

11. According to Welbourne 'the agents issued a solemn warning against restort to violence... It was a warning scrupulously obeyed'. Welbourne, op. cit., pp. 188-89.

12. It is difficult to be precise about an exchange rate in this period. Seventy contos de reis was a sum of the order of £6,000. I am grateful to my colleague Dr Frank Colson for this information.

13. This curious detail, which does not apper in the other letters, may have some connection with Eca de Queiros's transfer to Bristol. Although he was appointed to Bristol in June 1878, it is clear from personal cor correspondence that he was still in Newcastle at the end of November. The apparently careful definition of his status at the end of this letter of 15 April 1879, combined with the fact that on the first page the heading Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle is hand-written rather than printed as in the other letters, may perhaps indicate that by April he had already moved to Bristol, retaining some responsibility for the Newcastle Consulate pending the arrival of his successor.

A SPOT OF BOTHER

Civil disorder in the North East between the wars by Ian Turner

Four incidents of civil disorder in the North will be examined in this study. They are: the South Shields race riots of 1919 and 1930; a clash between police and the unemployed during the 1921 depression in Sunderland; the General Strike in the North East; and, finally, a Durham City means test demonstration in 1933.

Newspapers in 1919 had reports of labour unrest, a fear of Bolshevism¹ and riots in Glasgow² and London³ mainly involving ex-servicemen demanding work. Most of the disorders in Cardiff were fights between discharged soldiers, sailors, local people and coloured men. They involved attacks both on person and property; laundries and lodging houses were damaged. Neil Evans lists the various motives from comments overheard by police and statements made in court: "We went out to France, and when we came back, we find these foreigners have got our jobs, our businesses and and our houses and we can't get rid of them ... this is what one gets for fighting for the country ... we mean to clear these niggers out ... I did it for the benefit of the seamen, of whom I am one and cannot get a job because of the niggers being here. We have tried other ways and we now intend to take the law into our own hands."⁴

Employment was only one source of grievance. Evans mentions one incident where a soldier had smashed a window; a crowd gathered, thinking that an attack on a coloured man was the reason for his arrest and they tried to rescue the prisoner, exclaiming "he is one of us, and has fought for us, not like the blacks". As Evans concludes, "The idea that the coloured men had done well at the war and had not been exposed to danger ... was one of the chief grievances of the white rioters."⁵ Also on 11 June a "brake containing coloured men and their white wives was returning from an excursion and attracted a crowd. Within the small vehicle, the whites saw

a seductive explanation of the problem; they were experiencing difficulties because of the affluence (affluent enough to afford an excursion in a brake) of the blacks who were simultaneously overturning what was seen as the natural racial order in their sexual relations with white women. The white men who started the melee were pimps and the white women were former prostitutes. The pimps had been called up for military service and had returned to find the source of their livelihood allied with black men".⁶

In South Shields the fracas arose out of the selection of the ship's crew. An Arab who offered himself for service was informed that he was not wanted, as only white men were being engaged. A disturbance followed, and a large number of his 'fellow countrymen' in the vicinity joined in the fray, which soon became a full-scale riot in which the Arabs 'armed with sticks, bottles and stones' attacked anyone who happened to be about. John B Fye, a delegate of the Ships' Cooks and Stewards' Union, was charged with provoking nine Arabs, engaged to attend at the Shipping office, to sign on a ship. He allegedly shouted "Don't let these -- Arabs sign on"¹⁰, and called for them to come out of the Shipping Office. However, it became clear the Arabs had runners who told engineers when they arrived at South Shields that if they could get Arabs'.¹¹ On this occasion, Arabs were engaged but this was resented by the seamen at a time when jobs were scarce. Hence, so far the motives seem to be purely racial, arising from the economic crisis. However, a man named Gilroy, a delegate of the Seamen's and Fire Firemen's Unions, asked the chief engineer of the ship where he had got his men. He was outraged when he discovered where the nine Arabs had been engaged and mentioned "it would have been better if the engineer had selected the men in the 'open market' and not previously in the Arab lodging houses." Then the engineer proceeded to pick nine white men.¹² So we do have the source of antagonisms from the coloured and white seamen. However, what one has to decide, is whether the riot occurred entirely from racial hostility or from a break in normal procedure? Probably blending of the two, especially as one seaman complained in the court proceedings "about the engagement of the Arabs when there were hundreds of demobilized men, waiting for work".¹³ It is also worth mentioning in this context a later scuffle between Arabs and soldiers in South Shields which arose when one of the former shouted, "I'll kill all the soldiers", and gave as his defence in court: "Since the recent riots, the life of the Arabs in the town was becoming intolerable".¹⁴

