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J. KEIR HARDIE, M.P.

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KILLING NO MURDER !

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE RAILWAY STRIKE.

What Caused the Recent Railway Strike?
Who Settled It?

For What Purpose were the Troops Called Out?

— BY —

J. KEIR HARDIE, M.P.

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HOW IT BEGAN.

The railway trouble started at Liverpool, on the Lancashire and Yorkshire line, where the porters and others came out on strike for an increase of 2/- per week. They were receiving 17/- a week. The Manchester men, of similar grades, joined their Liverpool comrades, and the strike spread to other lines. The Liverpool dockers decided not to handle goods from any of the lines where the strike was on, whereupon the ship owners of the port retaliated by a general lock-out. The railway companies affected declared they were not free to give the advance asked for by their men, because they were bound by the decisions of the Conciliation Board, set up to avert a strike in 1907, at the instance of Mr. Lloyd George, as President of the Board of Trade. During the four years of its working the Conciliation Board had proved a fresh means of harassing and terrorising the railway servants, and wages had actually decreased and conditions of service worsened under its operations. In 1907 the railway men had sought to force the railway companies to recognise their Trade Unions, and allow the Union officials to present the case of the men before the directors. This recognition, however, the directors refused to concede, and so, when the men's notices were on the point of expiring and a general railway strike seemed imminent, Mr. Lloyd George came to the rescue of the companies and succeeded in inducing the Union leaders, with Mr. Richard Bell, the General Secretary, at their head, to accept the Conciliation Board instead. By 1911, however, the men had become so incensed at the chicanery, the mean and petty artifices, the long drawn-out quibbling, and the increasing tyranny and persecution which the companies were practising against them under cover of the Conciliation Boards that they resolved to make one mighty effort to secure recognition for their Unions, and a joint meeting of the Executives of the four Unions within which the different sections of railway workers are enrolled was convened to meet at Liverpool. By this time the area of the strike on the railways was gradually being extended by the spontaneous action of bodies of men acting without the authority of their Unions. Threats of similar action were pouring in from all over the country. The strike fever had seized the railway men, and the four Executives, after a careful review of the situation, wisely decided that the psychological moment for drastic action had come. They therefore issued an ultimatum to the railway companies giving them 24 hours' notice in which to agree to recognise the Unions. This was accompanied by a declaration of war. If recognition was not conceded within the time specified then every grade of railway worker on every railway would be called out. A general railway strike would follow the refusal of recognition of the Unions.

GOVERNMENT AND THE COMPANIES.

That notice to the railway companies was issued on August 15th. It caused considerable sensation and uneasiness, and completely snuffed out all interest in the "constitutional crisis." Next morning it was announced in the Press that the managers of the railways were to meet the President of the Board of Trade in consultation, and in the late editions of the evening papers the result of the conference was announced. Sir Guy Granet, Chairman of the Midland Railway, made the communication to the Press. Here it is as it appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* on Wednesday evening, August 16th :

Managers left Conference at Board of Trade at 5-25, and issued following statement:—"The Government, having assured the railway companies that they will give them ample protection to enable them to carry on their services, the railway companies are prepared, even in the event of a general railway strike, to give an efficient though restricted service."

This jubilant cock-a-whoop outburst from the railway companies considerably re-assured the public. It was felt that the railway companies and the Government acting together could not fail to best the men somehow. There might be some little inconvenience for a few days, owing to the "restricted" service which the companies would be able to give, but as only about one-fourth of the railway men were members of a Trade Union, and as the directors had assured the Government that the remaining three-fourths of their servants, and also a fair proportion of the Union men who were getting old and had places and pensions to lose would remain loyal, the trouble might not be so serious after all. It is plain that at this stage both the railway directors and the Government were deceiving themselves, and had no conception whatever of the forces which they were up against.

But something else happened on the Wednesday, and it is to tell of that something else, and what it led to, that I am writing this pamphlet. I think I had better let the Press *communiqué*, which was given to the *Times*, presumably by the Government, tell this part of the story also:—

The military authorities are making preparations not only to send further troops into strike areas, where they may be needed to assist in maintaining order in the streets, but to send large bodies of soldiers from Aldershot to London for service on the railways should the threatened national stoppage occur. Cavalry, it is stated, will be employed at all the big stations, and will patrol railway lines to the north and south of London. *At Dover the employment of Royal Engineers to run the mail and Continental train services is contemplated.*

But the Cabinet had come to another conclusion. That was to offer the railway men a Royal Commission. Here is the actual wording of the decision come to by the Cabinet:—

His Majesty's Government are prepared to appoint a Royal Commission to *investigate the working of the Conciliation Agreement*, and to report what amendments, if any, are desirable in the scheme, with a view to the prompt and satisfactory settlement of differences. We hope to announce, without delay, the names of the Commissioners who will meet at the earliest possible moment.

Not a word about the recognition of the Unions, or of the size of the Commission, or when it was to report. All these were read into the decision at a later stage, but there it is in the bald form in which it was subsequently hurled at the heads of the four Executives.

GOVERNMENT AND THE MEN.

Meanwhile the four Executives had accepted the invitation of the Board of Trade to come to London. They left Liverpool by a night train and arrived in London on the morning of the 17th, Thursday, and were at the Board of Trade during the day, accompanied by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Chairman of the Labour Party. The Secretaries of the four Unions were all present, and Mr. E. Bellamy, as President of the A.S.R.S., acted as Chairman and spokesman. The task could not possibly have been entrusted to abler hands. First of all, the Executives were called upon by Mr. Buxton to answer a series of questions, and as every scrap of evidence is of importance at this stage, I here reproduce the document in full, with the replies of the Executives:—

QUESTIONS.

