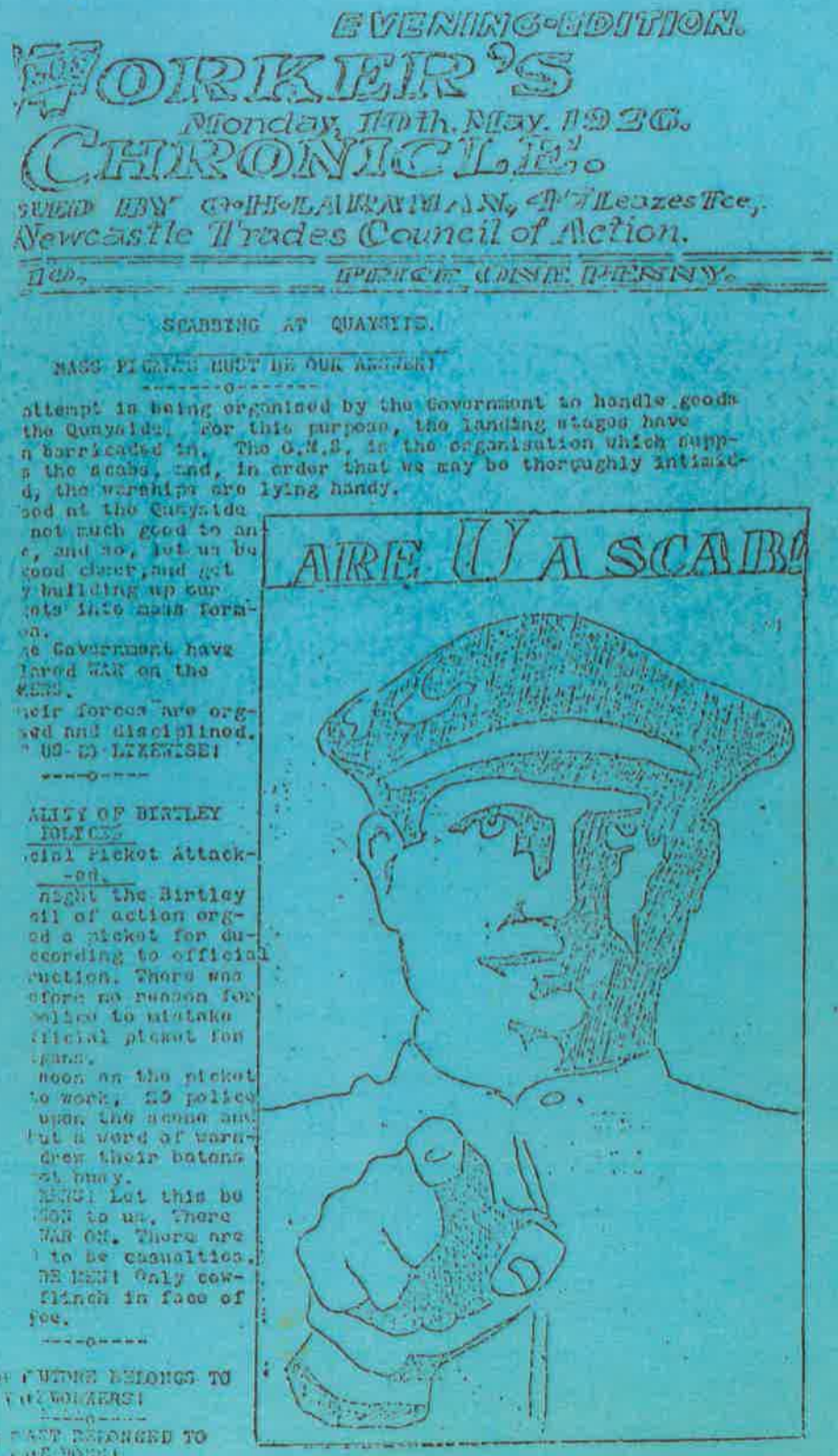
North East Group for the Study of Labour History



EVENING EDITION.

WORKER'S CHRONICLE.

Monday, 10th. May. 1926.

ISSUED BY G.H. LAWSON, 47 Leazes Tce, Newcastle Trades Council of Action.

No. PRICE ONE PENNY.

SCABBING AT QUAYSIDE.

MASS PICKETING MUST BE OUR ANSWER!

attempt is being organised by the Government to handle goods the Quayside. For this purpose, the landing stages have n barricaded in. The O.M.S. is the organisation which supp- s the scabs, and, in order that we may be thoroughly intimat- d, the warships are lying handy.

ood at the Quayside not much good to an- e, and so, let us be good clear, and get y building up our ots into mass formation.

e Government have lared WAR on the ers.

eir forces are org- ed and disciplined. UD-TO-LIKEWISE!

---o---

ALITY OF BIRTLEY POLICE.

cial Picket Attack- ed.

night the Birtley ll of action org- ed a picket for du- ccording to official uction. There was efore no reason for olice to mistake fficial picket for pans.

noon on the picket to work, 25 police upon the scene and ut a word of warn- drew their batons st busy.

NEWS! Let this be SON to us. There WAR ON. There are to be casualties. NE ENT! Only cow- flinch in face of foe.

---o---

FUTURE BELONGS TO WORKERS!

---o---

PAST BELONGED TO OUR MASTERS!

---o---

WE ARE MANY !---------THEY ARE FEW.

Bulletin 10 October 1976

THE GENERAL STRIKE IN THE NORTH EAST

The Editorial Board of the Bulletin has decided to devote most of the current issue to commemorating the 50th anniversary of the General Strike. The North East figured prominently in the struggles of 1926. From the Government's standpoint, it was almost certainly one of the regions where its authority was most severely challenged. Councils of Action sprung up throughout Northumberland and Durham. Their activities were co-ordinated and, for a time, the strikers possessed very real power.

The history of the General Strike in the North East has already been written in some detail. Dr Anthony Mason of Warwick University has produced a valuable study published by Hull University in pamphlet form. One of the participants - veteran historian Robin Page Arnot - has also written a gripping account of his experiences in the region. Then, of course, there has been the fine collection of documents on the subject, with explanatory notes by Joe Clarke and Jim Lennard, which were published as a teaching unit by Newcastle University Education Department.

In view of this wealth of material already available, it may be thought that little remains to be written. However, each of the five contributions contained in this Bulletin provides fresh and valuable information. R W Morris was employed as a mechanic at Pelton Colliery, County Durham, in 1926 and his piece, part of his autobiography, is unique: it is the first extended account by one of that small band of mineworkers who opposed the stoppage and their union's policy. In contrast to this, William Muckle, a militant miner, tells how he, along with a small band of others, derailed the Flying Scotsman. A third miner, Bill Carr, shows how, for some of the participants, 1926 was a traumatic experience, moulding their attitudes for the rest of their lives. After the capitulation of the General Council, Bill Carr expressed his disgust by defiantly joining the Communist Party and he remains one of its leading cadres in the coal industry right down to the present day.

The other two contributions come from members of the Society. Horace Green has sought to unravel the problems facing the Government's supporters in the North East as they attempted to counter the strikers' moves. Connie Pickard describes the Durham mining village of Chopwell. She discusses the background to the events of 1926 and how the village gained the sobriquet "Little Moscow". Mrs Pickard has been working as a BBC researcher on this subject. The programme, which should be of interest to members of the Society, is scheduled to be screened on BBC One in early November.

The articles of Horace Green and William Muckle first appeared in Labour Monthly and that of Bill Carr in Marxism Today. They are reprinted here by courtesy of their editors.

The cover of the Bulletin shows the front page of the Newcastle Workers' Chronicle for 10th May 1926. Over a hundred local strike bulletins are known to have been produced throughout the country. The first issue of the Workers' Chronicle appeared on 5th May, declaring the intention "to provide our class with correct news or the great struggle into which we have entered in defence of our wages and hours". Other local strike bulletins were the Northern Light, issued by the Blaydon and Chopwell District Council of Action, and the Midgie, published by a Communist Party Group in Northumberland.

