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# NINE DAYS IN MAY

## THE GENERAL STRIKE IN ST PANCRAS

**Sarah Friday**  
Camden Trades Council

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**Photo:** Strikers attack a 'volunteer' in York Way, alongside Kings Cross train station.

St Pancras Trades Council played a role of national significance during the general strike, since in 1926 most heavy goods were transported by rail and St Pancras Trades Council covered the stations and railway yards of Euston, St Pancras and Kings Cross stations the London termini of three of the 'Big Four' railway companies.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1926, St Pancras Trades Council formed a Council of Action – a strike committee – which was in permanent session during the nine days of the general strike. It was militant and well organised. The general strike in St Pancras was solidly supported from beginning to end.

St Pancras Trades Council published *St Pancras Bulletin*, a daily newsletter, which was sold and publicly distributed on each day of the general strike. The *St Pancras Bulletin* is a remarkable record of the strike activity because its coverage went far beyond the guidelines issued by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) leadership, that Trades Councils should only publish centrally produced publicity containing official TUC statements. In the aftermath of the general strike, the TUC banned several St Pancras Strike Committee officials over items published in the *St Pancras Bulletin*.

St Pancras Council of Action also established a Workers Defence Corps to provide protection for strikers and pickets and to maintain order.

From midnight on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1926, the TUC General Council called for a withdrawal of labour in transport, electricity, gas, docks, heavy chemicals, building and printing industries involving approximately 1.75 million workers in solidarity with the miners.

The mine owners had served notice on over a million miners that they would be locked out of work from 30<sup>th</sup> April 1926 unless they accepted an end to national pay agreements and increased shift lengths underground from seven to eight hours amounting to a 13.5 per cent pay cut. The Miners' Federation rejected these terms with the rallying cry, "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day".

In all, around 2 million workers joined the general strike during the nine days from 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> May 1926 in a magnificent display of solidarity with the miners.

But on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1926 – Day Nine of the general strike – the TUC General Council went to 10 Downing Street to meet Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin and informed him they were calling off the strike without agreement on the miners' demands, or to prevent the victimisation of striking workers. Many strikers were victimised by their employers when they eventually returned to work with pay cuts, demotion and selective re-engagement.

The miners were left isolated, locked out and fought on alone for seven more months. There was fury among many workers in St Pancras at the betrayal of the miners and the whole working class by TUC leaders. Attempts were made to keep the strike going.

## THE RUN UP TO THE STRIKE

### *May Day Rally 1926*

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1926 thousands of workers gathered in Hyde Park for one of the largest May Day rallies ever held there.

Peter Zinkin, a delegate to St Pancras Trades Council and Assistant Secretary of South West St Pancras Labour Party wrote "there was a huge contingent from St Pancras at the May Day rally."



**Photo:** May Day rally marching to Hyde Park, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1926.



**Photo:** May Day rally marching from Hyde Park to Farringdon, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1926.



**Photo:** May Day rally in Hyde Park, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1926.

## **Saklatvala Arrested**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1926, the Metropolitan police arrested Shapurji Saklatvala at his home at St Alban's Villas, Highgate (in St Albans Road, opposite Parliament Hill Fields). The 52-year old Communist MP for North Battersea who was active in St Pancras Labour Party and Trades Council, had given a fiery speech at the May Day Hyde Park rally, which the police considered to be an act of sedition. Saklatvala told the May Day rally, "...We tell the Government that the young men in the Forces are more of our own class and whether Joynson Hicks likes it or not, whether he calls it "Sedition" or not, to soothe the financiers, his friends, we have a duty towards these men, to say to them that they must lay down their arms."

Sir William Joynson Hicks (known as "Jix") was the Tory Home Secretary who in 1925 ordered the show trial of Harry Pollitt and eleven other leading communists, under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797. During the general strike Joynson Hicks along with Winston Churchill (Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer) was a leading organiser of the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS).

St Pancras Trades Council reported Saklatvala's arrest in 'Points for Trade Unionists' in the first *St Pancras Strike Bulletin* published on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1926: "The bosses act now" ... "They do not wait. Saklatvala M.P, was arrested this morning at 12 o'clock. WORKERS RALLY: This is your fight."

Saklatvala was imprisoned for two months after refusing to be bound over for 12 months – sparking discussions about whether it was legal to arrest an MP while the House of Commons was sitting.

## **TUC Announces the General Strike**



**Photo:** The tremendous May Day Demonstration passing the Memorial Hall where the Special Conference of the Trade Union Executive Committees decided on the strike.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1926, while trade unionists attended the massive rally in Hyde Park, a Special Conference of Trade Union National Executives called by the TUC at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon voted to declare a general strike from 3<sup>rd</sup> May in support of the miners who had been locked out by the mine owners.

Following the May Day rally in Hyde Park demonstrators marched almost three miles across London's west end to Farringdon Street to lobby the TUC Conference. Peter Zinkin's job as a march steward was to ride up and down on his bike and inform the march leaders of any gaps in the procession, wrote:

*"There was great excitement as more and more people joined the march as it proceeded on its way. As we approached the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street where the trade union executives were meeting we heard that they had decided to call the Strike. We cheered ourselves hoarse as we passed the hall in exultant enthusiasm, confident that the unity displayed that day would be repeated in the nearing battle and so carry us forward to victory. Little did we know what the future had in store".*



**Photo:** Crowd outside of Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street.

# PREPARATIONS FOR THE STRIKE

## The Government

The Government prepared meticulously for the strike action, which they fully expected, firstly by building up large stocks of coal. By contrast, The TUC were unprepared for the strike – and they did not want it to happen.

the Government issued calls for “volunteers” to join its Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), which it established in 1925 to maintain essential services and act as a strike-breaking force to support transport and communications. Most OMS volunteers were from the middle and upper classes and some were University students, very few of whom were from working class families.

Hyde Park was requisitioned as the operational base for the OMS in London. *St Pancras strike bulletin No. 1* reported that “Lorry drivers in Hyde Park engaged on food services are being regaled with cups of tea by beautifully dressed society girls. This is the first time the two groups have met so there are no fatal results reported so far”.

Peter Zinkin, described Hyde Park as having been turned into an ‘armed camp’.<sup>[1]</sup>

Regent's Park was turned into a temporary bus park for 3,300 buses, manned by ‘volunteer’ crews, mainly students.<sup>[2]</sup> London Zoo next door remained open.

Strike breaking activities and the organisation of services across central London were co-ordinated from Marylebone Town Hall by a Hammersmith Strike Committee<sup>[3]</sup> which covered the area of Marylebone, St Pancras, Holborn, Hampstead, Finsbury, and Westminster. The Town Clerk acted as the Food Emergency Officer, helped by Ministry of Health and the Sanitation Inspectors. They were responsible for rationing coal, electricity and gas supplies, and for street clearing and refuse removal and disposal during the strike.<sup>[4]</sup>

Distribution of fruit and vegetables was run by a Committee which met daily at 10.30am based at Covent Garden market.<sup>[5]</sup> Local Committees, including at Kings Cross and St Pancras had delegated members on the central Covent Garden Committee.



**Photo:** Marble Arch, Hyde Park during the General Strike with troops and Army transport vehicles including armoured cars and Metropolitan Police guarding them.

## St Pancras Trades Council

In the absence of adequate preparation or strike organisation by the leadership of the TUC, St Pancras Trades Council organised **St Pancras Coun-**

## **il of Action.**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1926, a special meeting of St Pancras Trades Council Executive Committee with local strike committees agreed to form St Pancras Council of Action for the duration of the general strike. A Holborn Council of Action was also established (St Pancras Bulletin, 13<sup>th</sup> May, page 2), although there is little evidence of its activities.