- (1) What were the actual grounds on which the Executive had founded their action in issuing their manifesto?
- (2) What were the actual grievances in connection with the Conciliation Board Agreement of 1907?
- (3) Were these grievances sufficiently grave to justify the action which the Executive had taken?
- (4) Could these grievances not be remedied in a less drastic way?
- (5) Could these grievances be remedied in the way proposed by means of a general railway strike?

REPLIES.

(1 and 2) The failure of the railway companies to observe the spirit and letter of the Conciliation Board Agreement of 1907, and the utter impossibility of the men's representatives to redress the many grievances of which the men complained.

(3) Yes.

(4) *Yes, by the suggestion offered by the Committee to the railway companies to meet the official representatives of the men.*

(5) Yes. In our opinion it is the only course.

We have also considered the possibility of further questions being asked, and we have unanimously come to the conclusion that the *only way* that will now be *an effective method of peace* is that the *companies consent to meet us.*

Having thus evaded the snare of the fowler, the Executives were next beset by a new temptation. Mr. Sidney Buxton, President of the Board of Trade, and Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, next produced the Cabinet offer of a Royal Commission as outlined above. There was no kind of explanation offered. There was the Commission and they could either take it or leave it. The men promptly rejected it. As P.W.W., the Parliamentary correspondent of the *Daily News*, subsequently pointed out, the companies were "delighted" with the Commission. "The awkward question of recognition seemed to be shelved for months. If the men refused the Commission they would seem to be unreasonable." Mr. Bellamy and his colleagues took in the situation at a glance. For them, in vain, was the net spread in sight of the bird. In 1907 they had been caught with a Conciliation Board and they were not going to be taken in a second time with a time-wasting Commission, with its infinite possibilities of delay, and with no assurance that its findings might not land them in even a worse plight than had the Conciliation Boards. Had the Commission been to consider the claim for official recognition of the Unions it might have been worth considering, but that question seemed to have been carefully ruled out of the terms of reference. They decided, therefore, to have none of it, and asked the Government instead to aid them in bringing pressure to bear on the railway companies to secure recognitions for the Unions. This, however, the Prime Minister flatly refused to do, and then followed the incident which has given rise to so much comment. Both the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade were mortified at finding that the Cabinet scheme of deluding the Executives had woefully miscarried. Mr. Sidney Buxton was simply dumb with amazement. Mr. Asquith was not dumb. What happened had best be told in some detail.

In the lengthy resolution which the four Executives subsequently passed rejecting the Government's offer, it is set forth, *inter alia*.

That . . . having given careful consideration to the Prime Minister's statement, and the remarks which accompanied it, but which the Government has not ventured to commit to writing, resolve as follows:—"That we consider the statement made on behalf of His Majesty's Government an *unwarrantable threat uttered against the railway workers*. . . We therefore refuse to accept the responsibility which the Government has attempted to throw upon us . . . and with a full sense of the grave step we are taking, feel satisfied that our duty to those we represent compels us to refuse the offer of His Majesty's Government, and reluctantly resort to the decision of this body on Tuesday last."

What were the remarks which the Government had not "ventured to commit to writing" and which constituted an

“unwarrantable threat” against railway men? Every one of the 40 men present are in absolute agreement as to the effect which Mr. Asquith’s language and manner produced upon their mind. It was this: That the army would be used to break the strike, even if that involved “shooting down the men like dogs.” These are the actual words used by a member of the Executive in the presence of all his colleagues, and endorsed by them. It was not merely what the Prime Minister said which produced this impression on the minds of his hearers, it was as much the violent outburst of anger and uncontrollable rage which accompanied the words which filled the men with amazement and indignation. The actual language used, as repeated by Mr. Bellamy whilst addressing a meeting of railway men in Nottingham on Sunday, August 27, and reported next day in the *Nottingham Guardian*, was as follows:—

“The words Mr. Asquith did use,” said Mr. Bellamy, “were something like this:—‘In addition to what I have already said I desire to call your attention to the seriousness of the position, so serious that the Cabinet have had it under consideration, and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow the commerce of the country to be interfered with in the way it would be by a national dispute, and we want you men to realise, in the event of it reaching that stage, *His Majesty’s Government have decided that they will use all the civil and military forces at their disposal to see that the commerce of this country is not interfered with.*’ That,” continued Mr. Bellamy, “he believed, was what was said, word for word, and he asked them what other conclusion they could arrive at than that the Government intended to take the side of the railway companies, if need be, in order to defeat the men.”

The interpretation, I repeat, put upon Mr. Asquith’s statement by all who heard it, and noted the manner in which he made it, was that the troops would be used to shoot down the strikers, if need be, in order to keep the lines going. I shall prove this was the real meaning later on. The members of the Executives were startled and shocked beyond measure by what they had just seen and heard, but even then they determined not to abandon hope, but to make one more last despairing effort to save the situation. They realised all that a strike would mean, not only to the “commerce of the country,” which seemed to be Mr. Asquith’s one concern, but to the hundreds of thousands of railway men, and their innocent, helpless wives and children. All they were asking from the Government was to aid them in bringing pressure to bear on the railway companies to recognise the Unions. That secured and there would be no strike. It was the one and only point at issue, and the representatives of the workmen simply could not believe that the Government would refuse to help them in this. And so to make assurance doubly sure that

they had not mistaken what the Prime Minister had said they put a question in writing to him. It was this:—

Question: TO ASK THE PRIME MINISTER WHETHER HE HAS DONE, IS DOING, OR INTENDS TO DO ANYTHING TO BRING THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RAILWAY COMPANIES AND THE EMPLOYEES TOGETHER TO-DAY.