THE GENERAL STRIKE by R W Morris of Pelton Colliery

As is well known, the General Strike lasted just ten days. Sir John Simon's threat to jail the TUC leaders was enough to call it off. Unfortunately, the miners chose to fight on. It was a tragic mistake, with all the consequent misery and suffering of the following nine months. In addition, it sounded the death knell of the mining industry.

Those of us who went through the strike will never forget it. I look back now and wonder how it was done. The womenfolk were the real heroines in the battle, for it was they who had the task of producing meals from literally nothing, and nowhere. Whilst the menfolk, right from the start, spent most of their time getting coal wherever we could, which was a hard enough task in itself, this would have been of little value had our meals not been forthcoming. We were harrassed and chased from place to place in our coal getting. We scraped and scratted every available source, from what was left in the empty trucks to digging in the most dangerous places in the pit tips and hillsides. Even the usually friendly Bobby became our enemy. Yet coal was an absolute necessity. Our fireplaces were designed to use large amounts of coal. In normal times the fire was hardly ever out. In the strike we had to work like beavers to get enough to keep any sort of fire at all. The summer of 1926 was one of the best on record, for which most of us were eternally grateful. We ranged far and wide to get the easiest coal, and of course everybody was doing the same. All the existing sources had been exploited many times before, so it generally meant there was a lot of dirt and rubbish to be removed or dug out before you ever got to the seam itself. As I said, it was almost a full time job with our big fireplaces. We were a big family, so we could pool our labour force.

Just one example of how we went about it might be of interest. Six of us got up at four o'clock one Monday morning. Two of the lads were married and would expect their share of the coal we got. We had a general idea of where we should start to dig to uncover the seam. There were two seams in the Dene where we lived, and the Dene itself was between 100 and 120 feet deep, with a stream called the Cong Burn running through it. The first seam was roughly about half way down the bank, but it had been exploited

in the past, so it was very much a hitty missy affair trying to locate it without having to remove very large amounts of dirt, earth, clay, and all sorts of other rubbish. I never thought it worthwhile myself, but very often others did, with varying degrees of success. On this occasion, however, we decided to go for the lower seam. The Dene ran in an East/West direction and the village of Newfield was on the North side. We decided to try our luck on the South side and, as the lower seam was known to be at or near the level of the Burn, we chose a place where we thought we would have the least amount of dirt to shift to reach the seam. It was a lovely morning, so we peeled off our clothes and set to in earnest. Long experience of pit work instinctively teaches one how to set about such a task. There is no point on shifting more muck than is necessary. So we set about sinking a small narrow shaft at about the level we knew the seam had been located some days beforehand. While some worked at the shaft, the others were casting back the dirt out of our way. As the sun came up, we soon began to sweat, and to ease the burden we kept changing places. At the end of three strenuous hours we located the seam. It was then only a matter of making ourselves safe and opening up the hole we had made so that we could get at the coal more easily. By eight o'clock we were all ready to start coal getting. The point where we were working was roughly about ten yards from the Burn and almost at its level. It wasn't very deep at this point, but it was full of rocks and rubbish, and difficult to cross. We therefore set about making a simple bridge, and to do this we felled a couple of small trees at the narrowest place handy and soon had a suitable crossing in place. Meanwhile the lads more used to coal getting had been digging away, and had quite a nice pile all ready for the rest of us to start carrying it across the Burn. The whole operation had to be done in relays to relieve the tedium. We used small bags weighing about half a hundredweight when full. It was quite enough to carry and the method adopted was to get as much coal as possible from the seam, bearing in mind there was no timber available to prop up the place where you were working. This meant that the most careful watch was necessary so as not to endanger the man digging. The further you went in, the greater the danger, and it required a very firm understanding on the part of all concerned not to exceed the ultimate danger point. We had got about two tons of coal by the time the place was no longer safe, so we called it a day. The coal was all on the far side of the Burn, and we were now faced with the task of getting it up to the top of the bank. Now the six of us set about carrying a half hundredweight sack each up that long steep bank. It was about 11 a.m. but we still had a long way to go before that coal was in our coalhouses. By about 5 p.m. we had most of it at the top of the bank, then we began the job of filling the coal into bigger bags for transport to our respective homes by wheelbarrow. We had taken sandwiches to last us all day, and without scarcely a break we finished about 8 p.m. It had been a very hard day indeed. By the weekend we were faced with the task of doing

the same thing all over again the following week. And so it went on right through the strike. Towards the end of the first month the constant dread that someone would be killed through the grave risks that were being taken, the added aggravation of being chased and chivied by the police, prompted the union officials to approach the colliery manager to see if the seam could be opened officially. I am more than pleased to report that he agreed at once, his only condition that the whole operation be supervised by a deputy. Everything necessary for the job was soon forthcoming. A hand winch was soon anchored on the village side or the Dene and a wire rope fastened to a tall tree on the other side, then a hand line and running block and we were in business. This changed the whole situation, in that it supplied our basic need. A rota system was drawn up and the digging of coal so supervised that each household got a basic allowance. From then on it was not too bad getting what extra we needed from other outcrop sources. Many other places were not so fortunate and it is sad to report that there were many lives lost through men being buried in banksides and other holes in the ground. About two months after the strike began all sorts of proposals were being put forward to end the strike. Amongst these were those of the Bishops. In effect, these would have allowed the men to go back on the old terms and get negotiations going for a mutually agreed settlement. Unfortunately, this was stubbornly rejected by the miners' executive. If there are any of them left, I hope they have long since regretted the folly of that decision. I do not know how deeply the miners' executive was involved with the Communist Party but there is no doubt that A J Cook, the miners' secretary, was the chief culprit in the whole sad business. If an almost completely National Stoppage could not succeed there was no chance whatever of one section, however important, succeeding. It occurred to me then, and I have had no reason to alter my opinion since, that if a career as a trade union leader is to be the passport to political leadership, and by this to a seat in the affairs of Government, then heaven help this nation of ours. As the long weary weeks and months dragged on, the situation became really heartbreaking. Nothing coming in, and what bits of savings we had at the beginning were very quickly used up. Our parents drawing on their dividend savings from the Co-ops. Tick became the order of the day, and here the Co-ops became our real friend in need. The small shopkeepers were quickly in trouble, and I am sure a lot of them never recovered from this setback. Whatever union funds there were in the kitty to start with must have been quickly swallowed up, for we received little, if anything, from that quarter. Things became so desperate, that after repeated appeals to the Board of Guardians for help had been ignored a mass march on the offices at Chester-le-Street almost led to a riot. Had it not been for the intervention of one or two well known and respected trade union officials there would have been serious trouble. In the end the Board agreed to grant each man two shillings and sixpence a week. As is now well known, the Boards of Chester-le-Street and Poplar were quickly set aside and superseded by the Government's own nominees. That was the only money we got, and from then on until the end of the strike

