‘Strike-breaker’, ‘scab’ and ‘blackleg’; few terms evoke as much emotion and opprobrium in the labour movement. In times of industrial struggle, trade unionists attacked strike-breakers for doing the bidding of employers and undermining workers’ solidarity. Strike-breaking took on a variety of forms and was marked by a complex web of actors and incentives: the importation of substitute labour by employers during disputes was done with the intention of maintaining production and deterring trade unionism; a mixture of personal, political and economic reasons could dissuade individual workers from joining a picket line and even trade unions themselves have refused to back national strikes because of a perceived lack of democratic legitimacy.[1] Despite this complexity, strike-breaking has historically been the preserve of aggressive employers opposed to trade unions. A veritable industry serving these needs sprung up around the activity of strike-breaking in nineteenth-century Britain; specialist ‘free labour’ organisations were formed to provide employers with a steady supply of non-union workers.[2] This privatised strike-breaking nexus of employers and ‘free labour’ groups would eventually be supplanted by the state and local government in the early twentieth-century who, in response to national, sympathetic and general strikes in essential industries, developed an organisational apparatus predicated on the use of volunteers. [3]

This article provides the first systematic historical study of these strike-breaking volunteers across a relatively broad timeframe, focusing specifically on the period between 1911 and 1926. These years bore witness to the largest industrial conflict in British history, encompassing the Great Labour Unrest of 1911-1914, the post-war strike wave of 1919-1923 and the General Strike of 1926. The sheer size and scale of these strikes, which involved millions of workers and engulfed entire cities, towns and communities, mandated a bigger alternative source of reserve labour, instigating a shift away from traditional strike-breaking agencies and actors and towards civilian volunteers. Volunteers were recruited *en masse* by branches of national and local government, tasked with maintaining essential services and

[1] On the motivations of employers see A.J. McIvor, *Organised Capital: Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations in Northern England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 93.

[2] On ‘free labour’ see G. Alderman, ‘The National Free Labour Association: A Case-Study of Organised Strike-Breaking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *International Review of Social History*, 21:3 (1976), pp. 309-336; A.J. McIvor, ‘Employers' organisation and strikebreaking in Britain, 1880-1914’, *International Review of Social History*, 29:1 (1984), pp. 1-33.

[3] R.H. Desmarais, ‘The British Government's Strikebreaking Organization and Black Friday’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6:2 (1971), pp. 112-127; ‘Lloyd George and the Development of the British Government’s Strikebreaking Organisation’, *International Review of Social History*, 20:1 (1975), pp. 1-15; K. Jeffrey & P. Hennessy, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking Since 1919* (London, 1983); C. Wrigley, ‘The State and the Challenge of Labour in Britain, 1917-1920’, in C. Wrigley (ed.), *Challenges of Labour: Central and Western Europe, 1917-1920* (London, 1993), pp. 262-289.

supplies during totemic strikes in the transport and mining industries. The social background of these volunteers set them apart from conventional 'blacklegs' who were often poor or unemployed and acting in response to hardship and discrimination.[4] The volunteer strike-breaker, by contrast, tended to be of middle and upper-class extraction with students, professionals, businessmen, religious ministers, peers and clerks being especially prominent. Volunteers were motivated primarily by ideology; ostensibly non-conflictual stances of patriotism, civic duty and service to the community and the general public were commonly cited. Such reasoning, however, intermeshed with outright condemnations of organised labour and the key function of volunteer activity, whether it was directly stated or masked by harmonious rhetoric, centred around resistance to the economic and political power of trade unions.

Strike-breaking as a form of voluntary labour has not been examined in great detail outside of studies of the General Strike.[5] During the strike, nearly half a million volunteers were recruited by the Conservative government and affiliated organisations such as the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. Volunteers drove trains, trams, cars and lorries, served as special constables, shovelled coal and unloaded goods at docks. A problematic reading of the volunteer's role in the strike has prevailed in many scholarly and popular accounts. Scholars, writers and broadcasters have placed an excessive emphasis on the light-hearted spirits of the volunteers; the strike taking on the character of a quasi 'holiday' for Oxbridge undergraduates, peers, stock brokers and socialites who revelled in the opportunity to escape everyday routine and serve their country, a repeat for many of their service in the First World War.[6] A different interpretation by Ross McKibbin has emphasised

[4] On ethnic and racial discrimination in particular see P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 111-112; On similar themes in an American context see S.H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 2002), p. 16.

[5] Amidst the voluminous literature on the General Strike see the following examples where the roles of the volunteers are examined in detail; G. Crompton, 'Some Good Men, Some Doubtful Men …': The Role of Railway Volunteers in the General Strike', *Journal of Transport History*, 9:2 (1988), pp. 127-148; M. Morris, *The General Strike* (London, 1976); R.H. Saltzman, ' Folklore as Politics in Great Britain: Working-Class Critiques of Upper-Class Strike Breakers in the 1926 General Strike', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 67:3 (1994), pp. 105-121; *A Lark for the Sake of their Country: The 1926 General Strike Volunteers in Folklore and Memory* (Manchester, 2012); J. Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike: 1926* (London, 1976); J. Symons, *The General Strike: A Historical Portrait* (London, 1957), pp (2001 ed),. 66-111; C. Wrigley, 'The General Strike in Local History, Part 1: The Government's Volunteers', *The Local Historian*, 16:1 (1984), pp. 36-50;

[6] For scholars see Morris, *The*, p. 12; Saltzman, *A Lark*, pp. 6, 36, 77-78; Symons, *The*, p. 67; For writers see A. Perkins, *A Very British Strike: 3 May- 12 May, 1926* (London, 2006), pp. 24, 206; for broadcasters see the fourth episode of Andrew Marr's 2009 BBC television series *The Making of Modern Britain* entitled 'Having a Ball' which emphasises the joviality and good spirits of the volunteers.

the pervasiveness of anti-labour ideology, arguing that middle class volunteers supported the Conservative government's portrayal of the strike as 'an attack upon the constitution'.[7] This article provides evidence which supports McKibbin's argument in relation to the General Strike but it challenges his assertion that the 1920s was the 'first and last decade' in which large numbers of the middle class broke strikes. In fact, the dynamics associated with volunteer strike-breaking in the 1920s first became salient in the Edwardian period. The performance of working-class labour by middle and upper-class volunteers, press coverage focusing on the novelty of such activity, the identification of the volunteers as the defenders of the public and the community, and overt displays of antipathy towards the organised working class were all features that had been evident during the Great Labour Unrest. Never simply a response to the class conflict ridden years of the 1920s, interwar volunteers re-enacted pre-established patterns of behaviour. This continuity was also accompanied by elements of change. The interwar mobilisation of volunteers was bigger in terms of numbers and more centrally coordinated with the establishment of state-directed strike-breaking bodies such as the Supply and Transport Organisation. Edwardian efforts were generally more ad hoc and responsive to local circumstances, enacted at the behest of city authorities and independent strike-breaking entrepreneurs akin to Allan Pinkerton and 'Big' Jim Farley in the United States [8]

A second innovative feature of this article relates to its interpretation of the volunteer worldview. Whilst not denying that some saw the strike as a bit of 'a lark', more stress will be placed here on comparably neglected aspects of the volunteer worldview, namely its arrogance, hostility and finely attuned sense of social distinction and hierarchy.[9] A powerful logic of class-rooted entitlement and superiority underlay the volunteer assumption that one could take another person's job without any requisite training, knowledge or expertise. The conservative press, which was instrumental in the creation of the contemporary mythos surrounding the volunteers, encouraged the view that working-class labour was rudimentary, deeming it to be 'easy enough' for an 'educated man of intelligence'.[10] Such sentiments owed much to pervasive class distinctions rooted in the perceived differences between manual and non-manual labour; the former, dependent on physicality and routine, was depicted by right-

7 R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), p. 58.

8 For Pinkerton and Farley see Norwood, *Strikebreaking*, pp. 4-5, 52-62.

9 Saltzman, *A Lark*.

10 'General Strikes and General Strike Breakers', *The Times* (26 Aug 1911), p. 7.

wing newspapers as posing few problems for those used to the more cerebral demands of work in the professional, commercial and intellectual sectors of society.[11] This belief was not simply an expression of conceit, it also imparted an important disciplinary message to workers, namely that their labour was replaceable and that it was the volunteers who were 'essential to the country'.[12]