And the question came back with the reply written under it:—

THE ANSWER IS IN THE NEGATIVE.

There was a repetition of the Commission offer, but the reply to the question was in the "negative." The Government had not done anything, were not doing anything, and did not intend to do anything to try to bring the Union officials and the directors together that day. The Executives had striven hard to maintain the peace. But they had made nothing of it. They had been flouted by the offer of an illusory Commission and threatened with the rifle and bayonet of the soldier, and so, burning with anger, shame, and indignation they made for Unity House, their headquarters, in Euston Road, and within an hour the wires were flashing the news to 1,600 Union Secretaries in all corners of Great Britain that war was to begin. Asquith had left them no other alternative.

On the afternoon of Thursday, August 17, when the strike notices went out the position stood thus:—

(a) The Government had promised the railway companies the use and control of the entire civil and military forces of the Crown to aid them in defeating the men who were asking for recognition for their Union.

(b) The Government had refused to endeavour to bring the railway directors and Union officials together, and had threatened the men that the entire civil and military forces of the Crown would be brought to bear against them if they succeeded in bringing about a general strike of railway men.

We may never know all that the threat implied, but judging by what took place, under similar circumstances, in France last year, and in the United States in 1895, the strike leaders would have found themselves in prison for interfering with the free passage of His Majesty's mails, and charged with being engaged in a criminal conspiracy to injure the trade and commerce of the country, or some other trumped-up charge, whilst bloodshed would have been common.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON.

After the strike notice had been issued, the full joint Executive attended a conference with the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress at

the House of Commons. Mr. Bellamy reported the result of their interview with Cabinet Ministers, and two resolutions were passed, one condemning the action and attitude of the Government and the other pledging the support of every section of the working-class movement to the railwaymen in their great fight. It was also resolved that the Labour Party should move a vote of censure on the Government. It had been arranged that the House should adjourn next day, Friday, till October 24, and so the censure could only be moved by the Government granting facilities, which, as a matter of fact, is the usual procedure when votes of censure are moved. During the course of the evening the Government Whips began to realise the seriousness of the situation which the speech of the Prime Minister earlier in the day had produced, and had communicated their views to such members of the Cabinet as remained in town. Mr. Asquith had left, and in the end the Cabinet re-opened negotiations with the Joint Executive through the mediumship of Messrs. Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, and G. H. Roberts, the Chairman, ex-Chairman, and Chief Whip of the Labour Party. The object of these negotiations was to get the men to accept the Royal Commission. It was explained to them that Asquith had not made the meaning of the Government clear (rather a queer statement to make about the "master of clear, concise exposition," which everyone admits the Prime Minister to be)—that it was to be a small Commission, it was to get to work at once, was to report in a few days, "a week or ten days" was actually mentioned, and that it would be loaded so as to make sure of its findings being in favour of the men. Further, if when its report appeared, the railway companies refused to carry it out, and it was found that the Board of Trade had no power to compel them to do so, a specially convened session of Parliament would at once be called to pass legislation to give the Board of Trade the necessary powers. What might have been the decision of the Joint Executive had matters been put to them in this fashion earlier in the day I cannot say, but having been goaded into issuing the strike notices by the treatment meted out to them at the Board of Trade, they decided to sleep over the new interpretation, and the other terms offered, before coming to any decision. They had been on constant duty for thirty hours, and had the feeling that they were masters of the situation. Besides, there had been no "recognition," and the Government and the Railway Companies were both obviously in a bit of a blue funk.

All through Friday the "negotiations" proceeded, whilst a constant stream of telegraph boys kept delivering wires from one district after another telling of a clean sweep, Unionists and non-Unionists alike having obeyed the word of command. One station after another had been closed, one section of a line after another left in charge of the soldiers and the police. The "restricted service" promised by the companies was becoming

more restricted every hour, and was bound soon to reach the vanishing point. The trade and commerce of the nation were paralysed, and the man-in-the-street bewildered.

SATURDAY, RECOGNITION WON.

Saturday morning found 230,000 men out and meetings arranged for Sunday which would have made a clean sweep. The desire for recognition was growing stronger, and it was once more the Government which supplied the needed touch to make it irresistible. On Saturday morning the *Times* contained an official communication issued by the Home Office to keep the public informed of the progress of the strike.

The following official statement was issued from the Home Office at 11-30 last night:—

The railway strike developed to-day all over the country and produced a widespread though partial dislocation in the railway services. *Most of the trains, both for goods and passengers, have been got through, and the necessary services are well maintained.*

So far as the present information goes, considerably *more than two-thirds* of the railway men are remaining *at their posts*. Numerous applications are being received by the railway companies for employment. The companies report that the *defections* have not been in excess of expectations.

It has not yet been found necessary to put in force special arrangements with regard to emergency traffic.—*Times*, August 19.