In 1930 the same social origins existed, there was a high level of unemployment and a substantial proportion of British tonnage was laid up. The differences between 1919 and 1930, however, lay in the change in status of Arab seamen and trade union structure and procedure. The Aliens Order Act of 1920 and, more important, Special Restriction (Coloured) Alien Seamen's Order Act of 1925 permitted the issue of a deportation order by magistrates. The order could be issued if a foreigner was receiving parish relief, or was found to be destitute. All negroes on Tyneside were British nationals but the status of Arabs was unclear. Those who could prove their birthplace as Aden were classified as British, but those who could not were alien; most Arabs on Tyneside were classed as Coloured Alien Seamen. Somalis were defined as British Protected Persons and, therefore, sometimes treated incorrectly as aliens. To confuse the situation even further, many seamen often referred to Somalis as Arabs, and the communities did mix, in a fashion, but Somalis were almost always treated as British.

Also, during the 1920s, the Seamen's and Firemen's Union and the Cooks' and Stewards' Unions amalgamated to form the National Union of Seamen. In 1926, Havelock Wilson refused to allow it to join the General Strike, so this, coupled with its support of non-political breakaway miners' union, caused its expulsion from the Trades Union Congress, which then reluctantly commissioned Ernest Bevin and the Transport and General Workers' Union to set up a seafarers' section. However, Bevin realised that any such section would be dominated by the mainly Communist Minority Movement. Hence, Bevin aimed not to oppose the N.U.S. but to assist it to rejoin the T.U.C., which subsequently paid £10,000 compensation to the T.G.W.U. when it wound

up the seamen's section. So, by 1930, a militant 'seaman's pressure group again existed inside the N.U.S. But the militants were handicapped by the 'P.C.5' and associated subscription rules of the Seamen's Union, excluding fully paid-up members from all official trade union activities. Disgruntled sailors called the P.C.5 a 'slave ticket' because no seaman could ship without it and simultaneously gave the union bureaucrats a considerable hold over the membership. Full-time officials who used pensioners to carry its votes at elections. It was described as 'a company union for the British Shipping Federation'. All Arab seamen were members of the N.U.S. and 'traditionally among the strongest supporters of the union'.

The first incident occurred 29 April when the steamer, Cape Verde, signed on a crew at New Quay, North Shields, and thirteen Somalis were brought over from South Shields (the two ports were administratively separate) to sign on as firemen, trimmers and donkeymen. This procedure was wrong under National Maritime Board rules which stated that a ship had to take a crew from seamen in the port she was staying, if any were available. The unemployed regarded the Somalis as Arabs. This incident followed a demonstration by white firemen at South Shields on 28 March 1930, caused by

The unemployed had tried to prevent the Arabs from signing by blocking the way to the union office. Somalis drew knives and razors, a melee

After this, a lengthy debate began between the N.U.S. and the Minority Movement. Firstly, however, the purely racist position appeared in the press: 'The import of coloured seamen and firemen is a more serious menace to the health of the country than parrots or love birds, and should be prohibited'. The March edition of the N.U.S. magazine The Seaman attacked Arab seamen, and boarding house masters in particular, for illegally importing large numbers of British Arabs from Yemen. They were taking British jobs. The union's campaign was conducted against alien coloured seamen who came into this country, or were smuggled in, by Arab boarding house-keepers in order that 'they may become money-making machines for those same boarding house-keepers. They had no quarrel with British coloured seamen, Arab or otherwise, but with unregistered and alien seamen expressly forbidden entrance by the 1925 Act. It was a disgrace when four million tons of British shipping was laid up and 20,000 British seamen were idle that boarding house-keepers were illegally obtaining jobs for Arabs. The N.U.S. intended to eliminate them and their 'half-caste children, whose only potentialities seem to be confined to becoming dole aspirants'. The militants, however, claimed the N.U.S. were attacking Arab seamen in an effort to distract attention from the high level of unemployment among seamen. One member commented, "The Arabs should not have been imported from South to North Shields which was in breach of the labour clause of the National Maritime Board Agreement. Surely, the Arabs could not be blamed for taking a job when it was offered to them .. it is hard lines they should suffer through official action".