things really did become grim. Few people in the mining areas escaped the hardships, the shopkeepers especially. I am quite certain that these people had never realised, until now, just how dependent they were on a mining community for their living. I attended one meeting in the recreation field where a decision was being taken whether or not to return to work. When a show of hands was called for I noticed that quite a few people who were not miners, but railwaymen and shopkeepers, had their hands up, and drew the meeting's attention to this. A new motion was put but the result was just the same. Quite early, steps were taken to open soup kitchens and an arrangement was made with a local horse and flat owner to go down to South Shields and buy fish leftovers on the quay side. This was fish that was left over from the usual daily sales, and it proved to be a valuable addition to our daily diet. A shoe repair group was set up to help with everybody's repair problems and this, too, proved a great boon. Bread was collected from wherever we could get it, but this too became more difficult as time went on, and it is true to say that but for self-help communal efforts it is difficult to know what might have happened. Above all, though, the sun shone. That fact, I believe, was our saving grace. It enabled everybody who could to get out of doors. Another problem cropped up that summer, however, quite early on: because of the long spell of sunshine the water taps went off. Our water supply came from the Waskerly reservoir high up in the Wear valley. I do not know to this day whether it was because of an inadequate supply source, or mains, but whatever it was if the sun shone for any length of time the taps just trickled, or went off altogether. It was then a case of carrying it from the wells down the Dene. The water from these wells came from the accumulated water in the two top seams of the 5/4 (five-quarter) pit. They ran for most of my life in the village, and I often wonder if they are still running. How well I remember that water carrying when I was at school. We used to set off from the well with two full buckets and finish up at home with two half-empty ones, and with very wet feet. As more houses were built the situation got steadily worse, until eventually the county council took over the water supply. It must have cost an enormous amount of money to reorganise that company's water supply. Meanwhile, the strike went on and the search for coal got steadily worse. All the places where it had been easy to get it at first were far too dangerous, and opening up new places became more and more difficult. This meant we had to go further and further afield with all the attendant difficulty of getting the coal home after the hard work of digging it out. For a short time we tried cutting up the trees which were falling in the Dene due to taking out the coal, and so causing ground subsidence. This proved to be an even harder task, for it meant some very hard work with a cross-cut saw. Some of these trees were two feet or more in diameter and it was no use cutting off more than about a foot at a time. It then had to be split into carriable portions, a bag of which, although weighing a lot less than a similar bag of coal, was far more bulky, and thus far more difficult to carry up the bank. Even

when you got it home it went up the chimney in smoke far more quickly than did even the poorest quality coal we could find. So woodcutting was not a popular pastime, even though at times we had very little choice, in our attempts to keep the home fires burning. The lads I felt very sorry for were the single ones: those who had no parents and were in lodgings and, even more so, the older ones amongst them. These men were the first to feel the pinch, with nothing coming in at all with which to pay their way. In many cases it was a heart breaking decision for the family with whom they had been living, but they had very little choice, for they themselves had nothing coming in. In most cases the men themselves made the decision to leave. One lad I know tried to get into the workhouse, but they refused to take him. In the end some of them began living in garden sheds and greenhouses on the allotments, with the kind permission of the allotment holders. How they managed to live I do not know, but the soup kitchens helped. For the first time in their lives these men knew real poverty and, when the strike was over, even then they scarcely had time to get readjusted when the pits closed down and many of them never found any kind of employment again. After nine months of misery the miners were compelled to accept whatever terms they could get and go back to work. We, as colliery mechanics, lost more than the miners did. We had previously been able to negotiate some quite good conditions for working underground. All these were swept away and instead of a seven hour pit shift we had to work eight hours underground and then take our tools back to the shop on the surface, and arrange for any spare or new parts to be made, or ordered, in our own time before we could go home. Our overtime rates were drastically cut and, the worst blow of all, we had to take our orders from the pit staff, whereas previously the engineer had been our boss. This caused a lot of trouble and led to a great deal of friction between all parties concerned. On the first day back at work everybody knew we had lost the day. The officials had been instructed to make this obvious in every possible way. In our case both the Overmen and the Deputies began a campaign of intimidation designed primarily to let us be shown that they were now "in charge; and don't you forget it". We didn't, because if you wanted to keep your job, we daren't. So we just did the best we could and got on with the job. The best sequel to all this that I remember was some weeks after the pit finally closed down. From the very earliest days of the closure there was (in spite of all the talk about the men not looking for work) a wild rush to all the other pits round about, and in some cases right down to Yorkshire and even in some cases to the Kent pits. In the case of the local ones, we soon realised the folly of this. We should have known it was quite impossible for them to absorb so many men. Yet, even some of our officials were themselves caught up in the scramble for jobs. The Miners' Strike of 1926 was finally called off in October and, as I have said, we went back on far worse terms than before it started. The Pelton Collieries were not very badly affected by the long stoppage, but like a lot of the others round about they were

becoming uneconomic, in that the seams were now a long way from the shaft with no new ones left to exploit. It was a case of getting what coal was left in the most economical way and it was becoming evident that it could no longer support the existing manpower, and some sort of reorganisation was necessary. Almost as soon as the strike ended the management began to plan for this reorganisation. It was decided to concentrate all future output on the Low Pit and abandon the Busty Pit completely. For some weeks all efforts were concentrated on this project. In the Tilley seam a new innovation was tried in the shape of a coal-sucking plant (a development of the well known grain sucking plants). Theoretically, this may (and I only say may) have had some place in a coal mine but personally I could not see it. Anyway the machine was installed under conditions of great difficulty, and a new long wall face prepared for a trial run of this new and novel means of getting coal off a face. In essence, it was supposed to supersede the conventional conveyor belt, the suction pipes themselves being much smaller, and thus requiring much less room than the usual belt mechanism. It must have been obvious to even the most unintelligent man in the pit, though, that there would be complications. Right from the start of the trials there was trouble and, apart from the foreseen ones, the unseen and most unexpected one turned out to be coal dust. As any schoolboy knows, the mechanics of a vacuum require that the exhaust end of the machine is as important to its efficient working as the suction end. This monster was doomed from the start in this respect. The exhaust dust from it soon proved to be a highly dangerous mining hazard for, as all miners know, coal dust itself constitutes one of the most dangerous elements in mine explosions. Every available expedient was tried in an attempt to eliminate this problem, from leading the exhaust pipe into the back return, to passing it through a trough of water. It was so fine that it could almost have been turned into black paint. Those who had to work anywhere near the thing got thoroughly impregnated with the stuff, body and lungs.

It had a very fair trial, a lot more than it deserved, and I am certain everybody was glad to see it stripped down and taken away. Even during the short time it was in use, it became almost impossible to creep along the coal face mainly, it seemed to me, because the sponsors of the project were trying to prove just how much it could save in timber and other costs but, in my opinion, at the expense of safety. As I said previously, this was one of several expedients that were tried to make the concern pay its way. When the end did come, however, it came like a bolt from the blue. No-one that I knew expected such a thing; some sort of reorganisation was certainly on the cards, but all the notice we got was a notice put up on the official notice board near the lamp cabin, on the Friday morning, to the effect that the pit would work on the Saturday morning in order that the men could collect their tools, and that was that. Some time later the concern was split up into lots and put up for auction. I have no

details of any particular transaction but, as it turned out, the Low Pit was bought by another mineowner, who caused quite a stir by insisting upon employing who, and upon what terms he liked, and when and where he liked, thus ignoring all the previous precedents for consulting the trade unions. It was during this period that the village began to fall apart. At first the unions got together to try and sort out the problems involved in an effort to preserve the greatest number of jobs for all concerned. It was agreed that a meeting be sought with the new management to arrange who should be given the chance to return to work, in what order, and under what conditions. Anyone who had not been in continuous employment over the last three or four years would be automatically excluded, as well as those engaged during that period. This, they believed, would give employment to those who were the real natives and with most entitlement to remain in the village. Whether this idea was ever accepted by the new management I do not know, but it quickly became evident they had no intention of doing anything of the kind. They say Human Nature is very frail, but the village was soon to be treated to a spectacle no-one ever thought possible. All sorts of clandestine approaches were soon seen to be made to the new officials' homes and to the colliery offices. The new officials were waylaid, in every possible way, both in daylight and darkness. Families quarrelled amongst themselves, long standing friendships came to an end, and a bitterness established that lasted for years. I was soon resigned to my fate, for I had been away from the pit on two separate occasions. I must admit, though, I did not fully appreciate the seriousness of the situation. I had the feeling that a single man prepared to move anywhere would easily find a job, even though a family man might not find it so easy. How differently it all turned out, and like the rest I was to have my share of trouble over the next year or so.