The effect of this precious document on the men's leaders was electrical. They knew that everyone of the statements which I have italicised was untrue. The Government was playing them false. Whilst two members of the Cabinet, Mr. Sydney Buxton and Mr. Lloyd George, were meeting the men and speaking them fair, another, Mr. Winston Churchill, was using the Home Office as though it were a blackleg "Free Labour" agency by disseminating carefully concocted falsehoods meant to deceive the public and dishearten the men who had struck. The Joint Executive realised that they were being bluffed, and with prompt decision they resolved that all negotiations were at an end UNTIL THEY WERE FACE TO FACE WITH THE DIRECTORS. The Government might do as it pleased with its troops; so far as they were concerned the period of being fooled was over. Mr. Lloyd George must have felt, looking at these muscular, good natured, peace-loving fellows, now resolute and determined, that he was at the end of his tether. The order to the Railway Directors went forth, and shortly the titled master and the victorious servant were seated round a common table arranging the terms of peace.

HOW RECOGNITION WAS WON.

The Government say they "settled the strike," they "brought pressure to bear on the Directors" to meet the men. Fudge! I shall have a word to say in a minute upon another

aspect of the "pressure" which the Government brought to bear on the Directors. It may be thought that I, not being a Liberal, and not believing in the blessings which flow from Government interference in trade disputes, am biassed, and that therefore my judgment is warped. I shall here, therefore, put in a witness not open to such charges. This is how Mr. P. W. Wilson, ex-M.P. for St. Pancras, and parliamentary correspondent for the *Daily News*, described the end of the strike in that paper on Monday, August 21:—

Saturday morning brought the Government face to face with the tremendous and incalculable results of the repression policy. Every soldier was standing sentry or under call to do so. If more trouble arose the reserves would have to be mobilised. It dawned upon the Government that though the strike *might be crushed in blood* by Monday or Tuesday, other steps might be taken by Labour.

The Engineers, numbering 100,000, were ready to reinforce the railwaymen. The South Scottish miners were also actively preparing, a matter of great interest to representatives of Mid-Lothian [the Chief Liberal Whip sits for Mid-Lothian], Fifeshire [Asquith sits for Fifeshire], and, be it added, Dundee [Churchill sits for Dundee]. Moreover, the whole South Wales coalfield, on which depends the Navy, needed but the word.

Politically it was obvious, in view of the attitude of the Labour Party, that the Government would fall during the Autumn Session, if the policy of batons, bayonets, and bullets continued over the week-end—SOLELY, BE IT REMEMBERED, BECAUSE THE MANAGERS WERE NOT REQUIRED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO DISCUSS MATTERS WITH THE MEN.

With brief decision the entire position was abandoned by those acting for the Cabinet. A peremptory message was sent to the companies telling them that a round table conference must be conceded at once and unconditionally. As speedily the companies on their side surrendered. At noon and for 11½ hours afterwards the managers sat face to face with the four Union representatives, assisted by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and Mr. Arthur Henderson.

"Recognition," on this occasion, was won—ON THE BRINK OF CIVIL WAR.—P.W.W., in *Daily News*, August 21, 1911.

The words within brackets are mine. That, then, is how the strike was won—at the point of "Civil War." The Janus-like policy of the Government had failed; the issue of troops had brought them face to face with their own defeat; the splendid discipline, solidarity, and courage of the men had upset all calculations, and, there was no Liberal-Labour element at the head of affairs only too anxious to sacrifice the interests of the men in the interests of the party, as was unfortunately the case in 1907. From the big responsible man at the lever down to the happy-go-lucky nipper who greases the wagons, there was unity, confidence, enthusiasm, determination. That is why the railway men won. They were out for recognition; they got it, "on the brink of Civil War," it is true, but they got it, and now they are going to keep it, again at the "brink of Civil War" if need be.

USE OF MILITARY.

Let us turn for a moment to the use of the military. Hitherto it has been assumed that by common law, custom, and usage, the military arm of the State should only be employed when, owing to tumult and wild disorder, life and property were in danger and the Civil power powerless to quell the lawlessness. Even then the military may only act under the authority of the Magistrates, save in case of a grave emergency, when the officer is empowered to use his own discretion. The distinction which has hitherto distinguished a constitutional country like Britain, as compared with a militarist autocracy like Russia, has been that the police, controlled by the Local Authority, has been primarily responsible for the maintenance of order, whilst the soldier has been for the defence of the State against foreign aggression. This, until recent times, has been the established order, unchallenged and unbroken. Now, however, all that has been changed. In connection with the coal strike in South Wales a year ago, military were sent into districts like Aberdare, for instance, in defiance of the local Police Authority, and solely at the bidding of the colliery company. But the great illustration of this revolutionary and far-reaching change is, and will always be, the action of the Government in connection with the recent railway dispute. It may be argued that the circumstances were so exceptional as to justify all that was done. No constitutional lawyer, however, will maintain this unless he has some personal or partisan axe to grind. The railways of this country, though established under a Parliamentary franchise, are private concerns, whose primary object is to make dividends for the stock-holders. The heads of the railway companies approached the Government with the intimation that a strike might take place on their systems, and required a promise that they would be given the use of the military to assist them to defeat their servants. The request may not have been put in that blunt form, but it could have no other meaning. The promise was given and, judging by what followed, the companies were empowered to command the use of troops, not in conjunction with the constitutional Local Authorities, but in *defiance* of the Local Authorities. The case of Manchester best illustrates this.

Speaking in the House of Commons on August 18th Mr. Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, said:—

“Manchester is perfectly quiet, the strike leaders having appealed for order, but the railway service is greatly disorganised.”