Indeed, volunteers' actions, unsurprisingly, provoked considerable revulsion on the part of workers, who sometimes resisted with violence. This was particularly the case during and after the General Strike where there were considerable outbreaks of localised violence and public disorder. On the ground, in cities and towns across Britain, many strikers resisted the calls of the Conservative, Labour and trade union leaderships to show restraint, attacking, intimidating and victimising volunteers. Dominant interwar motifs promoted by politicians relating to the inherent moderation and peaceability of the British nation were rejected by strikers angered at the perceived impudence of the volunteers.[13] Indeed, such action demonstrates that industrial conflict often cut across prevailing political and public messaging which emphasised that the 'British… were a uniquely peaceable people'.[14] Outbreaks of strife between volunteers and strikers destabilised the credibility of these self-congratulatory claims and underscore the salience of conflict in interwar political culture, which has been downplayed in recent historical writing on the period with scholars favouring readings that stress the pre-eminence of consensus and shared national values.[15] The case made here will be that the stability of the British polity in the interwar period was not simply about a collective commitment to shoring up the political centre ground. Militant trade unionism, which posed a threat to entrenched inequalities of power, status and wealth, had to be comprehensively defeated in order for wider myths regarding the stability of the British nation to appear plausible; a state of affairs that would only truly come to pass after the defeat of the General Strike in 1926.

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11 'General Strikes'.

12 S. Pedersen, 'Triumph of the Poshocracy', *London Review of Books*, 35:15 (08 Aug 2013).

13 J. Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post–First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75:3 (2003), pp. 557-589; 'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past &Present*, 190 (2006), pp. 185-216.

14 Lawrence, 'Forging', p. 588.

15 See A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991), pp. 82-84, 146-150; P. Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 163-187; H. McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 891-912; *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918-1945* (Manchester, 2013).

The final historiographical contribution of this article will be to shed light on the hitherto neglected role of the voluntary organisations in early twentieth-century strike-breaking. A diverse array of voluntary groups, ranging from those representing the interests of businessmen and motorists (Chambers of Commerce, Automobile Assocation), supporting veterans and young people (British Legion, Boy Scouts) and providing forums for male sociability and charitable work (Rotary clubs).[16] The anti-labour activities of these groups have not been singled out in the recent wealth of scholarly literature that has proliferated on voluntarism in early twentieth-century Britain.[17] The dominant tendency here has been to stress the progressive and reformist implications of voluntary activism. The co-operative nature of the relationship between voluntary organisations and the state in the foundation, development and administration of the welfare state has been especially highlighted.[18] A different, more conflictual side of voluntarism in early twentieth-century Britain will be emphasised in this article. Contrary to social scientific and historiographical readings, which emphasise that Britain's civil structures have historically acted as a break on overextensions of state power or mediated social and political conflict, the evidence in this article demonstrates that voluntary organisations have often been implicated in such struggle, actively aiding the state to resist perceived encroachments of trade union power.[19] During

[16] The anti-labour stances of Rotary, the British Legion and Chambers of Commerce have been highlighted in the work of Ross McKibbin but are very much seen as a feature of the 1930s and there is no account given of their strike-breaking activities. See McKibbin, *Classes*, pp. 96-98.

[17] See P. Ackers & A. Reid (eds.), *Alternatives to State Socialism in Britain: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2016); C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester, 2013); E. Colpus, *Female Philanthropy in the Interwar World: Between Self and Other* (London, 2018); N. Deakin & J. Davis-Smith, 'Labour, Charity and Voluntary Action: the Myth of Hostility', in M. Hilton, J. McKay (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 69-94; H. McCarthy, 'Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality: Gender Relations and Middle-Class Associations in Britain Between the Wars', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), pp. 531-552; 'Associational Voluntarism in Interwar Britain', in M. Hilton, J. McKay (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 47-68; H. McCarthy & P. Thane, 'The Politics of Association in Industrial Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011), 217-229; T. M. Proctor, *On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia, 2002).

[18] 'P. Thane, 'Government and society in England and Wales 1750–1914', in F. M. L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1990), pp 1-66; ''The Big State' versus the 'Big Society' in twentieth-century Britain', in C. Williams & A. Edwards (eds.), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885-1997: essays in memory of Duncan Tanne*r (Manchester, 2015), pp. 32-45; See also G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare in Britain 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 19-22.

[19] For social science perspectives see J. Habermas, T*he Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge MA, 1991), 57-67; R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London, 1968), pp. 53-54; For historians see J. Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain: Elites, Civil Society and Reform since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2002); B. Harrison *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982); McCarthy, ''Parties, Voluntary Associations'.

periods of intense social and political strain, voluntary action has often served conservative ends as opposed to being an exemplar of the liberal virtues of participation, openness, equality and pluralism.

This article is divided into chronological sections. The first section focuses on the ideology and activities of the volunteers during the Great Labour Unrest whilst the second shifts the narrative forward towards the interwar period. Both sections examine the relationship between the volunteers and the state, the role of voluntary organisations and themes of conflict, hierarchy and violence.

Volunteers and The Great Labour Unrest

The three-year period between 1911 and 1914 witnessed the greatest agitation of the labour movement since the time of the Chartists.[20] National strikes by railwaymen, miners and dockers paralysed British industry, threatened the transport networks on which it relied, stimulated fears of a danger to the nation's food supply and were racked by consistent and often dramatic outbreaks of violence. The strike called by the Miners Federation of Great Britain in 1912 constituted the largest ever industrial dispute the world had seen up to that point, involving one million colliers.[21] Ten million working days were lost to strikes and lockouts in 1911, rising to forty million in 1912, and around 9.8 million lost days were recorded in 1913 and 1914.[22] Large-scale industrial disputes in essential industries such as coal and the railways were matched by smaller localised strikes, which often involved previously unorganised sections of the working-class.[23] Critics of labour unrest commonly pointed to the malignant influence of foreign doctrines such as syndicalism. In March 1912, the Conservative MP, William Ormsby-Gore moved a resolution in the Commons criticising the 'growth and advocacy by certain Labour agitators of the anti-social policy of syndicalism'.[24] Left-wing opponents of syndicalism singled out the perceived futility of its central tenet, namely that a general strike was necessary to bring down the capitalist system. The Labour politician Philip Snowden asserted that it was a folly to think that the general

[20] Y. Beliard, 'Introduction: Revisiting the Great Labour Unrest, 1911–1914', *Labour History Review*, 79: 1 (2014), p. 1.

[21] L. Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-file Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield* (Manchester, 2018), p. 2.

[22] W.H. Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism, 1700-1998* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 121.

[23] Beliard, 'Introduction', pp. 1-2.

[24] 'Menace of Syndicalism', *The Times* (15 Mar 1912), p. 5.

strike 'could ever take the place of political action'.[25] The prominence of syndicalism as a source of influence on the development of unrest could often be exaggerated by such politicians for partisan ends. A broad spectrum of Edwardian writers, politicians and intellectuals also noted the part played by rising educational standards, perceptions of unjust economic inequality, the shortcomings of Labour's parliamentary project and the loosening of deferential class distinctions.[26]

In the summer of 1911 Liverpool lay at the apex of this wave of industrial unrest, hit by a succession of seamen, dockers and railway disputes that culminated in a general transport strike. Events in Liverpool proved to be especially violent; on August 13th police baton charged a mass demonstration of strikers, an event that would become known as 'Bloody Sunday'. Two days later, troops which had been deployed into the city by the Liberal Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, fired upon and killed two strikers.[27] An unofficial strike committee, chaired by the Marxist trade union leader Tom Mann and who had earlier coordinated mass action on the part of railwaymen and dockers, called out tramway, brewery workers, corporation scavengers and electricity workers at the Lister-Street Power station. [28] The potential closure of this power station, which provided much of the electricity that powered the city of Liverpool, spurred a group of volunteers into action. Under the aegis of Thomas Ockleston, a member of the Liverpool Stock Exchange and a former Conservative parliamentary candidate, 500 volunteers were recruited to work as stokers, shovelling coal into furnaces in order to generate electricity.[29] Contemporary press reports, at both the national and local level, paid great attention to the social background of these recruits. A *Daily Mail* correspondent who visited the station identified the presence of merchants, students, barristers, doctors, poor law guardians and clergymen.[30] The prominence of youth was singled out by the *The Liverpool Evening Express* who noted the contribution of

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25 'Strikes no Remedy', *The Times* (24 March 1912), p. 6.