**Photo:** St Pancras Council of Action outside of strike headquarters at 67 Camden Road.

Emile Burns, a member of the Communist Party who worked for the Labour Research Department, was appointed as Publicity Secretary of St Pancras Trades Council during the strike. Emile Burns described St Pancras Council of Action as “highly effective”. The Council of Action met daily throughout the nine days of the general strike in almost permanent session at St Pancras Labour Party and Trades Council offices at 67 Camden Road, which was the strike headquarters. St Pancras Council of Action was one of the few which negotiated an agreement with the Co-operative Society to supply goods on credit for the strikers’ family’s canteen organised by St Pancras Council of Action Women’s Committee.

Emile Burns explained in “General Strike Trades Councils in Action” (published in 1926), that Councils of Action were formed by Trades Council representatives (usually Trades Council executive committee), strike committee representatives from each union or group of workers involved, as well as representatives of unions not affiliated to the Trades Council, and representatives of special groups – for example Constituency Labour Parties and women’s organisations, such as Women’s Guilds. Councils of Action brought together the entire organised labour movement apart from Co-operative Societies. Individual strike committee representatives reported to the Council of Action.

Communist Party activists encouraged workers to form Councils of Action to plug the gap created by the TUC leaders’ opposition to a general strike and their failure make preparations for it. Militant areas such as St Pancras established Councils of Action as soon as the general strike was announced. In some areas Councils of Action were all-powerful. For example, in Fife the Council of Action controlled road transport and workers swore allegiance to it. In Northeast England local authorities even had to negotiate with the Council of Action.

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 the counterrevolutionary ‘White Russian’ forces. Two days later, the British Government abandoned its plans and backed Soviet proposals for a peace treaty with the principal aggressor, Poland.

This was the first and only occasion that the leadership of the British Labour movement has formally countenanced industrial action in order to bring pressure to bear on a ‘constitutional’ Government. Its success provided a precedent and the rationale for Councils of Action to become an organisational nuclei of the general strike.

## **Workers’ Defence / Workers’ Vigilance Corps**

St Pancras Trades Council established a Workers’ Defence Corps. The *St Pancras Bulletin* on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1926 urged workers to “sign up to their Vigilance Corps” and ensure their strike committees were represented in the Corps.

*St Pancras Bulletin* on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1926 again called on workers to join St Pancras Vigilance Corps after the Government stopped paper supply for *The British Worker* (the official daily newspaper of the TUC during the general strike).

the Government had issued a statement in *The British Gazette* (the Government's own newspaper) "for all ranks of the armed forces to take any action needed to aid Civil Powers [and] will receive the full support of the Government."

The *St Pancras Bulletin* described this as a direct incitement to Army Officers to utilise "fascist methods" to squash the strike. They wrote, "do not let anyone scare you, take action as a disciplined party," "We are many, they are few," and "We are told that peace overtures are being made, but we would like to know by whom? We have not heard anything officially." The *St Pancras Bulletin* called for a general election "to give the Bosses the evidence they deserve."

However, St Pancras Trades Council delegate Peter Zinkin, described St Pancras Defence Corps as being "half-hearted". He wrote that whether the army would have taken up arms against the workers was not put to the test, but the sight of military vehicles on the streets showed that the Government's intentions were serious.



**Photo:** Food convoy escorted along Holborn, London, by troops in armoured cars.

## The *St Pancras Bulletin*

The *St Pancras Bulletin* was printed, distributed and sold every day of the general strike from 67 Camden Road, as well as from other locations such as 65 Chalton Street, Somers Town (headquarters of South East St Pancras Labour Party).

Contemporary handwritten notes on several issues of *St Pancras Bulletin* give an indication of how many copies were sold, from where and at what time:

- Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May, (*St Pancras Bulletin* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), 2,980 copies sold from 65 Chalton Street (3,200 copies were sold of the previous issue)
- Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May, (*St Pancras Bulletin* No.3), 4,000 copies sold from 65 Chalton Street, between 10.00am and 12.30pm
- Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May, (*St Pancras Bulletin* No.5, 1<sup>st</sup> edition), about 4,000 copies issued 9.00am onwards
- Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May, (*St Pancras Bulletin* No.8), sold at Bedford Theatre

In the second *St Pancras Bulletin* on 5<sup>th</sup> May, the editor explained that it had achieved "a remarkable sale, so much so that they have not been able to meet demand."

*"That this is the spirit that wins. Not only in St Pancras but all over the country workers have rallied to the cause. So they ask themselves what does this say about the nature of the strike? It is workers refusal to accept the conditions of the boss class. We must keep our spirits up and we will clear away for ever the 'accursed capitalist system'."*

Emile Burns, Publicity Secretary of St Pancras Trades Council described local strike bulletins as being "of the greatest importance" and reported there were "queues of eager distributors".

The *St Pancras strike bulletin* appeared from 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> May 1926, sometimes twice a day. Each edition ran to between four and five thousand copies, costing half a penny. 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. With Fleet Street on strike, capitalist newspapers appeared only in a truncated form if

at all. This made Trades Council strike bulletins a very important source of news. To plug the gap in news management during the strike the Government published a broadsheet, *The British Gazette*, while the TUC published *The British Worker*. The TUC's news sheet emphasised passivity, urging strikers to keep calm, stay off the streets, and play organised games such as football.<sup>[6]</sup> (The BBC, founded by radio manufacturers in 1922 as a private corporation, played its familiar role supporting the Government against the strikers. The Royal Charter establishing the BBC as a public corporation was not issued until 1 January 1927).

To counter the passivity of the TUC bulletin, the Communist Party authors of the *St Pancras 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 after the strike when the TUC formally expelled St Pancras Council of Action.

The importance of the bulletins in providing information for striking workers was not underestimated by the Government who initiated a national crackdown on trades councils copying and printing facilities – including that of St Pancras Trades Council when police raided their strike HQ at 67 Camden Road on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1926.

The Communist Party suspended its usual workplace bulletins during the general strike, apart from a special strike edition of the Railwaymen's broadsheet, *'Camden and Granby Street Spark'* which reported, "RAILWAYMEN SOLID! All the railway unions, the N.U.R., the A.S.L.E. and F. and the R.C.A are working together and running joint strike committees in every locality."

A note dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1926 records:

*"This paper was printed on both sides with the imprint 44 Malden Road, NW3 at the foot. It was the only Factory paper issued as the Trades Council EC decided to limit publications to official TC publications. It was printed on the night of May 4-5th in an edition of 200 copies and distributed at 10am outside 44 Malden Road, which had been lent by the C.P.G.B. as strike headquarters."*

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You can find the *St Pancras Bulletin* on the Camden Trades Council website, at this link: <https://camdentradescouncil.com/history-of-camden-trades-council/>

## Authors and editors of the *St Pancras Bulletin*:

### Emile Burns (1889–1972)



Writer, historian and Marxist educator, Emile Burns was a founding member of the Communist Party, a long-time member of the CPGB Executive and Political Committees. He was Propaganda Secretary of the St Pancras Strike Committee during the 1926 general strike and subsequently went on to develop the Left Book Club with Harry Pollitt and Victor Gollanz in the late 1930s.

Family documents indicate that Emile joined the Communist Party in 1921 and confirm that from 1921 to 1929 he was secretary of the Labour Research Dept, except during the period of the 1926 general strike. Emile produced a major report on the work of Trades Councils during the strike, *'The General Strike of 1926: Trades Councils in Action'*.

### Kay Beauchamp (1899–1992)



Kay Beauchamp joined CPGB in 1924 and was lifelong communist activist. In 1926 she was a delegate to St Pancras Trades Council and was elected chair of the women's group.

She helped Emile Burns produce the *St Pancras Bulletin* for the St Pancras Council of Action during the general strike.

St Pancras Trades Council set up a Women's Committee in the spring of 1926. Membership came from local Labour Party, Communist Party and Co-op women's groups. The Trades Council intended for its purpose to be "to organise meetings and entertainment for strikers' wives." But the group saw its role more in terms of food distribution and fund raising for the locked-out miners. After the strike the committee stayed in existence with this as its main purpose.