The Lord Mayor of the City, the Watch Committee, the Chief Constable, all declared that Manchester was quiet. There had been no disturbance, none was apprehended. The Authorities had been through big labour troubles before without the aid

of the military, they would go through this one also. They were proud of their great city and its peaceful citizens. On Saturday morning, August 19th, however, the city woke up to find the railway stations in possession of the troops. They had crept in like a thief in the night. Who had sent for them? No one knew. The Lord Mayor demanded an explanation from General Burney, who was in command. He had been sent for, he said, by the "Railway Companies." The Mayor was staggered but powerless. The troops remained till Monday, and then General Burney withdrew them, because, as he explained, the railway companies had informed him they had "no further need for his services." In other places, like Swansea, the Government tried to force the Mayor and the Chief Constable to have the soldiers, but failed. In Blackburn they went in as they did at Manchester, without having been asked, and, presumably, at the bidding of the new masters of the State, "the Railway Companies."

WHAT FOR?

Desperate efforts are being made by members and supporters of the Government to make it appear that the troops were only meant to protect life and property against the violence of the "mob." Liberal papers have rung the changes on this in every key. Mr. Alexander Ure, the Lord Advocate for Scotland, speaking in support of the Liberal candidate at Kilmarnock on Monday, September 11th, eulogised railway men to the seventh heaven as paragons of all the virtues. The troops were not meant for them, but for "hooligans" and "scoundrels," other than railway servants, who might take advantage of the strike to create riots. Mr. Churchill, with all his faults, has never descended to hypocritical mendacity of this order. At the Board of Trade the Prime Minister made no pretence that the troops were meant for "hooligans." His statement was quite explicit. If the men stopped the railways by going on strike the troops would be used to reopen them. That's what the Prime Minister said. Here are some of the things the Home Secretary said in the House of Commons:—

August 16th.—"It would be the duty of the Government in the event of a paralysis of the great railway lines, on which the lives and food of the people depended, to secure to the people engaged in working them full legal protection."

August 18th.—"The Government believe that the arrangements which have been made to safeguard the working of the railways and to maintain order will prove effective. If not, other measures, even of a larger scope, will have to be taken promptly, so that the transport of everything really necessary will be secured."

The *Times* newspaper, August 18, interprets these "measures of a larger scope" thus: "Alone, the military railway services at the Government control would furnish but a drop in the ocean [for the purpose of working the railways if there was a general strike.—J.K.H.]. There are only three railway companies of Royal Engineers in the country, while the Territorial Railway Units are probably, to a large extent, affected by the strike. It will rest, therefore, with the railway companies to work their lines with such non-Union men as they can employ, *plus* the very great assistance that can be given them by the officers of the Corps of Royal Engineers."

August 21.—Mr. Churchill: "The railways must, at all costs, be kept running for the food supply . . . The steps we took were, I admit, exceptional, and of great extent. But they were nothing to the measures which would have had to be adopted promptly, and without hesitation, had the dispute continued and the scale of events become more tremendous."

Now there is no snivelling about all this. The troops were to keep the railways open, first, by giving protection to blacklegs, and if that failed, by employing Royal Engineers to work the trains. This, as the military correspondent of the *Times* pointed out, meant guarding the railways as on "active service" during war, and that, in practice, means shooting at sight.

If it had been the purpose of the Government to have the troops used solely for the "protection of life and property" they would have put them under the control of the Local Authorities, whose business it is to see to that. But they didn't. They handed them over instead to the railway companies.

LLANELLY.

As showing how the troops were likely to be used to shoot men down like dogs, take what happened at Llanelly. A train was stopped by a crowd of strikers squatting down on the line in front of it. Some troops, quartered at the station, rushed up at the double, and lined up on both sides of the engine. Before they got there, however, a striker had boarded the footbridge of the engine and drawn the fire, and so the engine was effectively disabled from proceeding. But for the presence of the soldiers nothing more would have happened. Some boys and youths did pelt stones at the soldiers, and one of them was struck. Mr. Lloyd George spoke of what happened as being undoubtedly a "very great riot," and described the engine driver as lying bleeding and helpless from the violence of the mob. This, however, was all imagination without an atom of truth. The train was standing in a deep cutting, and the official story is that stones were coming in showers from both sides. Now, not one pane of glass in the carriage windows was broken, not one passenger was hurt or molested, in fact, they were looking out of the windows, no

civilian was struck, no property was damaged; there was no riot. But the officer in command ordered the people to disperse; he gave them one minute in which to do so; at the end of the minute he ordered five shots to be fired which killed two men outright, and wounded four others. John Johns, one of the murdered men, was sitting on the garden wall of his own house in shirt and trousers, looking on; the other was also in his garden at the top of the railway embankment. No one has ever alleged that either of them threw stones or took any part in what little stone throwing there was. Presumably, however, they made good targets, and so were picked off. For the troops are not to fire at random. They are not to use blank cartridge, even by way of warning, they are not to fire over the heads of the people, they are not to fire at the legs of the crowd; their instructions were to make every shot tell, they were to shoot to kill. At the inquest the jury, at the suggestion of the Coroner, brought in a verdict of "justifiable homicide." But, to ease their conscience, they added a rider. It was this:—

"We think it would have been better if other means than giving an order to fire had been adopted by Major Stuart for the purpose of dispersing the crowd."