I mentioned a little while back that the officials of the old regime let us see we had lost the strike, and treated us very badly on occasion. Some of these men were also amongst the victims of the final closure and it was one such particularly obnoxious specimen we met on one of our daily scrambles for work. About a dozen of us were on our way to Craghead when we were joined by this odious specimen of the human family. Every one of us had often wished for just such an opportunity in the past few months. Few of us ever thought we would get the chance, but here it was and that man will never forget it as long as he lives. We didn't leave him the lickings of a dog by the time we got far less than half way to Craghead. There is a gate somewhere on that railway line and the last I ever saw of him he was disappearing over it making for the road. I am sure he must have thought we were going to set about him with physical violence. He had bubbled and blustered his excuses that it was not his fault, that he was only doing what he was told, etc., etc., until the snivelling little rat made me feel sorry for him. He wasn't the only one, worse luck. There was one in particular who

had the habit of chiding me in a nasty sarcastic manner of my relationship with my Grandfather. I never knew the old man, for he went off to South Africa within a month or two of my birth. From those who knew him, I gathered he was a particularly good pitman, albeit a bit rough tongued and given to calling a spade a spade. This man had evidently come in contact with the old man in his early mining days, for they used to go from place to place doing all kinds of special jobs such as shaft sinking and drift driving. This was why he went off to Africa. Here again I had the questionable pleasure of seeing him in the same old dole queue as myself. It must have been a far greater blow to his ego than it was to mine, as I couldn't help reminding him. I often look back and wonder what they gained by it all. Men in authority bullying their fellow men just to show their authority, knowing full well that they couldn't or daren't retaliate without their bread and butter being at stake. Even at this distance in time I can not remember them without a feeling of pity.

One very important episode I missed out of my account of the 1926 strike occurred about half way through the strike. There can be no doubt lots of men were getting sick of seeing the awful mess we were in and would have given almost anything to get back to work, except that the stigma of being called a blackleg held them back. There couldn't be any wonder that some men at some places did attempt to break away and return to work, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain solidarity for the strike. The Owners were well aware of this and doing everything they could to encourage this move, by dangling all sorts of schemes in front of them to get them back to work. Rumours spread that the Ouston Collieries were being prepared to reopen and meetings were called at Pelaw and Pelton Fell with a view to picketing the pits to stop any such re-opening. Whether there was every any truth in these rumours or not I never discovered. But what happened I will never forget. Hundreds of men concentrated at Ouston E pit and even the local people seemed mesmerised at the gathering and wondered what it was all about. To my knowledge no speeches were made and no attempt was made to approach the pit itself. The houses at Ouston were exactly like ours, facing the pit and quite close to it. To this day I don't know who set it in motion, or why but quite suddenly a large furniture van appeared at the end of the street, the doors were flung open and out poured a couple of dozen policemen with their batons drawn and they began laying about them in all directions. For a moment or two the crowd was completely stunned, then broke in panic in all directions. One of my pals and I nipped into the yard of one of the houses, and crouched down behind the postub. The crowd continued to flee in all directions away from the pit and its vicinity, followed by the baton flaying policemen. When they had all passed our hiding place, we too hopped it, and quick. We were told later that the police had been informed there was likely to be violence and came prepared to prevent it.

They did but at the expense of a good few lumps and bumps on a lot of people's heads. I never did get to know who was responsible for that police raid, or who started those malicious rumours at Ouston Colliery.

There was another incident towards the end of the strike that might easily have had serious consequences. As I have said, some men were under pressure from their wives to have the strike called off, so as to end the increasing hardship. As many efforts to this end failed, some men resorted to digging coals from outcrop seams, on a large scale, in an effort to relieve the family hardship. Groups of men got together in an organised way and started out at Waldridge Fell, where the seam outcropped in places quite near the surface. For a while, nothing happened, but as their efforts became so blatently obvious threats of violence against the operators began to be made. In an effort to persuade these men peacefully to stop coal digging, a mass meeting of all the men employed at Pelaw and Pelton Fell was called and it was agreed to go to Waldridge and try and persuade them to stop. I think there was a general feeling that if they did not agree the diggings would be destroyed. There were rumours that these men would seek police protection, although their activities were illegal. I myself thought it was a dangerous situation, but that night some hundreds of men duly arrived on the Fell. There were three or four field gates at different places on the Fell to contain the cattle grazing there and to proclaim the rights of way. It was at one of these gates that the crowd came up against the Law in the shape of a group of policemen. Besides some local miners' lodge officials, there were a couple of local magistrates present, and they asked to be allowed to meet some of the diggers. The police said there were none on the Fell and that we should all turn round and go home. Alas, while this parleying was going on groups of men had broken away from the crowd and were roaming the Fell in search of the diggers. It was a bright moonlight night and the Fell is a rough place at any time, and difficult to navigate even in moonlight, so some of them began to set fire to the prickly whinn and yellow gorse bushes and, with the exceptionally dry summer, soon the whole Fell side was ablaze from end to end. As soon as we saw this we made for home as quickly as we could as we feared the military would be turned out upon us. This was no idle thought either, for right from the start troops had been drafted into the mining areas for just such contingencies and armoured cars were a frequent sight on the roads throughout the strike.

Nobody had any idea whether or not there were coal diggers on the Fell that night, as all sorts of rumours were abroad. It took the passing of a couple of days before anyone could be

sure there had not been someone burnt to death at Waldridge that night. Whatever the effect it had on most of us who were there, it did not stop the digging. A day or two respite, and they were at it again even better organised than ever. I believe they realised just how frightened everyone had been at the possibility of the terrible tragedy that might have happened, and cashed in on the belief they would not do anything so stupid again. It is quite possible the only casualties were a large amount of game as well as birds and rabbits.

Another event occurs to me which took place about the middle of the strike. I have said that many attempts were made to bring the strike to an end, but about this time the Miners' Executive mounted a morale boosting campaign, with members of the Labour Party, MPs, but especially the miners' secretary, A J Cook touring the mining areas. If nothing else, Cook had the gift of public speaking, especially as a propagandist. I had heard him on three previous occasions and although I did not know he was a member of the Communist Party until about the middle of the strike I somehow feel I ought to have guessed he was. The Communist Party had very little support in the Durham mining areas, although it is possible that the influence of a tiny minority might have had a good deal more effect than many of us realised. By half way through the strike I think it would be true to say that the will to continue was waning and no-one could be surprised at it.

So those who wished the struggle to continue brought up A J Cook to tour the country. I do not know who chose the location but on this occasion it was a stroke of genius on their part, whoever it was. The spot chosen might have, and no doubt did, surprise many people. It surprised me. Burnhope is a tiny village, with a small pit, on an almost unknown side road from Craghead to Lanchester, on the west side of the county. You could not have had a more rural setting, and the particular spot chosen proved to be a natural amphitheatre for just such an occasion. Seldom have I seen so many miners and their families in one huge throng, except perhaps at the Big Meeting on their Gala Day at Durham. Once again, the sun shone, and it brought out the bands and banners from miles away, and I am positive there were few buses, if any, in sight of the place. A farm waggon had been brought to the centre of this natural agricultural bowl and it must have seemed an inspiring sight of solidarity from that platform. A vast sea of faces, of men and women, boys and girls, from a very wide area, gathered there to hear a miners' leader. I said it was a beautiful warm day, and many were soon in their shirt sleeves. A couple of members of the Durham Miners' Executive opened the meeting with appeals for closed ranks and unity. Then Cook rose. He began in his usual slow measured tones, stating the facts as he saw them, but as on the two previous occasions, when I had seen him, gradually, almost imperceptibly,

he was subtly applying the art of persuasive propaganda of which I came to know he was a master. Appealing, pleading, cajoling, taunting, and accusing, he worked from side to side of that limited platform, facing first one part of the audience and then the other, and so obviously carrying them with him. He peeled off his coat and rolled up his sleeves as he warmed to his task. It was a masterly performance as he carried his audience along with him in his mesmeric peroration. You could not help being carried away. He was cheered to the echo, and for a while at any rate little more was heard of breakaways. He was not always so well received though, and at one of his later meetings in some other part of the country, he was kicked by some irate person, and I understand the injury eventually led to his death.

