

The idea of Councils of Action was developed in 1920 when the TUC and Labour Party National Executive Committee formed a Council of Action with the aim of preventing the British Government from declaring war on Soviet Russia, or supplying troops and munitions to opposition 'White Russian' forces. Two days later, the government abandoned its plans and backed Soviet proposals for a peace treaty with the principal aggressor, Poland. This was the first occasion on which the leadership of the British Labour movement formally countenanced industrial action to bring pressure to bear on a 'constitutional' government.

Its success provided a precedent and rationale for Councils of Action to become an organisational nucleus of the 1926 General Strike.

Labour Guardians drop in sessions

Labour Guardians were available at 67 Camden Road every evening of the strike between 6-7pm to deal with Poor Law enquiries (strikers could not claim relief – but their wife and children could).

To learn more, see original issues of the **St Pancras Strike Bulletin** here:



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67 Camden Road

ST PANCRAS TRADES COUNCIL GENERAL STRIKE HEADQUARTERS

4th-12th May

This building
was HQ of the
St Pancras
Labour Party
and Trades Council
during the
GENERAL STRIKE
4th - 12th May
1926

CAMDEN TRADES COUNCIL 2026

67 Camden Road was the headquarters of St Pancras Trades Council during the general strike. Peter Zinkin, a delegate to the Trades Council and Assistant Secretary of South West St Pancras Labour Party described the scene:

“There was a great deal of activity at the St Pancras Trades Council Headquarters with a constant toing and froing of people involved in co-ordinating strike activity and keeping in touch with the situation at the rail depots and other workplaces. Some come to collect the bulletin for distribution.”



— St Pancras Council of Action outside 67 Camden Road. —

The strike action coordinated from 67 Camden Road was of national significance, since in 1926 almost all goods were transported by rail and St Pancras Trades Council covered the railway yards and stations at Kings Cross, St Pancras and Euston. As Peter Zinkin described:

“Even the most optimistic were surprised by the solidarity with which the strike started. There was almost 100% response from St Pancras railwaymen, and this was of the greatest importance. St Pancras was a major rail centre with three main line termini, Euston, St Pancras and King’s Cross with very large goods and marshalling yards.”

On 10th May 1926 the police carried out a midnight raid on 67 Camden Road arresting St Pancras Trades Council Secretary, Jack Smith and seizing equipment used to print the Trades Council’s strike bulletin.

What happened at 67 Camden Road:

67 Camden Road was the hub of activity during the general strike. Today it is residential and commercial premises, but in May 1926 at the time of the general strike No.67 was the shop and offices of South West St Pancras Labour Party and was the base for St Pancras Trades Council during the 1926 General Strike.

The St Pancras strike bulletin was printed, distributed and sold every day of the General Strike from 67 Camden Road. Emile Burns, St Pancras Trades Council publicity secretary described the local strike bulletins as being “of the greatest importance” and reported there were “queues of eager distributors”.

The St Pancras strike bulletin appeared from 4th to 12th May 1926, sometimes twice a day. Each edition ran to between four and five thousand copies. The strike bulletin carried updates on strike action, information on strike meetings, encouraged solidarity with the strikers and explained the reasons for and importance of the strike action.

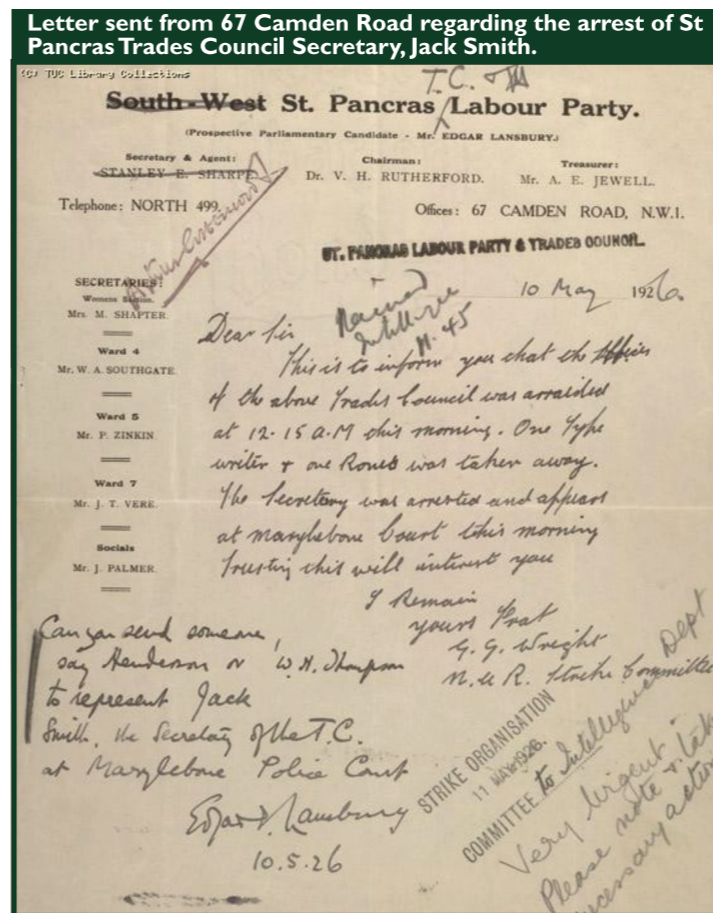
As Fleet Street printers had been called out on strike, if capitalist newspapers appeared at all it was only in a truncated form. This made Trades Council strike bulletins a very important source of news. To plug the gap in news management the Government published a broadsheet The British Gazette during the strike, while the Trades Union Congress published The British Worker. The TUC’s news sheet was very passive. It urged strikers to keep calm, stay off the streets, and play organised games, such as football.