## Peter Zinkin

Peter Zinkin was a delegate to St Pancras Trades Council and as a journalist and publicist helped to produce the St Pancras Bulletin. At age of 19 he joined the Labour Party and was elected Assistant General Secretary of the South West St Pancras Parliamentary Constituency branch and stood as a Labour candidate for St Pancras Borough Council in 1925.

As a result of his experiences in the general strike and the betrayal of the miners he joined the Communist Party and subsequently had 56 years of unbroken membership. He went on to become political editor of the Morning Star and in 1985 published his memoirs 'A man to be watched carefully'.

## Frank Jackson

Frank Jackson was said to be always wanting to have a joke and make mischief. In 1914 he was a member of the executive of the militant breakaway Building Workers' Industrial Union, which he had helped to found. He was also an EC member of the Trades Union Rights Committee. He was working on the new Pearl Insurance Building in High Holborn when he became involved in the great building workers lock-out of January to August 1914.

Frank Jackson's father gave him membership of SDF (Social Democratic Federation) when he was 15 years old. When the Communist Party was formed in 1920 he was quick to join. He worked for the CP on a couple of occasions. During the general strike he was organiser for the St Pancras Trades Council Trades Council. [7]

[1] Peter Zinkin, 'A man to be watched carefully', People's Publication (1985), page 42

[2] Hold on Tight, London Transport and the Trade Unions, Martin Eady, Capital Transport publishing ltd 2016

[3] Holborn Guardian, 14 05 26 p.2 column3 "Incidents of the strike"

[4] Fitzrovia, the other side of Oxford Street, Fitzrovia's Radicals p.2

[5] The General Strike and Road Transport, George Glasgow "Being an account of road transport organisation prepared by the British Government to meet national emergencies, with a detailed description of its use in the emergency of May 1926".

[6] Peter Zinkin, 'A man to be watched carefully', People's Publication (1985), page 47

[7] R.A. Leeson, STRIKE, A Live History, 1887 – 1971, George Allen & Unwin Ltd (1973), p.92 [https://files.libcom.org/files/Strike-live-history\\_0.pdf](https://files.libcom.org/files/Strike-live-history_0.pdf)

# THE STRIKE BEGINS

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 1926 was the first full day of the general strike.

St Pancras Bulletin, No.1, (4<sup>th</sup> May 1926), was a call to arms and a rally for support for the strike. It focused on the reason for the strike and the relevance of the strike demands for workers in St Pancras.

It carried the title, "All behind the miners!" The opening paragraph explained the TUC General Council appealed to all organised workers to rally in support of the miners - in what was their fight against wage cuts and lengthening of hours (an hour extra on the working day for a period of three years) as demanded by the mine owners and the Tory Government. The bulletin explained that if the mine owners got their way they would be working longer hours than any other European miner - and because the cost of living was higher than before World War I, earnings would buy less. "How would you like it?" the bulletin asked. If the Government were allowed to get away with this - other workers would be next, readers were urged to "Remember you are organised workers, not a mob."



**Photo:** 4<sup>th</sup> May 1926. High Holborn, London, England. A Policeman directs traffic, cyclists, and pedestrians.

The St Pancras Bulletin explained that the St Pancras strike committee acted

under the auspices of the TUC General Council, co-ordinating the work of strike committees for the area. All information would be issued in the bulletin and each strike committee would have a supply.

Strikers were told to rely on the 'Workers Daily'<sup>[8]</sup> and Daily Herald<sup>[9]</sup> for their news and to ignore the BBC "Wireless Dope" because the Government controlled this.

The miners' union slogan for the strike, popularised by their General Secretary A.J. Cook was "Not a penny off the pay, Not a minute on the day!" the *St Pancras strike bulletin* adapted it for frequent use as "Not a cent off the pay, not a minute on the day".

The St Pancras Bulletin footer read "**Stand Solid to win!**"

### **Personal memories of the first day of the strike:**

**Ted Barham**, looking back on his memories of the strike on the 50th anniversary in 1976:

When the general strike was announced Ted went immediately to his local strike committee based at the Old Labour Hall, 65 Chalton Street, Somers Town – an area that would have been the centre of the action during the general strike.

**Peter Zinkin**, delegate to St Pancras Trades Council, wrote in his memoirs:

*"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."*

**Frank Jackson** was interviewed in 1973 for *STRIKE, A Live History, 1887 - 1971*, about his memories of the general strike as a retired rank and file building worker.

*"I was organiser for the St Pancras Trades Council, and in St Pancras the strike was absolutely complete. When they tried to move the buses, we lined them all up, pulled out the distributor wires and hauled the blacklegs out of the cabs."*

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**[8]** *The British Worker* was produced by the TUC during the General Strike. It was the official strike news bulletin. The first issue of eleven came out on 5<sup>th</sup> May and the publication ended on 17<sup>th</sup> May after the official cessation of the strike. The principal objective of the newspaper was to circulate information and maintain the strikers' morale throughout the stoppage.

**[9]** *The Daily Herald* was a national daily newspaper published daily in London from 1912 to 1964. Between 1922-1929, *The Daily Herald* was the official organ of TUC. It underwent several changes of management before ceasing publication in 1964, when it was relaunched as *The Sun*, and was at that time a Labour supporting newspaper.

## **ST PANCRAS STRIKE HQ – 67 CAMDEN ROAD**

The South West St Pancras Constituency Labour Party had a shop and offices at 67 Camden Road, which was used as the headquarters of St Pancras Council of Action. Groups of workers reported there daily, including the Printing Machine Managers Trade Society and the Building Trade workers. The *St Pancras Bulletin* was collected each day from the Camden Road offices.<sup>[10]</sup> Peter Zinkin 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 came to collect the bulletin for distribution."*

Other groups of striking workers signed on at 293 Kentish Town Road,<sup>[11]</sup> including ASW (Associated Society of Woodworkers) No. 1 & 2 branches, RCA (Railway Clerks Association) Camden NW and Euston.

Whereas Building Trades Central Strike Committee, all sections, including NAFTA (National Amalgamated Furniture Trades' Association) met at the Old Turkish Baths, Kentish Town Road. The committee consisted of the following branches: ASW (Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers) 2 branches, 1 branch plumbers and Domestic Engineers, 4 branches of Builders Labourers, 1 branch AUETW (Amalgamated Union Engineering Trades Workers), 1 branch ETU (Electric Trades Union).

## Police raid St Pancras Council of Action at 67 Camden Road

During the strike the Government suppressed independent news reporting with a national crackdown on Trades Councils/Councils of Action copying and printing facilities. On 10<sup>th</sup> 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 reproduce the *St Pancras Bulletin*. Police arrested Jack Smith, the 21-year-old secretary of St Pancras Trades Council, a member of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association (NAFTA).

Jack Smith was charged with issuing seditious material in that day's *St Pancras Bulletin* in relation to the reporting of an incident that had taken place on Harmood Street, which the police claimed was inaccurate. Smith appeared at Marylebone Magistrates Court, where bail was offered on the proviso that he refrained from political 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.