The minority Movement programme distinguished between coloured seamen shipping from a British port and 'Coolies and lascars' carried by some shipping combines who were only paid 30 shillings a month. The N.U.S. should have looked at this low wage question long ago; instead it was just trying to create the impression that coloured men shipping from British ports were undercutting the white men's rate. This was not true.

Minority Movement meetings on Quay Dam in South Shields on these issues coincided with the N.U.S. approved introduction of registering Arabs and other Asiatics, who now had to produce evidence of British nationality or of their presence on British ships at the time of the Coloured Seamen's Order of 1925. The union also established a 'rota system' from which men would be shipped in turn, giving it greater control over Arabs and Somalis. On 8 July, the Minority Movement stated that a 'mass meeting of Arab seamen had rejected the rota' and, 'in addition, were not prepared to be used against white seamen as strike breakers'. On 24 July, another meeting proposed that 'they were prepared to ship out, but would not accept the P.C.5.'

However, peaceful picketing proved unsuccessful and had to be replaced by forceful efforts to prevent 'scabs' from shipping out. Success was debateable. The South Shields Gazette (27 July 1930) reported that two steamships had 'no difficulty in obtaining crews' whereas the Daily Worker claimed that only eight 'scabs' had been signed on. By 1 August, things were 'hotting up' with sympathetic strikes in Liverpool and Barry, to oppose the P.C.5 in a situation which was fast becoming a 'test for the Minority Movement, and a severe challenge for the N.U.S.'

As in 1919, almost all press coverage portrayed the episode of 2 August 1930 as a race riot'. On Monday, newspapers reported 'Desperate rioting at South Shields ... stabbing and breaking of heads ... fierce fight with a crowd of Arabs' A ship had paid off at South Shields and the re-engaging crew paid off. However, when they presented themselves for re-engagement, they refused to get a P.C.5. or register on the rota. The press vaguely mentioned that the riot "was attributed to the new rota system of engaging coloured men on ships under an agreement between the Shipping Federation and the N.U.S." When two 'scabs' Bradford and Hamilton (accused by the Minority Movement of being N.U.S. plants) went forward to engage, with Hamilton taunting the men with a whip and Bradford with a razor, the Minority Movement members exclaimed they "were ashamed of being British, because the Arabs are standing at 100% and white men are still signing on(and, when the pickets moved forward to prevent the 'scabs' from reaching the office, the police baton charged. The newspapers did not lay stress on the Chief Constable's statement mentioned "today has seen the real test of the Minority Movement", rather they emphasized the fact that there was no trouble 'until three white men were making their way to the Federation office.... and an ugly rush forward of coloured men took place ... three white men then emerged from the Federation office, to proceed to the Board of Trade office and a crowd of Arabs, armed with sticks and other weapons surrounded them in a threatening manner. At the following court proceedings, the Chief Constable alleged that 'these are the men (the Minority Movement members) who incited the coloured men to riot. I must say that when the riot started these men were conspicuous by their absence'.