That rider destroys the verdict of justifiable homicide. If other means could have been tried before shooting was resorted to then the killing of the two men was felonious, and not justifiable, homicide—in other words murder. The officer, having seen the two men killed, went to the driver of the train and asked him to go on, but the driver replied either that he "could not or would not," and then, naively added Major Stuart, "seeing I could have given no more service, I withdrew my men to the station." Hours afterwards when an infuriated crowd were looting, burning, and destroying railway stock, the Major and his men remained immovable until a wagon exploded and killed another four people. His orders, he said, were "explicit." Under no circumstances was he "to allow a train to be held up." Protection of life and property forsooth! I invite all good Liberals to explain this Llanely incident on any other grounds than those I am putting forward. The throwing of a few stones, even if one soldier be hit, does not justify the shooting of two respectable lookers-on, standing in their own backyard. It was the orders to protect blackleg labour which appeared to render that necessary.

I have already expressed my opinion of the finding of the jury. There are three degrees of homicide known to the law. There is justifiable homicide, where, for instance, one man kills another in self-defence; there is excusable homicide, where one person kills another without meaning to do so; and there is felonious homicide, which is ordinary murder. Now if, as the jury stated in their rider, it "would have been better"

if other means had been tried by Major Stuart of dispersing the crowd, what happened was not "justifiable homicide." Murder is only justifiable when it is the only resort left, and the jury, by saying that other means should have been tried, rob the deed of its justifiable character. What action is contemplated to have this point sifted to the bottom I know not, but the responsibility rests with the Trade Union movement to use every process known to the law to have the question fully tested. The right to strike effectively is at stake.

TERMINOLOGICAL INEXACTITUDES?

I now come to the last part of my story. It is also the most astounding. A diplomatist has been described as a patriot who lies for his country's good. Some of our Cabinet Ministers seem to be qualifying as diplomatists, only with them party takes the place of country. Let me revert to the Manchester case. Mr. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons on Wednesday, August 16th, said:—

"At Manchester business is practically at a standstill, but *there has been no disturbance*. Two battalions and a Cavalry regiment are held in readiness to proceed *at the request of the Local Authority*. . . ."

Sir W. Byles asked why, seeing that he was able to say that there was no disturbance whatever in Manchester, the Home Secretary should hold out the menace that the military were in readiness to pounce down upon them.

Mr. Churchill: "I have received a request from the Lord Mayor of Manchester that in case they should be needed the military should be conveniently at hand. It was in view of that that I made the statement to the House. *The Lord Mayor of Manchester got through the last strike a few days ago without recourse to the military—(cheers)—and I shall not send any troops there unless he applies for them*. If he does apply for them, they are conveniently handy."

Next day he reported "no change" in Manchester. Food supplies were coming through. Friday, his report was as already quoted: "Manchester is perfectly quiet."

Tuesday, August 22nd. Still Churchill, replying to a question by Sir W. Byles, said:—

Mr. Churchill: "In regard to Manchester, I did make some enquiries yesterday when I heard that the troops had been moved in, and I found that General MacKinnon *had come to an arrangement with the Lord Mayor by which the troops were to occupy the railway station*, because there was an almost complete arrest of the deliveries of goods from the station, and that the traffic was being wantonly interfered with to a degree wholly different from any interference with the traffic in other parts of the railway system where the military had already given protection. *I understood also yesterday evening that the Lord Mayor fully concurred in the steps which had been taken*, and that the result had been extremely beneficial in permitting free movement of necessary supplies.

Speaking again later in the evening, Mr. Churchill said, "It is not true that the military have been sent there (Manchester) contrary to the wish of the Lord Mayor."

Now here we have a series of perfectly definite statements. First that the troops would not be sent to Manchester unless the Lord Mayor applied for them; second, that the troops have gone to Manchester as the result of an agreement between the Lord Mayor and General Mackinnon; and third, that the Lord Mayor had concurred in the steps that had been taken. Let us test these statements. Churchill was worrying the Lord Mayor to have soldiers, but without effect. Finally, in reply to fresh importunities, the Lord Mayor sent a telegram. Here it is:—

"In reply to your telegram of last evening, in reference to the protection of railways and railwaymen, and in view of the rejection of London settlement, I desire that Manchester be placed on exactly same footing as other municipalities.—Lord Mayor, Manchester."

That was all. Of course the same "footing as other municipalities" meant that Churchill was to keep his troops till they were asked for. Finding that the Lord Mayor was not to be inveigled into consenting to having soldiers in the city, where they were not needed, Churchill appears to have got the railway companies to move in the matter, and then assumes the Lord Mayor had "assented." But the Lord Mayor was not going to be imposed upon after any such manner. He had his own personal honour to maintain and the dignity of his city to uphold. Next day, therefore, the *Manchester Guardian* had an interview with him.

"Interviewed by a representative of the *Manchester Guardian*, the Lord Mayor said he could only repeat what he stated on Monday afternoon, that the first intimation he had of the arrival of the troops in the city was by a telephonic message from General Burney, the officer commanding the troops in this district. That was at 11-33 in the forenoon, *when the troops had been in the city several hours*, and the message was subsequently confirmed by General Burney in person. "It was certainly," the Lord Mayor said, "by no arrangement with me that the 'troops were to occupy the railway station,' to quote Mr. Churchill's words. With regard to Mr. Churchill's statement that he 'heard yesterday afternoon that the Lord Mayor fully concurred in the steps which had been taken, and that the result had been extremely beneficial in promoting free movement of necessary supplies,' *I can only say that he must have been misinformed.* When General Burney called on me I asked, 'By whose authority have the troops been sent?' and he said **THEY HAD COME AT THE REQUEST OF THE RAILWAY COMPANIES** to protect the stations. As for my 'concurring,' seeing the troops had not come at my bidding, and that I had *not been consulted* at all, it was not for me to concur or otherwise."—*Manchester Guardian*, August 23, 1911.