CRAMLINGTON by William Muckle

I was getting 6s 9½d per shift, and a 40 per cent reduction in pay had been threatened by the mine-owners. The conditions were wet, with foul air. There was no annual or statutory holiday pay. There were no pit-head baths. We lived in hovels. The toilets were earth closets, and water was drawn from a standpipe 30 feet from the house.

On May 10, 1926, a meeting of the Cramlington Lodge was held in the Miners' Institute. One of the lodge officials ended the meeting with A J Cook's slogan: "Stop the wheels turning". Someone in the meeting called for them all to come back after dinner and have a rail up to stop the blackleg coal trains going through.

The men returned about 1.30 p.m., and just as they all met they saw blackleg platelayers working in their "plus fours" on the line. The miners stoned and chased them away. Then someone called out: 'Come on lads, we'll have a rail out'. Over two dozen miners participated. As a precaution to save injury to anyone, one of the miners went about 400 yards up the line, sat on the bank and tried to wave the train down to stop, while two others nearer to where the rail had been removed also gave a second warning to stop the train by waving it down. But the blackleg crew did not heed the warnings, although it was common talk at the time that the blackleg platelayers had waved the train down at Nelson village, about a mile away, to warn the blackleg train crew to expect trouble at Cramlington. That would account for the train only travelling 20 miles an hour as it reached the gap in the line, which the engine almost cleared before toppling over on its side. To our astonishment the train was the Flying Scotsman and not the coal train, as the trains were not running to the usual schedule. Fortunately no one was killed and only one was detained in hospital with an ankle injury.

Following the derailment the police were very busy trying to trace those responsible, and for weeks nobody cracked. But eventually Lionel Waugh, whose uncle was a police superintendent and whose brother was a policeman, turned King's evidence and with his two witnesses, Robert Taylor and George Wardle who had taken part in the derailment, provided the evidence on which eight of us were arrested at 1.30 a.m. in the morning of a day in June. Three of us were sentenced to four years penal servitude, two to six years and three to eight years. After short stays at Durham, Leeds and Pentonville prisons, we were finally sent to Maidstone prison to serve our sentences.

Meanwhile, an organisation called the International Class War Prisoners' Aid, of which Bob Lovell was secretary of the British section, began to organise a campaign for our release, raise funds to help our families and make it possible for them to visit us in jail. We did not know of the existence of this organisation until we received our first visits, and it lightened the load of our sentences considerably to know we were not forgotten and our dependents were being cared for.

The campaign was a great success. Those sentenced to four years were released after two years and three months, those to six years after three years, and those to eight years after 3½ years. And it must be remembered that the ICWPA was not only campaigning for us: there were hundreds of general strike and miners' lock-out prisoners; the twelve Communist leaders were in prison; and there were great campaigns for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti in America and the prisoners of fascism in Europe, all going on at the same time.

Great meetings in London, Newcastle, Dudley and Cramlington welcomed us home on our release, I remember, when I was released with the first three, the great welcome we received at Poplar Town Hall, then at Newcastle by a great demonstration led by Will Lawther, the national chairman of the ICWPA, followed by a packed-out meeting at Cramlington Co-op Hall and finally at the Dudley Co-op Hall where we were presented with ICWPA silver medals.

No doubt when the mass media deal with the fiftieth anniversary of the general strike, the derailment of the Flying Scotsman will be cited as an example of violence. We were not violent men, and had the middle class "plus four" train crews and platelayers not sought to break the strike, the incident would never have occurred.

Our aim was to stop blackleg coal trains only, and for this we have no regrets. We were on starvation wages and fighting to preserve outselves and our families from further degradation.

MEMORIES OF THE GENERAL STRIKE by Bill Carr

Over the last 110 years my grandfather, father and myself, have worked in the coal mining industry. Grandfather started at the age of 11. Throughout this period little had changed in the practice of obtaining coal from the seams at knock-down prices; never was there a commodity that had produced such huge fortunes - for the owner. And however the industry suffered from time to time through a fall in demand, the owner escaped hardship. He usually could find ways to pass on the fruits of the crisis to the man in the darkness - the miner. Which was really the crux of the great 1926 strike, the strike which nearly brought about the downfall of a Government, and but for a betrayal of the miners, would have succeeded.

I was 18 years old at the time, living in Millfield, a few miles from Newcastle-on-Tyne, and working at Maria Pit.

Councils of Action were set up in our area. The plans outlined at these TUC-organised groups in the villages, which I attended, were in effect to set up at strategic points, barriers which would be manned by appointed pickets to control the movement of any vehicle in and out of the village. Any article delivered would be scrutinised, but only those needed for the sustenance of the community would be allowed. The vehicle driver would need a chit to grant him free passage.

In only one short term of a fortnight, masses of workers learned of their tremendous political power.

Inevitably, VIPs of many shades of honesty were driven to the conclusion that their whole future depended on the goodwill of the local Council of Action. Though they supported the Government, they had no scruples in applying to the Council for preferential treatment in the issuing of chits. To my delight they were rebuffed.

Picketing of the pit was intensive, though I cannot recollect any person at that time who would have dreamt of blacklegging in the face of the complete solidarity of the miners and their families.

This was a most exciting period of my life. The collapse of the General Strike, while disheartening to the miners, did not lead to any weakening of resolve. My family expressed the reactions of everyone around us when they vilified the traitors who left us to struggle alone, though care was taken not to denounce the workers who had responded to the call. Miners' leaders throughout Britain redoubled their efforts to rally the miners for struggle, at the same time spelling out the causes of the desertions. Arrests of miners' leaders were denounced and at the several mass meetings I attended on Newcastle Town Moor, the anger of the miners was clearly shown by calls for more retaliation in reply to the attacks by the Government.

It seemed nothing but death could silence this great roar, a demand for justice. Great fighters without a doubt! Meanwhile, each day in the villages was marked by some new event. The women organised all kinds of supper evenings. The supper my aunt provided was from a wash boiler, chips fried in fat provided free by a local butcher. Others produced boiled peas, and there was always plenty of home-baked loaves standing on window ledges to cool off for consumption later in the day. Herrings were ten a penny. Living on the fringe of the Northumbrian moors, netting rabbits was a nightly pursuit. Wild birds' eggs we could obtain easily. We even helped farmers in their fields for the reward of a bag of potatoes. Pinching went on too, but it was mostly from public or private property which had little or no relevance for the owners.

Fuel was needed for cooking too, there were no such luxuries as electric cookers for mining families. There were plenty of trees in the area, but on a solid fuel cooking range had little value. So the miners made their own coal-mine in a nearby wood, Walbottle Dene. Very thin seams of poor brown coal had always been known to exist in the Dene and a start was made by odd individuals to exploit it, purely for local domestic use, of course.

My two brawny uncles and myself set out our "claim" in the Dene, breaking into the three-foot seam on the sides of a steep ravine. Roof supports for the tunnel were obtained from the sawn wood from the trees around us. Driving in a pilot heading, and then fanning out further tunnelling to the left and right, providing essential ventilation, was an exhibition of good technical skill in mining engineering.

My uncles needed no lessons in this. They were experts. My role in the venture was haulage: I had a large tin bath which I pushed in ahead of me empty into the heading. With a clothes line attached to the handle, my uncle, hewing the coal, then filled the tin bath with coal. I then dragged the bath back out of the heading. My other uncle at the heading entrance would then empty the coal out of the bath tin into a sack.