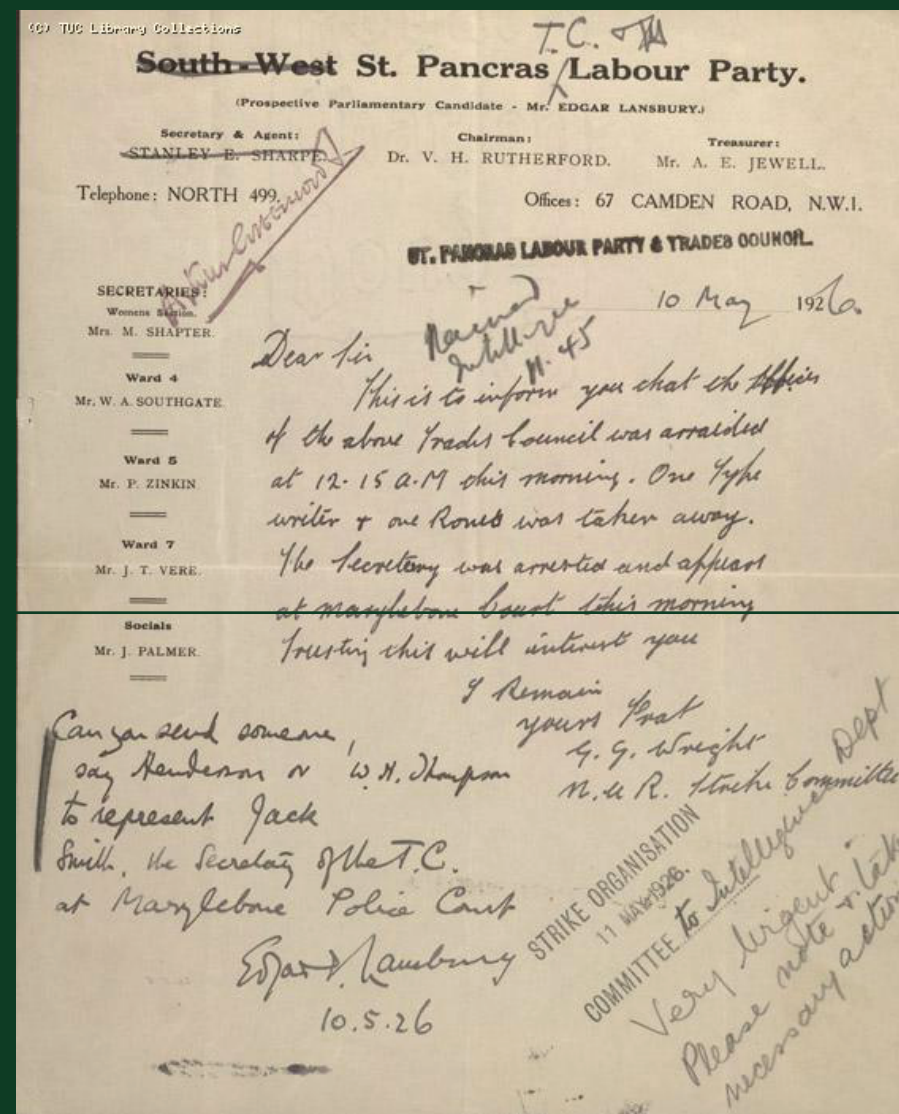
### The Joke Was on Them

Frank Jackson explained how he 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, the Labour MP for Bow and Bromley). The Gestetner 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 by police.

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."

[10] 'A man to be watched carefully', Peter Zinkin, page 28

[11] *St Pancras Bulletin*, No 1, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1926



Letter sent from 67 Camden Road regarding the arrest of Jack Smith.

The Harmood Street incident, for which Smith was arrested, was reported in *St Pancras Bulletin* No.9 as follows:

"Overground Bus Garage, The police attempted to draw about the Buses, and formed a cordon in Harwood(sic) Street, of course a crowd collected, a covered lorry then drove out of the garage and run up and down Harmood 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".

## WOMEN IN THE STRIKE

### St Pancras Council of Action Women's Committee

St Pancras Council of Action established a Women's Group in St Pancras. Its work included organising special relief work and other activities. It met every day of the general strike at the Old Turkish Baths, Kentish Town Road, Camden from 10am.

Kay Beauchamp, was elected chairman of the women's group, and described how it got started.

*"They set it up the day the General Strike started practically. And we called a meeting of the women you know, in about 24 hours. We had about forty or fifty women there. You know in a situation like that everyone on the strike committee were told to tell their wives and others and they just came in, you know. It wouldn't happen in any other situation. But it was a well attended meeting, we elected the committee, and I was elected chairman, and a Co-op woman....was elected as secretary.*

*And we set to work. We were going to open kitchens, you know soup kitchens. We got in touch with the Co-op., negotiated with them, looking for halls and so on. But really before we got going the strike was called off".<sup>[12]</sup>*

The agreement with the Coop was that a week's credit was to be given for supplies required for a canteen for strikers' families. It was agreed that food to the value of £30 to £40 a week should be supplied.<sup>[13]</sup> Given the strike was called off after nine days, no use was made of this agreement.

Frank Jackson wrote, "We had a united committee with all the women on it. The Trades Council fitted up a canteen, where meals were organised for the pickets and tea fights for the kids. The women organised the lot."

St Pancras Bulletin, which continued as a weekly publication after the strike, reported on the Women's committee (in bulletin No 1, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1926), explaining that the Tory Government was proposing all strike ballots in future should be by secret ballot of all members of trade unions – and their wives. The St Pancras Bulletin commented that the Trades Council's experience from the general strike was that women were just as solid as their hus-

bands to continue the strike.

They added that St Pancras Trades Council intended to carry on organising working class women in Trade Unions, Women's Guilds, Labour Party sections, factories and shops in preparation for the next crisis.

### Women and Politics

Ellena Burns (wife of historian Emile Burns) worked for St Pancras Communist Party during the general strike. Living in Gospel Oak, Ellena described organising discussion groups for strikers' wives: "We discussed how women could go about influencing events"; "I think the general strike was the first time we in the Communist party, were able to get women involved in political discussion."<sup>[14]</sup>

### Unorganised Women

The St Pancras Bulletin of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1926 wrote that some unorganised women were still working. The bulletin hoped that they would realise that their interests as workers are identical with those of the miners – on very low pay. It explained that the Trades Council had set up a women's committee to rally women in the district so that they can give organised help and maintain solidarity and the spirit that wins.

The *British Worker* of 7<sup>th</sup> May described women cleaners joining the strike at Kings Cross; *St Pancras Bulletin*, of 12<sup>th</sup> May reported that at Kings Cross everyone, including the women cleaners (previously un-unionised) had joined the strike.

### Women Organise Solidarity Work for Miners

After the general strike ended St Pancras women's committee organised:

- collections for the miners,
- house-to-house collections
- sending clothes to mining areas

"Mrs Lansbury" (the famous Irish actress Moyna Macgill who married the Communist Mayor of Poplar, Edgar Lansbury) organised a "Grand Concert with a Welsh Choir" at the Bedford Theatre at 93-95 Camden High Street,

a few hundred yards from Mornington Crescent.

In July 1926, after the general strike had ended the St Pancras Women's Committee and the Plebs League put on a performance at the Memorial Hall of 'Singing Jailbirds' – a new play published in 1924 by American socialist writer, Upton Sinclair. The play told the story of "Red," an IWW union organiser locked up in a California prison cell. It was inspired by the author's own arrest in 1923 while defending striking longshoremen in San Pedro, California.

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[12] *Leninism, Stalinism, and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-39*, Sue Bruley, 2013, Taylor and Francis.

[13] *Weekly Worker*, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1926, p.6

[14] *The Journal*, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1976

## RAILWAYS

Peter Zinkin wrote of Monday 4 May, the first full day of the strike "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".

"The railways have stopped from John O'Groats to Lands End".

The *St Pancras bulletin* of Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May carried a message from NUR President, Charlie Cramp, "the stoppage of traffic on the railways is almost complete."

A circular published by the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) on the fifth day of the general strike, Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May read:

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GENERAL STRIKE NEWS BULLETIN  
SATURDAY, MAY 8<sup>TH</sup> 1926

I despatched a telegraphic message in the following terms to all Branches and Strike Committees this morning:

"STOPPAGE 100 PERCENT EFFICIENT. BE SURE AND  
MAINTAIN OUR POSITION. YOU CANNOT IMPROVE IT."