For the police baton charge in Sunderland, I pieced together this account from press coverage and personal eyewitness accounts. On 9 September, a large crowd had gathered in West Park, where Councillor Jimmy Lenagh had promised to lead a march to the Gaurdians' Offices. He had arranged to interview Councillor Burlinson there at 10.30 a.m. However, instead of going to West Park, Lenagh and a colleague went directly to the interview. The crowd, evidently tired of waiting in West Park, decided to march down to the centre of the town". The main body of them, surging more like a mob than a procession ...boeing and shouting. Young, irresponsible youths called out for a raid¹³ on a liquor van and grocery lorry. But the angry crowd were met by a wall of police. Yet this did not deter them. They just walked straight up and upset the police formation by surging forward. As the forces of law and order withdrew, the crowd kept advancing until another section of the unemployed emerged from another street at the rear of the police. The police baton charged, allegedly to prevent their formation being broken up, and fighting ensued. "A police officer halted the column, asking them to disperse, a scuffle started ... and the hot heads promptly started a punch-up".¹⁴ A statement by the Chief Constable afterwards said he "had informed Lenagh that it would be better for him to tell the men to move quietly away, but Lenagh had refused".¹⁵ James Conlin, a police inspector at the time, comments "Councillor Jimmy Lenagh and Wheeler, who were in charge of the unemployed demonstrations, were the cause of a lot of trouble ... when the baton charge was ordered, however, they were the first to run for it".¹⁶ The 'spark' for the riot was an angry crowd, deserted by their leader, being met by a large wall of police, who themselves feared being surrounded. "The unemployed got a bit naughty on the way to the Board of Guardians, en masse ... there were a lot of big lads amongst them ... shipyard workers, miners and the like ... it was only a one off incident ... it was usually quiet .. things went wrong on the day I

would say ... there had been minor skirmishes before that, but they did not continue as a riot situation ... they got hot headed ... worked up ... the police got sick of being on jobs of this nature ... they are only men ... people ... not super people ... they were hungry ... they were stealing off this huge long van".¹⁷

In the 1926 General Strike there obviously was great bitterness between strikers and strikebreakers. William Muckle comments, "You always get some blacklegs ... the police took them to work and brought them home at night".¹⁸ The feeling amongst the miners ran very high in regard to those who were smuggling coal out to the farms. Some small collieries were still working and the miners suspected that some coal was reaching the farms ... the farmers were willing to pay fantastic prices to get coal smuggled out and the miners would do anything to prevent it.¹⁹ ... "they used to hoot and shout at the blacklegs but the police always stood there in a menacing way and succeeded in keeping people quiet. But immediately it got dark, there used to be reactions, you know, they broke the blacklegs' windows and things of this sort ...²⁰ College students in Leeds decided that they would go and unload the boats in the docks in Hull ... when they came back, they found their cars were smashed up".²¹ Pickets were also afraid the roads were being used to carry supplies, hence there were numerous press reports of the highway being blocked by railway sleepers and trees at Garforth, Birtley²² Low Fell and Byker.²³ Milk and food wagons were also overturned through suspicion of carrying coal. "We discovered a milk lorry which was carrying coal" ... they emptied it into the road and the people gathered it up for their own use.²⁴ A farmer, who was travelling to Newcastle, was held up at Throckley and compelled to sell his eggs at one shilling per dozen and his butter at one shilling per pound".²⁵ Violence and hostility was not just confined to the miners; there were reports of attacks on buses carrying passengers, blackleg workers and being driven by 'non-union labour' by large crowds of pickets, comprising 'regular bus drivers and conductors' who were so threatening, one journalist wrote that 'the drivers ... who had done good business in the absence of transport, abandoned their vehicles'.²⁶

There were also attacks on trains, but perhaps the most well known one was at Cramlington. 'Scottish Express Wrecked ... Dastardly deed at Cramlington ... Glasgow to Newcastle Express wrecked one mile south of Cramlington, near the colliery'.²⁷ William Muckle, one of the protagonists explains his motives "Well, it was said, stop everything on wheels ... I have no regrets for what I did ... we were fighting for our right and a little bit of cake ... we were miners, content with what we had ... only if they had let us alone, but they came back for a 40% cut in our wages and that put our backs up". Muckle was sorry that it was the Flying Scotsman that was stopped "but when you come to think again, it was a General Strike and they were blacklegs running the trains .. they should not have been running ... we were fighting for our daily bread ... what with the lords and ladies and the like taking the best out of the land ... when you come to think of the wages of the Government and the Royal Family ... you could go mad ... I worked fifty-two years in the pit, to my sorrow. Our day you had very little chance of doing anything else".