When we had obtained sufficient coal for our use, we then discontinued our mining until more coal was needed. We did, of course, provide coal for the less fortunate where we could. The coal was carted away from the heading to the village by cycles - at night time. A tricky operation through the Dene in the dark. The "Specials", too, were very active in stopping and searching anyone carrying anything suspicious. Later in the strike, they clamped down on the "Dene" coal digging operations; presumably it was far too successful for the liking of authorities directing the crushing of the strike. But steathily it still went on. I must say, too, that a "Black Market", unwholesome in many respects

to the strikers, did develop, but people were in many cases being deprived of necessities. Selling coal could buy food.

From the period of the beginning of the General Strike, the local Council of Action had organised morale boosting, social events and these events were carried on in the village long after the General Strike ended. On special days children participated in concerts on waste land; buns and cocoa were distributed. The women excelled in soup kitchen work, various charitable organisations helped.

Sports days were plentiful. Football and cricket matches for men and women as well as walking and running competitions, swimming races in the Tyne (a half mile away) were skilfully planned and executed. No effort was spared in the pursuit of solidifying the unity of the people, a necessity for victory.

My sister, 19 years of age, still a beautiful woman now at 67, was quite an expert at track and long distance running. Her winning trophies were, fortunately, a parcel of groceries donated by a local grocer. Such local characters as these made splendid contributions of credit to miners during the strike, with really little hope of ever recovering their losses. They never had much themselves to tide them over difficult times. No others were employed in the shops but themselves. Most miners remembered them and gave loyal customer support to the end of their lives.

The "Means Test" applied by the "Board of Guardians" at that time was always the subject of bitterness. Then, as now, miners were receiving heavy blows from the press and authority. Shiftlessness on the part of the miner was the main charge laid against him. True, the fantastic lovely summer weather did not give me any incentive to want to resume back-breaking underground toil, but then I had no dependants to keep.

But it was degrading for any family applying for "Guardian" relief. Many did not bother to have the humiliating experience, and refused to join the queue. Union hand-outs to the strikers were already small, and weekly getting less. The miners' leaders worked incessantly to obtain financial support for us, internationally, as well as nationally, but whatever they obtained was shared out among many. Baldwin, the Prime Minister, parried the appeal of our leaders to the USA for financial aid for the miners, by publishing a message to them that there was no hardship or destitution amongst the miners. The miners regarded this as a definite intention of the Government to assist the coal-owners to starve the men back to work.

Evan Williams, coal-owners' representative, said in a meeting with miners' leaders in August 1926, when they were still searching for an honourable settlement - "I do not know whether, with your recent ecclesiastical associations, you have developed the habit of starting the proceedings with a prayer and a hymn, and I hope you will not find it strange if we do away with it this afternoon,

and get straight down to business". This was a reference to Church Bishops' meetings with union leaders trying to find a formula for ending the strike. Typical attitude of contempt and ridicule of the tyrant class, arrogant in their might, merciless in what they felt was to be their victory.

My gentle though rough family, slow to react to cruelty, were enraged. I think they knew the nature of the beast from past experience; this clinched it.

I think also that despite the great hardship experienced, these well-publicised arrogant expressions of overwhelming power against the more helpless, helped greatly to decide the miners, come what may, that they would not submit. As their resources grew less, the miners' firmness grew stronger.

Page Arnot correctly states the position in his reference to this period by quoting a few lines from the Song of the Fight at Malden:

"Mind shall be harder
Heart the keener
Mood shall be greater
As our might lessens."

A J Cook, miners' leader, was regarded as a heroic figure of great stature in our village. His ceaseless campaigning to stem any breach in the wall had a remarkable impact in the struggle. Some say he gave his life for the miners. The Soviet Union had made £1 million donation to the miners, a subject of ridicule and hatred from coal-owners, press and government. I can mark my entry into active radical politics from this period. The example of a naked class confrontation with all allied forces of the Establishment, there for all to see, to crush a section of the community down to semi-starvation level was the final confirmation of what I needed to know of class society. And I had not even read a Marxist sheet! The hand-out of strike pay amounted to 4 shillings a head - half for juniors. Even this meagre sum was the subject of violent attacks by government and press. The patient courage shown by the miners was exemplified by the torrent of hatred and abuse showered on them. Lying about supposed stealing and cheating by the miners was commonplace. The picture was complete with the "Specials" strutting around in their scores, watching, searching, overlooking any ordinary action. We experienced the embryo of a Fascist state. And as the strike went on, contributions to the miners grew less, and little as it was, the few shillings a week we had received as strike pay, dried up. It was sorely missed. With rare exceptions, these small sums had been used to buy food.

Opposite where we lived was a steelworks. For the first three months of the strike, coal had been poured into the smelting

yard. Picketing had not succeeded in preventing this; there was a "Special" for every yard of ground. Harassment of the people by these "supermen" could, and did, receive counter-action. Night after night raids on the coalstocks took place within a hundred yards of where the "Specials" were stationed. Coal wagons were raided on their way to the yard; many of them arrived empty, the drop floor of the wagon expertly released. Some of the men were caught and fined, but most of them were not. This was entirely unorganised, in some ways counter-productive, but who can say that it was any more criminal than the never-ending attempts by authority to starve the miners' families into submission.

A colliery nearby, "Coronation", newly constructed had re-opened, and some of the first blacklegs appeared. In the beginning none of these came from our village. Coal was transported from the pit for some two miles by a rope-drawn tubway. The blacklegs at this pit were the scum of Newcastle City. Of no mining experience and without any training, they were guided and coerced by pit officials to produce coal by direction. It needed an army of "Specials" to guard them night and day from the pickets. For the coal to reach its destination at the rail terminals at Lemington, there were many open fields, part woodlands and culverts to pass through.

Obtaining fuel for home use was a difficult problem, and I, along with several other young mates, decided we would, like the Red Indians of old, raid these wagon trains without impeding their progress, fill up our bags with coal from the train (their speed was about 2 miles an hour) and proceed home with the booty. This had been done many times before successfully. The "Specials" rarely knew where to be to meet the many demands made of them; stretching them out over a two-mile area made their job harder. Well, there we were, mid-day, contemptuous of any intervention, eight of us marching in single file, each carrying a sack of coal on our shoulders. All at once a mass surge of police and "Specials" burst through the bushes, pouncing on the nearest. Being at the rear of the file, I had the advantage, dropping my bag and running. I ran like a hare across the ploughed fields but, looking back, there were two uniforms travelling faster, and in a short time I was hooked, taken to the police station and detained, and put in a cell with another lad. Done to frighten us! The gruff sergeant had invited us to promise to go back to work. Idleness, he claimed, was the breeder of crime. After a few hours we were released, but the village was agog with excitement over our confinement.

Our appropriated coal, stored in the police station yard, later disappeared from the yard in the night. And we did not go back to work.

Our first blackleg in the village was a sensation. An ex-sergeant-major of the last war, he always walked about with the arrogance of a ruler. He had little credit as a miner, nor did his usual loud voice give him respect.

What makes a blackleg? They vary in type. What they have in common is a shrinking away from any social responsibility, they can be expert at fawning on the boss, almost serf-like in appreciation of authority.

Our whole village seemed to turn out for the hero's return from his first day's work blacklegging. Marching at the head of what looked like an army of "Specials", it was indeed a spectacle of state might. The blackleg even appeared to be enjoying his glory, pathetic posing under the umbrella of a doubtful kind of protection. He chose his way, he certainly could not expect the manly joy of being recognised as a man of principle. Rather he was treated as one would a snake.

The younger element in the village, having agreed that this blackleg should not enjoy some of the spoils of his traitorous action, decided to extract the concessionary coal delivered to him by a grateful boss. This was done in the middle of the night by the simple unscrewing of his coal-house door hinges, and removing the coal in bags. Daily cat-calling of the man on his return from work must have made his life wretched. Or is their brain specially insulated against such deprecation?