26 J. Thompson, 'The Great Labour Unrest and Political Thought in Britain, 1911-1914', *Labour History Review*. 79: 1 (2014), pp 37–54.

27 S. Davies & R. Noon, 'The rank-and-file in the 1911 Liverpool General Transport Strike", *Labour History Review*. 79:1 (2014), pp. 55–58.

28 R. Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 63; P. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism:* A *Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981), p. 256.

29 'Strike Romance', *Liverpool Evening Express* (22 August 1911), p. 4.

30 'Amateur Stokers', *Daily Mail* (21 August 1911), p. 5.

'a band of young' men composed of 'members of several of the leading families' of the city.[31] *The Times* stated that 'several muscular footballers' were also present.[32]

These accounts emphasised the unusual sight of professionals, businessmen and students engaged in manual labour. A barrister was seen 'loading a wagon', a clergyman 'shovelling coal and raking ashes' and the son of the Bishop of Oxford 'leaning for a moment's rest on a spade'.[33] While such descriptions did highlight the upbeat spirits of the volunteers, they also struck conflictual and hierarchal tones. The volunteers, after a total of five days' work, were declared to be 'as good as the regular hands who are out on strike' and as a result 'revolt would occur were any of the strikers taken back'.[34] That such activity was seen in explicitly political terms is confirmed by an invaluable personal testimony of a volunteer stoker published in the *Liverpool Daily Post*.[35] Writing under the pseudonym of 'Seti', this stoker argued that the volunteers were motivated by an opposition to the Strike Committee's plans to deprive Liverpool of 'its light and its tramways'. The 'labour agitators', unaware of the enormity of their actions, had to be taught a lesson that they were not 'omnipotent'. In possession of 'a few more brains', 'just as much muscle', and 'more public spirit', the volunteers sought to paralyse the 'evil machinations' of the 'labour agitators' sitting on the Strike Committee. 'Seti's account reflected the volunteers' unfamiliarity with manual labour, comments abounded relating to its 'monotony' and the intense heat of the boiler-room was colourfully compared to a Babylonian king's 'burning fiery furnace', but an overriding belief prevailed, namely that 'if the ordinary workman could stick it, we would'. 'Seti' exaggerated the effectiveness of the volunteers, claiming that their work had ensured no disruption to electricity supply in Liverpool, when in fact businesses across the city had reported shortages.[36] Press coverage of the Lister-Street volunteers noted that they worked under the protection of the army, the ground surrounding the station described as resembling a 'military encampment'.[37] Little was made of the presence of the HMS Antrim, a naval

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31 'Strike Romance'.

32 'The Liverpool Disputes', *The Times* (22 August 1911), p. 5.

33 'Amateur Stokers'.

34 'Strike Romance'.

35 'The Experiences of a Volunteer Stoker', *Liverpool Daily Post* (22 August 1911), p. 4.

36 Waller, *Democracy*, p. 256.

37 'Power Station Guarded', *Liverpool Evening Express* (18 Aug 1911), p. 5.

battleship which had been dispatched to Liverpool on the orders of Winston Churchill.[38] Alongside its briefing of providing assistance to the military and the police, the battleship was instructed by Churchill to defend the volunteers. The volunteers were protected in this instance from strike violence by the military and naval might of the state.

The Strike Committee's success in calling out corporation scavengers, responsible for street sweeping and waste disposal, also initiated an appeal from the Liverpool city authorities for volunteers. Responding to a plea from the Lord Mayor, 'a civic service corps of voluntary workers' was formed and promptly started to 'sweep the streets' of the city.[39] Again, much was made of the social class of these volunteers. The Voluntary Service Corps, which eventually numbered 1,000 persons, was said to have enrolled clergymen, barristers and 'other professional and leading citizens'.[40] Although, in contrast to the Lister-Street power station, there appeared to be more of a lower middle presence amongst the scavengers with clerks, tradesmen, cadets and Scouts being prominent.[41] The Mayor also issued a call for special constables, specifying a preference for men 'between the ages of 20 and 40'.[42] Over 3,000 of these men were sworn in as special constables across the city. One of these constables provided an account of his experience to the *Liverpool Daily Post*.[43] Enlisted at the city hall, this special constable was tasked with the protection of commercial property and street duty. The latter task led him into the 'hooligan zones of the city' where he saw men and women throw missiles at the police and the army. He also referenced the deplorable state of the city's streets, 'upswept' and 'overflowing with refuse bins', and praised the work of the Voluntary Service Corps. The appalling condition of Liverpool's streets was deemed to be one of the 'evil' effects of the strike and was explicitly connected to the efforts of strikers. The constable referenced an incident where a shop assistant had tried to sweep the pavement 'in front of his master's premise' but had ended up being accosted by a picket. Happening upon this scene, a colleague of the special constable had crossed the road and stood silently at the assistant's side. Faced with this stoic resolve, the picketers 'took a mouthful of dust and vanished'.

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38 J. Morgan, *Conflict and Order: The Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939* (Oxford, 1987), p. 51.

39 'News of the Day', *Liverpool Daily Post* (21 Aug 1911), p. 4.

40 'News of the Day'.

41 'News of the Day'.

42 'City of Liverpool', *Liverpool Evening Express* (21 Aug 1911) p. 5.

43 'On Duty', *Liverpool Daily Post* (21 Aug 1911).

After the cessation of the strike, the efforts of the Liverpool volunteers were praised by the Lord Mayor. A resolution was passed at a town hall meeting which recommended the creation of a permenant Civic Service League.[44] This organisation was to assist the authorities in preserving the health, safety and well-being of the city in times of need and all those who had served as special constables, volunteer scavengers and stokers were to be automatically accepted as members.[45] The Civic Service League became a lasting presence in the city and played a prominent role in the recruitment of volunteers and various other types of war service between 1914 and 1918.[46] Its first president was the local Conservative politician, the Earl of Derby, who explicitly decreed in a public speech that it was 'not a strike breaking organisation'.[47] This denial of strike-breaking amounted to a common tendency amongst volunteers and their supporters in the Edwardian and interwar periods, pointing instead to ostensibly neutral motivations such as civic duty, public spirit and service to the community. The deployment of these terms, however, was politically inflected, implicitly situating strikers and trade unions outside the boundaries of the public and the community. This framing also commonly assumed more explicit forms with organised labour depicted as being in opposition to communal and public interests.[48] The epithet of strike-breaker was used by the conservative press to describe the volunteers. *The Times*, for example, praised the actions of the Liverpool volunteers but criticised the 'haphazard and casual character' of the preparations.[49] Assessing proposed plans for the systematic recruitment of volunteers during general strikes, the newspaper noted that the key difficulty hampering 'suggestions for turning the public themselves into general strike breakers' was 'one of authority and organisation'. There was no doubting that 'the professional, business and unoccupied' classes were capable of undertaking the work of unskilled and 'half-skilled' labour with very little difficulty. 'Manual labour' was not as taxing or as 'unpleasant' as trade union leaders made it out to be; it would not take long for educated men 'to master the signal plate or the engine box'.

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44 'For Emergencies in Liverpool', *Liverpool Daily Post* (30 Aug 1911), p. 4.

45 'For Emergencies'.

46 S. McGreal, *Liverpool in the Great War* (Yorkshire, 2014), p. 30.

47 'Liverpool's Civic Service League', *Yorkshire Post* (23 Feb 1912), p. 7.

48 For the language of labour versus the public in the Edwardian period see J. Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 231; For the interwar period see R. McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom: The Conservative Party and the ''Public'' in Interwar Britain', in R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259-293.

49 'General Strikes'.