---

*St Pancras bulletin* carried the following reports from NUR branches:

### NUR No.1&2 Chalk Farm and Camden No.1:

*All solid.*

### NUR Camden No.3 (London Underground branch):

7<sup>th</sup> May: "Our position is splendid, our men as firm as a rock. We are assured that there can only be one end to the fight. ADOPT THE SLOGAN – STAND FIRM TO WIN"

10<sup>th</sup> May, the funeral of Bro J. Grave, took place on a procession of 200 members with two banners, escorted the coffin from Christ Church, Euston to Kentish Town, the RCA were in attendance.

From Camden depot, about 3 o'clock on 6<sup>th</sup> May, polices and special constables escorted five lorries driven by scabs out of the depot.

### NUR London, Midland and Scottish Railway Co. members:

*St Pancras bulletin* carried a message from NUR London Midlands strike committee, that all their members should only follow notices that were issued from 67 Camden Road and under the names of branch officers W. Gore, Chairman and W.H. Watson, Secretary.

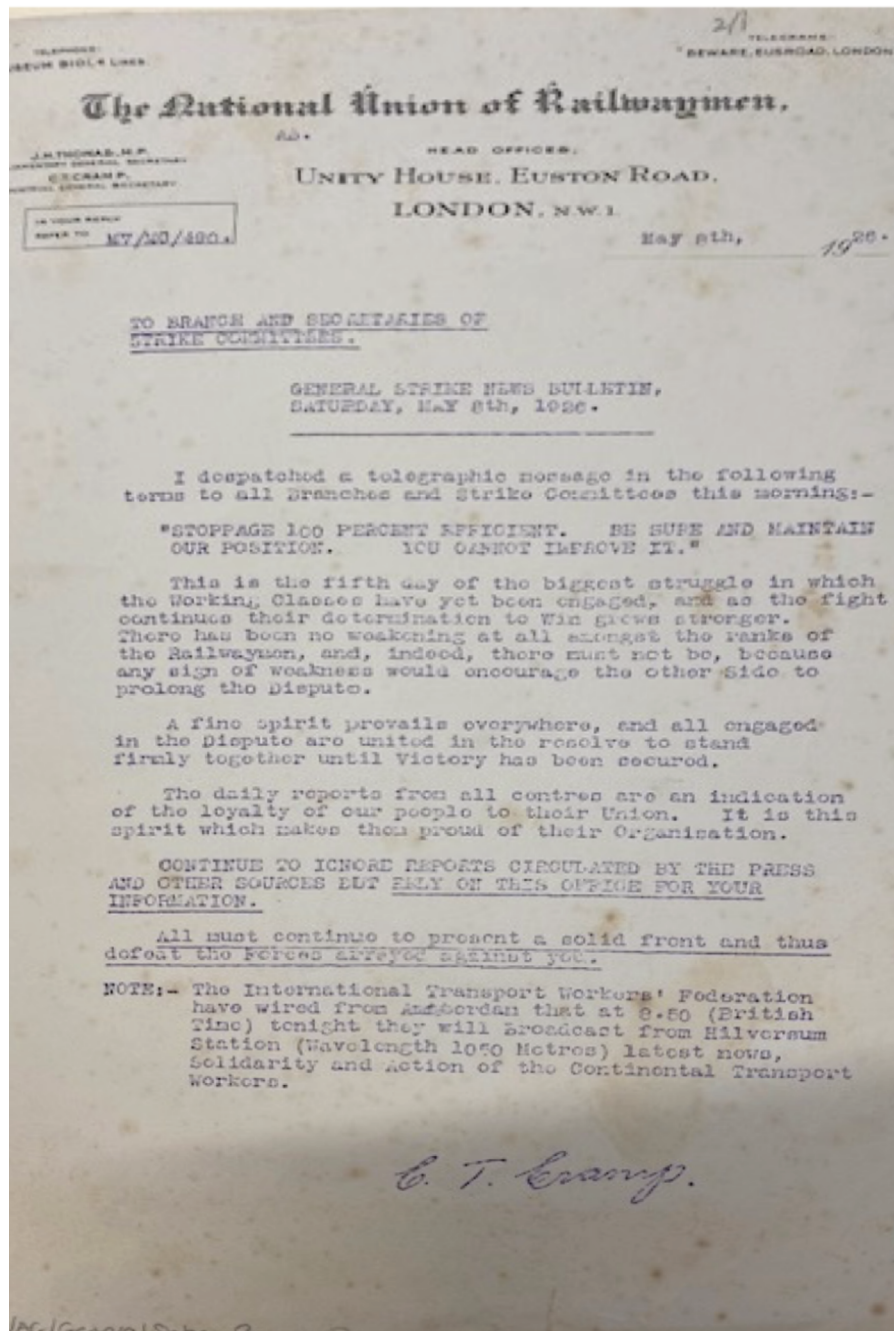
On 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May, 6pm, NUR London, Midland and Scottish Railway members and strike committee met on Parliament Hill, a meeting that was proceeded by the *St Pancras Staff Band*.

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 5-6pm, *St Pancras Passenger Band* played "selections" on Parliament Hill from after which a meeting was held.

### NUR Euston:

*NUR 100% out and they have recruited 200 new members.* "We the members of Euston branch refuse to return to duty until all the nons and those still working are removed from the railway".

*Railwaymen and other workers were mostly solid at Kings Cross and Euston stations. An attempt at Euston to run a train ended with the "volunteer-run train run into the catch-points near Camden."*



The circular published by the NUR on Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> May

## ASLEF

Driver Ernie Denley, who started work at Kings Cross in 1919, when asked of his memories of the general strike said, "I remember them fetching the sleeping cars for the troops that Churchill had sent. There was a little squad of them marching through the goods yard. We wanted to talk to the soldiers but the sergeant wouldn't let us. I wanted to tell them "turn a blind eye mate, like Nelson."<sup>[15]</sup>

## RCA (Railway Clerks' Association)

RCA members working at The Railway Clearing House on Drummond Street, near Euston Station, managed revenue allocation and through-traffic between the 'Big Four' private railway companies. RCA branch members: Stewart Purkis, Billy Williams, Bert Field and Ruby Rayner who worked in Somers Town met at event at St Mary's Church on Eversholt Street in Somers Town organised by Reg Groves (aged 18), a Christian socialist follower of the revolutionary vicar of Thaxted, Conrad Noel who "strove to win the Church to socialism". Groves shared "the exhilaration of witnessing the blackcoated aristocrats of the Clearing House walk out to join the strike. He shared the bitterness of defeat and the victimisation of union activists."

On 9<sup>th</sup> May the RCA organised a social and concert at 7pm at Foresters Hall. They welcomed any trade unionists. The Camden branch RCA reported that on 8<sup>th</sup> May they were still strong and absolutely solid in support of a living wage for the Miners (H.J.H. Martin).

An RCA Camden branch meeting was held on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> May at 9am at Stanhope Arms, on the corner of Jamestown Road and Oval Road, NW1.

## Kings Cross Station

The TUC's newspaper, the *British Worker* on 7<sup>th</sup> May described women cleaners joining the strike at Kings Cross.

Also at Kings Cross the attempt to get trains driven by middle class blacklegs backfired: "two of the OMSers [volunteers from the Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies] took charge of a train. They failed to open the drain-cocks before starting the locomotive and the cylinder heads blew out." There was further incompetence: "a heavy engine has fallen into the pit of the turntable..."



**Photo:** Fourth day of the General Strike, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1926 - milk accumulating on No.1 platform, King's Cross.<sup>[16]</sup>

The impact the strike had on the railways is evident from the report on 'incidents of the strike' in the Holborn Guardian, which reported that on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1926 it took a train 37 and a half hours to travel from Kings Cross to Edinburgh.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Other Workers

St Pancras bulletin, No2, 5<sup>th</sup> May, ETU (Electrical Trades Union) report from pickets explains that the load was down to 3,900 and that links were to be withdrawn from various sections of the Borough.