But, back at home, the continuous pressure of trying to provide an adequate meal brought strains and stresses. While the family spirit of togetherness was of a deep character, great hardship could be borne. There were other cases though where ill-health had already existed before any strike had started; where existence had depended for a long time on pittances, these suffered the cruellest blows. A neighbour, in such a plight, cut her throat, but her life was saved by other neighbours. Another chap hanged himself in the yard of the steelworks. These tragedies to people not connected with the mining industry were linked to the strike I believe by the venomous action of local "Boards of Guardians". In hindsight I can see that any unfortunate family could be denied the financial help needed to sustain them, if only to use such cases as proof of what harm the wicked miners were causing to the community.

There was, of course, as strike funds dried up, a growing number of men returning to work. It was not serious in our village, but not all the village worked in the pits. One of my own firm friends, young, vital, and naturally loving the bright lights went back to work. He was not a rat; the sheer boredom of non-preoccupation with the pit that at least gave him, as a single man, a reasonable social life, was denied him, coupled with family pressures and (father a non-miner) all this finally caused him to make the break. It was a deep, sad blow to me. He was blacklisted from our home for ever. Many more young people were attracted back by the apparent hopelessness. Our family stuck to their guns. I believe many more were influenced by their decisions. By November, the majority of miners were

still standing firm, but a quarter of the work force, nearly a quarter of a million had gone back to work. The Government now offered what they thought were reasonable terms as conquerors:

(a) Immediate resumption of work.

(b) Longer hours to be discussed at district level.

(c) "Temporarily" rates of pay at pre-strike level (but conditional on acceptance of longer hours).

(d) No guarantee against victimisation, etc.

Not surprising, after these humuliating terms were referred by the Miners' Executive to the districts, they were rejected. The end, we knew though, was near. On November 29 it was all over. The lockout had lasted seven months, and things would never be the same again. The bitter hatred of the miners against the Tories was deep indeed, and has continued until today. This is reflected in the almost obsessional desire in every miners' family to vote Labour in every mining village. The fact that the few Labour Governments since 1926 have betrayed the ideals set in the minds of the miners by the Socialist Pioneers, does not allow a miner to forget the maniacal enemy of 1926. Easy to forgive wrongs done to themselves, our lads know of the tortures inflicted on their innocent families, and it will never be forgotten.

Our pit was by this time completely manned by blacklegs, most of them from other parts of Britain. None of my family were accepted when they presented themselves for work. The blacklist was thoroughly operated, no mercy was shown, nor even expected by the miner from the coal-owner. Yet the locked-out men were rated among the most highly qualified, conscientious pitmen in Britain. Conversely, the men who had returned to work during the lock-out forming the basis of the new man-power in the industry, were largely raw, limited in conception of struggle against geological conditions in the primitive mining existing then.

Their productive results were not outstanding, so that over a period of a few months after the end of the strike, managements were coming to see the necessity of little by little re-employing the old hands, but not at the pits they worked at prior to the strike.

I finally got a job at a pit near Blaydon across the river from where we lived - called "Stargate". Appalling conditions, water coming in through the roof in cascades. Earning power in the circumstances was poor. My uncles had similar problems where they finally got a job, and in 1928 we left the North for the new Yorkshire coalfields, where we joined, at a new Thorne

Colliery, hundreds of colliers from other areas of Britain, victims of blacklisting.

NEWCASTLE : THE OTHER SIDE by Horace Green

The story of the general strike, on balance, often deals predominantly with the actions of the struggle of the trade unions and then the miners, but the other side of the picture shows long prepared work by those in power to meet this challenge.

In Newcastle upon Tyne, the City Council meeting on December 15, 1925, saw Councillor Locke putting a question to the Town Clerk on a query about the contents of a "secret circular" issued by the Ministry of Health, on what actions needed to be taken, anticipating that a "national stoppage" might take place at some time.

This circular, it was asserted, indicated what expenditure might be incurred and Councillor Locke wished to know whether an opportunity would be given to the Council to discuss this and to consider whether the city should bear any expenditure.

The Town Clerk's reply was that there had been no "secret circular" but there was a public circular which he had and which, if the Council wished it, could be printed for consideration.

In discussion which followed it was asked if officials had already been appointed on this directive, and an Aldermen, Sir George Lunn, said that "a similar circular to this had been issued by Mr Arthur Henderson when he was Home Secretary".

The Lord Mayor said that the questions were 'irrelevant" and that they would have the circular 'printed and circulated'. On a show of hands it was agreed that this be done. This led to a circular from the Ministry of Health, dated November 20, 1925, being printed and circulated in which it was stated that "local authorities" were directed by the Minister of Health to refer to a circular sent to them in May 1922, which called for arrangements for the "maintenance of local services, as may be thought to be required in the event arising" of an industrial dispute which "may be so extended as to interfere seriously with communications", conveyance of food, etc., light and power supplies, health and the "means of livelihood of the population at large".

It set out in detail the machinery and organisation to be set up: a Minister to act as "Civil Commissioner" in each of ten divisions in England and Wales, with a staff of representatives from government departments to deal with "transport, food, postal services, coal"; this body to keep in touch with local

authorities in each division, and "empowered if necessary to give decisions on behalf of the government".

Each division was to be divided into "areas" for administration, and to recruit volunteers, and in each area there was to be a "local food officer, local road officer, a haulage committee and a coal officer" along with a chairman selected by the government to convene and preside over a "volunteer service committee".

There was to be consultation with principal local "traders", and the document set out detailed plans, which included co-operation with police, to ensure "law and order" with local authorities taking steps in this co-operation by, "for instance, securing able bodied citizens of good character to serve as special constables".

This led to a debate on a resolution moved by Councillor Adams at the City Council meeting held on May 5, the second day of the general strike, "that this Council, whilst adopting a strictly neutral attitude, recognising the widespread injury to the country arising out of a national stoppage, hereby respectfully urges the government to resume negotiations with the contending parties". Standing Orders were suspended to discuss this motion. Alderman Millican moved an amendment to alter the motion to add the suggestion that it be sent to the TUC as well as the government, asking for a resumption of negotiations, and Mr Adams accepted this.

A defence of the miners and the TUC was put, in the debate, and eventually Alderman Sir George Lunn said he wanted to move that the general strike order be withdrawn, and that negotiations be resumed as early as possible, saying the motion before the Council was "a good horse, but it wanted a better rider". He finally moved "that the general strike order be withdrawn and that the coal owners re-open the mines at the existing rates of wages and conditions for a time long enough to arrive at a settlement, with the continuance of the government subsidy for that period". Mr Adams agreed to this, and the motion was then carried, with decision that copies be sent to the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and to local MPs.

In September of 1925 there did appear newspaper adverts calling on citizens who were prepared to volunteer to "maintain supplies and vital services in the event of a general strike", and a leaflet urging them to "join now", issued with the heading OMS: Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, setting out its objects and how to enrol, was published and distributed in the north-east, giving the chairman as Sir Alexander Leith, MC, vice-chairman Viscount Allendale, MC, and secretary Captain A E Brooks, with address at 21 Louvaine Place, Newcastle upon Tyne.

This folder declared that it was not a political or aggresive organisation but was aimed at compiling a register of members for the "use of the government of the day should a "state of emergency" be declared". It outlined the tasks of maintaining law and order, essential public services, food, heat, light, power, transport and sanitation, setting out five classes needed:

A Protection: age limit 45, to be sworn in, if required, as special constables.

B Workers: those with knowledge of work in connection with railways, tramways, electrical power, gas, food supplies, water, sanitary services, clerical, canteen and other social services, postal, inland waterways, dock services, loaders for foodstuffs (state fully on page 4 your special qualifications).