One of the proposed schemes referred to by *the Times* was that of the Volunteer Police Force. The Volunteer Police Force was formed in October 1911 with the objective of subduing disorder that arose from large strikes or any instances of civil unrest.[50] It also proposed keeping a register of its members that could be used by authorities during times of emergency, specifically with the intention of maintaining essential public services. The organisers of the Volunteer Police Force asserted that it was not a ‘’blackleg’’ ‘labour bureau’ and had no intention of interfering in normal industrial disputes between employers and workers.[51] Only in times when ‘disturbances threaten the whole community’ were volunteer registers ‘to be placed at the disposal of authorities’.[52] Several notable right-wing figures were associated with the Volunteer Police Force; the Earl of Meath, Sir Gilbert Parker and the Earl of Lonsdale sat on its governing council. The Volunteer Police Force claimed to represent the defensive interests of a public who had been threatened with starvation and dislocation.[53] Striking railway workers, who were paid by the public to transport goods, food and people, had abrogated their duties. Wronged by strikers and neglected by the government, who took ‘no adequate precaution to avert mischief’, the Volunteer Police Force sought to mobilise the protective instincts of the ‘ordinary citizen’.[54]

The sitting Liberal administration rejected the overtures of the Volunteer Police Force, who bitterly referred to the ‘hostile’ and ‘frigid’ attitude of Winston Churchill.[55] The government’s hostility stemmed from the Conservative biases of the Volunteer Police Force and because it overlapped with a similar initiative spearheaded by the Home Office. During the national railway strike of August 1911, Churchill had issued a circular to police authorities across the country instructing them to enrol special constables.[56] Over 9,000 constables ended up being enrolled but few were used outside of Liverpool, owing largely to the shortness of the strike, which lasted only two days.[57] As a result of this enthusiastic response and the perceived need to create a permenant reserve force with a brief of

50 ‘Volunteer Police’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (12 Oct 1911), p. 1.

51 ‘Volunteer Police’.

52 ‘Volunteer Police’.

53 ‘The Volunteer Police Force’, *The Times* (08 Dec 1911), p. 9.

54 ‘The Volunteer’.

55 ‘The Volunteer’.

56 ‘Police Authorities’, *Daily Mail* (18 Aug 1911), p. 5.

57 ‘Volunteer Police’, *Daily Mail* (15 Sep 1911), p. 3.

combating public disorder, the Home Office disseminated another circular to police officials in September 1911, calling upon them to keep a register of suitable persons ready to serve as special constables.[58] The circular stated that there was a need for a 'well organised body of citizens ready for enrolment as special constables, affording confidence to the police and the public 'that effective protection would be given to life and property'. These efforts would establish the conditions for the modern special constabulary, consisting of two reserves, one paid and composed of retired policemen and the second comprised of unpaid volunteers, with both expected to be deployed alongside the police during large-scale industrial conflict.[59] Special constables would play an especially controversial role in the subsequent strike wave of the 1920s, using force to protect volunteers and police picket lines.

The fears engendered by the railway strike in 1911 also prompted an initial discussion about the use of a new technology that would become central to the experience of volunteer strike breakers in the 1920s. A year earlier, *the Times*, reporting on a French train strike, had noted that the motor car represented a great alternative to the railways and could usefully be deployed 'against the strikers'.[60] This point was taken up by motoring enthusiasts such as Lord Montagu of Beaulieu who detailed in a public letter how cars could be put to use in a railway strike.[61] Celebrating the characteristic desire of the English to 'volunteer and cooperate in order to combat a public danger', Montagu argued that motorists could safely transport food, supplies, passengers and heavy goods. He implored the government to set up a register of volunteer motorists and cars so if a strike was called the transit of goods and services could be maintained by the road network. The Automobile Assocation (A.A.), the largest voluntary body representing car owners, also offered its services to the government. In September 1911, William Joynson-Hicks, the chairman of the A.A. and future Conservative home secretary, wrote to the Home Office stating that his organisation was considering a scheme where cars could be used for the carriage of food and other necessities during a national emergency.[62] The example of the recent railway strike was of foremost importance in Joynson-Hicks' considerations; a national emergency equated as being tantamount to a

[58] 'Volunteer Police'.

[59] C. Leon, 'From Special Constables to Special Constabularies', in K. Bullock & A. Millie (eds), *The Special Constabulary: Historical Context, International Comparisons and Contemporary Themes* (Abingdon, 2018), p. 50.

[60] 'The Railway Strike in France', *The Times* (13 Oct 1910), p. 11.

[61] 'Automobilism', *The Times* (17 Oct 1911), p. 10.

[62] 'Motor Notes', *Dublin Daily Express* (11 Sep 1911), p. 7.

situation where the ‘ordinary facilities for transport are inadequate to deal with the needs of the public’.Joynson-Hicks pledged the support of the A.A’s 35,000 members for a car register that would be employed to meet the strike-breaking needs of the government. With no serious disturbances in the railway industry after 1911, there is no evidence to suggest that the Home Office took this offer particularly seriously but it was prescient of later developments in two important ways. Firstly, governments in the 1920 solicited the use of privately-owned cars when confronted with large strikes affecting the railways and secondly, the involvement of the A.A. was a precursor to the much larger interwar activism of voluntary organisations.

Compared to the disturbances, military interventions and shootings that marred transport strikes in the summer and autumn of 1911, the national coal strike of 1912 was a relatively peaceful affair. Nevertheless, it prompted calls for volunteers. Students at the University of Oxford formed a Strike Emergency Committee and pledged to ‘avert the disaster with which the nation is threatened by the coal strike’.[63] Plans were made to get permission for student volunteers to work in the mines. It was claimed that 400 prospective undergraduate ‘miners’ had signed up for duty, motivated by a mission to provide ‘necessities to the community’.[64] Alongside Oxford undergraduates, engineering students at the University of Liverpool volunteered their services, pledging to prevent the flooding of mines.[65] It is notable that the Oxford students were mobilised by the writer George Calderon, who served as the chairman of the Strike Emergency Committee. Calderon, an expert on Russian literature who published English-language translations of Anton Chekov and Ilya Tolstoy, was also responsible for organising a group of volunteers during the London Dock Strike of 1912. This strike, which was led by Ben Tillett and involved 100,000 dockers, was eventually defeated by the Port of London Authority. The Authority’s victory was aided by the labour of a 300-strong cohort of volunteers led by Calderon, who unloaded food supplies and cargo at the docks.[66] A separate force of 800 volunteer dockers also helped to dispatch frozen meat from a steamer ship during the strike.[67] Calderon, an independent strike breaking mobiliser, condemned the national coal strike as leading only to chaos and destruction. He asserted that strike-breaking amounted to a communal form of self-defence; when the

[63] ‘Strike the Strikers’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (07 Mar 1912), p. 2.

[64] ‘Strike the Strikers’; ‘Students for Pits’, *Bradford Weekly Telegraph* (08 March 1912), p. 10.

[65] ‘Engineers Volunteer Services’, *Western Daily Mercury* (08 March 1912), p. 10.

[66] ‘Strike Breaking at the Docks’, *Oxfordshire Weekly News* (12 Jun 1912), p. 2.

[67] ‘Volunteers unload a Vessel’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette* (28 May 1912), p. 5.

community saw its 'very existence threatened' by militant trade unionism, it would 'rise and defend itself'.[68]

Volunteers would also be instrumental in the defeat of the Leeds Municipal Strike of 1913-1914. Beginning in December 1913, 3,000 corporation workers, employed in the sanitary, sewage, gas, electricity, water and tramway departments, walked out in pursuit of pay increases.[69] The Leeds corporation, in an obvious parallel to the actions of the Liverpool city authorities in 1911, enlisted the support of volunteer workers to maintain affected public services. Volunteers, again, worked at power stations, as scavengers and drove trams. Army officers, undergraduates, bank clerks, stockbrokers and aldermen were said to be found in the ranks of the volunteers.[70] The efforts of students from the University of Leeds were especially highlighted. 200 students volunteered, working mainly at gas and power stations, and their actions had the backing of the university's vice chancellor, Michael Sadler.[71] Sadler publicly defended his students in response to a protest by the local trades' council.[72] National right-wing newspapers were vociferous in their praise for the volunteers, portraying it as a defensive mobilisation of the public. The *Daily Mail* asserted that the failure of the strike was due to the resistance of citizens who would not accede to the strikers demands.[73] This band of 'citizen volunteers' provided the necessary material 'for effectually smashing any strike of municipal workers'. Another article contended that the 'self-reliance of the public' shone through in the strike; municipal services had run for days without the single importation of a free labourer.[74] The university's support of its students provoked considerable controversy. The vice chancellor had actually been instrumental in the mobilisation of undergraduates, contacting them after a request of help from the Leeds city council.[75] His actions were condemned by the Leeds branch of the Workers Educational Assocation.[76] The vice chancellor, the acting president of the branch, was criticised by his colleagues who asserted

[68] 'Cambridge and the Coal Strike', *The Cambridge Magazine* (20 April 1912).

[69] 'Leeds Strike Settled', *Daily Mail* (14 Jan 1914), p. 5.

[70] 'Strike Broken by the Public', *Daily Mail* (17 Dec 1913), p. 4.