Muckle concludes "The de-railing of the Flying Scotsman was not an example of violence as the press said ... we were not violent men and had the 'plus fours' train crews and blacklegs not tried to break the strike ... we would have had no need to do what we did ... we only tried to stop blackleg coal getting through".²⁸ Indeed, the press reported the act 'was deliberately planned by a gang of men and youth who unbolted the fishplates and loosened the rails ... and when the smash occurred the men were seen on

a nearby bridge laughing at the spectacle.²⁹ Despite the narrow-minded view of the press, the very fact that it was deliberately planned, is true enough. Muckle tells how, after a meeting at Cramlington Lodge, he suggested to his mates having a "railup" to stop the blackleg trains getting through. "Fifty-five years ago, and nobody knows to this day that I and three others went up the old wagon way to the North East Railway ... and broke into the cabin and stole the gear in the morning (before the meeting) to do the job in the afternoon. This never came out at the trial and we never told this to the papers ... I could count on the one hand the people in Cramlington that know the real facts today ... about what happened before that meeting". Before removing the fishplates 'they saw the blacklegs ... the plus-fours platelayers coming along the railway, so we all set out and stoned them and then took the rail up' "in record time".³⁰ This does correspond with the newspaper accounts describing statements from the engineers who 'were patrolling the main line between Benton Quarry and Plesney and left the former at 10.45 a.m. and near Annitsford Station ... The strike breakers were assaulted by a lot of pitmen and their wives, who threw missiles and used foul language. They noticed how the window had been taken out of the platelayers' cabin between Dam Dyke and Cramlington Station. They observed men running towards them, shouting, "Kill the blacklegs! Get hold of their gear", but at that time the line was in order. However, later it was found, the outside rail on the 'uproad was completely out of position and the fish-plate and bolts had been removed'.³¹ However, what the press could not report was the complete amazement of the miners when the train turned out to be the Flying Scotsmen; they expected a coal train. Yet even more interesting are Muckle's comments that "the scab platelayers ran about four hundred yards up the line and stopped the train and warned them that 'there was something likely to happen as they had been stoned'.³² This explains a press report of a passenger who said "there was no warning ... but at Cramlington the guards came along the train and requested the passengers to draw the blinds so there would be less danger of injury from flying glass, should the train be stoned."³³ The travellers did not expect they would be derailed. Muckle continues, "This lad Joe was sitting on the embankment and he waved a little white handkerchief to stop the train. I saw him myself, from where we were ... there was a signal cabin one hundred yards further down the railway ... it used to be a signal cabin, but the platelayers kept their gear in it then ... the engine went right up to that signal cabin ... when it came off it was dragging itself ... if they'd been on the engine, they could have stopped it before it got that far. The driver knew what was happening but they did not want to know. I still believe it could have been stopped ... the crew were given enough warning".³⁴

Can we accept William Muckle's account? The driver had been warned, but it was vague to say the least. As the engine driver remarked himself "he never noticed anything wrong with the track".³⁵ Why should he have been looking? It is interesting, however, to note that the driver of the train, a blackleg called Bob Sheldon, was 'one of the company's servants' but the firemen were Robert Aitken, an Edinburgh University student, and Charlie Hird, also of Edinburgh, both obviously inexperienced. Moreover, alongside the column reporting the Cramlington crash were two more similar rail crash reports.³⁶ The first one describing an accident killing three and injuring others at Edinburgh: 'The driver of the passenger train, who is understood to have escaped without serious injury, was in the company's employment, but was not a regular driver'. Secondly, a 'fatal smash' at Bishop Stortford. Although no particulars were mentioned in this report, could all three crashes have occurred due to 'inexperienced blackleg labour'?

Will Lawther and Harry Bolton noticed a grocery van in Blaydon illegally distributing goods. Harry started saying "This is illegal ... it's against the shop lawsit's against the Shop Act ... it's against the council byelaws". He then proceeded to 'lay down the law' to police helping the distribution. "Had they a permit from the Chopwell, Blaydon and Ryton Council of Action?" Will complemented this by saying, "You --- won't deliver that stuff ... the Emergency Regulations are nothing to me ... if you intend to --- deliver that stuff, I am going to Chopwell for two hundred men who will soon put a stop to your intentions".³⁸ This was ample evidence for the police to charge them for impeding food supplies. Another incident followed the two councillors trial in Gateshead. This started when the Chopwell and High Spennet Band acquired a 'group of rowdies' which turned a peaceful demonstration into a wild melee between miners and police. One personal reminiscence corresponds with this press account "the violence was mostly carried out by people who did not belong to the area ... it was wasn't the legal pickets ... it was generally somebody from the back of the crowd, who used to have a brick .. and, of course, with the crowd they never seemed to get hold of the people that was responsible". However, it was known that all the miners were loyal to their leaders, and if their leaders got sentenced to imprisonment ... they intended to rescue them by force ... Well, the authorities knew about this ... it was common knowledge knowledge".³² It was when the crowd tried to carry out this threat, or the police thought they were going to, when the trouble started.

