my guarantors.

Although my activities during the long lock out continued they are not part of the General Strike.

Fred Warburton