[71] R.D. Dalton, Labour and the Municipality: Labour Politics in Leeds, 1900-1914', (PhD: University of Huddersfield, 2000), pp. 276, 300.

[72] 'Labour and the Municipality', p. 305.

[73] 'Strike Broken'.

[74] 'Leeds Strike Lessons', *Daily Mail* (18 Dec 1913), p. 5.

[75] 'Labour and the Municipality', p. 300.

[76] 'Leeds University and the Strike', *Rochdale Times* (14 Feb 1914), p. 8.

that the 'university being a public institution must remain perfectly neutral in such questions as trade disputes'. The most spirited objection to the university's actions came from a distinguished professor based in the department of economics.[77] D.H. MacGregor argued that the university had shown itself to be part of a broader spectrum of 'middle-class strike breaking' that was hard to limit to the municipal sphere. This was because the arguments used to justify strike-breaking, namely that it amounted merely to a defence of essential public services relied upon the community, could be applied quite liberally to a whole host of other industries deemed suitably vital. Wide-ranging 'middle-class interference' of this kind would result in an upsurge of 'social hostility'.

MacGregor's misgivings about volunteers and their role in potentially aggravating social conflict would be borne out after the First World War. The industrial truce that followed the outbreak of war in 1914 stalled the mobilisation of volunteer strike-breaking labour. Motivated by the need to increase production, the wartime Liberal administration made trade unions an official partner of government and drew up legislation which mandated that disputes should be settled by arbitration rather than strikes. Many trade unionists became official employees of the state with the nationalisation of the coal, transport, armament and engineering industries. This truce between government and the unions would be broken in the immediate years following the end of the war in 1918, initiating a resurgence in volunteer strike breaking. Volunteer involvement in interwar strikes was bigger and organised by the state on a more national scale. The state also recruited far greater numbers of motorists, cars and voluntary organisations. Changes were also matched by continuity. Ideologically speaking, volunteers continued to proclaim they were acting in defence of the public and the community. The next section of this article will examine the fate of the volunteer strike breaker in the interwar period.

Volunteers and Interwar Strikes

The strike wave of 1919-1923 would surpass the Great Labour Unrest in terms of its militancy.[78] It was both a product of and a response to a seemingly more radicalised post-war environment; a world in which the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution weighed heavily on the minds of elites across the world. These fears were made even more acute in the British

[77] 'One Sided Weapon', *Leeds Mercury* (15 Jan 1914), p. 3.

[78] For a good account of the strike wave see Wrigley, 'The State and the Challenge of Labour'.

context by the dramatic electoral advances of the Labour Party in local and national elections and the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. These political developments were matched by a spirit of confrontation in the industrial sphere; national strikes by railwaymen, miners and police, violence in Belfast and Glasgow, direct action taken by dockers in sympathy with the Soviet Union and related discontent in the armed forces all attested to the apparent instability of the new post-war social order. Aided by this wave of militancy, trade union membership soared to over 8 million by 1921, constituting half of the nation's workforce.[79] Eighty-five million working days were lost in 1921 to strikes, the greatest ever annual figure in British history and double that of 1912, the worst year of the Great Labour Unrest.[80] Owing to fears relating to the challenge posed by the Triple Alliance of miners, dockers and railway unions and apprehensions about the reliability of some sections of the police and the army, Lloyd George's coalition government established an organisation called the Strike Committee.[81] The Strike Committee was entrusted with the task of recruiting civil volunteers, who in turn were expected to provide a reserve and loyal source of labour during large strikes. This governmental body would encounter its first real test in September 1919 when the railway unions called a national strike.

The strike, instigated in response to the government's plans to reduce pay, lasted nine days and was eventually settled in the railwaymen's favour when an agreement was made to maintain existing wage levels.[82] The government, echoing pre-war communitarian rhetoric, framed the strike as a 'fight for the life of the community'.[83] This language elided the interests of the state with those of the community, a conceptual sleight of hand that was commonly employed to attack organised labour.[84] Robert Horne, the Minister of Labour in 1919, argued that the railway strike 'was against the state' with the duty of the government being to save

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79 M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p. 103

80 Beliard, 'Introduction', p. 3.

81 On the Strike Committee see Desmarais, 'Lloyd George', pp.11-15

82 For accounts of the strike see P.S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London, 1963), 375-403; D. Howell, *Respectable Radicals: Studies in the Politics of Railway Trade Unionism* (Aldershot, 1999), 223-233; and more recently L. Beers, ''Is This Man an Anarchist?'' Industrial Action and the Battle for Public Opinion in Interwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 82 (2010), pp. 30-60; J. Edgcombe, The 1919 Railway Strike: The Government's Response', (MA: University of Hertfordshire, 2017).

83 'How every Citizen can Help', *Daily Mail* (29 Sep 1919), p. 3.

84 See E. Yeo & S. Yeo, 'On the Uses of Community' in S. Yeo (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation* (London, 1988), p. 247.

'the community from disaster'.[85] Volunteers were accorded a central role in this communal defence effort. The government issued communiques appealing for volunteers to fill posts on the railway network, encompassing drivers, stokers, guards, foremen, carters, signalmen, cleaners, porters and checkers.[86] 'Every citizen' was implored to do their 'part'. The Strike Committee organised a designated road transportation network 'for the supply of food and other vital necessities'. The Ministry of Transport opened a registration office for 'volunteer motor drivers' in the capital. The need for 'able-bodied men' to serve as special constables was also emphasised by the government.

This call for volunteers appears to have been well-received with the response being deemed 'overwhelming' by the press.[87] 25,000 volunteers were said to have registered in London alone.[88] Great numbers of volunteers enlisted to work on the London underground, the Great Western, the London and North Western, and the Northern Eastern railways.[89] Volunteer motorists provided an alternative method of transport within cities and towns and were part of larger convoys that moved food and supplies between different areas of the country. The A.A. greatly aided the government's recruitment of volunteer drivers. It issued an appeal to its members asking them to give particulars of their cars and motorcycles and to state clearly what they would be willing to do in the strike.[90] Led by its chairman, William Joynson-Hicks, the A.A. made explicit overtures to the government with a special subcommittee being formed to coordinate efforts.[91] As a result, specific jobs such as the 'task of filling up the gaps in the distribution' of petrol were delegated by the Ministry of Transport to the A.A.[92] In regional centres, the A.A. advertised for motorists to carry post and other supplies.[93] Motor car insurance companies also expressed support for the government, vowing

85 'Railwaymen's Strike', *The Times* (27 Sep 1919), p. 6.

86 Information in the rest of the paragraph comes from 'How Every Citizen Can Help'.

87 'Fifth Day of the Strike', *The Times* (01 Oct 1919), p. 8.

88 'Peers and the Poor', *Daily Mirror* (02 Oct 1919), p. 2.

89 Edgcombe, 'The 1919 Railway Strike', pp. 50-51.

90 'Railway Strike', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (29 Sep 1919), p. 3.

91 R.H. Desmarais, 'The Supply and Transport Committee, 1919-1926: A Study of the British Government's Method of Handling Emergencies Stemming from Industrial Disputes', (PhD: University of Wisconsin, 1970) pp. 64, 68.

92 'Executive', *Yorkshire Post* (02 Oct 1919), p. 7.

93 P. Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement, 1880-1939* (London, 1985), p. 183.

to 'settle any claims' that arose 'out of volunteers' drivers accidents'.[94] The actions of the A.A. were mirrored by Rotary clubs. The executive committee of British Rotary wrote to Lloyd George, 'placing at the disposal of the government the service of all of its members'.[95] Rallying to this call, clubs in Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth and Exeter established an inter-urban road transport link.[96] The Bristol club was especially prominent in its strike-breaking activities, setting up a stranded passenger bureau and helping to maintain the postal and telegraph services in the city.[97] The postmaster of Bristol commended the club's 'yeoman' efforts and contribution to ensuring that the strike had passed 'with a minimum of discomfort', efforts which had been 'much appreciated by the public'.[98]

Much of the press coverage of the strike focused on the novelty of middle- and upper-class volunteers undertaking tasks associated with the working class. Pictures in the visual magazine, *The Sketch*, showed smiling peers and army officers working as porters and stable hands on the Great Western Railway.[99] The labour of women was also highlighted in newspaper reports with most of the work seemingly conforming to traditional gender conventions. Women cleaned carriages, did clerical work on registration desks and laboured in canteens serving food to the male volunteers.[100] However, there were female drivers and one newspaper report noted that in Leeds most of the offers of motor cars for food distribution came from women.[101] These placid depictions of the volunteer experience were interspersed with accounts that outlined the antipathy felt by many towards the strikers. One volunteer asserted that he was motivated by the prospect of helping 'to break this unjust strike'.[102] Moved by resentment at the strike, another volunteer threw a stone through the window of a booking office at Kingston station and was arrested by police. Similarly, a group

94 'Strike Items', *Daily Mail* (03 Oct 1919), p. 2.