That is what in polite circles would be called the "lie direct." It cannot be glossed over as a "terminological inexactitude." The untruth was repeated in half-a-dozen vari-

ous forms, and on different occasions, but it remained an untruth just the same. But for the high character of the Lord Mayor of Manchester the lie would have gone unchallenged, and the Liberals of the country would have been prepared to stake their reputation on the Home Secretary's word, and the *Daily News* and *Westminster Gazette* would have dubbed anyone who dared question it a "slanderer."

THE "SCENE" IN THE HOUSE.

Mr. Lloyd George is another case in point. During the debate on Tuesday, August 22nd, I had charged the Government with siding with the companies, and had pointed out that had they brought pressure to bear on the companies the strike would not have taken place. Instead of doing this they had threatened the men with the military, and that the two men killed at Llanelly had been murdered in the interests of Capitalism. I don't say I made all my points with the precision and clearness of a lawyer trained in these arts, but all who heard me, as well as those who care to read my speech in *Hansard*, cannot miss the fact that I was referring to the conduct of the Government on the days immediately preceding the strike. That, and a reply to the Home Secretary's speech, in which I charged the presence of the troops with being the cause of the disorder at Llanelly, was the main burden of my remarks. It was here that Mr. Lloyd George came on the scene. Reading from a newspaper paragraph which purported to give a report of a speech of mine to the railwaymen of Aberdare on the previous Sunday, he charged me with stating that the Prime Minister had threatened to keep the railways open if they had to shoot down every striker. I interrupted him to explain that what I said was that that was the interpretation put upon the Prime Minister's statement by every one of the forty railway men present at the interview. That, however, he said, only made the offence worse. It was "contemptible." The Joint Executive of the Railwaymen's Unions met next day. This joint body is composed of forty selected men, and includes such responsible officials of the Trade Union movement as Mr. Arthur Bellamy, President of the A.S.R.S.; J. E. Williams, Secretary; Mr. A. Fox, Secretary of the Associated Society of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen; Mr. T. Lowth, Secretary of the General Railway Workers' Union; Mr. S. Chorlton, Secretary of the Signalmen's and Pointmen's Society; Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P.; and Mr. Walter Hudson, M.P. All of them were present when the Prime Minister made his statement. [Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., was also present at the interview, and did not dissent from the interpretation of the Prime Minister's language as given above, when it was put to the Labour Party at the Joint Conference already mentioned.] These are not feather-headed men of straw, and they and their

colleagues, when they read Mr. Lloyd George's outburst, unanimously passed the following resolution:—

“THIS JOINT EXECUTIVE BODY REPUDIATE THE UNWARRANTABLE ATTACK BY THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER (MR. LLOYD GEORGE) UPON MR. KEIR HARDIE FOR USING ARGUMENTS WHICH EACH OF THE FORTY REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT AT THE BOARD OF TRADE FEEL WERE QUITE JUSTIFIABLE AFTER THE LANGUAGE AND ATTITUDE OF THE PRIME MINISTER. WE FURTHER TENDER THE BEST THANKS OF THE JOINT EXECUTIVES, REPRESENTING ALL RAILWAY WORKERS, TO MR. KEIR HARDIE AND THE LABOUR PARTY FOR THE SPLENDID SERVICE IN HELPING BOTH TO BRING OUR MEN OUT AND TO GET THEM BACK AGAIN WHEN THE TRUCE WAS CALLED.”

That sufficiently disposes of the first part of Mr. Lloyd George's outburst. But he went on—at Llanelly, before the killing of the two men “the engine driver was badly hurt, blood streaming freely from his head.” That is a pure invention. One of the witnesses at the inquest gave it as his opinion that the man had had too much liquor, but no one save an imaginative reporter and Mr. Lloyd George saw “blood streaming from his head” or any part of his person. Again, “constant appeals were made to the crowd before there was any shooting.” Untrue. One appeal was made and then *one minute* was given the crowd to clear. The officer stood with his watch in his hand, and when the minute was up opened fire. The officer himself stated that his men were only fifteen minutes on the spot altogether. Proceeding, Mr. Lloyd George alleged that I had stated that the Government had brought “no pressure *at all* to bear upon the railway directors.” As already explained I had said nothing of the kind, and nothing capable of bearing any such interpretation. He persisted in repeating the statement, which I as emphatically denied. Then followed this: “I took down in writing,” said Mr. Lloyd George, “the very statement which he made, and if that is wrong I will apologise to him to-morrow morning. This is the statement he made: ‘No pressure was brought to bear by the Government on the directors to see the men.’” My reply was, “That is not accurate. If the Government had brought pressure to bear the strike would not have taken place. That is what I say, and I stand by it.” Next day Mr. Lloyd George found out that he had misrepresented me, but his apology is still wanting.