Some similar questions can be raised about the 1933 Durham riot that have been asked about both 1921 and 1926. After the January 'fiasco' a second attempt was made to interview the Chairman of the County Council at Shire Hall. Again, a large crowd appeared from the South Bank, Teeside, Gateshead, Chopwell, Birtley and Chester le Street, carrying banners saying 'Down with the Means Test'. This time their leader figure was a Mrs Chaytor who 'was a conspicuous figure in her red cloth hat ... This time, a deputation was allowed to interview the P.A.C. However, the riot began when the rank and file demonstrators, already refused entry by the police once to a street containing various Ministry offices, proceeded to Market Place, 'thinking they had laid a decoy for the police' and hastily returned to the street. only to be met again by a large body of police. who again refused them entry. "Meanwhile, the marchers behind were demanding action ... and to the sound of their band they began their attack; the police drew their batons and a fierce struggle followed. After the riot, weapons such as sticks weighted with lead were seized, which perhaps proves this time the demonstrators descended upon Durham expecting violence".⁴⁰ Here is a summary of Mr Liddele's account of the incident. They converged in their hundreds on the P.A.C., headed by a warrior-like crowd, carrying banners. They were met by solid ranks of police armed with batons ... the crowd refused to retreat and the baton charge was made ... it was a bloody confrontation with many broken heads, etc ... I remember an old lady neighbour of my mother's taking in the wounded ... the crowd assembled in the Market Place chanting 'we want buses' ... the Chief Constable addressed them and made it clear that there would be no transport made available to them, and, unless they dispersed, he would command arrests to be made ... gradually the mob dispersed and the local residents, myself included, began to wonder if such a thing as a brutal baton charge could really have occurred in the calm of the cathedral city ...⁴¹

NOTES

1. Newcastle Journal 6 February 1919
2. Ibid, 1 February 1919
3. Ibid, 27 May 1919
4. Neil Evans, 'The South Wales Race Riots of 1919', Llafur, p.6
5. Ibid, p.16
6. Ibid, p.15
7. Ibid, 11 February 1919
8. Ibid
9. Ibid, 5 March 1919
10. Ibid,
11. Ibid, 11 March 1919
12. Sunderland Echo, 9 September 1921
13. Anonymous letter written to Ian Turner
14. Sunderland Echo, 9 September 1921
15. Chief Inspector James Conlin, History of Sunderland Borough Police Force, p.75.
16. Mr Williams, personal tape recording by Ian Turner, May 1984
17. Mrs Hudson, also tape recording, Ian Turner, April 1984
18. William Muckle, No Regrets
19. Gateshead Local History Collection, Memoirs of the General Strike, Mr J Armstrong
20. Andy Lawther, interviewed by Ray Challinor, April 1984
21. Gateshead Collection, Mr H Bevitt
22. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
23. Sunderland Echo, 5 May 1926
24. Mr J Armstrong, op cit
25. Sunderland Echo, 5 May 1926
26. Ibid
27. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
28. William Muckle op city, p.16
29. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
30. William Muckle op city, p.20
31. Newcastle Journal, 14 May 1926
32. William Muckle, p.10
33. Mr Hamilton, passenger, and quoted in Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
34. William Muckle, op city, p.35
35. Newcastle Journal, 14 May, 1926
36. Newcastle Daily Chronicle North Mail, quoted in Muckle
37. Andy Lawther : op cit
38. Newcastle Journal, 14 May 1926
39. Gateshead Collection, op city - Tom Brown
40. Newcastle Journal, 11 April 1933
41. Mr Liddele op cit