95 'Rotary Clubs Offer', *Pall Mall Gazette* (03 October 1919), p. 2.

96 'Strike', *Fifeshire Advertiser* (04 October 1919), p. 5.

97 Bristol Record Office, 42730/IM/PM/1/3, Rotary Club of Bristol, Gearbox Magazines, 'The Railway Strike: What the Bristol Post Master said', November 1919.

98 BRO, 42730/IM/PM/1/3, 'What the Bristol Post Master Said'.

99 'Society and the Strike', *The Sketch* (08 October 1919), p. 7.

100 'Court, Society and Personal', *Daily Mail* (30 Sept 1919), p. 2; 'Where to Volunteer', *Daily Mail* (02 Oct 1919), p. 3; 'Strike Snapshots', *Daily Mail* (30 Sept 1919), p. 2.

101 'Strike Snapshots'.

102 Examples of volunteer antipathy are all taken from 'Strike Happenings', *Daily Mail* (02 Oct 1919), p. 2.

of Brixton women sympathetic to the volunteers tore down posters 'asking public support of the railwaymen'. There were reports of volunteers and trains being attacked by strikers in Edinburgh, Clapham, Cambridge, Kings Cross, Bradford-On-Towe and Euston Station.[103] Perhaps most controversially, the political neutrality of one central branch of the British state was compromised during the strike. Lord Louis Mountbatten, a member of the House of Windsor, volunteered as a train engine driver on the Isle of Wight. [104]

Students also provided assistance to the government. Engineering students from the University of Liverpool served as railway signalmen.[105] After the strike, the principal of the senate of the University of St Andrews thanked undergraduates who had offered their assistance to local railway companies.[106] The work of these youthful strike breakers was complimented by the actions of the Boy Scout movement. It had always been suspected by some sections of the left that the Boy Scouts harboured anti-socialist sympathies, an impression that owed much to the movement's patriotic outlook and the militaristic and imperialist views of Robert Baden-Powell. The Scouts involvement in the railway strike would demonstrate that some of these suspicions were not entirely unwarranted. Indeed, Scout anti-socialism was often quite overt. In the same year as the railway strike, the Scout's national magazine, *The Headquarters Gazette*, told its readership that 'wrong ideas' and 'fallacies' were being taught to children in socialist Sunday schools.[107] In the midst of the strike, the county commissioner of the Kent Scouts called on members to 'heed the call of the government'.[108] He urged local scout officers to assist 'food and traffic authorities'. Boy Scouts in central London served as porters at the Marble Arch underground station.[109] In Bournemouth, Scouts helped the local Rotary club, directing cars to the Strike Emergency Information Bureau it had set up in the town.[110] These endeavours were praised by *The*

[103] See the reports 'Trains Attacked', *Sunderland Daily Echo* (30 Sep 1919), p. 4; 'Volunteers Attacked', *Globe* (03 October 1919), p. 1; 'A Regrettable Incident', *Cambridge Independent Press* (03 October 1919), p. 9; 'Volunteer Drivers Attacked', *Barnsley Independent* (11 Oct 1919), p. 6; 'Incident of Big Strike', *Derry Journal* (10 October 1919), p. 8.

[104] 'Strike Happenings'.

[105] 'Students as Railway Signalmen', *Liverpool Echo* (03 October 1919), p. 5.

[106] 'St Andrews Students and the Railway Strike', *St Andrews Citizen* (18 Oct 1919), p. 2.

[107] 'Industrial Ignorance', *Headquarters Gazette* (March 1919), p. 43

[108] 'Opinions on the Strike', *The Times* (1 October 1919), p. 6

[109] 'Strike Happenings'.

[110] 'Rotary Service during British Strike', *The Rotarian* (Dec 1919), p. 308.

Headquarters Gazette, singling out those involved in the distribution of food.[111] This intervention in the railway dispute was justified by an ambiguous internal resolution which upheld the neutrality of the Scouts and declared that it would not break any ordinary commercial strike.[112] However, the resolution stated that if voluntary workers were needed by authorities and if the threat was deemed sufficiently dangerous to the general public there was to be no action taken against a 'scoutmaster offering the assistance of his troop' in a dispute. Couched in the language of public service, this resolution stopped far short of a blanket condemnation of strike-breaking that one would expect from a non-political organisation and in effect granted considerable license to local scout leaders.

This license would be exploited by local Scouts in the tumultuous industrial years that followed the end of the railway strike. In 1920 a local Sea Scout troop helped to break a gas workers strike in the Isle of Wight.[113] Responding to an appeal made by the manager of a gasworks, where an unofficial strike had broken out, Scouts helped to ensure that a 'sufficient supply of gas' had been maintained for the town of Sandown. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that a strike-breaking mythos was becoming prevalent in Scout culture. In 1921, for example, a Scout group in the Sussex town of Lewes put on a theatrical performance of Cinderella.[114] Adjusting elements of this folktale to reflect the contemporary salience of industrial unrest, the narrative was framed by a backdrop in which strikes have engulfed the imaginary realm of 'fairyland'. Cinderella, as a result, is unable to find a carriage to take her to the ball. A group of heroic Boy Scouts step into the fold and help to save the day, ferrying Cinderella to the ball in an aeroplane. The anti-socialist credentials of the Scouts were further confirmed in 1923 when the Norfolk County Commissioner reputedly stated that the movement was 'the biggest factor behind the scenes' combating 'Communism, Republicanism and extreme Socialism in this country'.[115] The problematic ambiguity of the movement's resolution in relation to its participation in strikes was also recognised by members; as one Hull-based Scout noted 'public service to one man might mean strike-breaking to another'.[116] Alongside Scouts, undergraduates continued to be prominent in 1920s

111 'Scouts and Strikes', *Headquarters Gazette* (November 1919), p. 202.

112 'Scouts', *Headquarters Gazette* (November 1919).

113 'Boy Scouts as Blacklegs', *Daily Herald* (10 Aug 1920), p. 6.

114 'Cinderella', *Sussex Agricultural Express* (14 Jan 1921), p. 10.

115 'Are Boy Scouts to be Fascisti', *Daily Herald* (22 Jan 1923), p. 1

116 'Scouts and Strikes', *Hull Daily Mail* (26 Jan 1924), p. 4.

strike-breaking. During the national coal strike of 1921, pit pumps and engines in the Lanarkshire coalfield were worked by students and members of the Middle-Class Union, an anti-socialist body that acted as an organisational hub for strike-breaking.[117] These actions provoked the ire of miners and their wives, culminating in a violent incident where police were stoned and cars destroyed. Volunteer labour would also be employed during a strike of 10,000 farm labourers in Norfolk in 1923 and in 1925 when bus drivers and conductors in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottingham walked out. [118]

The phenomenon of volunteer strike-breaking would reach its apogee in the 1926 General Strike. For nine days, between the 3rd of 12th May, 1.75 million trade unionists came out in a sympathy strike over wages and working conditions in the mining industry. The Conservative government constructed a successful narrative that portrayed the General Strike as a politically motivated attack on the constitution. The thrust of government attacks focused on the strike's supposed revolutionary potential and its subversion of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. This emphasis on the constitution was more pronounced than in earlier strikes. The grand scale of the General Strike, which involved a substantial proportion of the country's total workforce and all of its vital national industries, provided rhetorical space for opponents to depict it as an existential extra-parliamentary threat to Britain's political institutions. Earlier strikes examined in this article, although large and nationally-observed, had generally been confined to one industry or a bounded geographical area and were never as temporally concentrated at such a specific point of time. This convergence of factors, allied to lingering post-war fears of proletarian revolution and the Trade Union Congress's connections to the Labour Party, gave weight to Conservative claims that the strike was actually aimed at undermining the constitution. As part of this political mission, volunteers were recruited in their thousands under the direction of the government's Supply and Transport Organisation. Formerly known as the Strike Committee and re-named after the culmination of the railway strike in1919, the Supply and Transport Organisation was entrusted with setting up a number of subsidiary agencies that would coordinate supplies of food, fuel, transport, communications, finance, publicity and protection during emergencies.[119] Dividing the country into 88 divisional areas, the government's recruitment of voluntary labour was delegated to specialist Volunteer Service Committees. Its efforts were

[117] 'More Rioting in Scotland', *The Times* (07 Apr 1921), p. 10.