Still he persisted. By this time he must have known he was wrong, but with railway directors and shareholders cheering him on both sides he was bound to go on. He kept referring to what happened on *Saturday*. I had been referring to what took place on the previous Wednesday and Thursday. He appealed to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to corroborate what he said about Saturday, a point which was not then or ever had been in dispute. When, however, he claimed that the directors had met the men “entirely owing to the action of the

Government," and challenged me to deny it, I did deny it right vigorously. "The reason why the directors met the men," I replied, "was because the bulk of their men were on strike and they couldn't help themselves." Those who want the proof of this may turn back to the preceding section of this pamphlet. Then occurred the incident which, more than anything else, revealed how the pettifogging attorney dominates the man. I put this question to Mr. Lloyd George. "Is it the case that when the deputation from the Railwaymen's Unions on Thursday met the President of the Board of Trade and the Prime Minister, a question was put to the Prime Minister on these lines: 'Has the Government done anything, is the Government doing anything, does the Government intend to do anything to bring the directors and the men's Unions together?' And the reply was 'No.' Is that the case?"

Mr. Lloyd George wriggled. By his side sat the Prime Minister, who had I think, been sent for. Then the Chancellor of the Exchequer got up to brazen it out.

"The Prime Minister says he has no recollection of that"

was what he said. Mr. Asquith fidgetted uneasy. He knew the question had been put to him in writing, and that the answer also was in writing, *and that the railwaymen had the document.* He rose from his place and admitted the accuracy of my statement. The answer which had been prepared for him, he said, and which he approved was, "We have not done so." This would have settled the matter with anyone save the Chancellor. But some evil spirit prompted him to appeal from the Prime Minister to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. Mr. MacDonald, who had been present when the question was put and answered, and who probably drafted the question, at once rose and confirmed my statement and the Prime Minister's recollection. Everyone now looked glum, and it was then the Chancellor pressed Mr. MacDonald to admit that on the Saturday the Government had pressed the directors. The "pressure," in part at least, took the form of giving the directors an assurance that if recognition of the Unions resulted in higher wages and shorter hours to the men, the Government would give the companies power to charge higher fares and rates, a "pressure" which sent the railway market booming next day, and led to great jubilation on the Stock Exchange.

That, then, is the "truth" about the scene when Keir Hardie was "trounced" by Mr. Lloyd George. I had exposed the trickery by which the Government were seeking to impose on the public the fable that they had settled the strike. The railway men were to bear the blame of the strike and the Government carry off the credit for having settled it. That would have suited the book nicely of the "friends of Labour" on both sides. They howled like dervishes part of the time I was

talking, and that particular specimen of sound democrat, Sir C. Henry, so far forgot himself in his righteous indignation, that he had to be taken in hand by the Speaker. He had to "withdraw" one of his expressions; a gentleman would also have apologised. It only needed that other paragon of financial purity, Mr. Horatio Bottomley's presence, to make the scene complete.

CONCLUSION.

When Mr. Lloyd George, by his attack, set all his jackals in the Press howling out abuse against Keir Hardie, he doubtless imagined he had done a good thing for his party. No doubt he meant well. The actual effect has been to lead people everywhere, and especially Trade Unionists with Liberal leanings, to examine their moorings. The Government hoped to add to its laurels by "settling the strike." I destroyed that little game. So long as it is a question of Insurance Bills that are being discussed, the Government is sweetness itself towards Labour, and many are deceived. The moment Capital and Labour come into conflict, and the scene of action can be concealed behind the curtain of make-believe, then the true affinity of the Liberal Government is revealed. It is because I have dared to draw aside the curtain and show a little of what has been going on in the dark that Mr. Lloyd George and his friends are so wrathful.

There is but one solution for these recurring Labour troubles, the State must own the railways. There is no other way. The gradgrinds who now mismanage them are burdening industry with oppressive rates, and sweating and grinding the faces of the employees. The railwaymen have again brought this question into the forefront of politics, and if the Government carry out their promise to the directors to give them power to levy higher rates and fares, that will give the movement for nationalisation a fresh impetus. But it will do more than that, it will add to the price which the nation will have to pay for the railways when the time comes for taking them over. When the Government proposals come before Parliament that is one aspect that must not be overlooked.

I have thus tried to bring home the facts concerning the attitude of the Government towards the railwaymen because of its terrible import. The military mind, spirit, and outlook are alien to all democratic or popular Government. To the average officer, himself reared in the lap of luxury, the working class is simply a dirty, unwashed mob, of no more worth than a warren of rabbits. The military, therefore, are totally unfitted to handle a crowd, or even to understand one. Besides the presence of bodies of soldiers in a strike area has a certain psychological effect on the mind of the strikers. It is apt to

produce a feeling of hopeless despair of his ever being able to win against masters who can command such a powerful backing. I therefore, I repeat, view with the gravest alarm this introduction of the military into the civil area. It bodes ill to the worker, and to the nation at large. It is a complete departure from our traditional methods, and the Government responsible for it is the enemy of all that is best and highest in the life of the nation. No Tory Government would have dared act as the Liberals have done in this matter. It is only when the Liberals are in office that such breaches of the constitution can be made without question.

The working man who reads this pamphlet will have one fact borne in upon his mind. The Government which tried to save the railway directors from defeat, and gave them the use of the British Army, and promised them the use of the Navy, to protect blackleg labour, is a Government of the rich; the magistrates who went about reading Riot Acts were employers or business men, not one working man amongst them. The Town Councils which control the police are mainly composed of rich and well-to-do people. Therefore it happens that when Labour troubles come along the employer can always reckon on having the police and the soldiers behind him. But the strangest thing of all is that the Parliament which controls the soldier, and the Council which controls the policeman, are elected by working men. I leave that thought with you.

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