[15] Solidarity Forever, 100 years of Kings Cross ASLEF, John Rose

[16] 'A History of the LNER: I. The First Fifty Years, 1923-33', Michael R. Bonavia

[17] Holborn Guardian, 14.05.26, p.2 column 3

## STREET PROTESTS

### Camden High Street

The Holborn Guardian reported "Alarming Scenes in Camden Town, stones thrown at cars carrying police reinforcements". The incident took place in High Street, Camden Town when missiles were thrown, shops suffered damage and the police had to send reinforcements from Hampstead police station in response to an urgent call. A number of arrests were made.

St Pancras Gazette reported that an arrest was made in High Street, Camden Town, for throwing stones at buses and two shop windows in the upper part of High Street were broken during 'some disorder, which was very speedily suppressed'.

William Walter Dennis, 28, railway motor-setter from Kentish Town Road, was charged with having thrown missiles at passing buses in High Street, Camden Town, and at the police to try and prevent the buses from running. The magistrates passed a sentence of two months hard labour.

The police inspector in charge of the fleet of cars said at Marylebone Police Court that two to three thousand people had gathered, and showered the police cars with missiles, smashing the windscreen of two or three of the police cars. An order was given to clear the street. Five men and a youth refused to move and they were arrested for obstructing police officers.

### Incident outside of the Britannia pub (on the corner of Camden High Street and Parkway, NW1)

St Pancras bulletin, No.8, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) reported:

*"We have had well authenticated reports of the incidents at the Britannia yesterday, and regard the methods used by the authorities as unnecessarily and provocative. This particularly refers to the incidents with women and children. It is clear that workers must take steps to organise to defend themselves against such action"*.

Peter Zinkin, a delegate to the Trades Council describes the scene at this junction during the strike:

*“At the main traffic crossings at the Camden Town Tube Station, where five major roads converged, very large crowds of men and women throughout the day line the pavements booing the drivers of the infrequent blackleg transport, watching the efforts of those trying to turn them back. From time to time, groups of men were to be seen gathered round a halted blackleg bus or lorry working away to immobilise it. The police were unable to do anything to stop them. With similar activity all over the country the Government forces were stretched to the utmost limits, they could not find enough police to support the people’s mass pickets. The few police that there were at Camden Town and had been there for long hours, mounted and on foot, and after four or five days repeated baton charges against the mass of the people, has become so tired they could barely manage to lift their batons, or for the mounties to use the sandbags attached to their saddles. They were being ignored. It was an astonishing sight”.*

## **Stopping Trams from Running**

### **From Hampstead Depot**

Frank Jackson described in an interview for “STRIKE, A Live History 1887-1971” (R.A. Leeson) the scene in Chalk Farm:

*“Mounted police were escorting the trams down the Chalk Farm Road, so we staged a fight and drew off the police. Then we planted wedges between the rails with a sledgehammer and brought the trams to a halt”.*

*St Pancras Bulletin, No.5, (1<sup>st</sup> Edition) reported that 100 fascists had been drafted into run the trams from Hampstead depot; “They have been unlucky and have not been able to take a single tram out so now they have their bedding moved in”.*

### **Along Camden Road**

During the general strike large crowds attempted to hold up two LCC (London County Council) tramcars in Camden Town and Kentish Town near North London Railway station. Two windows in one of the tram cars was smashed.

## **Up the Red Cry at Hampstead**

44 Malden Road, Hampstead was the area office of the Communist Party, which had taken over the property from the British Socialist Party when it fused with other left wing groups to form the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. They lent out the rooms to St Pancras Trades Council during the general strike.

The *Evening Standard* newspaper in a general strike special edition on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1926 reported on an incident outside 44 Malden Road: “UP THE RED” CRY AT HAMPSTEAD - SPECIALS DRAW THEIR TRUNCHEONS.

The *Evening Standard* reported:

*“After the restarting of an LCC (London County Council) tramcar service from Hampstead, a violent scene was alleged to have taken place outside the Communist offices in the Malden Road.” A Police Inspector, Charles Clayden said he went to Malden Road with a force of police in motor cars. “Outside the Communist offices he found a crowd of five or six hundred people in front of a tram. They were booing, hissing, and swearing at the volunteer driver and conductor”.*

The Police Inspector ordered his cars to drive through the crowd, which enabled the tramcar to proceed. A protester, Herbert Harrison (aged 24, a hairdresser of Malden Road) then stood in the middle of the road, when told by the police to move he said, “Don’t be silly.” He shouted to the crowd “Up the Reds!”. He was then alleged to have punched the inspector and run towards the Communist Party offices.

He was overtaken and was being put in a police car when George Self (aged 25, a labourer of Prince of Wales Road), forced his way, possibly accidentally in between. Frederick Kauselau (aged 27, a machinist of Rhyl Street, Kentish Town) was then alleged to have called on the “Reds” to rescue their comrades. Self was then alleged to have punched the inspector. When the inspector stood up, he forced Kauselau into custody, while special constables drew their truncheons to keep the crowd at bay.

Kauselau, Self, Harrison and Henry Newens (aged 16 of Rhyl Street) were all charged with committing an act calculated to injure or prevent the proper working of a tramcar at Malden Road and with obstructing police officers. Kauselau and Harrison were also charged with assaulting a policeman. Kauselau appeared in court with his head bandaged. The men were

remanded on bail.

## MEETINGS

### Evening Meetings

Meetings led by Trades Council activists were held every evening at 7.30pm during the general strike, at the following locations:

Mornington Crescent: Meeting led by: Mrs Bell, Batchelor and Edgar Lansbury (son of George Lansbury, Labour MP for Bow and Bromley). Edgar, while being a Communist Party member, had been adopted as the Labour Party candidate for the south west St Pancras constituency.

Mansfield Road – Meeting led by; Mrs Dollar, F. Raper Dawson Large,

Hawley Crescent – Meeting led by; Carter, Mellor, Bacon

Castle Road – Meeting led by; Marley, Bacon, Moore

Leighton Road – Meeting led by; Horne, Pearson, Lindgren

Ossulston Street – Meeting led by; Clifford, Wash, Coombes, Creswell

Mother Shipton – Meeting led by; Howe, Tibbles, Sharpe (Guardian Sharpe from the Vigilance Corps)

Clarendon Square

Cartwright Gardens

### Other meetings:

On Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm, there was a mass meeting at Cumberland Market.

## Mass Meeting on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 1926 at Bedford Palace

Music Hall, Bedford Palace of Varieties, 93-95 Camden High Street, NW1



*Photo: Bedford Palace in 1904 (demolished in 1969).*

The mass meeting was organised by TUC General Council for trade unionists and their wives. Admission was by 1926 union membership cards only. Doors opened at 6.00pm (entrance was via the front entrance for the hall and circle and side entrance for the gallery), there was music from 6.30pm and the speeches began at 7.00pm.

The event was chaired by Alf Tomkins, the President of St Pancras Trades Council, referred to in St Pancras Bulletin as “Our Alf”.

The St Pancras Gazette reported the event as follows, “There was a great gathering at the Bedford Theatre of Varieties, High Street, Camden Town. And an even larger gathering on the concourse outside”.

The St Pancras Bulletin described the “huge crowds both in the theatre and outside and explained that “the enthusiasm shown was magnificent”. Alf Perkins “gave an excellent lead”, speaking about the absolute necessity of maintaining discipline under the Trades Council, which itself was following instruction from the TUC. The bulletin reported that his remarks were followed attentively – he expressed the feeling of the St Pancras rank and file and “was cheered to the echo” when he said, “Not a minute on the day, not a cent off the pay”.

*St Pancras Bulletin* reported further points from the speeches at the meeting:



**Harry Day** (a theatre empresario and owner of Bedford Palace and Labour MP for Southwark Central) spoke of the miserable wages the miners were paid and contrasted this with the immense profits made by mine-owners. He said that the labourers working in Durham mines were paid four shillings and nine pence a day, and that this was why the organised Labour movement was solidly behind the miners in resisting starvation conditions.