[118] 'Norfolk Farm Strike', *The Times* (02 April 1923), p. 8; 'Omnibus Workers Threat', *The Times* (10 Jan 1925), p. 14.

[119] Information in rest of paragraph comes from Morris, *The*, p. 153, 160.

also supported by a new body, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (O.M.S.), which had been formed in 1925 with the objective of enlisting citizens who would willing to volunteer in the event of a general strike. Led by Lord Hardinge, a former viceroy and governor general of India, the O.M.S was nominally non-partisan and independent of the government.

The constitutional interpretation of the General Strike promoted by the government was commonly cited as a motivation by volunteers. One opposed the strike because she saw it as being based on the rule of force rather than the rule of law.[120] Another stated that the volunteer's work had 'postponed government of the country by trade unions'.[121] Themes of social hierarchy also continued to inform the volunteer worldview. A London-based Boy Scout, recounting the time he spent as a special constable guarding trains and trams in Enfield, asserted to a local newspaper that the strikers had stood in awe of his presence, particularly when greeted with the site of his blue armlet.[122] The Conservative view that the strike endangered the constitution was also evidently accepted by some of Britain's leading voluntary organisations. The British Legion, a charitable organisation for ex-servicemen, called on its branches and members to offer their services to the authorities during the strike.[123] Whilst proclaiming to be neutral on the merits of industrial disputes, this decision was justified by an earlier resolution passed by the organisation's general purposes committee which stated that if the strike 'became opposed to the constitution' members were to 'uphold law and order' and 'ensure the interests of the community as a whole'.[124] This stance was popular amongst Legion members as evidenced by another resolution that was rejected at the organisation's annual conference after the strike. The resolution, forwarded by the South Paddington branch and critical of the Legion's stance on strike-breaking, was voted down by delegates, 'the result being greeted with loud cheers'.[125]

Rotary clubs exhibited similar tendencies. Prior to the strike, members were not shy in apportioning blame for who they believed was responsible for ratcheting up tensions between the unions and the government. In March 1926, a Rotarian trade unionist, C.L. Wethered,

120 Saltzman, *A Lark*, p. 71.

121 Wrigley, 'The General', p. 37.

122 'Rover Scout as Special Constable', *Middlesex County Times* (22 May 1926), p. 9.

123 'Strike' *Liverpool Echo* (08 May 1926), p. 3.

124 'From All Quarters: British Legion', *West Sussex Gazette* (06 May 1926), p. 9.

125 'British Legion', *The Scotsman* (25 May 1926), p. 7.

asserted that the leadership of organised labour was now dominated by extremists intent on class conflict.[126] Motivated by political and ideological considerations, socialist trade union leaders were convinced that 'it was useless to expect any substantial betterment in the lot of the working classes under the existing economic and social order based on private ownership'. In Brighton, the local Rotary club was instrumental in the mobilisation of volunteers. The Brighton president stated publicly that his 'fellow Rotarians boldly stepped into the ranks of the volunteers to combat the challenge of a small minority to over-rule…the government'.[127]

The organisational endeavours of Rotary would be dwarfed by the Chambers of Commerce. The Chambers were particularly active in provincial areas where they complimented the work of the Supply and Transport Organisation and the O.M.S. Throughout the interwar period, the Chambers had consistently demonstrated hostility towards organised labour. In 1922, 1924 and 1928, the British Chambers of Commerce passed resolutions urging the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce legislation that would compel co-operative societies to pay income tax.[128] During the General Strike, the Nottingham chambers coordinated recruitment with the Volunteer Service Committee, overseeing a regular service fleet of vehicles carrying food, lace hosiery and tobacco to London and maintaining a warehouse in the Lace Market.[129] In nearby Sheffield, the local chamber was pressurised by the O.M.S to set up a branch in the city, which was inaugurated on 30 April 1926.[130] Similarly, the Torquay Chamber of Trade and Commerce had an arrangement with the O.M.S whereby it encouraged its members to join.[131] The London Chamber, which made a public declaration of support for the government, established a depot through which goods

[126] BRO, 42730/IM/PM/1/2, Gearbox Magazines, C.L. Wethered, 'Industrial Unrest', May 1926.

[127] A. Durr, *Who were the Guilty? General Strike: Brighton, May 1926* (Brighton: Brighton Labour History Press, 1976), p. 8.

[128] 'The Assocation of British Chambers of Commerce', *Monthly Journal of the Bristol & West of England Chambers of Commerce* (August 1922); 'The Assocation of British Chambers of Commerce', *Monthly Journal of the Bristol & West of England Chambers of Commerce* (December 1924); The Assocation of British Chambers of Commerce', *Monthly Journal of the Bristol & West of England Chambers of Commerce* (October 1928).

[129] Morris, *The*, p. 175

[130] Wrigley, 'The General', p. 40.

[131] J.H. Porter, 'Devon and the General Strike, 1926', *International Review of Social History*, 23:3 (1978), p. 333.

could be transported.[132] Liverpool's Chamber housed a local road haulage committee tasked with organising transport and the enlistment of volunteer drivers and vehicles.[133]

The A.A. also continued its established pattern of behaviour in national strikes. Its offices were kept open for the registration of volunteers and cars, a road patrol system was maintained and it rendered 'mechanical assistance' to vehicles.[134] The A.A. deemed these activities to be 'organised and rendered in the interests of the community'. ''Strike breaking'', the organisation decreed, constituted 'no part of its programme'. This stance provoked controversy and was challenged vociferously by a member at the A.A.'s annual general meeting.in July 1926.[135] This member denounced what he saw as the 'strike breaking activities of the Assocation during the recent labour troubles'. A son of a trade unionist, he deplored the fact that his money had been used to 'break the strike'. This intervention was met with repeated interruptions of a hostile nature. A.A. members called on the dissenting party to 'sit down' and asked 'What has this man's father to do with the assocation?'. A contrastingly glowing account of the A. A's role in the strike was given by William Joynson-Hicks, now vice president of the organisation. Joynson-Hicks praised motorists for putting their services at the 'disposal of the government' and against a strike 'which was without doubt a deliberate attack on the constitution of the country'. Joynson-Hicks' speech was allowed to proceed unhindered in a manner which contrasted to the repeated interruptions that greeted those who dared to call out the A. A's strike breaking activities in May 1926.

As highlighted briefly in the introduction, violence was often sparked during the General Strike when volunteers and strikers came across each other in cities, towns and rural areas. Prevailing interpretations of the strike argue that it was conducted with very little violence on the part of trade unionists, the volunteers and the government. This argument captures the calm mood that prevailed in many areas, such as in Plymouth where the police and strikers famously played a football match, but actively masks the existence of serious disturbances and fatalities if applied to the strike as a whole. Such an account of the strike, as Chris Wrigley has also noted of textbooks that stress its 'bank holiday' atmosphere,

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[132] R. J. Bennett, *Local Business Voice: The History of Chambers of Commerce in Britain, Ireland and Revolutionary America* (Oxford, 2011), p. 581

[133] Bennett, *Local*, p. 581.

[134] Information in the next couple of lines from 'Motorists and the Strike', *Sussex and Essex Free Press* (27 May 1926), p.