To counter the passivity of the TUC bulletin, the Communist Party authors of the St Pancras strike bulletin (Emile Burns, Frank Jackson and Kay Beauchamp) deliberately ignored the TUC’s diktat that Trades Council bulletins should contain only centrally issued publicity. They were punished for this when the TUC expelled St Pancras Council of Action after the general strike.

Police raid

During the general strike the Government suppressed news reporting with a national crackdown on Trades Councils/Councils of Action copying and printing facilities. On 10th May 1926, police carried out a midnight raid at No.67 Camden Road, seizing a typewriter, some St Pancras Trades Council headed letter paper, a Roneo duplicator machine used to duplicate the strike bulletin and arrested Jack Smith, the 21-year-old secretary of St Pancras Trades Council, a member of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades’ Association (NAFTA).

Smith was charged with issuing seditious material in that day’s St Pancras strike bulletin, in relation to a report of an incident on Harwood Street, of which the police contested the accuracy. He was taken to Marylebone Magistrates Court, where bail was offered on the proviso that he refrained from activities during the strike. He refused and was fined £10 by the magistrates. The fine was paid on his behalf, meaning he could rejoin strike activity.



The Harwood Street incident, for which Smith was arrested was reported in St Pancras strike bulletin No.9 as follows: “Overground Bus Garage, The police attempted to draw out the Buses, and formed a cordon in Harwood (sic) Street, of course a crowd collected, a covered lorry was then driven out of the garage and run up and down Harwood Street, and someone inside the lorry proceeded to fire blank shot, obviously intending to stampede the crowd — There was some disorder, but fortunately our men controlled the situation and no one was hurt”.

The joke was on them

Frank Jackson, full time organiser for St Pancras Trades Council was one step ahead of the police. Concerned the police would raid 67 to suppress the strike bulletin, the Council of Action accepted an offer of an almost new Gestetner duplicator from Edgar Lansbury (son of George Lansbury, Labour MP for Bow and Bromley). The machine was transported at night to Peter Zinkin’s home, where it remained for about five days copying the strike bulletin, before being removed when it was thought that Zinkin’s home was being watched.

Jackson recounted the raid on 67 Camden Road, as ‘workers watched with glee as police carried out what they thought were duplicating machines... But were in fact, simply machines covered with heavy bricks’. The offices were then moved to a ‘fellow’s house: it backed up on the police station, but they never thought of looking here’.

Strike committee meetings

Individual trade union branches met at 67 Camden Road to coordinate strike action. For example, in the

“Instruction to trade unionists” section of the St Pancras bulletin of 4th May 1926, it was explained that all building trades workers should report to 67 Camden Road between 9 and 11am, as should RCA (Railway Clerks Association) London Underground members 10 and 2pm (all five tubes, clerks were out on strike) and Printing Machine Managers’ Trade Society members living in Finsbury, Islington and St Pancras between 11am and 1pm.

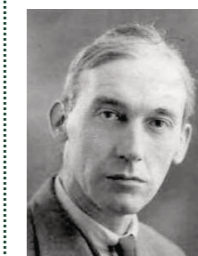
Information on where other strike committees were meeting was also available at 67 Camden Road.

St Pancras Council of Action

On 3rd May 1926, a special meeting of the Trades Council Executive Committee and local strike committees agreed that the Trades Council should turn itself into a St Pancras Council of Action for the purposes of the General Strike.

Emile Burns described it as an effective Council, which met daily throughout the strike and was in almost permanent session at 67 Camden Road. It was one of the few Councils of Action with which the Co-operative Society agreed to supply goods on credit (for a canteen organised by the Women’s Committee).

Communist activists encouraged workers to form Councils of Action to plug the gap created by TUC leaders’ opposition to a General Strike and failure to prepare for it. Militant areas such as St Pancras set up Councils of Action immediately the general strike was announced. In some areas of Britain Councils of Action were all-powerful. For example, the Fife Council of Action controlled road transport and workers swore allegiance to them. In Northeast England the local authorities had to negotiate with the Council of Action.



Emile Burns, who worked for the Labour Research Department, except during the general strike when he was publicity secretary for St Pancras Trades Council, explained in “General Strike Trades Councils in Action”, that Councils of Action were formed of

Trades Council representatives (usually Trades Council executive committee), strike committee representatives from each union (or group) involved, representatives of unions not affiliated to the Trades Council, representatives of special groups – for example Constituency Labour Parties and women’s organisations, such as Women’s Guilds. Councils of Action brought together the organised labour movement with the exception of Co-operative Societies. Strike committee reps gave reports to the Council of Action.