**Mrs Harry Day** (who married Harry Day in 1901 was a frequent music hall performer at the Bedford Theatre under her stage name Kitty Colyer) said she was convinced that the general strike was a class struggle – and if the miners lost, every worker would have to work for a lower wage. She appealed to everyone to keep their cool, particularly women, and added that people should remember that even a policeman or an OMS (Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, the Government's scab workforce) had a heart – talk to them – because if the miners are beaten every worker will have to work for a lower wage.



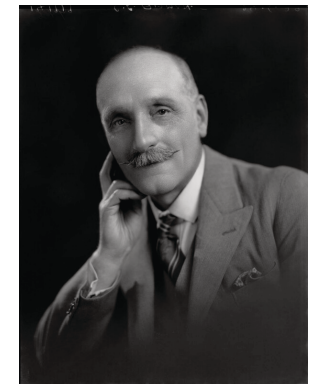
**J.H. "Jimmy" Thomas** (1874–1949 joint General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and MP for Derby) “received a tremendous ovation”. Thomas said that the Government had deliberately caused the strike by closing down negotiations. The response of the workers had been tremendous.

He explained the course of the negotiations was that the mineowners had not put forward terms until after they had posted lockout notices and that no settlement could be reached under such circumstances. The defence of the miners by the workers was “unprecedented in the worlds history”.

Thomas said that the strike was solid from John o' Groats to Lands End. He warned that strikers should keep out of the pubs while the fight is on. The capitalist class fear the power of the people.

St Pancras Gazette reported that earlier in the day, at a meeting in Hammersmith Mr Thomas, said he had “never disguised, and he did not disguise it now, that he had ever been in favour of the principle of a General Strike. The workers had no right to say to the employer, you must negotiate under the threat of a strike.”

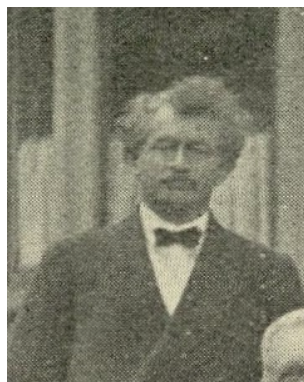
**Charles Ammon** (General Secretary of Post Office Workers Union and MP for North Camberwell) said that the Government had declared war and reminded the audience that the Home Secretary, J.H. Hicks was the man who said “fire and be damned” over Ulster and that Churchill was “the hero of Sydney Street and other not very glorious” battles – but he thought himself a Napoleon. That the governing class were not feeling the rising power of the people. And the public were increasingly on the side of the miners.



**Dawson Large** (the Labour London County Council candidate in St Pancras South East constituency who ran the office at 67 Camden Road) kept the audience laughing while the collectors bagged the “dough” from the collection. He spoke about media coverage of the strike and inflated the effectiveness of the strike breaking operation. As an example, he told the story of a train that ran from Camden Town to Mornington Crescent. “When it departed it was one train. But by the time it got to Euston it was two – and by the time it had got to Charing Cross it was 18.” He said that the Government coverage reminded him of a boy whistling to keep his spirits up.

**Neil Maclean**, a Scottish socialist and an Independent Labour Party who later became Labour MP for Glasgow Govan, “raised great enthusiasm by a fighting speech.”

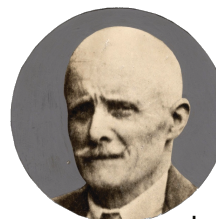
Maclean said the solidarity of the British workers would be a stimulus to the whole world and would spread a wave of enthusiasm over the earth that would engulf the whole capitalist system. If the Government want it fought to the bitter end – let them have it, our job is to see that the other side drink the bitterness of defeat. No one in London can realise what the miners’ life is. Last year 72 boys under 16 were brought out dead, and ten thousand boys under 16 were brought home injured and broken. The miners were entitled to the highest benefits our civilisation could give.



If the miners went down in defeat, never again could the workers call themselves men and women. The solidarity already shown will go on until victory is ours. This is only a skirmish, the workers must go on, skirmish to skirmish until the final conflict, when we shall pull down the final ramparts of capitalism and place over the banner of the workers, the Red Flag.

**Alexander G Walkden**, (1873–1951, General Secretary of the Railway Clerks Association) said that his union were on strike for the first time and were glad to be able to back up the miners. “We are in this struggle and determined to stay in until a decent standard is secured”.

**Edgar Lansbury** (son of George Lansbury - Labour MP for Bow and Bromley) while a Communist Party member had been adopted as Labour Party candidate for the south west St Pancras constituency. Edgar said that victory will be secured when the notices of reductions to the miners are withdrawn and the miners go back on the same conditions as before the lock out.



**Arthur Pugh** (1870 – 1955, General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation) spoke at the overflow meeting. He was TUC President in 1926 and chair of TUC's Special Industrial Committee, very important during the general strike. He was known as a moderate and it was doubted that he even supported the strike action.

The meeting ended with the singing of The Internationale, England Arise (an English socialist song) and the Red Flag.

## INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

*St Pancras Bulletin* reported on support for the General Strike from around the world:

- The Palestine Federation of Labour cabled £100 for the miners.
- German Miners implemented the Miners International decision not to export coal to England.
- The French railway men, dockers, have solidarity with their British comrades.
- Paris Motor Factory have struck in solidarity.
- *St Pancras Bulletin*, No.6, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1926 reported “Support from America – from Miners Federation and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America”.
- The French printing trade unions took solidarity action to prevent the printing of British newspapers in Paris and these being flown into Lon

- don.<sup>[18]</sup>
- The Canton Workers' Government and the Indian Trade Union Congress sent messages of solidarity and promised financial assistance.

[18] *Holborn Guardian*, 14 05 26 p.2 column3 "Incidents of the strike"

## THE BETRAYAL

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1926 was the final day of the strike. The notification calling off the strike was issued at 13.00 hours when the BBC announced that 10 Downing Street and the TUC had officially declared the termination of the strike.

The strike came to an end without any agreement conceding the miners' demands and without any arrangements for an organised return to work or guarantees against victimisation of strikers.

Employers immediately sought to take advantage of the sell-out. In St Pancras many railwaymen were refused their jobs, causing much anger. <sup>[19]</sup>

St Pancras Trades Council issued a Special Edition of St Pancras Bulletin, in which without having details of the settlement, they described the Government as having given way before the united stand of the workers – as they had committed to continue subsidising the mining industry.

The St Pancras Bulletin continued, that the TUC General Secretaries were in negotiations with the Government to call off the General Strike, but that the TUC must not forget the reason for the strike, which was to save the miners from working longer hours, and from wage reductions. And they must not forget those who have been victimised during the strike – those in prison and those victimised from their job.

The Trades Council Secretary, Jack Smith wrote:

*"Comrades, in St Pancras this struggle has shown the solidarity of the Trade Union movement. The St. Pancras Trades Council has been the TUC centre local, acting under the National Centre. The General Council of the TUC. The fight has been straight on our side. We are pleased with the solidarity and loyalty to the movement shown in St Pancras.*

*Do not forget that now we have to carry on with our work and maintain our position both industrially and politically. See to it that when the time comes, we have Labour majorities, local and nationally. Let your slogan be: - Workers' Control, Industrially and politically".*

When more news began to filter through as to the true nature of settlement, the trade union activists of St Pancras were shocked and angry.

In 1976 on the 50-year anniversary of the strike, Camden Pensioners' leader, Ted Barham recounted his memories of the general strike as an 18-year old local activist, "the end of the strike came as a shock," "the people I was with were aghast when the news came through. We didn't believe it." He added, "I went to with my father to Unity House (NUR HQ) on Euston Road, to find out if it were really true."

*"Some strikers were so angered that they got out after it had been called off." Railway workers and others tore up their union cards in disgust at moderates who had involved them in loss of pay and suffering for nothing.*

Frank Jackson was convinced that the strike would have succeeded if it had gone on, and it would have been outside of the control of the TUC and the Government. He explained that it wasn't the greatest defeat of the working class – but the greatest betrayal.