[135] 'Motorists and the Strike', *The Times* (15 July 1926), p. 11.

understates the 'violence, victimisation and sheer privation many people experienced'.[136] Violent actions do appear to have been the preserve of trade unionists, who reacted angrily when confronted by obvious instances of strike-breaking. In perhaps the most well-known example of this dynamic, miners derailed a train called the Flying Scotsman near the Northumbrian town of Cramlington. At a subsequent inquest into this incident, a witness had recalled that he had seen men and youths running towards the derailed train shouting 'Kill the Blacklegs'.[137] Strikers in nearby Gosford stoned motorists who managed to bypass a transport cordon and succeeded in overturning a lorry, dragging out the driver and stoning him as he lay prostrate on the road.[138] In cities, riotous conditions could ensue when strikers and volunteers were brought into close proximity. The recruitment of volunteers at the Hull city hall on the 7th of May aroused the ire of a large crowd of strikers, numbering around 4,000.[139] Attempting to block the path of the volunteers, the crowd was consequently baton charged by the police. Over the next couple of days in Hull, the police made several more baton charges against strikers who sometimes responded with charges of their own.[140] 41 arrests were made as a result of these disturbances, including one incident where strikers attacked a group of 50 motor cars carrying imported University of Cambridge volunteers.[141] Indeed, the scale of public disorder in Hull during the strike, where trams and trains driven by volunteers were burned and wrecked, prompted the city authorities to appeal for help, enlisting the support of a naval battleship called the Ceres.[142] The crew of the Ceres, which normally was responsible for guarding the docks in Hull, marched into the city and helped to restore a semblance of order.

There were reports of similar unrest in Cardiff, Liverpool, Middlesbrough and Leeds, mainly involving strikers harassing and attacking trains, trams and charabancs driven by volunteers.[143] Serious rioting broke out in Glasgow when five hundred miners from the Newton and the Camsbulang districts arrived into the city to assist pickets at the Ruby Street

136 C. Wrigley, '1926: Social Costs of the Mining Dispute', *History Today*, (1 Nov 1984), p. 6.

137 'General Strike Echo', *The Berks and Oxon Advertiser* (30 July 1926), p. 3.

138 'Rioters before the Court', *Londonderry Sentinel* (11 May 1926), p. 5.

139 'Hull and Cardiff Scenes', *Belfast Newsletter* (08 May 1926).

140 'Tyne and Tee Riots', *Belfast Telegraph* (10 May 1926), p. 5.

141 'Tyne and Tee'.

142 Morgan, *Conflict*, p. 122.

143 'Hull and Cardiff'; 'Middleborough Railway Attack', *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph* (15 May 1926), p. 9; 'Disorder in the Provinces', *Dover Express* (07 May 1926), p. 5

Depot.[144] Rumours had spread that student volunteers from the University of Glasgow were housed in the depot and the strikers attempted to storm the building, initially dispersed by the police they returned several times and set off a chain of events where property was destroyed and sporadic fighting continued for hours. Tensions also flared in Edinburgh as a result of the presence of university students. Acting as tram conductors in the city centre, they were subject to intimidation by a crowd of strikers and required baton charges by foot and mounted police to protect them from serious harm.[145] Another incident in Edinburgh demonstrated how the volunteer's lack of expertise could have fatal consequences. A passenger train driven by a volunteer crashed into a goods train at St Margaret's Goods Yard resulting in the deaths of three passengers.[146]

Strike violence and intimidation were also responsible for a number of fatalities. In London, where serious disturbances had broken out in Poplar, Hammersmith and Canning Town, a young striker was imprisoned for inciting a crowd in Newington Butts to attack a bus.[147] In the resulting fracas, the bus had careened off the road, hitting and killing a pedestrian on the street. Arguably, the most shocking example of violence associated with the strike occurred a few days after its conclusion. On May 15, 1926, Frederick Peachey, a volunteer who had been working on a wharf near Regent's Canal in London, was assailed by a group of disgruntled strikers in a Rotherhithe tunnel and struck repeatedly in the head, eventually dying from his injuries.[148] Three young working-class men in their twenties were imprisoned for the murder of Peachey and were said to have acted in response to call that there were 'some blacklegs going through the tunnel'. Peachey's murder and the subsequent trial of his assailants garnered a large amount of press attention, covered by leading national and local newspapers.[149] His picture appeared on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* under the heading 'Killed by Strike Hooligans'.[150] Peachey's funeral saw large crowds line the route to Nunhead Cemetry in Peckham and his body lay in repose in the Camberwell branch of the

144 'Riotous Scenes in Scotland', *The Times* (08 May 1926), p. 4.

145 'Strike Hooliganism', *Penrith Observer* (11 May 1926), p. 4.

146 'Rail Crash at Edinburgh', *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (11 May 1926), p. 2.

147 'Man Killed in Bus Attack', *Western Morning News* (07 May 1926), p. 5.

148 'Volunteer Killed', *Daily Mail* (08 June 1926), p. 5.

149 'Strike Volunteer's Death', *The Times* (20 May 1926), p. 10; 'Dock Volunteer's Death', (01 June 1926), p. 11; 'Volunteer Worker's Fate', *Daily Mail* (20 May 1926), p. 7; 'Volunteer's Fate', *Daily Mail* (01 June 1926), p. 7; 'Hero of Strike', *Birmingham Daily Gazette* (28 May 1926), p. 5.

150 'Killed by Strike Hooligans', *Daily Mirror* (20 May 1926), p. 1.

British Legion, symbolic of his war service and also of the Legion's identification with the cause of the volunteers.[151] Bitter memories relating to the involvement of volunteers in the strike would linger on in the years that followed. At a July 1927 inquest into the suicide of a Hull Corporation tramway inspector, it was alleged by the deceased's widow that her husband had been persecuted and 'hounded to death by socialists'.[152] The inquest outlined that the inspector had been a volunteer on the trams during the General Strike and had been kept on afterward by the corporation. The fact that volunteers had been retained after the strike infuriated trade unionists and socialist politicians in Hull and the resultant intimidation that followed was reflected by a statement made by the tramway inspector on the eve of his death 'The Labour Party are determined to get me out of a job… They are persecuting me'.

The tragic cases referred to in the previous paragraph demonstrate that the decision to become a volunteer in the General Strike was never simply tantamount to a form of frivolous escapism. For some, it was a choice freighted with serious and long-lasting consequences. The physical and psychological violence meted out to volunteers reflected their role in a broader process of social and political conflict. Volunteers acted to thwart the machinations of a trade union movement that had overstepped its expected briefs of deference and service. Strikers, by confronting volunteers in public space, challenged the foundations of a hierarchical social order. A more nuanced and rounded understanding of the General Strike emerges when we incorporate the intersecting experiences of volunteers and strikers. More work too is needed on the legacy and memories of the strike in its immediate aftermath, namely how it continued to shape, inform and haunt the daily lives of ordinary people in the 1920s and 1930s.

Conclusion

Industrial militancy fell by the wayside after 1926. Disillusioned and in some instances vindicated by the defeat of the General Strike, the leadership of the trade union movement came to embrace a more conciliatory strategy, predicated on negotiations with employers and political action through the means of the Labour Party. This more judicious approach also reflected the impact of punitive legislation and declining levels of membership. In 1927, the Conservative government passed the Trades Disputes Act which banned the use of sympathy strikes, mass picketing and mandated that trade union members consented to any political levy made on their behalf. Trade union membership, which had been in consistent decline

151 'Hero of Strike'.

152 'Widow's Inquest Accusation', *Leeds Mercury* (02 July 1927), p. 5.

from its peak in 1921, continued to fall precipitously after 1926, further weakening the bargaining power of organised labour. The strike's failure also strengthened the hand of those within the labour movement in favour of parliamentary gradualism, such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, and instigated a shift in others towards the primacy of political methods, a good example here being Ernest Bevin.

The use of volunteers to break strikes would decline as a practice after 1926, reflecting the notably more sedate climate of industrial relations throughout the remainder of the interwar period. In the 1940s and 1950s governments did sporadically consider using volunteers in response to strikes in the docks, mines and railways but refrained from doing so, mindful of antagonising the trade union movement. [153] Conservative politicians far less amenable to trade unions sparked a resurgence of interest in the issue of volunteer strike breakers during the 1980s. Constituting a small part of the wider Thatcherite assault on organised labour and the welfare state, volunteers were drafted in to replace striking public sector workers opposed to the government's privatisation programme. Compared to earlier efforts in the twentieth-century, however, this amounted to a relatively minor mobilisation and the idea of using civilian volunteers was greeted with scepticism by many figures within the government. It was felt that volunteers were of little use in disputes involving skilled workers. There was, then, something unique about the deployment of volunteer strike breakers in the period between 1911 and 1926. Never again would thousands of volunteers be recruited by the government and local authorities in order to break strikes and defend bounded visions of the public, the community and the constitution.

[153] On volunteer strike breaking in the post-war period see J. Davis-Smith, 'An Uneasy Alliance: Volunteers and Trade Unions', in R. Hedley & J. Davis-Smith (eds.), *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice* (London, 1992), pp. 39-43.