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The British General Strike (1926) - IV

Lead: In the spring of 1926 Britain endured the only General Strike in its history.

Tag: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Labor leaders were frustrated. Led by Walter Citrine of the Trades Union Congress, they wanted to work out a settlement of the looming strike of the mine workers and the possibility of a national sympathy strike, but radical rank and file workers pushed for a confrontation. The conservative government of Prime Minister Stanley

Baldwin was clearly on the mine owners' side and had used a nine-month cooling off period to prepare. Labor was not prepared, but when the mine owners locked out their workers and a million of them went on strike, on May 3, 1926, a million and a half transportation, electric, steel and dock workers followed right behind. It was the only time in British history when the vast majority of organized industrial workers gave support to another group of workers for more than one day.

For the nine days of the general strike, the nation was divided, striking workers against the rest of society. Baldwin's government had stock-piled essential supplies and used the police

to distribute them. Volunteers jumped in into take the place of striking workers and the unions knew they were beaten when undergraduate students from Cambridge University were seen arriving in chauffeured limousines at the Dover docks volunteering to load ships. The unions called a halt on May 12th.

At first it seemed the mine owners and the government had won. The miners eventually had to return to work at less pay, but overall, union membership continued to grow throughout 1920s and 1930s. Pro-strike radicals gradually lost influence and the hand of moderate union leaders was strengthened. Because of this and the enormous losses the

government and employers incurred during the strike, all sides began working to avoid the use of such an extreme weapon in the future. Thus, the General Strike of 1926, painful as it was at the time, ushered in a new era of understanding, cooperation, and industrial peace.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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