Jackson said that as soon as the strike was over the first thing the right wing did was to bump the trades councils. He explained,

*"I was delegate from the St Pancras Trades Council to the Labour Party Conference and they turfed me out of that. Among the rank and file we had no faith in the trade union leadership, but we didn't have a real suspicion there would be a sell-out and never made any move to counter-act what the officials were doing. The rank and file did not have a real objective in front of them, what to do if they won the strike".*

[19] *A man to be watched carefully, being the Memoirs of Peter Zinkin, former Morning Star Political Correspondent (1985), page 50*

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

St Pancras Trades Council delegate, Peter Zinkin wrote that on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May 1926, the numbers on strike were higher in St Pancras than on

12<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>[20]</sup> This meant that many of the threats of victimisation were dropped – although the attempts to continue the strike, despite the TUC agreement, failed.

But there were repercussions – for example, a local paper reported that the train company L&NER were to reduce staff. At Kings Cross notices were posted that said men who remained loyal to the company would be given employment preference:

**“AFTERWARDS.”**

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**L. & N.E.R. TO REDUCE STAFF**

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Yesterday morning, at King’s Cross, the L. & N.E. Railway Co. posted notices to the following effect:—

(1) That, as a direct consequence of the strike, when work is eventually resumed they will be compelled materially, to reduce their staff;

(2) That men who have remained loyal to the company will receive preference in employment.

The L.M.S. Railway yesterday published the following notice: “Members of the staff who have absented themselves from duty without giving the prescribed notice are notified that unless by 12 noon on Friday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, they offer themselves for re-employment, steps will be taken to fill their places.—H. G. Burgess, General Manager.”

The Newport Corporation decided that all volunteers will be kept on permanently if they continue to perform satisfactory service. They reserve the right not to re-engage those who broke their contracts and whose places are filled.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May thousands of St Pancras workers turned up at a hurriedly convened meeting at Cumberland Market, near Regents Park, Albany Street army barracks. Miners’ leader, A.J. Cook spoke, along with some other national speakers, local Labour Party activists including Peter Zinkin. A large collection was made for the miners. There were harsh words for the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald and NUR General Secretary J.H. Thomas.



**Photo:** Cumberland market in 1924 with Hay Carts in the middle of the square.

In Kentish Town on 13<sup>th</sup> May four men and one woman were charged with obstructing the police while dispersing a crowd at Mansfield Road, Kentish Town. The inspector said that when he arrived at the scene at about 3.30pm with two tenders full of police he found about 500 people holding up the tramcar and booing and hissing at the volunteer driver. “They were trying to pull the driver out of the tramcar and shouting “get out you blacklegs”. One of the others shouted that the police were as bad as the “swines” on the trams. The woman shouted to the volunteer driver, “Come off, you \*\*\*\* blackleg” and said that she and the crowd would “stop the \*\*\*\*s from working”.

*St Pancras Bulletin No. 13*, carried a message from Trades Council secretary, Jack Smith: “Trades Council were considering ways of keeping the bulletin going as local workers’ paper - as the value of a worker’s press was now without question. Reports of no return until all return.

A letter was sent from Holborn Labour Party and Trades Council, calling on the Labour Party to make every effort to secure the immediate release of all those imprisoned during the strike and that all convictions be quashed.

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**[20]** A man to be watched carefully, being the *Memoirs of Peter Zinkin*, former *Morning Star* Political Correspondent (1985)

## AFTER THE STRIKE

St Pancras Trades Council agreed to continue production of the *St Pancras Bulletin*. In bulletins after the strike the editors began to come to terms with what had happened and to learn lessons from it.

Comrade Horsly gave a report of London Trades Council meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> May. In relation to “conflicting opinions expressed as to the terms of the settlement” the Trades Council urged the TUC General Council to call an urgent full meeting of the Executive Committees of affiliated unions to explain and declare future activity and policy. And for an amnesty for all those arrested during the strike.

In relation to local organisation, they write that that the one thing that arises out the strike clear and unchallenged, is the importance of the Trades Council as a central controlling body.

They call for the machinery to be strengthened by the including of direct representatives of the Factory and Shop Committees, and a closer connection with the branches of the union. As much can be done by the Trades Council in helping with the recruitment, protecting active member, and trying active members, and trying to arrange younger members – when sports and competition should be organised. The Trades Councils should be the one local body which reflect the whole ideas and aspiration of the workers as a class, aiming at turning Baldwin’s works about ‘alternative Government’ into an actuality.

In a powerful article entitled “**Ten days that shook Britain**”, *St Pancras Bulletin* 22<sup>nd</sup> May wrote that the filter of darkness since the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> May was finally lifting, when in the words of George Lansbury, the “*Victory which solidarity had undoubtedly won was expressed in the terms of most abject defeat.*”

They wrote that the local feeling, which was that the rank and file had an absolute and definite desire to “sever the chains that had so long bound them” – and that this was also a national feeling.

They had found out that on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May union leaders had an attack of cold fear, when they heard the decision of the Law Lords to arrest members of the General Council and the Local strike committees – yet this had already been happening to local activists. They summed up the article, “*this is only the first skirmish. **The fight is yet to come***”

# STRIKER'S ALPHABET

*St Pancras Bulletin, Nos. 2-9, May 5-10th 1926*

- A** *is for ALL, ALL OUT and ALL WIN,  
And down with the blacklegs and scabs who stay in.*
- B** *is for Baldwin, the Bosses' Strong Man,  
But he's welcome to dig all the coal that he can*
- C** *is for Courage the workers have shown,  
Class Conscious and Confident that they'll hold their own.*
- D** *is for DOPE that the Government spread—  
Dishwash for Duncos and Dubbs—"nuff sed".*
- E** *is for Energy that will carry us through,  
Everyone class-conscious, steadfast and true.*
- F** *is for Fight, our fight to the end,  
For we're solid together, not an inch will we bend.*
- G** *is for Grab-all, the bosses, you know,  
Greedy and grasping, one day they must go.*
- H** *is for Hardship, we all must endure;  
However, keep smiling, for Victory is sure.*
- I** *is for Interest, Profits and Rent  
Into the pockets of the Indolent.*
- J** *is for Jix\*, the stirrer of strife,  
Just waiting the chance to have your life.*
- K** *is for knife that is wielded by Jix,  
Keep yourself orderly and frustrate his tricks.*
- L** *is for London, where the TUC meet,  
Leading the workers the bosses to beat.*

- M** *is for miners, for whose rights we must fight,  
Maintaining the cause which we know to be right.*
- N** *is for Natsopa, who stopped dope from the Boss,  
Narking Churchill and Jix, so Baldwin was cross.*
- O** *is for OMS, the scabbing patrol;  
Oh! How they are working, digging the coal!!*
- P** *is for pickets on guard at the gates,  
Pulling up blacklegs who scab on their mates.*
- Q** *is for Quandary the Government's in,  
Quite certain now the workers will win.*
- R** *is for Railways that won't run alone,  
Ready for workers to run as their own.*
- S** *is for Solidarity that is winning our fight;  
Stick well together, for Victory's in sight.*
- T** *is for Taximen joined in the fray,  
Troubling the blacklegs to walk all the way.*
- U** *is for Unity, each one for all,  
United we stand till the Government fall.*
- V** *is for Victory, of which we are sure,  
Vanquishing the bosses for evermore.*
- W** *is for Workers' Wages and hours,  
We are nearing the day when control is ours.*
- X** *is for exit the whole boss class—  
Xtra enjoyment for me and my lass.*
- Y** *is for Young Workers to whom fighting is new;  
Yes, Young, but determined to fight with you.*
- Z** *is for Zeal shown by the Vigilance Corps,  
Zealous that workers aren't trapped by the law.*

*\* Jix is a play on Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary.*