C Transport: 1. lorry, omnibus and motor car drivers, mechanics, horse transport drivers and stablemen (state fully on page 4 your special qualifications, type of vehicle you are accustomed to and whether able to do own running repairs);

2. Particulars on page 4 of any lorry, van or car (horse power accommodation, etc) you are willing to offer for use.

D Messengers: small car drivers, motor cyclists, cyclists, mounted or foot messengers (state fully on page 4 if any special qualifications).

E Members: who are willing to take an energetic part in recruiting for classes A, B, C and D, or who subscribe to the funds of the OMS.

Note: women are eligible for classes B, C, D and E, but in no circumstances will they be employed where there is any danger of rough handling.

And page 4 set out the form for joining, with details asked for and at the foot a section for contributions to the fund.

A meeting at Durham was held on April 15, 1926, to set up OMS organisation with a Dr A Robinson in the chair. Amongst those there and who played an active part throughout the period on this side of the struggle was Lord Londonderry's local agent, Malcolm Dillon.

A Captain Matthews set out an explanation of the need for and role of OMS organisation. Officials were appointed and a "strong financial committee" formed to appeal for funds. The Finance Committee included Lord Barnard as chairman, Sir Alfred Palmer, Sir Henry Havelock-Allen and Colonel Sadler amongst its members.

A Declaration of Objects was set out, this included the statement that "the OMS is an association of loyal citizens organised in the Public interest, without political or class partisanship," the objects being to provide the government, in times of emergency, with "those who will assist in maintaining essential public services ...", declaring that "such co-operation is the natural duty of every citizen, but it can only be effective with organisation".

Under the heading of "Who will the OMS benefit by its operations?" it stated: "The general community whose vital interests must not be compromised to secure those of a particular section, or for the purposes of promoting political aims".

The minutes of the Newcastle upon Tyne Watch Committee for May 21, 1926, reported that the city was often a "centre of unrest", that for the use of the mounted police horses had been provided "gratuitously", and having to use the St James Park Football Ground had been charged for. The Chief Constable in his report said that "during the emergency a total of 1,500 special constables were enrolled".

The report was accepted with tributes to the Chief Constable and everyone else concerned on the services rendered. Confidence was expressed that "at any time in the future if occasion demanded it" reliance could be placed on the "help and assistance of the citizens to assist in protecting life and property and maintaining good order throughout the city".

CHOPWELL - "Little Moscow" by Connie Pickard

It is difficult to pin down the date when Chopwell was first referred to as "Little Moscow". The term was certainly fostered by the press and was clearly intended as a term of abuse in the wake of rumours that Chopwell had set itself up as a Soviet. The only reference I have found to the latter was to the football team Chopwell Soviet which, though known locally by that name, was unable to prevail upon the Football Association to be permitted to use it and had to be content with the title Chopwell White Star. A Communist Club was set up in Chopwell in 1912, founded by an anarchist photographer called George Davison. But the term "Communist" had something of a religious connotation in those days, and the club owed more to the ideas of William Morris and Edward Carpenter than to Marx.

The streets built by the Blaydon Urban District Council in the early twenties bear the names Lenin Terrace and Engels Street but they also commemorate E D Morel and Robert Owen. On the Chopwell Miners' Lodge banner the portraits of Marx and Lenin appear, but so does that of Keir Hardie and the words of the American poet Walt Whitman.

"We take up the task eternal, the burden and the lesson.
Pioneers! Oh Pioneers'. "

On the other side of the banner there is a group of miners, before them a globe bearing the words:

"The world for workers and he who would be free must strike the first blow."

and above that the words "Cooperative Commonwealth".

The lodge banner was controversial in its day. Some people in the village described it as a Communist banner and the first time it was taken out of Chopwell the banner party was attacked by an angry crowd as they marched to board the train at Westwood station.

This banner now stands in the Museum of Trade Unions in Moscow, and this story goes back to 1926. During the period of the great strike the miners of the Donbas coalfield, though hard-pressed themselves, collected half a million pounds to assist Britain's miners. Some of this money eventually reached Chopwell, after much talk in the House of Commons and elsewhere about "Moscow gold". Actually the money was raised by the Donbas miners and did not come from the Soviet Government. Thirty years later a delegation of Donbas miners visited Chopwell on their way to the Durham Miners Gala. As this coincided with the replacement of the Chopwell Lodge banner the lodge chairman, Len Hawkshaw, presented the Soviet delegation with the old one, which they took back to Russia. On a return visit to Russia in the following year Len Hawkshaw was presented with a scarlet banner from the Donbas miners. Both the Donbas banner and the present lodge banner now hang in the Chopwell Community Centre.

Chopwell's militancy had long roots. In its heyday Chopwell was producing 11,000 tons of coal a week and employing 12,500 men. These men had come to Chopwell to work the colliery and they founded a virile mining community. Unlike the older pit villages in Durham Chopwell with its three pits - the first sunk on 13 May 1895 - created a Klondyke in the middle of a forest and attracted some of the most fearless, energetic and free-thinking families from the older mining areas. Men and women who were ready to put the spirit of the "New Unionism" into the old-established Durham Miners Association and the Spen and District Labour Representation Committee.

The Lawthers came from Choppington in Northumberland and the Boltons from the Welsh coalfield. Harry Bolton's journey to socialism travelled a difficult route. The Bolton family were Wesleyan Methodists and Harry Bolton rebelled against the chapel's attitude to the First World War. The preachers were gripped by the same patriotic fever that held the rest of the country, but Harry argued that "War is murder". His own son, Wesley, went to

prison as a conscientious objector. Rumour has it that Bolton burned his bible and replaced it with Das Capital. He also ran a Socialist Sunday School which had people like Jack Parks preaching evolution. There was the singing of Socialist hymns and readings from William Morris and Edward Carpenter; and, no doubt, from E D Morel, for when Bolton was chairman of the Blaydon UDC he named one of the new streets after Morel, the champion against militarism. Unlike some other local leaders Harry Bolton never left Chopwell, preferring to play the part of a people's advocate, and he made a deep mark on Chopwell.

The Gillilands came to Chopwell around the same time as the Lawthers and the Boltons. Jack Gillilands was elected to the Blaydon Council in 1926, the year Labour swept the board in the local elections, and this enabled Gillilands and his colleagues to use the local Board of Guardians to channel relief to striking miners. There is a story that two buses arrived in Chopwell, the first with "Newcastle" on its destination board and the second with the words "Relief". "Oh'." went up the cry, "Don't say Jack Gillilands is laying on buses now as well".

Chopwell folk never lost their sense of humour even in the hardest times. During the great strike there was a soup kitchen, which used all kinds of wild creatures to flavour its soup, and a favourite quip was "You might have taken the wool off that beast before you chucked it in the soup." Or, again, when the Gestetner duplicator, which was used to produce the local strike bulletin Northern Light, had to be kept moving to escape police surveillance, the cry was "Who's for the mangle the night then?".

The produce of the allotments proved crucial to family budgets as a means of supplementing supplies obtained from "the Store". Chopwell had to be almost self-sufficient to hold out for the length of time it did, for not only was it the last colliery to go back after the 7 months national strike it was also on strike for 11 months before the great strike began. However, the Coop certainly played a key role in sustaining the strikers. There were, in fact, three Co-op branches in Chopwell: Annfield Plain, Leadgate and Blaydon. The miners' union had arranged a grocery ticket system with the Co-op: each union member was allowed half a crown of groceries every week for each member of his family and after the strike members repaid the money at the rate of half a crown a week.

I have briefly outlined here some of the social, cultural and political factors which lay behind the designation of Chopwell as "Little Moscow", and have tried to show that the roots of Chopwell's militancy sprang from English soil but were nurtured by an idealism that looked outside the village to the formation of some kind of international workers' commonwealth.